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# The message of American pro-Soviet movies during World War II – *The North Star*, *Song of Russia*, *Mission to Moscow*

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„War has put Hollywood's traditional conception of the Muscovites through his wringer, and they have come out shaved, washed, sober, good to their families, Rotarians, Brother Elks, and 33rd Degree Mason”  
Variety, 28 October 1942

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is not only to present the process behind pro-communist Hollywood film-making during the first years of World War II, but also to give notice concerning the nature of the visual message, illustrating how the attitude towards communism evolved in the interwar period. Moreover, this paper will demonstrate that the pro-Soviet attitudes found on the big screens were a mix of several factors: from Roosevelt's grand design and the use of “soft power”, to the OWI (Office of War Information) directives concerning movie scripts, and the major studios (MGM, Warner Brothers, RKO) intentions to capitalize on the new forced alliance, “giving a pat on the back, to keep them fighting” (Committee of Un-American Activities, 1947: 80). Although some 20 movies with a clear pro-Soviet message were produced between 1942 and 1944, I will direct my attention on three most important ones: “The North Star”, “Song of Russia”, and “Mission to Moscow”.

**Keywords :** OWI, Mission to Moscow, World War II, Roosevelt, Propaganda

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## The on-screen portrayal of the communist before 1942

**B**ETWEEN 1919 AND 1920, The US witnessed its first Red Scare, ignited by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, and fueled by such events as the “great strikes” (3600 strikes with over 4 million workers), flourishing race riots all over the East coast, and mail bombings of eighteen government officials and industrial leaders. These public unrests were put on the shoulders of “red radicals” by the US General Attorney Mitchell Palmer ordering the rounding-up and deportation of 10000 aliens, in what are now called the “Palmer Raids” (Heale, 1990: 72).

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This, together with a conservatory approach on Hollywood's movie themes handled by the newly appointed head of the MPPDA (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors), the Presbyterian Church official Will H Hays, offered the perfect context for anti-communist pictures to reach the big screens. Moreover, pictures that dealt with labor unions, corruption, strikes were put aside, considered too dangerous (Shaw, 2007: 13).

It is in this hostile environment that motion pictures like *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919), *The Right to happiness* (1919) and *Orphans of the Storm* (1922) were released. While the first movie dealt with an utopist settlement with a socialist basis that destroys itself, the later compares the French Revolution (which overthrew a bad government) to the Russian one (which has no chance of overthrowing the American government, due to its good nature).

Another group of films (*Virtuous Men*, *The Great Shadow* and *Dangerous Hours*) portrayed the strikes of 1919-1920 as being ignited by the works of well-trained Bolsheviks, and not as a consequence of postwar inflation and low wages: crowds of workers were being choreographed to seem more like an angry and violent mob. *Volcano* (1919) showed the mail bombings as the work of Bolsheviks and Undercurrent explains that the US steel strike was ignited by Trotskyists.

The irony is, as Steven Ross points out, that the labor unions were seen as strong organizations of either communist, Bolsheviks or socialists. In fact, these radical groups in the US were disintegrating either by government harassment, or by internal division: The Socialist Party had 40000 members, and the feared Communist Party 118.000, less than 1% of the adult population of America (Ross, 1999: 141).

As for governmental endorsements, many anti-radical films were accustomed to them. Senators, Governors and state legislators gave their support for the creation and distribution of such material (Ross, 1999: 141).

Although the Red Scare had its prewar climax in the early 1920s, the danger of a worldwide revolution seemed unrealistic, considering that leftist movements failed to succeed in countries like Germany and Hungary, an. In addition, the prosperity of the 1920s diminished the Soviet critique of the capitalist system until 1929, when the stock market crashed. What changed after that is the portrayal of the nature of evil: Before Wall Street crashed, poverty and injustice were portrayed a consequence of foreign threats. Now, the villain stereotype has a more individualistic characteristic: Bankers and managers were identified as responsible for the mismanagement that led to the crash.

Moreover, the election of *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (FDR) as president in 1933, and the breakthrough recognition of the Soviet Union seemed to put the bilateral relations on a steady zone. The membership of the communist party was at its highest peak, and the

anti-communist seen before seemed to be transforming into anti-fascism, once the Civil Spanish War started.

Nevertheless, even with all that, the portrayal of the communist continued to be a caricaturist; Ernst Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) depicts the communist as criticizing the lead character for her foolish and irresponsible way of spending money on jewelry and cosmetics. *Ninotchka* (1939) illustrates the whole cumulated anti-communism of the interwar period. It's the love story between the Soviet-style new woman, tough, cold and work-obsessed, (Greta Garbo) and the witty, capitalist lawyer, Leon (Melvin Douglas). After he converts her to capitalism, *Ninotchka* is deported to the Soviet Union, which is portrayed as a place where outside information is censored, food is rationed. The plot states that an average Soviet citizen, far from being an ideologist, given the chance, will be turned around by capitalist virtue (McLaughlin and Parry, 2006: 149). Despite all these, the movie sets itself apart from other anti-communist flicks, by giving the communist a human face. Normally reluctant of praising political movies, due to the political context of late 1939 (the Nazi-communist pact and the Red Army invasion of Poland), the film got excellent reviews from *New York Times* ( a humoristic view of the humor-sided folk who read Marx but never the funny papers) and *New York Tribune* (Greta Garbo has done more in one line to debunk the Soviet Union than we have been able to do in hundreds of editorials) (Shaw, 2007: 23).

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## The war and OWI

The United States' attitude towards the Soviet Union shifted on 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941, when Hitler began sending his Panzers towards Moscow, and after December '41 the alliance between the two opposite systems was a necessity. So, the American's perceptions of the Soviet Union had to be shaped overnight so that FDR could receive popular support for entering the war on the Soviet Union's side. The responsibility for such a task was put on the back of the OWI (Office of War Information). Understanding the relationship between this agency and Hollywood can help shed light the objectives of pro-Soviet films released between 1942 and 1945.

The OWI was formed by an executive order on 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1942 consolidating several prewar information agencies. The BMP (Bureau of Motion Pictures) headed by a liberal New-Dealer, Lowell Mellet, was in charge of advising Hollywood about the means to support the war effort. Mellet established a Hollywood office ran by Nelson Poynter, who was in charge of overseeing the message of the wartime movies (Koppes and Black, 1977:

89). To help the Hollywood raise awareness of the nature of WWII, Poynter wrote a set of guidelines united in “Manual for the Motion Picture Industry”

In a comprehensive third chapter of the handbook, called “Who are our allies”, “Tinsel Town” is advised to learn more about their former enemy, The Soviet Union: We must fight the unity lies about Russia (..), emphasize the might and heroism, the victory of the Russians. In a most surprising manner we find out that ‘we Americans reject communism, but we do not reject our Russian ally’ (United States, 1942).

Although OWI clashed several times with the heads of the Big Studios, MGM, Warner Brothers, RKO, Paramount, it found a way to capitalize on war, by simply denying reality. They would announce BMP of the themes of the productions, so that the international bureau could direct the distribution of the films into areas where Louis B Mayer, Harry Warner, or Samuel Goldstein could capitalize.

It is in this context that every major studio (except Paramount) submitted its share of pro-Soviet movies: Samuel Goldwin’s *North Star* (1943), MGM’s *Song of Russia* (1943), United Artist’s *Three Russian Girls* (1943), Warner’s *Mission to Moscow* (1943), RKO’s *Days of Glory* (1944), Columbia’s *Boy from Stalingrad* (1943) and *Counter Attack* (1945). The three most important pillars of pro-Soviet propaganda emerged in 1943: *The North Star*, *Song of Russia* and *Mission to Moscow*.

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### **The North Star**

In 1942, screenwriter Lillian Hellman and director Wyler met with the Soviet ambassador, Maxim Litvinov, in order to get approval for a shooting a documentary in the Soviet Union (Westbrook, 1990: 168). The other side of the pre-production, according to Hellman’s official biographer, William Wright was that officials from the White House solicited Hellman to write a pro-Soviet movie. As film historians Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black claim, Hellman was approached by a protégée of Roosevelt’s, Harry Hopkins for doing an on-scene documentary, and that the production was given a green light by none-other that Viaceslav Molotov (Koppes and Black, 2000: 209). But after director Wyler was drafted in the army, Samuel Goldstein hired Ukrainian born Lewis Milestone to direct the film, and transformed it into a pure-blood Hollywood piece. The story is simple: A small collective farm (which Hellman locates somewhere on the Bessarabia-Russian border), shaped as an American village, is being under attacked by the brutal Germans in June 1941 who, besides wanting to erase the village, have been draining children of blood to provide plasma for their wounded. The highlight of the movie is the resistance fight of the heroic villagers, portrayed by an all American cast: Walter Houston, Dana

Andrews, Anne Baxter, and Walter Brennan. As Bernard K Dick puts it, it's a historical inaccuracy to portray the Ukrainians (who suffered the worst famine ever in the winter of 32-33) as resistance fighters, especially when there are photos depicting Ukrainian peasants welcoming German troops (Dick, 1996: 160).

The movie intends to provide an explanation as to why the United States should fight next to the Soviet Union. Just like in her previous project, *The Negro Soldier*, Hellman's script emphasizes the fact that, by diminishing differences between the two cultures, one can see that both are fighting for the same goals.

To build up sympathy for the Soviet drama the common notion that the Soviets were faceless, shallow, godless men would have to disappear. In order to do that, the film portrays the regular soviet family just like classic American ones: the little Ukrainian town, in times of peace resembles a paradise, with dances, picnics. The wives are affectionate and the children are all properly brought-up; except for the icon in the dining room, and the picturesque rooftops, this could be Iowa or Oklahoma (Koppes and Black, 2000).

The propaganda behind the movies is seen in the ability of the peasants to organize themselves into guerillas and without a trace of military or governmental help to protect their homeland (resembling the ad-hoc assemblies that governed themselves in American westerns). Nothing is mentioned of the communist regime, or of any local government, shedding a feudalistic light on the whole village. Moreover, it doesn't seem likely that any Russian authority would accept their men giving loaded weapons to the Ukrainian people, after decades of oppression.

After the village is seized again by the villagers-turned-guerilla fighters, the final lines pronounce judgment of days to come: 'We'll make a free world for all men. The Earth belongs to us. If we fight for it. And we will fight for it'. In a strange way the line would be accurate in view of the future planned by Stalin for the world.

Even though Lillian Hellman, the screenwriter, stated that she was inspired by her visits to the Soviet Union, as it turns out, she didn't know anything at all about the common Russian people, not to mention about villages. Whenever she visited Moscow, Hellman stayed at Soviet officials' houses, benefiting from an NKVD escort.

The film ended up being nominated for six Oscars, including best musical score, which was composed by Aaron Copland, and supposed to be Ukrainian folk, but ended up inspiring itself from Russian popular music (Pollack, 2000: 381).

As for the reviews, Bosley Crowther, the New York Times critic (a vehement opponent of anti-communist propaganda in the early 1950s), called the movie "a picture (..) without any political pondering at all (..) lyric and savage" (Crowther, 1943a). In the same tone, Life magazine called it "an eloquent tone poem (..) a document showing how the people fight and die" (Life Magazine 1943: 119).

Opposite, the Hearst Press condemned it as communist propaganda, The Sunday Times admitting that the film could not have been worse if Stalin directed it (Shindler, 1979: 63).

The North Star proved itself a success even in Russia, the Soviet embassy in Washington reporting that the film played with a full house in Tomsk, Novosibirsk and Stalinsk.

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### Song of Russia

The 1943 MGM movie stars Robert Taylor as John Meredith, a famous American symphony conductor who is touring Soviet Russia before the war. He falls in love with Russian Nadya Stepanova (Susan Peters), who charms him with her typical American girl conviviality. The two marry, but their honeymoon is interrupted by the brutal German invasion. Nadya joins the resistance, throwing Molotov cocktails all over the place and transforming (as the villagers in *The North Star*) into a virtuous fighter. The attitude of the peasants in Nadya's village resembles the North Star villager, who, aware of the imminent danger decides to burn down their houses and lands. John returns from his tour and decides to fight next to his wife against the Nazis, but the villagers wisely advise them to spread the word of the Russian resistance back in America. The wartime message is summarized by John when he tells his countrymen that "we are all soldiers side by side in the fight for all humanity" (Whitfield, 1996: 128).

Before the movie reached the audiences, its script was several times cut and renewed with elements coming either from OWI advices, or from The Hays Office. Even though both the producer, Louis B Mayer and the leading man Richard Taylor, testified in 1947 in front of the Committee of Un-American Activities, they both denied the fact that the Office of War Information approached them. Meyer testified that his people came with the idea and that OWI only accepted it, and from Taylor's deposition we find out that Mellet, head of the BMP, was a common presence at the studio (Committee of Un-American Activities, 1947).

In his extensive studies of the movie, Robert Meyhew reveals from what remains of the archives OWI, that even though the Bureau didn't interfere directly it set a number of guidelines for the film, and also asked the opinion of Vladimir Bazikin, the First Secretary of the Embassy, who in return made a list of 8 points: from including Russian intelligentsia, the lead role driving a car, not a wagon, the use of "more Russian names" (Frumkin became Petrov), to an explanation of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, that Nadya had to offer to John.

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Of course Russia signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, that Russia would sign a non-aggression pact with any country, that Russia is opposed to aggression by any other country and is willing to give guarantee not to be aggressor against other country. This rather than the explanation given in the present script. ( Letter from Lowell Mellett to Warren Pierce (deputy to Nelson Poynter), 9 January 1943, in Mayhew, 2004: 346).

In the final script no mention of the Nazi-Soviet Pact ever exists. Even OWI reviewers were concerned that the Nazi-Soviet Pact could prove to the audiences that the Soviet Union is unreliable. Concerning Russia's preparedness for the imminent war, the same reviewer, speaking almost like a Soviet official says:

Here again is an opportunity to show that Russia had felt that it was almost inevitable that some day she would be attacked by Germany. This fixation on the part of Russia explains so many things about Russia that are not well understood, such as her war against Finland and extending her frontiers soon after Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939]. (Film analysis of Jarrico-Collins' script (MHL f.2928-29). Reviewer's name not given, 28 December 1942 in Mayhew, 2004: 345).

Even though not all recommendations were met in the final version of the script, the fact that the studio would at least consider the opinion of the government or a Soviet official reveals the intent of the picture.

Like in *The North Star*, the idea is to reveal that Russians have in fact many of the qualities and habits of an "average Joe". When seeing the atmosphere in a Moscow nightclub (!), John is surprised of the cheerfulness of the Russian people. Moreover, a piece from an American composer is heard playing. Cold War film critic, Nora Sayre, points out that the portrayal of the Russians is almost identical with the portrayal of Afro-Americans: a cheerful race, dependent on music and laughter, with music in their souls (Sayre, 1979: 217).

Many movie scenes are filled with historical inaccuracies: John is conducting the American orchestra playing the American anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner", under the Soviet flag; when John goes to Nadya's village, collectivization by the happy community resembles more a hay raising in the United States; the freedom of religion is also present: the two lovers are married by the local orthodox priest (Mayhew, 2002).

The New York Times turns a blind eye on the movies obvious pro-Soviet message and Crowther sees in it only 'a topical musical film, filled with rare good humor, rich vitality and a prosper respect of the Russians' fight in the war' (Crowther, 1944).

## Mission to Moscow

The Warner Brothers' contribution to the war effort was the portrayal of former US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Joseph E Davies, and his visit to Moscow, on which he decided to write a book in 1942.

The movie relies on Davies' own experiences and beliefs about the Soviets following his visit, and meeting the Soviet officials.

Mission to Moscow starts with the real former ambassador, telling the viewer that the authenticity of the information cannot be put under question, since it's part of his experience. 'No leaders of a nation have been so misunderstood as those in the Soviet Government during those critical years between the world wars' (Mission to Moscow, 1943). After his meeting with President Roosevelt (close friends since World War I), he is proposed to go to Moscow and improve bilateral ties between the two countries. Even though that didn't happen, he succeeded in establishing a rapport between him and the communist counterparts.

The plot is full of historical distortions in order to put the Soviet Union in a favorable light. After leaving the United States, Davies travels first to Nazi Germany where, even though he is denied a meeting with Hitler he tries to persuade the head of the National Bank of the benefits of a disarmament plan guaranteed by FDR. He then goes to the Soviet Union, remaining astounded by the people's cheerfulness and their progress. After meeting Litvinov, he visits the factories of several high points of Soviet Union industry (from the tractor factories of Kharkov, to the oil fields of Baku), and is amazed of the development of the Russian society. Moreover, he is also informed that 1/3 of the workers are women, and that most head engineers have worked before in the United States. The preparedness of war also comes into discussion, when Davies finds out that most tractors built by the Russians can be transformed into fighting tanks.

Russian women, we are told, are not so different from American women. Molotov's wife, Polina, is the manager of a Cosmetic Factory in Moscow, and when confronted with Margaret Davies' doubt that the Russians were fond of cosmetics, she replies: "We discovered that feminine beauty is not a luxury (...) we have so much in common" (Mission to Moscow, 1943).

The plot thickens when Davies is invited to an official banquet held at a Russian Dacha, where officials from England, France, Italy, Japan and Germany are invited. It is here that he meets Bukharin (chief editor of Pravda, and the Izvestia), Radek and Marshall Tukhachevski (former leader of the Red Army between 1925 and 1928). Over the next days the three men and others are brought by the NKVD in front of a Moscow court, on suspicion of trying to subvert the government (history tells us that in fact, Marshall



Tukhachevki was shot in the head without a public trial a year before). The movie insists on the guiltiness of the accused, when each one of them admitting that they carefully followed orders from Leon Trotsky, in a conspiracy which also included German and Japanese officials (for their help the Japanese were to be given territories in the Pacific Ocean, and Germany received Ukraine).

After a talk with Litvinov, Davies is informed that war is inevitable, and if the collective security fails, the Soviet Union will do whatever it takes to protect its borders (it is obvious that this is an attempt to explain to the American people the future Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939). Assisting at the 1<sup>st</sup> of May parade in 1938, Davies is stunned by the innovative military techniques of the Russian Army, but hours later he is informed of the atrocities committed in Shanghai and other Chinese cities, by the Japanese soldiers. Davies is convinced of the necessity of an alliance with the Soviet Union and China against the common enemy.

Last but not least, he is privileged to meet Stalin, who informs him that the current situation is only France's and England's fault. Reactionary forces there have permitted Germany to arm itself again. "In my opinion, the governments of France and England don't represent the people", says Stalin (*Mission to Moscow*, 1943). Although admitting that he would not ally with Germany, if Czechoslovakia is conquered, he maintains his distrust of the collective security system. Nevertheless he speaks kind about the American people: We want you to realize that we feel friendlier toward the government of the United States than toward any other nation.

Talking to Churchill about an alliance with the Soviet Union, he informs him of their immense progress in the industry, the military, and of the bravery of the common Russian soldier. If not, he informs Churchill, Russia will sign a pact with Germany (again, the Nazi-Soviet pact is pun on the shoulders of Western democracies' passiveness).

Returning home, Davies tries to convince the senators of the immanency of war, and of the necessity of an alliance with Russia, but is confronted by their non-interventionist policy. After 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1939 Davies was the promoter of a lend-lease pact, and after the German Barbarossa operation the film portrays him taking delivering speeches all over American. He also tries to explain the 1940 invasion of Finland: Russia tried to occupy defensive positions on the territory of Finland, but when the fascist government of Mannheim refused, Stalin didn't have any other choice.

Like the other two examples, and even more than that, the picture is an example of how Roosevelt, the OWI and the studios worked together in producing a wartime pro-Soviet motion picture.

From his extensive study of governmental involvement in *Mission to Moscow*, Todd Bennett reveals that Roosevelt met Davies three times in 1942 to be informed on the

film's progress. "By reviewing scripts and prints, OWI propagandists exercised authority over *Mission to Moscow*, ensuring that it promotes the "united nations" theme." (Bennet, 2001: 495).

After seeing the final script the Office of War Information was thrilled; the effort to show that no major differences existed between the two people worked: both leaders desired peace, both people are well fed and have a high living standard, and the American people is told that the Soviet Union would prove itself a good neighbor in case of fire (Bennet, 2001: 495).

The *New York Times* praised the film for showing sharply and frankly the point of view of Russia, and emphasizing the fact that the Soviets were able to identify the danger in Europe, when no one else could (Crowther, 1943b). Fortunately, most reviewers criticized the flick: James Agee, in *The Nation*, refers to it as a "shameful rot", and *Commonweal* finds it dull and pedantic. The *New Republic* notices the sudden change from red-baiting to red-praising, both turning out ignorant. *Life* notes that the only purpose of the movie, besides entertainment, is to sell the USSR to American citizens (*Life Magazine*, 1943). John Dewey, who led the commission for the investigations of Soviet purges, wrote a letter to *The New York Times* [*Moscow Film Again Attacked*], in which he defines the movie as the first "totalitarian propaganda for mass consumption" (Dewey, 2008: 353).

The spring of 1943 saw American-Soviet relations slowly deteriorating following the failure of opening a second front in Western Europe. Roosevelt maintained the belief that if he could talk face to face to Stalin, then all these misunderstandings would be cleared off. Because he thought that not social thinking, but the state on international insecurity motivated the Soviets, FDR felt that a state of trust had to be built between the leaders. It was up to Davies again to smooth the path for cooperation. A "second mission to Moscow" found the former ambassador trying to explain to Stalin that no differences should divide the Allies. It is in this context that the 1943 movie became part of the cultural diplomacy, as a means of "soft power". The Soviet film historian, Peter Kenez, notes that before being distributed, every film of the late 1930's was watched by the members of the Politburo and by V.I. Stalin (Kenez, 1995: 157).

So, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1943, Stalin, Molotov (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Litvinov (Ambassador to the United States), Beria (Head of NKVD), Mikoyan (Special Representative of the State Defense Committee) and Marshall Voroshilov, together with Davies and the US ambassador at the time, Standley (although he had presented his resignation 4 weeks before), viewed "*Mission to Moscow*" in the private cinema at the Kremlin Palace.

Although the movie didn't manage to get a positive reaction from of Stalin, except a grunt or two, he approved the movie's release in the Soviet Union, being one of the first

American movies to receive distribution rights in more than a decade, being praised by the Soviet's press. Pravda and Izvestia noted that the intention of the film was to promote mutual understanding between the two powers (Bennet, 2001: 509). And although Davies' "second mission to Moscow" wasn't a success (Stalin promising FDR a meeting in Alaska, only to keep putting off the meeting, and eventually meeting FDR and Churchill in Teheran), the movie was considered as a token of good will, and managed to buy more time before the United States would give their approval for a second front. Moreover, as a result of the visit, America's distribution power grew, delivering approximately 150 newsreel and 70 motion pictures to the Soviet Union, numbers that, towards the end of the war, began to worry Soviet officials.

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## The Aftermath

The so-called on-screen friendship between America and Russia was deeply criticized in Washington, in the wake of the Cold War. Such governmental organization, as HUAC (House of Un-American Affairs Committee), The Catholic League for Decency, The Motion Picture Alliance, the Alliance for Preservation American Values, put up together the infamous blacklists of people presumed to be members of the Communist Party, or have communist beliefs. The Hearings Regarding Communist Infiltration of The Motion Pictures were held by HUAC in 1947, and the main targets were the contributors to wartime pro-Soviet pictures.

Robert Taylor (the lead role in *Song of Russia*) testified that he was persuaded by the White House to appear in the film, although he retracted it later. Louis B Mayer, the head of MGM said in front of Parnell Thomas, the head of the committee that he intended to do a musical, than a realistic portrait of the Soviet Union, reminding that he also made movies like *Ninotchka* and *Comrade X*, which portray Russians as a joke. Also testifying about the film was famous novelist, Russian-born Ayn Rand, who declared that 'the presentation of that kind of happy existence in a country of slavery and horror is terrible because it is propaganda.'

Jack Warner, the producer of *Mission to Moscow*, being terrified of the hearings, 'behave like a cornered villain from one of the studios' gangster movies' (Ceplair and Englung, 1979: 259). He named as a communist almost every left-wing believer and liberal in the studio (that practically meant everyone who worked there, most of them being New Dealers), although, as he states, 'I have never seen a communist, and I wouldn't know one if I saw one' (Committee of Un-American Activities, 1947: 11).

Director Lewis Milestone (*The North Star*) was part of the group of the Hollywood

Nineteen (the group of unfriendly witnesses, who invoked the first amendment ) to be summoned by the Commission for their involvement with the Communist Party. He together with other seven directors and screenwriters finally managed to avoid testifying. As for the rest of the Hollywood Ten, they remained the main victims of the Hollywood Purges, each of them being tried and sentenced for contempt of the Court.

Screenwriter Howard Koch (*Mission to Moscow*) was himself blacklisted in 1951, after being subsequently fired from the Warner Brothers Studios, after the war.

Lillian Hellman, the screenwriter of *The North Star*, was summoned in 1952 by the committee, and although in a letter sent to HUAC she declared not invoking the fifth amendment, if the all the questions were concerning herself and no one else (I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashion – Hellman, 1952), the questions of the chairmen forced her into doing so. As a result, she was blacklisted as well by Hollywood's major studios.

The Pro-Soviet attitude turned again into Soviet demonization; in the same way in which the OWT's pressures convinced the studios to blindfold the differences between the two superpowers, in response to HUAC's inquiries, most studios produced a number of anti-communist, anti-Soviet pictures that would emphasize the startling mismatch between the two. But if the cost of the wartime propaganda could be considered low and without great prejudice, and should be looked at as a necessity in time of war, the witch-hunt that followed and the continuum state of paranoia and uncertainty left a great scar on the history of the American society of the 1950's.

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## Conclusions

Hollywood's attitude towards political issues was, and is nowadays a sensitive subject. Regarding communism, the first Red Scare lighted up the imagination of Hollywood producers and political figures alike. If one could find a balance between capitalizing on public fear, and in the same time acting like the voice of the government, then both sides would have found the perfect formula. The image of the communism menace was one of the first images of a foreign enemy ever to be portrayed on the big screen, and its transformation evolved for over 70 years.

But no mutation has been so abrupt and ironical than in the films produced shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack. From vicious beasts that sought to destroy capitalism by infiltrating every branch of the economy, the communist image was put in a wringer and transformed into a misunderstood brother. Trying to sell a new alliance to the American public meant trying to sell a new lost friend: communism was misunderstood, the Soviet

Union was misunderstood, and it was up to Hollywood to set the balance straight.

Mission to Moscow, The North Star, Song of Russia and some other twenty films share the same pattern and motivation: the Soviet counterpart was in fact no different from the US. Communism after all was just another side of the same coin. Last but not least, the Russians talked, dressed, plowed the earth, spoke and thought similar to Americans. They were to be presented as a heroic people that fought a defensive war to the end against Nazism. Full of historical inexactitudes, the films were the product of a fruitful collaboration between Roosevelt's political established agencies, like the Office of War Information and the Bureau of Motion Pictures and Hollywood producers, seeking to capitalize again on public fear.

The analysis above sought to demonstrate the particular process of transforming an enemy into a friend. Every line, trait of character, action was put under a magnifier and analyzed by special commissions until communists came out clean. It is a piece of history that for many Americans remains a black page, and a piece of history that was forgotten during the Cold War; it was the task of other men to shape public opinion afterwards and to shift the balance once again; After all, the United States has always been better in portraying enemies than friends.

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