

The Muckraker Declares His Devotion

By Jack Anderson

Americans have soaked up many a shock lately; no wonder some are punchy. Our leaders have lied to us about war and peace. A 10-year conflict has been lost, all its hopes in ruins. Atrocities have tarnished the image of our military. A dozen congressional figures have been convicted or censured.

Crime rises while law enforcement at the highest levels is subverted; one prominent prosecution after another fails because the jury finds the government more disreputable than the accused. Our dollar has lost almost as much credibility as the White House.

It is a symbol of a world turned upside down that even the late J. Edgar Hoover is now disparaged by superiors. And lest anyone escape the grim news, Watergate dramatizes and compounds it all.

People come to hate those who destroy their faith. They begin to believe that all politicians are corrupt, that the press is incorrigibly venal, that the nation is diseased—all infected by a system that somehow has ceased to work. So persuaded, millions sink into a funk, or rise into a dudgeon, alike vulnerable to the nostrums of political quacks who never fail to come forward.

Should the muckraker take a sabbatical? No. Until he is ready to concede that America

is sick beyond the cure of truth, he must continue to stalk the incriminating memo and the double-entry ledger.

Strangely enough, he has more confidence in America than most others.

In this season of disillusion, when our national spirit is damp and bedraggled, perhaps he can serve by once in a while writing about how his pursuit of grafters and chisellers has taught him to better respect and love his country.

The muckraker's career hangs upon three attributes of our society. First, the relative scarcity of corruption. If it were the norm, it would not be news. Second, the probity of most citizens. If the majority found official corruption undisturbing, the cry of the reformer would become hollow. Third, the ultimate responsiveness to truth, when forced to the wall, of our governmental system. It has demonstrated a unique toleration, however reluctant, of hostile inquiry.

Tough though his hide gets to be, the investigative reporter is as emotionally needful of emphatic response as a clown or an actor. If his public was unmoved by exposures, if his work did not sometimes cause wrongs to be righted, he would soon lose stomach for it and become a speech writer or an ad man at better pay.

He learns in the most intimate way that the people care deeply that right be done. And

he comes to know in his bones that though an individual politician, or a government agency, or even a whole administration may be his adversary, the American system is his friend.

There is one comforting thing about the nature of crime—its particularity. A Lee Harvey Oswald or a William Calley or a Charles Manson is not representative of a society or an army or a generation. He is an aberrant. We discover this in the peculiarities of his disturbed life; we know it, too, from looking at the rest of America.

Applied to political crimes, the rule of particularity again puts things in balance. Among the affluent and the privileged, crimes are committed by culpable individuals, calculatingly, for identifiable motives.

Just as the ideologue will excuse the actual felon in order to indict society as the criminal, the professional patriot bemoans any exposure of flaws because he is not really sure about the strength and goodness of this land, and secretly fears it may crumble if the facade is disturbed.

The muckraker has no such doubts. He pounces with unholy zeal on any clue of malfeasance precisely because he is secure in his faith that this country is too good and too strong to be hurt by the truth. The pillars will stand; let the dry rot be blasted out.

Perhaps a reporter, like a prize fighter, is in trouble the moment he gets a bit reflective and sentimental. But when I see this nation scourging itself because it must have the truth, I must rise from my wallowings to say and urge others to say, "I love America."

© 1973, United Feature Syndicate

Migrants in U.S. Send Protest To Puerto Rico

SPRINGFIELD, Mass., Aug. 14 (AP)—About 1,000 migrant workers in Western Massachusetts have signed a letter to the Puerto Rican government protesting poor working conditions.

The letter also criticized negotiating procedures by the Puerto Rican Department of Labor, which negotiates contracts for the workers with shade tobacco growers, according to the director of the Springfield-based New England Farm Workers' Council, Marcel M. Ringawa.

Ringawa charged that representatives of the workers have not been included in the contract talks, and that contract supervision by the labor department has been incomplete.

The letter lists grievances in housing, medical treatment pay and of costs in company dormitories.