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68

Folder
826

On Kefauver crime investigation, 1951.

April 29/1951
51-19

The Kefauver investigation into the tie-up between organized crime and government has shocked and startled the American people. Frankly, I do not know why they were so startled. Most intelligent Americans who have been reading their newspapers have been aware for a long time of the existence of widespread crime and criminal gangs in this country, and of recurrent instances of police corruption and of graft and favoritism and the peddling of influence in high governmental circles. Certainly those of us who have lived through the prohibition era and its aftermath, when bootlegging became America's biggest single business and racketeering a most lucrative profession and gang-killings an almost daily commonplace and public collusion between police and criminals a well-publicized secret - certainly we should not have been startled by the revelations of the Kefauver Committee.

Nor should those of us who were not unaware of the moral slump which followed both the First and the Second World War, nor those of us who had not forgotten the Teapot Dome scandals of the Harding administration, which make the present revelations of the Fulbright Committee investigating irregularities in connection with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation pale into insignificance.

It is very difficult to determine whether at this given moment lawlessness and corruption are more widespread in our country than at any given period in the past. I suppose that it would not be very difficult to discover moments in our history when graft and official corruption were even more extensive than at present, but there would be very little consolation for us in that. The evil which now exists is eating at the heart of American life, and is fraught with the greatest dangers to our country, our institutions and our homes.

If the facts which have been brought to light by the recent investigations will lead to soul-searching on the part of our people and to the mending of our ways and to new attitudes on our part towards practices which are tolerated and indulged in by good and respectable citizens, that will have proved to have been a great boon to the American people. We need higher standards of moral integrity among our people. We

have to tidy up our moral life. We have to learn to abide more rigorously by the moral codes which we proclaim. We must learn to demand more of ourselves.

It is not that the American people make bad citizens; they do not. It is not that they do not love and appreciate their country and its free institutions; they do. They just take them for granted. Their principal interests lie elsewhere. They spend very little time on citizenship. They spend very little time on educating their children in the duties and responsibilities of members in a free society. And yet, citizenship should be the most important enterprise in the life of a citizen.

We are all convinced that our country is sound. Nothing can hurt it. It does not need our personal attention. Here is where we make the great mistake. The political bosses and grafters and corruptionists do pay personal and continuing attention to government. They do take time out for it. And in the struggle between the active dark forces and the passive and indifferent forces of light, the dark forces win out inevitably. The task of maintaining a free government, of running a democracy is a very difficult and exacting task. It is a day-by-day job. Unless there is eternal vigilance, expressing itself in action, a democracy slips back very quickly into lawlessness, into chaos, into dictatorship. The great democracies of the past which perished were first corrupted from within. Political negligence on the part of their citizens and moral laxity, the undermining of home and family, prepared the way for the vicious elements, the gross of heart and the grasping of hand, who are always there lurking in secret places, waiting for their opportunity to step in and to take over. Regeneration of the American people, a religious revival, is long overdue.