

Jane Fonda, other stars, revive the Committee for the First Amendment – a group that emerged when the anti-communist panic came for Hollywood

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Resilience and silence

Many look at the blacklist era as a time of capitulation by progressives in the face of repression. While there's some validity to these claims, I've found that many progressive filmmakers also banded together, using allegory and other creative techniques to make movies with progressive – sometimes radical – messages.

Take “The Pajama Game,” for example. It's a musical comedy about labor trouble in a pajama factory. While the film is a sexy, frothy romp, on the one hand, the film also casts Doris Day as Babe, a feisty union steward. In “Racing with the Clock,” workers sing about the pressure they feel to speed up the pace of their labor.

Scenes include workers organizing a slowdown, sabotaging machinery and going on strike. The last word spoken in the film is “solidarity.”

To me, the revival of the Committee for the First Amendment draws attention to the dangers implicit in efforts to muzzle writers, artists and filmmakers.

“Silence the artist, and you silence the most articulate voice the people have,” the actress Katharine Hepburn said in May 1947 in a speech written for her by Dalton Trumbo, one of the Hollywood 10. “Destroy culture and you destroy one of the strongest sources of inspiration from which a people can draw strength to fight for a better life.”

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