

When I Become the Enemy of America; and Who Decided That, Anyway?

The following article by Henry Scanlon was published on March 15, 1993 in *Newsweek Magazine* as one of its “My Turn” columns.

Background: For some time, Bill Clinton had been making political headway by promulgating—emphatically, repeatedly and effectively (from a political point of view)—the idea that the well-to-do amongst us were not being required to pay their fair share of the tax burden. Rather, he argued, the great masses of hardworking Americans (that is to say, the political base he was cultivating) were, in effect, subsidizing the “lucky rich”. Further, this was being done with the support (sometimes open and obvious, sometimes less so) and cheerleading of the political champions of those fortunate few—the Republicans...

This ongoing rhetoric, which was increasing in intensity at the time, had generated some spirited discussion about the unseemly “class warfare” that Clinton seemed willing to countenance in order to exploit.

On Saturday, March 3rd, 1993, Scanlon sat down and wrote the article in approximately two hours, and then sent it by messenger to the *Newsweek* offices the following Monday, March 5th. Two days later, on Wednesday, March 7th, Scanlon was contacted by a *Newsweek* editor who informed him that they wanted to publish it in the next week’s issue, which would hit newsstands six days later, on Tuesday, March 13th, with a dateline of March 15th. This meant that there were no more than three days to arrive at final edit, have the author’s picture taken, and prepare galleys for publishing. The result was that the timeframe from creation of the piece to nationwide distribution would be ten days. The *Newsweek* editor confided to Scanlon that this represented the fastest turnaround time from-submission-to acceptance-to publishing of any *Newsweek* “My Turn” column on record.

As originally submitted by the author, the title of the piece was, “When did I become the Bad Guy?”. At the editor’s suggestion, it was changed to, “Suddenly, I’m the Bad Guy.” Approximately 250 words were excised for space requirements.

Other than that, it ran as written.

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[*Newsweek Magazine*, March 15, 1993]

Suddenly, I’m the Bad Guy

Bill Clinton has me in his cross hairs because I am the enemy. I make more than \$100,000 a year. I am, therefore, a member of the “economic elite,” a recipient of all the opprobrium my status as a parasite deserves. Yes, I pay taxes, more real dollars than any 10 of my average fellow city dwellers combined, but I have gotten, nonetheless, a free

ride. I deserve scorn and contempt. I deserve to be nailed. I deserve to *not get away with it*.

In short, I'm what's wrong with America.

But I find myself wondering why I'm so confused and dispirited. I find myself asking just when it was, exactly, that I became a bad guy.

For example, I believe in taxes, America and the commonweal. And I used to believe that I was doing what I was supposed to be doing: creating jobs (and sharing the profits with my employees), trying to treat people fair and square and paying taxes. Lots of them.

In 1975, on the day I hired my first employee, I secured the best health insurance I could find for her. The cost then compared to 1993 was small, but from my vantage point—sleeping on the floor in my sister's apartment, working 70 hours a week while generating a personal paycheck amounting to about zero—it was a lot of money. But I believed that if anyone was willing to dedicate themselves to the photo business I was trying to build, they shouldn't have to worry about health care. Now, with more than 100 employees, I have had to ask them to contribute. But I don't think we had to change as a result of my being a parasite. I think we had to change because even though I was doing my job trying to run a growing company on sound economic and ethical principles (and doing it pretty well, I think) the people in Washington weren't doing theirs.

I don't think, therefore, that it was precisely then that I became a bad guy.

Maybe it was two years ago when we took a tremendous risk opening offices in Europe and began bringing back foreign currency to this country. But, no, everybody says that's a good thing, so it can't be that.

Maybe it was when we started doing some hiring through "America Works", an absolutely terrific organization that provides welfare recipients with the support and training to enter the work force. But if that's what makes me a bad guy, then I'm willing to be one.

To tell you the truth, I don't think it was any one of those things. I think I became a bad guy when Bill Clinton *needed* me to become a bad guy—for the same reason a pickpocket needs a "jostler"—to create a diversion.

No matter how much taxes are raised on folks like me, no matter how many surcharges are imposed, no matter how many deductions are eliminated—it doesn't amount to a hill of beans in generating real dollars toward reducing the deficit. There are just too few of us. I know that, and Bill Clinton knows that. If you take \$100 from 10 people, that's a lot less money than taking \$1 from 10,000 people.

But if you can get the 10,000 to focus on the \$100 you're taking from the 10, they might not notice the hand that's slipping into their own pocket. Or, better still, they won't care. Because they'll have the satisfaction of knowing the "fat cats" aren't getting away with it. As long as you keep thinking the problem with this country is that I don't pay enough taxes, you'll be diverted from demanding a solution to the real problem—the squandering and mismanagement of the taxes they already collect from all of us.

Positive contribution. As a result of many years of hard work, not a little bit of luck, the help and support of a second-to-none staff of unbelievably dedicated people and the fact that I live in a country that I adore and whose principles I support unconditionally, I now make a tremendous amount of money—and pay huge amounts of taxes without complaining. (Well, at least I don't complain any more than anyone else.) Believe me, I know what it is like to earn \$8,000 a year, or \$30,000 a year. And I do not expect for an instant that anyone would or should care whether I like or don't like the amount of tax I pay.

But I do expect this: I expect that after I have spent decades creating jobs, never cheating anyone, constantly trying to make a positive contribution to the society in which I live, doing everything I can to treat employees, customers and suppliers fairly, honestly and even generously, not only adhering to the founding principles of this country but actively trying to make an ongoing, positive contribution—I would not be spoken of by the president of my country as if I were a reptile.

I, like a lot of other members of the "economic elite," am ready, willing and able to support the Clinton initiatives for fundamental change. He and I are the same age, come from similar backgrounds and share, I think, some important core values. The only thing I ask is that he stop acting and talking as if anyone who makes more than \$30,000 a year is the enemy and that we've all been prancing around gleeful in the knowledge that we're *getting away with it*.

I don't feel like I've been "getting away" with anything. Whether the taxes I pay represent my "fair share" is a matter for debate. The ability to pay is only one prism through which to view "fairness". The ability to pay is essentially a practical issue—a valid one—but it is not necessarily an ethical one. By wrapping tax increases for the "economic elite" in an emotional mantle based upon a narrow and self-serving interpretation of the components of "fairness," Clinton fosters unnecessary and corrosive divisiveness throughout the economic spectrum.

While I claim no *greater* virtue for myself than any other hardworking man or woman in this country, I admit to no less. I don't consider myself the enemy of America. In fact, all in all, and on balance, I consider myself a pretty good guy. It would be nice if my president did, too.

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Quickly on the heels of this piece's publication, Scanlon was contacted by and was featured on a great many radio stations around the country. He reports:

"I was a bit trepidatious, at first, thinking that I was going to be something of a punching bag for the underpaid and under-appreciated workers of the world. I remember saying on one show—I believe it was the Bob Grant Show in New York—that 'I really don't want to be the poster boy for the filthy rich...'

"As it unfolded, however, I was pleasantly surprised—amazed, really—and enormously gratified by the overwhelmingly positive and supportive response my radio sessions generated-- mostly from those same hard-working folks that the Clinton's seemed willing to believe resented me and my 'ilk'. Almost without exception, the sentiment that came my way was, 'Hey, as long as you get there fair and square without cheating people or running over them—more power to you. That's what America is all about, and if you can do it, maybe I can, too...'"

Three years later, the Scanlon *Newsweek* piece was reprinted in a volume of essays produced by St. Martin's Press that also included work from luminaries ranging from Allan Bloom, Shelby Steele, P.J. O'Rourke, Langston Hughes, Peggy Noonan and Newt Gingrich—to Benjamin Franklin!

The book:

The Presence of Others

Voices that Call for a Response

By Andrea A. Lunsford & John J. Ruskiewicz

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