MORMON MUCKRAKER: AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK ANDERSON

Dialogue *readers need little introduction to reporter-columnist Jack Anderson. Since he took over the nationally syndicated Washington Merry-go-round column at the death of Drew Pearson in 1969 Jack Anderson has been in the center of controversy and political headlines. He has made the column a vehicle for constructive "watchdogging" rather than the platform for editorializing and personal vendettas that occasionally characterized it under Pearson. He has also gone out of his way to make public apologies in those cases where his reporting has proved inaccurate or unfair. In all, he has injected a new honesty (or fear of exposure) into Washington politics. His exposure of the ITT affair, the release of Watergate grand jury transcripts that moved the President to begin his "investigation" this past March, and many other day by day reporting activities have had a history-making impact on contemporary events. The following interview was conducted for* Dialogue *in early June by David S. King, Mary L. Bradford, and Larry Bush, all of whom reside in the Washington, D.C. area. In this interview Jack Anderson speaks out forthrightly on the Watergate and Pentagon Papers cases and talks about the influence of his Mormon upbringing on his personal and professional life. Evident throughout are his commitment to democracy and his concomitant belief in the public's right and need to know.*

Dialogue: The type of reporting or writing in which you are engaged, in which you have won your well-deserved reputation for excellence, including a Pulitzer Prize, is one that carries you to an area that some people would call controversial. Do you personally see any conflict between the law and those who go after the news?

Anderson: No, I would say that there's no conflict with the law, except improper law; we try to follow the constitution. Anybody who reads and understands the founding of this republic, anybody who has studied what the Founding Fathers thought, would know that they intended that the press should be a free agent, and they intended that the press should represent the people rather than the government. They intended that the press should report to the people on the functioning of government. It should inform the electorate on how their elected officials are managing their affairs. James Madison put it this way, "Popular government without popular information and the access to it would be but a farce or a tragedy." Madison clearly recognized that in our form of government the people must have information and the access to that information. Thomas Jefferson put it even stronger. He said, "If I had to choose between government without newspapers and newspapers without government I wouldn't hesitate to choose the latter." You see, he understood about government. He recognized that people would be better off with no government at all than a government without a watchdog. These Founding Fathers intended that the press should be the watchdog. It's not a perfect watchdog by any means, but it's the watchdog that they selected. So what I do in my pursuit of the news is what they intended that I should do.

Dialogue: Suppose a journalist in the pursuit of this information finds himself running into collision with law governing the classification of information. What happens in a situation like that?

Anderson: Well, the government doesn't own the news. The government has never owned the news.

Dialogue: We assume you make the usual exception where the news has a direct bearing on national security.

Anderson: Yes, but I wouldn't necessarily accept the government's definition of national security. If we did that, there would be no Watergate story, because the President tried to claim that it concerned national security. He's still trying to claim that portions of it concern national security. Our investigation demonstrated quite the opposite: that it's political security not national security that Richard Nixon is concerned about. We have established quite clearly that this para-police unit he set up inside the White House was protecting political more than national security.

Dialogue: Didn't President Nixon or someone accuse you of undermining the press through your reporting about the Pentagon Papers?

Anderson: He said that there were grave security violations in the publication of the Pentagon papers, and yet we've had witness after witness in the Daniel Ellsberg trial, including McGeorge Bundy, testify that there was no national security involved, no military secrets. Clearly, this was a case of misclassification. The government was using the classification stamp as a censorship stamp. And of course the government always does this. We have the injunction of our Founding Fathers, we have the First Amendment to the Constitution, and of course, because of my Mormon upbringing, I believe that my function is part of a divinely inspired form of government. In the name of a divinely inspired Constitution I dig out secrets which the government has improperly classified. If the Pentagon Papers had been properly classified, they would have been classified as "censored" and then there would have been no public uproar. The President wants the American people to believe that anything *he* designates as secret is secret. Well, now, if we are going to give the President those kinds of powers, we are giving him the same powers the Kremlin claims. If we give the President those kinds of powers, then anything the President didn't want us to read, anything the President didn't want us to know, anything the President didn't want us to hear, he could prevent us from having simply by classifying it.

Dialogue: Suppose a journalist, operating by your standards, got a hold of censored information and decided that it did not involve national security and he went ahead and published it, and let us assume that it did involve national security and that it put our country in great jeopardy.

Anderson: An example of what you're talking about occurred during World War II when the Chicago *Tribune* reported that the United States had broken the Japanese secret code. That journalism was about as irresponsible as one could imagine. In time of war, when we were using that secret code to save American lives, the Chicago *Tribune* jeopardized national security. In spite of the fact that I think they made a horrendous mistake in publishing this story, I have to defend their right to publish it. We did survive the war. I'm not sure we would survive as a nation were we to deprive the *Tribune* of that right. I'm not sure that we would remain a free land if we deprive the *Tribune* editors of that precious right to make their own decision about what they publish.

Dialogue: Then you feel there should be no bar to the press, no checks?

Anderson: I believe that the government has the right to protect its secrets, but I believe it ought to limit that protection to legitimate secrets. Clearly, the government doesn't do that. The government abuses its power to classify. Therefore, the press has a clearly defined function to dig out those secrets and to inform the American people. I'm much less concerned about the violation of security by a few newspapers than I am about the government's violation of the people's right to know. The government has at this moment some 20 million classified documents. Those who have access to these documents tell me that between seventy and ninety percent contain information that the American people are entitled to have. The pathetically few stories that we get are pinholes

in this paper curtain. We just get fleeting glimpses at this classified information. The government is far more successful at covering up than we are at uncovering.

Dialogue: The press plays the unofficial role of the Supreme Court to everybody else. Suppose the press commits a grievous error, or is unfair, or massacres somebody's character unfairly. Who is there to act as the Supreme Court of the Press?

Anderson: The press has more watchdogs than anybody else. In the first place the press is watching itself. I've been castigated by the press more than I have been by politicians. I have been assailed in editorials more than I have on the floor of the Senate. I have been abused by my colleagues more than I have by politicians. Bill Buckley has written at least a dozen columns taking me to task. I can't get away with anything. Also, the government is watching us. At any given moment, there are more government people watching me, than I have reporters watching the government. We found this to be literally true. The government has far vaster resources than I do, clearly much greater manpower than I do. If I write a story and get as much as one comma wrong, the government tends to seize upon that comma as evidence that the whole column is wrong. And believe me, they put their whole public relations mechanism into gear. And even if we are right, if they think that we can't prove it, they are on top of us. I recall a story we wrote wherein we cited a CIA report that the Thais who had been offered a million dollars to burn some opium as part of our war against dope smugglers, had in fact burned cheap fodder which was laced and covered with opium. Remember this was a CIA report we were citing. The White House, for some reason, thought that we didn't have the supporting documents. They called the Justice Department and encouraged them to refute our column; the Justice Department produced a five-page press release and held a press conference with an expert who had been to Thailand to witness the burning. They even brought in films of the burning. It was a major and costly undertaking. We defended ourselves by merely passing out copies of the secret CIA report. Of course, the White House's attempt to refute us was a fiasco. But the point is that they are always watching us.

Dialogue: We were wondering where most of your information comes from, what kind of people come to you?

Anderson: We hear from all kinds of people. I'd say mostly people who are concerned citizens.

Dialogue: Who want to see justice done?

Anderson: Concerned government employees who want to call things to our attention. We get a large percentage of tips from disgruntled people who want to do in their superiors. It doesn't really matter where the information comes from because by the time we get it and complete our investigation, it's our information. We never accept information that comes in over the transom. Our basic information comes from a network of informants within the government.

In order to become a part of that network, you just about have to be an American who believes in the public's right to know.

Dialogue: Are there any Mormons in that network?

Anderson: Of course, Mormons and non-Mormons. We get information from people who believe in the right of the people to know what their government is doing. We avoid anybody who we know to be destructive, because it's been our experience that their information is usually tainted. We never pay for information, because we have found that information you pay for is generally unreliable. It has always appalled me that the FBI depends upon paid informants for much of its information. This is the reason the FBI is constantly losing cases. It's the reason they lost their case against the Berrigan brothers. We have found that most government employees believe that their obligation is to the people who pay their salaries, the taxpayers, and not to a Richard Nixon, or a Bob Haldeman or a John Ehrlichman; that their obligation is to the American people. Our big problem is not finding people who agree that we ought to have the information, it's finding people with the courage to give it to us.

Dialogue: Suppose you take on a private citizen of limited resources and cut him down to size and let us say that this happened to be a case where an injustice was done.

Anderson: His only protection then would be the libel laws, and of course they do protect him. What we write about him has to be true. It is our policy not to attack private individuals unless they become involved in a matter of public interest and public urgency. The corporate executive who is lobbying with the government, trying to impose his will upon the rest of us, is the kind of private citizen we will go after.

Dialogue: There have been very few cases where you have chosen to recede from your original position. The Eagleton case is probably the best known example.

Anderson: Unfortunately there has been more than one. Everytime we cannot back our story up we recede as we did in the Eagleton case. I am pleased to report that there have been very few such cases. Happily our record for accuracy has been good. That is sometimes difficult in the kind of high-risk journalism that we practice. When the government has the power to classify and when great corporations have the power to hide their activities, you almost never can get a picture of any more than the tip of the iceberg. You have to go with what facts you can find, and hope that those facts will lead to a public hearing—as they did in the ITT and Watergate cases—and that from these hearings the public will get all the facts. And I am pleased to report in both the ITT and the Watergate cases, the stories we reported have turned out to be totally accurate. I don't know of a single error that we have made in either of these cases. But we certainly did not have all the facts in either case. There have been new facts that have been brought to light that we were unable to dig up. So we have a

rule around here that a fact does not become a fact until we can prove it. We won't accept what we believe to be true as news, only what we can prove to be true. That means we must have witnesses or documentation. If the witnesses back down then we have to retract the story. This is what happened in the Eagleton case, for example. We did not make up the story. We relied upon witnesses whom we considered to be reliable. We backtracked the moment that we realized our sources would not stand up, and this is what we will do every time. I regret to say that in this kind of high risk journalism where the heat is on there are going to be times when sources will give us something then refuse to back it up and we will probably have to back down again. Having said that, I don't want to give the impression that Eagleton was guilty. It's always possible that the reason these sources would not step forward was that they had misinformed us and were afraid of the consequences. The one thing you can be sure of is that we didn't make the story up. We never go to press without talking to everybody we can reach, and that included Eagleton. We tried to reach him; we left messages for him just as we try to do with everybody we write about.

Dialogue: Your activities have connected you with the publication of grand jury proceedings, testimony and so on. Does that pose any special problems?

Anderson: Well, only insofar as the courts might want to send me to jail for publishing it. But again, the courts don't own the news either, and the grand jury transcripts played a role in breaking open the Watergate case. And I think that most Americans will have to admit it's in the public interest to expose this kind of a major scandal. There are those who would prefer not to know about it. These are the kind of people though, who don't want to know that they've got cancer. In this case it was the body politic that had cancer and the American people are certainly better off knowing it because now we're treating it.

Dialogue: Have you stopped publishing them?

Anderson: I have stopped publishing them for the simple reason that I'm now persuaded that the prosecutors are doing everything in their power to get the facts. As long as they're doing that, then my publishing of the transcripts would have an adverse effect; it would hamper their investigation. In other words, I published those findings only at the time when I thought it might stimulate a wide-open and all-out investigation.

Dialogue: What effect will Watergate have on the next President?

Anderson: The next President of the United States is going to be a purer President. Whatever his background may have been, whatever mistakes he may have made in the past, once he gets in the White House, he's going to be a very sober president. And he is not going to pull the tricks that Richard Nixon pulled; you can be sure of that. Any President after Watergate is going to do all in his power to demonstrate to the electorate that he is clean and is running an open shop. You'll see more openness, more candor, and tighter restraints

than we've ever had before. Some of these will be imposed on the White House by Congress after the Watergate investigation. Some of these will be adopted by the new President, voluntarily for political reasons.

Dialogue: What effect has Watergate had on the President himself?

Anderson: I think that he has been ruined politically and historically. I think Richard Nixon will go down in history as the Watergate President and will be categorized alongside Warren Harding, the Teapot Dome President. I think he had one opportunity to salvage himself and he muffed it. He has continued to cover up while announcing that he is not covering up; he has continued to obstruct the investigation while announcing he is not obstructing it.

Dialogue: Do you think Nixon will last out his term?

Anderson: I think that's in grave dispute. What the President was trying to do was to control the investigation. He could hardly hide the fact that five burglars broke into Democratic party headquarters. But he did his utmost to try to confine it to those five burglars and the two others who masterminded this bizarre scheme—G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt. They were the President's boys, members of the Plumbers, this para-police unit that he had established inside the White House.

If you go back and take this thing in its chronological order, the President was claiming that the nation was threatened by subversives, saboteurs and radicals. This was in 1970. You go back and read your newspapers and you'll

find the President himself was inciting these radicals. He was defying them; he made provocative statements. So whatever excitement, whatever turmoil we had in 1970 was at least in part stimulated by the President himself, who actually stood up on a car on one occasion and held his hands up in the victory signal and whispered to an aide and was overheard by a newsman who reported it, "This always gets them." His attempts to provoke and taunt certain types of people were part of his campaign. Having helped to create this situation he decided that something had to be done about it. Or at least he used that as his excuse. And so he went to J. Edgar Hoover and told him it was necessary to form an anti-subversive organization that would be empowered to break into houses and use other illegal methods to crack down on this very grave security threat. J. Edgar Hoover would have no part of it. So the President then set it up inside the White House. He established his own unit. Now he has claimed that he didn't give it the powers that he has admitted that he wanted to give to J. Edgar Hoover. But somebody didn't tell the Plumbers about that. They thought they had the very powers the President himself had advocated earlier and that J. Edgar Hoover had refused to exercise. The Plumbers must have thought they had these powers, because they exercised them. Two of the Plumbers, G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, burglarized the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, among other nefarious and illegal deeds. The same burglars, the same "Mission Impossible" operators, burglarized the Democratic Party headquarters, because they seemed unable to discriminate between national security and political security. We now have secret testimony which tells us that H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman received orders from the President to cover up this affair. Haldeman and Ehrlichman tried to cover up everything. They tried to confine the investigation to the five people who were arrested inside the Democratic Party headquarters. They even went so far as to ask the CIA to help in restricting the investigation. And then when Liddy and Hunt were exposed, Haldeman and Ehrlichman arranged for the payment to the Watergate defendants to keep their mouths shut. At all times the President sought to keep the Watergate investigation under the Justice Department control, which means under his control. He obstructed the attempts by the Senate to investigate. He had to offer up to the public some evidence that he was investigating, so he announced that he was cooperating, that he was using the proper grand jury process. Now anybody who knows anything about grand juries knows that they do exactly what the Justice Department wants them to do. So you have the Justice Department, an arm of the Nixon administration, running the grand jury. This was clearly a situation that called for an investigation. So I investigated, and got the grand jury transcripts and four days after the President found out I had those transcripts he abandoned his attempts to confine the investigation. I can't claim that our access to the grand jury findings changed the President's mind, but according to the *New York Times* it was a factor.

Dialogue: We wonder if we might approach another aspect of your occupation. The Latter-day Saints traditionally are a people who put emphasis on the team spirit in civic matters. The emphasis from the pulpit is on the fact that we are good, law abiding citizens who support and sustain the government. We emphasize the fact that when things are not to our liking we have recourse through

the ballot box: we vote for good people, we run good people for office, and once people have spoken and our officers or officials are elected, we close ranks and get behind them and show the team spirit. Now, in the popular mind, you are playing the role of a dissenter, one who retains the right to speak out frankly, boldly, against anybody and everybody whom you think is deserving of being spoken out against. Now, does this pose any problem for you? Do you find yourself running counter to the broad mainstream of Mormon thinking and the pattern of behavior that has become more or less characteristic of Mormon people?

Anderson: No, quite the opposite. My parents, who are honest, orthodox Mormons, brought me up to believe that public office is a public trust, that anybody who abuses that public office ought to be exposed. I believe that my people, the Mormon people, do not approve of waste or fraud or wrongdoing or hypocrisy. These are the things that we expose.

Dialogue: Do you see yourself as part of the Mormon tradition?

Anderson: I certainly do. I grew up in the West. I regard the Mormons as my people. I know their teachings, I believe in their teachings. I was taught at the knee of Mormon parents who exemplified honesty and integrity, and I am certainly motivated by my Mormon upbringing.

Dialogue: Do you presently hold a Church position?

Anderson: Yes, I teach Sunday School.

Dialogue: Do you have any qualms in writing about the Church when you come across some things that might be damaging to it?

Anderson: I think that sunlight is always the best disinfectant. I don't approve of the Church or the government covering up information that the tithepayers or the taxpayers are entitled to know.

Dialogue: Have you reported on stories of that type about the Church?

Anderson: I wrote some time ago about Church contributions to right wing organizations. These were contributions that were made from Church-owned corporations, and they were made by the late J. Reuben Clark, Jr., who channeled money to a right wing organization called Irvington on the Hudson which was lobbying in Congress against social security, the United Nations, public housing, and federal aid to education. I wrote about that, and I spoke to J. Reuben Clark about it. He made two defenses. First, that tithe money was not being used, and second, that he was unaware of the lobbying activities. He said that he was aware of the stand of Irvington on the Hudson but did not know that they were trying to influence legislation. I pointed out that I really didn't see that much difference between tithe money and corporate money, since it all belonged to the tithepayers. These Church corporations, I suggested,

did not belong to him, but to the body of the Church. I told him that I was positive that the majority of Mormons believed in social security, the United Nations, public housing and aid to education. I said that he was using Church funds to oppose programs that a majority of Mormons believe in. We had a very long and friendly discussion. At no time did he get angry. He went on to discuss the Church welfare program, and in discussing the Church welfare program it seemed to me that he changed sides. And I came away from the experience impressed that he was a man speaking in the name of the Lord when he said one thing, and speaking in the name of J. Reuben Clark when he said another. I didn't find the experience to be at all shattering. Quite to the contrary.

Dialogue: Do you feel a need to go to Church leaders when you come across something that might be damaging?

Anderson: Church leaders or non-church leaders. I don't write about people or institutions without checking. This is not special favor that I would accord the Church. If I had been writing about the Catholic church, I would have spoken to them.

Dialogue: Did you have any personal experiences with Apostle Benson while he was Secretary of Agriculture?

Anderson: I got along well personally with Brother Benson. In fact when he was Secretary of Agriculture and on a trip to Denmark, he made a point of looking up my parents who were on a mission there. Then he was kind enough to telephone me when he returned and give me a personal report on how they were doing. On religious or doctrinal questions, Brother Benson and I undoubtedly would agree. On political questions we undoubtedly would disagree most of the time. I believe that the John Birch Society, which he has upheld in his speeches, is as subversive as the Communist Party. I think both of these organizations are trying to overthrow democracy. And it is appalling to me, that a member of the Counsel of the Twelve would even indirectly support an organization whose leader has disavowed democracy and called for a dictatorship of the elite. I would be equally appalled if a member of the Counsel of the Twelve should turn out to be supporting the Communist Party. Any attack on democracy, whether from John Birch right or Communist left, is contrary to my view of the doctrines taught by the Church. I leave it to Brother Benson's conscience to justify what I'm sure he believes to be democratic.

The most dangerous of all moral dilemmas: when we are obliged to conceal truth in order to help the truth to be victorious. If this should at any time become our duty in the role assigned us by fate, how strait must be our path at all times if we are not to perish.

—Dag Hammarskjold

Dialogue: Are you ever asked any embarrassing questions about the Church?

Anderson: Constantly. Almost daily people ask me questions about the Church. I have never yet apologized for the Church. I have always defended the Church.

Dialogue: Do you see a need for somebody to play the same role in relation to the Church as you do to the national society?

Anderson: I don't think that the Church bans free discussion. I think that there are some basic doctrines in our theological system that cannot be challenged. Either we have a prophet who gets direct revelation or we don't. And if he gives us a revelation, if he gives us doctrine, then I don't think it is something that we can reject, unless we wish to reject the prophet, unless we wish to reject the Church. But I think that quite often general authorities indulge in speculation on basic doctrine and I think our right to speculate is as great as theirs. I accept as my authority for that statement President Harold B. Lee who, before he became prophet, visited Chevy Chase Ward, and spoke on this subject. I remember his sermon well. He said that the general authorities sometimes disagree among themselves on interpretation of doctrine. He said that their interpretation is not doctrine, and that the members of the Church had as much right to interpret as they did.

Dialogue: We were thinking more particularly along secular lines. For example the Church Building Committee, or some of the Church finance programs. We don't know that we've ever seen any tabulation of sources of income for general authorities, despite the fact that they do get salaries for working on Church corporations—fees and so forth. Do you think that there is a necessity for telling about that in the Church?

Anderson: I think that every tithepayer is entitled to know the salary and the expenses of the general authorities. This isn't anything that I think is a matter of national interest and therefore I wouldn't seek that information for the column. But it is a matter of Church interest and every tithepayer is entitled to know it. I think that the general authorities have an obligation to report to the tithepayers how much of the tithepayers' money they are using and for what purpose. I fully believe that they could give us that report without incriminating themselves. I believe that they are honest men and that they do not misuse tithe money.

Dialogue: We were interested in what you said in your column about the Indians at Cedar City.

Anderson: Here, again, I spoke with Spencer W. Kimball who, at that time at least, was handling Indian affairs for the Church. I disagree in part, although not entirely, with the Indian program. It seems to me that on the whole I have defended our policies toward the Indian. I have even answered those who criticized BYU for not having a large percentage of blacks. This question has been raised with me at universities in the East. When this has happened, my

rejoinder has been, "How many Indians do you have?" I find that they have almost none, or a very small percentage. I point out to them that BYU has a very large percentage of Indians. And I suggest to them that there are a lot of blacks in the East and a lot of Indians in the West. It seems quite normal that there would be more blacks in eastern schools and more Indians at western schools. I say that BYU is no more prejudiced against blacks than Princeton is against Indians.

But I have some question about our policy of taking Indian children away from their families. What it does, it seems to me, is fly in the face of our basic Mormon teachings of the family unit as the backbone of the Church. When you take a child away from his parents and put him in another home, you are saying to the child, "Your parents are not worthy, your parents are unable to take care of you." And you are saying to the parents, "You are unworthy of this child and so we are taking this child away from you to give him a better opportunity." I can't conceive of anything more disruptive to the family unit than to take the child from the parents, even though our efforts are well meaning.

Dialogue: What do you think we ought to do to alleviate poverty and ignorance among the Indians?

Anderson: The Mormon philosophy, which I share, is a hand up instead of a handout. I'd like to go in and help the Indians do what they do best.

Dialogue: Preserve their culture the way we have in Polynesia?

Anderson: Exactly. I think our policy in Polynesia should be applied to the Indians. I don't think that we necessarily have to make white men of them. They have every reason to be proud of their Indian heritage. We don't have to rob them of that heritage. Let us help them to build.