

# HUAC

## An afterword on absurdity

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How does one describe a House Un-American Activities Committee hearing? From a legal viewpoint? Confrontation of opposing forces? Show biz? From any point of view, the hearings held in Washington October 1, 3, and 4, to investigate what took place in Chicago were a flop, a farce.

Only two of the seven subpoenaed “defendants” were questioned—Dr. Quentin Young of the National Medical Committee for Human Rights and Robert Greenblatt, co-chairman of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Not called to the witness stand were Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, representing the Yippies, probably would have livened things up a bit but they had to be content with making their presence known via interruptions and antics outside the hearing room.

For Rubin, it was a repeat of 1966 when he was also subpoenaed by HUAC but was not called on to testify. Then he came dressed as an American revolutionary soldier. This time, Jerry was a guerrilla fighter—bullet bandolier slung across his bare chest, toy machine gun on his back, beret, pajama-type pants, colorful paint on his face, chest and arms. and—to symbolize the union of guerrilla fighter and flower child—bells whose tinkle, tinkle in the hearing room produced some of his few laughs.

Hoffman showed up the first day as an Indian. When he showed up on the second day wearing an American flag shirt he was grabbed outside by Capitol police and thrown into a paddy wagon as was his wife who came to his rescue and a kid who was caught letting the air out of the paddy wagon’s tires. Hoffman spent Thursday night in jail, which led to a walkout Friday morning by all the witnesses and their attorneys except for Young who was testifying all the time and his attorneys. They all returned for the afternoon session when Hoffman showed up minus his flag shirt.

Dr. Young engaged in a lot of cat and mouse play with the committee. He refused on first amendment grounds to answer the classic question of whether he was a member of the Communist Party. But outside the hearing room he gave a “No” answer to the question when it was posed by a newsman.

The next day the committee asked him the same question and he again refused to answer, informing them that he had answered the question outside the hearing room but that he would never answer such a question before HUAC. One of the committee members asked him what his answer had been to the newsman. Young replied “Read the papers.” He was also asked whether he had attended a certain Communist Party meeting in, would you believe it, 1948.

Young and many in the hearing room cracked up at this and he refused to answer. Although protesting that his right of free association was threatened by the question about the Communist Party, Young later spoke of his association with the NMC and SDS. The CP, conservative and ineffectual, still carries weight on both sides at a HUAC hearing.

Much of the questioning of Dr. Young centered around a check he had made out for a thousand dollars in payment of the rent of the NMC office in Chicago.

The committee had a photostat of the check. Young said it was merely, in effect, a loan to Renny Davis to be paid back in 48 hours which it was, he claimed. The committee also had a copy of an index card from the NMC files which listed Dr. Young as a contributor.

Robert Greenblatt was a juicier prospect for the committee. Greenblatt had been to Hanoi and had conferred with the Viet Cong in Prague and in Paris and had attended a communist youth festival in Cyprus, all of which the committee gleefully questioned him about. But first Greenblatt had some fun with them. When asked where he was born ( which was Hungary) and when he came to the U.S. (which was 1949) he took the opportunity to speak about the Nazis and the concentration camps he had been in. making various analogies to HUAC along the way.

In speaking of his contacts with the NLF and the Viet Cong, Greenblatt caused committee chairman Ichord to ask incredulously "Do you support the NLF?" as if he couldn't have imagined such a thing were possible for any American. Greenblatt went into a rather long answer, the effect of which was to say yes, including the idea that he supported oppressed peoples everywhere. When asked if he intended to make further trips to meet the NLF or the Viet Cong, Greenblatt said "In the words of a famous American, I will go anywhere, anytime, and speak to anyone if it will serve the cause of peace."

The most significant legal hassle that arose during the hearings was the defense counsel's claims that inasmuch as five of the seven witnesses had charges pending against them in Chicago and elsewhere, testimony being heard at the hearings could "hopelessly prejudice those cases."

Ichord paid some lip service to this and then proceeded to allow all kinds of testimony from the police informer who had served as Rubin's bodyguard and to allow questioning of Young and Greenblatt to bring out facts about the other witnesses and Greenblatt himself who has a narcotics charge pending against him from the time he arrived back in the U.S. via Canada.

At the Canadian border, a number of papers were taken from him plus marijuana, allegedly. The committee had some of these papers at the hearing, including a letter of introduction to a Vietnamese official in Paris, written for Greenblatt by Tom Hayden.

Although the committee is still hung up on the Communist Party myth and otherwise showed naivete about how the Left operates in this country, they were spared much of the ridicule that in the past has been their fate, primarily because there is no buffoon-type like Joe Pool on the present Committee.

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