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Mike Wilson  
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Dear Mike:

Your lament is fully justified, and I apologize. I got so deeply involved in so many things that I kept postponing a letter to you on the grounds that a few days more would permit me to give a fuller account of what has been going on.

Even now, I'm dictating this letter and my sister is transcribing it for me, so don't expect any very thoughtful organization of what I have in mind. It's just as it comes to me at this moment.

Yours and Albert's cables arrived and were ready for use. As I told you at the time, each of you would have been notified in advance when the news would break. The truth is that the publicity developments surrounding "The Defiant Ones" and "The Brave One" turned out to be more important than had been anticipated. Once I saw how very greatly the times have changed, I shelved the King Brothers' idea altogether. It would have been, in a way, anti-climactic; it was not, in any event, big enough to top what had gone before; and it was just faintly illegitimate. The illegitimacy wouldn't have bothered me if the situation had been such that desperate measures needed to be taken to keep the general publicity flow moving and alive. However, the thing continued of its own momentum, and you may be sure that your cable to the King Brothers will never be used.

The situation within the industry, the various guilds and unions, and the Academy, may, I think, accurately be summarized as follows: there is no longer a left, and there is no longer a right, and there is no longer a centralized control of the industry tight enough to enforce the blacklist. This general fragmentation of the industry, and of the political forces within it, has opened the field for straight guerilla warfare. The movement within the Academy to revoke its rule was originated, led by, and accomplished by the center. The movement within the Screen Writers Guild to revoke some of its more absurd working rules is similarly led by the center. They are moving of their own volition because they must.

One of the main problems has been to restrain certain die-hard elements of the left from making organizational moves. There was, for example, the idea of placing an ad in the trade papers and in the Los Angeles Times. It would have been sponsored by the local Dorothy Marshall-Frank Wilkinson outfit. I was able to torpedo it, thank God. I pointed out to them that the slightest appearance of an organized and organizational effort at this moment would frighten off the center forces which are actually doing the job without anybody's assistance. Not only would it frighten them off, but it would give the old right an opportunity to reactivate itself and bring to the forefront issues and arguments twelve years old which have no relation to the present. Similarly, it was proposed that the Guild have an open meeting to which all the blacklisted persons would be invited. And there the blacklisted persons could present their point of view to the Guild. I objected to this on the grounds that it would call forth the right onto the floor of the Guild, and again the argument would be conducted between

right and left, while the center would fade away entirely. The point here is that we simply must not permit the arguments and issues of 1947-48 to be repeated in 1959. No greater service to the idiot right could be rendered than to give them the opportunity to revive the argument as it was. Since they cannot handle the argument as it is today, they are completely silent. And they will remain silent unless some fool gives them a platform.

The theory behind what Hal and Ned and I have done in the last six weeks is simply this: there is no way the blacklist can officially be rescinded. How can an industry officially rescind a blacklist which legally it cannot admit the existence of? There was, however, the Academy rule. Revocation of the Academy rule was the nearest thing to an official rescision of the blacklist that could or will occur. Therefore we hailed this official revocation by the Academy as an official revocation; we know that the blacklist still does exist. But the public relations problem was to create throughout the industry an atmosphere which would accept the end of the blacklist as an accomplished fact. In other words, by repeatedly stating that the blacklist is over, we actually convinced large segments of the motion picture industry and the public at large that it was really over. Once this idea was accepted by the industry at large, a great step forward was made toward breaking the blacklist in fact.

It is my very strong feeling that our triumphant bellowings were correct; and that the worst possible tactic now would be for anyone to present himself as a martyr, or to wail "oh, the horror of it all!" People hate martyrs, and as if that weren't bad enough, there is the added fact that martyrs simply do not make news. If we were to reach the press we had to make news, and the news value of the present situation does not lie in publicizing a blacklist which was stale news five years ago, but rather in hailing its demise, which turned out to be very hot news in the present. To some persons, formerly writers and artists in motion pictures, who changed professions and are still suffering both economically and morally from exclusion from their own profession - our happy chortlings in the press have seemed cruel, untrue, and self-serving. For such persons I have sympathy but very little tolerance. If they cannot understand that what is good for one is good for all, then they've learned nothing in the last twelve years of the blacklist.

Before this thing is over, a number of persons who were not outstandingly successful before the blacklist are going to have to face some bitter truths. The first truth is this: that whereas, prior to 1947, there was a place in the motion picture industry for the writer who earned twelve-fifty a week perhaps twenty weeks a year, there is no place for that writer now. If he is lucky, he will end up in television. If he is not lucky, he will end up peddling Fuller brushes. Consider the Board of Directors of the Screen Writers Guild at the time of the 1947 blacklist, and consider where they are today: Mary McCall, Dwight Taylor, Emmett Lavery, Wells Root, Sheridan Gibney, and a dozen others who were then the leaders of the Guild. They were basically middle-bracket writers - successful mediocrities - and today I doubt that one of them has had a full credit for the past three years. Most of them are in TV, and those who aren't are simply starving to death. When this accursed blacklist is finally broken, we shall discover the same situation applying to blacklisted writers. Those who just barely got by in the old days will not be able to survive under

present conditions. For them, therefore, the breaking of the blacklist will have no significance at all, and they will therefore seek to lay the blame for their failures on those persons whose successes made the break-through possible.

Any studio in town will pay a writer of your stature from seventy-five thousand to a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars for a script. But it will not take a Mary McCall or a Sheridan Gibney for ten thousand dollars. They want the best or nothing. The result will be that only the best blacklisted writers will profit from the end of the blacklist, while the rest will be confronted with a terrible competitive struggle for their existence.

About six months ago I had a discussion with Albert Maltz on this very problem. It was his feeling that the proper tactic to break the blacklist would be to sneak in small people obscurely, thereby setting small precedents which would admit the more notorious blacklisted writers ultimately to come forward. I disagreed altogether. It was my feeling then, and still is, that the blacklist will be broken by the shock troops or will not be broken at all. The shock troops are Wilson, Maltz and Trumbo. You can put Phil Stevenson publically to work tomorrow and nothing will happen. Put Wilson to work tomorrow and the blacklist is over. The reason for this is pretty clear in my mind. (Incidentally, Albert is now in agreement with me.) Wilson, Maltz, and Trumbo are better writers today than they were when the blacklist was promulgated. This is because they deliberately set out to build a second career in the black market. Those second careers are now at their peak. By not abandoning their professions, those three writers, accepting the handicaps of the second career, are probably better writers today than they would have been had there been no blacklist. Those who did abandon their professions, those who took other work to support their families, have probably become poorer writers than they were when the blacklist began. You cannot cease practicing your profession and grow better at it simultaneously. You're bound to regress.

This blacklist will not be broken by the triumph of morality over immorality. It will not be broken by the triumph of one organization over another organization. It will only be broken by the sheer excellence of the work of two or three blacklisted writers. Call it talent, call it competence, ability, craftsmanship, or what you will - still in all that is the only practical weapon for the job. I think we have that weapon, and that within the next few months, or the next year, we shall have to use it. Which is to say that each of us individually, and acting in coordination with each other, must very soon use the excellence of our work to compel the use of our names, or of established pseudonyms which will be used on other pictures, and which will be identifiable with us. This seems to me to be the next step.

Now let me get to certain points in your letter. Although the tactic here is sweetness and harmony, with nobody rocking the boat, and no remote expectation of court suits and such-like, I see no reason why your suit against Metro in Europe should not be carried forward. It has received no publicity here, and it probably won't, and if it does, I don't think it matters.

As to using your name on a picture made in Europe, which would ultimately be released here also: I think its a fair idea, but that it won't be decisive. As we both know, the real break-through has to