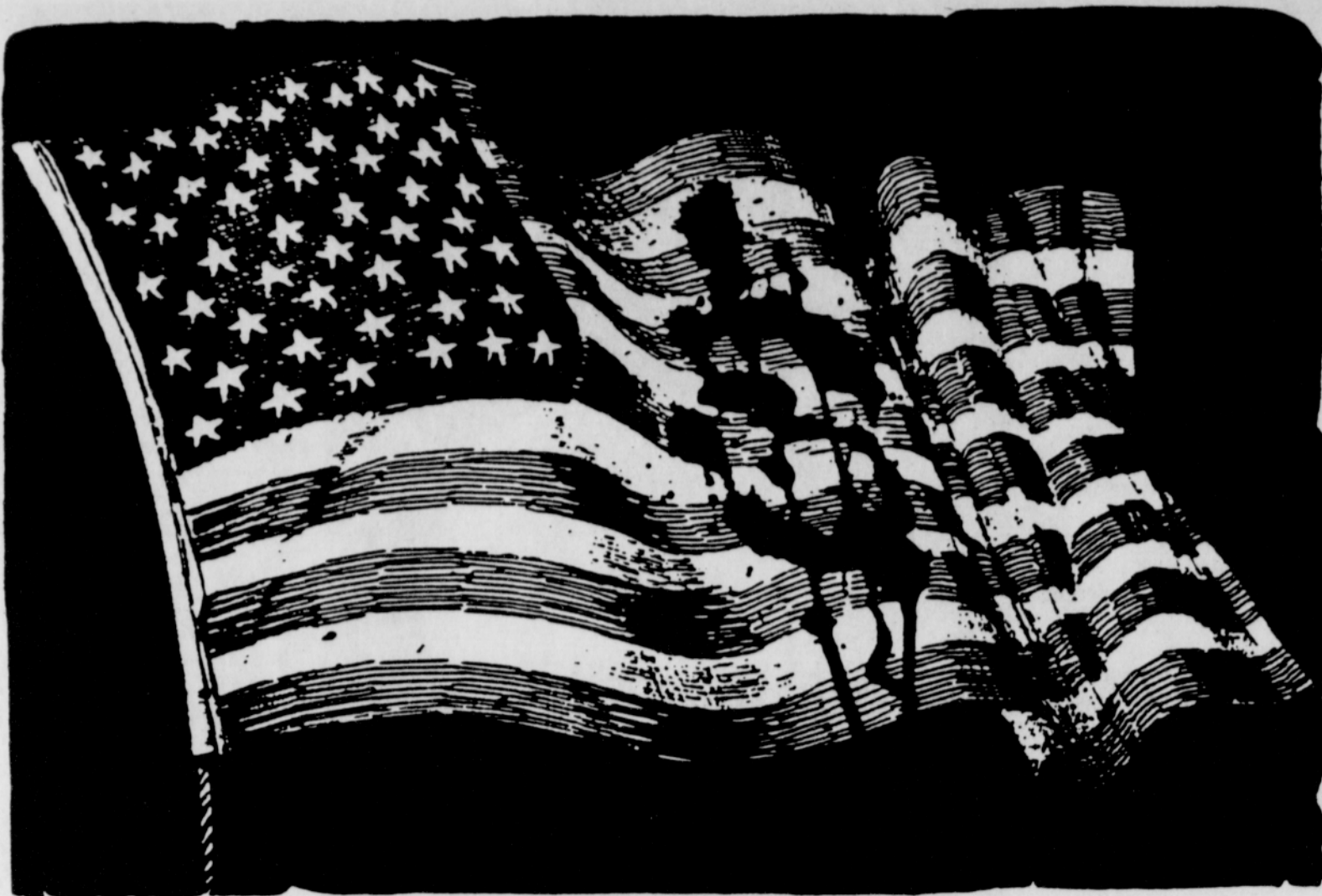




FROM THE TORONTO STAR

THE AMERICAN FLAG

HOPE OR BETRAYAL?

BY RICHARD JOHNSON

Old Red White & Blue, flying high over our schools, our city, state and federal institutions, and indeed over most major American enterprises. Many of us may feel this well indicates that what is happening below is good, worthy, wholesome and correct, just and respectable, certainly in our best national interest, and yes, in our personal interest.

Most of us think of the American Flag as a symbol of fairness, equal opportunity, peace, freedom and justice for all. Many of us feel it represents the 'best' country on planet earth, paid for in blood, sweat, and years of tears, taxes and toil. So many have given so much. Some feel now the USA is ichiban, numero uno, #1, the best, the paragon of how the rest of the world should be.

Although many will part company on some or all of these points, there is a great deal of general agreement none the less, which is understandable. What concerns me, however, upon closer investigation of this flag flying marvel and all its assumptions and deeds performed in the name of nationalism, is that we may in fact be perpetuating mass acceptance of activities which very often have aspects much different than they appear.

Something is alarming here that I feel bears some thoughtful consideration. As we pledge allegiance to our flag and the USA it represents, we unconsciously (often the case when we see the flag) condone and support, however subtly, those activities carried on underneath the flag. And upon closer scrutiny, we may well realize that we don't really agree or support what may be happening there totally or even at all.

Consider that inherent here is a condition of mass acceptance, a preconditioning that things are basically alright if the flag is flying, and we therefore may be inclined to think no further or only a little further, like token thinking, then onto other pressing matters at hand we go. You know, like fixing dinner, taking care of the kids, mowing the lawn, making a living, watching Rosanne or the Super Bowl, etc. Let me suggest this may be something like sheep to slaughter mentally.

Much of the time for lots of reasons, we are in an ongoing state of acceptance and complacency. And many of us assume that since we are such a great country things are fine and we will work out our problems satisfactorily as we plod along, no

need to worry too awfully much. The flag is there, sort of like a security symbol telling us things are under control, have faith and be patient. Our elected officials, our Prez and VP and the rest will handle matters well enough and let's think about what we're going to do Saturday night. Right? NOT!

In the last few years I have investigated and considered what is really going on in this country, and too much of what I find out is extremely disturbing and seems downright bad for most of us. Our flag flies over activities being conducted that are highly questionable as to their appropriateness and worth.

I think we should reconsider our own assumptions and awareness about what may be going on in places we see our flag flying. We should look at our own levels of understanding about such things as nuclear energy, television programming and media reporting of issues that affect our lives and future.

We should all be encouraged to take a new look at what may be disturbing us right now and follow it to its source. Then quietly and very carefully reassess what we find in terms of its appropriateness for people and not necessarily for business or government.

Are you comfortable with what you realize? If not, it is important to think about doing something to change it.

Should you be moved to some fact seeking of your own, avoid sources owned by large business enterprises such as mass media newspapers, TV, and the large circulation magazines. And pay less attention to the latest gossip of the day, this only distracts you from what is important.

Instead, look more to alternative sources of information, such as locally supported, listener sponsored radio and small newspapers typically distributed at colleges and by community political action groups. The public library is a good source of material by writers who are inspired more by speaking the truth than serving profit or power motives of big business or government.

You might challenge yourself to question seriously that which you accept in your life and be willing to open up to new ideas and information about the realities which confront us all. And to possible solutions that may appear strange or far out on the fringe. Maybe that which seems uncomfortable is what needs our attention most. Can we be receptive to change?

You may also wish to reconsider who you are as a hardworking individual who pays increasing taxes from shrinking wages, who in fact has a say in things. We are not

slaves to our government. We are still a democracy and it is our responsibility to keep government working in the real interest of the people, not special interests with lobbying power and large bankrolls to drive their narrow agendas.

To assume that because our flag is flying somewhere, all is well and fine below, in the White House or anywhere else in its shadow, may be a mistake. We need to know what is happening under our flag, and that it meets with our full approval, and if it doesn't, we better get clear why not and what does. We may find we have some work to do.

Our flag is too many a symbol of hope and freedom, individual opportunity, fairness and justice. But there most certainly is betrayal of these tenets, right under our flags. Those precious tax dollars mailed to Uncle Sam are spent in ways that should encourage most of us to demand the truth about where the money goes and who it profits. We should ask not only those who govern us but those we work for.

I am suggesting here a revolution in thought and our ability to demand and know the truth. We must be unwilling to accept anything less than what our flag symbolizes. Why should we stand by and be party to anything not meeting high standards of humane decency and sustainable life?

We need to turn off the TV, make it our business to get the true facts, do the work, be involved, and just get real responsible about the business of our country, our lives, our future. The choice is our own. We can be lazy, duped, misguided and sheeplike. We can act stupid, uninformed or pretend we just don't care very much. Or we can realize it is time for personal sacrifice for the sake of the generations who will follow, for if we don't do what is necessary, how shall we be judged?

Our flag is a great symbol but it is often shielding activities detrimental to you and me. We need to reevaluate what is going on underneath that flag to be sure those activities are just and fair and supportive of longterm well being for all living things here on mother earth. You count. Care enough for yourself to be informed and proactive for your own good. Know your power. Be your power. Get involved in the real business of your life while you still can.

Richard Johnson divides his life between Manzanita and Astoria.

