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ACLU Honors Kirk Douglas For Role In Ending Blacklist

By WILL TUSHER

Largest crowd in the 22-year history of the Bill of Rights Award dinners — estimated at 1150 — turned out Saturday night to honor Kirk Douglas, this year's recipient of the annual recognition from the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California.

With a cross section of industry leaders on hand at the Registry Hotel in Universal City, the award to Douglas was used as a rallying cry to vow never again to permit a recurrence of the Hollywood blacklist which he was credited for helping to end.

His Bill of Rights plaque, presented by Burt Lancaster, a founder and past chairman of the Southern California Foundation of the ACLU, was inscribed:

"For having the courage and conviction to break the infamous Hollywood blacklist and forcing the full recognition of one of its victims. You brought to a close the shameful period of persecution, and our voice is joined with yours in demanding that it never happen again."

The Hollywood blacklist, according to the ACLU, was dealt its deathknell when Douglas, executive producer of the Universal film "Spartacus" in which he starred, decided to dispense with the planned use of the pseudonym and give screenplay credit to the man who did the script, blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo.

That happened in 1959, while the picture was being shot, but Douglas, Lancaster and ACLU executive director Ramona Ripston agreed that his action took on new relevance because of attacks on the ACLU and perjorative use of the word "liberal" in the just concluded presidential campaign. Many at the dinner wore buttons proclaiming, "Card-carrying member of the ACLU."

Douglas went out of his way to acknowledge the role played by Eddie Lewis, the producer of "Spartacus," in helping him decide to restore Trumbo's identity.

"Eddie Lewis," he said, "did a tremendous job the eight years we were together in pushing me, encouraging me, prodding me. It's why I'm here tonight."

Explaining the decision to use Trumbo's real name, Douglas recounted meeting after shooting one night with Lewis, and Stanley Kubrick, director of the film. Douglas said when he and Lewis balked at using a nom de plume on the screen credit, Kubrick declared, "Put my name on it."

"Stanley," Douglas recalled responding, "wouldn't you feel funny taking credit for the work someone else has done?" Well, apparently not."

Douglas remembered exchanging glances with Lewis and thereupon knowing what he would do. The following morning he left a pass at the studio gate in the name of Dalton Trumbo.

"It was the first time in 10 years that he set foot on a studio lot," Douglas recounted. "We had a card made for the screen saying screenplay by Dalton Trumbo. I had reward enough when he said, 'Thanks, Kirk, for giving me back my name.'"

The action was not universally well received, Douglas reflected.

"The studio grumbled and grumbled," he related. "There were some threatening letters. Hedda Hopper attacked me (in her syndicated Hollywood column). There was a little picketing, but the sky didn't fall in, and the blacklist was over. And as Dalton said, there were no heroes. There were just victims."

Douglas said he had all but forgotten the incident 29 years ago, but that "it came into sharp focus during the election campaign."

Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, led the audience in a toast to the actor he described as "my most loving, most treasured, most valuable, most enduring friend — an undismayable Kirk Douglas."

Asserted Valenti: "Without conviction a man is going to be right only by accident."

Lancaster said Douglas decided to use Trumbo's name "despite the dire warnings of friends and colleagues." He pointed out that it was commonplace to use blacklisted writers under pseudonyms, and that Trumbo started doing the script for

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"Spartacus" under the nom de plume of Sam Jackson.

"The time came . . . when a decision had to be made," Lancaster noted. "Whose name would go on the film? Sam Jackson alone, or Sam Jackson plus one of the producers, Eddie Lewis? Or perhaps the director, Stanley Kubrick? . . . Kirk went ahead and risked his career, his livelihood and his reputation. He insisted that Universal Studios use the name of Dalton Trumbo."

Also at the dinner, KABC commentator and former California Supreme Court Justice Rose Bird presented the Eason Monroe Courageous Advocate Award to former U.S. Court of Appeal Judge Shirley Hustadler, who was Secretary of Education during the Carter Administration.

The dinner raised \$50,000, the most-ever for a Bill of Rights dinner.