

Dear Howard,

8/22/72

Three things coming together this evening remind me of a fragment of the past of which I want to make a note not because it is important, although in its day it was, but because I think I recently made a partial note, forgetting a few incidents that I've now recalled.

I went to a neighbor to get some corn and he was telling me that if there isn't some rain soon (remember the floods?) there will be no more corn. What I got tonight showed the lack of water. Later this reminded me of the great droughts of the depression days. On the evening TV news there was a man of great spirit featured. He is a very large lettuce grower, as the equipment made obvious in the shots of his farm. Well, because of the organizing efforts today he has campaign slogans to re-elect Nixon on his boxes in which he ships his lettuce. And that took me back to where I was when I came in from mowing about dark and Lil had The Grapes of Wrath on TV.

I can't remember which was the chick, which the egg, Steinbeck's book or the investigation of which I was then part, which went into the migrant worker situation in California over the opposition of the subcommittee chairman. His was simple, direct, solid political reasoning: he had gotten all the benefit there was in his investigation and if he continued he'd just accumulate powerful enemies, too many of whom he'd already made. He was Robert M. LaFollete, Jr., and he was not his father's son. He was, in fact, as bad an employer as I ever worked for. At that time I wasn't on his payroll. I was administrative assistant to the head of the Farm Security Administration, but I never worked a day there. I was loaned to the investigation, for which I'd worked on another payroll until that better job was arranged by a man who later became a sugar lobbyist.

The odds were very much against the always under-financed investigation being continued. FDR was also against it, as was every employers' and trade association.

I then was friendly with a man named Gardner Jackson, known as Pat. He had been publicity director for the Sacco-Vanzetti committee. He and his wife both came from well-off families. Her name was Dorothy (Dode). Summers she and the kids went to Cape Cod and Pat batched at their large Chevy Chase home. He also ran around a bit and was an alcoholic. I was much younger, he trusted me, I shepherded him when he could not navigate, answered when he called, and often, when he wasn't able, did his thinking. He wanted the investigation continued for the migrant-worker investigation and stayed drunk, so it fell to me to tell him what to do. The two crucial things as I remember them now I'll note. There was another then important, but probably not as important in the final outcome. When he was drunk I got him to patch up a blood feud with Senator Bertram Wheeler, then a power. Bert was beginning to turn more conservative then, but he had and used influence on some votes after Pat buried the hatchet. The think that may have been the most important single one was farout, real farout, a device to give the whole thing perspective in those New Deal Days, when there were decent older politicians (I knew Norris and Borah, for example—did you ever hear of them?) and some liberals not yet as tainted as the breed became. Including Pat.

Well, there was a day Pat began drunk. His office was then in the Earle Bldg. So we left it he stopped off at a liquor store and got what is still a feature in my mind, a pint of Baccardi Rum. I remember the greenish bottle. We nipped at it as we went around.

There was a bitter reactionary of the disappeared kind, the flowery southern orator. This one was a monstrous caricature, named Ed and called "Cotton Ed" Smith, of South Carolina. So, knowing that Smith would rip a gut at the very idea, cheap labor in his state adding to his reactionary opposition to the whole notion, I got Pat to try to get Smith to vote for the appropriation, knowing damned well it was impossible. But what I'd hoped would happen and had a hunch would is what Pat drunk and persistent, precipitated, one of the most excessive speeches in a body whose long history offers effective competition for the distinction. It was a real outrage, a veritable obscenity. No decent man could associate himself with that, especially with the grinding poverty in the fields. So, Smith, our enemy, became our best ally. The association of farm operators, by the way, was known as The Associated Farmers of California. That is also the time Carey McWilliams got his start, I think somewhat later.

Then there was another cute little maneuver. Paul Y Anderson was one of the more respected reporters of the day. It is he who broke the Teapot Dome scandal. I knew him but not as well as Pat. Whether one of us or both together did it I don't know, but I'm fairly sure it was my idea and Pat, satyng drunk, usually did what I wanted and I never, ever,

took advantage of him. When he sobered up a bit and I told him what I'd gotten him to do, he never had a complaint and usually enjoyed it. Well, we had Anderson ask FDR about the continuation of this investigation. He didn't want it, but he didn't dare say so. He also didn't dare hedge. That would have been like casting doubt on motherhood or the true church. So, unhappily, he had to say how bad the conditions of the poor people forced off their farms by the dust storms was, how deplorable their conditions at that time, etc. It had to be and was a much better endorsement that LBJ gave Mc overn, believe me. In these day, by the way, it was no special trick to plant a question at a press conference. The White House has since taken that over as a virtual monopoly.

This combination made it possible for the appropriation to pass. It also earned me the enmity of LaFollette, who I think kind of knew I knew he was a fake.

Oh yes, one line I think you'll like that always infuriated Lil. Pat would be drunk, I'd have Lil with me, we'd drive him all the way out to Chevy Chase from way downtown where we lived, and as he'd get out of the car, Pat would wipe his hand across his face, rubbing it a bit on his mouth, back and forth, lean down into the window again and almost holler at Lil, "Do you really appreciate this guy you got." They didn't hit it off too well. For that matter, with no such incident to give her offense, Dode and I didn't either. I think it is because she associated me with Pat's running around. The contrary was the truth. I helped him out aof a couple of serapes, including one with a niece, of all things. The niece's husband has since become a famous architect. But I'll never forget the night like from a poor grade B movie Pat and this woman my age and I were sitting and drinking in the den at his home when he husband walked in and announced, in just these word, no kiddin, "I have come for my wife." I'd have thought, under the circumstances, the conversation might have had a little more sparkle and wit than that, but it didn't.

She left with him, and I fear Pat and I laughed about that quiet, dry, overly-dramaticallt delivered line and drank a bit over it. Not that the situation of a hurt marriage was good, but the sterility of the scene and the blindness of this young man who had, to my observation over a long period of time, done everything possible to drive his wife out or himself from her heart, was a bit too much.

That gets me away from The Grapes of Wrath. If you've not read the early Steinbeck, I recommend it. Now you'd take it as light reading, but the staff is serious as hell, but he did it with magnificent understanding, much wit and insight, and you'll laugh at some of the more deplorable things.