ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dalton Trumbo has written four novels of which the most successful was Johnny Got His Gun. His motion pictures include A Man to Remember, Kittty Foyle, A Guy Named Joe, Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo and Our Vines Have Tender Grapes. He has written fiction and articles for a variety of magazines ranging from Vanity Fair and the Saturday Evening Post to the New Masses and Mainstream. His play, The Biggest Thief in Town, will appear shortly in Theatre Arts magazine. His last effort at pamphleteering was entitled Harry Bridges. He is presently engaged in a novel based upon his experiences at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, and in the Pacific where he was a war correspondent in the summer of 1945.

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Some time before he became involved in the Dreyfus Affair, Emile Zola wrote an article called "The Toad." It purported to be his advice to a young writer who could not stomach the aggressive mendacity of a press which in 1890 was determined to plunge the citizens of the French Republic into disaster.

Zola explained to the young man his own method of inuring himself against newspaper columns. Each morning, over a period of time, he bought a toad in the market place, and devoured it alive and whole. The toads cost only three sous each, and after such a steady matutinal diet one could face almost any newspaper with a tranquil stomach, recognize and swallow the toad contained therein, and actually relish that which to healthy men not similarly immunized would be a lethal poison.

All nations in the course of their histories have passed through periods which, to extend Zola's figure of speech, might be called the Time of the Toad: an epoch long or short as the temper of the people may permit, fatal or merely debilitating as the vitality of the people may determine, in which the nation turns upon itself in a kind of compulsive madness to deny all in its tradition that is clean, to exalt all that is vile, and to destroy any heretical minority which asserts toad-meat not to be the delicacy which governmental edict declares it. Triple heralds of the Time of the Toad are the loyalty oath, the compulsory revelation of faith, and the secret police.

The most striking example in recent history of a nation passing through the Time is offered by Germany. In its beginnings in that unfortunate country the Toad was announced by the shrill voice of a mediocre man ranting against Communists and Jews, just as we in America have heard the voice of such a one as Representative John E. Rankin of Mississippi.

By the spring of 1933, the man Hitler having been in power for two months, substance was given his words by a decree calling for the discharge from civil service of all "who because of their previous political activity do not offer security that they will exert themselves for the national state without reservation," as well as those "who have participated in communist activities . . . even if they no longer belong to the Communist Party or its auxiliary or collateral organizations," and those who have "opposed the national movement by speech, writing or any other hateful conduct" or have "insulted its leaders."

Thereafter, in a welter of oaths, tests, inquisitions and inquests, the German nation surrendered its mind. Those were the days in Germany when respectable citizens did not count it a disgrace to rush like enraptured lemmings before the People's Courts and declare under oath that they were not Communists, they were not Jews, they were not trade unionists, they were not in any degree anything which the government disliked—perfectly aware that such acts of confession assisted the inquisitors in separating sheep from goats and rendered all who would not or could not pass the test liable to the blacklist, the political prison or the crematorium.

Volumes have since been written telling of the panicked stampede of German intellectuals for Nazi absolution: of doctors and scientists, philosophers and educators, musicians and writers, artists of the theatre and cinema, who abased themselves in an orgy of confession, purged their organizations of all the proscribed, gradually accepted the mythos of the dominant minority, and thereafter clung without shame to positions without dignity. Of such stamp are the creatures in all countries who attempt to survive the Time of the Toad rather than to fight it.

If the first street speeches of Adolf Hitler may be said to have begun the Time in Germany, then June 7, 1938, signaled the approach of the Toad into American life; for on that day the House of Representatives, under a resolution offered by Mr. Martin Dies of Texas, established by a vote of 181 to 41 the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

To outline in exampled detail the conduct by which the committee thus far has soiled over a decade of American history would merely be to repeat the obvious and to belabor the known. As a matter of general policy it has flouted every principle of Constitutional immunity, denied due process and right of cross-examination, imposed illegal sanctions, accepted hearsay and perjury as evidence, served as a rostrum for American fascism, impeded the war effort, acted as agent for employer groups against labor, set itself up as censor over science, education and the cinema and as arbiter over political thought, and instituted a reign of terror over all who rely in any degree upon public favor for the full employment of their talents.

Throughout the whole period of its existence the committee has been under attack, not only by progressive and liberal-minded persons, but by all persons of whatever political party who despise unbridled authority and believe in the reality of Constitutional proceedure. The most distinguished enemy of the committee was Franklin D. Roosevelt, who rarely overlooked an opportunity to denounce its methods and objectives. Practically every other respected public figure has similarly made known his hostility to the committee.

In addition to individuals, a very large number of bar and ministerial associations, civic groups, trade unions, guilds, and professional and academic bodies have besieged the Congress with resolutions criticizing the committee or demanding its abolition. The principal law reviews of the country have published extensive articles calling attention to the destruction of civil rights wrought by the committee and its agents. The issue repeatedly has been carried to the electorate, and time and again committee members have been retired from public life, indicating the temper of at least some of the people on a fundamental issue.

But neither denunciation nor resolution nor defeat at the polls has diminished the committee's hold upon American life. During eleven years of incessant criticism its budget has increased from $25,000 to $200,000 per year, while its status has changed from temporary to permanent. It stands today as the employer of at least seven investigators in addition to its clerical workers. Possessed of dossiers on millions of Americans, it is more powerful, more feared and more determined than ever it was before.

What, then, is the secret of such power? It lies in the right, which the committee has arrogated to itself at the expense of the Constitution, to inquire into the realm of political thought, affiliation and association. It lies specifically in the asserted right of the committee to ask a single question—"Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?"—a question to which thirty years of propaganda has lent a connotation so terrible that even the asking of it, regardless of the answer given, can imperil a man's career and seriously qualify his future existence as a citizen free from violence under the law.

How then, since group resolutions and public denunciations and electoral defeats have not affected the committee's usurpation, can its immense power be destroyed? It can be destroyed only if it is flatly challenged; only if the dread question is faced and the servile answer refused; only if the courts, by reason of the individual's refusal to surrender to the committee, are obliged once and for all to rule on the validity of the Bill of Rights as opposed to that of any inquisitorial body however constituted.

Men may yearn for easier ways to halt the encroachments of government upon the individual, but in the final moment there are none. Placed on the stand before this committee, a man must either collaborate with its members in their destruction of civil rights, or by his refusal attempt to destroy the committee's fraudulent power and mark out its limitations. After all the resolutions and denunciations and political campaigns have failed of their purpose, there is no other choice. At this ultimate point of conflict either the committee or the individual is bound to be destroyed.

Mr. Bernard De Voto, writing in the September, 1949, issue of Harper's Magazine, makes trenchant comment on the committee's re-