

An Experience of Faith in America



Jack Anderson

THE JAILING of my friend and associate Les Whitten has taught me a lesson about America.

He was arrested in the act of reporting a news event. His constitutional rights were violated by FBI agents who had sworn to uphold the Constitution. His notes were ripped from his hands and he was stopped from writing a story that would have embarrassed the FBI.

For he had found the broken treaties papers that the Indians stripped from government files and carted out of Washington right under the eyes of the FBI. He had inspected thousands of the documents and had extracted the news from them while the FBI scoured the country in vain for them.

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THEN, as the final indignity, Whitten had showed up to witness the return of the first big batch of documents. Frustrated FBI agents, helpless to stop the theft or to locate the stolen papers, swooped down on Indian leader Hank Adams before he could deliver the documents the last few blocks to the government. Whitten was present to report the news.

He was expected. The FBI had been emboldened, we now know, by word from the White House to make a case against us. For the White House also didn't like what he had been writing. Our real crime, in other words, was to dig out stories that made the government look bad. Make no mistake about it. That's the only reason Les Whitten was arrested.

I was outraged, of course. Then some

heartening things began to happen. Senator Ed Muskie (Dem-Me.) detached his Lincolnian frame from his desk and rose slowly on the Senate floor. Only last year, we had obtained documents from his own private files and had published some embarrassing extracts. But there was Muskie standing tall in the Senate, defending our right to do so. Said Muskie of the Whitten arrest: "The administration has opened up a new front in its campaign against the First Amendment."

Another legislator who has felt the prick of our needle, Representative Pete McCloskey (Rep-Calif.), phoned us for details of the arrest. He said he will seek a probe of FBI activities.

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SENATOR Frank Moss (Dem-Utah) told the Senate: "Now the administration has achieved the censor's dream: it has found the means to strike at the dynasty of muckrackers which leads from Upton Sinclair and Lincoln Steffens through Drew Pearson to the vigorous legatees, Jack Anderson and Les Whitten."

Representative Jerome Waldie (Dem-Calif.) charged the Nixon Administration with "a deliberate, systematic and conscious campaign" to harass reporters.

The outpouring of editorial support was also overwhelming. But perhaps most gratifying of all was the flood of letters from everyday Americans who pledged their support.

Yes, Whitten's experience has strengthened, not shaken, my faith in America.