

Herblock

On Watergate and Snooperstate

Excerpts from a talk before the National Press Club on May 23:

I hope you don't mind meeting here in this unusual way. I was originally going to follow the normal procedure of asking each of you to go to a telephone booth on a parkway near your home, and to wait for me to put in a conference call under the name of Watson.

After I said, "Hello, Watson, this is Watson speaking," you were supposed to give the code words, "Who's on first?" and then I would proceed to talk.

The job of a cartoonist is not to recite good news or to say, "Let us now praise famous men." A cartoonist should really be the kid in the Hans Christian Anderson story who says, "The emperor has no clothes on."

People keep telling me that I should be having a great time these days, and I wish I were. But it gets to be too much to have to keep saying the emperor has no clothes on and to keep adding, "Good grief—the whole bunch have no clothes on!"

Cartooning is an irreverent form of expression—and I think most needed when high officials seem to get higher and higher from inhaling power.

Americans who used to ask each other "What do you think Roosevelt will do?" or "What's Truman up to?" or "What do you think Eisenhower will say?" now ask each other what they think *The President* will do. In some way the office has become so sacred, that any occupant becomes a kind of Mr. President Superstar. And an ordinary mortal name is not good enough any more.

We should have known something was wrong when we heard about a "Committee to Re-Elect the President." If they didn't even want to mention the name of the candidate, we might have guessed they weren't going to want to name his campaign contributors either.

It is 10 months since President Nixon referred to Watergate as a "very bizarre incident," and it is two weeks

since he referred to it as a "very deplorable incident." That shows progress. But not very much. And the recent White House comments on the good work of the press are already on the verge of becoming "misspoken" or "inoperative."

In any case I cannot say that I feel gleeful, or even complacent.

For one thing, the present administration is still pushing in Congress what has been called an "official secrets act." The proposed law would make it a criminal offense to disclose anything marked with a classified stamp, however wrongly it might be classified. It would provide the complete cover-up for all government mistakes and misdeeds. And with 20,000 rubber stamps, it would stamp out the people's right to know about their government.

I don't think our real national security is to be found in the use of rubber stamps—or rubber gloves.

Several people have recently expressed a proper concern for the reputations of public officials. And Vice President Agnew has specifically warned that "many in public life are damaged by snide remarks." Recently he also referred to "personal abuse" and "innuendo."

I think this is certainly something to watch out for; and I can think of some awful examples:

Such men as Cyrus Vance, Sen. Edward Kennedy, Sen. William Fulbright and New York Mayor John Lindsay have been accused of being "sunshine patriots" and "summertime soldiers."

A man who has served his country as wisely and well as Averell Harriman—among the first Americans to warn of the danger of Stalin's policies, and a man highly praised by Winston Churchill—was not spared from the smear-gun. It was carefully implied that he sold out Poland to Stalin for a pair of horses, and that the Ho Chi Minh Trail should be called Harriman's Highway.

The name of Republican Congressman Paul McCloskey, a Korean war

hero, was publicly linked to that of Benedict Arnold.

These are among the snide innuendos and reflections on the characters of public officials which came from one source—Spiro T. Agnew.

The constant cry of this administration has been that there is bias in the news and that they want better balance in the media. So do I. Before Watergate, most of what we got in the way of news about government every day, every week, every year, was news of, by and for the executive branch of government—and that is the news that has needed to be balanced.

Most of the news from Washington is what the President says, what his press secretary says, what his Vice President says, what his cabinet members say, what the Pentagon says, and so on. I don't recall any of these people talking about the administration not doing a fine job.

I don't know why any President should have all three major networks at his disposal any time he chooses to speak, except in case of national emergency. And I've always felt that presidential speeches not only should be analyzed but that the people should be given a chance to hear a reply.

The present administration has not cared much for answering questions from the press or from Congress. But it's been big on giving out statements. It has created *communications* staffs—all of them engaged in one-way communications.

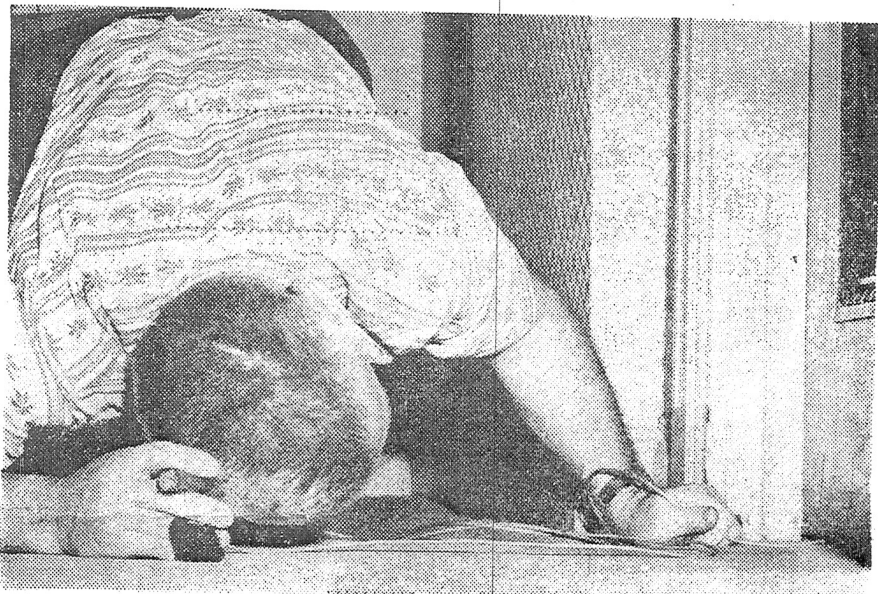
Washington Post columnist Mike Causey has written of how the White House communications department has set quotas for speeches and propaganda material to be filled by information chiefs and department heads. There have been handy-dandy ready-prepared "communications" kits to help out these officials—and also handy aids for the media. Free recorded news items have been provided for radio broadcasting—and free government-produced canned editorials have been sent broadside to small newspapers. In that way, the executive branch, not only makes its own news, but also creates its own editorial comment on the news.

These are examples of *your tax dollars at work*—often against you or against your congressmen. It is sort of a switch on the Marshall McLuhan idea that the medium is the message. The administration idea has been that the media should be the messenger boy.

From all its crying about the media, you would not know that in the 1968 election, 80 per cent of U.S. newspapers (with 82 per cent of newspaper circulation) endorsed President Nixon, or that more than 92 per cent endorsed him in 1972.

So if the administration had 80 per cent of the press, all it wanted was just a fair 50-50 split of the remaining 20 per cent. And then half of the remaining 10 per cent and so on—until it would have 99 44/100 per cent of a not-very-pure press.

Through more than one administration there's been a trend toward what I've called the Secret Snooperstate—in



which the government pries more and more into the lives of private citizens, while keeping more and more of the government's business from the people. In the past four years this trend has been stepped up by officials who have acted as if the U.S. government was their private property.

Privacy has been for government people. And after reading the disclosures of some of the methods used, it's easy to see why they wanted it. Never did so many people need so much privacy.

I recall Mr. Nixon frequently reminding us that he is a lawyer. And he has referred to some of his advisers as "lawyers' lawyers." It's surprising in this law-and-order administration how many of those lawyers' lawyers now seem to need lawyers' lawyers' lawyers to keep them out of jail.

Incidentally, in the future, newsmen who are sent to jail for not disclosing their sources might find jail a pretty good place to get acquainted with some interesting sources.

Lately there has been a rash of articles anguishing over the possibility of what is called a crippled presidency. The only way the presidency can be damaged is by making the White House a "safe house" for wrongdoing.

The role of the free press in all this has been to do exactly what it was set up to do—to act as a check on all government.

When the Watergate disclosures began, I did a kind of cram course on comparative corruption and read up on the Harding administration, which was widely regarded as holding the record up to that time. I discovered that one of the people who took the lead in disclosing Teapot Dome was a man who later became a U.S. Senator, Clinton Anderson—just recently retired.

In the early 1920s Clinton Anderson was reporting and editing on The Albuquerque Journal, published in the home state of Secretary Albert B. Fall. This paper suffered severe reprisals for exposing the scandals. In a book titled "Teapot Dome," by M. R. Werner and John Starr, there is a short description of a brief encounter:

After The Albuquerque Journal began writing about the lease to Teapot Dome, Fall came into the newspaper office one day and asked in his characteristic loud tones, "Who is the son of a bitch who is writing those lies about me?" Anderson, a tall man, stood up and said, "I'm the son of a bitch, and I don't write lies." Fall left the office quickly.

Clinton Anderson certainly knew how to make himself perfectly clear.