Mr. Agnew and the press

As a byproduct of his recent attempts to intimidate and discredit the nation's news media, Vice President Spiro Agnew has raised some legitimate questions about the responsibilities of the press.

He urges that readers be critical of reports that do not reflect the printed word. This is certainly a reasonable attitude; the members of the press are being given the same freedoms as everyone else. On the other hand, Agnew's attempt to tell them they are "in some sort of dark conspiracy that distorts the news" is unacceptable from a high government official. The notion that there is any systematic distortion of information from the financial interests whose advertising supports the paper is not only unfounded, but the development of a spirit of professionalism and responsibility within the press is encouraged.

A newsman must now realize that his credibility is a precious thing which is slowly acquired but can be quickly lost. No one can report with 100% accuracy, but by constantly striving to reach that goal will suffice. He must endeavor to remove opinion from articles purporting to be factual, and to be corrected if he is not. He must strive to avoid being affected by personal prejudices. A man with no opinions or passions would be some kind of vegetable, so natural complete success is impossible; but one must try.

Actually, we do not fear a public which is critical of the press, we fear it is critical of the verbiage of its government leaders. The public will then no longer be the silent majority which (like Hitler's) does not object to simply because it has not considered them rather than because it has consciously approved them. When the public is thus informed we no longer have to fear the Agnew's of the world.

By Harvey Baker

Once upon a time, this political figures were heroes. They grew up in log cabins, loyal to the Constitution, completely ethical, and most of all honest. Theirs was a world of principles rather than political opportunism.

Look at the clown in the White House, Richard Nixon. He may not have lost the draft, doesn't give a damn about the poor, or the young (they didn't vote for him), and pictures himself as some sort of aristocrat. He speaks for the idealists, grooves on General Electric Board, the common man. But Bob Kennedy was then still perfect. His was a world of public service and public duty.

Look at the clown in Blair House, five years ago he was a county commissioner. Now he is a major car salesman. His principles are spending on Vietnam, a curious way indeed and a waste of billions of dollars. He is a wonderful savior of the public's interest, but even allowed him to play the public's half-hearted hands in public. He says he was at the polls three minutes before closing time, in line, but nearly a thousand people had already voted before him, after all, curiously enough for Lyndon.

President is even more interesting. HEW Secretary Robert Finch has shown his provisionalism and uncertainty between the side of the Nixon administration and the side of the congress. He must believe in the man he is advising.

It seems that Agnew's critics were in part justified, but only in part. For one, FR is not a press agency and cannot be intended to be. It is very definite that its function is to act as a watchdog of the administration, totally committed to do that job no matter how you view it (FS) see it. Remember however that FR is not a monolithic body; it has internal disagreements. But in general the major job of Public Relations Relations of its staff functions, is to be in order.

This was done through examination of its publications, press releases (particularly those issued during the November Actions) and an interview with its director, Francis Wykle.

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