

PROCEEDINGS AGAINST JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

NOVEMBER 24, 1947.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. THOMAS of New Jersey, from the Committee on Un-American Activities, submitted the following

REPORT

CITING JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

The Committee on Un-American Activities, as created and authorized by the House of Representatives through the enactment of Public Law 601, section 121, subsection Q (2), and under House Resolution No. 5 of the Eightieth Congress, caused to be issued a subpoena to John Howard Lawson, 9354 Burnett Avenue, San Fernando, Calif. The said subpoena directed John Howard Lawson to be and appear before said Committee on Un-American Activities on October 23, 1947, at the hour of 10:30 a. m. and then and there to testify touching matters of inquiry committed to the said committee. The subpoena served upon John Howard Lawson is set forth in words and figures as follows:

By authority of the House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States of America, to Robert E. Clark, United States Marshal: You are hereby commanded to summon John Howard Lawson to be and appear before the Un-American Activities Committee of the House of Representatives of the United States, of which the Hon. J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey, is chairman, in their chamber in the city of Washington, on October 23rd, 1947, at the hour of 10:30 a. m., then and there to testify touching matters of inquiry committed to said Committee; and he is not to depart without leave of said Committee. Herein fail not, and make return of this summons.

Witness my hand and the seal of the House of Representatives of the United States, at the city of Washington, this 18th day of September 1947.

J. PARNELL THOMAS, *Chairman.*

Attest:

JOHN ANDREWS, *Clerk.*

The said subpoena was duly served, as appears by the return made thereon by W. S. Sweeney, deputy, who was duly authorized to serve the said subpoena. The return of the service by the said W. S. Sweeney being endorsed thereon, is set forth in words and figures as follows:

Served September 19, 1947, on John Howard Lawson, at 9354 Burnet St.; San Fernando, California. Robert E. Clark, U. S. Marshal; W. S. Sweeney, Deputy.

On October 11, 1947, a telegram was sent to Mr. John Howard Lawson, which is set forth herein in words and figures as follows:

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES,
Washington, D. C., October 11, 1947.

Mr. JOHN HOWARD LAWSON,
9354 Burnet Avenue,
San Fernando, California.

In response to the subpoena served upon you summoning you to appear before the Committee on Un-American Activities, United States House of Representatives, in Washington, D. C., on October 23, you are hereby directed to appear on October 27 instead of October 23, at the hour of 10:30 a. m., Room 226, Old House Office Building.

J. PARNELL THOMAS, *Chairman.*

The said John Howard Lawson, pursuant to said subpoena and in compliance therewith, appeared before the said committee to give such testimony as required under and by virtue of Public Law 601, section 121, subsection Q (2), and under House Resolution No. 5 of the Eightieth Congress. The said John Howard Lawson having appeared as a witness and having been asked a question, namely, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" which question was pertinent to the subject under inquiry, refused to answer such question; and as a result of the said John Howard Lawson's refusal to answer the aforesaid question your committee was prevented from receiving testimony and information concerning a matter committed to said committee in accordance with the terms of the subpoena served upon the said John Howard Lawson. The record of the proceedings before the committee on Monday, October 27, 1947, during which the said John Howard Lawson refused to answer the aforesaid question pertinent to the subject under inquiry, is set forth in fact as follows:

(The committee met on Monday, October 27, 1947, at 10:30 a. m., Hon J. Parnell Thomas (chairman) presiding.)

The CHAIRMAN. The meeting will come to order. Everyone please take their seats. The record will show that a subcommittee is present, consisting of Mr. Vail, Mr. McDowell, and Mr. Thomas. Mr. Stripling, the first witness.

Mr. STRIPLING. The first witness, Mr. Chairman, is Mr. John Howard Lawson.
The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Lawson.

* * * * *
The CHAIRMAN. Stand and please raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. LAWSON. I do.

The CHAIRMAN. Sit down, please.

Mr. LAWSON. Mr. Chairman, I have a statement here which I wish to make—

The CHAIRMAN. Well—all right; let me see your statement.

* * * * *
The CHAIRMAN. I don't care to read any more of the statement. The statement will not be read. I read the first line.

Mr. LAWSON. You have spent 1 week vilifying me before the American public—

The CHAIRMAN. Just a minute—

Mr. LAWSON. And you refuse to allow me to make a statement on my rights as an American citizen.

The CHAIRMAN. I refuse you to make the statement, because of the first sentence in your statement. That statement is not pertinent to the inquiry. Now, this is a congressional committee—a congressional committee set up by law. We must have orderly procedure, and we are going to have orderly procedure. Mr. Stripling, identify the witness.

Mr. LAWSON. The rights of American citizens are important in this room here, and I intend to stand up for those rights, Congressman Thomas.

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Lawson, will you state your full name, please?

Mr. LAWSON. I wish to protest against the unwillingness of this committee to read a statement, when you permitted Mr. Warner, Mr. Mayer, and others to read statements in this room. My name is John Howard Lawson.

Mr. STRIPLING. What is your present address?

Mr. LAWSON. 9354 Burnett Avenue, San Fernando, Calif.

Mr. STRIPLING. When and where were you born?

Mr. LAWSON. New York City.

Mr. STRIPLING. What year?

Mr. LAWSON. 1894.

Mr. STRIPLING. Give us the exact date.

Mr. LAWSON. September 25.

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Lawson, you are here in response to a subpoena which was served upon you on September 19, 1947; is that true?

Mr. LAWSON. That is correct.

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Mr. STRIPLING. What is your occupation, Mr. Lawson?

Mr. LAWSON. I am a writer.

Mr. STRIPLING. How long have you been a writer?

Mr. LAWSON. All my life—at least, 35 years—my adult life.

Mr. STRIPLING. Are you a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

Mr. LAWSON. The raising of any question here in regard to membership, political beliefs, or affiliation—

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Chairman—

Mr. LAWSON. Is absolutely beyond the powers of this committee.

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Chairman—

Mr. LAWSON. But—

(The chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON. It is a matter of public record that I am a member of the Screen Writers Guild.

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Mr. STRIPLING. Now, Mr. Chairman, I am also going to request that you instruct the witness to be responsive to the questions.

The CHAIRMAN. I think the witness will be more responsive to the questions.

Mr. LAWSON. Mr. Chairman, you permitted—

The CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). Never mind—

Mr. LAWSON (continuing). Witnesses in this room to make answers of three or four or five hundred words to questions here.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Lawson, you will please be responsive to these questions and not continue to try to disrupt these hearings.

Mr. LAWSON. I am not on trial here, Mr. Chairman. This committee is on trial here before the American people. Let us get that straight.

The CHAIRMAN. We don't want you to be on trial.

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Lawson, how long have you been a member of the Screen Writers Guild?

Mr. LAWSON. Since it was founded in its present form, in 1933.

Mr. STRIPLING. Have you ever held any office in the guild?

Mr. LAWSON. The question of whether I have held office is also a question which is beyond the purview of this committee.

(The chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON. It is an invasion of the right of association under the Bill of Rights of this country.

The CHAIRMAN. Please be responsive to the question.

Mr. LAWSON. It is also a matter—

(The chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON. Of public record—

The CHAIRMAN. You asked to be heard. Through your attorney, you asked to be heard, and we want you to be heard. And if you don't care to be heard, then we will excuse you, and we will put the record in without your answers.

Mr. LAWSON. I wish to frame my own answers to your questions, Mr. Chairman, and I intend to do so.

The CHAIRMAN. And you will be responsive to the questions or you will be excused from the witness stand.

Mr. LAWSON. I will frame my own answers, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, Mr. Stripling.

Mr. STRIPLING. I repeat the question, Mr. Lawson: Have you ever held any position in the Screen Writers Guild?

Mr. LAWSON. I stated that it is outside the purview of the rights of this committee to inquire into any form of association—

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair will determine what is in the purview of this committee.

Mr. LAWSON. My rights as an American citizen are no less than the responsibilities of this committee of Congress.

The CHAIRMAN. Now, you are just making a big scene for yourself and getting all "het up." [Laughter.] Be responsive to the questioning, just the same as all the witnesses have. You are no different from the rest. Go ahead, Mr. Stripling.

Mr. LAWSON. I am being treated differently from the rest.

The CHAIRMAN. You are not being treated differently.

Mr. LAWSON. Other witnesses made statements, which included quotations from books, references to material which had no connection whatsoever with the interest of this committee.

The CHAIRMAN. We will determine whether it has connection. Now, you go ahead—

Mr. LAWSON. It is absolutely beyond the power of this committee to inquire into my association in any organization.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Lawson, you will have to stop or you will leave the witness stand. And you will leave the witness stand because you are in contempt. That is why you will leave the witness stand. And if you are just trying to force me to put you in contempt, you won't have to try much harder. You know what has happened to a lot of people that have been in contempt of this committee this year, don't you?

Mr. LAWSON. I am glad to have made it perfectly clear that you are going to threaten and intimidate the witnesses, Mr. Chairman.

(The chairman pounding gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON. I am an American, and I am not at all easy to intimidate, and don't think I am.

(The chairman pounding gavel.)

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Lawson, I repeat the question. Have you ever held any position in the Screen Writers Guild?

Mr. LAWSON. I have stated that the question is illegal. But it is a matter of public record that I have held many offices in the Screen Writers Guild. I was its first president, in 1933, and I have held office on the board of directors of the Screen Writers Guild at other times.

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Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Lawson, are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party of the United States?

Mr. LAWSON. In framing my answer to that question, I must emphasize the points that I have raised before. The question of communism is in no way related to this inquiry, which is an attempt to get control of the screen and to invade the basic rights of American citizens in all fields.

Mr. McDOWELL. Now, I must object—

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Chairman—

(The chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON. The question here relates not only to the question of my membership in any political organization but this committee is attempting to establish the right—

(The chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON (continuing). Which has been historically denied to any committee of this sort, to invade the rights and privileges and immunity of American citizens, whether they be Protestant, Methodist, Jewish, or Catholic, whether they be Republicans or Democrats or anything else.

The CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). Mr. Lawson, just quiet down again. Mr. Lawson, the most pertinent question that we can ask is whether or not you have ever been a member of the Communist Party. Now, do you care to answer that question?

Mr. LAWSON. You are using the old technique, which was used in Hitler Germany in order to create a scare here—

The CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). Oh—

Mr. LAWSON. In order to create an entirely false atmosphere in which this hearing is conducted—

(The chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON. In order that you can then smear the motion-picture industry, and you can proceed to the press, to any form of communication in this country.

The CHAIRMAN. You have learned—

Mr. LAWSON. The Bill of Rights was established precisely to prevent the operation of any committee which could invade the basic rights of Americans. Now, if you want to know—

Mr. STRIPLING. Mr. Chairman, the witness is not answering the question.

Mr. LAWSON. If you want to know—

(The Chairman pounds gavel.)

Mr. LAWSON. About the perjury that has been committed here and the perjury that is planned.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Lawson—

Mr. LAWSON. You permit me and my attorneys to bring in here the witnesses that testified last week, and you permit us to cross-examine these witnesses, and we will show up the whole tissue of lie—

The CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). We are going to get the answer to that question if we have to stay here for a week. Are you a member of the Communist Party, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Mr. LAWSON. It is unfortunate and tragic that I have to teach this committee the basic principles of American—

The CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). That is not the question. The question is: Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Mr. LAWSON. I am framing my answer in the only way in which any American citizen can frame his answer to a question which absolutely invades his rights.

The CHAIRMAN. Then you refuse to answer that question; is that correct?

Mr. LAWSON. I have told you that I will offer my beliefs, affiliations, and everything else to the American public, and they will know where I stand.

The CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). Excuse the witness—

Mr. LAWSON. As they do from what I have written.

The CHAIRMAN (pounding gavel). Stand away from the stand—

Mr. LAWSON. I have written Americanism for many years, and I shall continue to fight for the Bill of Rights, which you are trying to destroy.

The CHAIRMAN. Officers, take this man away from the stand—

Because of the foregoing, the said Committee on Un-American Activities was deprived of the answer to a pertinent question propounded to said John Howard Lawson relative to the subject matter which under Public Law 601, section 121, subsection Q (2), and under House Resolution No. 5 of the Eightieth Congress, the said committee was instructed to investigate, and the refusal of the witness to answer a question, namely, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?" which question was pertinent to the subject under inquiry, is a violation of the subpoena under which the witness had previously appeared, and his refusal to answer the aforesaid question deprived your committee of necessary and pertinent testimony and places the said witness in contempt of the House of Representatives of the United States.

