

By Patrick J. Buchanan

WASHINGTON—The ambitiousness of Ben Bagdikian's attack upon the President's daily news summary [Op-Ed, Nov. 1] should not go unnoted. What other "press critic," in America possesses the singular effrontery to fob off on The New York Times 900 words of critique and analysis about a publication he has never seen nor read?

In the last five years, the President's news summary staff—over whom I have jurisdiction, but to whose work I rarely contribute—has produced an estimated 1,300 editions. Mr. Bagdikian managed to discourse learnedly upon the merits of this voluminous production from the unique perspective of never having read a single issue.

His bill of particulars was based, in its entirety, upon a 30-month-old analysis of a single section of one edition of the summary, penned by an employe of The Washington Post Company, an institution whose own reputation for "accuracy, fairness and balance," where the President is concerned, is not widely celebrated.

Should some enraged pamphleteer, who had never seen nor read a single edition of The Times, arrive at the Op-Ed offices with a 900-word screed against The Times based solely on a suspicious 30-month-old analysis in Human Events, I am confident Harrison Salisbury would have alerted, not his editors, but the security police. Why were these standards suspended for Mr. Bagdikian?

Given his unfamiliarity with his subject, one should not hold Mr. Bagdikian too strictly to account for stumbling into contradictions. Nevertheless, in paragraph one, he darkly suggests that the President's news summary may have "reinforced" Mr. Nixon's profound animosity toward professional journalism. By paragraph nine, however, the news summary has "systematically omitted public condemnation of the President." Will Mr. Bagdikian please explain how a news summary can reinforce the President's "animosity" toward the press, if we are "systematically" scissoring out all the nasty things reported or said about him?

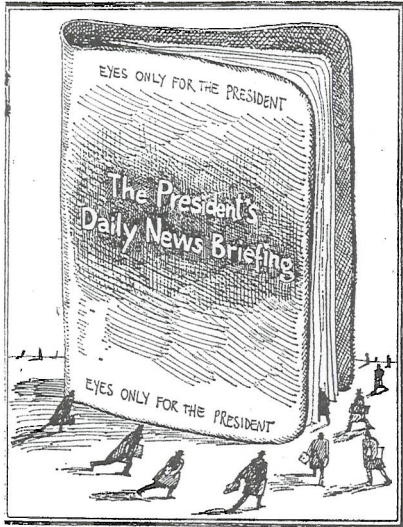
With professional media critics like Mr. Bagdikian, small wonder we amateurs dominate the field. His own phrase, "slovenly and misleading reporting" is the most charitable label one can apply to his little essay.

Moreover, it is no coincidence that the massive decline in public confidence in America's communications cartels has been coterminous with the passing of genuine journalistic watchdogs like A. J. Liebling and their replacements with mascots like Mr. Bagdikian.

But the more effective witnesses than I to the quality of the President's news summary are professional journalists themselves familiar with the product. Herewith a sample of testimonials:

Columnist Jack Anderson: "... carefully objective . . . comprehensive. . ."

Jules Loh, Associated Press: "From the day of the Watergate break-in a year ago, news summaries placed daily on President Nixon's desk have spelled out allegations reported in the press on all aspects of the scandal . . . they have not spared him embarrassing details or critical comments."



Eugene Mihaesco

James Naughton, New York Times: "The summaries are, perhaps surprisingly, objective . . . it is possible to agree with Mr. Safire's description that the news digest is a 'brilliant job.' . . ."

William McGaffin, Chicago Daily News: "... A full and accurate account of the Watergate scandal has been presented to the President. He has not been spared any of the embarrassing details."

Paul Healy, New York Daily News: "... (the) digest has faithfully reflected the media's overwhelming preoccupation with Watergate, and has reported it straight. It has not spared the President the barrage of newspaper, network and magazine speculation about his possible resignation or impeachment."

Robert Pierpoint, C.B.S. News: "... when he is finished (with the news summary) the President, Claims Buchanan, knows more than any well-informed reporter. It hurts to say so, but Buchanan is very possibly correct."

Modesty prevents further recitation. To demonstrate, however, that the extracts are representative, the full articles, with others of similar character, are being routed along to The Times, in the event that when the moon is again full, the specter appears anew at the outer office.

But enough powder has already been expended on this tertiary target.

The question at issue is not vapidity on that attack in the news summary, but the validity of the President's allegation that recent reportage of Watergate developments has been unbalanced, unfair, and indeed, hysterical.

Exhibit A: On the Monday night [Oct. 22] before Congress' return, the network evening news ran nineteen separate attacks upon the President (including commentaries), many calling for resignation and impeachment, balanced by two unvarnished defenses.

Exhibit B: Rather than setting the firing of Archibald Cox and the "Stennis compromise" in perspective, the Saturday night network specials contributed to the national hysteria. In the phrases of Chicago Tribune columnist Bob Wiedrich, the network's "almost paranoid," indulged themselves in "manufactured fervor," and "instant panic."

Exhibit C: On the evening of Henry Kissinger's press conference on the Middle East war and national alert, N.B.C. ran all four questions and answers (excepting only one question) dealing with press suspicions that the military alert had been ordered by the President for domestic political reasons—thus hammering into the national consciousness the media's own esoteric suspicions.

Exhibit D: Archibald Cox was given, by a worshipful Walter Cronkite on his C.B.S. evening news, an almost unprecedented ten minutes of interview time, for two minutes worth of news—a privilege accorded by Mr. Cronkite only to Messrs. John Dean and Daniel Ellsberg in the past.

Exhibit E: C.B.S. ran, in recent weeks, three network news stories, one of eight minutes' duration, about Mr. Rebozo, the competing bank and proposed savings and loan in Key Biscayne, leaving the nation with the suspicion of massive influence peddling. This despite the fact that no such unfair influence has been demonstrated, and, as The Washington Star-News wrote, "there is no evidence of any political influence figuring in either Federal ruling, a full check of the files

made available by the controller's office indicates."

Exhibit F: John Dean, the President's accuser at the Ervin hearings, was run for five consecutive days on all three networks, while none of the President's defenders, Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Ehrlichman or Mr. Mitchell, men in senior position, were given equal coverage. Why?

What of the President's contention that terms such as pirate, dictator, "lost his senses" have been linked with his name and conveyed to the nation by the national media?

Herewith a few samples: "... Hanoi radio said the bombings indicate President Nixon has taken leave of his senses."—Walter Cronkite, Dec. 21, 1972.

The United States "has embarked on a large-scale terror bombing" with the operative word, "unrestricted"—Dan Rather, Dec. 20, 1972.

Mr. Nixon is acting like a "mad man, a tyrant or both" said Ralph Nader, to which Mr. Muskie cried "Dictatorship," and Congressman Koch retorted "lawbreaker." "We no longer have a President; we have a dictator," said The New Orleans States-Item, and to The London Times correspondent on the scene . . . "The whip of the gestapo was in the clear October air."

Mr. Anthony Lewis' sensitive nostrils picked up the "smell of an attempted coup d'état." To Julian Bond, the President was an "outlaw," the "Jessie James of Washington, D.C." Senator Robert Byrd had a dual entry: "Brown, shirt operation" and "gestapo tactics," while Prof. Raoul Berger asserted the President was leading us down "the road to tyranny, dictatorship and Hitlerism." Senator Kennedy's speechwriters weighed in with . . . "a reckless act of desperation by a President . . . who has no respect for law and no regard for men of a conscience."

All this over the firing of Mr. Cox, and the offer to have Judge Stennis rather than Judge Sirica hear the tapes.

The only comic relief from the collective nervous breakdown was provided by the junior Senator from California. As the howl of liberal solon after solon from Capitol Hill came crackling over the wires, accusing the President of defying one or another of the other two branches of government, Congress or the court, John Tunney came storming forth from his favorite discotheque to declare: "The President has committed a monstrous action. He is now openly defying all three branches."

Calvin Coolidge, thou shouldst be living at this hour.

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