The Real Object of the Investigation

At the risk of boring some of you, I would like to be technical for a moment—to trace the history of a motion picture. Any motion picture.

First, the story is purchased. The working producer, the writer, and the director have the power to recommend and persuade but that is all. The right to buy is exclusively in the hands of the executive in charge of production—the head of the studio—or his executive assistants.

When the story is purchased, the next phase is preparation. A writer is hired to transform the story into screenplay. At any time during preparation, the head of the studio can ask for and read what has been done.

When the first draft script is finished, it is then sent to the head of the studio, to the executive staff, to the studio censorship office which in turn sends it to the Johnson office and to some twenty departments.

The executive head makes suggestions for script changes, the executives make suggestions, the Johnson office makes suggestions on matters of censorship and industry policy. As a matter of fact, anybody can make suggestions; and “anybody” does.

Second and third and sometimes more drafts of scripts are prepared until the day when the script is ready for the cameras. The final script, okayed by the production head, is submitted to actors and actresses, some of whom, incidentally, retain the right to decide whether they will make a picture or not.
The picture starts actual production. Day after day, what is shot is shown to the producer, the director, the executives, the head of the studio, the production staff, the film editor and still others. Each inch of film is scrutinized until the picture is finished.

The picture goes into rough cut. It is again seen by the head of the studio and the executive staff. The picture goes through several more cuts. Inch by inch, frame by frame, the picture is viewed by the head, his staff, the producer and the director. There is discussion, conflict, argument, hot tempers, cool tempers -- and finally agreement. When this is reached, the picture is quickly finished and ready for release.

This is the history, with only slight modifications, of every script and picture.

I do not wish to seem critical of this method -- it is the best method thus far conceived to meet the demands of large-scale production.

I merely wish to state directly that in all cases not the director, not the writer, not the working producer, not the actor in the great majority -- but the executive head of the studio, who is sometimes a major stockholder -- the executive head of the studio is the final, ultimate authority.

What I mean to say is -- he's got the say.

If he says this picture will not be made, it is not made. If he says I do not like this line, or this phrase, or this flattering allusion to Herbert Hoover or Molotov, you can bet that it won't be in the script or the final picture.
I submit that on this stage tonight there is no majority stockholder, there is no executive head of a motion picture studio. These men here are co-workers -- who have distinguished themselves and their industry by the pictures they have served in various capacities.

I submit that these men are accused of subverting the screen -- a screen over which they have no authority -- a screen they could not subvert even if they wanted to. I submit that certain individuals and the M.P.A. welcomed the Committee on Un-American Activities to root out the subversive screen creations of these men.

I submit the fact that there is no such thing as a Communist picture; I submit that there have been pictures calling for a better world, calling for more understanding among people, more tolerance, less lynching and more forthright use of citizenship. I submit that.

I finally submit that this entire conglomeration of facts produces a devastating contradiction: These men on this platform are charged with directly subverting the screen. But as proven, they do not have this authority. It seems then as though the wrong guys are being chased in this witch hunt. It seems as though a mistake has been made.

But has a mistake been made?

Or is their real objective something else? Of course it is. The real objective of the M.P.A. and the Committee on Un-American activities is to reach through us the men who do have direct authority over the screen. It wants to frighten them into lifeless conformity.
Let's look at the record:

We know the M.P.A. called for this investigation. We know that they could not, in their less than infinite wisdom, directly charge the heads of the studio with subverting the screen. They did not dare. They would have been laughed -- if not thrown -- out of the office. The charge could not be substantiated. Nor would it have been true.

But they could attack the people who wrote, directed and produced fine pictures under the direct sponsorship and help and authority of the executive heads.

We know that this is their grand strategy.

We know how the M.P.A. went to work. How they produced an atmosphere in which anyone who engaged in activities -- screen or otherwise -- contrary to their beliefs was subject for smear. They smeared. And they smeared again. But they needed official help. They got it. From the Committee on Un-American Activities.

The attack is now ready to take place on a national scale. Hysterical headlines will hit the American people. Absurd charges will be made that the screen is dominated by Reds. This may be designed to produce legislation against the film industry -- but legislation will not be necessary. Because, as a result of this campaign, the Motion Picture Alliance will have achieved its objectives -- it will have produced a state of fear and hysteria throughout the industry so that pictures will automatically conform. Ideas unsympathetic to the Un-American Committee or to the M.P.A. will automatically be rejected -- or if a few should be a subject of consideration, they will be referred to the fanatic
minority within the M.P.A. for approval.

This has already happened, the M.P.A. has already been successful in some cases, if the charge of one of its members is to be believed. Said Mrs. Rogers, "Since the M.P.A. started there have been definite results. Stories that were being considered for early production have been gone over, and when doubtful, shelved."

This eventuality means no more or less than the abdication of the function of the studio heads to the Un-American Affairs Committee and their Hollywood spearhead, the M.P.A. This means that this enterprise which subsists on the originality and showmanship displayed by its executive heads, in association with their co-workers, will turn their sovereign rights over to a minority -- a minority within whose ranks is a white supremacy advocate and a leading anti-Semite. This means that their enterprise is no longer wholly free but subject to an unwritten political censorship. This means -- that ideas -- the very life blood of the industry -- are shackled and that means, finally, that freedom of the screen will be no more.

You will note that I use the future and the potential tense: I say this "will" happen and this "may" happen given conditions that exist under a rock.

I do not say this is going to happen.

For my colleagues and myself, whatever the position of anyone else, we propose to reject anyone's right to make the screen conform to anyone's ideas. We have seen what has happened in other countries when creators failed to resist the first
invasion of their rights. We recognize that you cannot be smart and tricky with principles. Either you defend them, and attack while defending them, or you go down.

We know that aside from our careers and our livelihood an issue is at stake which at other times in our country's history has been at stake.

We know it was at stake when Wendell Willkie defended the industry against the FSA investigating committee. Willkie upheld the right to a free screen and a free enterprise. He said it well:

Be said: "This industry, with many others of our country, demonstrates that neither race, creed, nor geographical origin is an essential qualification to participate in American business..." And Willkie said: "You and I, together with the great overwhelming majority of the people of our country, share the unalterable belief in a democratic form of government and in the inalienable rights of the individual to freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom to choose his government without interference, and freedom to live in economic security"... And Willkie said: "...the investigation and harassment of free expression in the United States is a procedure, once accepted, that may be applied to the theater, to newspapers, and magazines, to the radio, to publications of all kinds and finally to the right of public officials and private citizens to speak freely. As American citizens, we protest this as vigorously as possible..."

Along with Wendell Willkie, we protest as vigorously as possible.