

April 9
1959

Mr. Sam Lundberg
1454 North Seward
Hollywood 28, California

Dear Sam:

These are rough, dictated notes, hence they'll be prolix. Kindly forgive, abide with me to the end of them, and perhaps we can discover a way that you can get an interesting show, in the course of which I shall not have to run unnecessary risks.

The changing times, and the more salubrious climate of the present, inform me that we are long past that period in which I need expose myself to public and open red-baiting. Similarly the new times indicate that I attract no unfavorable attention to myself by attacking the Motion Picture Producers Association, the Academy, the various Guilds, or any other Hollywood organization. The point of view in relation to Hollywood is simply this: I did not want the blacklist, Hollywood does not want the blacklist, and both of us are therefore its victims. Hence neither of us are heavies.

To the degree that they are legitimate, I do not mind questions about my going to jail. My position is that the Hollywood Ten went to jail on a First Amendment issue which the Supreme Court at that time felt unable to review, but which has since been sustained by later decisions of that Court. The result is, as I see it, that were we to assert the same right today, no conceivable prosecution could result.

I do not wish to be asked whether I was, or now am, a Communist. It is very interesting to me that this question was not propounded to Ned Young by a single reporter in the course of a three-month publicity flurry preceding the Academy revocation of its rule, and Ned's later winning of the Academy award. I was asked the question on Night Beat in New York and I replied then, as I would reply at any time since, that I am perfectly willing to sit down with the TV commentator, or with any newspaper reporter, over a private drink, and answer any question he is genuinely interested in asking about any phase of my political life and affiliations; but that I will not do it in public in order to get a job, or to "clean myself up" from something which was not at all dirty.

I would be quite willing to answer any questions relating to the historical effort of any government to suppress, censor, prosecute, exile, blacklist, or kill writers for their beliefs. That holds for Greece and Rome as well as for France and England; it holds for the United States, for the Soviet Union, for the present government of Hungary, and for any other government of whatever political complexion that has sought to suppress the opinion of its writers. This, it seems to me, gives you a rather wide latitude in discovering for your audience not what I am, but what I think of writing, of freedom of opinion, and of any government which suppresses them.

I will not answer any questions concerning my present work, or any work that I have done in the past under the conditions of the blacklist. By this, I mean that I will not name pictures, aside from that one which has already been named - "The Brave One". In relation to "The Brave One", I think I would have some interesting background material relating to plagiarism, and so forth, and the various problems for all writers which that particular picture posed. I will, of course, be willing to say that I have been steadily employed throughout the blacklist (twelve years of it for me), and that I am presently steadily employed, and that my commitments last many months into the future.

While I understand perfectly that the interviewee cannot be in charge of the show, either in relation to its format or its content, nonetheless, having watched your show, it does not strike me as the sort of show that Night Beat was. There I was warned in advance that I could expect all manner of ugly surprises. It was a different period, I was willing to take that risk, and I believe I put my point across. But your show, if I am correct, is an information show - that is to say, it presents differing points of view, but it does not present the dramatic spectacle of a kill, intellectually or any other way. That in a position where I could be badly hurt by an ugly surprise question, and there is no reason why I should take such a risk at this time, and I feel that ugly surprises should be barred from our consideration of this show.

For example, even on Night Beat one has an interview which gives one the general trend of questioning, and includes many of the questions actually asked, but does not include one or two or three extremely hostile surprise questions. Those one can, by and large, anticipate. But I do not wish to anticipate them on your show. I wish to prepare myself for a point of view program, in which the viewers may leave us knowing something more of both sides of the situation than they did before. So if you have any ugly surprises in view, I would have to insist that I be told about them, and that we discuss their advisability in advance.

Under no circumstances do I wish to be asked about any picture which I may or may not currently be writing. For example if the picture's title was "X" and if it had been rumored that I were writing it, I simply could not permit such a question as: "Is the rumor that you are writing 'X' true, or untrue?" I simply would not wish "X" to be mentioned at all.

In conclusion, please do not think that I am trying to censor your right to conduct your own show in any way that you see fit. Please believe also that I am sure your intentions are of the best. On the other hand, in times so pregnant with good possibilities, I simply dare not risk a bad public-relations burble. In the course of your professional life, this is simply another Sunday night show. In the course of my own professional life, it could represent a mortal danger to my entire career and to the careers of others in similar situations. If I wish, I have the right to risk such danger for myself, but I do not have that right in relation to some thirty

or forty others. What I am actually trying to say (and with it I shall conclude) is this: that I do not mind an objective interview, but that for three years I have insisted on going only where I shall not be the victim of a hostile program; granted that I am able to make my point of view comprehensible to an audience (if I can't it's my fault, not yours) I absolutely refuse to enter into any position of public jeopardy; every press story and TV thing I have done in three years has been prearranged in my favor as a condition stated off the record and understood in advance; I give my time to a station, to a program, to an interviewer for nothing - it must return a profit to me or I don't go. I'd be a fool if I did. On the other hand, we are both actors if the show is to be any good, and your demeanor and tone can be as severe as you wish. Your questions can appear to be as severe as the most objective viewer could wish. But there must always be a way for me to get out from under them. And the intent in your mind and heart must not be severe toward me. For if I thought it were, I should not have consented in the first place.

Forgive me for this. It's important to me and to others. I'm sure you understand why I feel that I have to be explicit. In the meanwhile, thank you very much for thinking of me in relation to this show; and be assured that I shall do my poor best to make it no loss for you either.

Cordially,

Dalton Trumbo