



James Aronson

On the banquet trail of the failure of American journalism

One of the more disheartening developments of post-Watergate journalism is that journalists themselves have become news—even worse, celebrities. As such, and for fees of \$1,000 to \$3,000 or more, they have turned to the lecture circuit, where they studiously avoid assessing the press' responsibility for the mess we're in and pile it onto poor old Spiro Agnew. The press emerges as a faithful ink-stained St. Bernard standing vigil at the ramparts of freedom, a flagon labeled "Truth" dangling from its neck. Despite an occasional woof, the warp is more obvious.

At least for me it was, after sitting in recent weeks in uncomfortable seats at convocations of journalists and at hotel dinners, seeking morsels of enlightenment from my fellow craftsmen who lately have been closer than I to the action.

It began with a symposium at the *New York Times* auditorium, sponsored by the Alumni Association of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, titled "Campaign Past—Administration Future." The panelists, all of whom had covered the presidential campaign, were Richard Reeves of *New York*; Jules Witcover of the *Los Angeles Times*; Marvin Kitman of *Newsday*, and David Broder of the *Washington Post*. The evening had little past and no future. The participants sought to upstage one another with one-line gags that failed to convulse even a cordial audience, and with self-deprecating comments that somehow enhanced their self-importance. Witcover, an able and serious reporter, even sang a song (lyrics by Witcover) called "Lust in My Heart," reportedly sung in person to candidate Carter in a San Francisco hotel. It was the strongest argument to date for laying permanently to rest all gags, songs, doggerel and cartoons about lust.

A questioner—modesty forbids me from naming him—asked why the press seemed duty bound to sanctify the two-party system: how could the public even begin to learn about political alternatives if dissenting views were proscribed by the media. Silence. Anyone can answer, the questioner encouraged. Finally Reeves spoke up: It was the fault of archaic election laws that froze out the minor parties. The rest declined comment.

The next stop was the fifth annual A.J. Liebling Counter-Convention sponsored by the journalism review, *MORE*. It is grossly unfair that Liebling cannot rise in his shroud to protest the use of his name. They ought at least to remove the "counter." Since its first session in 1972 at a New York union hall, even as the American newspaper Publishers Association met across town, the Liebling affairs have moved trendily into the world of established journalism (the fifth was at the New York Hilton). The invited panelists extended no further "left" than the *Village Voice*. The *New York Times* and *Daily News* were in ample supply, and the major networks were represented, as were *Vogue* and *Women's Wear Daily*.

► Grave-diggers award.

Some of the journalists transcended the sexy titles of the panels ("Gossip: Private Parts of Private People"... "Obscenity on the Run"... "Private Eyes") to make thoughtful presentations (particularly about protecting sources and the ethics of interviewing). But the over-all impact was feather-down and the final event is best described as counter-Liebling. It was the presentation of the Annual A.J. Liebling Award for constructive and courageous journalism to CBS-TV's "Sixty Minutes." It was accepted, among others,

by Mike Wallace, who a few months earlier on "Sixty Minutes" had helped dig a grave at CBS for Daniel Schorr in an interview marked by calculated baiting and, according to Schorr, calculated editing. The award should have gone to Schorr.

Wearily, but buoyed by a freebie invitation and a free bar, it was back to the main ballroom of the Hilton some days later for a dinner of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the First Amendment Freedoms Award (seriously) to William S. Paley, the old master of the CBS plantation. That was an evening to remember. The money and power on the dais and in the room was staggering: the heads of all the networks, bankers, publishers, corporation lawyers and the Mayor of the City of New York. The chairman was that staunch defender of the right of the people to be heated and cheated, Charles F. Luce, chairman of the board of Consolidated Edison. CBS, of course, was out in force: Cronkite, Rather, Collingwood and Several Sides, his massive head blessedly free of the need to stare blinkingly at the teleprompter.

► Cox spoils a pleasant evening.

The award ceremony was without incident. But there was an aftermath. The speaker of the evening was Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor who went to the guillotine in the Saturday Night Watergate Massacre. A standing ovation, at the start. With Cantabrigian grace and a lawyer's circumlocution, he noted Paley's sensible criticism of the Federal Communications Commission's "Fairness Doctrine" (applause from Paley and the CBS crowd) and the complexities of the "Equal Time" provision (more applause). Then he lowered the boom. It was a contravention of democracy, he said, a de-

basing of the First Amendment for the networks to have systematically excluded the voice of minority candidates from election campaign coverage.

Cox's quiet voice was disarming, but the effect was remarkable: the applause at the end was perfunctory. Except at my table, where the recollection of the *Times* auditorium was vivid.

Last stop was the Americana Hotel, for the 25th anniversary dinner of the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee and the Tom Paine Award to Bella Abzug. Russell Baker of the *Times* spoke. Splendid on the Op Ed page, fine for 15 minutes on the platform, he went on for 50—including at least seven references to lust, what sounded like 107 to Lyndon Johnson's peccadillos, and (self-deprecating) references to his own success at the *Times*.

Then Bella rose. She accepted the award ("It's about time!"), and cast aside most of her prepared speech in anger at the lateness of the hour. She was glad to hear that Baker had achieved success through the *New York Times*. "I lost my job through the *New York Times*," she added. She was of course reversing the slogan of a *Times* appeal for classified ads and underscoring the *Times*' endorsement of Daniel Moynihan in the recent senatorial primary that had cost her the nomination.

Her one sentence put the press truly in perspective and wiped out a month of platitudes and preening. When the laughter died, I heard a single muffled but persistent chuckle. It was the ghost of Joe Liebling.

James Aronson is professor of communications, Hunter College, New York; veteran journalist; and a founder and long time editor of the *National Guardian*.



Frances Moore Lappé & Joseph Collins

Turning the desert green for international agribusiness

It takes a lot of freight to fill a DC10 cargo jet. Yet every day, from early December until May, a DC10 takes off from Senegal loaded with green beans, melons, tomatoes, eggplant, strawberries and paprika. Its destination? Amsterdam, Paris and Stockholm. Ironically the airlifts began in 1972, just as the drought in Senegal was beginning, and they dramatically increased even as it worsened.

In the late 1960s certain agribusiness firms circled Africa's semi-arid regions on their world maps. They were not concerned about hunger in the Sahel. They saw only low-cost production sites from which they might profit, given the European demand for fresh winter produce.

In 1971 Fritz Marschall, a German executive of world-ranging, California-based Bud Antle, Inc., visited Senegal. Perhaps you have heard before of Bud Antle. One of the world's largest iceberg lettuce growers, it once managed to get Cesar Chavez jailed for picketing. Marschall was struck by the similarity of Senegal's and southern California's climate. Only two generations ago U.S. government irrigation projects had made the California deserts bloom. Why couldn't Senegal replace California as his company's source of vegetables for the high-priced European winter market? By February of the following year Marschall—known among European vegetable dealers as "the pusher"—had set up Bud Senegal as an affil-

iate of Bud Antle's Brussels affiliate, the House of Bud.

► Budding business.

Today Bud Senegal operates garden plantations, using nothing but the latest technology. Israeli, Dutch and American engineers have installed a drip irrigation system with miles of perforated plastic tubing to take advantage of the vast reserves of water just below Senegal's dry, brownish red soil.

And since the undertaking is billed as "development," Bud has had to bring in virtually none of its own capital. Major stockholders and soft-term creditors include the Senegalese government, the World Bank and Swiss and Dutch development funds. The Senegalese government helped also by supplying police to evict villagers from land for Bud's plantations. Two Peace Corps volunteers are even helping develop nearby vegetable plantations for marketing through Bud.

Despite rhetoric about development and despite widespread hunger in Senegal, all the production is geared to feeding consumers in the European Common Market. This in spite of the fact that in 1974 alone European taxpayers spent \$53 million to destroy ("withdraw from the market") European-produced vegetables in order to keep prices up. One year green bean prices in Europe went lower than the costs of picking, packing and air freighting Bud's big crop in Sen-

egal. Did that mean more food for hungry Senegalese? Hardly. The director of Bud Holland, Paul van Pelt, admitted in an interview that "since the Senegalese are not familiar with green beans and don't eat them, we had to destroy them."

From May to December European tariffs make it unprofitable to export any vegetables. Does Bud Senegal let its plantations lie fallow or allow the local people to grow food for themselves during those months? No, again. Bud's better idea is to grow feed for livestock.

Agribusiness certainly does not see Senegal as a forsaken wasteland, devoid of agricultural resources, as most outsiders are made to view it. But the wasteland image continues to be reinforced. It makes the World Bank and A.I.D. appear benevolent as they rush in with multi-million dollar loans to countries like Senegal to build the infrastructure that agribusiness needs.

Kissinger in Senegal this year called for a multi-million dollar anti-hunger program that would "roll back the desert." But any analysis of hunger that puts the blame on "encroaching desert" consciously or unconsciously fails to come to grips with the inequalities in power at the root of hunger. Solutions proposed will inevitably be limited to the technical and administrative aspects—irrigation programs, modern mechanization, new seed varieties, foreign investment, grain reserve banks, etc. As with Bud Senegal,

increasing numbers of rural people will be deprived of land and at best will get low-paid seasonal jobs. Their impoverishment—as well as the huge foreign debt incurred in building such American-style agriculture—ensures that whatever is produced and much of the profits will be exported.

Unless the majority control the land and water resources, such "modernization" works against the interests of people who are seeking to feed themselves. Such a technical approach allows no reflection upon the political and economic arrangements that far more than changes in rainfall or even climate are at the root of human suffering and deprivation.

Until all the people share control over their country's resources, such "solutions" can only exclude an ever larger majority and at best make them perpetual objects of charity. In contrast, as the Chinese people have demonstrated, a people organized in control over their own resources can through their labor and ingenuity—not debt bondage to the World Bank and the I.M.F.—transform a desert into a granary for all to eat.

Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins are codirectors of the Institute for Food and Development Policy. Their book, *First Food: Beyond the myth of scarcity*, will be published in March. Lappé is author of *Diet for a Small Planet*. Their column appears regularly. Syndicated in *These Times*.

Editorial

Criminals move in all walks of life

In the 19th century, when people spoke of crime they usually referred to the Criminal Class, by which they meant some substrata of the working class. More recently, "criminal element" was in fashion among middle and upper class commentators. Now, since Watergate, various bribery scandals, and illegal corporate contributions and pay-offs, some people still think in the old ways. But it is increasingly clear that in the field of crime, unlike society at large, there are no classes in the United States.

In every category, and among all sectors of American society, crime has increased dramatically in recent years, as the first installment of Elliot Currie's four-part series on crime in this issue demonstrates. True, as we reported two weeks ago, the press plays up crimes of violence against middle and upper class whites and portrays blacks and hispanics as the most frequent criminals. But, in fact, those most likely to be murdered, raped, assaulted, or robbed are working class people themselves, and especially lower income blacks. Higher income people are less frequently victimized and, on the other hand, whether they be guilty of violent crimes, shoplifting, embezzlement, or some of the more esoteric crimes available only to people in positions of influence and power, are much less likely to be tried or imprisoned—and if they are imprisoned they are less likely to receive long sentences.

This has always been true and is only to be expected in a society where a person's power, status, and influence is measured primarily in monetary terms. But the rapid increase in the rate of crime across the board is something new. Some of it can be explained by particular circumstances, like the rising crime rate among youths, where almost 20 percent of the white youth and over 40 percent of black youth are unemployed. But rising crime cannot be explained in terms of increasing poverty alone, since there has been an overall relative decline in poverty in recent decades, and in any case criminals today are just as likely to be relatively well-off suburbanites as they are to be inner-city poor. Nor can rising crime be explained in terms of increasing inequality, either of income or power. The kind of inequality we have now is nothing new.

Inequality in itself is not a source of crime. In fact, in a society with vast inequalities where people have no reason to believe that things could be better and no personal expectations, discontent and crime will be relatively slight. But in a society like ours, where the capacity exists for everyone to live in comfort and security, and where people are constantly reminded that this is so and are constantly urged to consume an incredible array of goods and services, it should be no surprise that people act on these urgings, even if they don't have the money to buy things.

And in a society like ours where we are taught that there is no "natural" social order and where "money is the measure of the man," it should be no surprise that people in all walks of life will do whatever they can to get more—especially, as is the



case with wealthier thieves, when the expectation of serious punishment is low.

In the end, there are two ways substantially to reduce crime. The first is to lower expectations, to suppress needs, to destroy desires. This would require convincing people that there is a natural social order, that a few are born to live like kings while the rest remain peasants. The other is to fulfill the needs and desires created by corporate capitalism by establishing a society in which the technical skills and productive capacity of this country can be used to satisfy people's needs rather than being constrained by the need to make profits for private owners of capital.

Short of one or the other of these solutions and regardless of the activities and policies of criminologists and law enforcement agencies, crime will continue to plague us all.

The minor party vote

In this issue we publish the complete official election returns for minor party candidates. From the point of view of the left parties the results, as could have been expected, are rather sad. The combined vote of the Socialist Workers party, the Communist party, the People's party, the Socialist Labor party and the Socialist party is some 215,000. This is less than President-elect Carter received in Rhode Island alone. It is less than half the 503,000 votes garnered by the three right wing parties. And it is less than a third of the 751,728 votes captured by Eugene McCarthy's independent candidacy.

Furthermore, the various left parties cannot even take comfort in believing that

no matter how miserable their showing it represents progress. Just the opposite. On a percentage basis, the Socialist party in 1912 received 20 times as many votes as the combined vote of the left parties in 1976. And the Socialist and Communist parties together in 1932 received 10 times as many votes as the combined left parties did last November.

From any point of view other than narrow doctrinal or organizational rivalry these left presidential campaigns are a painful waste of financial and human resources, a token ritual that proves nothing except the bankruptcy of the parties concerned.

Blacks and women in Carter's cabinet

In an interview in *Playboy* last November, President-elect Carter's top staff man, Hamilton Jordan, was quoted as saying, "If after inauguration you find a Cy Vance as Secretary of State and a Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of national security, then I would say we failed."

So soon, oh Lord, so soon!

As for the cabinet as a whole, the "new faces" we were promised, particularly blacks and women: if we can believe what President-elect Carter has to say, many were culled, but few were chosen.

The treatment of blacks, whose votes carried the South and the nation for Carter has been particularly insulting, though not entirely unexpected. It is true that Carter interviewed and offered many

blacks a job in the Cabinet. The problem was that it was all the same job, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Not surprisingly, several of those who were offered the job turned it down because, as one anonymous black politician told the *New York Times*, "It's a no-win situation for a black to become Secretary of H.U.D. or H.E.W. (Health, Education and Welfare)," because the problems in housing, health, education, and welfare are "probably insoluble as long as nothing is done about the economy."

Many blacks would have been glad to have accepted top economic or foreign policy jobs like Secretary of the Treasury, or Secretary of State, or even Attorney-General. But Carter seemed to be looking only for blacks already in highly vis-

ible positions, and then only to fill jobs that had little to do with basic policy making matters. The same, it should be noted, seems to be true of women.

In a sense, of course, this should not be seen as discrimination against blacks or women on Carter's part. The truth is that Carter would have chosen anyone for posts like head of the CIA, Secretary of the Treasury, Office of Management and Budget, national security advisor—so long as they were acceptable to the corporate community, so long, that is, as they were reliable members of the ruling class establishment. The problem is that such people tend not to be black or female.