

6 Sept. 1972

Dear Harold:

This is in reply to your memo to LF and myself regarding the lack of TV coverage of Larry O'Brien's charges against the Republicans.

In my opinion, this appears to have happened late on a Friday, at which time the weekend already would have begun and decision-making wheels would be scarce around any news studio. Consequently a weekend staff probably would have been reluctant to take responsibility for airing such serious charges. It goes without saying that this situation should have been provided for and the necessary authority delegated if that were necessary.

However this is only the beginning. It is axiomatic in any country I've ever heard of that the media treat the government in power with what is called objectivity but in reality means giving it every possible break. This is because of the possibility of drying up official sources of news, for one thing, and because many governments can retaliate drastically without trouble.

But this also is only the tip of an iceberg. We have been talking about what really amounts to policy on the part of business corporations, and this applies to all media, not just TV. A corporate decision is just that, not a professional decision. Its motives are totally unprofessional, and ~~its~~ its product emerges unaffected by ethical or professional considerations only when these do not interfere with its attraction for audience or circulation. A pro would consider this story essential, if not important. A hired hack would hesitate because of possible consequences and rationalize that he was unable to obtain what passes for balancing comment.

I think there is still more to it, a element of class aspirations in what we still think of as a society in which there is upward mobility. You do not improve your upward mobility by hassling the establishment or encouraging those who do. The individual newsman, faced with a decision like this in a society like ours, meets his professional responsibility at his risk alone. He knows from experience that when the chips are down his management rarely will back him up, that if management has to choose between supporting an underling whose has made waves or tossing him overboard to appease the powers that be, only in the rarest cases will management do what it professes to be dedicated to doing, report what is going on and let the chips fall where they may.

There may be other factors involved, but I think these more often are the controlling ones.

jdw6sept72