

World of Books

The Selling Of the Government

William Hogan

THE TIMING of David Wise's solidly documented and uncompromising book "The Politics of Lying: Government Deception, Secrecy and Power" is both accidental and fascinating. Wise is a political writer based in Washington, the author (with Thomas B. Ross), of "The Invisible Government," an informative analysis of the CIA. He has been working on the present book for some time.

Lying in American politics is nothing new as Wise shows in this explosive survey. But over the past four administrations the words of his subtitle "deception, secrecy and power," have been building up to a Watergate mentality in which the American public seems to be some kind of enemy of the government, especially the Executive branch.

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WISE's examples are concentrated mainly in the Johnson and Nixon administrations. He brings his story up to Watergate, at least to the early stages of it, to the point where Presidential press secretary Ron Ziegler kissed off the break-in as "a third-rate burglary attempt."

One wonders in reading this book if the author is engaged in some fictional "Seven Days in May." He isn't. Just last year he tells us in one remarkable piece of news to me, eight men were recruited, under the Department of Defense, as the core of an apparatus known as the U.S.

Office of Censorship. Because of the unpleasant sound of that word, the Nixon Administration changed the name to War-time Information Security Program (WISP).

But what, Wise asks is "wartime"? Technically not Vietnam. These censors can be ordered into action any time the President wishes to do so. They can "arbitrate" what the public can see, hear and read. If ordered, the apparatus could move to cable heads and other strategic locations to censor mail, cables, phone calls. This is only one case of Orwellian planning Wise discusses in a book that should arouse all citizens. The book deals with the future, the present, the recent past and suggests the government itself is diminished.

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"THE Politics of Lying" is first-rate investigative journalism by a concerned writer who shows in this reportage the urgency for a return to credibility; the ending to the use and misuse of communications as an instrument of policy; of political image-making by professional public relations people, and to clandestine politics and coverups.

In "Common Sense" (1776), Thomas Paine appealed to the common man to declare his independence. As a reporter David Wise appears to be working in that tradition (Random House: \$8.95 — and a paperback edition soon, please, so everybody can get it).