

RICHARD WILSON

The Cover-Up—A New Morality

Record Shows Federal Officials Who Expose Shady Deals Get Bounced

The handwriting on the wall has been written large here: Don't buck the system! This truth is freshly proved by a Government distinguished service award to an obscure official named Horace D. Godfrey. Mr. Godfrey is the administrator of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation service under Agriculture Secretary Freeman.

It is charged in the House of Representatives that Mr. Godfrey was given this award although in his branch of the Federal service "obviously a cover-up was attempted in the entire Billie Sol Estes case." The evidence in the Billie Sol Estes investigation showed, it is charged, incredible confusion, mismanagement, lack of records, duplication and "woeful lack of management and knowledge of what was going on in the Estes case."

Mr. Freeman so values Mr. Godfrey today, however, that he confers upon him the highest accolade of his department as an example to others.

But what of the man who testified and supplied records to show that the big time-Texas promoter now under prison sentence for fraud was shown favoritism in Mr. Freeman's department as early as November, 1961? This man, N. Battle Hales, has been denied an automatic in-grade promotion which would ordinarily have come to him in the course of his Federal service. Thus the accuser languishes and the accused flourishes, although the record seems clear that Billie Sol enjoyed a

favored position in the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Freeman has no monopoly on this technique. One Jerry Jackis, who revealed to Congress the use of foreign aid funds in Cambodia for a Communist-sponsored hospital, was fired while the State Department official who made a record against him was promoted.

Otto Otepka, State Department security official, who committed the unforgivable sin of peaching on his superiors and telling Congress what is wrong with the internal security system in the State Department, is in limbo. But William J. Crockett, deputy undersecretary, who was in charge of the Otepka matter for Secretary Rusk, is up for promotion to career minister, a better job. The Senate Foreign Relations committee is looking into this because the record shows wiretapping, general harassment, and attempts to degrade Mr. Otepka after he helped the Senate Internal Security committee to expose some of the weaknesses of the State Department security system.

It is worth noting also that Gen. Curtis LeMay has been given an extension, at least until after the election, of his tenure as Air Chief of Staff. Gen. LeMay protested against the multi-billion dollar award of the TFX contract for what he thought was a second best fighter plane to be used by both the Navy and Air Force.

The Navy commander, Admiral Anderson, who also objected openly before Congress, has long since vanished from the Washington scene. But Gen. LeMay was pointedly given only a one-year reappointment, instead of the usual two, and this has now been extended. But it looks as if Gen. LeMay's service is rapidly coming to a close.

The pattern set in these several cases is shocking. The lesson taught to Federal officials is that if they see mismanagement, wrongdoing or bad judgment they would be wise to keep their mouths shut if they wish to maintain or improve their job status.

Their worst sin would be to tell their story to Congress, although it is the clear and imperative responsibility of Congress to inquire into the operation of Federal executive departments funded solely by the votes of Congress. Congress controls absolutely the appropriation of money to operate the Federal government and of taxation to provide these funds. This is its exclusive power, and Congress has the right to know how the funds are spent.

Some kind of a new morality seems to have gotten lodged in official Washington. It is the morality of blind loyalty to superior authority and complete obedience to the word from on high. It is the morality of cover-up in the Billie Sol Estes case and whitewash in the Baker case. And it is not a very healthy atmosphere for the prudent conduct of the public's business.

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