



The Gordon File: A Screenwriter Recalls Twenty Years of FBI Surveillance

Bernard Gordon

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For twenty-six years, the FBI devoted countless hours of staff time and thousands of U.S. taxpayer dollars to the surveillance of an American citizen named Bernard Gordon. Given the lavish use of resources, one might assume this man was a threat to national security or perhaps a kingpin of organized crime - not a Hollywood screenwriter whose most subversive act was joining the Communist Party during the 1940s when we were allied with the USSR in a war against Germany. For this honest act of political dissent, Gordon came to be investigated by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1952, blacklisted by the Hollywood film industry, and tailed by the FBI for over two decades. In "The Gordon File", Bernard Gordon tells the compelling, cautionary story of his life under Bureau surveillance. Drawing on his FBI file of over 300 pages, which he obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, he traces how the Bureau followed him from Hollywood to Mexico, Paris, London, Rome, and even aboard a Dutch freighter as he created an unusually successful, albeit uncredited, career as a screenwriter and producer during the blacklist years. Comparing his actual activities during that time to records in the file, he pointedly and often humorously underscores how often the FBI got it wrong, from the smallest details of his life to the main fact of his not being a threat to national security. Most important, Gordon links his personal experience to the headlines of today, when the FBI is again assuming broad powers to monitor political dissidents it deems a threat to the nation. "Is it possible," he asks, "that books like this will help to move our investigative agencies from the job of blackmailing those who are critical of our imperfect democracy to arresting those who are truly out to destroy us?"

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