

Mr. Erwin Knoll
The Progressive
409 E. Main St.,
Madison, WI 53703

4/25/91

Dear Erwin Knoll,

For Hill & Knowlton representing tyrants of one kind or another has been a growth industry. Forty-four years ago I exposed their representing tyrannical employers for whom they had invented a new kind of strikebreaking, so-called "citizens committees" to keep working people oppressed and underpaid. They were the respectable counterparts of the strikebreaking agencies, the best known of which was headed by a man named ~~Harold~~ Pearl Durgoff, the best-known of the "nobles" or leaders of the strikebreakers were the fabled "Stinkfoot" McVey and the brothers Chowderhead and Phony Lou Cohen.

Chowderhead's technique for starting the fights in which pickets were bashed was to walk up to one and suddenly propel his enormous middle into the picket's stomach, usually knocking him down if not out. When the New York police finally decided to do something to him he was charged with consorting with known criminals, his own brother, Phony Lou.

Indirectly, The Progressive was connected with my youthful learning and experience. Robert M. LaFollette, Jr., from my experience hardly his father's son (with the possible exception of Pierre Dupont, whose morning paper I worked for he was my worst employer), headed the Senate Civil Liberties Committee.

At 23, ^(in 1936) after an investigation of a fancier ~~strikebreaking~~ labor spy outfit in Cleveland, the Corporations Auxiliary Company, I was sent to Akron for a rubber-industry investigation. Leader of the anti-union activity there was The Greater Akron Association.

Not waiting for a subpoena, I walked into its offices and told its head, Edgar ~~A~~ Browse I'd like to look at his records for the United States Senate.

"Hi that's the Russian way!" he exclaimed in indignation.

"Well, Mr. Browse, I told him, "I offer you a choice of the American way. I'll come back with a duces tecum subpoena and you can cart all these file cabinets to Washington. Do you prefer the Russian or the American way?"

He decided he preferred to avoid the American way, as he had described it, and instead, in those days before xeroxing, he got typists to type copies of the records I wanted and that is how first the Hill & Knowlton and then the literary whoring of reporters like George Sokolsky, who worked for the same ends, paid by the same money, first came to light.

They were the upper-class strikebreakers working for tyrannical employers.

This led to exposure of such prestigious groups as the Iron & Steel Institute and then the National Association of Manufacturers as the employers of these "respectable" finks and strikebreakers.

I don't know if Arthur E. Rowse had any further interest in H & K but I write you

in the event he does.

While I could not prove it I then believed that these respectables sicced the Akron Beacon-Journal on me. The story led to my recall to Washington, in sort-of disgrace. As my work in Cleveland had been interfered with by the NLRB's regional director there, Ralph Lind, so also was it somehow arranged for me to be accompanied to Washington by the rubber-workers union's general counsel, Garret Patterson. Within a short time both were working for the other side, employers' associations.

And with my reporting background I was made the committee's editor, after preparing for its first hearing, of "The Railway Audit and Inspection Company." The labor-spy outfits all had fancy names that did not suggest what they really did. That RA & I hearing was the first official exposure of labor spying, later of strikebreaking, both industries of the era then being replaced by the less publicly objectionable Hill & Knowlton's.

If Rowse has further interest, as editor I saw to it that copies of our hearings when published were deposited in Washington at the Library of Congress. I believe the Senate also preserves them and if there is a deposit of the younger LaFollette's records, I had them bound in hardback for him and other Senators. And for myself. When the same workers were a different union that it became I deposited a set there and I still have the 15 volumes I edited and I'm not much more than an hour from him, if that much.

I was too progressive for LaFollette. He fired me under trumped-up charges. His real reason was he wanted the support of those he was exposing in his campaigns and had gotten all the benefit from working people he could expect and I was successfully lobbying for the committee's extension so it could investigate the farm labor situation in California, along with Gardner "Pat" Jackson, of Labor's Non-Partisan League. Pat had been the information officer of the Sacco-Vanzetti committee. Remember "Grapes of Wrath?" That was what we exposed. Well, not we. It cost me that job.

Things did not change much, I report on a personal level. I turned to exposing Nazi cartels and that, too, faced strong opposition. The also-respected Walter Annenberg was running his father Mo's empire while Mo was in jail and he succumbed to the pressures and liquidated that staff and stuck to girlie stories. Even the vesting of the corporations I exposed as enemy property made no difference to him. As had the younger LaFollette, he had enough.

P.S. As editor I used to send Isadore Feinstein galley proofs at the New York Post. I would like to think that is what got Iszy interested in government records. I'm sorry now I never asked him after he moved to Washington and got so well and deservedly known as I.F. Stone. Some of those hearings might make interesting stories today. Like Bloody Harlan (County, Ky.), the early Bull Connor, what I got away with titling "The Memorial Day Massacre" (steel) and a number of others.

Best wishes,


Harold Weisberg.