

Capitol Punishment

The Turn of The Screw

By Art Buchwald

The big story in Washington last week was the revelation that the White House had an "official enemies list" which they intended to use to "get" the people who opposed the administration.

Naturally, anyone worth his salt in this town was hoping to make the list. The test of one's importance in Washington obviously depends on how seriously the White House takes you and to what lengths they would go, to use a John Dean word, to "screw" you.

When the list was released I searched it frantically for my name. First there was the "Dirty Twenty." I didn't make it so I waited for the second list of 200, and discovered I hadn't made that one, either. I thought to myself, "What kind of people do we have in the White House who don't even know who their *real* enemies are?"

Then the phone started to ring. Friends called to give their condolences. Sources who had been leaking to me on a steady basis telephoned to say they hadn't realized for the past five years that they had been leaking to nobody. Colleagues who made the enemy list stopped by the office to rub in the fact that I was finished as a serious communicator.

Bill Mauldin telephoned from Chicago. He also hadn't made the list. Pat Oliphant checked in from Denver because he was left off. Paul Conrad of the Los Angeles Times was furious because they hadn't mentioned him. Herblock said, "That does it for me. No more Mr. Nice Guy."

The worst blow came at lunchtime when I went to the Sans Souci Restaurant and found myself sitting next to the kitchen. The maitre d'hotel working from the "list" was seating all the White House enemies at the best tables.

When I protested about the table Paul said, "You're lucky to be here at all. With all the enemies the White House has, I can no longer let in every Art, Dick and Harry."

I must say my wife took it well. "You may not be an enemy to them," she said kissing me on the cheek when I walked in, "but you're still an enemy to me."

That night I studied the list again. It seemed to be filled with such mediocre people. Then suddenly it dawned on me! The White House knew exactly what they were doing. These thugs and double-crossing, lying rats (names on request with a self-addressed envelope) had drawn up the list not to get the people on it, but to get the people who were left off it.

They knew the best way to "screw" their real enemies was by leaving them off the most prestigious list in the United States today.

By not mentioning us they knew editors and TV executives would lose faith in us and find ways of putting us out of business.

"What a Machiavellian plan," I said to myself, "why did it take me so long to realize it?"

I immediately called Block, Mauldin, Oliphant and Paul Conrad and told them what the White House was up to.

We decided there was only one thing to do. We will immediately institute a class action suit against the White House, John Dean III, Charles Colson, Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and possibly the President of the United States, on behalf of all the people in the United States who did not make the official enemy list.

We intend to prove we were financially damaged, publicly humiliated and suffered grievous professional injury. We will prove that the White House conspired to put out a strawman list of names to detract from their real enemies in the media, the arts, the Congress and the business world.

We only hope Maurice Stans has enough money in his safe to pay for the damages we are certain will be awarded to us. If not we intend to attach certain homes in Key Biscayne and San Clemente.

© 1973, Los Angeles Times