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WORSE THAN "HOGWASH"

Those of us who seek to inform others bear a special responsibility - to inform. Only an informed electorate can make representative society work as those truly great leaders and political thinkers who created our form of government intended for it to work. This does not require perfection for perfection is neither human nor possible. It does require honesty and scrupulous adherence to fact and it requires that we state our prejudices in either the expression of opinion or representation of fact.

My own reporting experience, first print and last electronic, may well have begun before Roy Meachum's. It began in the late 1920s and within a few years some of my writing was syndicated. My last daily reporting was of Harry Truman's election and it did include the successful Jewish effort to establish the state of Israel against the attacking armies of much greater numbers and more abundant equipment of the entire Arab world. For more than two decades, based on prior experiences that include Senate investigator and editor, investigative reporter and wartime intelligence analyst, my writing has been about the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. King. These are controversial subjects. I have received at least 15,000 letters from strangers and from those about whom I have written. Not one person has written to complain of factual error or that I treated him unfairly. I say this not to boast but to indicate that on even the most controversial subjects, those that arouse passions, it is possible to be both accurate and fair. The prerequisite is not a lack of feeling but the intent to be accurate and fair. One can be and still be a partisan.

Those of Roy Meachum's columns that I have criticized have been neither accurate nor fair and, as recently as his "The Cry of anti-Semitism: Hogwash!" column, all the evidence is that he does not intend to be. One of the common faults in all these columns is that he misrepresents. This one, too, is at best a shallow mishmash.

And it is, from headline to conclusion, classic anti-Semitism, what the headline and text prate does not exist.

It also is anti-Israeli, which is not the same as anti-Semitism.

Most of the column is devoted to the flap over Cardinal O'Connor's recent trip to the Middle East, including Israel, but that is merely a vehicle for Meachum's biases. It is self-important and patronizing, as in, "I personally doubt that American Jewish leaders tried to set up the cardinal," Meachum's own straw man which still suggests that Jews did set the cardinal up. It is ignorant in stating that "the Vatican decided to exculpate Jews in the death [sic] of Jesus." Obviously, no living person could be responsible for that crucifixion and equally obviously, Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler, ordered it. The most the Vatican could say is that Christ was not killed by a Jew. Only secret or overt anti-Semites have held otherwise. But even Meachum's formulation can be interpreted as the classic anti-Semitism - that Jews, living, dead and yet unborn, are the "Christ-killers." I do not take time for the other dubious content of this portion of his mishmash.

His opening sentence gives credibility to a White House fabrication to protect Reagan, one already exposed for what it is, that Israel "set up" the disgraceful, wimpish, flimflammed swap of weapons to Iran for the return of American hostages. From this Meachum attempts to justify himself and condemn letters to the editor criticizing him - which are mostly mine - and to defend himself against this criticism. He says, "We hear the familiar cry of 'anti-Semitism' - raised every time criticism appears of Israel. It appeared in Letters to the Editor..."

I did not equate his anti-Semitism with his anti-Israeli writings. I was in each instance quite specific, never resorting to the dishonest kind of generality I quote above. I was no less specific in illustrating his pro-Arab propaganda and his factual inaccuracies. Neither then nor now has he been specific in any pretended defense of his writing. He did defend Abu Nidal, one of the major Arab terrorists, and his subordinates over their piracy and cold-blooded murder when they hijacked the Achille Lauro and murdered an aged and crippled American who also happened to be a Jew. They are, to Meachum and in such barbarities, real "freedom fighters." In trying to apprehend Nidal when it

captured the others, our government was wrong, according to Meachum. This, no doubt, comes from his vast knowledge of the laws of piracy.

Jews, he wrote, defeated Illinois liberal Republican Senator Charles Percy and persuaded our own Mac Mathias not to run for reelection. Meachum just knew this about Mac's decision because, he said, he had <u>not</u> spoken to Mac about it. In neither case was Meachum truthful and it is not easy to believe that one who pretends to his erudition and extensive personal experience and knowledge is not aware of the responsibility of the extremists in the national, Maryland and Illinois Republican parties for those decisions.

Then there was his writing that Jews were killing innocent Arab babies, writing that omitted the exact opposite, that Arabs bombarded the schools and homes of Jewish children (and women and old people), terrorist and not military shellings. Meachum also did not recall all those bombings of buses and other vehicles, including airplanes, or the slaughters at airports, all of innocents. Only that Jews (who he neglected to mention were defending themselves) killed Arab babies.

And who, according to Meachum, is responsible for the fact that there is no peace in the Middle East? Only <u>American</u> Jews. (That after the combined Arab armies attacked the Israelis and were defeated; that Israelis had established and much of the world had recognized the state of Israel; and that not one of the Arab powers would sign a peace treaty or recognize its existence - which is <u>directly</u> responsible for the present situation there - Meachum has not seen fit to mention.)

So, Meachum now does not respond to any of <u>specific</u> criticisms of his writing for he cannot. Instead, he launches into another generality - one, it happens, that is a classic formulation of 2000 years of anti-Semitism. It also is the classic complaint about other immigrants and minorities by those to whom Emma Goldman's words engraved on the Statue of Liberty mean nothing - they and they alone are responsible for all persecutions of themselves.

Meachum, not uncommonly, is ambiguous. He does not say whether he means that my criticisms of him for his anti-Semitic

writings or the existence of anti-Semitism itself is "hogwash." From the internal evidence of this column I think he means both. After what I quote from him above about Letters to the Editor, which is where he cries "Hogwash!" he says:

"Where anti-Semitism increases in this country, American Jews must look to themselves and their actions, as individuals and through their organizations."

I criticize him for anti-Semitic writing and I cause anti-Semitism? The Anti-Defamation League exposes anti-Semites and that causes anti-Semitism? In this Meachum says exactly what Hitler said, what the Tsar's police said when they fabricated the famous anti-Semitic tract generally referred to as the Protocols of Zion.

This was said about the Irish, the Polish, the Italian, the German and the Jewish immigrants, from major cities like New York to small hamlets throughout this land, and it was said by those who disliked the immigrants or who had other motives for their prejudices - and violences.

Meachum repeats this in slightly different form toward the end of his "Hogwash," the "principal source" of anti-Semitism "these days is the myopia of American Jews, who are blind to everything, it seems, in their zeal to protect Israel. They make enemies out of friends, in their zeal."

Here again, classic, traditional anti-Semitism: Jews are a monolith, they agree on everything, including Israel. It is difficult to believe that Meachum knows any of us and believes this. And if exposing anti-Semitism and unjustified criticism of Israel can or does make enemies out of friends, one must redefine friendship.

As usual in his flauntings of ignorance and prejudice, if not hatred, Meachum is arrogant, ordaining that what is is not and that what is not is; he looks down on mere mortals, and in this remarkable, if unintended, self-portrait, after saying that, as quoted above, Jews are responsible for anti-Semitism, he has an incredible clause, referring to non-Israeli Jews as "those who choose to live in other nations, including the United States." American Jews are not American? Why should any American have to "choose" between living here or anywhere else? And do

any Americans have to live anywhere else to have and express opinions on events in those parts of the world? Would he dare say this about blacks and South Africa? About Chinese Americans and China? Russian Americans and the Soviet Union? (His entire sentence suggests that American Jews think they govern Israel, (—— another Meachum evil.)

Meachum really means that there is no anti-Semitism. His reason is that "laws and the media's watchdogs prevent its existence as official or corporate policy." Laws cannot prevent prejudice and hatred or indulgence of them any more than "the media's watchdogs" can; and, omniscient as Meachum would have us blighted and ignorant yokels believe he is, can he really know the policies of all corporations, to say nothing of their practices? Where has he been living all these years, other than in his dream-world presentation of himself in his columns?

He cannot resist closing his column with another slur on the State of Israel: "No one can seriously believe that the government in Jerusalem will suffer in the present White House scandals; they are professionals who, in fact, resent amateur bumblers." That is the reason the Israeli government will not suffer, that they are "professionals," whatever he may mean by this? Not that they did not, as he begins this column by suggesting they did, "set up" the swap of weapons to Iran for the release of our hostages.

Meachum has every right to be blindly, uncritically pro-Arab. He has every right to be anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic. These are among the personal rights we all have. However, when Meachum the person becomes Meachum the writer, he does assume responsibilities and if he does not meet them he in practice subverts representative society. He has often enough proclaimed his dedication to the glorious tradition of American journalism and just as often he has hippodromed the exact opposite, as he does in this "Hogwash" column. That principle, decency and morality (yes, he did write a column on "Amorality") require the writer be truthful and fair and not the creature of his personal prejudices.

In the absence of specific refutations of specific allegations of anti-Semitism in his columns, resort to inappropriate and meaningless generalities in pretended denial merely confirms his intent to be anti-Semitic, and that, in this country, is much

worse, much more serious than "Hogwash."

Meachum called Governor Shaeffer a fascist, "another Mussolini," only once from that self-conceived Olympus from which he looks down on all the rest of us. Maybe he will not repeat that libel again. But his anti-Semitism is repeated, unrepented, without apology and now he has joined Hitler and so many others in saying what they have said to justify their anti-Semitism, that Jews are the cause of it.

The first amendment gives us all precious rights but these rights to not include, as the Supreme Court held, shouting "fire!" in a crowded theater. Meachum's column pretending that "the cry of anti-Semitism" is mere "hogwash" is traditional anti-Semitism and typifies his incitations to hatred that has victimized Jews for 2,000 years. One at a time such small-time evils do not do the harm of starting a riot in a theater but over the years they have accumulated into the most horrible genocide history records. In this stretching of the first amendment Meachum does, I think appropriately, align himself alongside Hitler who also claimed that the Jews are responsible for anti-Semitism. This was not an accidental slip - Meachum said it twice. He puts himself where he is, not I. I regret that his column says he belongs there.

Harold Weisberg

1-16-87

Understanding the 'wiser than truth'

How fortunate are we yokels to have the self-depicted Omniscience in Residence, Roy Meachum, to give us his unique understanding of complicated political affairs, foreign and domestic, to teach us that up is down, black is white, in is out. And with his usual modesty, so lucidly expressed in his saying that "Lord Acton was wrong" — without repeating what Lord Acton said. It is, after all, merely one of the most enduring and widely believed wise sayings of the ages, and how can its universal acceptance and confirmation by so much of man's most painful experiences begin to compare with the simplistic ideas that pop in and out of the murk of Meachum's mind, in from nowhere and out in the newspaper's pages?

"Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely," what Lord Acton said, is what Meachum says is wrong; and fear that it might be lost is more corrupting than having and wielding absolute power is what Meachum says in his column, "Amoral Acts."

This absolute power, according to Meachum, is not Reagan's. In his "Amoral Act" column's lengthy portrayal of the present incredible scandal, Reagan is detached from all of it. This absolute power, Meachum version, is Reagan's flunkies', those "White House men" who are " 'white knights' in American eyes."

Meachum's wiser-than-truth version limits this scandal to Reagan's backfired and in-secret yielding to Iranian blackmail to pay ransom in arms for the release of kidnapped Americans. Those of us who read the newspapers Meachum denounces for their reporting of this wretched business know that there is in it what your Omniscience does not mention, illegal acts in siphoning off taxpayers' money for further illegal acts, financing the Contras in their effort to overthrow a government with which the United States maintains diplomatic relations and which is recognized as a legitimate government by the rest of the world, no matter how much (unmentioned in Meachum's "Amoral Act" version) Reagan dislikes it.

Naturally Meachum did not have space had he the thought, overwhelmed as he appears to be with his usual shallowness and superficiality, for reporting actuality. He required that space for such sophomoric explanations of this great national and international disaster as that these "white knights," Reagan's flunkies, "had as their objectives from the start, securing "an energizing advantage in the selection of the GOP's 1988 presidential candidate."

That they already *have* this "energizing advantage" by control of the party and its machinery is immaterial to Meachum when he gets one of those brilliant flashes in which he flaunts his insatiable ego and his lack of understanding of the real world and how it works. This is succinctly illustrated in his description of what he never gets around to explaining by those he never gets around to identifying, as "the lead-off on the(ir) plan to wrest domestic gain from fishing in 'safe' Middle Eastern political waters."

Now if there is one thing I've learned from my reading of Meachum, aside from his compulsion to proclaim his unique wisdom and understanding, it is that he considers himself a real expert on the Middle East. How in the world even a political infant who has any knowledge of what is going on today can describe having anything at all to do with Khomeini and his government as "safe" is not apparent. There could hardly be anything more the exact opposite of "safe" for an American president when they stormed our embassy and kept its staff hostage for so long and for so much longer have supported, if not also directed, that insane crew of terrorists who, among their other accomplishments, murdered hundreds of American Marines and foreign-service personnel.

As usual, perspective is also missing in Meachum. He defines *all* that these Reaganites did, all that is wrong, as "selling arms" to Teh ran. And that, he suggests, "may not turn out to be illegal." (To hurt our nation seriously, as it has, need it be only illegal?) These sales of arms entail government property and payment for those arms involves government money. There thus are additional questions lost upon your Omniscient in Residence. He proclaims his "strict constructionist's view of the Constitution," which merely requires that all public moneys be accounted for. In secret, numbered Swiss bank accounts? In siphoning off this public money for Reagan's private, undeclared wars? In stealing it and sliding it under the table to Reagan's mercenaries, those Contras? Strict constructionist indeed!

In all of Meachum's amateurish mishmash of pretended punditry, in more than a full column of type, not inconsiderable space, there also is lacking — and is required for genuine understanding — asking, if not reporting, who conceived this disastrous nightmarish affair to begin with? By whose authority was it and that large spending of public moneys implemented? If it was not Reagan's idea, was there *any* authority other than in his name? And if Reagan, having praised those Samonista murderers as the moral equivalent of our founding fathers, a description in which I take no pride, did not conceive and/or authorize this disgraceful and, contrary to Meachum, clearly illegal catastrophe, when did he first know and what did he then know and do about it?

Perhaps the most basic questions are: Is Reagan the most ignorant president we've ever had or is he the most dishonest one? "Amoral," if Meachum prefers.

In this sad display of his ego and ignorance, Meachum did find space for defaming us all, inherently and explicitly, the latter in sneaking in this explanation of how these unnamed Reaganite ideologues, who confuse ideology with running a government, "figured themselves 'smarter,' " and thus could "coattail themselves into continuing power:" "they knew most Americans view all Arabs as subhumans, unworthy of human consideration." If Meachum actually believes this, then he lives in a place other than Frederick, a country other than the United States. But then there is Meachum's other compulsion, to propagandize for Arabs on any and every occasion, regardless of inappropriateness or truthfulness.

Nobody is safe from Meachum's vitriol. Despite this oft-proclaimed dedication to a free press, he begins this flaunting of his own immaturity and ignorance by denouncing those who had told the nation what it knows of this sordid business, the press — to him "the media pack" which will soon again "be in full cry once more."

I hope so, for we can ill afford a Watergate ending to a worse-than-Watergate abuse of our nation, its principles and laws, and of common decency.

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