

Red Channels



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Place ★ New York, New York

Type of Source ★ Political Movement Document

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Context ★ Fueled by Cold War suspicion, media companies began “blacklisting” artists suspected of ties to the Communist Party. Some had joined Communist organizations, but none were ever convicted of criminal activity. Even more artists had no serious ties to the Communist Party at all. Blacklisted artists were denied jobs and often forced to testify before Congress. In 1950 the conservative newsletter *Counterattack* published a special report titled *Red Channels*, which included the names of 151 performers reportedly linked to the Communist Party, including playwright Arthur Miller, author Langston Hughes, song writer “Yip” Harburg, and actress-singer Lena Horne. The report was given free to anyone responsible for hiring in the entertainment industry.

In indoctrinating the masses of the people with Communist ideology and the pro-Soviet interpretation of current events, the Communist Party, with set purpose, uses not only Party members, but also fellow-travelers and members of Communist adjuncts and periphery organizations. It is the Party’s boast that for every Party member, there are at least 10 “reliables,” dupes or innocents who, for one reason or another will support its fronts. Our so-called “intellectual” classes— members of the arts, the sciences and professions— have furnished the Communist Party USA with the greatest number in these classifications.



Dramatic programs are occasionally used for Communist propaganda purposes. A few documentary programs produced by one network in particular have faithfully followed the Party line. Several commercially sponsored dramatic series are used as sounding boards, particularly with reference to current issues in which the Party is critically interested: “academic freedom,” “civil rights,” “peace,” the H-bomb, etc. These and other subjects, perfectly legitimate in themselves, are cleverly exploited in dramatic treatments which point up current Communist goals.

Perhaps the acme of Party success in this field was reached when one program, sponsored by the advertising industry and American business, and supposedly portraying the benefits of our economic system, turned out to be— in the words of one reviewer in the trade press— “more nearly a plea for collectivism”!



A party member who is a radio director, actor, or singer earning \$50,000 a year from American business must pay to the Communist Party *minimum*

ideology
system of ideas

fellow-travelers
people who support some, or all Communist aims, but were not Party members

adjuncts
connected organizations

periphery
marginal

fronts
organizations that were Communist controlled, but hid their connection to the Party

propaganda
promoting

H-bomb
Hydrogen bomb. In 1950 there was heated debate over whether the U.S. should develop this new type of nuclear weapon, which is considerably more powerful than the atomic bombs (A-bomb) used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

collectivism
Working for a group, rather than for one’s self. Similar to communism.

[emphasis original]... of \$4,790 yearly—his contribution to the cost of destroying American business and our American way of life.

Some fellow-travelers and “reliables,” who are not members of the Communist Part, as well as many well meaning innocents, have unknowingly contributed to Party adjuncts and periphery organizations, as also must Party members. At one Communist-front meeting, a leading producer-director-announcer-actor pledged \$500. A noted playwright contributed \$1,000. Many \$100 contributions were noted by a person who attended the meeting. And remember, this was but one of many such meetings these individuals attended during the course of a year!

It is no wonder, then, that Party organizers double and redouble their efforts to spawn front organizations, rallies, “benefits” and committees for this-and-that. No cause which seems calculated to arouse support among people in show business is ignored: the overthrow of the **Franco dictatorship**, the fight against **anti-Semitism** and Jimcrow [sic], civil rights, world peace, the outlawing of the H-Bomb, are all used. Around such pretended **objectives**, the hard core of Party organizers gather a swarm of “reliables” and well-intentioned “liberals,” to exploit their names and their energies.

In sworn testimony before a U.S. Senate subcommittee, Mr. Louis Budenz, formerly managing editor of the *Daily Worker*, has testified how such “sucker money” is **siphoned off** into the secret conspiratorial fund of the Communist Party. This fund is used to finance trips abroad of high Party functionaries, to bring alien Communists in the USA, and for other secret Party work.



The Communist-operated “escalator system” in show business has been in force for at least 12 years— since the **Spanish Civil War**. Those who are “right” are “boosted” from one job to another, from humble beginning in Communist-dominated night clubs or on small programs which have been “**colonized**,” to more important programs and finally to stardom. Literally scores of our most prominent producers, directors, writers, actors and musicians owe their present success largely to the Party “boost” system, a system which involves not only “reliable” producers and directors, but also ad-agency executives, network and studio executives, writers, fellow-actors, and critics and reviewers. In turn, the Party member or “reliable” who has “arrived” gives the “boost” to others who, the Red grapevine whispers, are to be helped.



At the same time, it must be remembered that the **Red Fascists** and their sympathizers, for all their numbers and influence, are still in the minority. The greater proportion of those in the broadcast industry are of sturdy mind and sound patriotism. Radio-TV has erred no more than other comparable fields. The hour is not too late for those of the patriotic and intelligent majority to immediately undertake and suitable counter-attack. No time is to be lost...

Source: “Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television,” *Counterattack*, June 1950,2–6.

Franco dictatorship
Fascist government of Francisco Franco in Spain.

anti-Semitism
prejudice against Jews

objectives
goals

Daily Worker
the official newspaper of the American Communist Party

siphoned off
stolen, secretly moved

Spanish Civil War
The 1936–1939 war between the left-wing (though not wholly Communist) Spanish Republic and the Spanish military, led by Franco. Republican forces were armed by the Soviet Union, while the military was armed and re-enforced by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Anti-fascist, including communist, volunteers including Americans fought for the Spanish Republic.

colonized
programs or organizations where communists had effectively taken over

Red Fascists
Communists, the word “Fascist” is used here to mean “dictatorial.”