

Gary Cooper: Excerpts of Testimony before HUAC

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*In the 1947 HUAC inquiries on communism in Hollywood, Gary Cooper testified as a "friendly" witness. At the time, Cooper was a famous leading man in such movies as "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town," "Beau Geste," "Sergeant York" and "Meet John Doe."*

*In his testimony, Cooper mentions scripts he has seen that he felt were communist in nature. He also defends himself against rumors that he participated in a Communist rally.*

ROBERT E. STRIPLING, CHIEF INVESTIGATOR: When and where were you born, Cooper?

GARY COOPER: I was born in Helena, Montana, in 1901.

STRIPLING: What is your present occupation?

COOPER: An actor.

STRIPLING: Mr. Cooper, you are here in response to a subpoena which was served upon you on September 26, are you not?

COOPER: Yes, I am.

STRIPLING: Chairman, the interrogation of Mr. Cooper will be done by Mr. Smith.

CHAIRMAN: We will have more order, please.

H.A. SMITH: Mr. Cooper, how long have you been an actor?

COOPER: I have been an actor since 1925.

SMITH: And how long have you been in Hollywood?

COOPER: Since 1924.

SMITH: I believe you made many pictures, some of which pictures are "Unconquered," "Pride of the Yankees," "Saratoga Trunk," "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town," and you are presently making "Good Sam," is that correct?

COOPER: Yes.

SMITH: Are you a member of the Screen Actors Guild?

COOPER: Yes, I have been a member since the guild was organized.

SMITH: During the time that you have been in Hollywood, have you ever observed any communistic influence in Hollywood or in the motion picture industry?

COOPER: I believe I have noticed some.

SMITH: What do you believe the principle medium is that they use (in) Hollywood or the industry to inject propaganda?

COOPER: Well, I believe it is done through word of mouth ...

CHAIRMAN: Will you speak louder, please, Mr. Cooper?

COOPER: I believe it is done through word of mouth and through the medium of pamphleting -- and writers, I suppose.

SMITH: By "word of mouth," what do you mean, Mr. Cooper?

COOPER: Well, I mean sort of social gatherings.

SMITH: That has been your observation?

COOPER: That has been my only observation, yes.

SMITH: Can you tell us some of the statements that you may have heard at these gatherings that you believe are communistic?

COOPER: Well, I have heard quite a few, I think, from time to time over the years. Well, I have heard tossed around such statements as, "Don't you think the Constitution of the United States is about a 150 years out of date?" and -- oh, I don't know -- I have heard people mention that, well, "Perhaps this would be a more efficient government without a Congress" -- which statements I think are very un-American.

SMITH: Have you ever observed any communistic information in any scripts?

COOPER: Well, I have turned down quite a few scripts because I thought they were tinged with communistic ideas.

SMITH: Can you name any of those scripts?

COOPER: No, I can't recall any of those scripts to mind.

CHAIRMAN: Just a minute. Mr. Cooper, you haven't got that bad a memory.

COOPER: I beg your pardon, sir?

CHAIRMAN: I say, you haven't got that bad a memory, have you? You must be able to remember some of those scripts you turned down because you thought they were communist scripts.

COOPER: Well, I can't actually give you a title to any of them, no.

CHAIRMAN: Will you think it over, then, and supply the committee with a list of those scripts?

COOPER: I don't think I could, because most of the scripts I read at night, and if they don't look good to me, I don't finish them, or if I do finish them I send them back as soon as possible to their author.

MCDOWELL: That is the custom of most actors, most stars, Mr. Cooper?

COOPER: Yes, I believe so, yes, sir. As to the material, which is more important than the name of the script, I did turn back one script because the leading character in the play was a man whose life's ambition was to organize an army in the United States, an army of soldiers who would never fight to defend their country. I don't remember any more details of the play, but that was enough of a basic idea for me to send it back quickly to its author.

SMITH: Mr. Cooper, have you ever had any personal experience where you feel the Communist Party may have attempted to use you?

COOPER: They haven't attempted to use me, I don't think, because, apparently they know that I am not very sympathetic to communism. Several years ago, when communism was more of a social chit-chat in parties for offices, and so on when communism didn't have the implications that it has now, discussion of communism was more open and I remember hearing statements from some folks to the effect that the communistic system had a great many features that were desirable. It offered the actors and artists -- in other words, the creative people -- a special place in government where we would be somewhat immune from the ordinary leveling of income. And as I remember, some actor's name was mentioned to me who had a house in Moscow which was very large -- he had three cars, and stuff, with his house being quite a bit larger than my house in Beverly Hills at the time -- and it looked to me like a pretty phony come-on to us in the picture business. From that time on, I could never take any of this pinko mouthing very seriously, because I didn't feel it was on the level.

SMITH: Mr. Chairman, we have several official documents that we have obtained through the State Department, which I believe clearly shows that the Communist Party attempts to use actors individually throughout the world to further their cause. With your permission, I would like to show one of those documents to Mr. Cooper and have him read it to the committee. This document from which Mr. Cooper is going to read was distributed in pamphlets in Italy during May of 1947. ...

COOPER: Shall I read it?

SMITH: ... by the Communist Party. Yes, sir, go ahead.

COOPER: Gary Cooper, who took part in the fights for the independence of Spain, held a speech before a crowd of 90,000 in Philadelphia on the occasion of the consecration of the banner of the Philadelphia Communist Federation. Between other things, he said: "In our days it is the greatest honor to be a communist. I wish the whole world to understand what we communists really are. There could be nobody then who might say that we are enemies of mankind and peace. Those who want to discuss communist ideas should first get to know them. ...

SMITH: Were you ever in Philadelphia, Mr. Cooper?

COOPER: No, sir, I was never in Philadelphia.

SMITH: Do you have any comment to make regarding this letter?

COOPER: Well, a 90,000 audience is a little tough to disregard, but it is not true.

CHAIRMAN: I want to help you along, Mr. Cooper. ...

COOPER: No part of it is true, sir.

CHAIRMAN: I happen to know it is just a plain, ordinary, ruthless lie. We know that for a fact. So you don't have to worry any more about that.

MCDOWELL: And also, Mr. Cooper, in order to get it into the record, don't you think there wouldn't be 90,000 people in Philadelphia who were communists?

COOPER: Well, I believe it was Mr. Smith here that said you would have a hard time getting 90,000 people out in Philadelphia for anything. I don't know about that. ...

STRIPLING: Mr. Cooper, witnesses who have preceded you from Hollywood have said that they consider members of the Communist Party to be agents of a foreign government. Do you consider the members of the Communist Party to be that?

COOPER: I am not in nearly as good a position to know as some of the witnesses that have been ahead of me, because I am not a very active member in our guild. They,

therefore, know much more about the politics and the workings of what communists there are in the guild than I. From the general, overall things that you hear in Hollywood, I would assume that there is such a close parallel. ...