



Jean-Pierre Laffont/Sygnia

Another Defends the 'Inquisitor'

By Louis Heren

LONDON—There are times when I really do believe that Bernard Levin should stick to music. Yesterday was such an occasion, when he demonstrated with his usual writing grace and artistry that he knows less about Southern politicians and politics than the delights of Miami's kosher restaurants.

The fact that Senator Sam Ervin is up for re-election next year does not explain his conduct as chairman of the Senate Watergate hearings. He has never had any trouble in winning re-election since he succeeded to his seat in 1954.

Moreover, at the age of 76 he is a man with all ambition but not passion spent. His passion remains the United States Constitution and the rights of the individual. His knowledge of the law is profound. He is the son of a lawyer, he read law at Harvard, and served on the bench for 23 years, the last six as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina.

The Senator was a member of the

committee that voted for the censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy. As chairman of the Senate subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, he revealed, long before the Watergate affair, the surveillance by Army intelligence of radical movements in the sixties.

Being a Southerner, he hides this passion behind a folksy cracker-barrel humor that tends to mislead visitors from the North and Camden Town.

He does look as if he is playing the part of Charles Laughton playing a Southern Senator, but surely this is preferable to the bland facelessness of modern politicians devoid of all color and passion. And the folksy manner and humor have their place in the Senate's committee rooms. At times they have been devastating.

But, I can hear Bernard Levin ask, what about his opposition to civil rights legislation? Alas, with other Southerners, the Senator has always opposed Negro civil rights for obvious political reasons. He, Senator Fulbright and other fine members of the Senate would not have been re-elected if they had voted otherwise.

Despicable, perhaps, but when another Southerner, President Johnson,

successfully proposed civil rights legislation more far-reaching than any offered by a Northerner, they accepted defeat with good grace.

The South is a very complicated region, which explains why it has produced so many fine writers and journalists. And in spite of the racial tragedy, it has made many contributions to what remains the freest country in the world.

Take the Senator's home state of North Carolina. It was one of the last of the original thirteen states to ratify the Constitution because the State Legislature held out until the first Ten Amendments guaranteeing fundamental civil rights were included.

Nearly 200 years later, Bernard Levin is not protected by a Bill of Rights, but Stans, Magruder, Dean and all the other Watergate crew are. It is worth remembering next time Senator Ervin appears as Charles Laughton on the box, because he will not have forgotten.

This article by Louis Heren, deputy editor and foreign editor of The Times of London, appeared as an answer to Bernard Levin's views on Watergate.