

ON THE EVE
OF PRISON

TWO ADDRESSES

BY

Gale Sondergaard

AND

Albert Maltz

" . . . the people of the United States are the rightful masters of both Congresses and Courts, not to overthrow the Constitution but to overthrow the men who pervert the Constitution."

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

PRICE TEN CENTS

The following address was delivered by

GALE SONDERGAARD

(Academy Award actress and wife of Herbert
Biberman of The Hollywood Ten)

at a rally in Hollywood April 21, 1950

I HAVE BEEN a working actress practically all my life—if you will permit me not to count the first eighteen years—and the last two. I have views on many subjects—I have convictions—political convictions, but I am basically an actress.

If you were to ask me what kind of time 1938 was—as compared with 1950—I might not remember the political events, but I would remember that in 1938 I played the wife of Alfred Dreyfus in the picture “The Life of Emile Zola.” And I would think of the year 1938 as a time in which we were allowed to make a picture dealing with a great champion of social justice like Emile Zola—of an unbending victim of military arrogance and bigotry like Alfred Dreyfus. And I would conclude that there was vitality in a time in which an actress could play a courageous and embattled wife of a courageous and embattled man upon the screen.

Today I bring the same emotion and the same imagination to the same role—only now it is played upon a very real stage—and I am playing the role today, not for a living, not for an Academy Award—but for the preservation of my family, even as Mrs. Dreyfus.

I chose to play Mrs. Dreyfus. I enjoyed playing her. I did not choose to play this role today, and I do not enjoy it. But having to play it, I will play it with all the initiative and tenacity and effectiveness I can command.

At Zola’s funeral you will remember that Anatole France, (played in the film so beautifully by Morris Carnovsky), said of Zola that he was a moment in the conscience of mankind. I do not hesitate to say that long after the name of Eric Johnston, collaborator with Parnell Thomas and Senator Mundt in forging implements of mental slavery for our country, has ceased to be remembered even as a name—long after the quiet ones in our community, who fear to interrupt the stultification of our medium, have withered into the oblivion they deserve—The Ten men of Hollywood will be known as part of the conscience of the American artist in a very black cultural moment in American history. And I believe that all the rest of us will be remembered as we stand forth—and only if we stand forth—to save the conscience of our community and our profession from the censor, the bigot and the coward.

I believe these men, “these beloved Ten” as they were named by Rabbi Franklin Cohn at a Passover ceremony in which I participated, have cut their names into the real rock upon which this community stands. Censors and bigots may use their temporary power to remove

these men from us for a time—but they cannot erase their contribution to the dignity and decency of our medium and our community.

I still find it difficult to believe that these men may actually be taken forcibly from us. But I have come to understand that I had better believe it. The uglier the fact, the less can we afford to ignore it. If this shameful thing happens—then I will say of those who caused it—**DO NOT FORGIVE THEM—FOR THEY KNOW WHAT THEY DO.**

I confess to fear of the callous and the arrogant who walk—who run across our land today. But I have an even greater fear—that by inaction we deliver this lovely land and its people into their hands—the hands of thieves, inquisitors and non-interfering courts.

As a wife, a mother, an actress, a citizen—as the daughter of Danish parents who came here to build more liberty—as the daughter-in-law of my husband's Russian-Jewish parents who came here to build more liberty—as an American who reverences the great moments of American conscience and humanity—I accept my present role with conviction that none of us is alone—that the forces do exist which can prevent our America from being taken away from us and frozen into the ugly image of the year 1950. Yes, I believe more fearlessly than I fear.

Do you nod your heads and say to yourselves, “all that is wishful thinking—I don't blame her but let's face it—she's whistling into the wind?”

Then you are wrong—

I recall a story of a young antifascist thrown before a Nazi firing squad. He looked at the assassins before him and laughed—not with bravado but because he couldn't help it. “You think you are killing something when you shoot me,” he said. “You are wrong. You are giving birth to a hundred who will take my place.” He opened his shirt and called to them “Shoot and destroy yourselves.”

He was not wrong. I am not wrong. The fight for our men of Hollywood is a fight against the cultural, social and political assassins in our time. And we—who have gathered together to participate in only one stage of that fight may well cry out our warning: **“TAKE THESE MEN FROM US AND YOU WILL FURTHER EXPOSE AND DESTROY YOURSELVES!”**

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The following address was delivered by

ALBERT MALTZ

(Dramatist, novelist, screenwriter
and one of The Hollywood Ten)

at a rally in Los Angeles April 23, 1950

I DO NOT like the idea of spending a year of my life in a Federal prison. I do not like the problem of trying to explain to my twelve year old son and to my seven year old daughter why their father, and other fathers of their acquaintance, need to be political prisoners. I find it hard to convey to them why they must be law-abiding—why they should never take a bar of candy from a drugstore counter—when their father apparently is a law-breaker of another sort. For obviously the father is some sort of law-breaker; or else he would not be going to prison.

One explains! And one hopes that the explanations are at least partially understood, and that love and loyalty will be a bridge to understanding, and that the year, the neighborhood, the school, will not bear down too hard upon the child. And you wonder with your wife whether a visit to prison will be good for the children or bad. You are not altogether sure of the answer, you never can be, because a child's heart is not your own. And you like none of it.

I do not like an unfinished book in my file. I wanted it finished and read. I think now, for reasons personal to myself, that this particular book will never be finished and never read. I am not happy about it.

Nevertheless, circumstances being what they are, I am satisfied with this year in prison and with all of its consequences. If the opportunity were offered ten times over, I would not withdraw a word, alter a sentence, change a tone of what I said before the unspeakable Committee on un-American activities—except where I could make the words sharper, the sentences more biting. And if we go to prison, I for one will go with a deeper anger than I ever have felt in my life.

What is the substance of that anger? For myself and my colleagues—our families—our work—our lives? Yes, of course. But even more because I abominate the manner in which our land is now being befouled by the men in charge of the machinery of government. You will notice here that I do not limit my charge. When this case began, in the fall of 1947, I did that, as did others. I pointed to the evil actions of certain committees, like the un-American Activities Committee, to certain individuals like J. Parnell Thomas, Rankin, Attorney General Clark. But many things have happened in our land in two and a half years—bad things. And today it would be blindness to view such events as the work of a

few individuals alone or a few reactionary committees of Congress. On the contrary, the time has come when it must be admitted that what is at work here is the total machinery of our men of government, on a policy level and on an executive level. When I say this, I am referring to the loyalty oaths and the loyalty administration boards; to the low courts and to the high courts; to magistrate judges and to Supreme Court justices; to public prosecutors and their sinister squads of perjured informers, who now roam the land testifying for expenses, and who know in advance that the government machinery will protect them in any lie they choose to utter. I am referring to the Harry Bridges case and to the Owen Lattimore case as merely the most recent examples of the manner in which the reputation, career and liberty of a citizen are now dependent upon the testimony of the professional stool pigeon. We have had case after case in which government witnesses are admitted perjurers. Furthermore these same perjurers have been caught on the witness stand in still further perjuries. Yet it is not these men who are prosecuted; on the contrary they are protected from prosecution by the Department of Justice, they are given generous fees and expense accounts and they cross the country on public tax money to appear and perjure themselves in still other cases. All this by the arrangement, connivance and manipulation of what is solemnly called a Department of Justice.

I refer also to the malicious, premeditated and dishonorable conduct of judges who penalize with prison sentences lawyers who have dared to defend vigorously clients whom the government is out to get. I refer further to the thickening nightmare atmosphere hovering over our land in which increasing numbers of citizens are forced to swear, "I am not this and I am not that." In Pittsburg a violinist is removed from the symphony orchestra because his politics, as charged before the un-American Activities Committee, are unbecoming to a fiddler. In New York a celebrated tap dancer, Paul Draper, is removed from a television program where he was merely to dance, not utter a political word. This in spite of his affidavits that he is not a Communist! This because he has made the past error of expressing certain thoughts not in conformity with the foreign policy of the American Legion.

Not least in this record of charges I refer to our bipartisan foreign policy, to the manufactured urgencies of an unnecessary cold war, and

to the pretense that national emergency makes it imperative to intimidate and persecute opposition political opinion.

I am, ladies and gentleman, making what some will call a very radical speech. Perhaps so. But it may be that in calling for justice in the courts, for an end to indecency in public life, for a land in which ideas may be spoken without fear and in which all men and women—all—may live and act politically without intimidation, job blacklist and persecution—that in this I am being very conservative after all. In any instance I know of no other speech I can make in the month of April, 1950. Ten citizens are going to prison. It is not just that they suffer this. And it threatens thousands of others that the courts send these ten to prison. It is a time for anger and a time to speak out.

For myself, I was born in this country, moulded by it, and I will not repudiate what it has taught me. I went to its schools, learned to salute its flag, learned its proud history, read and re-read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and therefore I have not learned how to hold my tongue. This land has created a sense of loyalty in me, its way of life has given me a conscience. But it is a loyalty to the land and its people, and to their free life and independence; it is not loyalty to a particular office holder, to the Board of Directors of any corporation, to a particular Secretary of State or a particular policy. Furthermore I was not born to a land in which informers and professional perjurers wrote the Constitution, dictated the substance of debates in Congress, or decided who might lead a trade union, teach in a school or write a book.

Not since 1798, under a law infamous in our history, have men of letters been imprisoned in this land—have political parties been so persecuted, not for their deeds but for their ideas, as is the Communist Party today—have educators, ministers, trade unionists, scientists, entire organizations of the people, been declared subversive by governmental edict and court opinion. It was not true loyalty in 1798 to bow before the Sedition law, and Thomas Jefferson did not. It was not true loyalty in 1848 to accept as necessary, just or good the war launched against Mexico by the slave owners dominating our government, and Abraham Lincoln did not. It was not loyalty in 1857 to accept the Dred Scott decision as wise, proper and constitutional, even though Chief Justice Taney

argued out of his great legal knowledge that no slave or descendent of slaves could have any standing in Federal Courts — and Emerson was too loyal to this nation to nod agreeably to such a decision, Thoreau was not heard applauding, Walt Whitman wrote no poems in honor of Taney. It was not loyal in 1921 to approve the Palmer raids against radicals, even though they were carried out under the Attorney General by the present head of the F.B.I.—and Charles Evans Hughes was not silent or approving.

The weapons of tyranny are many, and foremost amongst them is the current lie that those who oppose the policies of men now in office are disloyal to America. If we cloud our reasoning by mumbling that the tyranny of other governments requires the same of our own, then we will damn our own future. We have no command over the varying histories of other lands, over their internal development, the character and culture of their people. And we will be fools if we abandon any of our own liberties for any reason. We fought a successful war against Hitler without the necessity of loyalty oaths, purges, witch-hunts or the other institutions that have come to be visited upon us. Now, in peace time, the Appellate Court of Washington presumes to inform us that an emergency requires the abridgement of our civil liberties.

This is precisely what the Appellate Court ruled in the Hollywood case! The Appellate Court re-wrote the Bill of Rights without the consent of the people, and our all-wise, all-just, above-approach Supreme Court has in its turn ruled that there are no issues in the Hollywood case on which it cares to adjudicate. The powers-that-be have spoken!

I do not think so. I do not think that the powers that be have finally spoken. J. Parnell Thomas and his Committee have spoken. Senator McCarthy, Louis Budenz, Whittaker Chambers, Judge Medina, have spoken. The Appellate Court has spoken and the Supreme Court has spoken with the cowardly eloquence of its silence. But in 1859, the sixteenth President of the United States said, "The people are the rightful masters of Congresses and Courts." And the central issue of our time, no less that Lincoln's, is precisely whether the people will remain the masters. And I think the American people have not yet been fully heard on this.

I don't think I suffer from a wholly naive faith in our people. I know that it is possible, in certain historical circumstances, that a people can be tricked, deluded and made drunken, so that it seeks its destiny on a path that leads to an abyss. We have seen Germany and we know this. I think whole sections of the American people are now partially tricked and deluded, confused and groping, but the hysteria has been manufactured on high and does not burn in the grass roots. And I believe the American people do not want Mundt Bills or hydrogen wars or the jack boot. It remains to be seen whether they can be deluded into accepting them.

The issue then lies in the days ahead. As you know, there has been a measure of real protest over the Supreme Court's action in the case of the Hollywood Ten. For this I express the thanks of my colleagues. Certainly our personal fate will be affected if these protests, for which citizens like you are responsible, make the Court pause and cause the Justices to accept our petition for re-hearing. But of even greater importance is what happens next in our land and in our community. The fight to keep the Hollywood Ten out of jail is part of a larger fight to keep Hollywood free of a second investigation, to keep book publishing, the theatre, and all other media by which ideas are expressed, free from inquisition. For two and a half years, despite its promises, the Committee on un-American Activities has not returned to Hollywood. It did not because the Hollywood Ten had challenged its power in the Courts. But if the Hollywood Ten enter prison, then a long struggle has been lost. And then the members of the motion picture industry will need to decide how they will live—and whether the blacklist will be extended—and whether there will be oaths required—and whether the enthroned producer in Hollywood will be John Rankin of Mississippi.

I am not talking lightly. It would be wrong to pass over casually the consequences of a defeat. The ten of us did not go to Washington with the illusion that only we were involved. And if there are any who have thought so in the years since, they are due for bitter instruction.

We will live in the world we make. If we bow before new onslaughts by the Committee on un-American Activities, then we will live

in that world. And although that world may bear down most heavily at first upon certain individuals, ten, a hundred or a thousand—nevertheless if there are any decent people who think they can live well within that world, they are mistaken.

We will live also in the universal community we make. If we go along with those who hunger to punish the Russians for their socialist ways, which some citizens abhor, by dropping hydrogen bombs on Moscow and other Russian cities, then we will learn on our own flesh the hideous consequences of allowing others to decide our fate. If we are too frightened of our public servants to demand of them that they meet the world's problems without resource to war, then we will suffer the consequences of our fears when we cower in bomb shelters.

These are not easy times. But there have been times no less difficult or threatening in the history of our nation and of the world. This is a time when men and women of principle and courage and a true instinct for self-preservation must come forward. I think they will come forward. They are represented here tonight. That's what this evening is all about.

I have said before, and I want very much to repeat again, that I am always impressed at a gathering like this by the indestructable bond that exists among people. We are so varied, each one private unto himself, with his secret heart, longings, problems, anxieties. Yet not alone, because we always come together. And we come together to see justice done, to advance thought, to combat rheumatic heart disease in children, to achieve brotherhood. It is an ever-recurring act of hope and love, and it moves the world. We have reason to be serious these days, but we also have reason to remember our history and to feel confident that the American people have a way of retaining mastery over Congresses and Courts.

Friends—be of good cheer.