

— A CASE STUDY —

HAROLD HECHT

and the

HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

Congressional Testimony • Contemporary Press Coverage • Historical Commentary

— WELCOME —

This case study explores producer Harold Hecht's appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee from 1951 to 1953.

Through primary transcripts, contemporary reporting, and historical analysis, it reconstructs the events, context, and consequences of one of the most controversial moments in Hollywood's encounter with the Red Scare.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

THE ACCUSATION

How the accusation became public and drew Hecht into the Committee's inquiry.

THE TESTIMONY

Executive session, public hearing, and the record he left behind.

THE CONTEXT

The politics, fears, and pressures of the early 1950s.

THE AFTERMATH

What followed — for Hecht, for others, and for the films that shaped a era.



The record begins with an accusation in 1951 and follows Hecht through private testimony, public hearings, contemporary press coverage, and the consequences that followed.

— READY TO EXPLORE? —

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HAROLD HECHT & HUAC

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A NOTE ON THIS CASE STUDY

This case study reconstructs producer Harold Hecht's appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) using published transcripts, contemporary press coverage, memoirs, and later scholarship. Verified information on HUAC's closed executive sessions is included where available.

Quotations from the HUAC transcript and from period newspapers appear exactly as recorded, preserving original spelling and stenographic conventions. Editorial commentary is clearly separated from primary-source material, and any details that could not be independently confirmed are identified as unverified.

A word on sourcing and its limits: this compilation was assembled from committee transcripts, digitized newspaper pages, and secondary research materials gathered. Because unpublished National Archives holdings were not consulted, portions of the executive-session narrative rely on secondary accounts; these instances are noted in the text.



Harold Hecht - Movie Producer

PART ONE — THE ACCUSATION

The Catalyst: Martin Berkeley's Charge

Who Was Martin Berkeley?

Martin Berkeley was a Hollywood screenwriter who became one of HUAC's most consequential cooperative witnesses during the Hollywood hearings. Like Hecht two years later, Berkeley was represented before the committee by attorney Edward Bennett Williams of Washington, D.C. - the transcript of Berkeley's hearing records Williams introducing himself in the same words he would use for Hecht in 1953: "My name is Edward Bennett Williams, of Washington, D.C., sir."

Source: HUAC hearing transcript, Communist Infiltration of Hollywood Motion-Picture Industry, Part IV (September 19, 1951), via the Boston Public Library HUAC research guide, archive.org/details/communistinfiltr04unit.

Public Testimony, September 19, 1951

Screenwriter Martin Berkeley appeared before HUAC in a public hearing on September 19, 1951, as part of the committee's series of hearings titled "Communist Infiltration of Hollywood Motion-Picture Industry." Berkeley cooperated fully with the committee and, in a single appearance, identified an unusually large number of individuals he said he had known as members of the Communist Party. Contemporary press accounts put the figure at roughly 150 names, among the largest single lists supplied to HUAC by any Hollywood witness during the period.

Berkeley's testimony carried particular weight with the committee, and with the industry, because of the sheer scale of his naming. No other single witness in the Hollywood hearings is as consistently cited for the size of the list he supplied.

That scale made Berkeley's testimony a recurring reference point in the hearings that followed, including Hecht's own two years later.

Additional sources: Communist Infiltration of the Hollywood Motion-Picture Industry, archive.org/details/annualreportfory1952unit/page/n47;

Minutes of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Feb. 16, 1951, catalog.archives.gov/id/28890655.



The HUAC panel during the Los Angeles hearings, March 23, 1953. From left, Congressmen Gordon H. Scherer, Kit Clardy, Chairman Harold H. Velde, Morgan M. Moulder, Clyde Doyle, and James B. Frazier Jr. Committee counsel Frank S. Tavenner Jr. (not shown) conducted much of the questioning. Congressman Donald L. Jackson (not shown) also participated in the examination of witnesses.

The Line That Named Harold Hecht

Among those Berkeley identified was producer Harold Hecht, whom he knew from New York's left-wing theatrical community of the late 1930s, particularly the Federal Theatre Project. Berkeley identified Hecht as a former member of the Communist Party, but not during his widely reported public testimony. Berkeley's public hearing on September 19, 1951 was followed, that same day, by a second appearance before the committee in a closed executive session. It was in that private session, that Berkeley named Hecht.

At the time Berkeley named him, Hecht was out of the country, in Italy, producing *The Crimson Pirate* for Warner Bros., which made it impractical for the committee to summon him to testify immediately. HUAC did not take Hecht's own testimony until nearly eighteen months later, on March 23, 1953.

Source: HUAC hearing transcript, executive session, September 19, 1951; Harold Hecht, Wikipedia (House Un-American Activities Committee testimony section), citing Hecht's own March 23, 1953 HUAC testimony, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Hecht.

The official transcript records Berkeley naming Hecht in these words:

Mr. TAVENNER: Were there any other individuals in that particular group or associated with the writers' faction that you recall?

Mr. BERKELEY: Yes, sir. There was Harold Hecht.

Mr. TAVENNER: What was his occupation?

Mr. BERKELEY: At that time, Harold Hecht was a dance director, I believe, and later became a talent agent and is now a motion-picture producer. He was a member of the party.

Mr. TAVENNER: How do you know that he was a member of the party?

Mr. BERKELEY: I knew him as a member of the party through association and through party channels. I knew him to be a member of the faction.

PART TWO — THE TESTIMONY

Harold Hecht Before HUAC • March 23, 1953

When Hecht finally appeared before the committee on March 23, 1953, Tavenner began by returning to Berkeley's accusation.

1. *Joining The Party*

Hecht told the committee that he joined the Communist Party in New York in 1936, during the Depression.

Mr. Tavenner: Now, will you tell the committee, please, the circumstances under which you became a member of the Communist Party?

Mr. Hecht: In 1935 I left Hollywood. I was without a job and also without any money. The motion pictures I had been working in were more or less stopped. They were higher-budget pictures, and I was a dance director at that time. I was out of work for some time. I went to New York. I remember going to New York, and it was on a May Day. I saw a vast army marching.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Hecht: I saw this army marching. There were pamphlets, literature, and other material handed out. I read the *Daily Worker*. It interested me. That summer I heard more about communism, that communism found jobs galore, spoke about the growing need for social reform and social security, with one voice fighting nazism and fascism, and these things interested me, and in 1936 I joined the party.

Mr. Tavenner: That was in New York City?

Mr. Hecht: That was in New York City.

2. *The Federal Theatre Project*

In 1937, Hecht joined the Federal Theatre Project, where he was put in charge of the musical revue Sing for Your Supper. He testified that a Communist Party group operated within the production.

Mr. Tavenner: Were you a member of the Communist Party while you held that position?

Mr. Hecht: Yes; I was.

Mr. Tavenner: What group of the Communist Party did you belong to at the time that you were employed by the Federal Theater?

Mr. Hecht: I belonged to a group that was concerned with this particular show.

Mr. Tavenner: You mean to say that there was a Communist Party cell or group established within the cast which produced this play?

Mr. Hecht: Well, there was the cast, there were the workers. I said there were 200 in the cast. I should say from the time we started the show until the show went on there might have been 500 people connected with it.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Tavenner: How many persons composed this group or cell of the Communist Party, within the Federal Theater?

Mr. Hecht: About 40.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Tavenner: Now, will you tell the committee just what the objective was of the group of Communists that had been organized within the Federal Theater, at least within your project, the one that was producing *Sing for Your Supper*?

Mr. Hecht: Well, they had the immediate objective of keeping their jobs, trying to influence the content of the show to some extent, and they had the larger objectives which all Communist Party members have of following the party line, of reading literature, of doing certain neighborhood work.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Hecht: At one time there was great protest among a number of the comrades over the content of the show. There was a dress rehearsal and V. J. Jerome, who was the cultural director of the party, was at this dress rehearsal. The rehearsal was not given for him, but he was there. After the show.

Mr. Tavenner: V. J. Jerome at that time was the cultural director of the Communist Party in this country, was he not?

Mr. Hecht: I believe so. I am not sure that is his actual title, but that describes the position he held.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Hecht: I remember we had a midnight meeting and he talked to us about the play. He felt that it was good, that while it did not necessarily follow the party line or was as left as a number of the people wanted it to be—

Mr. Tavenner: When you say “a number of people,” what people?

Mr. Hecht: As I said before, there was a group of the people in this unit who had protested about the content of the show. They felt it wasn't sufficiently slanted to the left.

Mr. Tavenner: Were those persons members of the Communist Party?

Mr. Hecht: Oh, yes; they were.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Tavenner: Well, now, just tell us what V. J. Jerome did.

Mr. Hecht: Well, he said he thought that it was a good show. If it was slanted any more it would become sectarian. The content of the show was good and these criticisms were unjust.

3. Hollywood And Leaving The Party

After returning to Hollywood in 1939, Hecht resumed attending Communist Party meetings, including gatherings at the homes of director Herbert Biberman and screenwriter Gertrude Purcell. He testified that the Nazi-Soviet pact deepened his growing disillusionment with the Party.

Mr. Moulder: When did you discontinue your affiliation with the Communist Party organization?

Mr. Hecht: At the beginning of 1940.

Mr. Moulder: At anytime since then have you in any way been connected with the Communist Party?

Mr. Hecht: I have not attended a meeting or been connected in any way with the Communist Party since then.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Doyle: What did you mean when you said that the lack of democracy in the Communist Party disturbed you a great deal?

Mr. Hecht: One of the things that was told us and taught to us was that the Communist Party is a democratic organization, the members of which decided on the action and line of the party. This I found never to be true.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Hecht: When there were important decisions, when important decisions were made, these decisions came down to us.

Mr. Doyle: Came from where?

Mr. Hecht: Some place from up above.

Mr. Doyle: Well, you mean from some source of which you had no knowledge?

Mr. Hecht: Yes. These matters were decided and they were passed on to us. It was considered a matter of party discipline to follow the line.

[Brief questioning omitted.]

Mr. Hecht: At this time Roosevelt was called a warmonger. The Communist Party had supported Roosevelt and supported him strongly, and suddenly he became a warmonger. It was a little difficult to follow and a little difficult to swallow. It was also at this time, as I said before, the Nazi-Soviet pact occurred. One of the reasons I came into the party was because the party was fighting against nazism and against fascism, and now for some reason that I couldn't understand or believe in [...], this was changed and communism and nazism were aligned.

4. The Names

The questioning then turned to the people Hecht remembered attending Communist Party meetings in Hollywood.

Mr. Tavenner: Will you advise the committee who were in attendance at those meetings, that is, the Communist Party at Biberman's home and at the home of Gertrude Purcell?

Mr. Hecht: You want the names?

Mr. Tavenner: Yes, sir.

Mr. Hecht: Betty Anderson.

Mr. Jackson: With identification as to occupation, if you know the occupation.

Mr. Tavenner: Give all of the identifying material you can.

Mr. Hecht: Betty Anderson, I believe, is a housewife, was a secretary. Martin Berkeley was a writer. Edward Biberman, a painter. Herbert Biberman, director. John Bright, writer; Gordon Kahn, writer; John Howard Lawson, writer; Mel Levy, writer; Albert Maltz, writer; Gertrude Purcell, writer; Meta Reis, housewife at that time; Madelaine Ruthven, professional Communist; Budd Schulberg, writer. Madelaine Ruthven was also a writer. Gale Sondergaard, actress, and Frank Tuttle, director.

5. Called A "Stool Pigeon"

During the luncheon recess, Hecht encountered George Willner, a fellow Hollywood agent who had previously refused to testify before HUAC.

Mr. Jackson: Was George Willner a member of your agency during the time you were a member of the Goldstone Agency?

Mr. Hecht: George Willner came to the agency sometime after, sometime shortly before I went into the Army. George Willner, incidentally, met me in the hall and said, "**I understand you are going to be a stool pigeon.**" I want George Willner to know that he will not intimidate me in any way by remarks and expressions of that kind.

Mr. Tavenner: When did that occur?

Mr. Hecht: In the luncheon recess.

Mr. Tavenner: When?

Mr. Hecht: Today.

Mr. Jackson: Here in the Federal Building?

Mr. Hecht: Here in the Federal Building.

[Committee discussion of Willner's previous HUAC appearance omitted.]

Mr. Moulder: When he asked you the question or made the statement as to whom you were going to turn stool pigeon on, what was he referring to?

Mr. Hecht: We carried the conversation no further. I imagine he was referring to the fact that I was going to divulge the fact that I was a member of the Communist Party and tell the committee all the things I know about the Communist Party and **all the people I knew working in it.**

6. Why He Cooperated

Mr. Hecht: In December 1950 I made a flat policy with our company of not hiring any more Communists, investigating them and making sure that we did not hire any more Communists, and since that time we have carried this out.

[Questioning omitted.]

Mr. Doyle: What propels or compels you to come here today and tell not only your own experiences but to do what this man Willner evidently criticized you for doing, becoming a stool pigeon [...] and when you do give the names of known Communists to this committee it is helping us very materially and it is a help to your country. What got under your skin to make you do that?

Mr. Hecht: There are many people in this country similar to me, people who are not necessarily Communists, but people who are left all the way to the center, and these people, I believe, are gradually becoming more and more aware of the sinister ways of the Communist Party and the place where they belong. They need new forces to work with and new friends. That is an important part of the anti-Communist program and I would like to be a part of it.

[Questioning omitted.]

Mr. Velde: The Chair desires to thank the witness for his appearance here, adding considerable knowledge to the great fund obtained by this committee.... It has been a privilege to hear you speak frankly on the issue of communism, and give us the benefit of your beliefs.

The witness is hereby dismissed.

Full Testimony Of Harold Hecht

QR link to the complete hearing transcript

Scan the code to read Harold Hecht's complete testimony before HUAC, every question, every answer.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-m5ZWnmCUSSVdUvlt5UeK9QwTCf5JX3B/view>

Scan to read the full testimony



The Substance of Hecht's Testimony

Hecht testified that he had joined the Communist Party during the Depression. Questioning focused heavily on the 1939 Federal Theatre Project revue *Sing for Your Supper*, which Hecht had helped write, cast, and direct. Hecht testified that the production contained what he described as “party-line insinuations”, sketches that he said he recognized, only in retrospect, as reflecting Communist political viewpoints.

Among those Hecht identified was screenwriter Roland Kibbee, who had by then become one of Hecht's closest professional collaborators at Hecht-Lancaster. Kibbee had already been named separately by Martin Berkeley, along with 155 others; Hecht's independent naming of him compounded the pressure on Kibbee, who was subsequently required

to testify himself, believing - incorrectly, according to Victor Navasky's later research - that he was mostly naming people who had already named him.

*Sources: Roland Kibbee, Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Kibbee, citing Kate Buford, *Burt Lancaster: An American Life* (2001) and Victor Navasky, *Naming Names; Investigation of Communist Activities*, archive.org/details/investigationofc01unit, pp. 298–314.*

The committee's particular interest in Hecht stemmed from his position as co-head, with Burt Lancaster, of the independent production company then known as Norma Productions (soon to become Hecht-Lancaster Productions), which had employed numerous writers, directors, and actors already identified as Communists or Communist sympathizers. His full cooperation - acknowledging his own past membership and supplying names of former associates - allowed him to avoid blacklisting, and his production company continued operating without interruption.

Hecht's testimony ended when the committee dismissed him on March 23, 1953. But the meaning of that testimony, what he said, the names he named, and the choices he made before the committee, would continue to be examined long afterward. In the decades that followed, historians, biographers, and other writers returned to Hecht's appearance before HUAC, placing it within the larger history of the Hollywood blacklist.

PART THREE — THE LEGACY: DECADES OF COMMENTARY

Hecht is not the central subject of any full-length book, but he appears sometimes briefly, sometimes pointedly, in a range of scholarly histories, memoirs, and biographical reference works. The accounts below are organized chronologically by original publication date. Page numbers refer to the editions cited in the research materials assembled for this case study.

Victor S. Navasky - Naming Names

Navasky's *Naming Names* remains the most influential historical study of the Hollywood blacklist, built on interviews with more than 150 participants, congressional records, FBI material, private correspondence, studio files, legal documents, and contemporary newspapers. It won the National Book Award and is widely described as a "moral detective story" about why witnesses who had once shared political commitments and friendships came to name one another before the committee.

"What follows is less a history than a moral detective story. After an introduction to the way in which the informer and what I call the Informer Principle - the naming of names as a test of virtue - determined and defined the cold war environment, I focus on the role of the informer in Hollywood and ask: How did it come to pass that scores of otherwise decent individuals were compelled to betray a moral presumption?"

Navasky, *Naming Names*, p.17.

Navasky discusses Hecht as one of the "friendly witnesses" whose primary objective, in Navasky's analysis, was protecting his business rather than expressing genuine ideological conviction - one of many producers for whom testifying was transactional: admit past membership, name colleagues, continue working.

"There were denigrating informers, like Harold Hecht, who told the Committee that George Willner, an agent for many blacklisted people, had threatened him that morning at the luncheon recess saying, 'I understand you are going to be a stool pigeon.'"

Navasky, *Naming Names*, p. 74.

Navasky's broader analytic framework - that HUAC hearings functioned as "degradation ceremonies" in which confession alone was insufficient and witnesses were expected to validate their repentance by naming others - is developed at page 478 and applied by Navasky to witnesses across the hearings, Hecht's March 1953 appearance among them. Navasky also traces the case of Roland Kibbee, Hecht's close collaborator, whom Hecht separately named; Navasky's interview with Kibbee found that Kibbee had in fact supplied names not previously known to the committee, contrary to Kibbee's own belief that he had mostly named people who had already named him.

Navasky, *Naming Names*, pp. 17, 74, 478, 654–660.

Walter Bernstein - Inside Out: A Memoir of the Blacklist

Walter Bernstein, a screenwriter blacklisted during the McCarthy era, worked directly for Hecht in the late 1940s, sharing screenplay credit with Ben Maddow on *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands* (1948), one of Hecht's earliest productions - giving Bernstein's account a firsthand, pre-blacklist vantage point on Hecht as an employer, distinct from his later testimony.

*"After my ten weeks with Rossen I was offered another job by my agent, a nervous ex-dancer named Harold Hecht. He had just formed a producing company with his star client, Burt Lancaster. They raised my salary from \$250 to \$500 a week and paired me with a more experienced screenwriter named Ben Maddow. We were to adapt an English thriller called *Kiss the Blood off My Hands*."*

Bernstein, *Inside Out*, p. 8.

"He would ask me questions about what classical music to listen to, what art to look at, what books to read... Hecht viewed this with suspicion. He would have been happier if Lancaster had only wanted to chase women... When Lancaster, feeling himself inadequately trained, wanted to take acting classes at the Actor's Laboratory Theater, Hecht vetoed it. The Lab was considered a left-wing organization and Hecht, although (or because) he was a Communist himself, did not want Lancaster anywhere near the place."

Bernstein, *Inside Out*, p. 10.

"As usual, I was inconsistent in how I felt about the informers I knew, contemptuous of Kazan but only saddened by Maddow, understanding (if not forgiving) of Rossen but despising Harold Hecht. The difference seemed to lie in how personally aggrieved I felt."

Bernstein, *Inside Out*, p. 250.

Bernstein was never subpoenaed by HUAC in 1951 and never testified before the committee; his blacklisting stemmed from being listed in the publication *Red Channels*, not from unfriendly testimony, as some secondary sources have incorrectly stated. His authority on Hecht rests on having worked for him just before the blacklist hit, not on any shared HUAC appearance.

Bernstein does not devote a chapter to Hecht's 1953 testimony; Hecht appears in the memoir as one of several producers whose careers survived cooperation with the committee, set against writers - Bernstein among them - excluded from Hollywood employment for years afterward.

Kate Buford, Burt Lancaster - An American Life

Buford's biography of Lancaster, cited via its discussion of Roland Kibbee (and corroborated by Navasky), states that Kibbee was named as a former Communist Party member both by Martin Berkeley - among 155 others - and separately, by his own colleague and Hecht-Lancaster executive Harold Hecht.

"The face to watch was Hecht's in Italy as he read a telegram from HUAC in September informing him he had just been named as a member of the Communist Party in a closed session of the committee. The informant was Martin Berkeley, a screenwriter and former Communist whom Hollywood Ten writer Ring Lardner Jr. dismissed as a writer of animal movies such as *The Lone Wolf* because "[h]e couldn't write human dialogue."

Berkeley set a kind of record, naming around 155 people at one go, among them Dorothy Parker, Dashiell Hammett, Lillian Hellman—and Kibbee, who had become a member of the party back in 1937, according to Victor Navasky, "by way of the Hollywood

[...]

Kibbee and Hecht persuaded HUAC that, as Berkeley's testimony had been private, they should be allowed also to respond privately before their names were made public. "

Kate Buford, *Burt Lancaster: An American Life* (2001), pp. 119-120.

"To his credit, Hecht insisted the FTP had not been run by Communists and was "a hallmark in the history of the American Theater." But then he reeled off several names including John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Budd Schulberg, Frank Tuttle—and Roland Kibbee (a wry blacklist story that circulated around Hollywood for years claimed that when Kibbee turned to Hecht for advice on how to handle his HUAC summons, Hecht graciously obliged, and then turned around and named him). "

Kate Buford, *Burt Lancaster: An American Life* (2001), pp. 131.

Kibbee was consequently required to testify before the committee himself, doing so in the belief that he had mostly named people who had already named him. Kibbee subsequently broke off his relationship with Hecht but continued to do freelance work for the company, and retained his friendship with Lancaster.

Sources: Wikipedia, "Roland Kibbee," citing Buford and Navasky; *Investigation of Communist Activities*, testimony volume, p. 314.

Mickey Knox - The Good, the Bad and the Dolce Vita

Mickey Knox, a blacklisted actor who relocated first to Paris and then to Rome to continue working, offers the most personal and least detached account of Hecht among the sources reviewed for this case study. His 2004 memoir, with an introduction by Norman Mailer, describes a social circle in which the Lancasters, the Hechts, and the Knoxs dined together regularly before the blacklist, and a professional relationship.

"I got to know Harold Hecht, Burt Lancaster's agent, through Burt. The Lancasters, the Hechts, and the Knoxs saw each other several times a week for dinner."

Knox, *The Good, the Bad, and the Dolce Vita*, p.50.

Hecht handled Burt Lancaster as his sole client-agent before becoming his producing partner - that curdled permanently after Hecht's 1953 testimony.

Years later, Knox described an encounter with Hecht at a Rome studio commissary, roughly two decades after Hecht's HUAC appearance:

"I was startled to see Harold Hecht, Burt Lancaster's ex-business partner, approaching our table. He had aged badly; he was stooped and looked decrepit... I had refused to speak to Hecht after his appearance as a witness during the House Un-American Activities hearing twenty years earlier. He was the friendliest songbird; he sang and sang, naming friends as Reds from his WPA days in the thirties to his recent friends in Hollywood. He then got on his knees and kissed those fathead interrogators' asses."

Knox, *The Good, the Bad, and the Dolce Vita*, pp. 262–263.

"Harold had cashed in on his friendship with Burt. He made big bucks, but as wealth usually does, it bred fear. Gone were first principles and the main necessity in life was to protect the estate."

Knox, *The Good, the Bad, and the Dolce Vita*, p.263.

Knox describes a chance reunion at a studio commissary in Rome years later, at which he refused to greet Hecht beyond a slight nod, and reflects at length on why Burt Lancaster, a vocal liberal who publicly defended his own ACLU membership decades afterward, nonetheless maintained his business and personal ties to Hecht despite Hecht's testimony. Knox's account frames Hecht's cooperation not merely as political compliance but as a personal betrayal of a once-close circle, a reading he shares with Bernstein but states considerably more bluntly.

Sing for Your Supper and the Federal Theatre Project Record

Independent of the memoir and scholarly sources, the research materials include a well-corroborated account - cross-checked against Wikipedia, the Internet Broadway Database, Playbill, IMDb, and the Library of Congress's Federal Theatre Project playbill archive - of Hecht's path to HUAC's attention through his stage career.

Hecht (1907–1985) worked as one of Hollywood's leading dance directors in the early-to-mid 1930s, choreographing for the Marx Brothers, Mae West, Bing Crosby, Cary Grant, and W.C. Fields, among others, at Paramount, RKO, MGM, and Fox. After his choreography work dried up, he returned to New York around 1935 and, by approximately 1936–37, had joined the Communist Party USA, attending meetings and taking classes in labor studies and Marxism - according to his own later testimony.

In 1937 he joined the Federal Theatre Project, a Works Progress Administration program directed by Hallie Flanagan that, by 1939, employed more than 10,000 theatre workers nationally, and spent nearly two years assembling *Sing for Your Supper*, credited to Hecht, David Lisan, Turner Bullock, Charlotte Kent, and John La Touche, with music by Lee Wainer and Ned Leha and choreography by Ned McGurn and Anna Sokolow. The revue opened at the Adelphi Theatre on Broadway on April 24, 1939, and closed on June 30, 1939, after 44 performances.

Sources: *Harold Hecht*, Wikipedia; *Sing for Your Supper*, IBDB, ibdb.com/broadway-production/sing-for-your-supper-12464;

Harold Hecht, Other Works, IMDb;

Federal Theatre Project playbill, Library of Congress, loc.gov/resource/musftpplaybills.200221809.0;

New York Daily News review by Burns Mantle (1939), via newspapers.com/newspage/429901451

An Earlier Controversy: Sally Saunders and the Federal Theatre

A separate, earlier controversy involving Hecht predates HUAC entirely: in 1938, actress Sally Saunders publicly clashed with him over his hiring practices - he had refused to fire a Black cast member she objected to - and Saunders subsequently testified against Hecht, the Federal Theatre Project, and the Workers Alliance at an anti-Communist hearing in Washington, well before the 1953 HUAC hearings.

Sources: The Falls City Journal; Testimony Of Actress Stirs House Inquiry (1939), - newspapers.com/image/689650541

General Reference and Web Sources

In addition to the book-length sources above, general reference material - principally the Wikipedia entry for Harold Hecht, which itself cites primary HUAC records - was used to confirm biographical and production details discussed elsewhere in this case study, including Hecht's choreography career, his Federal Theatre Project work on *Sing for Your Supper*, and the formation of Norma Productions, its successor Hecht-Lancaster Productions, and the later Hecht-Hill-Lancaster organization.

PART FOUR — LIVING THROUGH THE RED SCARE

HUAC in Context

The House Un-American Activities Committee did not appear overnight. It grew out of a special committee formed in 1938 to investigate disloyalty and subversive activity, and by 1945 Congress had made it a permanent standing fixture of the House of Representatives. For most of the country, HUAC was an abstraction, a name in the newspaper attached to hearings about government workers and labor unions. That changed in October 1947, when the committee turned its attention to Hollywood and produced the case that would define it in the popular imagination: the "Hollywood Ten," a group of screenwriters and directors who refused, on First Amendment grounds, to answer the committee's central question, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" For that refusal they were cited for contempt of Congress, sent to prison, and blacklisted by every major studio in town.

That was only the opening round. The committee returned to Hollywood again and again through the early 1950s, holding further hearings in 1951 and again in March 1953. By then the choreography of the hearings was well understood by everyone who took the witness stand. Cooperate, admit past Communist Party membership and supply the names of other members, and the industry would treat you as rehabilitated and employable. Refuse, whether on First Amendment grounds, as the Hollywood Ten had, or by invoking the Fifth Amendment's protection against self-incrimination, as many later witnesses did - and the result was some combination of a contempt citation and a professional blacklist.

HUAC did not operate alone. Its Hollywood hearings ran alongside the broader anti-Communist climate associated with Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose Senate subcommittee pursued its own parallel investigations into alleged Communist influence in government. McCarthy himself held no formal role on HUAC, which was a separate House committee. Together, HUAC's hearings, McCarthy's Senate investigations, industry blacklists compiled by publications like *Red Channels*, and the loyalty oaths studios and unions increasingly demanded of their employees created a climate in which a past political association, however brief, however long since abandoned, could end a career overnight. It is a climate visible even in the ordinary newspapers of the day: the front page reproduced earlier in this book, with its adjoining headline on the Bohlen confirmation fight, is itself a small illustration of just how deeply anti-Communist politics had worked its way into the era's daily news.

The Hollywood Ten

Cooperation was never the only path, and the record of resistance begins at the very start of the story. In October 1947, ten screenwriters and directors, among them Dalton Trumbo, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, and Alvah Bessie, sat before HUAC and refused, on First Amendment grounds, to answer questions about their political affiliations or to name fellow members of the Communist Party. The committee cited all ten for contempt of Congress. Most served prison sentences ranging from six months to a year, and every one of them was blacklisted by the Hollywood studios, several for a decade or longer.

Their stand became the defining act of public resistance to HUAC's Hollywood investigations; the moral benchmark against which every subsequent witness's choice, cooperation or refusal, would implicitly be measured for years afterward.

The Committee for the First Amendment

The Ten did not stand entirely alone. In the days surrounding the 1947 hearings, a group of the industry's most prominent actors, directors, and writers organized themselves as the Committee for the First Amendment to publicly oppose

HUAC's investigation and defend the Hollywood Ten's right not to testify. A delegation that included Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Danny Kaye, and John Garfield flew to Washington, D.C., to attend the hearings in person and register their opposition face to face. A striking public gesture from some of Hollywood's biggest stars, made at a moment when the political and professional risks of doing so were not yet fully understood. The pressure that followed proved too much to withstand: within about a year the Committee for the First Amendment had dissolved, and several of its members, Bogart among them, later distanced themselves from the effort altogether as the blacklist hardened around them.

Set side by side, the Hollywood Ten's public refusal and the Committee for the First Amendment's public protest represent two very different responses to the same committee and the same underlying pressure, and they carried very different costs. The Ten lost their careers for years, and for some, permanently. The Committee's members largely kept theirs, though several paid a real reputational price, and the organization itself did not outlast the era.

Blacklisted, Underground, and Under Other Names

For the writers and directors who refused to cooperate, or who were named by others, the blacklist did not always mean the end of work, only the end of working under one's own name. Many continued in the industry by concealing their authorship: writing under pseudonyms, working through "fronts" who lent their names to blacklisted scripts for a fee, or leaving the United States altogether for Europe, where several found steady employment. Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten, kept writing throughout the 1950s under pseudonyms and fronts, and even won an Academy Award under the name "Robert Rich" for *The Brave One* (1956), years before he could publicly claim it as his own.

This archive's own research turned up a documented case in Roland Kibbee, one of Hecht's closest collaborators at Hecht-Lancaster. Kibbee was named as a former Communist Party member both by Martin Berkeley, among his roughly 155 names, and, separately, by Hecht himself. Required as a result to testify, Kibbee believed at the time that he was largely naming people who had already named him, a belief that Victor Navasky's later research found to be mistaken, since Kibbee had in fact supplied names not previously known to the committee. In the aftermath, Kibbee broke off his close working relationship with Hecht, though he continued doing freelance work for the company, and he held on to his friendship with Burt Lancaster, who was himself an outspoken critic of HUAC throughout the era.

Sources

Roland Kibbee, *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Kibbee

Investigation of Communist Activities, archive.org/details/investigationofc01unit/page/314

Mickey Knox, *The Good, the Bad, and the Dolce Vita* (2004)

PART FIVE — THE FILMS THAT MIGHT HAVE NEVER BEEN

Had Harold Hecht refused to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953 and been blacklisted, Hollywood history might have unfolded very differently. As the driving business force behind Hecht-Lancaster Productions (later Hecht-Hill-Lancaster), Hecht helped pioneer the independent production model that challenged the dominance of the major studios. A blacklist could have crippled the company's ability to finance, package, and distribute films.

During the Height of the Blacklist

Vera Cruz (1954) - a landmark western whose visual style influenced the later Spaghetti Western.

Marty (1955) - winner of four Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

Trapeze (1956) - one of the highest-grossing films of its year.

Sweet Smell of Success (1957) - today regarded as one of the greatest film noirs ever made.

Run Silent, Run Deep (1958) - a classic World War II submarine drama.

Separate Tables (1958) - nominated for seven Academy Awards, winning Oscars for David Niven and Wendy Hiller.

Marty won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1956. *Sweet Smell of Success* is now widely taught as one of the finest American films of its decade. Neither would exist in the form we know them, nor, quite possibly, would Hecht's company have existed to make them at all, had Hecht answered Frank Tavenner's questions on March 23, 1953, the way the Hollywood Ten had answered similar questions six years earlier.

After the Blacklist Began to Dissolve

The blacklist gradually weakened after Senator Joseph McCarthy's censure in 1954, but many artists remained unable to work openly until Dalton Trumbo received on-screen screenwriting credit for *Exodus* and *Spartacus* in 1960. Had Harold Hecht been blacklisted, there is no way of knowing whether he would have returned to producing - or whether later films associated with his career would have existed in the same form.

The Young Savages (1961) - a groundbreaking social drama that helped establish director John Frankenheimer.

Birdman of Alcatraz (1962) - a four-time Academy Award nominee and one of the era's most respected prison dramas.

Cat Ballou (1965) - an Academy Award-winning western comedy that became one of the decade's biggest hits.

No one can know how long Harold Hecht might have remained unable to work had he refused to cooperate with HUAC. Although the political momentum behind the blacklist faded after 1954, many of those who were blacklisted remained professionally marginalized until the practice began to unravel following Dalton Trumbo's on-screen credits for *Exodus* and *Spartacus* in 1960. Whether Hecht would have resumed producing after that - and whether the films associated with his later career would still have been made - is impossible to know.

What is clear is that the blacklist's consequences extended far beyond those who were publicly accused. They shaped not only careers, but the films themselves — the ones that were made, the ones that were delayed, and the ones that were never made at all.

For Harold Hecht, the hearings marked a turning point, separating his political past from the years of filmmaking that followed. In an industry reshaped by fear, silence, and survival, the choices made before HUAC could reverberate for decades.

PRIMARY SOURCES - DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE HUAC ERA

A grouped visual pause before the story breaks in the press: the hearing room itself, and — for context — the 1947 Hollywood Ten hearings that set the pattern Hecht's testimony would later follow.

The 1947 Hollywood Ten Hearings



The Hollywood Ten in November 1947 waiting to be fingerprinted after being cited for contempt of Congress. Front row (from left): Herbert Biberman, attorneys Martin Popper and Robert W. Kenny, Albert Maltz, Lester Cole. Middle row: Dalton Trumbo, John Howard Lawson, Alvah Bessie, Samuel Ornitz. Back row: Ring Lardner Jr., Edward Dmytryk, Adrian Scott.

(Wikimedia Commons)



Detail from the audience at the same 1947 hearing: a man taking notes in a notebook, seated beside a woman in a wide-brimmed hat. As with the wide shot above, the content is consistent with the 1947 Washington, D.C. hearings; the date is flagged here as unconfirmed.



The press pool at a HUAC hearing - newsreel and still photographers packed at the rail below the committee dais. The grand columned setting is consistent with the Caucus Room of the House Office Building in Washington, D.C., where the 1947 Hollywood Ten hearings were held.

The Committee for the First Amendment



The Committee for the First Amendment delegation in Washington, D.C., 1947, photographed in front of the U.S. Capitol. Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall stand at center; other identifiable members of the entertainment-industry delegation who traveled to protest the Hollywood Ten hearings are pictured alongside them. Source: contemporary press photograph, provided in case-study research materials.



Audience at a HUAC hearing, with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall visible at right (Bogart smoking, hand raised to his mouth). The setting and the identifiable presence of Bogart and Bacall are consistent with the October 1947 Hollywood Ten hearings in Washington, D.C., which the Committee for the First Amendment delegation attended

At the March 1953 Hearing



"A photograph of the faces of the public listening to testimony during a House Committee on Un-American Activities hearing, 30 March 1953."

Original caption: "The deep interest of the public in the current 'Red' probe is seen in this picture showing some of the spectators as they listened intensely to the testimony of witnesses... The room on the fifth floor of the federal building, where the House Committee on Un-American Activities is conducting the hearing, was jammed with spectators almost every day." Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library via the California Digital Library / Digital Public Library of America.

Note: this photograph is dated seven days after Hecht's own appearance and depicts the hearing room generally rather than Hecht's specific session; it is included here as documentary evidence of the room, spectators, and atmosphere in which the March 1953 Los Angeles hearings - including Hecht's - took place.

APPENDIX - BEHIND THE RECORD

The documents and notes in this appendix explore several questions that sit just beyond the main narrative: the incomplete record between Martin Berkeley's accusation and Harold Hecht's testimony, HUAC's longstanding interest in the Federal Theatre Project, the atmosphere inside the 1953 hearings, and the way newspapers reported these events at the time.

Some of these materials clarify the historical record. Others help reconstruct how contemporaries understood the hearings as they unfolded. Together, they provide additional context for readers interested in the broader story surrounding Harold Hecht's appearance before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

APPENDIX A - ARCHIVAL NOTES & PRESS COVERAGE

The Missing Months: Between Berkeley and Hecht

This account is reconstructed from secondary research materials rather than a surviving primary transcript. Executive-session records of this kind were generally not included in HUAC's published hearing volumes, and many remain unprocessed within National Archives collections. As a result, this period cannot be documented in the same detail as the public hearings that precede and follow it.

What is clear, however, is the practical result. Between Berkeley's 1951 testimony and Hecht's public appearance before HUAC in March 1953, approximately eighteen months passed during which the matter was addressed privately rather than in open session. This period is consistent with Frank Tavenner's later statement that Hecht was afforded an opportunity to cooperate with the committee before his name was publicly disclosed.

Why the Federal Theatre Connection Mattered

Berkeley's identification of Harold Hecht carried significance for HUAC beyond the naming of a single individual.

When Berkeley connected Hecht to New York's left-wing theatrical community and the Federal Theatre Project, he touched on a subject that occupied a special place in the committee's institutional memory. HUAC's earliest investigations had focused on allegations of Communist influence within the Federal Theatre Project, and committee members frequently cited the project as an example of political activity within federally supported arts programs.

By the time Berkeley testified, HUAC investigators had spent years tracing personal and professional networks that originated in the theater world of the 1930s. For committee staff, a Federal Theatre connection was not simply biographical information; it fit into a framework they had been applying for more than a decade.

Whether that interpretation was justified remains the subject of historical debate. What is clear is that Berkeley's reference to the Federal Theatre Project would have resonated with assumptions and investigative patterns already familiar to committee members.

Inside the Hearing Room

When Harold Hecht finally appeared before HUAC on March 23, 1953, he entered an environment carefully designed to attract public attention. The hearings took place in Room 518 of the Los Angeles Federal Building before an audience described in contemporary accounts as crowded with spectators and surrounded by television and newsreel cameras. A contemporary newspaper caption described the room as being “jammed with spectators almost every day.”

Newspaper Reaction: Berkeley, 1951

Berkeley's September 1951 testimony generated widespread newspaper coverage across the United States.

Headlines emphasized his naming of alleged Communist Party members, his cooperation with committee investigators, and the broader Hollywood inquiry then underway. Newspapers from California, Wisconsin, Missouri, and elsewhere devoted substantial coverage to his appearance before HUAC.

Selected examples include:

- *Green Bay Press-Gazette* — "Ex-Red Film Writer Names 150 at Probe"
- *Santa Barbara News-Press* — "Writer of 'Informer' Movies Refuses To Say Whether or Not He Is, Was Red"
- *The Kansas City Times* — "Martin Berkeley, 47, Cited as Communist in Hollywood Hearing Despite Anonymous Threats"

Newspaper Reaction: Hecht, 1953

Coverage of Harold Hecht's March 23, 1953 testimony extended well beyond Los Angeles.

Reports focused on his admission of former Communist Party membership, his description of activity within the Federal Theatre Project, his cooperation with investigators, and the committee's handling of televised proceedings. Newspapers across the country carried stories the following day.

Publications covering the hearing included:

- *The New York Times*
- *Los Angeles Times*
- *Los Angeles Examiner*
- *The Herald*
- *The Louisville Times*
- *The Star-Ledger*
- *Santa Barbara News-Press*
- *National Guardian*

Together these accounts show that Hecht's testimony was viewed not merely as a Hollywood story but as part of a larger national conversation about the Cold War, political loyalty, and the entertainment industry.

APPENDIX B - THE MORNING AFTER

How the Los Angeles Times Covered Hecht's Testimony

Harold Hecht's testimony appeared prominently in the *Los Angeles Times* on March 24, 1953.

The newspaper offers an unusually complete snapshot of how the hearing was presented to readers because the story can be followed from the front page through its inside-page continuations. The result is a revealing glimpse not only of the testimony itself, but also of the broader Cold War news environment in which it appeared.

The Front Page

The Los Angeles Times led with the headline:

"Soviet Propaganda in Two Hit Shows Revealed to Probers"

accompanied by the subhead line:

"Former Reds Tell How Stage Revues Put Over Communist Party Line."

The story shared Page One with reports on Korea, Soviet broadcasting, Nevada atomic testing, and Senator Joseph McCarthy's activities, illustrating how closely HUAC coverage was woven into the larger Cold War atmosphere of the period.

7th Division Surges Back After Heaviest Korea Assault of Year

RUSS REJECT U.S. PROTEST ON MIGS

**Incident Off Alaska Caused by Violation
of Soviet Frontier. Note to Embassy Says**

The incident had occurred 25 miles off the coast of Kamchatka Peninsula and about 100 miles northeast of a Soviet base at Petropavlovsk. The U.S. Air Force said the American plane, a B-50, was on the first violation was at Cape Krestovoi, the Soviet part of Kamchatka, and the second was near the village of Zhupanovo northeast of Petropavlovsk, the broadcast said.

Hysterical Teen-age Girls Again Stage Riot at State Reformatory

**NEW ATOMIC
TEST SET FOR
NEVADA TODAY**

Assaults German Leader

In the Saturday broadcast, Leontyev reminded the Russians and foreigners—as they have not been reminded by the Soviets for some time—that the

United States and Britain helped Russia win World

Mrs. Kuraishi said her husband was murdered the following month by Manchurians and she was injured seriously and was rescued by a Korean family.

Girls Again Formatory

•

L.A. Warned Defenders Lack Shells

between the San Luis Obispo ammunition depot and other installations in the desert in a effort to secure an adequate "on-hand" supply of ammunition for all calibers without

Practice Firing

Buy Beef to Bolster Price

WASHINGTON, March 2

Soviet Propaganda in Two Hit Shows Revealed to Probers

Hot Air, Says Truman

of Russian Peace Moves

The Weather Bureau said today will be cooler. An early morning fog is expected near

TV Announcer

Soviet Propaganda in Two Hit Shows Revealed to Probers

Former Reds Tell How Stage Revues Put Over Communist Party Line



**Danny Dare, producer, testifies
before House investigators.**

Several former Communists this week told the House Un-American Activities Committee . . . Danny Dare, producer of two hit revues, stated messages were set in entertaining ways . . . "We devised member by member," he said, "to perform to the best of their ability to audiences in a sort of way. I was a member of the Communist party . . . Felt it was my duty to see that the performances carried out my activity . . ."

"Former Hecht, identified as a former party member, was also named as a one-time participant in the left-wing Federal Theater Project in the New York scene . . ."



Harold Hecht

Front page, *The Los Angeles Times*, Tuesday, March 24, 1953. Headline: "Soviet Propaganda in Two Hit Shows Revealed to Probers," with subheadline "Former Reds Tell How Stage Revues Put Over Communist Party Line." The story ran alongside "L.A. Warned Defenders Lack Shells," "New Atomic Test Set for Nevada Today," and "M'Carthy Seeks Bohlen Lie Test." A photograph of a witness at the microphone is captioned "LEAD-OFF WITNESS - Theatrical Producer Danny Dare, first witness called by House Un-American Activities Committee, changed his testimony after questioning by his lawyer."

Source: *Newspapers.com*, image 386219701.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/386219701>

The Story Continues

The article continued on Page 6 under the heading:

"Red Line in Stage Revues Admitted."

Here the newspaper expanded its discussion of testimony from Dare and Hecht and included additional references to the Actors' Laboratory and Martin Berkeley. The tone shifted from headline news to detailed hearing coverage.

By Page Seven, the coverage continued a final time under the running head:

"Inquiry on Reds."

By this point, the story appeared alongside routine local features, arts coverage, community news, and department-store advertising.

The progression is revealing. What began as front-page Cold War news gradually merged into the ordinary rhythm of daily life. For readers in Los Angeles, HUAC was simultaneously a national political drama and part of the regular flow of local news.

Use your PDF viewer's zoom controls to enlarge either newspaper page for easier reading.

The Los Angeles Times, March 24, 1953 - Page 6



"Red Line in Stage Revues Admitted." Continuation of the Dare/Hecht hearing coverage begun on page 1.

Source: Newspapers.com, image 386219748

The Los Angeles Times, March 24, 1953 - Page 7



"Inquiry on Reds" (continued from page 6), alongside local arts, society coverage, and department-store advertising.

Source: Newspapers.com, image 386219762

A Final Word . . .

Harold Hecht spent one day in a crowded federal hearing room answering questions he had eighteen months to prepare for. He answered them calmly, cooperatively, and completely, and walked out with his company, his career, and his partnership with Burt Lancaster all intact. Roland Kibbee did not have that luxury; George Willner's word for what he watched Hecht do still carries a sting seventy years later. Both things are true at once, and this case study has tried to hold them together rather than resolve them: a producer who helped build some of the era's most enduring films, and a witness whose cooperation had a cost that fell on people other than himself.

For Harold Hecht, the hearings marked both an end and a beginning: the close of one chapter in his political past, and the beginning of an extraordinary run of films made in an industry reshaped by fear, silence, and survival.

*Duffy Hecht & Faith G. Nyaga
for My Back Pages*

