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Harold Weisberg

Wrong-headed propagandist

My commentary on Roy Meachum's "Dark days" column of Friday, Oct. 2, written and mailed that same day, did not appear until Thursday, Oct. 8. In it I ridiculed Mr. Meachum's predicate, that in voting on the Robert Bork nomination the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee would be "slinking into the crowd of the Senate as a whole" where "they obviously hope their individual positions will get lost in the crowd." I noted that this was typical Mr. Meachum, the omniscient mind-reader. I noted also that no "slinking" would be possible and that there would, inevitably, be considerable published attention to all votes.

"Can anyone both honest and in his right mind," I asked, "believe that with all the exceptional attention to and controversy about the Bork hearings and nomination it could be possible for any senator to hide his vote in any way?"

Among other things, Mr. Meachum pontificated that the Democrats would hold their members strictly in line for a straight party-line vote on this nomination. I pointed out that were this the actuality there would have been no need for those hearings because the Democrats control the Senate and that the actuality was that the Republicans, on this matter, were not able to keep their members under Mr. Meachum's imaginary "tight control."

Well, four days after Mr. Meachum's typeset versions were published and my commentary was mailed the senate committee voted. It was broadcast live by radio, was on all TV newscasts, and without a single exception each of the senators was, as I'd predicted, quite explicit in stating his reasons for his vote. This was quite the opposite of Mr. Meachum's made-up "slinking." All were pointed and articulate.

Not only was it impossible for any senator to hide his position, it was politically unwise, as anyone making Mr. Meachum's pretenses about knowing Washington and politics should have known.

Now for Mr. Meachum's additional fabrication, one that it was really stupid to make up, that silliness of the committee members "obvious," no less, alleged "hope," that "their

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individual positions will get lost in the crowd" of 100 senators voting:

As of midday the day my commentary appeared, Oct. 8, a week after Mr. Meachum's right-wing extremist's nightmare pretended to be political commentary was published, 51 or a majority of the senators had stated a forthright and very public position against the Bork nomination. They did not have to — they wanted to. The voting had yet to come.

With only brief radio newscasts as of that midday, I cannot state that those senators who announced that day that they would vote against Mr. Bork's nomination issued detailed explanations of their positions, but I can and do state that the first 49 did exactly that.

This is to say that once again, in excruciating detail, Mr. Meachum was entirely wrong. Or, as I've said over and over again, without a single refutation, and as I said in the commentary I wrote Oct. 2, Mr. Meachum was once again inventing truth to serve his prejudices and preconceptions and at the same time was flaunting his ignorance.

He wasn't right about anything. That is his usual condition when he writes about national and international affairs.

Mr. Meachum has the right, as I said, to deify Mr. Bork and President Ronald Reagan, but he also has the obligation to be factual and truthful. He wasn't.

He did refer to what he described as Mr. Reagan's "incandescent presence." He also called Mr. Reagan "a bigger than life icon." This gets close to deification. How brilliant is Mr. Meachum's incandescent icon when he actually depended upon getting the votes in support of Mr. Bork from those conservative southern Senators against whom Mr. Reagan had campaigned vigorously? When despite Mr. Reagan's efforts to defeat them and

his expenditure of considerable GOP funds in the attempt they were elected — by the votes of the southern citizens who were so articulate and united in opposing Mr. Bork?

Those conservative southern senators came out against his incandescent iconship and against Mr. Bork.

Mr. Meachum once proclaimed, with his customary detachment from reality, that when he makes a mistake he admits it. He had ample opportunity after the committee's broadcast and extensively-reported vote. But, consistent with several years of egregious error, never once retracted or apologized for, he did not.

There is no requirement that a columnist be right in his expression of opinion. There is, however, the reasonable presumption that he tries to be accurate and truthful, that he not merely make up and present as fact whatever at any moment seems congenial to the prejudices with which he begins and the political positions he had stated earlier.

Mr. Meachum has once again proven himself, as my cited commentary begins, a columnist rather than a columnist and a propagandist rather than a real thinker.

Once again he has corrupted fact and truth to prejudice the views of those who read our only local newspapers. Once again he has heaped calumny on those he does not like and still again his column has been amateurish propaganda rather than factual and thoughtful. **FACTUAL**

Once again, unfortunately, this appears to be the standard and the desire of the papers. And once again, this relates to matters of considerable import. I do regret it, as I very much appreciate the papers' fairness in publishing contrary views. However, it is axiomatic that the refutation rarely catches up with the misrepresentation.

Frederick ought be entitled to honesty, fairness and truthfulness in both reporting and commentary, and those who are not intimately conversant with national and international affairs ought not have their trust imposed upon or their minds and beliefs twisted by a wrong-headed propagandist pretending to be a political commentator.

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