

Loeb's 'Star' Newsman Jolts Probers

By Jack Anderson

Every few months, the nation's most erratic publisher, William Loeb, jolts the country with some fantastic story in his Manchester, N.H., Union-Leader. As often as not, the revelation is the work of his rambunctious star reporter, Arthur Egan.

Last week, Egan's "Mission Impossible" Watergate stories put him behind closed doors at the Senate Watergate committee for one of its most colorful sessions.

Dumbfounded committee sleuths are still trying to weed the fancy from the fact in Egan's astonishing secret statement, all of it given under oath and with a straight face.

What brought him to the committee was his claim that Teamsters vice presidents and other Teamsters bigwigs were ordered to kick in \$1,000 each toward a \$175,000 war chest for President Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign. Las Vegas casinos with Teamsters loans came up with \$400,000, he said.

As it turns out, the alleged custodian of the war chest is suing Egan and his paper, and has already caught Egan in a glaring departure from the truth. However, Newsweek, even as we were writing this story, quoted former Teamsters chief

James Hoffa telling of a \$60,000 to \$175,000 war chest collected from the union's leaders at \$1,000 a clip.

The committee also heard a sizzling tale of how then Attorney General John N. Mitchell, irked at Egan's criticism of the Justice Department, was "going to put some agents on me and wattle me silly." "Wattles" are rods of woven wood.

The "wattling," Egan said under oath, was ordered by Mitchell personally "to shut me up" about stories demanding Hoffa's release from prison. Mitchell, said Egan, used misleading old records to try to get Egan indicted on gun charges. "Geez, right away I am John Dillinger," Egan marveled.

In view of the Nixon administration's hassling of the press via wiretaps, arrests and tax audits, Egan's charge sounded plausible. Besides, Egan claimed that both the then U.S. attorney for New Hampshire, David Brock, and the state's attorney general, Warren Rudman, would back him up. We contacted both Brock, who said the yarn was "completely erroneous" and Rudman, who snorted it was "horse - - -."

Egan's credibility dropped even further when he testified that the late J. Edgar Hoover was "murdered." As his questioners gasped, he went on, "Ev-

eryone on hearing that says I am nuts, but somebody in the Watergate thing murdered . . . J. Edgar Hoover."

When his interrogators recovered enough to query him, he admitted his statement was "just my own hunch." All available evidence indicates it is a false hunch.

Yet, as credibility of the Union-Leader's star seemed ready to dim, he told how federal parole officials confided in him that Hoffa's prison commutation papers left their offices with no restrictions on Hoffa's future Teamsters activities.

The final papers banned Hoffa from Teamsters activities until 1980. If Egan is right, the White House quietly skewered Hoffa even as it publicly courted him. Egan's commutation story was backed forcefully by the Union-Leader's lawyer, Ralph Sullivan, who told the committee he heard the pardon and parole official's words. The parole official, however, told us the story was not true.

The committee is still checking these other wild leads from Egan:

• That a famous singer-movie star coughed up 40 tickets to her performance after a union lawyer threatened "either I get (the tickets) or you don't open." The singer and lawyer vehemently deny it.

• That Egan and Hoffa's son were bugged at the Watergate, even as the Democrats were. The accused bugger convincingly denies it.

• Egan denied that he once suggested a reporter on Loeb's paper wrote one of the letters quoting Sen. Edmund Muskie in an alleged racial slur on "Canucks." But Egan, according to other statements to the committee has taken two different positions on his colleague's suspected letter-writing.

At one point, Egan proved he was his credibility's own worst enemy when he described some of his own newspapering "dirty tricks."

"'Dirty Tricks,' " he philosophized under oath, "is a new phrase that has been coined, but it is not new to political campaigns. Hell, we have seen this in the newspaper profession right along.

"If you want to get a candidate defeated, just start a little whispering campaign. Start a rumor. I have done it just to sit back and see reactions . . . Is this a dirty-trick? I don't think so."

Footnote: In our talks with Egan, he stuck to the story he told the committee. His "wattling" by the administration, he said, included questions on his tax returns for five consecutive years.

© 1973, United Feature Syndicate, Inc.