

though British society were evolving along the lines of F.A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*.

That said, it has become a fashionable game during the past ten years to predict one or another tyranny for the United Kingdom. Novelists, playwrights, newspapers, magazines, and television have all played this Orwell-monopoly: Cast your dice, pick a card, go directly to a dictatorship; do not pick up your human rights, do not pass go. With all the poison in the political atmosphere (and there has been nothing like it since the seventeenth century), there is still far more resilience in the social and economic fabric of Britain than one might imagine from the dema-

gogy of Michael Foot or Tony Benn. Paradoxically, the surly indiscipline of the unions, which has done so much economic harm, remains a sporadic source of flexibility and strength in the body politic—though there is an important caveat to this. Loyalty to unions has repeatedly been placed before the public interest, and sometimes exploited for ugly political purposes. Protestant workers literally struck down the Sunningdale Agreement on power-sharing in Ulster in 1974. Strikes brought down the Heath government in the same year, and destroyed support for Callaghan in 1979, and these are not the only cases in point. The latest attack by a union on government policy is the

Civil Servants' "industrial action." With the single exception of the hideous "winter of discontent," none of these maneuvers has aroused real public anger. This suggests a public opting out of the political process, except for the ritual casting of a vote, as villagers kill the corn spirit and set up a new straw figure to make a better harvest next year. There is an apparent willingness to gape passively as government and pressure groups battle it out, the electorate never considering the government as guardian of the public interest.

If Mrs. Thatcher's gamble succeeds, she may be able to modify or reverse this process. There are those

who are more interested in her failure than in the recovery of Britain. But so far she has been a stimulant to morale, even among her opponents—something the British electorate needs far more than any electoral bribe. The public may sense this, and it may be why even a Socialist taxi-driver is willing to give her a chance. Certainly she is the luckiest political leader since Harold Macmillan, but whether this will carry her through the next couple of years is another matter. So far neither the Tories nor any other party have a credible substitute for her or for her policies. If she is knocked down it will be very bad luck—not just for her, but for Britain, too. □



J.C. SUPERSTAR

by Michael Ledeen

The event of the month was of course the "Jimmy" scandal in the *Washington Post*. In a way this was like the story of the idol with clay feet, for it brought home to the press what the public had long realized: Journalists had been corrupted along with everyone else, and were no more reliable than anyone else. Of course, the psychological effects on the *Post*'s self-proclaimed stars were shattering: Bob Woodward had been warned about the "Jimmy" story, but didn't check it out, and it seems that even the great Ben Bradlee had had his chances earlier, but stuck with the story when it was challenged by the Washington police force and the mayor.

A lot has been made of the operational failure: No editor insisted that Ms. Janet Cooke, the author of the fraud, identify the real source of the story. That is, she was never made to give the actual name of "Jimmy" and/or "Jimmy's" pusher and/or mother to an editor at the *Post*. At a meeting in Washington just after the scandal, members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors permitted themselves the self-serving observation that if the

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Post's editors had done their job right, the story would never have been published. They went on to explain that this meant the journalist should have been forced to share her source(s) with her editor.

Similar remarks were made by Anthony Lewis and Abe Rosenthal at the *New York Times*, with the latter quoted as saying that if a journalist didn't feel like identifying his sources to an editor at the *Times*, said journalist could find another newspaper to write for.

It seems to me that these remarks miss the point, which is the old problem of "what is the truth?" In a city like Washington there is never a lack of sources for whatever you wish to establish. On the sort of problems I work on, for example (foreign policy, intelligence questions, strategic issues), I generally get directly conflicting information from excellent sources. And I could satisfy the most exigent editor on the matter of sources, even giving names and telephone numbers of people who would confirm what they had said. Yet in many cases the story would be wrong, and could be demonstrated to be wrong by adequate footwork and brainwork.

William Safire got at this question in his usual cunning way when he admitted that he himself had got

stories wrong in the past. Indeed, he had got one wrong just the week before, when he found a way to blame his favorite scapegoat—Secretary of State Haig—for an AWACS decision that Haig had actually opposed. But you may be sure that Safire had an excellent source (if not more than one) for his story, and that any editor limiting himself to checking the source would have been satisfied.

So the issue is accuracy, not sources. And this means that editors have to check the story, and not just the sources. This is terribly hard work, and if done meticulously might deprive the editors of long, leisurely lunches and banker's hours: the sort of life-style that has been adopted by some (only some) types at major newspapers. But the major problem here is not energy, concentration, or even (for the most part) good will; rather the problem is one of knowledge and capacity. There are very few living people capable of checking out the majority of foreign news stories coming in to a major newspaper every day. Indeed, there are

very few that can check the stories coming out of the Washington bureaucracy in a normal 24-hour period. Worse still, all news operations, whether papers or TV or radio, run on deadline, and have to "beat the competition." The economics of the news business requires that if you think your competition is "going" with a certain story, you "go" with it also, to avoid being "scooped."

Let's stop to take stock: The journalists are going to get some stories wrong, the editors are going to be unable to check them out, even if they are scrupulous and very hard-working, and the nature of the news game precludes editors' taking the proper time to check out the stories on a day-by-day basis. Conclusion: Much of what gets printed and/or broadcast is going to be false. (Marginal note: But shouldn't we insist that articles nominated for Pulitzer Prizes be checked out? And how can those stories be checked if the publications themselves do the nominating? And if the board just reads the stories without looking into the facts?)

My impression from the hundreds of letters to the editors in Washington and New York is that the public knows all this, even if there is some fuzziness about the details. The two columnists who managed to draw attention to the "truth" issue were Mary McGrory and Meg Greenfield



(is it a coincidence that both are women?), with the latter stressing the decline of professional standards (she as much as said that much of what appears between quotation marks in the daily press was not said word for word, but rather represents a "composite" or a "sense of the speaker").

This is a fairly grim picture, and it cannot be brightened by the brave

words of editors and ombudsmen who constantly tell us that the *Post* (or whatever) is a "great newspaper." The way the news business is run these days, there are no great newspapers in the United States. And hope for change is not bolstered by Ben Bradlee calling Janet Cooke a "helluva writer." How would he know? Has he checked anything she wrote?

The only measures that would encourage me are those aimed at establishing a proper respect for the truth. That means that newspapers have to correct themselves if, as I assume, they will not restrain themselves from publishing and/or broadcasting stories that haven't been checked out completely. My guess is that every paper can find at least one full column per week in order to cor-

rect past errors. And they ought to do it systematically, not in the mealy-mouthed way currently practiced. These days there's a little box that says, "in Monday's *Blurb* we said that according to the CIA 95 persons were killed by terrorism in 1975. The actual figure is 950." No one understands the significance unless they keep clips and go back to see what the context was. One would hope that a paper would have the courage to say something like, "the *Blurb* wrongly said . . . the truth is . . . and that means that our story considerably overstated the case when it quoted sources to the effect that the CIA previously considered terrorism a minor phenomenon."

To return to Janet Cooke: One of the most fascinating aspects of the story is the *Post*'s decision to stand by it when it came under attack from Washington, D.C. officials. I share with the *Post* a low esteem for many of these officials, but there is no question that the *Post*'s response was politically conditioned. Woodward said so when interviewed by the *Post*'s ombudsman. According to Woodward, "we went into our Watergate mode," which means that the newspaper stonewalled, blindly endorsed their journalist, and hit the government. It's interesting that Woodward should refer to Watergate, for there's a whole chapter of *All the President's Men* that tells of the time when Woodward and Bernstein wrongly accused a Nixon administration official of making certain statements to a grand jury. When the White House slammed the *Post* for the story, and Woodward and Bernstein had in fact confirmed with a lawyer that they had got the story wrong, Bradlee issued a ringing endorsement of Woodward and Bernstein, and stood by the story. Not to put too fine an edge on it, according to their own account, Woodward and Bernstein wrote a lie, and their editor, knowing it to have been false, endorsed it. The only difference in the Cooke affair is that when the paper "stood by the story" it did not know that it was false.

But in each case the reflex was the same: Given the choice between a reporter's version of the truth and the government's version, the paper opted for the reporter. The truth got lost in the (political) shuffle. Events of this sort convince the public that the press is unreliable, and the public is right.

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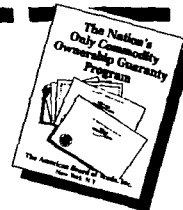
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emotional obituary for James Brady, only to discover later that Brady was alive. I watched Dan Rather excoriate Alexander Haig for confusing the chain of command (or Constitutional authority) in the executive branch, and then heard Jeff Greenfield a couple of days later on CBS say that Rather had "cooly" discussed the event. Indeed, during those hours immediately after the shooting in Washington, we saw an arrogant and rude bunch of journalists lambasting administration spokesmen for failing to confirm rumors or to provide detailed information, even though every journalism school student and every law student has been told repeatedly that in such a situation it is virtually impossible to get accurate information. I offer an award to Marvin Kalb and Edwin Newman for refusing to endorse the rumors (like Brady's death), and for reminding viewers that although many people were going to draw conclusions from the lack of confirmed information, they should not do it.

Moral: Since television feels it *must* do "live" coverage of confusing events, the TV reporters and editors ought to take the time to explain to viewers that much of what is broadcast will undoubtedly turn out to be wrong later on. And when it does turn out to be wrong, the broadcasters and journalists should not insinuate and imply that the government lied, or distorted, or misled. When a president is shot, the confusion will be so great that lots of people will misspeak, lots of rumors will circulate, and the truth will be very hard to come by. That's the way life is, and the reporters should be rather more modest about their own abilities to figure out what is correct simply by the way it sounds or looks or smells. Of course, this sort of confusion is one of the reasons I rarely watch TV, except for children's programs and sports events. The newspapers, bad as they are, are better.

The last reflection of the Janet Cooke story is the "racism" angle. As you can well imagine, there was considerable gossip around Washington that Ms. Cooke had advanced at the *Post* not because of her journalistic ability, but because of her beauty and charm. Some black writers immediately concluded that the "real" tragedy of the affair was that it revived hostility to blacks in the profession, gave encouragement to racists, and threatened equal opportunity programs in the newspapers. Tony Day, the editorial page editor of the *Los Angeles Times* (and

a good editorial page it is, too) said that editors ought to "turn this point of view aside before it hurts feelings and gets us in trouble." I quite agree that the Cooke story has little if anything to do with racism (lies are color blind), although one must point out that Bradlee said his confidence in the story came in part from the fact that Cooke is black, and hence ought to have better understanding of, and contacts in, the black community than a white journalist. But there is no question about the fact that equal opportunity programs have sometimes led to a decline in standards, especially here in Washington where everyone in the government bends over backwards to avoid the slightest tinge of racism. Or has Mr. Day forgotten the saga of the State Department, which was ordered to change its Foreign Service Examination until the results conformed to the pre-established racial quotas (ethnic balance, I mean) so dear to the Justice Department? Now, the *Washington Post* does not do that sort of thing: It has a choice of really talented and highly trained people every year, and can afford the luxury of meeting its

quotas (I mean, improving its ethnic balance) with very high-quality minority representatives. So the insinuation that Cooke was favored because she was black, is nonsense. If anything, the fact of her being black—in this case, at least—would suggest she was rather more talented than the usual new journalist.

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Disinformation: Before the debate over disinformation gets out of hand, one should observe that the term is almost always misused in the press. There is a Bureau (or perhaps it's a "Directorate") of Disinformation in the Russian KGB, and its role is to purvey a systematically distorted picture of reality of both Soviet and Western realms. IT IS NOT SIMPLY A MATTER OF SENDING OUT THE ODD LIE. So that when the Russians embark upon a disinformation campaign, their goal is to paint themselves as peace-loving, driven to their military programs by (reasonable) fear of the aggressive West. And conversely, to show us as irrationally

militaristic and imperialistic. Space does not permit examples this month, but I'll get back to it—in detail—next time.

There is one big point, however, that has to be made: Our information about their world is very poor indeed, and on this there are three examples at hand: The first is the nuclear plant tragedy in Russia in the late fifties, that only emerged in the last couple of years. The second is the story of the Gulag Archipelago, only presented by Solzhenitsyn a few years ago. The third is a truly sensational story that I heard on BBC in mid-April (and have yet to see in the American press). According to the BBC, an article appeared in Peking, signed by a leading Chinese authority, saying that during the "great leap forward" Mao's agricultural policies (late 1950s, early 1960s) led to the death by starvation of between ten and twenty *million* Chinese. Remember the way so much of the Western press hailed Maoism? The suppression of this story for twenty-some odd years is a tactical move; the picture of Maoism as a great success is disinformation. Got it? □



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A GREAT PAIR OF EGGS

by Philip F. Lawler

In July 1969, the *Eagle* landed. Man walked on the moon. And *Time* magazine, in its coverage of the story, canvassed the country to report American reactions. One delightful anecdote came from a *Time* correspondent in the Midwest. In a small neighborhood bar, when the news came over the television, a little old lady jumped to her feet, raised her stein, and led the assembly in singing the Star Spangled Banner.

A wonderful vignette, isn't it? Just one problem. It isn't true. The *Time* reporter made up the story, as he sat comfortably at his desk. He thought it added a nice touch to his report, and of course it did.

No harm done, right? Perhaps that particular little old lady didn't really exist, but there was a little bit of her in every one of us. And somewhere, sometime, some little old lady probably *did* give a pot-valiant rendition of the national anthem. The details might not be accurate, but the gist of the story rings true.

In September 1980, the *Washington Post* carried a richly detailed investigative piece by staff reporter Janet Cooke, depicting the horrific life of an 8-year-old heroin addict identified only as "Jimmy." The heart-rending tale brought immediate calls for reforms and investigations, and on April 15 the *Post* proudly announced that Cooke had won a Pulitzer Prize. On April 16, the *Post* ran an embarrassing sequel: The Prize had been withdrawn. Cooke had resigned. The story was a fraud. Jimmy did not exist.

Although some readers (notably DC's Mayor Marion Barry) had doubted the "Jimmy" story all along, the deception did not emerge until the Pulitzer committee made its announcements. In a biographical statement to the Pulitzer committee, Cooke had awarded herself a bachelor's degree (*magna cum laude*) from Vassar and a master's from the

University of Toledo. The announcement of these credentials came as a surprise to both schools. One question led to another, and within hours the *Post* editors were cross-examining Cooke about Jimmy. Eventually she broke down and confessed her fraud to the interrogators, led by Managing Editor Howard Simons and Assistant Managing Editor Bob Woodward.

Bob Woodward. Remember him?

Several years previously, Woodward had copped his own Pulitzer for investigative reporting—reporting that eventually led to the resignation of President Nixon. Surely Woodward, of all people, was qualified to sit in judgment of Janet Cooke.

Bob Woodward knows the frustrations that an investigative reporter encounters. During their investigation of the Watergate scandal, he and his partner Carl Bernstein often found themselves working on the basis of rumors. They needed corroborating evidence. Fortunately for them, Woodward had a friend: an anonymous source code-named "Deep Throat." Throughout the development of the Watergate investigation, Deep Throat consistently offered confirmation of stories that

would otherwise have been too sketchy to print.

But here is a curious thing about Deep Throat: No one but Woodward ever met him. Not even Bernstein. Woodward and his informant developed an elaborate code of signals, and arranged meetings in an underground parking garage in the wee hours of the morning to avoid detection. Woodward never divulged his friend's identity.

Once—just once—someone at the *Post* pressed Woodward about Deep Throat. In *All the President's Men*, Woodward and Bernstein describe a breakfast meeting with publisher Katherine Graham:

Woodward said that he had told no one the name of Deep Throat.

Mrs. Graham paused. "Tell me," she said.

Woodward froze. He said that he would give her the name if she wanted. He was praying she wouldn't press it. Mrs. Graham laughed, touched his arm and said she was only kidding, she didn't really want to carry that burden around with her. Woodward took a bite of his eggs, which were cold.

Too bad about those eggs, of course, but don't the *Post* editors have a wonderful sense of confidence

in their reporters? Deep Throat never offered any revelations. He just made it respectable to print items off the grapevine. Although he had access to myriad sources of information about Watergate, he never divulged anything that Woodward had not heard elsewhere. Oh, yes, once or twice he did volunteer something new; he periodically advised Woodward that the Watergate story was much more important than anyone realized. No doubt Woodward enjoyed relaying that advice to his bosses.

Who was Deep Throat? To this day, no one knows. There are rumors, of course, but they are contradictory. Despite the fact that he could have made a small fortune by publishing his memoirs, despite the fact that everyone in Washington (the city where there are no secrets) sought to identify him, despite the fact that magazine publishers have lusted for an article revealing his identity—despite all these things, Deep Throat remains anonymous today, seven years after he appeared as the hero of *All the President's Men*.

Now consider what we know about Deep Throat. From the descriptions available in that book, we know that he held an "extremely sensitive" position in the Executive Branch. He had access to information from the White House, the Committee to Re-Elect the President, the Justice Department, and the FBI. Despite his paranoid fear of being followed, he stopped past Woodward's apartment virtually every day—over a period of months when Woodward twice moved to new locations—to check for their secret signal. If he wanted a meeting, he left a message in the newspaper at Woodward's front door. He was voluble, emotional, unable to conceal his feelings. He loved literature. He and Woodward had been good friends before the Watergate story broke, and had often spent pleasant evenings in conversation. He smoked and drank (Scotch), occasionally to excess. He lost weight noticeably during the



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