

STAGE

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The Screen Opens Fire On Fascism

The polite silence is broken. Hollywood, the timid little pink rabbit of the West, which has always tried to please everybody, is going to fight back with "Confessions of a Nazi Spy," a courageous attack upon Fascist activities in America.

IT is admitted that Hollywood could, if it would, serve the greatest propaganda service in the world today. The reasons why American motion picture producers—the loudest talkers—have not dared defy the totalitarian powers up until now are no concern of ours here. A thrilling thing is about to happen on the American screen—a brazen and blatant defiance of all film precedent, a deliberate holding up to the public gaze those forces in this country that have been privately deplored by the Hollywood filmmakers, but, until now, never openly challenged.

The Warner Brothers are about to release *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. It is natural and most commendable that it should be the Warners. They have led, with but one or two exceptions, every significant film trend in America. They introduced sound (*The Jazz Singer*); they were the first to dramatize realistically the biographical film (*Disraeli*); they were the first to make the gangster a hero (*Little Caesar*) and the first to make him a heel (*The Public Enemy*). They were the first to introduce the film musical (*42nd Street*) and the first to glorify the FBI (*G-Men*). Now they are the first to talk back to an internationally despised despot.

Warner Brothers are prepared for anything when they release *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. A great deal of undercover nastiness has taken place within and without the studio during the pro-

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duction, and the Warners, producer Robert Lord, and the cast are taking no chances that a perilous venture of this kind should collapse through a mere oversight.

Specifically, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* is a vehement cry for counter-espionage. Leon Turrou started the whole thing when he published *Nazi Spies in America*, a book naming names and pleading for an American defense against Fascist activities in this country. It seems, according to Mr. Turrou, that the G-Men are pretty busy attending to our own local bad men, aren't allowed to open mail or indulge in any other spy businesses so exotically presented in fiction, and are not permitted by FBI regulation to delve very sharply into private codes and symbols. It is also Mr. Turrou's contention that American institutions are eaten with Nazi influences, and that it's high time everybody knew about it.

The Warner brothers agree with Mr. Turrou. *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* will show all these things, plus presenting characters based admittedly on actual persons, and whipping it all into action melodrama as only the Warners can. The quality of the venture as a motion picture will be considered judiciously on these pages after its New York première. Until then the events that will precede this notable occasion, according to studio crystal-gazing, must be set down.

IN THE first place, the announcement that a production bearing the name, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, was to be made brought immediate protests from German representatives both on the West Coast and in Washington, which were ignored. Warners found it necessary, and convenient, to organize a counter-espionage system of their own to defend their activities, and to insure the completion of the picture. They feel reasonably sure that certain things are going to happen upon the release of the film—plans that have been uncovered by their own W-Men—and have counter-planned accordingly. Their first concern is a pos-

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sible suit by the three spies who were arrested and indicted in New York in 1938, on whose activities the story is based. In 1910 Louis D. Brandeis instituted a law, called the right of privacy, by which any citizen or resident of this country might sue a person or institution making public certain facts in his life. It is an obscure law, with but two or three precedents, and allows only one exception—that a public figure has no right to suit. The line of difference between a private citizen and a public figure is slight and variable, but it is unlikely that the suit will be brought. In any case, the Warner defense is ready.

THEIR second concern is protecting the master print (the negative film from which positive prints are made for country-wide release) in Hollywood. The picture has been made behind locked doors. Every night the print is put in the vault, before which stand four armed guards. Their third concern is protecting the master print during its shipment from Hollywood to New York and other key centers. The studio has received threats of bombing, burning, and assorted mayhem at the moment of the print's departure from the studio. They will, of course, ship one master print by the regular channels—and a second, made for obvious reasons, will be secretly transported. Upon the film's release in New York City, hell's expected to pop. Stinkbombs, picketing, sabotage, violence—these things seem certain.

There are seventy-eight members of the cast, ten of whom will be named, sixty-eight of whom prefer to remain anonymous because of possible Nazi reprisal. Francis Lederer, a Czech, plays the part of the leading Nazi spy. Edward G. Robinson plays the rôle of Turrou, and Lya Lys, a Hungarian, makes her American début in the picture. Nineteen players were approached to play the part of Hitler, all of whom refused. The part was stricken from the script. Marlene Dietrich asked the studio to let her play a part, but for some reason, possibly financial, the deal was not made. Samuel

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Goldwyn is known to have formally requested the Warners to shelve the picture. Warner is reported to have answered: "What do you want me to make? *The Cowboy and the Lady?*"

The picture will cost \$1,500,000 and is the first film to name a power—Germany—outright in a motion picture indictment.

The uniforms for the Nazi Storm Troopers in the film had to be made at the studio. No costuming concern in California had any. Pictures of Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels, which hang prominently on the walls of the sets, are almost daily defaced—a pretty complex case of counter-sabotage. The Warners receive dozens of crank letters every day threatening everything from boycotting, which does not worry them, to bombing, which does. The studio claims to have been dangerously frank in the picture, showing Nazi soldiers training in the U. S. Army, Bund meetings, propagandist parades, and the intricate system of intelligence service between here and Nazi Germany. They claim to give the true picture of Fascism in this country, with one exception. They could not name nor picture the people who are financing it—that law of privacy again.

Formal protests from European governments are expected the day of release, even from the British government. The whole thing is pretty tense and international. Joe Breen, head of the Hays office in Hollywood, came over to the studio during the shooting. "Go to it," he said.

