

PRESIDENT CALLED TARGET OF SMEARS

Reporter Says Attacks Could Harm Public Confidence

President Johnson has become the target of a widespread "vilification" that could "tear down public confidence" and lead to "the confusion of anarchy," according to a Pulitzer Prize reporter of 20 years' experience covering the White House.

Merriman Smith of United Press International, has reported that New Orleans variety stores sell license plates "associating the President with barnyard filth" and Southeastern roadstands peddle lapel buttons with "dirty sayings" about the Presidential family.

Recent so-called peace demonstrators in Central Park, Mr. Smith says, included "grown men carrying signs which openly and plainly challenged the President's normalcy, mentally and sexually."

There were similar attacks, he notes, on Secretary of State Dean Rusk and songs and signs charging the President and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara with "deliberately burning Asian babies."

Kennedy Death a Topic

He says buttons and printed placards have been distributed around the country, reading,

"Lee Harvey Oswald, where are you now?"—a reference to the assassin of President Kennedy.

Mr. Smith cites "pamphlets, books, newspapers of a sort and even recorded tapes alleging that Johnson engineered the death of President Kennedy."

The anti-Johnson phenomena were described by Mr. Smith to nearly 800 newspaper publishers and their wives at the annual United Press International subscribers' meeting last week at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

"It is open to legitimate public debate" whether the nation's leaders "are embarked on a wrong course," Mr. Smith said, but "under our system they cannot be dumped overboard."

Mr. Smith contended that the "rather open merchants of filth and utterly unfounded innuendo . . . could have only one motivation that would make any sense at all—and that is to tear down public confidence in the establishment" and "authority on almost any level."

A 'Rudderless Society'

"If successful," he said, "this then could lead us to a sort of rudderless society of irresponsibility to the group, amorality for the further erosion of the family unit, and finally the confusion of anarchy."

President Johnson, Mr. Smith declared, knows much of the venom is symptomatic of "natural justified concern" about the Vietnam war, "inequities long overdue in their correction in such a lush society as ours," and "the futility which haunts a great many of our young people in a thermonuclear age."

In a long editorial, The Chicago Tribune said last Tuesday that it shared "Mr. Smith's anger and disgust at the personal attacks on the President." The Tribune noted that it had vigorously criticized many of Mr. Johnson's policies, but recognized his difficulties and efforts to do his best.