

News vs. Gossip

By William Randolph Hearst Jr.
Editor-in-Chief, The Hearst Newspapers

That President Nixon is sending his top aide, Henry Kissinger, to Hanoi, would seem sufficient evidence of the President's continuing trust in the capabilities of Henry K. Not, however, if one keeps reading some of our "liberal" columnists and listening to the commentators of the same stripe. These would have you believe there is a growing, boiling feud between the President and Kissinger which will surely erupt any second.

Fortunately, the public is not generally fooled by these conjectures. These same "experts" vilified the President from here to hell and gone when he resumed the bombing so as to get Hanoi back to the peace table. We all know he succeeded even though you don't hear much about that from



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these birds. But the public is obviously happy with the Nixon results.

In a recent issue, The New York Times, to their credit, printed an article by Charles W. Colson, special counsel to President Nixon. I say to their credit, because, as readers of this department know, I have often been critical of the manner in which the Times and others are sometimes inclined to interpret the news rather than just report it. It's a type of journalism I never could buy because usually it's editorializing rather than reporting and it damages the reputation of newspapers for accuracy.

At any rate the Times did print the Colson article in which he pretty well laid the ghost of the Nixon-Kissinger feud to rest. Here are some excerpts from it:

"On the C.B.S. Evening News, Monday, Jan. 8, 1973, Dan Rather announced to the twenty million faithful followers of the Cronkite show that the reported rift between the President and Henry Kissinger was 'past the rumor state to the fact stage.' He thereby elevated to gospel that which had been for weeks the speculation of Washington commentators and columnists.

"Mr. Rather's 'fact' was a full-blown myth born in the Washington Georgetown cocktail circuit."

And further, "elevating this piece of gossip to serious national news was quite another story. This was not merely fodder for the banal inanities which float around the Washington elite in their social gatherings. This was an effort, perhaps deliberate, to drive a wedge between the President and his closest foreign-policy adviser in the way that could only hamper the very delicate negotiations then under way.

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"GEORGE MCGOVERN, who since Nov. 8 has acted as if the election were still to be held, helped dignify the myth on the N.B.C. Today show, Dec. 26, when he said:

"I think there's developing a fundamental conflict between his (Kissinger's) view of the war and Mr. Nixon's view of the war."

"Joe Kraft, whose column appears regularly in the Washington Post, is a favored critic of the war. Though Kraft has never made a correct prediction or assessment on the conflict, his columns are holy writ to the 'sellout brigades.' Thus, Kraft's contribution to the myth was that Kissinger really abhorred the policy he was executing and merely lent 'a cover of respectability to whatever monstrous policy President Nixon is pleased to pursue.' Kissinger, in Kraft's words, had been 'compromised, and everybody in town knows it.' That meant everybody but President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger."

Continued Colson:

"One thing is clear: There was no Nixon-Kissinger rift and through all of the torrent of gossip-column reports, President Nixon and his chief negotiator persevered to achieve that which many thought the President would never achieve — an honorable and successful peace in Vietnam."

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COLSON CITED OTHER EXAMPLES but these make the point. All of this is not to say that opinion is not a valid part of newspapering but it should be labeled as such and not be presented as factual news, particularly when it is about our top administration figures during very ticklish negotiations. It is in my opinion nothing short of reprehensible journalism.

However, playing the devil's advocate for a moment, I must make the point strongly that the President could alleviate a great deal of this type of gossip-mongering if he would just meet with the press more often.

We all know his decision to stay mum during the secret Paris talks and during the renewed bombing turned out to be wise and prudent. Nevertheless, were he to meet with the press on a more consistent basis in as frank a way as he did during the past week, many silly rumors could be quashed before they ever got started.

For instance, when a newsman suggested at that last conference that Nixon might prefer John Connally of Texas as his successor, the President replied he would be a fool to make any choice at this juncture. He went on to warn any potential candidate against announcing his intention at this stage of the game. He pointed out that there are many promising men across the country — governors, senators, etc. and, of course, referred to his own vice-president. Thus the end of a rumor that might have columned and gossiped us to death.

So, Mr. President, tell us every bit as much as you can—most of us want to help.