

OBSERVATION POINT

DISSENT

Agnew Should Know More

By Philip H. Power

"So how do you feel about Vice President Agnew now?"

Well, as a newspaperman, I feel about the vice president's remarks much as a lawyer feels when the Michigan State Bar Association is criticized or a doctor when the American Medical Association is attacked.

And I'm prone to feel, like my lawyer and doctor friends when they are under attack, that the vice president ought to know more about journalism before he starts taking the hide off it.

I suspect that most of these reactions are mainly emotional, and it's for this reason that I don't want to much further into them. Nor, for that matter, into the theory that Mr. Agnew is merely the vanguard of the Nixon Administration's effort to intimidate and control the news media in this country.

THERE ARE SOME points made by Mr. Agnew which deserve some comment, however.

The first has to do with the lack of objectivity in the news media. Whether it has to do with the way David Brinkley cocks his left eyebrow when making a sardonic remark or the manner in which the Washington Post editorializes on the war in Vietnam, this matter of what is objectivity and how to achieve it is no simple matter.

It's very, very difficult to have a totally objective news story. No two people observing the same event will write their news stories on it identically the same.

Further, a news story which merely describes precisely what happened may be inadequate to give the public a full understanding of that event.

Why did it happen? What does it mean? What are the probable future results? All these questions are appropriate to a news event, yet none can be answered in a rigidly descriptive news story.

This leads to the need for interpretive news reporting, which in turn poses problems with objectivity.

ELMER DAVIS, one of the most distinguished radio and newspaper men of our times, put the problem this way:

The good newspaperman and the good news broadcaster must walk a tightrope between two gulfs: on one side, the false objectivity that takes everything at face value and lets the public be imposed on by the charlatan with the most brazen front; on the other, the 'interpretive' reporting which fails to draw the line between objective and subjective - between a reasonably well-established fact and what the reporter and editor wishes were the fact.

Eric Sevareid, the TV commentator, has made much the same point: "Our rigid formula of so-called objectivity, beginning with the wire agency bulletins and reports ... our flat, one-dimensional handling of the news, have given, they lie the same prominence and impact that truth is given; they have elevated the influence of fools to that of wise men; the ignorant to the level of the learned; the evil to the level of the good."

If, for example, someone living in Redford Township issues a press release attacking Plymouth's efforts to develop the downtown area, that's news.

But if the man from Redford has never visited Plymouth, never talked to anyone involved in the downtown development, anything about how you go about developing a downtown - then the reading public has a right to know that, too. To do that demands interpretive reporting, if only to give the readers some way of evaluating the value of the Redford gentleman's remarks.

And, of course, if that is done by the newspaper, the gentleman from Redford will say the paper is not being objective.

Norman Isaacs, a distinguished newspaperman who spoke on this matter at the University of Michigan two weeks ago, made the point clear:

"And what is this interpretation? It is simply an honest effort to reach objective appraisal. It has to be based on the training in the field on his knowledge of the situation at hand, on his examination of the primary and related facts. It differs from editorial opinion because editorial comment is subjective judgment - the taking of sides."

SO THIS matter of objectivity isn't the easiest in the world.

Vice President Agnew may have been well-grounded in some of his criticisms of the news media - especially regarding the tendency of both TV and newspapers to sensationalize an event, particularly when it is being accompanied by people dressed in an outrageous manner while saying violent and inflammatory things.

But I think the vice president in trying to get the point about distorted coverage across has over-simplified the issue of objectivity.

This newspaper prints news stories, the key criterion for which is their accuracy; we would rather miss a story for an edition than run an inaccurate one.

This newspaper also prints stories that try to go into the background of an event, but we make clear that such stories are interpretations, and we label them "News Analysis" or "Background," just to make sure our readers aren't misled into thinking they are straight news stories.

And this newspaper prints editorials, from a number of differing points of view, on the theory that a good editorial will spur people to think. But this newspaper

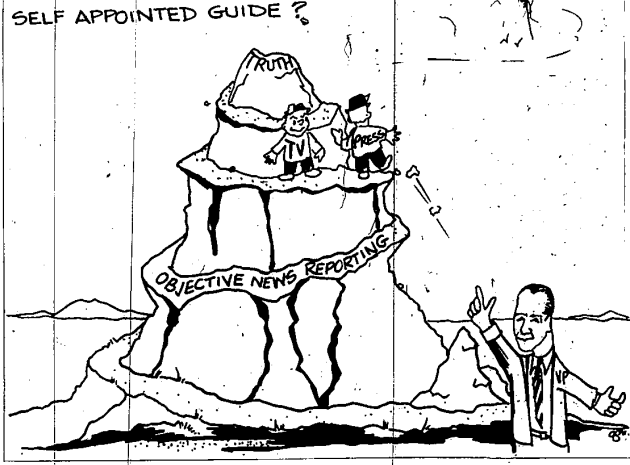
per makes sure that all editorials are labeled "Editorial," to make sure the reader realizes he's reading a piece which states an opinion.

No one newspaper, I believe,

can be completely objective all the time. All any newspaper can do - this one included - is to make accuracy the key factor in any news story, and then to alert the reader as to whether he is

reading news or interpretation or opinion.

It may be the most difficult course for a newspaper, but I believe it's the one that serves the public best.



R.T. Thompson writes

Visit Canada And Learn Just How Blessed We Yankees Are

After a recent visit to Canada, principally in the vicinity of Toronto which boasts three of the most powerful daily newspapers in the Dominion in the Globe and Mail, Star and Telegram, it is rather refreshing to get back to these United States and really wonder how lucky we are.

We complain about taxes, local, state and national. We have definite ideas on prochoiada. We have listened to the dissension created by sex education and we have moaned and groaned about the tremendous increase in interest rates on loans and mortgages.

Actually, we don't know just how well off we are until we begin to compare our complaints with those of Canada residents.

Two weeks in Canada has convinced us that we have little to complain about when we have a chance to read about the situation not farther than just across the Detroit River.

WE FELT THAT we had been stabbed in the back when the interest rates soared to eight and eight and a half per cent. It was something unheard of and we wondered just how a person could ever pay off a mortgage with that high rate.

But put yourself in the shoes of a young Canadian couple trying to buy a home. In the first place they have to have an exceptionally high down payment and then the mortgage interest rate is 12-1/2 per cent.

Of course, on the other side of the picture one could say that savings accounts draw 8-1/2 per cent interest compared to 5 and 5-1/2 here and point out it could make a big difference.

But paying 12-1/2 per cent interest on a mortgage which extends over a period of 25 to 30 years is something that we wouldn't like to have hanging over our head.

It is rather easy to get a loan on a new car in Canada. The purchaser needs only a minimal down payment but to secure the loan, he must have a statement from his employer, he must have a statement from his bank if he has one and he just about signs away his life - even then if he

misses a payment or two, the car is apt to be back on a used car lot - repossessed.

Then not too long ago, the Ontario Provincial government decided to levy a tax on meals and they didn't fool around.

ONE DOESN'T have to pay tax on a meal costing \$2.50 or less but there's a 10 per cent levy from \$2.51 and over. And it means exactly that - you pay 26 cents tax on a dinner costing \$2.51.

During the course of a two week vacation, one finds that the cost of eating out has mounted to quite a tidy sum - especially when one figures a tip on the cost of the meal plus the tax.

In addition, there's a little matter of an 18 cent provincial tax on the Canadian gallon of gasoline (five quarts in U. S. measurements) along with a federal tax. Small wonder that

gasoline costs 51 and 55 cents per gallon across the river.

A visitor from the United States to Canada can bring back \$100 in merchandise after a 48 hour stay - a Canadian visiting the United States can take back only \$25 in merchandise, all that is allowed by the government.

Most Canadians also pay a five per cent sales tax which is not placed on such items as children's clothes, many food items and the like.

But generally speaking, the average Canadian, who has less take home pay than the average American, pays more in taxes. We don't know how they do it, but most Canadians we met, were happy, cheerful and accepted the new taxes as something that had to be.

We only wish that the same kind of feeling existed here - it would be a much happier place to live.

Emory Daniels Writes...

Is Nixon Showing True Colors?

Richard Nixon's search for the "forgotten American" took an unexpected turn when he asked the television industry to join the ranks of the "silent majority."

For once in my lifetime, I find myself able to agree with Hubert Humphrey. The administration's actions during the weeks leading up to the anti-war demonstrations appear to be a deliberate attempt to harass dissenters, make criticism synonymous with disloyalty, and to replace the First Amendment with the spoils system.

The first episode was an announcement from the Secret Service that files would be kept on any individual participating in "anti-government demonstration" or threatening "to embarrass" public officials.

Like the old Alien & Sedition Acts, a citizen criticizing the administration is immediately suspect of sedition and has no right to privacy. Was the intent to scare demonstrators away from Washington, D.C. on Nov. 15? Or to warn the silent majority that protesters are seditious

and dangerous?

NEXT, NATIONAL GUARD headquarters sent out letters to state commanders urging Guardsmen to demonstrate in favor of the war. The attempt to entice the National Guard into the ranks of the silent majority is incredible.

Soon after, Guardsmen were being asked to sign letters supporting Nixon's position on Vietnam. Instructions asked Guardsmen not to use their military titles when signing the letters. "Civilian" signatures would aid the transition of the military to the silent majority.

Next, Spiro Agnew delivered his attack on television newscasters. The attack completed Nixon's plan to enlist the silent majority. Those 250,000 protesters were a distortion and should be ignored. The silent majority is still with Nixon, but we don't know it because the networks haven't told us yet.

The icing was applied by Attorney General John Mitchell's criticism of demonstration lead-

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By MICHAEL KILEY

It is my intention to rebut some of the opinions expressed in your Nov. 19 edition, in the Readers' Forum.

Though Agnew-styled verbal spewing cloud the substantive aspects of the Vietnam issue presented in recent letters, some valid questions were raised.

Robert Ashworth explains our fighting in Vietnam. "Since the beginning of this country we have always gone to the assistance of any country that needed it. We will continue to do this until the world ends."

Well Robert, your knowledge of history is hardly comprehensive. As for the future, I suggest you refer to President Nixon's most recent foreign policy statements.

Pvt. Ashworth, you might ponder these questions. Has the U. S. Senate declared war in Asia? If not, is that war constitutional? Is the government in Vietnam a legitimate one? Is it even a legitimate vehicle for democratic progress?

If so, please explain the gross corruption characterizing that government, the disenfranchised situation of the people outside of the city of Saigon?

Pvt. Ashworth has asked "Where would you like to see it happen?" His fatalistic assumption is that if communistic nationalism is allyed in Vietnam, our sovereignty is somehow challenged.

This country's leading scholars would disagree. Moralists would refute the idea that thousands must die because of the possibility there is a threat to our influence in a distant jungle.

Robert, I added this gem: "One nephew has a leg full of shrapnel from Vietnam, more nephews are due to go in. I don't like war; but can we afford to turn tail and run?"

Tall! That's pretty hairy. Nobody is suggesting that our men have not been courageous. Courage is also necessary to admit a mistake and make the appropriate adjustments.

In the same forum, Mildred Williams refers to the Presidential result of last year's campaign (hardly a mandate): "If we are not going to abide by the outcome of an election, then there really isn't much reason for having one."

I wasn't aware of any efforts to impeach or otherwise unseat our President. Are you denying the fiber of our constitutional intentions, intentions for a participatory democracy? Are citizens restricted to a once in four years shot at recognition? Totalitarian practices have been known to flourish from such provocative reactionary thought.

Am I suggesting peace at any price? Of course not; a reasonable price is no longer an attainable alternative. Each day that price swells, as do domestic crises and the chasm dividing our people. Peace.

ers for allowing violence after promising a peaceful protest. Violence at the Justice Department involved less than 1% of the total mass of demonstrators. Yet, Mitchell describes the peace march as "violent" and student leaders are now being investigated by the Justice Department. Is this distortion?

IF NIXON CONTINUES, the voice of the silent majority (which it's finally heard) will be meaningless because it was engineered and not allowed to speak naturally.

The silent majority probably supports Nixon's plan of phased withdrawal and is opposed to immediate withdrawal.

It is probably not necessary to engineer the voice of the silent majority - only necessary to wait until the nation speaks, and then to listen to it. It certainly is not necessary to amend the First Amendment or revive Joe McCarthy and Martin Dies. Nixon, once the bright young star of the Un-American Activities Committee, may be showing his true color.

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