

NY Times MAR 2 1976
Of Franklin, Schorr
And Official Secrets

To the Editor: (D)

In 1773, Benjamin Franklin, then an American agent in London, came into possession of a batch of private letters written by the Royal Governor, Thomas Hutchinson, of Massachusetts. These called for harsher measures against the American colonies and "an abridgment of what are called English liberties in America." Franklin sent these letters to friends in the Bay Colony, and soon that firebrand Sam Adams published them. For his violation of the right of privacy Franklin was called before the Privy Council, denounced by Attorney General Wedderburn as a scoundrel without honor whose name would be covered in infamy, and dismissed from all his positions.

Mr. Franklin, who put loyalty to his countrymen and to the cause of liberty ahead of loyalty to a private official, has somehow managed to retain the affection and gratitude of the American people, while — except for this particular episode — Mr. Wedderburn is largely forgotten. How extraordinary that we should now be witnessing a reverse replay of this episode. Daniel Schorr — who has violated no law — stayed loyal to the principle that the American people have a right to know what their Government is about and is now to be hounded by Mr. Flynt of Georgia — the same Mr. Flynt who some months ago wanted to punish Representative Harrington for fulfilling his constitutional obligation to let the people know what the Government was doing.

The issue is of little practical importance but immense philosophical importance. Mr. Flynt and his ilk believe the American people are not to be trusted with the truth. Mr. Schorr believes that our system can work only if the people are permitted to know what the Government does. Despotic governments that fear truth and fear public opinion always take refuge in secrecy. There are risks in open publication of truth, but risk for risk, the risks of secrecy are incomparably more dangerous than the risks of publication. It is a safe bet that Mr. Schorr — like Daniel Ellsberg — will be gratefully remembered when Mr. Flynt has retired to that oblivion which he has so richly earned.

HENRY STEELE COMMAGER
Amherst, Mass., Feb. 25, 1976

To the Editor:

President Ford and Secretary Kissinger are indignant that C.I.A. criminality is publicly exposed; Daniel Schorr is threatened by a Congressman with a contempt citation for releasing a secret Congressional report on C.I.A. criminality to the public press.

All this recalls the ethic of the last months of the Nixon Administration and confirms that the man who appointed his pardoner and the man who pardoned his appointer are in accord regarding official criminal conduct. Both Mr. Nixon and Mr. Ford, and their Congressional sympathizers, support the principle of the collusive protection of covert and criminal government by overt government, which threatens legal sanctions not against the covert criminals but against those who expose them.

If Mr. Ford and Congressional conservatives are advocates of law and order, perhaps they should learn something about law and about order in a democratic society.

JOHN ILLO
Shippensburg, Pa., Feb. 17, 1976