



PRESSWATCH

## BAKER UP, MOYERS DOWN

by Fred Barnes

Anyone eager to learn how to get along with the Washington press corps should study the habits of James A. Baker III, the White House chief of staff. With Democratic pol Robert S. Strauss out of power and thus no longer an everyday player, Baker is peerless in his mastery of Washington journalists, a true Clyde Beatty among press-tamers. And it's not just that he remembers the first name of reporters from obscure papers in the hinterlands, though he does that better than anyone else in Washington, too.

Given his job, mere charm is not enough. Since the days of H.R. Haldeman in the Nixon White House, the Boss of the presidential staff has been a lightning rod for criticism and often seen as a sinister figure. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Haldeman's replacement, was suspected of arranging a pardon for Richard Nixon. Donald Rumsfeld, President Ford's first chief of staff, alienated reporters with his let-me-unravel-the-flaws-in-your-question approach to the press. Richard Cheney, while able and well liked, was viewed as a Rumsfeld clone. Then came Hamilton Jordan, who got off on the wrong foot by pretending not to be chief of staff when every reporter in town knew that he really was. By the time Jimmy Carter officially gave him the title, Jordan was the butt of reporters' ridicule.

Despite such history, the Baker formula has worked splendidly, if only because it is so simple and aboveboard. First, Baker is accessible; he sets aside time on schedule each week for one-on-one sessions with reporters. And he doesn't limit his contact to the heavyweights of Washington journalism—the bureau chiefs and columnists who appear on the television chat shows. Baker spends time with the regulars on the White House beat.

Second, he is unfailingly honest. Baker has earned a reputation for never putting a phony spin on events at the White House or overstating

President Reagan's chances for success in Congress. This contrasts, of course, with the practice of Edwin Meese III, the White House counselor derided by reporters as "Good News Ed," a man whose knee-jerk optimism bears little resemblance to reality. Finally, Baker is informative; reporters go away knowing more than they did. This doesn't mean he leaks incessantly. There is a vast difference between giving reporters an accurate White House view of things, which Baker gives, and leaking.

All this works wonders. When *Time* appraised "the President's men" last December, Baker received the most favorable treatment, notably for his adherence to the politics-is-motion ideal. "Baker's instinct is for action," the magazine said. "He is bored by details, impatient with lengthy memos. When his aides get into a windy discussion, he will sometime leave a meeting and pace restlessly around the White House halls

or thumb absent-mindedly through papers in a nearby office before rejoining the group. On days when no crisis impends, he has been heard to mutter: 'I miss the campaign. This can be boring.'"

Hedrick Smith of the *New York Times* credited Baker with seizing on the New Federalism scheme for turning back federal programs to the states and making it the centerpiece of the President's State of the Union Address. "It is significant that Mr. Baker, as the President's chief political strategist, forced the pace of the policymaking and oversaw the development of the proposal put forward by Mr. Reagan Jan. 26," Smith wrote in February. "For this episode illustrates how much his role and organizational authority have expanded this past year, while that of Mr. Meese has waned." Another illustration of Baker's clout—and press recognition of it—appeared in the *Washington Post Magazine* in December in a piece on "a new kind of Lone Star politician in the White House—the Texas preppie." It was supposedly about Baker and Vice President George Bush, but Baker completely eclipsed Bush in the article.

Alone in Washington, Baker has the problem not of generating good press but of spawning too much. "Paradoxically, success could prove Baker's undoing," wrote Paul West of the *Dallas Times Herald* in January. "In Washington, recognition and influence often breed heightened expectations and greater risk. And having devoted most of his national political career to keeping Reagan out of the White House, he is already a juicy target for conservative critics. 'The higher the monkey climbs,' Baker likes to joke, 'the more you see of his behind.'"

Conservatives, always skeptical of Baker because of his background as campaign manager for Gerald Ford in 1976 and Bush in 1980, are indeed taking aim. They are vividly aware of Baker's distinct political temperament: He is a pragmatic conservative, not an ideological one. *Human*

*Events*, the conservative weekly, once defended Baker, but now warns darkly about "Bakerization" of the White House. In its February issue, *Conservative Digest* railed against Baker and other "non-Reaganites," saying that Baker "has been identified as a principal source of leaks trying to get the President to raise taxes."

But not all conservative journalists have given up on Baker. "As odd as it may seem, the supply-siders . . . retain their confidence in and respect for Jim Baker precisely because they see him as being driven by his own ambition to succeed as *this* President's chief of staff," wrote Jude Wanniski in February. "He will never, ever understand the economics of monetary policy, nor should he be expected to. But he can and will come to understand the politics of monetary policy and understand that change could put him ahead of the power curve, although he may never understand exactly why."

Bill Moyers, who recently returned to CBS after a stint with public broadcasting, is surely one of the saintliest figures in television news. He is earnest, quietly inquisitive, and normally measured in his judgments. He also qualifies, perhaps because of his personal integrity, as something of a journalistic sacred cow.

But his niche in the pantheon of sacred cows has become shaky after a high-voltage broadcast in December in which he suggested that Congress and both political parties had been corrupted by natural gas interests. "Dan [Rather], if you want to know why so many people are fed up with both political parties and have stopped voting and if you have a strong stomach, I have a case in point," he began his spot. The gist of it was that John McMillian, chairman of the Northwest Alaska Pipeline Company, and his co-investors had contributed \$80,000 to congressional candidates and campaign committees and hired politically well-connected



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lobbyists in a bid to win House and Senate approval of a new financing provision for the pipeline transporting natural gas from Alaska to the 42 consuming states. Moyers noted that McMillian's firm had reneged on an earlier pledge to fund the construction privately and now wanted permission to bill consumers, if necessary, for the building of the project. Congress agreed. "The two-party system is not only up for grabs—it's up for sale," concluded Moyers.

Tom Shales, the witty television columnist for the *Washington Post*, wrote enthusiastically about the Moyers broadcast, saying it "proved how potent and important TV news can be. . . . Most of the other news media had ignored the alarming aspects of the story, but with his one report Moyers inspired an avalanche of mail to Congress and to CBS and, says a spokesman for Ralph Nader, probably changed the House vote on the Senate-approved measure, though not enough to kill it."

Shales's admiration for the broadcast was not shared, for one, by Curtis B. Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. In an op-ed piece in the *Baltimore Sun*, Gans honored Moyers with "the 1981 Nadir Award for the lowest in television journalism . . . for his simplistic, cynical and one-sided account of the congressional debate on the Alaska natural gas pipeline." It was a complex issue with a degree of right on both sides, Gans said. "On the one hand, legislators were being asked to accept a dubious scheme for pre-billing consumers for services not yet rendered. On the other, if they refused to vote the waiver package, they were jeopardizing America's relations with Canada, voting certain death for the pipeline and with it the opportunity to provide a new large supply of natural gas. A close call." But one in which both houses of Congress voted overwhelmingly to approve the new financing.

"All of which brings us back to Mr. Moyers' story," continued Gans. "Why, if the vote was as one-sided in favor of the waiver package as it was, did he allow only opponents to speak? Why did he fail to present any of the complexities of the issue? Why did he choose explicitly to leave the impression that anyone who voted for the waivers had been bought by Mr. McMillian? Why did he choose to impugn the integrity of the overwhelming majority of both houses of Congress who voted for the waiver package? Why did he fail to show how broad the congressional consensus . . . really was?" All good questions.

"The story of Mr. McMillian's lobbying activities and their supposed impact on the outcome originated with Ralph Nader, a fierce opponent of the waivers," Gans wrote. "Mr. Moyers bought the story lock, stock and barrel. But while it is legitimate for Mr. Nader, the lobbyist, to engage in propaganda, it is not legitimate for Mr. Moyers to act as a non-critical conduit. The journalist's

role is to act as a filter which separates truth from fiction."

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A venerable practice of the press is trying to assess who is up and who is down in the reigning administration. Often, the reading of entrails supplies a clear answer: Baker up, Meese down; Treasury Secretary

Donald Regan up, Budget Director David A. Stockman down. But sometimes the matter is murky, as in the case of Vice President Bush and Secretary of State Haig. My own view is that Bush has all the influence that his office bestows, which isn't much, and that Haig's hegemony in foreign policy is threatened by William P. Clark, the new national security adviser at the White House. →

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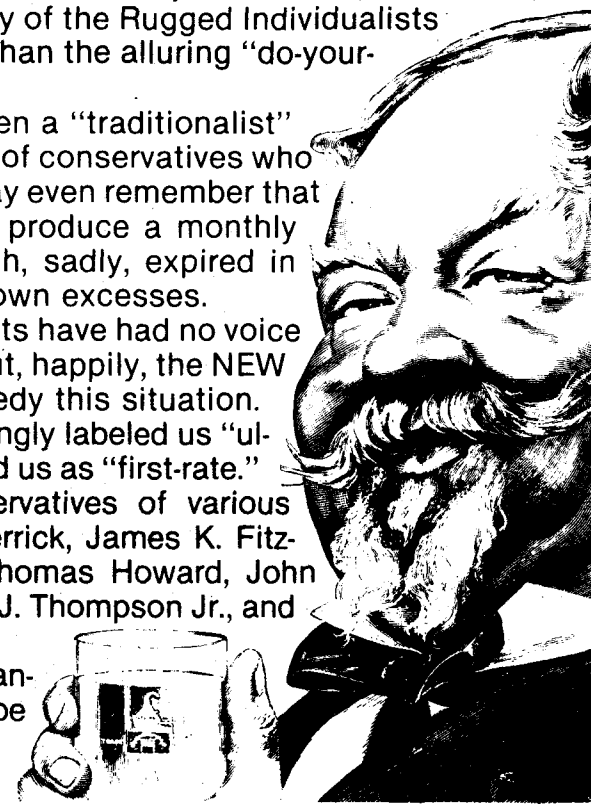
You are aware that there has always been a "traditionalist" current in America representing the stance of conservatives who put a premium on Christian culture. You may even remember that in the mid-1960s, traditionalists rallied to produce a monthly journal of opinion—called *Triumph*—which, sadly, expired in the mid-70s, a victim of the times and its own excesses.

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But both David Broder of the *Washington Post* and John McLaughlin of *National Review* see Bush as a front-line player. Broder detected in December "a seeming resurgence of influence for a man who has more than once been dismissed as a fringe player in the administration." McLaughlin went further, insisting that conservatives are warming to Bush. "They looked on Bush as light and Left," he wrote in January. "Instead, he is turning out heavy and Right . . . an agreeable alternative should the President decide to serve only one term." John W. Mashek, the respected political editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, disagrees. "Some political analysts argue that the vice president, who pledged from the outset to keep a low profile, is growing so inconspicuous that he is nearly dropping out of sight," Mashek wrote in December. "Some GOP conservatives continue to distrust him as a centrist."

The jury on Haig is even more widely divided. Last January 29, Karen Elliott House of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that "rather than dominating the formulation of foreign policy, he [Haig] often finds

himself alone, lashing out at Reagan aides he feels are unwisely denying him preeminence." That same day, R. Gerald Livingstone of Georgetown University's school of foreign service wrote on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* that Haig, "teetering on the brink of resignation or dismissal seven months ago . . . today is in a position to dominate foreign policy making." This view was shared by John Walcott of *Newsweek*, who wrote in February that "Haig is clearly in charge—at least for the moment." But perhaps not for long, added Rowland Evans and Robert Novak. "With Clark, his former State Department deputy, in control of machinery in the White House and non-political professionals installed at the top of his State Department, Haig's dominance is said to be complete," they wrote. "The contrary is closer to the truth: Clark's insistence that policy will now follow the instincts and ideological convictions of his old California friend may weaken, not strengthen, Al Haig."

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Ever wonder how the press could

have been so wrong about President Reagan and a tax increase? Well, the stories that said Reagan was ready to jack up excise taxes turned out to be incorrect, but they actually had some basis in fact. Obviously not enough, though.

For instance, there was the Associated Press story in early January that reported: "President Reagan tentatively agreed yesterday to include in his 1983 budget proposals a doubling of major federal excise taxes and a shift of major highway, welfare and education responsibilities to the states, administration sources said."

That was not made out of whole cloth. What Reagan had done, according to White House aides, was give "conceptual approval" to a scheme for transferring federal programs back to the states and raising taxes to give the states more money to finance the programs. The President, one aide said, had "reconciled himself to the concept," but not to the specifics.

There followed similar stories with different sourcing. In mid-January the *New York Times* reported: "President Reagan has decided to go ahead with a proposal that would raise some

taxes and give some of the revenue to the states, administration officials and congressional sources said yesterday."

That, of course, was wrong. So was the story in the *New York Times* two days later. It said: "Administration officials reported tonight that President Reagan, wrapping up the final decisions on his proposed 1983 budget, has decided to ask Congress for temporary increases in federal excise taxes on gasoline, cigarettes, whiskey and wine, but not beer."

Reagan had indeed discussed all this with his legislative strategy group for two hours. He pared \$40 billion off a package of "revenue enhancers" that was initially pegged at \$100 billion, cutting out such items as an oil import fee, aides said. But he never signed off on the excise tax boost.

And the next day, January 21, the whole tax proposal fell apart after Reagan was lobbied over rolls at the White House mess by leaders of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. This, too, leaked, but the press got the story right that Reagan was tilting against a tax hike. □



## CHARTER VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM

by Colin Welch

We weep for the poor Poles, living and partly living under martial law. We blame "the Russians" for imposing it on them. Fair enough, provided we define what we mean by "the Russians." For the Russians themselves have been living under a terrible form of martial law for some 65 years.

No more than the Poles did they choose their present form of government. It was forced on them by ruthless terror and by such terror it is still maintained. It is thus absurd to say that the Russians are oppressing the Poles. Far truer to say that those who oppress the Russians also oppress the Poles. We should weep for all their victims.

The oppressors are mostly Rus-

sians by birth, granted (though one or two of the very worst were, alas, of Polish origin—Dzerzhinski, Vishinski). But even the Russian oppressors have become aliens, as foreign as any army of occupation and infinitely more unfeeling, callous, and cruel

than most such armies. By the same token General Jaruzelski must have become an alien, a foreigner to the Poles.

To say that the oppressors care absolutely nothing for the welfare, happiness, and prosperity of the

Russian, Polish, and other sad peoples subject to them is—well—debatable. They may think hungry people dangerous to them, or they may not. History suggests that it is not so much despair as hope which breeds unrest.

The oppressors' record is strongly against them. It would be a strange love and solicitude indeed which expressed itself in the murder or starvation of millions—50? 60? 100 million?—in driving many of the very best into exile, in depriving those who survive and remain of all save inner freedom and dignity, in the extinction of whole historic nations, in ferocious attacks on religion, the arts, and thought.

It may be true that the oppressors themselves are slaves of an ideology which has, or once had or purported to have, the happiness of Russians and all mankind as one of its purposes. It may otherwise be true



Colin Welch is Editor-in-Chief of Chief Executive and former deputy editor of the *London Daily Telegraph* from which this article is reprinted.