

REDS UNDER THE BEDS

HOLLYWOOD is currently suffering a bad attack of the jitters. Reading the cables, one gains the impression that a large number of the most influential people in the movie colony are convinced that Russia is already running the American film industry. If one allows one's imagination to go to the extremes that theirs apparently have, one can easily conjure up a picture of big producers, big directors, and big stars looking under their beds for Reds before retiring, and offering up prayers that Uncle Joe won't get them while they sleep.

While it is probable—and indeed would be strange if it were not so—that the Communists have found themselves a corner in Hollywood and are up to their usual tricks, it is as well to try to get the present Red-scare in Hollywood in perspective. For getting things in perspective and into proportion is what Hollywood itself is constitutionally incapable of doing. Everything that happens there, happens in the atmosphere of a three-ring circus—a three-ring circus on which the white, glaring limelight of publicity beats incessantly and more glaringly than upon any other section of world society. To cater to the sensation-loving appetites of the world-wide spectators of this circus, some 400 newspapermen, columnists and feature-writers are (it has been estimated) assigned to full-time duty in Hollywood. Not only do they report anything that happens, but when there is nothing much worth reporting, they create something.

So whether we are reading about a witch-hunt or a wedding, we should remember these magnifying-glass qualities of Hollywood. The members of the film capital think, talk, and act all the time in superlatives—in order to convince others, but mostly to convince themselves. The situation has been well described by Dr. Leo C. Rosten in his Carnegie-Rockefeller research book on the movie colony. Rosten says that Hollywood is basically no more "screwy" than other, but less conspicuous, parts of society. In other words, they are now looking for Reds under the beds in Arkansas, Michigan, Mississippi, and virtually every other place in the United States—America, says an observer, is at present in the grip of an hysterical witch-hunt "fantastic in its proportions"—but it is Hollywood we are hearing most about. For, says Rosten, Hollywood is 20th Century American civilisation writ large; it is "an index of our society and our culture." The aberrations of this culture are more conspicuous and more dramatic in Hollywood than anywhere else: the values of modern society are extended to the strident and the unmistakable in Hollywood's way of life. A study of Hollywood casts the profile of contemporary society (particularly contemporary American society) into sharper relief.

IN this connection, a recent crack in *The New Yorker* is of some relevance: "Hollywood, we are told, is in the hands

of the Communists. We thought it was in the hands of the psychiatrists." This gives point to the saying that Hollywood not only contains the most expensive collection of talent in the world, but it also contains the largest collection of neuroses. One of the reasons why Hollywood is particularly likely to go off the deep end whenever there is any sort of a Red scare—in fact when anything happens which seems to threaten the accepted system—is that there is absolutely no sense of security in Hollywood, either for individuals or for great commercial undertakings. The Academy Award winner of to-day can be the flop of to-morrow: huge investments can disappear almost overnight. Behind the surface optimism and enthusiasm of the movie business, says Rosten, there is all the time fear and insecurity—the fear that it can't last. "Hollywood is afraid of its own shadow."

ANOTHER point to remember when reading about the present Red threat to Hollywood, and American society, and the American way of life, is that it has all happened several times before—and Hollywood and American society have both survived—except, perhaps, that American society has become a little more prone to hysteria with each recurring attack and therefore more disturbing for the liberal to contemplate or experience. This is not to say, of course, that there may not come a time when the Big Bad Wolf of Communism will actually and unmistakably appear; but if the outside world refuses at the moment to become unduly excited by the clamant protestations of some Hollywood luminaries that this time, yes this time, it really has happened, then Hollywood has only itself to blame.

Up to 1934, the immortal wisecrack of Dorothy Parker that "the only 'ism' in which Hollywood believes is plagiarism" held good—and still does in the main. But in 1934 something happened which shocked some workers in the movie industry out of their political apathy and into awareness of the high-pressure methods which could be used by privileged and powerful groups. It was in this year that occurred the bitter contest for the governorship of California between a dull Republican candidate named Frank E. Merriam and the *enfant terrible* of the Democrats, Upton Sinclair. The story of Hollywood's part in the campaign has been told before (the full details are in Rosten's book), but it is particularly worth recalling at this time.

Upton Sinclair gave Hollywood a really bad attack of the jitters; he was an outspoken critic of the industry; his tax programme threatened to hit the studios very hard; he was a reforming Socialist who believed in "production for use, not profit"—and for a while it really looked as if California might elect him. Big Business in Hollywood was at first panic-stricken, and then moved quickly into action. Randolph Hearst hurried home from a trip to Germany to throw his newspapers into

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