

Chapter 4

They Must Not Escape:

Cornered and the Specter of Postwar Fascism

All Fascism did not die with Mussolini. Hitler is finished—but the seeds spread by his disordered mind have firm root in too many fanatical brains. . . . Victory on the battlefield was essential, but it was not enough. For a good peace, a lasting peace, the decent peoples of the earth must remain determined to strike down the evil spirit which has hung over the world for the last decade. . . .

To divide and conquer was—and still is—their plan.

—Harry S. Truman, June 26, 1945

President Truman's concern about the continuing influence of fascism, even after the military defeat of the Axis powers, struck a chord with Adrian Scott. Indeed, it was the theme of his next film project, an antifascist thriller titled *Cornered*. A few lines of Truman's speech are scribbled in Scott's handwriting on his copy of the screenplay of *Cornered*, suggesting that he hoped to include it onscreen, as a preface or concluding quote, to bolster his antifascist vision and imbue it with the authority of the president of the United States.¹ 1

Though Scott, like many of his comrades in the Hollywood Left, had high hopes for the postwar world, both politically and artistically, he remained obsessed with the problem of fascism, as his films of the postwar era affirm. Though Scott finally seemed to be in a position to integrate his political and artistic visions, he quickly learned that the essential conservatism of the RKO front office presented a significant obstacle to his plans. The story of Scott's negotiations with both the studio system and his own Communist Party colleagues over *Cornered* offers important insights into the difficulties of making political films in the postwar era. 2

The Production of *Cornered*

Following the breakaway success of *Murder, My Sweet*, Scott was riding high and his prospects looked excellent. As one newspaper writer commented, Scott had graduated from a "new untried producer . . . to the busiest man in the studio."² His next assignment came from William Dozier, the new head of the story department at RKO. Searching for a property that would help him quickly establish his presence at the studio, Dozier spent \$50,000 on a twenty-page original treatment entitled *Cornered*, written by Ben Hecht, Herman Mankiewicz, and Czenzi Ormonde. The story was a thriller about an American merchant marine seeking revenge for the death of his brother after the war's end; the circuitous manhunt ultimately leads him to the Caribbean, where the murderer is 3

killed before the American can get to him. Though the rambling story itself was not particularly impressive, Dozier saw in it an opportunity to capitalize on the success of *Murder, My Sweet* with another gritty low-budget thriller, and he assigned Scott and Dmytryk to the project.³

Interestingly, Scott did not hire John Paxton to write the screenplay; instead, he brought John Wexley onto the project. Perhaps Paxton was working on another project, or perhaps Scott had political reasons for wanting to work with Wexley. Though Dmytryk later dismissed Wexley's screenwriting as "not impressive," in fact, Wexley had impeccable antifascist credits for his work both on and off screen. Originally an actor and playwright, Wexley was recruited by Universal in the early 1930s to adapt *The Last Mile*, his Broadway play about an uprising of convicts on death row. Over the next decade, he worked at every major studio in Hollywood, with particular success at Warner Bros., where his work on such films as *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) helped to establish the studio's reputation for hard-hitting gangster movies. Wexley was also responsible for two of the most powerful antifascist dramas produced in Hollywood: *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), directed by Anatole Litvak, and *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), written in collaboration with Bertolt Brecht and directed by Fritz Lang, both European refugees from fascism. An ardent Communist, Wexley was very active in Left politics, working on the defense of the Scottsboro Boys (about whom he wrote another successful play, *They Shall Not Die*), Upton Sinclair's 1934 EPIC campaign, and the highly publicized and volatile strikes by the Conference of Studio Unions in 1945.⁴

In his memoir *Odd Man Out*, Dmytryk hints darkly that Scott might have been "ordered" to use Wexley.⁵ Though Dmytryk's desire to see a sinister Communist conspiracy in Hollywood is clearly self-serving, there is, nevertheless, a small kernel of truth, however distorted, in the allegation. Certainly, as a screenwriter, Scott had taken every possible opportunity to insert his political vision into his films, whether the critique of capitalist greed in *The Parson of Panamint* or of class and corruption in *Mr. Lucky* and *Murder, My Sweet*. Now, as a producer, Scott seized the chance to transform the muddled scenario foisted on him by Dozier into a hard-hitting antifascist drama, and he deliberately and knowingly hired a Communist writer, a man who shared his radical vision and his commitment to making films as political as possible within the studio system.

And John Wexley certainly came through for him on *Cornered*. Wexley first proposed the key politicizing change—shifting the site of the manhunt from the Caribbean to South America—after reading a State Department White Paper by Cordell Hull that exposed Juan Perón's Nazi sympathies and his establishment of a protofascist police state in Argentina. As he recalled, "Argentina was harboring

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German U-boats which were sinking American ships and killing merchant marines by the hundreds. The U-boats were being fed information from Buenos Aires. I wanted to show the operations of the secret police, which Perón, a fan of Mussolini, had trained. Later Argentina became a haven for escaped Nazis, and they're still down there." Wexley's suggestion that the hero should chase his prey to South America in order to "reveal the guilt of Argentina—the criminal acts, the anti-U.S. acts" must have appealed enormously to Scott, and he gave Wexley the go-ahead. In late 1944 Wexley began researching the political situation in Argentina and outlining the story's new trajectory.⁶

From the very beginning, the studio executives had qualms about the project, particularly the decision to set the story in South America. Since the mid-1930s, the United States government, via the Good Neighbor policy, had worked feverishly both to protect American political and financial interests in Latin America and to expose German attempts to establish a fascist beachhead in the Western Hemisphere. In 1939, the Argentine newspaper *Noticias Gráficas* had exposed a Nazi plot to annex Patagonia; a year later, a Uruguayan congressional investigation uncovered a plot to form a "New Germany" embracing Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. In December 1940, *Look Magazine* reiterated the threatening situation to the south, reminding its readers of these recent examples of German imperial ambition. Citing the large number of German immigrants in South America, *Look* warned: "In the light of this totalitarian majority, Hitler's remark, 'If ever there was a place where democracy is senseless and suicidal, it is South America,' takes on menacing significance." Despite diplomatic and economic incursions by the Nazis, most Latin American countries remained technically neutral throughout the war, though fears of fifth column agitation to the south continued to haunt the American psyche. Even as the war drew to a close, the Hollywood studios, still fearful of jeopardizing their foreign markets, tried mightily to avoid antagonizing those South American nations that were neutral or even sympathetic to the Nazis.⁷

This sensitivity to relations with South America had a significant impact on the development of *Cornered*. On February 8, 1945, RKO executive William Gordon forwarded a telegram to William Dozier, along with a memo outlining the studio's position on using Argentina as the setting for *Cornered*. The telegram, from George Dorsey, reiterated the studio's concern for its financial interests in Argentina and suggested altering the film's locale to Spain, since Argentina had "severed relations with the Axis officially at least while Spain is still a neutral." Explaining to Dozier that there was a distinct possibility that the United States would "come to some understanding" with Argentina at the Inter-American Conference then underway in Mexico City, Gordon suggested that it might be "impractical and highly risky" to move forward with the project before they knew

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the outcome of the conference. At this point, however, Gordon felt that it would be premature to share these concerns with Scott, and Wexley continued work on *Cornered* as an exposé of pro-Nazi designs in Argentina.⁸

The first full draft of Wexley's screenplay, completed on March 26, 1945, opens with a chorus singing *La Marseillaise*, punctuated by machine-gun fire, as the French Resistance liberates a German POW camp near Marseilles in the final days of the war. One of the prisoners is a Canadian RAF lieutenant named Gerard, who searches through the littered corpses for his wife, Celeste (a member of the French Resistance), only to learn that she had been executed months earlier after enduring unspeakable torture. Gerard becomes obsessed with finding Vaudrec, the collaborationist who turned Celeste over to the Gestapo to be killed. Though the official record shows that Vaudrec is dead, Gerard discovers that this is a lie, but his informant is killed before Gerard can learn the details. Tracking Vaudrec through bank transfers to his "widow," Gerard follows the trail to Argentina, where he poses as an electrical engineer working on a government power plant (a project he learns is rife with corruption). In Buenos Aires, Gerard stalks the elusive Madeleine Vaudrec and confronts her with a phony dossier that "proves" Vaudrec is alive. Calling his bluff, Madeleine says she's glad her husband is dead, raising doubts in Gerard's mind about her commitment to Vaudrec and to fascism. Through his connection to the power plant project, Gerard infiltrates a nest of decadent collaborationists and escaped Nazis who have established themselves in the "best" circles of Argentine society: Señor Carmago, a wealthy industrialist; General Regules, a corrupt Argentine government official; Baron von Strahle, a "hero" of the London Blitzkrieg who now controls a cartel called the German Trust; Ounce, a sleazy informant for the Argentine secret police; and Mr. Perchon, a wealthy Belgian banker with major business interests in South America. Convinced that one of these villains is really Vaudrec, Gerard plays a dangerous game of cat and mouse and uncovers a vast fascist conspiracy to take over Argentine industry as a springboard to eventual world domination.

However, Gerard also stumbles across the Argentine Resistance, which has planted an agent at Gerard's hotel to serve as his valet and monitor his activities. Though they know of Gerard's valorous work with the French Resistance, they fear that he has become deranged by his desire for revenge and that he will undermine their own careful work. One of their leaders, Santayana, is a prominent lawyer, who uses his social position to gather information on the fascist network in order to publish it in the underground press. Ultimately, both Gerard and Madeleine gain the trust of the Resistance, and Madeleine reveals that Mr. Perchon is really Vaudrec. Santayana and his lieutenants explain that they cannot turn to the authorities for help; they will only get "excuses and lies," because the government and the secret police are part of the conspiracy.

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However, they must convince Gerard that killing Vaudrec in revenge will not bring justice; the justice they seek will come when they reveal the fascist conspiracy to the people of Argentina.

In the final scene, Madeleine offers herself as bait to trap her husband into revealing himself and opening the safe that holds the documents that prove the existence of the Nazi conspiracy. Gerard steps in at the critical moment, only to be outsmarted by Baron Von Strahl; in the ensuing melee, both Perchon/Vaudrec and Von Strahl are shot. The government and secret police concoct a story to cover up the deaths and deport both Gerard and Madeleine. Gerard joins her on the ship to France, bringing with him a copy of the underground newspaper *Libertad*, with a blazing headline: "We Accuse!"

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Wexley did an enormous amount of research on Argentina and created an elaborate and constantly evolving backstory, though little of it found its way into the final script in the form he originally imagined. Wexley's notes for the project, for example, reveal his myriad attempts to dramatize the vast scope of Nazi ideology and tactics, from fascist control of all radio and newspapers, to the indoctrination of soldiers by former Junker officers who taught in Argentine schools. At one point, to emphasize the essential goodness and antifascism of the French people, Wexley planned to show Gerard living in a French pension where everyone is friendly and patriotic. Another unused scene reveals Wexley's attempts to dramatize the role of the Popular Front in the defeat of fascism: Gerard takes on an American newspaper reporter who tells him "our forces" are having trouble with the FFI (French Resistance) and asks him if they are "starting this Popular Front stuff all over again." Gerard corrects the reporter, "The only trouble the FFI makes is for the Nazis. They have captured over 75,000 of them to date and have killed almost as many. . . . They're not starting the Popular Front again. The Popular Front never stopped. That's why France is free."⁹

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Though Scott no doubt applauded the overt antifascism in Wexley's script, other elements presented problems for him. Scott's handwritten notes reveal his concerns with the repetition and lack of clarity in the earliest versions of the screenplay. In his personal copy of the first draft continuity, dated January 16, 1945, Scott crossed out huge sections—sometimes entire pages—of dialogue. Despite Scott's attempts to tighten the script, however, Wexley's final version remained overly complicated and repetitive. Part of the problem was that Wexley knew—and perhaps cared—too much about fascism, and he tried to put everything he knew into his screenplay. The following extended quote is just one example of Wexley's romantic over-dramatization of the antifascist struggle:

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Santayana: This time they must not escape. This time there must be

retribution. Not revenge because revenge implies the doctrine of a life for a life and Vaudrec would need a thousand miserable lives to pay for all those good ones he destroyed. But retribution! Firm, unrelenting, merciless retribution.

Gerard: Look . . . when the people of Paris seized the city in July—they didn't try to drive the Nazis and quislings out. They barricaded every street to make sure they didn't escape alive.

Damonte: But that is exactly what we want too. To hunt down every one of them—not merely Vaudrec. To prove that through a puppet like Vaudrec—the Nazis actually control large industries here, then we automatically expose the entire nest of rotten corruption that permits them to operate!

Madeleine: It is true—don't you see? Vaudrec is not only an enemy of France but to all people. All over the world. Gerard wants to kill him—he doesn't care if he's called an assassin. In Vichy they called every patriot an assassin.

Gerard: Maybe I've seen too much blood . . . maybe I've just gotten a little kill-crazy. . .

Vasquez: When you are fighting for a big thing—you must grow big yourself. Like those you saw die. . . . Because all those who have died in all countries do not lie by themselves, lonely. They hold each other's hands, like a great chain linking up the whole world. And yet I say, amigo, not to kill Vaudrec now. We can wait a little longer.¹⁰

Given that Scott's initial problems with Wexley's work were less political than artistic, Dmytryk's analysis of the screenplay is particularly revealing: "The trouble was that Wexley engaged in agitprop. At every opportunity, he wrote long speeches loaded with thinly disguised communist propaganda. Expressed in classical antifascist rhetoric, there were manifestos by the dozen, or so it seemed."¹¹ Dmytryk's comment suggests the dilemma faced by radical writers dealing with overtly political subject matter. As a Communist writer presumably committed to injecting as much radicalism as possible into his work, Wexley was particularly vulnerable to charges of propagandizing. 14

At the same time, Wexley's script is a shining example of the OWI guidelines for representing the nature of the antifascist struggle, suggesting the extent to which the "radical" and "mainstream" perceptions of fascism overlapped during this period. For example, Wexley dramatized the Allied forces engaged in a "people's war," showing a unified internationalist front of Canadians, French, and South Americans working together to defeat fascism. He also dramatized very clearly that the foes of democracy were not simply the Germans, Italians, or Japanese, 15

but included anyone with antidemocratic tendencies, from fifth-columnists and saboteurs to the uncommitted and pessimistic. If anything, Wexley's antifascists are overly romanticized, while his Nazis and collaborators are overly demonized. Some scenes, too, are rather sensationalistic. In an early scene in which Gerard learns of the torture of his wife at the hands of the Gestapo, for example, Wexley included gory details of burning flesh and repeated whippings—representations of fascist sadism that Dmytryk had used to great advantage in *Hitler's Children* and *Behind the Rising Sun*.

As Wexley's screenplay made the rounds at RKO, it caused great consternation among the studio executives. On April 3, 1945, William Dozier fired off a memo to Scott with a critique that cut to the heart of Wexley's indictment of the fascist nature of the Argentine government. The changes requested by Dozier included deleting all references to the network of secret police, official wiretapping, and the existence of an antifascist resistance movement or an underground newspaper. Several weeks later, in a six-page memo to Dozier, RKO executive James Francis Crow echoed this critique, reiterating the studio's sensitivity to South American relations, particularly given the current volatility of world affairs:

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Now of course all this is all right with me personally. I believe Argentina really has been guilty of such things as these. [Walter] Winchell has said as much and more. Recently in *Collier's* there was quite a candid exposé of such goings-on in Argentina. But does the company wish to do battle with Argentina—just now, when Argentina has made a technical declaration of war against Germany, and has become, or is trying to become, a technical member of the United Nations? What will the OWI think of this? And the State Department—at a time when the State Department is trying to foster world unity?

Crow was clearly uncomfortable with the political angle that Scott and Wexley had grafted onto the original treatment by Hecht et al.: "In the previous version of *Cornered*, the man hunt was more of a personal, man-to-man business, with one lone inconspicuous guy on the prowl for another lone guy who was trying to be inconspicuous, and the international political considerations did not enter into it. Actually, I myself am partial toward the personal, man-to-man treatment of the earlier version."¹²

Nevertheless, Crow noted that it was "just dandy" with him if it was RKO's "intention to go boldly ahead anyway," and he offered a number of revisions to make the script more palatable to both the State Department and the South Americans. To assuage the Argentine government, Crow suggested that the script avoid naming a specific South American country by having Gerard cross many unnamed borders. He also emphasized that the script should show that the underground operates secretly so as not to tip their hand to the Nazis, not

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because they cannot depend on the local authorities. Drawing a parallel with the emerging narrative conventions of film noir, Crow recommended that the filmmakers show that the "underground workers, once they have got the goods on a Nazi fugitive, are quite ready to cooperate with the local police—in much the same way that many movie detective heroes are represented as doing."¹³

At the heart of these negotiations between the filmmakers and the studio executives is the very representation of the commitment to antifascism. Crow, on the one hand, recommended that the story show that the Nazi fugitives are trying to establish themselves not just in Argentina, but throughout the world, and that the underground is not peculiarly South American, but made up of transplanted Europeans, French, Dutch, Poles—"people like Gerard, with special, personal grievances against the fugitive Nazis—banded together, wherever they may meet, in the common cause of revenge upon the Nazi criminals, wherever they may seek refuge."¹⁴ Wexley and Scott, on the other hand, hoped to portray antifascism as a specifically *political* commitment. In their representation, an antifascist commitment might be reinforced by personal motives such as revenge, but true antifascism was altruistic and uncompromisingly ideological. **18**

In this sense, Dmytryk's criticism that Wexley's script was "too much of an attack against fascism" is significant. On the antifascist continuum, apparently, one might be *too* antifascist—an overcommitment that would soon be condemned as "premature" antifascism. In later years, after his own repudiation of Communism, Dmytryk would explicitly denounce Wexley's script as "communist propaganda." Ceplair and Englund suggest that despite his membership in the Party and his presumed antifascism, Dmytryk was also "strongly career-oriented" and "wanted the films he directed to be commercial successes." To this end, he advocated major revisions in the screenplay, changes that Wexley feared would "whitewash" the Perónists. These fears were confirmed for Wexley when Dmytryk flew to Buenos Aires on April 11, ostensibly on a creative reconnaissance mission. Though the film would be shot on a Hollywood sound stage, Dmytryk "wanted to minimize the possibility of errors of ignorance by absorbing the feeling, the color, of this great city. The plot of [their] film was there [in the script], but not the smells, the tastes, the dark places [their] pilot would haunt during his search for the killer. What was even more important was my need to flesh out the characters he would encounter in this strange and distant environment."¹⁵ **19**

Wexley, however, believed that Dmytryk's motives were more cynical, that he had gone to Argentina to "get the government's approval of the script." Wexley was particularly outraged that news of Dmytryk's trip had appeared in the trade papers, which to him seemed a public confirmation that the film would be made with the approval of, if not in direct collaboration with, the Argentine **20**

government.¹⁶ However, at least one article that appeared in the trade press reiterated the film's antifascist message:

Unlike the Raymond Chandler yarn, *Cornered* is not designed as a mere melodrama. The story of a detective's pursuit of a Nazi agent to Argentina, Scott hopes the picture will accomplish the important purpose of reminding us that while the war is over and some Nazis and Fascists are dead, that there are others, fanatical and deadly serious, who will carry on their fight in the underground, not only in Europe but all over the world.¹⁷

Whatever Dmytryk's original motives, he returned from Argentina convinced that *Cornered* would lose money if filmed from Wexley's perspective and that RKO might face a full boycott in Argentina. This assessment hit a nerve with the studio executives, and Wexley was removed from the project. Wexley remembers that Scott was "very embarrassed about the whole affair. He was working under great pressure and ashamed of what was going on, with Dmytryk trying to take the content out before shooting his picture."¹⁸

By this point, however, it must have been abundantly clear to Scott that he could not hope to overcome the myriad objections to Wexley's script. Though he was certainly committed to making political films, Scott, like Dmytryk, understood the importance of producing films that would be successful at the box office. His experiences as a screenwriter had taught him well that screen credits were everything in Hollywood. And he certainly recognized that even if a film's radical content survived the scrutiny of the executives and the censors in the Breen Office, the film still had to appeal to the taste and expectations of the moviegoing public. Acquiescing to the studio's demands for substantial revisions, Scott turned next to his friend John Paxton—in Dmytryk's words, "reliable, nonpolitical John Paxton." Dmytryk's equation of "nonpolitical" with "non-Communist" is particularly interesting in this context, since Paxton—though not a Party member—was far from nonpolitical. According to Norma Barzman, Paxton was a sympathetic liberal, even a "fellow traveller," and generally agreed with all of the key Communist positions "straight down the line."¹⁹

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Nevertheless, Dmytryk was correct in describing Paxton as reliable. By May 3, 1945, Paxton had completed his first revision of Wexley's screenplay, addressing not only the political objections raised by Dozier and the other studio executives, but also the creative problems that had concerned Scott. Though he retained the general plot trajectory created by Wexley, Paxton excised all references to wire tapping and other illegal secret police tactics and any implications of direct collaboration between the Nazis and the Argentine government, as well as Wexley's painstaking delineation of the fascist infiltration of Argentine industry.

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Many of Paxton's changes were in response to a number of plot points and characterizations that Dozier and Crow felt would cause problems with the Production Code, particularly Gerard's cold-blooded murder of Von Strahl in the film's denouement, and Madeleine's unsuitability as a love interest for Gerard, given her collaborationist past. Crow was particularly uneasy about the "not satisfactorily regenerated" Madeleine, noting that "for two years this girl has been sleeping luxuriously with one of the foulest of Nazi murderers." Crow was not averse to love scenes between Gerard and Madeleine so long as the ending would show her as "a complete heavy, and that she has been playing him for a sucker all along." Crow wanted to see "sex in the scenes between Madeleine and Gerard—and the clean satisfying romance with someone else," suggesting *Murder, My Sweet* as a model, in which "Dick Powell has the sexy affair with Claire Trevor, but Anne Shirley is his true love."²⁰ Scott and Paxton chose instead to regenerate Madeleine's character, and in their version she is both a good girl and a pawn. "Sold" in marriage to Vaudrec (called Jarnac in the final version) by her scheming, collaborationist father, she goes along in order to protect her ailing sister. To contrast with Madeleine, Scott and Paxton developed a new "bad girl" character, Señora Carmago, who attempts first to seduce Gerard and later frame him for murder.

Many of Paxton's changes improved the script in significant ways. For example, Paxton deleted the entire opening section of Wexley's script—the same section Scott had extensively edited and marked as repetitious and confusing—beginning instead with Gerard being mustered out of the RAF in London and then returning clandestinely to France to search for his wife's murderer. Though this change obliterated the stirring liberation of the POW camp by the Free French envisioned by Wexley, it also prevented the film from appearing too dated. By the late spring of 1945, as Allied troops marched on Berlin, the liberation of France was old news. Though the new opening, with Gerard being mustered out, is temporally vague, Paxton managed to keep the key political elements of Gerard's character—his impressive war record, his work with the French Resistance, and his imprisonment by the Germans—while simplifying the narrative and saving the big action scene for the end of the film. Paxton also rethought the scenes in which Gerard tracks Madame Jarnac to Buenos Aires, deleting the series of improbable coincidences in Wexley's version and making the trail to Argentina far more plausible. And if the studio's injunction against the showing the government in cahoots with the Nazis forced Paxton to cut a number of minor characters, such as General Regules and Baron Von Stahl, it also allowed him to expand the character of Ounce (Inza in his version), Gerard's "guide" through the world of Argentine fascism. In Paxton's version, Inza emerges as a man utterly without loyalty, playing one side off the other in a convoluted web of cross and double-cross.

Given these sorts of compromises, Paxton's version of *Cornered* is a more conventional manhunt thriller than originally envisioned by Wexley. Nonetheless, *Cornered* remains an antifascist film at heart. "Today there is only the right side and the wrong side," says one of the film's minor characters, and this principle guides Paxton's dramatization of the politics of anti-fascism throughout the film. The right side, obviously, is the Resistance, depicted as an international movement of "ordinary" people driven by a hatred of fascism and a desire for justice. The model of the French Resistance is critically important here. In an early scene, Gerard visits the cave where his wife and fifty others were lined up against the wall and shot. His father-in-law points to the graves of those Gerard had known personally, ordinary villagers who had risked their own lives to help him after his plane was shot down. "Why were they shot?" Gerard asks, and his father-in-law replies bitterly, "They were French." Indeed, being "French" is invoked throughout the film as a key signifier of antifascist commitment and essential goodness. The true French despise and resist fascism, in marked contrast to the collaborationism of the "un-French" Vichyites. When Gerard asks if Jarnac, his wife's murderer, is French, his father-in-law barks, "Vichy," and spits disdainfully. Similarly, one of the signs of the righteousness of Santayana, the Argentine Resistance leader, is his profound shame that his nephew Señor Carmago is a fascist collaborator. The Argentine Resistance is also linked to the French by its respect for the rule of law, one of the key distinctions between fascism and liberalism. Santayana is a lawyer who repeatedly chides Gerard for seeking revenge rather than justice; he insists that the fascists will only be destroyed when the Resistance has sufficient *evidence* to convict them in the court of world opinion.

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In contrast, the wrong side is depicted as a viper's nest of Europeanized decadence and corruption. Constrained by the studio executives from depicting the fascist infiltration of Argentine industry envisioned by Wexley, Paxton and Scott drew instead upon images of the moral bankruptcy of upper class society to suggest capitalism's collaboration with fascism. At a lavish party hosted by the Carmagos, Inza describes himself as an "epicure" whose blood is a "mixture of fine European wines." Though he refuses to answer when Gerard asks whether he is French or German, Inza the cosmopolitan longs for the days when his good friend Hermann Goering threw parties "like Roman festivals." Señora Carmago, first seen narcissistically inspecting the reflection of her flawless beauty and glittering jewels in a windowpane, complains that one cannot throw a good party in Argentina because the Latin Americans, unlike the Europeans, have no passion for intrigue—political, business, or romantic.

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Despite Señora Carmago's disclaimer, *Cornered* is rife with intrigue, and Scott and Paxton make clear that the political stakes are dangerously high. Raising the

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specter of escaped Nazis infiltrating circles of power throughout the postwar world, Santayana insists to Gerard that their enemies are "more than war criminals fleeing a defeated nation. They do not consider themselves defeated. We must destroy not only the individuals but their friends, their very means of existence, wherever they start to entrench themselves. Not only here but everywhere. In the United States, in England, in France, in Alaska or East Africa."

Though principal photography on *Cornered* was scheduled to begin on June 16, RKO executives continued to scrutinize the script, demanding changes large and small. In July, RKO sent the *Cornered* script to the OWI for comments. Reviewer Gene Kern gave the screenplay the green light, noting, "This exciting melodrama strikes us as potentially valuable overseas fare." In striking contrast to the studio's objections to the depiction of an Argentine Resistance movement, the OWI was concerned that the antifascist forces were not represented as "strong, well-organized or capable." Kern hoped that even though the story concerned a "personal grudge, a one-man war," some minor revisions still might be made to show that "Gerard is aware that he is not alone in his fight against the Fascists, that there are others, organized and strong." In keeping with the OWI's prohibition on outright propaganda, Kern added, "I am not suggesting a propaganda speech which would be useless if recognized, but rather an implication of organization and power that might be encouraging of freedom loving foreign audiences."²¹

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Despite the positive review by OWI, the RKO executives were still deeply concerned with the potential political repercussions of *Cornered*. In a memo to Scott, dated July 7, 1945, William Gordon reviewed the script point by point, emphasizing once again the studio's concern that the film must not be offensive to South American audiences. Reiterating the studio's desire to exonerate the Argentine government, he suggested that Paxton show that the Nazis, "during the period of neutrality, took advantage of the opportunity to betray Argentina," and that "the anti-democratic elements or Nazis have been so clever in their manipulations that even the Government, with its respect for law which is inviolable, has not been able to crack down on these elements, because of their apparently clean surface." In addition, the film's use of the word "fascist" continued to disturb him, and he felt it was "certain to give offense even possibly to the extent of causing the finished film to be banned in Argentina." To avoid this problem, Gordon ordered protection takes to be made for the Argentine print in which the word "fascist" would be replaced by the word "antidemocratic" or "some other equally acceptable synonym." Thus, in the scene in which Gerard first confronts Santayana, for example, Gordon ordered that the phrase "the worst kind of anti-democratic heel" was to be used (at least in the Argentine print) instead of "the worst kind of Fascist"—the phrase that remained in the American

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print.²²

As late as July 25, the film's ending was still only roughly sketched out, and Paxton continued to make changes to the script well into August. Scott worked closely with him on the script revisions, even as he assembled the cast for *Cornered* and shooting began in mid-June. Dick Powell, of course, had signed on early, starring as Gerard in a reprise of the tough-guy persona he had established in *Murder, My Sweet*. For the role of the oily con man Inza, Scott cast character actor Walter Slezak. Though often typecast as a bumbling idiot or menacing heavy due to his excessive weight, Slezak was also an apt choice for this internationalist film. Viennese by birth, Slezak was discovered by Hungarian director Michael Curtiz and played romantic leads in German films before emigrating to the United States in 1930. After working exclusively on Broadway for more than a decade, Slezak went to Hollywood in 1942, where he made notable appearances in several antifascist films, including *This Land Is Mine* (1943), *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943), and *Lifeboat* (1944).²³

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Scott also cast two prominent actors from the Group Theater in major roles. Both Morris Carnovsky and Luther Adler had come to Hollywood from New York in 1937, when the Group Theater began its slow disintegration. Carnovsky, cast as the antifascist leader Santayana, was well known for his leftist activism, as well as his work on progressive films including *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) and *The Master Race* (1944). Luther Adler, along with his older sister Stella, had worked on the Yiddish stage since childhood. Adler was less successful in Hollywood than most of the other Group members and had acted in only one film—*Lancer Spy* (1937)—before Scott cast him as the fascist mastermind Jarnac.²⁴ Though Adler only appears in the final reel of *Cornered*, his performance is stunning.

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Though *Cornered* could not match the visual innovation and relentless pacing of *Murder, My Sweet*, under the direction of Edward Dmytryk the film suggests the power of noir style to convey the politics of fascism and antifascism. Working with great economy, Dmytryk suggests the heroism and sacrifice of the Resistance through the wartime devastation of France, a stark landscape of firebombed buildings, ragged knots of villagers huddled against a whipping wind. The decadent world of the Argentine fascists, in contrast, is brightly lit and overflowing with abundance; in postwar Buenos Aires the trains still run on time, and there are no shortages or rationing. This shiny façade masks the much darker world of fascist intrigue, and here Dmytryk is at his best. Menacing footsteps in a shadowy park, the disruptive roar and flash of passing trains during a clandestine meeting in a subway station, the flare of a match illuminating for the first time the dark satanic face of Jarnac—all convey the sinister, conspiratorial world of the fascists. Gerard's growing paranoia and the emotional damage wrought by the

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war are brilliantly depicted through a series of brief, disorienting close-ups punctuated by staccato gunfire.

It is Scott and Paxton's ending, however, written under immense pressure as the opening scenes were already being shot, that saves *Cornered* as an antifascist film. This ending suggests the importance of the German example in shaping the filmmakers' understanding of the postwar fascist threat: Jarnac is a brilliant and evil leader surrounded by a handful of flunkies who do his bidding, much like Hitler and his henchmen. However, the denouement also reveals the filmmakers' muckraking sensibilities, particularly their deep-seated faith in the power of truth, brought into the light, to rally good Americans—or in this case, Argentines—into action against the forces of evil. In the final scenes, Gerard tracks Jarnac to the waterfront bar that serves as his secret headquarters. Jarnac speaks from the shadows, his voice silky and insinuating as he rebukes Señor Carmago and Perchon for handling the situation so poorly. "Do not attempt brilliant decisions," he warns them, reiterating his role as the mastermind of the fascist plot. Carmago and Perchon are clearly meant to be understood as tools of an evil genius, as is the collaborator Inza, described by Jarnac as "that fat sycophant." However, the filmmakers take their critique a step further. "The next time you want to indulge your hot Spanish passions for dramatics put on a uniform with polished boots and stomp around your wife's bedchamber," Jarnac mocks his toadies, suggesting the sadomasochistic lure of fascism and linking the drive for political power with perverse sexual desire.

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Adler's Jarnac is most compelling and malevolent as he outlines the fascist strategy for postwar domination, suggesting that the very tolerance that distinguishes liberalism from fascism will lead inevitably to his triumph. "How many times must I tell you," he berates his henchmen, "that our chief aim for the next five years, the next twenty years if necessary, is complete and absolute obscurity?" As they wait for Inza to bring the fake dossier on Jarnac, he turns his attention to Gerard, noting that though he has been a nuisance to their plans, he is also "reassuring." As Jarnac muses, "You should be dangerous because you're a fanatic. But you're not dangerous because you're a fanatic without a purpose." Scorning Gerard's desire for revenge, Jarnac sneers, "But what sort of political program is that? No, Monsieur, I'm afraid the Anglo-Saxon is a poor fanatic. He takes action only when you disturb his visceral emotions." Gerard retorts sarcastically, "We're stinking poor fighters, too. We got lucky and plastered you off the map, by accident." Jarnac, still hidden in the darkness, replies ominously, invoking the failure of World War One and the Versailles treaty to contain German aggression: "Remember, you plastered us off the map once before. You held the fruits of victory in your hands, but you let them decay. We caught the soggy rot that dribbled through your fingers and used it." Suggesting the inadequacy of

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liberalism to penetrate the fascist mind, he sneers, "You did not understand our methods. You do not understand now. You continue to attack the wrong things in the wrong way. You attack the evil in man. We accept it. We find it good and fertile." In a twisted, fascist rendition of Tom Joad's final "I'll be there" peroration in the film version of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Jarnac concludes: "Wherever you create misery and discontent, in whatever country, wherever men cannot earn the money to feed their children, there you will find us at work. If you look. I do not think you will look. Your political arteries will harden again. You will forget."

Jarnac's warning is interrupted by the arrival of Inza. Unaware of Jarnac's presence, Inza arrogantly informs Carmago that he will only turn over the dossier after he has proof that Jarnac is dead. As Gerard warns him, "You're covered, Tubby," Jarnac emerges from the shadows. He appears rather demonic, with a goatee, dark piercing eyes, one eyebrow arched contemptuously. Inza's attitude immediately changes and he grovels before Jarnac, trying to cover for his earlier slip, insisting, "All I ask is the privilege of serving you, whenever the moment calls for a clever man." "You are so clever. But you talk too much," Jarnac replies and shoots him repeatedly, obliterating the face so that he can pass Inza's body off as his own and return to the obscurity necessary to foment his fascist plan. Gerard, seeing an opening, pounces on Jarnac; the two men struggle, then Gerard gains the upper hand. From a sharp close-up of Gerard mercilessly beating his fascist enemy, the camera loses focus, leaving only a blur and the sound of a fist landing repeatedly on soft flesh. When the camera refocuses, Gerard is still punching, as Santayana and Dubois try to pull him away. Unaware that he has killed Jarnac, Gerard babbles, "That's a present for you. I hope you like it. . . . He likes to talk. He made a couple of big speeches. I was a little kill crazy, but he's all yours now."

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Cornered ends with the promise that the forces of democracy will continue to challenge the international fascist threat, by raising the cry of alarm and rallying the "decent peoples of the earth"—in President Truman's words—to the antifascist cause. Though Santayana is outraged that Jarnac is dead, Gerard presents him with the documents that prove Jarnac secretly controlled Carmago's vast industrial empire and planned to use his financial power to launch a Fourth Reich. Santayana will use this evidence to expose the fascist fifth column in Argentina and awaken the people to the fascist menace. He crows, "We cannot kill the whole animal with one blow, but we'll make him scream. We'll make a start." In the final lines of the film, Madeleine is fully rehabilitated and absolved of all suspicions that she was a collaborator, as Gerard announces, "She was a little confused, but she's all right now. She's a good girl. She's French." This emphasis on Madeleine's essential Frenchness is both a reminder of the un-Frenchness of the Vichyite collaborators and an insistence that "true" Frenchness is essentially

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democratic and nonfascist. Thus, the conclusion of *Cornered* works to rearticulate the boundaries between democratic and antidemocratic forces in the postwar world and to construct the antifascist vanguard as a broad-based movement that incorporates all freedom-loving peoples throughout the world.²⁵

The Public Reception of *Cornered*

On November 1, 1945, nearly a year after the project was first conceived, *Cornered* was finally previewed in Los Angeles. Overall, the film fared well with local audiences: of the sixty-five members of the preview audience, fifty-nine rated the film "excellent" or "good," while only six rated it "bad." Several viewers felt the picture was too slow, or were confused by the beginning and felt that they needed more information on the character of Gerard. Many—generally those who disliked the film—felt that Dick Powell was out of his element in a thriller and preferred him in the more familiar musical-comedy roles of singer and dancer. Those who disliked the film provided less valuable critiques of the film's content such as "too many scenes with fat fellow" or "don't like to have to sit through that type of picture to see the bill I came to see." Those who enjoyed the film, however, tended to applaud Powell's reincarnation as a tough guy and commend his acting. Interestingly, those who rated the film "excellent" offered critiques with a bit more depth than those who disliked the film. For example, one mentioned feeling disillusioned to learn that Jarnac was an unknown person; another saw in Jarnac's makeup a "too perfect" replica of the devil. Another was disturbed by the scenes of devastation in postwar France. Unlike *Crossfire* later, the preview audience for *Cornered* did not find the "propaganda" at the end to be jarring or intrusive.²⁶

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Not surprisingly, the RKO front office was more concerned with the box office than with the continuing dangers of fascism. Thus, in selling and publicizing *Cornered*, the RKO advertising campaign downplayed the political angle and pitched the film as a mainstream thriller, hoping to build on the success of *Murder, My Sweet*. The trade press, always concerned with box-office performance, certainly made the connection and predicted that this "tense, suspenseful yarn" with "a few nifty diatribes on Fascism" would do almost as well financially as *Murder, My Sweet*.²⁷ An early review in the *Hollywood Reporter* argued that "high-powered exploitation and selling can bring some impressive box office business to first-run engagements, but this will chiefly be cashing in on *Murder*. It is doubtful if there will be a proportionate critical response."²⁸ *Variety* was more optimistic and predicted a box-office smash. Writing in typical industry-ese, *Variety* called *Cornered* "lurid to the last minute," enthusing:

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Cornered is an exciting batch of melodramatic international intrigue. . . .
Chills, shivers and violent death are the ingredients of the story, which

stems from the plotting of some of the nastiest Nazis yet screened to perpetuate themselves in a war-battered world. Adrian Scott has produced with a de luxe finish and Edward Dmytryk's direction whips the dramatic values and a lot of eerie atmosphere into the most suspense an average audience can take.²⁹

Dick Powell's "new" screen persona was an integral part of the publicity campaign, and film reviewers frequently drew parallels between his roles in *Cornered* and *Murder, My Sweet*. One reviewer noted, for example, "Having first established in *Murder, My Sweet* a distinctly individual and arresting technique of unshaven charm and gun-wielding toughness, Powell now extends his reputation in a swifter, harder, more solid and gripping characterization.³⁰ The reviewer for the *New York Herald* commented that Powell's performance "is likely to make Humphrey Bogart suspect that he is being asked to move over."³¹

The violence in the film also became a selling point, particularly the final showdown between Gerard and Jarnac. As one reviewer noted, "The final shots must be seen to be appreciated. They constitute a memorable chapter in the depiction of sheer violence on the screen."³² The reviewer for *The New Yorker* found the final scene "filled with just about as much violence as I, personally, can stand."³³ Highlighting *Cornered* as its "Movie of the Week" in early December, *Life Magazine* published a splashy four-page photo spread on *Cornered* that focused almost exclusively on the final fight scene. The review emphasized not only the violence in the plot—a vengeful search that "gets [Powell] blackjacked by energetic Argentine patriots, slugged by Fascist conspirators and mixed up in one of the most brutal beatings ever filmed"—but also the behind-the-scenes details of the fight itself, which suggested that Powell was a tough guy both on and off the set:

But in this movie middle-aged Dick Powell also shows he can dish it out, a fact which pleases Powell and may earn him a place with middle-aged Humphrey Bogart on the hard-boiled hero's bench. . . . It took five days to rehearse and film this scene, but Luther Adler, Powell's opponent, never wholly mastered the art of pulling his punches, at which Powell was an expert. As a result Adler emerged from the screen battle unscarred but Powell wound up with a bruised jaw, a slashed wrist, and a sprained finger.

Life illustrated the article with two still photos from the final fight scene, accompanied by remarkably lurid captions: "With bone-crushing blows of his fists an enraged Powell methodically mashes the face of the conspirator who had tried to kill him. Here battering fight is nearly over." And: "Conspirator begins to slump as blow after blow crashes against his bearded jaw but Powell holds him up and keeps on pounding in a frenzy even after his victim is dead."³⁴

In many cases, RKO's attempts to sell *Cornered* as a conventional thriller were successful. Interestingly, some reviewers acknowledged the political elements in the film, but then reviewed the film as a typical thriller, burying the political message in genre-appropriate language and style, as in this review in *Cue*: 41

A savage melodrama of intrigue and revenge . . . [Powell's] portrait of a Canadian flyer, tracking down the collaborationist executioner of his French wife in a Fascist-infested Buenos Aires, is violently right. [In this] vipers' nest of Fascist collaborators, [Powell is] caught up in a twisted, tortuous maze of private villainy and public camouflage, with the identity of friend and foe equally uncertain behind the swirling smoke screens of espionage and intrigue. Powell finally runs down his prey in a breathtaking melodramatic climax. The picture is swift, tense, thrilling—among the best of its kind this season.³⁵

Other reviewers made the political connections, but were not impressed. Arguing that "[t]here is nothing especially cogent about the international complications of the show," the *New York Herald Tribune* reviewer suggested, "What is important is the man-hunt and the slugging sequences that give it a sustained crescendo."³⁶ And *The Hollywood Reporter* sniffed, 42

If a post-war warning is the purpose of this picture, a very round-about way is chosen to give it importance. The pursuit is by a man seeking revenge for the woman he loved. It is therefore incidental that he brings to justice a Nazi band. His antagonists could just as well have been jewel thieves or coffee planters. It wouldn't have changed the chase.³⁷

Though these are not terrible reviews, they do point to the limitations of using traditional film genres to convey overtly political themes.

Nevertheless, a significant number of reviewers recognized and commended the antifascist message in *Cornered*. Edwin Schallert of the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, praised the film's depiction of "the ambition of one supreme scoundrel, seeking to spearhead the way for a war of aggression at some time in the future." Schallert clearly made the connections the filmmakers had hoped viewers would make: "For the most part, *Cornered* evolves in the Argentine, refuge of Nazi-Fascist factions, as well as their opponents. Buenos Aires is here depicted as a fertile field for far-reaching schemes for conquest, and a vast array of spying activities."³⁸ Even the punch-drunk review in *Life* got the point: "RKO's *Cornered* is a bluntly outspoken spy thriller which gives Hollywood its first big chance to unmask a World War III plot being spawned in Argentina."³⁹ 43

Writing for *Liberty Magazine*, Helen Parker gushed, "Here's a picture that's alive—both politically and dramatically. . . . A devastating picture of the morally decadent Fascist society [in Buenos Aires] . . . , the plotters of a third world war." 44

She was particularly impressed with the film's emphasis on a united front against fascism:

On our side (that is to say, Powell's side) is an intelligent lawyer (Morris Carnovsky) who does a thoroughly creditable job of broadening the young fanatic's philosophy, finally making him see that the murderer of his wife is not the single enemy, and that a really successful attack must be a broadside against all Fascists. . . . This isn't just another war picture or just another murder mystery. *Cornered* is genuine drama, illuminating reality in a most telling way.⁴⁰

Don Craig, the reviewer for the *Washington Daily News*, pointed out the timeliness of the topic: "What really makes *Cornered* of importance—and Hollywood won a neat gamble to achieve it—is the coincidence of having a picture ripping into Nazi-Fascist sympathizers in Argentina playing day and date with the State Department's blast on the same subject in headlines all over the country." Though Craig was disappointed that "what *Cornered* tries to say is of more interest, for the most part, than the way it says it," he was impressed enough with the film's final scene to quote from it extensively: 45

Collaborationist Jarnac's sneering prophecy—in effect: "You defeated us once before and we rose again on the dregs of victory you carelessly let slip through your fingers . . . and we'll do it again"—is enough to make everybody who hears it stop and think, if only for a moment. So is his other warning in approximately these words: "Wherever you let poverty and disease and unrest go unheeded, you leave fertile ground for our seeds."⁴¹

The Radical Response to *Cornered*

Though Scott had been more or less successful in steering the film through the political labyrinth of the studio system, there was one final scene in the political saga of *Cornered*. This time, the criticisms of the film's political content came not from the conservative executives at RKO or the Breen Office, but from one of Scott's own comrades: John Wexley. Though Wexley ultimately came to believe that *Cornered* was "superior to most 'B' melodramas and an alert viewing audience could fill in the gaps," at the time he was very disturbed by John Paxton's revisions to his screenplay, which he felt had eviscerated its antifascist message. Though the details remain murky, it is clear that, at some point after he was removed from the project, Wexley took his complaints to John Howard Lawson and Albert Maltz, asking them to arrange a meeting with Scott and Dmytryk to discuss the political content in *Cornered*. Apparently Wexley hoped to "shame Dmytryk and Scott into restoring the cuts they and Paxton had made in his script—particularly the criticism of the Perón government."⁴² 46

In Dmytryk's recollection, written many years after the fact (and more importantly, after he had repudiated the Party and his former comrades), he and Scott went to the meeting expecting a challenge to Paxton's sole screenplay credit.⁴³ However, they were confronted by a sort of Party tribunal made up of Lawson, Wexley, Richard Collins, and a fourth writer— "all communists, of course, who had been picked to hear Wexley's complaint." Dmytryk claims that "Wexley charged that our severe editing had emasculated his work, that it was now pro-rather than antifascist, and he demanded that we shoot the eliminated scenes and insert them in the film." Scott, who "understood party procedure much better than I," requested another meeting to discuss the issue in greater depth, "now that the nature of the problem was clear." According to Dmytryk, in order to "balance the scales" at the next meeting, Scott brought Albert Maltz into the proceedings, while Dmytryk recruited Ben Barzman as his advocate. The second meeting, held in Dmytryk's apartment, proved inconclusive. Apparently Lawson and Maltz "did not think the two scripts were as dissimilar as Wexley claimed." In Dmytryk's words: "After a long Kafkaesque meeting in which Wexley took his lumps, nothing had changed." And yet, in Dmytryk's mind, everything had changed. He was outraged by Wexley's "silly demands" and the "incredible situation":

Scott and I would have needed the studio's permission to recall the film, and such permission could not have been obtained without a complete disclosure of our reasons. Very obviously, that would have been impossible, and I knew that everyone at this meeting was fully aware that Wexley's request was unrealistic beyond belief. I couldn't imagine on what grounds it was being made. Aesthetically and commercially, Wexley's scenes were pure trash, and though our film was by no means great, Scott and I had earned a reputation for a certain standard of excellence, and we weren't about to throw it away on scenes that would ruin both it and us.⁴⁴

For Dmytryk, the meetings were a "masquerade," a bizarre and arbitrary show of power by the Communist Party. He believed that the issue at hand was "not the salvaging of a writer's ego, but the savaging of two recalcitrant members. It was a question of the Party's control over its artists." According to Dmytryk, this marked the end of his affiliation with the Party. He wrote in his first memoir, *It's a Hell of a Life* (1978), that the formal break came immediately after that second meeting, as he and Scott walked Lawson to his car, while his later *Odd Man Out* (1996) describes yet a third meeting with Lawson at the Gotham Deli (arranged by Scott, who hoped to make "a reconciliation with the Party"), but his account of the exchange with Lawson is essentially identical in both:

"If this is the way things are going to go," I finally ventured, "I think I want out." Scott agreed with me.

"I think you're quite right," said Lawson. "For the time being, consider yourself adrift. When you decide that you can accept party discipline, we'll explore the situation again."⁴⁵

Wexley's version of the meeting is, of course, rather different. Wexley remembers that he asked Lawson and Maltz to intercede not because they were Communists, but because he considered them "'distinguished, politically wise writers'" and trusted their judgment in such matters. According to Wexley, 49

I gave the script to Maltz, a colleague who was politically minded and who would know what we were talking about. . . . But it had nothing to do with any Party approval or getting consent from Moscow. It was to say to Dmytryk, "This is a more exciting story than if you take out the juice . . . the substance of it. Otherwise, it'll just be a melodrama." And that's what he turned it into.⁴⁶

The inconsistencies and contradictions in the various accounts raise a number of troubling questions: Was Wexley being disingenuous in denying that he approached Lawson and Maltz to arbitrate as Communists? Was it Wexley or Scott who brought Albert Maltz into the proceedings? Did Dmytryk's break with the Party come after the second meeting, at his home, or at another meeting at the Gotham Deli, or even later? At what point in the writing or production process did Wexley raise his concerns about the political content in *Cornered*? According to Dmytryk, the film had been "cut, dubbed and was ready for release printing" when he and Scott "received the summons" from Lawson.⁴⁷ If so, he is certainly correct in emphasizing both that Wexley's request for changes was pointless and that everyone involved knew that, lending credence to Dmytryk's claim that the Party was simply flexing its political muscle. But what if Wexley raised his concerns earlier, in April or May, or even June or July, at any point in the tortuous process of revising the screenplay when he might have been able to truly influence the film's content? Is it possible that Dmytryk "postdated" the meetings to make more credible his tale of commitment and betrayal by the Communist Party that he had already repudiated? 50

In the end, there are no definitive answers to these controversies surrounding *Cornered*. However, as Ceplair and Englund point out, there were two important consequences of the experience. First, it justified Dmytryk's "break" with the Party. Though members of the Hollywood Ten would insist that Dmytryk was "one of them" during and after the 1947 hearings, Dmytryk would later cite the conflict with Lawson over *Cornered* as the beginning of his disenchantment with Communism and as justification for his collaboration with HUAC and the anti-Communist apparatus in Hollywood. Second, "it proved that screenwriter, director, and producer Communists were far more vulnerable to the dictates of the studio system than to the demands of their ideology or the influence of fellow 51

Party members."⁴⁸ This is particularly important, since the *Cornered* incident, along with the vociferous debate over Albert Maltz's article in defense of artistic freedom, "What Shall We Ask of Writers?" are often cited by conservative critics as examples of leftist "thought control."⁴⁹ However, as the case of *Cornered* makes quite clear, artistic freedom was not exactly a top priority within the Hollywood studio system, and ultimately, it was the studio executives—and not Party functionaries like Lawson (however doctrinaire or threatening he might have been)—who held the real power to enforce "political correctness" in Hollywood filmmaking.

It is not at all clear, however, that Adrian Scott joined Dmytryk in repudiating the Communist Party at this point. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence one way or the other on this issue. Perhaps more importantly, despite the political and creative difficulties surrounding the production of *Cornered*, Scott was not deterred from his desire to make films that were both popular and progressive.

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Notes

Note 1: Typescript excerpt from speech by Harry S. Truman, San Francisco, June 26, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 2: Article by David Hanna, July 19, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 3: Edward Dmytryk, *It's a Hell of a Life, But Not a Bad Living* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 69; Bernard Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 144–145; *Cornered* Script Files, Collection of Motion Picture Scripts, Arts Library Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles [ALSC-UCLA].

Note 4: Wexley, interview in Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 699–715; Edward Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out: A Memoir of the Hollywood Ten* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 19.

Note 5: Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 19. According to Dmytryk, before Scott brought Wexley onto the project, William Dozier had assigned a well-known right-wing writer to the project. Dmytryk, intent upon establishing himself as broadminded and reasonable, wrote: "This bothered me not at all; whatever his political bent, he had a solid reputation as a writer of mystery and suspense. Adrian, however, blew a fuse; he had many strong objections to the man, all of them political." Dmytryk offered to help make the case for Wexley, but Scott said he would handle it himself. When Scott received the script from the right wing writer, he promptly tossed it in the trash without reading it, told Dozier the "material was unusable" and hired Wexley. Dmytryk maintains this story, with minor variations, in both autobiographies, though in *Odd Man Out* he says that he "had a feeling that someone behind Adrian was pulling the strings" (18–19). However, there is absolutely no evidence in either the script or production files to suggest that anyone worked on *Cornered* prior to Wexley. The script files, which thoroughly document the writing process through extensive notes by Wexley and multiple drafts of the screenplay by both Wexley and Paxton, contain nothing to suggest a mysterious first writer. It is possible, of course, that Scott threw any evidence in the trash. The *Cornered* budget file, however, lists only two writers—John Wexley and, later, John Paxton. It is hard to believe that there would be no trace of another writer on the project, given the meticulous financial record-keeping required by the studio. The budget

files for *Crack-Up*, for example, lists the dates worked and the amounts paid to seven different writers—including Irving Block whose contribution was so miniscule that he only earned \$50 for the project. See *Cornered* and *Crack-Up* Production Files, RKO Studio Collection, ALSC-UCLA.

Note 6: Wexley, interview in McGilligan and Buhle, *Tender Comrades*, 716; Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–60* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 314. See also the RKO Script Files, Motion Picture Scripts Collection, ALSC-UCLA, which contain extensive notes from the planning stage of the project and Wexley's incomplete first draft of *Cornered*, dated December 28, 1944.

Note 7: William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1962), 162–200; Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Bros.'s Campaign against Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 22–23; "Nazi Propaganda in America," *Look* (December 31, 1940): 15.

Note 8: RKO memo from William Gordon to William Dozier and telegram from George Dorsey to William Gordon, February 8, 1945, both in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 9: Wexley's notes on *Cornered* are included with his screenplay drafts in the RKO Script Files, Motion Picture Script Files, ALSC-UCLA.

Note 10: Wexley, *Cornered* screenplay, in RKO Script Files, Motion Picture Script Files, ALSC-UCLA.

Note 11: Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 19.

Note 12: William Dozier to Adrian Scott, April 3, 1945; James Francis Crow to Dozier, April 24, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 13: Crow to Dozier, April 24, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 14: Ibid.

Note 15: Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 19.

Note 16: Wexley, interview in McGilligan and Buhle, *Tender Comrades*, 716.

Note 17: Article by David Hanna, July 19, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 18: Wexley, interview in McGilligan and Buhle, *Tender Comrades*, 716; Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 315; Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 19.

Note 19: Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 19; Barzman, interview with author, April 1999. See also John Paxton, taped interview, [n.a.], 1977. Of all the films he worked on with Adrian Scott, *Cornered* was probably John Paxton's least favorite. Years later he described it as "a very poor film," remembering, "I had no feeling for the script. It was a hack job on my part." Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 315.

Note 20: Crow to Dozier, April 24, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 21: Letter from Gene Kern, Office of War Information, to William Gordon, RKO, July 5, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 22: RKO memo from William Gordon to Adrian Scott, July 7, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 23: "Walter Slezak," in *The Film Encyclopedia*, ed. Ephraim Katz (New York: Perigee Books, 1979), 1066.

Note 24: "Luther Adler," and "Morris Carnovsky," in *The Film Encyclopedia*, ed. Katz, 12, 209. See also Wendy Smith, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931–1940* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), on their work with the Group.

Note 25: All quotes from the film are taken from the *Cornered* Screenplay File, Motion Picture Scripts Collection, ALSC-UCLA, and from the revised screenplay by Paxton in Scott Papers, B11-F2, AHC.

Note 26: Summary of preview cards for *Cornered*, November 5, 1945, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 27: Review of *Cornered, Independent*, November 24, 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 28: Review of *Cornered, Hollywood Reporter*, November 14, 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 29: Review of *Cornered, Variety*, November 14, 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 30: Review of *Cornered, Cue*, December 29, 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 31: Review of *Cornered, New York Herald Tribune*, December 16, 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 32: Ibid.

Note 33: Review of *Cornered, New Yorker*, December 29, 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 34: Notice the slippage between fantasy and reality in the caption, as Dick Powell is identified by his own name rather than by the name of his character, while Luther Adler is identified wholly with his screen character and referred to only as the "conspirator." "*Cornered: Ex-crooner Dick Powell is Tough Guy in Film about Argentine Plotters*," *Life Magazine*, December 10, 1945, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 35: Review of *Cornered, Cue*, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 36: Review of *Cornered, New York Herald Tribune*, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 37: Review of *Cornered, Hollywood Reporter*, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 38: Edwin Schallert, "*Cornered* Absorbing Melodrama," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1946, in *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 39: "*Cornered: Ex-Crooner Dick Powell is Tough Guy*," *Life*.

Note 40: Helen Parker, "Liberty Goes to the Movies," *Liberty*, February 9, 1946, *Cornered* Production File, AMPAS.

Note 41: Don Craig, "New Powell Tackles Fascists in Argentina," *Washington Daily News*, February 15, 1946, in Scott Papers, AHC.

Note 42: Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 315.

Note 43: Brian Neve suggests that Wexley had complained unsuccessfully to a Screen Writers Guild arbitration committee about Paxton's sole credit on *Cornered*. Brian Neve, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 95–96.

Note 44: Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 20–21; Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 315.

Note 45: Dmytryk, *Odd Man Out*, 20–21; Dmytryk, *It's a Hell of a Life*, 72. Drawing on the memories of other Hollywood radicals, however, Ceplair and Englund suggest that Dmytryk remained a Party member during his years as one of the Hollywood Ten. Once he decided to recant, during his imprisonment for contempt of Congress in 1951, the *Cornered* incident provided a plausible excuse for his break with Party. Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 358. These issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter 8.

Note 46: Wexley, interview in McGilligan and Buhle, *Tender Comrades*, 716; Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 315.

Note 47: Dmytryk, *It's a Hell of a Life*, 71.

Note 48: Ceplair and Englund, *Inquisition in Hollywood*, 314–315.

Note 49: See, for example, Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, *Red Star over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), 123–136.