

Mr. Nixon And The Press

by James Reston

Washington, Oct. 5 - You can hardly pick up a newspaper these days without finding some new evidence that the freedom of the press is being nibbled away in this country, and what's equally significant, that quite a few people think this is not a bad idea.

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The consequence of these recent court cases and these successful political and publicity tricks, however, are not unimportant, and this is not merely a struggle between the Government and the press and television. For Mr. Nixon is not only defeating Senator McGovern, but he is defeating the press and what is more important the American democratic system.

He is a master of the technique of propaganda and evasion, and the more they succeed, the more they establish a pattern for the whole Government. Once the officials of a Government see that the President regards reporters as instruments of his policy rather than as servants of a society that lives by accurate information - and assumes an attitude of mutual hostility - you may be sure that this mood will infect the whole bureaucracy.

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With laws like these plus the techniques of publicity and evasion, even the boldest and most honorable men in Government are now more scarce and cautious than ever in my memory.

This, of course, is precisely what the President and the Vice President apparently had in mind, and let's face it, they have won. The only trouble is that the country is losing something of fundamental importance, and the public is taking it all with indifference if not actual approval.