PS1 for 6/15/89 # Loyalties and Disloyalties

A controversial article in **The New Yorker** a few weeks ago by **New York Times** writer Janet Malcolm hit journalists' self-esteem and self-righteousness right in the solar plexus. "Every journalist," she wrote, "is a kind of confidence man" who gains the trust of persons he writes about and then" betrays them without remorse."

Ms. Malcolm's lengthy article detailed many examples of journalists who had put on an act of being "friendly and sympathetic" to persons they interviewed, thereby gaining their confidence, and then stabbed them in the back when the article or book was published. Many journalists were stung by her blunt revelations, but a new book by Pulitzer Prize-winning author proves her thesis.

For 30 years, the liberals and leftists have fostered the myth that the last 1940s and 1950s witnessed an ideological "reign of terror," when Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) and the House Committee on Un-American Activities "falsely" accused many persons of being Communists. We encounter this leftist distortion of history everywhere, as for example, even in last week's obituaries of 88-year-old Own Lattimore.

The new book I refer to tells the intimate story of Alfred Bernstein, one of 8,000 federal employees who left government services after being accused of being Communists during 1947 to 1954 under President Harry Truman's Executive Order 9835. The trouble with the left-wing myth about a "witch hunt" is that Bernstein admits, and corroborative evidence proves beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he and his wife were, indeed, members of the Communist Party.

The author went through literally mountains of files and quoted from the lengthy hearing records only recently made public, in order to chronicle the story. But, like any good writer, he needed interview with the accused in order to bring the cold record to life with anecdotal and human interest material.

But the subject of this inquiry had put that Communist era behind him and didn't want to talk about it. Above all, he didn't want a book written about him because he know that the truth would shatter the comfortable illusion that he and his associates were victimized by "false accusations."

The accused literally begged the writer not to do the book, saying, "The premise people eventually accepted after McCarthy period was that the victims weren't Communists. If you're going to write a book that says McCarthy was right, that a lot of us were Communist, you're going to write a dangerous book."

He made his plea even stronger: "You're going to prove McCarthy right, because all he was saying was that the system was loaded with Communists. And he was right."

But the writer was determined to do the book and was patient enough to spend years on the project. He used his personal entrée to the accused to get the interviews, and he grabbed every

opportunity to pick up revealing tidbits in relaxed conversations until he collected the juicy quotations that would make the book compelling.

As it became apparent that ideological argument could not persuade the author to abandon his determination to publish a book, the old Communist appealed to their personal relationship. “There’s no reason,” he pleaded, “was have to spend our declining years justifying what we did – getting involved in a controversy.”

Even when the book was ready, the old man asked the writer to follow the example of other leftists who had used the real names of Communist Party members only with their express permission because “that is the decent thing to do.” His request fell on deaf ears.

If this book had been written by a conservative, the “McCarthyism” cry would have gone up from the left. Why rehash old accusations? Why not let Bernstein live out his life without harassment?

But the book was written by Carl Bernstein, who (with fellow **Washington Post** reporter Bob Woodward) played a prime role in the mid-1970s making Watergate a household word. And the Communist Party memberships he exposed were those of his father and mother.

This book cannot help but invite speculation as to why Carl Bernstein played the role that Ms. Malcolm called a “confidence man” with his own parents as the victims. Did he believe that his book could somehow help his parents by removing what he called the “stigma” of having been Communist Party members in the 1940s? If so, he was not successful.

Or was it a subconscious desire to retaliate against his father for what Carl Bernstein calls “the sense of shame” he felt as a boy in having parents who were Communist Party members? The younger Bernstein even admitted that “sometimes I hated him for it.”

Perhaps the title of the book was a Freudian slip. Instead of being called **Loyalties**, it should have been titled **Disloyalties**, because the book reveals two kinds.