

WHY GIVE TESTIMONY

KAZAN

It would prove much harder for Clifford than for me. He was Clifford Odets both, “Jesus of the proletariat”, and a man about town. Cliff was venerated on both sides of the revolving door. From the taxi stand in front of St. Regis to the King Cole Club in its womb... “he was the man.” Sure, like myself a former party member, still a staunch believer in “justice for all”, but one who saw Marx as the man who had actualized in words what Beethoven had done in sound. Cliff, some Marxist! Don’t ask me what the hell that means!

Anyway, we meet the night before my second testimony, the public one, at Lobster, off-Broadway, an uptown place you could still eat lobster without a knife and fork. It was ok to get your hands dirty. Nobody was claiming the 1st, like the 10, it was 52, not 47, and the 5th Clifford thought was for gangsters, people who by saying nothing confessed they had done something horribly wrong. Think bodies with concrete shoes at the bottom of the deep dark sea.

Clifford wanted to be bold, be Clifford Odets and lecture the committee, chastise them; he didn’t need the communist party to tell him poverty was a bad thing. Clifford figured he would play for an inside straight, he always liked betting against the house, and he would carve out a space for progressive thought neither subjugated to the Party nor sycophantic to the committee. Yes, both he and I agreed to name names, but only those already given. We revealed nothing new, surely no further harm could come to those already named. One in fact was already dead. We were not giving new carrion to those duly elected vultures we were just trying to find a way, to be honest to ourselves and feed our families ... still keep working. Lurking like a murder scene in Fritz Lang's movie was a dark shadow, the unholy grail, the blacklist...feared by all wanting to work, but acknowledged by none hiring as even existing. Clifford would neither be hostile nor friendly but bold, proud, a champion of justice, and show independence of mind (something we had both learned back in 35 that the party frowned on).

Clifford was elated after his public testimony he thought he had pulled off his inside straight and won the jackpot, done the Clifford Odets

thing, but alas, on the taxi stand side of that revolving door he would never again be hailed as the “Jesus of the Proletariat” nor even the great betrayer, Judas, but just another rat fink, a loose-lipped squealer, an informer. At the belly of this public cleansing, only a solitary thing mattered on both sides of the revolving door, it was simple, immutable...had you named names or not. The door was no longer revolving but sealed shut

Me, I simply let the chips fall where they may take the following ad out in the New York Times the day after my public testimony.

IF YOU WISH TO HEAR WHAT I HAD TO SAY I’M GOING TO
READ IT ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE ROOM

New York Times April 12.1952 pg. 7
A STATEMENT, by Elia Kazan

In the past weeks, intolerable rumors about my political position have been circulating in New York and Hollywood. I want to make my stand clear:

I believe that Communist activities confront the people of this country with an unprecedented and exceptionally tough problem. That is, how to protect ourselves from a dangerous and alien conspiracy and still keep the free, open, healthy way of life that gives us self-respect. I believe that the American people can solve this problem wisely only if they have the facts about Communism. All the facts. Now, I believe that any American who is in possession of such facts has the obligation to make them known, either to the public or to the appropriate Government agency.

Whatever hysteria exists--and there is some, particularly in Hollywood--is inflamed by mystery, suspicion, and secrecy. Hard and exact facts will cool it.

The facts I have are sixteen years out of date, but they supply a small piece of background to the graver picture of Communism today. I have placed these facts before the House Committee on Un-American Activities without reserve and I now place them before the public and before my coworkers in motion pictures and in the theatre.

Seventeen and a half years ago I was a twenty-four-year-old stage manager and bit actor, making \$40 a week when I worked.

At that time nearly all of us felt menaced by two things: the depression and the ever-growing power of Hitler. The streets were full of unemployed and shaken men. I was taken in by the Hard Times version of what might be called the Communists' advertising or recruiting technique. They claimed to have a cure for depression and a cure for Naziism and Fascism.

I joined the Communist Party late in the summer of 1934. I got out a year and a half later. I have no spy stories to tell because I saw no spies. Nor did I understand, at that time, any opposition between American and Russian national interests. It was not even clear to me in 1936 that the American Communist Party was abjectly taking its orders from the Kremlin.

What I learned was the minimum that anyone must learn who puts his head into the noose of party "discipline." The Communists automatically violated the daily practices of democracy to which I was accustomed. They attempted to control thought and suppress personal opinion. They tried to dictate personal conduct. They habitually distorted and disregarded and violated the truth. All this was crudely opposite to their claims of "democracy" and "the scientific approach."

To be a member of the Communist Party is to have a taste of the police state. It is a diluted taste but it is bitter and unforgettable. It is diluted because you can walk out.

I got out in the spring of 1936.

The question will be asked why I did not tell this story sooner. I was held back, primarily, by concern for the reputations and employment of people who may, like myself, have left the Party many years ago.

I was also held back by a piece of specious reasoning which has silenced many liberals. It goes like this: "You may hate the Communists, but you must not attack them or expose them, because if you do you are attacking the right to hold unpopular opinions and you are joining the people who attack civil liberties."

I have thought soberly about this. It is, simply, a lie.

Secrecy serves the Communists. On the other pole, it serves those who are interested in silencing liberal voices. The employment of a lot of good liberals is threatened because they have allowed themselves to become associated with or silenced by the Communists.

Liberals must speak out.

I think it is useful that certain of us had this kind of experience with the Communists, for if we had not we should not know them so well. Today, when all the world fears war and they scream peace, we know how much their professions are worth. We know tomorrow they will have a new slogan.

Firsthand experience of dictatorship and thought control left me with an abiding hatred of these. It left me with an abiding hatred of Communist philosophy and methods and the conviction that these must be resisted always. It also left me with the passionate conviction that we must never let the Communists get away with the pretense that they stand for the very things which they kill in their own countries.

I am talking about free speech, a free press, the rights of property, the rights of labor, racial equality, and, above all, individual rights. I value these things. I take them seriously. I value peace, too, when it is not bought at the price of fundamental decencies. I believe these things must be fought for wherever they are not fully honored and protected whenever they are threatened.

The motion pictures I have made and the plays I have chosen to direct represent my convictions.

I expect to continue to make the same kinds of pictures and direct the same kinds of plays.

ELIA KAZAN