

IN THIS ISSUE: EDWIN DIAMOND, JACK VALENTI, TRIBUTE TO JUSTICE DOUGLAS,  
FOREIGN COVERAGE DEBATE, TAPE RECORDERS DEFENDED, THE WASHINGTON POST

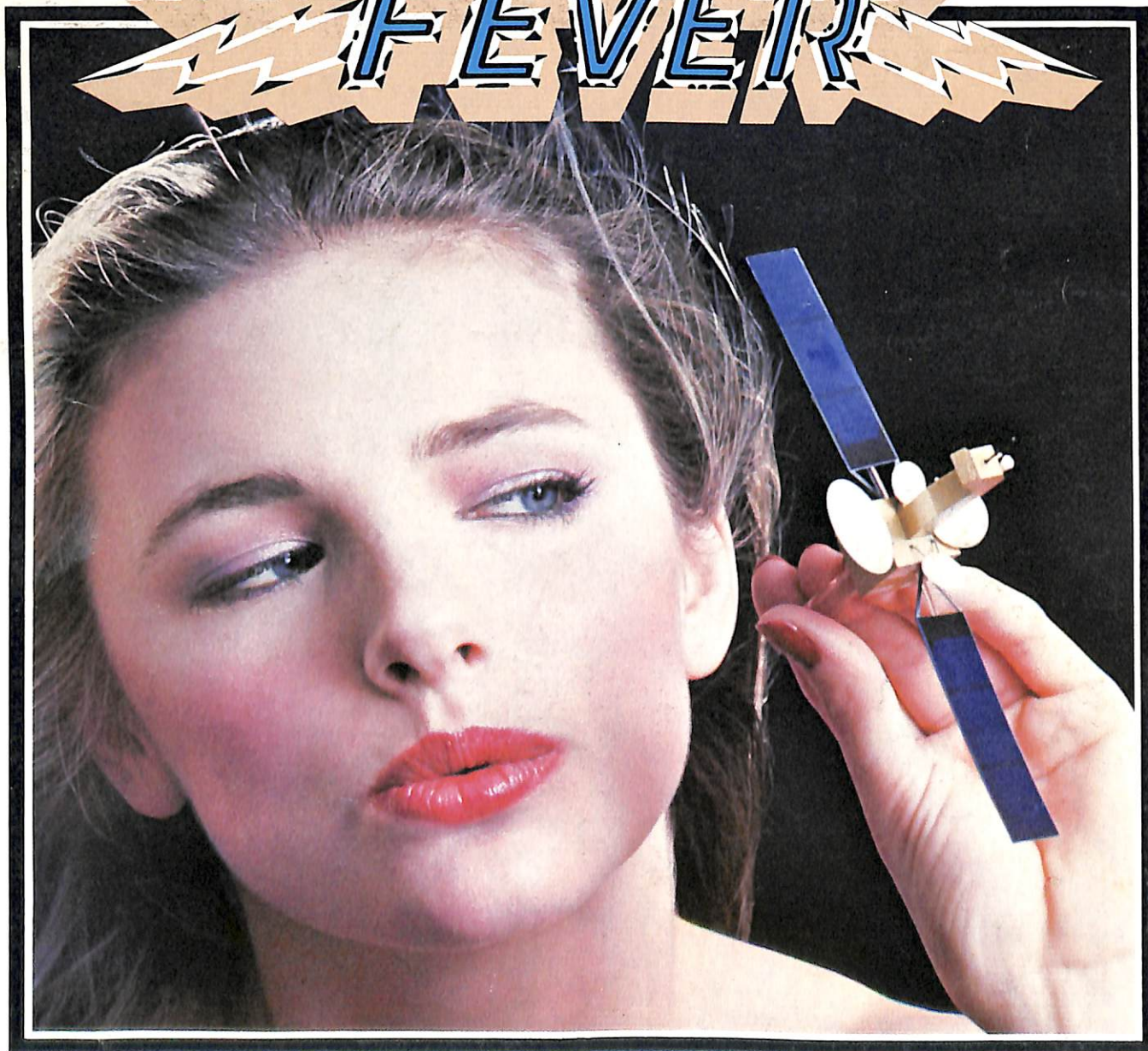
\$2.00

WASHINGTON JOURNALISM REVIEW

March 1980

# WJR

## SATELLITE FEVER





# Media People is a magazine about power. Yours!

Because you help decide what's news, and what's just plain baloney. Your words and opinions shape the substance and expose the artifice of today's crucial issues.

You're a twentieth century mythmaker, a sooth-sayer, a heartbreaker, because that's what it's all about. You know who's in and who's out (maybe you even put them there), and you tell it like nobody else. You're not afraid to "call 'em like you see 'em": The bestsellers and the big losers; the smash hits and the agonizing misses. You help decide what "the beautiful people" will be wrapping themselves in tonight, and what they'll be wrapping their fish in tomorrow.

Because just about everyone depends upon you to tell him what's happening and how things are going in this incredibly complex MEDIA culture we've created.

**MEDIA PEOPLE** is a magazine about power. It's a magazine for and about YOU!

Just fill out, clip and mail the handy coupon to:

**Media People Magazine**  
548 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10017  
212-699-0255

Please enter my subscription to Media People Magazine at the low cost of only \$20.00 for 12 issues (1 year), which is a saving of \$4.00 off the newsstand price. I understand I may cancel my subscription at any time and receive a full refund.

☐ **Send me an extra issue free!** Enclosed is my payment of \$20.00 (in Canada \$28.00; \$34.00 elsewhere). I understand that for saving you the trouble and expense of billing me later—you will send me an extra issue free.

☐ Please bill me later.

☐ Use my charge: ☐ Master Charge ☐ Visa

Credit Card number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(optional)  
Company \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Home ☐  
Office ☐  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

AWJR

## PRESS ON PRESS

### The New Foreign Correspondence

The upheaval in the Middle East has returned the focus to that fabled character in American journalism: the foreign correspondent.

The Middle East events, however, have caused a drastic revision of the correspondent's image. The satellite has replaced the telephone and telegraph wire, bringing the correspondent into American living rooms even as he reports.

Former foreign correspondent Stanley Karnow relates in the discussion that follows that a long-ago colleague thought it was bad enough when the wires replaced the mails. But technology has leaped again, and so our Press on Press this month assesses the results and looks at the state of the foreign correspondent and news coverage.

Three of the participants are journalists: Karnow, syndicated columnist and editor of the *International Writers Service*; Walter Pincus, writer for the *Washington Post* and consultant for *NBC News*; and Richard Valeriani, diplomatic correspondent for *NBC News*.

The other panelists are foreign affairs analysts and writers: Constantine Menges of the *Hudson Institute*, and Barry Rubin of *Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies*, both of whom write about the press.

Editor Ray White began by asking how valid the criticism was that the press had been manipulated in Iran, that Iran had turned reporters into diplomats and propagandists:

**VALERIANI:** When have you not heard that? I covered the civil rights revolution in the South, and I used to hear that all the time—"You outside agitators from the North come down with your television cameras. If you went away, the problem would go away." The cliché response is, "There were no cameras present at the Boston Tea Party." I think the press, to a degree, is always being manipulated, or people try—politicians, political leaders always try—to use or manipulate the press. As a newsman, you have to be careful how you respond to those attempts. If there are daily demonstrations and you cover them, you have to point out the demonstrations occur only because the cameras are there. Normally, that is not the case. The only difference is the camera is the next stage in media technology. If you didn't have the camera, you'd have still photography. Before you had still photographs, you had the printed word, the

MARCH, 1980



L-R: Walter Pincus, Stanley Karnow, Constantine Menges, Ray White, Richard Valeriani and Barry Rubin.

printing press, and before that, you probably had word-of-mouth.

**KARNOW:** There is an attempt all the time to manipulate different practitioners in the different media in different ways. Part of the problem for the practitioner is to resist this manipulation or, better yet, to try to understand the different manipulations that are going on because that helps him, in some ways, to find out where the truth lies, the truth sometimes being different from the facts, incidentally. It seems to be a constant process of conflicts in which there are going to be a lot of mistakes, particularly in those forms of the media that are under the most pressure, the electronic media and the news agencies because of their constant deadlines. And Dick is right about technological progress. Read the biography of George Morrison, who was the *Times of London* correspondent in Peking around the turn of the century. Up to a certain point, there was no telegraphic communication between Peking and Europe, and he would go off on muleback, spend six months, come back and file a story with a byline "from a traveller recently in Szechuan province." He said it was a terrible day when the telegraph lines were installed because he had to sit there in the capital filing stories every day. In many ways, rapid communications has increased the pressure on the reporter.

**PINCUS:** I'm a great believer in manipulation. I think it goes on all the time on both sides. The free press is a game. The people who make news play with it; the more so, the more sophisticated

they become.

We who write, or people in television or radio, are the focus of all the attention, and we are also competing. The best and the worst of us are used, depending upon how we want to play it. If you want to use Iran, there was a tremendous amount of frustration in the taking of the hostages and the fact that the country couldn't do anything. That led people to look for reasons and things to complain about. And this "wonderful" theory developed that if the cameras weren't there, the demonstrations in front of the embassy would stop. In fact, that's even been followed up now by stories recently that since the Americans have been kicked out, the demonstrations have stopped. It's really not true. I was there on Ashura, which was the big demonstration day, and there were enormous crowds. The thing that the crowds responded to was not American television, but rather Iranian television, which had a position up on a wall looking down and which also had a truck right in the middle of the crowd. And when those cameras went on, everybody really played because that was local television and they knew they'd see themselves and their families would see them, and that was it. I lay into George Will, who is my favorite whipping boy, who said we sort of "made" the militants in the embassy because we kept photographing them and we carried their message to the world. They became a power in Iran because they set up a studio right in the embassy that went right to Iranian television. We are not the center of the Iranian universe. They don't





Constantine Menges

give a hoot about whether they're on NBC.

**KARNOW:** I don't think it's fair, though, to deny completely that they're trying to manipulate.

**VALERIANI:** But their original motives had nothing to do with television.

**RUBIN:** There's another angle: the irony of the thing is the Iranians *thought* they were manipulating the American television and press, and a lot of Americans thought they were manipulating it. But actually, I think the more the Americans saw the demonstrations and listened to Ghotzbadeh and other people, the more antagonistic they became to the Iranian cause. So this is, in part, why we're getting the media backlash, because the Iranians are saying 'Well, we thought we had it under control, and obviously we didn't really have the media under control, and, therefore, they must have been twisting everything.'

**PINCUS:** Did they throw everybody out because they were bored with the embassy coverage? What was much more interesting and much more news were Tabriz and the riots.

**RUBIN:** That's right.

**VALERIANI:** Wait a minute, Walter. I think that's much too simplistic. I think that the Americans were thrown out partly because the Revolutionary Council and others who may have some power in Iran decided the militants at the embassy had more power than they deserved through their access to American television and American newsmen.

And if you were going to have a resolution to this problem, you had to somehow diminish the power of those folks, and one of the ways you did this was to diminish their ability to communicate.

**PINCUS:** No. I've seen that written and I've heard that said, and I think that's wishful thinking. The militants' power comes from the militants' ability to go on their own television and to hold documents up. And after the Americans were out, in fact, they still did it, and they knocked two more of Khomeini's aides right out of the government by finding more documents. That's where their power comes from. It doesn't come from appearing on TV here.

**KARNOW:** I'd like to point out for the record that there've been several enormous events in recent history that have not been televised, if you can believe that. Take, for example, an upheaval in Indonesia in 1965-66, one-half million people killed in a fantastic upheaval—a slaughter. No television cameras around. It happened anyway. Take the Cultural Revolution in China, which has sometimes been compared to the events in Iran. No television cameras, and there was an anti-foreign element in that. When the British ambassador was locked up and they demonstrated against the Russians, they weren't asking television cameras to come in and film it because they didn't need that. Events will happen whether the cameras are there or not.

**MENGES:** You might add Cambodia to

that with two million people who died from 1975-1976.

**VALERIANI:** That's the point I'm trying to make. That television is the latest development in journalistic technology. If it's not there, fine. Each personality, each movement, decides what he has to do for his own personal interest, national interest, whatever. If the camera isn't there to record it, that's not a motivating factor. That's precisely the point.

**WJR:** But would you deny that the presence of these new technologies somehow affects what it's taking pictures of?

**RUBIN:** I think it affects what's going on in Washington a lot more than what's going on in Teheran.

**VALERIANI:** I don't even accept that.

**RUBIN:** It's relative. I disagree with some people who say the media are making foreign policy and this kind of thing. But I think the pace and nature of media coverage do have more effect, do put more pressure on Washington and on foreign policy than they did 20 or 30 years ago. Not only because of changes in media technology, but also because of changes in the media themselves. They are much more critical and challenging than in the past.

**WJR:** How do you think the coverage of Iran affected government policy?

**RUBIN:** First of all, the pacing. I would not doubt that having American hostages in Teheran would have forced pressure on the government for quick action at any time by the nature of things, but clearly, having it on the television every night created this sense of crisis, created the need to do things...

**VALERIANI:** Excuse me, Barry, can I ask what the quick action was?

**RUBIN:** One might argue it's having more of an effect on the election campaigns than it would have otherwise. Iran is a central issue in the election campaign. Carter and various government spokespeople are on television each night, adding to the feeling of crisis and the feeling of tension.

**VALERIANI:** Barry, Teddy Roosevelt also got elected for charging up San Juan Hill, and that was before television.

**RUBIN:** Yes, but it's different. That was not an ongoing event that everybody was focusing on. I'm not really in disagreement with you. I generally try to play down some of these effects, but I think, relatively speaking, they are there.

**MENGES:** Maybe I can take an example. As a foreign policy specialist I found myself wondering what was happening in Afghanistan. I read on page A-30 of the *Washington Post* one-inch stories about massive offensives against the rebels; I read a story about the deputy commander of the Soviet armed forces on page B-29 of the *Washington Post* being in Afghanistan. And, yet, I never saw it on television. Night after night after night, all I saw was in front

WASHINGTON JOURNALISM REVIEW

of the embassy. And I wonder had the *Post* or the *New York Times* or the networks covered the major offensive against Afghanistan—the rebels—that was launched shortly after the embassy was taken, whether the policy-makers might possibly have spent a little more time on that before mid-December when they began to focus on the movement of Soviet troops and so forth. I wonder if that's an effect, if to some degree the agenda of all the meetings and the hurried discussions was partially set by the television coverage, not that television should be blamed for that. I think the judgment of the policy-makers has to be faulted.

**VALERIANI:** I would suggest you've answered your own question by mentioning B-29; television news deals with page one because of the limitations of time. I don't say there's a justification; it's a reality. You have 22 minutes out of a 30-minute evening newscast to put news on the air. If the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times* had put Afghanistan on page one, you would have seen it in the first 22 minutes.

**MENGES:** Of course there's an interactive quality to that. I think some editors feel that what's news is what was on television the night before.

**VALERIANI:** Man, I gotta tell you, you've got it exactly backwards.

**MENGES:** Then let's ask the question: If the creation of 300,000 refugees in November by the Soviet-backed offensive in Afghanistan should have been page-one, why was it on the back page of the *Post* until December 15?

**PINCUS:** But Iran is a classic case for media coverage and particularly for television. It suits all the needs of the systems: all the networks had four or five camera crews; it's a guaranteed grabber for American people because they don't like the idea of their people taken; there is one central focus that's active every day which provides a basic story which you can cover; and you commit your assets to covering this thing and so you produce a certain amount of material that gets on the air, and it's self-fulfilling. That isn't necessarily a criticism of television; it's the way the system works. The papers then have two or three people there, and we're grinding out two stories a day. And there is a basic reinforced belief that this is the central focus of everybody's attention. It also comes at a time when we have conditioned ourselves to needing a central focus.

The first person to talk to me about Afghanistan was Ghotzbadeh in an interview in the first week of December during which we were discussing, 'Are the Russians strong, are the Russians weak?' The vision of the United States was that the Russians are strong, and if they'd ever been caught in the Iranian situation, they would have acted with

MARCH, 1980



Stanley Karnow

strength. We, on the other hand, were weak.

Ghotzbadeh's view was just the opposite: Russia and the United States were both major powers faced with the same problem, which was the rise in the Muslim central revolutionary growth, and that the Russians in that early part of December were about to lose. They had killed people and been killed, and they were on their way out. And we ought to be looking at that, comparing what was happening to them to the way we were acting, which he thought was unsatisfactory from his point of view, but certainly a better way of handling it. But at that time, the focus was still in Iran. I tried to get NBC to send somebody in and they didn't want to do it. And it took the *Post* nearly two weeks to send somebody in.

**MENGES:** I had the experience in mid-November of talking with a number of network people and, in fact, making a Xerox of one of the stories on page A-45 and saying, 'I think this is important. I believe that the Soviet Union will not let an entrenched communist regime be defeated. I believe the only way, based upon the history of Soviet relations with their Muslims in Central Asia, the Islamic revival can hurt them is if there were a victory for the rebels, and, therefore, I would expect some things will be happening. They simply would not let their client communist government go down to defeat. You ought to be taking a look at that. I had four network peo-

ple chat with me for an hour each, and we had some good conversations, but they simply said, 'No, there won't be any coverage.' As a matter of fact, I had one say to me, 'What will that do to SALT II to cover that?' which I found to be rather strange.

**WJR:** How do you encourage better coverage?

**PINCUS:** There's a simple answer. If the *New York Times* only had as its whole production every day two thirds of its front page, you would not have the kind of coverage you get out of the *New York Times*. Television is the 20th century's tabloid. It is going to give you quick and fast short news. It is giving that kind of news to more people than ever had it before, and that is a plus. It is covering nine or so stories, and that's really all it can cover.

**KARNOW:** I think you have to make a distinction between the written medium and the electronic medium. There's a tendency on the newspapers to play 'catch-up' with television without realizing that most of the American public is getting its news from television. And therefore, what it is reading in the newspaper the next day tends to be somewhat redundant. So that the papers that are taking a different tack, like the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Financial Times of London*, *Le Monde* or a few others, are devoting less and less time covering what has been on television the night before and what has been seen by a large proportion of the public and try-





Richard Valeriani

ing to get into trend stories. The number of trend stories one sees on the front page of a newspaper has certainly been increasing. It is undeniable that there are more stories on the front page of the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* that don't have 'today' in the lead than there were 25 years ago.

**VALERIANI:** Stan, it's not fair to compare live coverage of conventions, space shots or sports events, which is what television does best, to stories in the field. There's still an awful lot of room for print journalists to do things that television people can't do in the field.

And there's another consideration: economics. If the *Times* wants to have a stringer in Kabul, that's one thing. But for NBC to have coverage out of Kabul is another. I went there twice with Kissinger. We didn't have a crew; it would have cost an extraordinary amount of money to send a crew to Kabul. Anytime you're talking about a television story, you're talking about a correspondent, a camera, sound and maybe a producer, which cost a lot of money.

**KARNOW:** It costs a lot for newspapers and magazines, too. Marvin Stone [editor of *U.S. News and World Report*] told us at a conference that it costs him \$250,000 a year to keep somebody in Tokyo. I don't think you can clear your throat for less than \$150,000 a year in most places. This means you're going to see the press gradually pull back these people because of the costs. And you're going to see more of the kind of thing

you're seeing now—which is the flying squad technique, getting people in and out in a relative hurry.

**RUBIN:** Our context here is Iran and the Middle East, but that is not a good example of how press covers foreign news. The stories that the American media blow are not the ones which it spends a lot of time and attention on, but the ones that are neglected. And if I were to go back over the last decade, I would talk about some of these neglected stories.

**VALERIANI:** Such as?

**RUBIN:** Coverage of the guerilla conflicts in southern Africa; a lot of dimensions of the oil stories; Chile under Allende.

**VALERIANI:** Excuse me. How was southern Africa ignored?

**RUBIN:** On two levels. First...

**VALERIANI:** Are you talking about television coverage?

**RUBIN:** I'm talking about both. Television, because of the technical problems, but also the print media. Southern Africa was pretty much ignored in both television and the press for different reasons until after the Portuguese coup when it became a crisis. Afterward, it was not dealt with very well analytically in explaining the different guerilla movements and what they stood for. The Lebanese civil war with tremendous technical problems for television is another story that was not covered well by the print media on an analytical level nor by television, given those technical

problems. Now there certainly are exceptions, and everyone can cite favorite reporters and favorite stories, but I would say, going back over the coverage, the American people were not informed on those events and developments, but particularly on the analysis of those developments. So a story like Iran gets the attention, and they're going to do a much better job on it, but it's the neglected stories that are costly.

**MENGES:** But Iran is an even better example of my concern because one had a slow-motion revolution in 1978 that was carried out by three very different groups—a moderate center nationalist group, a radical left and communist group and an Islamic group of mullahs and institutions. And, yet, there was practically no coverage in 1979 after the shah left and fell, after Bakhtiar left, of exactly how the shah was brought down, what the elements were. They all have deep historical roots, but I have seen practically no coverage of the differences among the groups.

**VALERIANI:** There was very profound analysis in the *Washington Star*, which had George Ball do a series of articles after he had been commissioned by the White House to do the same thing.

**MENGES:** I haven't seen any sense in 1979, especially once the hostages were taken, of the differences. I've heard about Khomeini and the Revolutionary Council and the militants in the embassy, but I didn't hear about factions and so forth until the Azerbaijani separation became much more public. The irony to me is that with all the television crews there, with all the media coverage, the spotlight is on the embassy on that particular story although the opportunity was there for a much better look into the factions and groups contending for power under the cloak of Khomeini, for a much better look into the question I still have in my mind: Do those people in front of the embassy represent 20%, 90% or half of the Iranian people? I haven't seen the coverage, whether in print or on electronic media, which would help me understand some of those things better.

**RUBIN:** Just one sentence to reinforce that point: look at the French and British media, which I think did a much better job of political analysis.

**VALERIANI:** The French and the British reporters don't know any more about who the militants at the embassy are than the American reporters.

**MENGES:** My point is a broader point. I'm saying that the whole question of coalition groups under Khomeini's cloak and competing for power is really not well understood and not well covered yet, and it's really very important.

**PINCUS:** Let me try and deal with what you're both saying. You may be interested in this and maybe it would be important for people to know about this to make a rational judgment about Iran,



## And now for a word about their sponsors . . .

You've heard the speeches before. And we've all seen the slogans, listened to the tunes, the jingles, the campaign promises. But what's missing is *what really makes them run*.

That's where THE PROGRESSIVE comes in. No fluff. No frothy profiles. No phony scorecards on the candidates. While others take you on that quadrennial roller-coaster ride, we take you behind the corporate boardroom doors for a look at the real sponsors of our politics and our politicians.

"The system is the SOLUTION," says one of those sponsors, AT&T. But they've got it wrong. We say the system is the PROBLEM. And for seventy years we've been explaining just how and why.

Since the days—and in the tradition—of Eugene V. Debs, Jane Addams and Lincoln Steffens, THE PROGRESSIVE has been America's most provocative political magazine. Provocative—and informative—because we write about the things the candidates and commentators rarely, if ever, mention.

We'll help you keep the *real* score. Not just on the surface politics of the Presidential campaign, but on the underlying system itself. And on the issues that help explain why the system works better for Exxon, General Motors, and AT&T than it does for the rest of us.

THE PROGRESSIVE is a whole lot more, too: Books, movies, humor, and lively comment. See for yourself by taking advantage of this special offer: The next nine months of THE PROGRESSIVE—and a complimentary copy of our historic issue on "The H-Bomb Secret"—for only \$8.95. You save 33%

off the newsstand price, and you get THE PROGRESSIVE's guarantee: if ever you decide to cancel, we'll send you a full refund on any and all unmailed copies, no questions asked. And that's a campaign promise you can believe in.

### THE PROGRESSIVE

408 West Gorham St., Madison, WI 53703

YES, please enter my subscription to THE PROGRESSIVE at the special introductory rate of just \$8.95 for 9 monthly issues—a 33% saving—and mail me my free copy of "The H-Bomb Secret."

☐ My payment enclosed.

☐ Bill me later.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

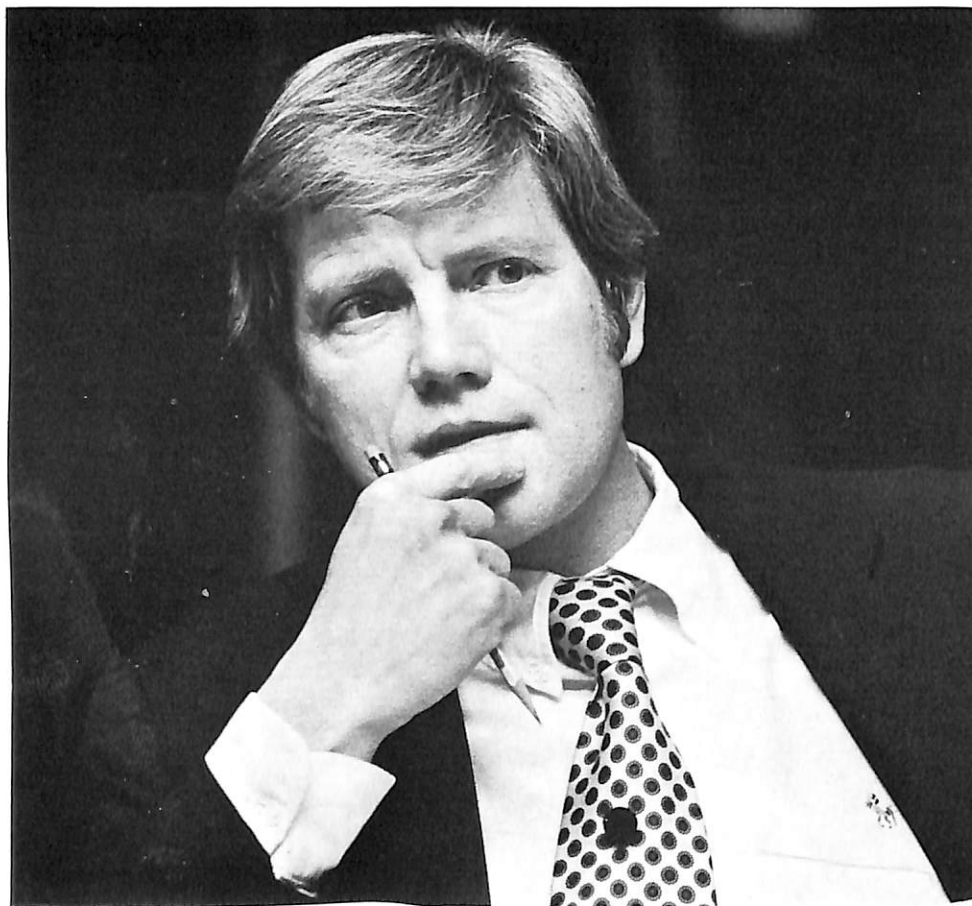
Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

DWJ 1





Ray White

but most Americans don't want to know that, don't care about it. They want it simple. It's a terrible thing to say, but they have a limited amount of time.

**MENGES:** They don't want to know if 35 million people or one million in Iran hate them? They don't care about that?

**PINCUS:** No, I don't think they do.

**KARNOW:** I think they care about that.

**PINCUS:** I don't. We're giving people what they want. We're giving people what we're capable of giving. A lot of your questions were answered, but they were answered in a 20-second sentence on one night's program which you may have missed. What you're saying is, because of television's nature, it ought to be repeated night after night after night because television is a repetitious medium. That's why ads go again and again. It has to be done four or five times. That's why Iran is perfect television—it's on every night; it takes that long to sink in. There were pieces in the *Post*, pieces in the *Times*, pieces in the *Star* analyzing those particular things you're worried about. They may not have been done as well as you may have liked them to have been done. There are also more serious journals, there are weeklies, there are monthlies, there are political science reviews. There are people who write books. But you can't expect everything to appear at the mass level.

**VALERIANI:** Let me interrupt to say I don't accept that they're more serious because they're covering a weekly,

monthly or yearly event. The daily journalist can be a terribly serious person.

**KARNOW:** And that includes dailies outside Washington and New York. In traveling around the country, I constantly hear criticism or denigration of what might be called the provincial press in this country. It's extraordinary when you go out and look at papers like the *Minneapolis Tribune* and the *Nashville Tennessean* and *Miami Herald* and the *Sacramento Bee*—the extraordinarily good coverage you get of world events. A constant coverage. Often they're buying some quality service like the L.A. Times/Washington Post news service. The best single editorial I read on the president's State of the Union Message was in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. When you think back to the days when everybody got their news and commentary spoon-fed to them by H.V. Kaltenborn and Gabriel Heatter and so forth, I think the public is getting a much better view of the world. They can buy the *Wall Street Journal* and read the long pieces, they can get the *New York Times* almost everywhere, they have their own regional newspapers, and they can watch television.

**VALERIANI:** But Stanley, we have to make a distinction between factual reporting and commentary when you're talking about that.

**KARNOW:** But there's a combination of those things. The *Missoulian* in Montana carries either the *New York Times*

or the *Washington Post/L.A. Times* service, so the stuff is there. They carry news, they carry columnists. I deal with a lot of these editorial writers; these guys sit down and really try to think about things.

**WJR:** But what about this argument implicit in Constantine's and Barry's criticisms—that the media may cover events well but they don't prepare the public for those events. Walter, your series in the *Post* on the shah's finances make interesting reading, but wouldn't they have been more valuable if we'd been able to read them prior to the embassy takeover?

**PINCUS:** Oh, it would have been much better if they were done contemporaneously with the events.

**WJR:** Would the *Post* have put them on the front page prior to the events?

**PINCUS:** You couldn't have gotten them there. I couldn't have collected the information. That's the problem, because the beginnings of that story came out of material I got in Iran after the shah was out.

**KARNOW:** Yeah, but Walter, there were stories. Francis Fitzgerald had a piece in *Harper's* . . .

**PINCUS:** The *Post* ran a six-part series by Dick Sales in 1976.

**RUBIN:** In terms of the strategic picture in the Persian Gulf and the U.S.-Iranian arms sales, I think the press did a pretty good job in preparing people, if one goes back and looks at the clips. The *Washington Post* and *New York Times* coverage of Iran in the 1970's was very good—and it stands up surprisingly well today. The main points I think the press missed were the problems in dealing with the arms on the ground, I mean the total and complete disorganization that was going on in Iran. Domestic affairs. Now the press faced a tremendous problem because Iran was a police state, the borders were limited, there were language difficulties—we all know the problems. Nevertheless, one gets the feeling American reporters never really got inside Iranian society; American reporters never really understood how it clicked. They never really got at some of the social problems.

Now why is that? Well, it's not easy to be a foreign correspondent, and anyone who thinks it is should be condemned to try it, but the answer in part is the nature of American media. They do not believe so much in specialization. Journalists do not do as much research in terms of reading books and scholarly articles. They don't have as much language ability as they should. I'll be perfectly frank, I have been talking to print and television reporters for the last two months who have called me up, and their ignorance of Iran is almost appalling. I'm frightened to realize I'm talking to someone who's going to go on 'X' network tonight and have access to tens of millions of people and has absolutely

no idea what's going on. These are some of the problems.

Europeans do not have all the solutions by any sense of the word, but there is more of a commitment to specialization, there is more of a commitment to research, and that shows in their reporting.

**KARNOW:** You know, there's nothing mystical about journalists; journalists are just guys who come out of the societies they live in. In the 1950's, many journalists were Cold Warriors. But attitudes change, so we have the famous quote from Admiral Felt in Vietnam when someone asked him a pernicious question, and he said 'How about getting on the team?' He was living in a past in which journalists didn't ask tough questions, and they were beginning to ask them in Vietnam. But I agree with Barry that Iran was not a mainstream area as far as American journalists were concerned.

**WJR:** But shouldn't it have been? Didn't we all know that Iran was important to America after the oil embargo of 1973?

**PINCUS:** I hate to defend the media, because I spend most of my time attacking it, but I really think you're asking an excessive amount, and particularly with hindsight, in terms of what you want. I read the clips on Iran before I went out there. I didn't know all that much about it. But the *Post* did run a six-part series, which was very unpopular because at that point the shah was a favorite, he was an ally, he was doing what we wanted, and it was extremely critical and it talked about the domestic problems. But that was three years ago and the series went by like a shot because people didn't particularly want to focus on that. There were other things going on.

The *Washington Post* is a 200-page newspaper to which the average reader gives between 15 and 20 minutes. You can't expect it to do what you want it to do, and television even less. I'm going through this thing with our own series right now; when we started, it drew enormous criticism from the government, which claimed we were doing what the militants wanted.

So for the *Post* to begin printing these things was a major decision and there are not that many papers that are going to give you that kind of chance. Incidentally, we tried to build into these stories the thought that what's going on in Iran is going to be repeated in Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, in Morocco and Egypt, probably, because the same forces are at work in those places, and we're going to try to follow up on that. But you can't do everything, and that's what worries me about your question.

**MENGES:** I think Ray has a valid question because the revolution against the shah was really a slow-motion revolution that built month by month by



Walter Pincus

month in 1978. My father has spent 50 years in the area, and knows all the languages, and knows all the ethnic groups and peoples and so forth, and I had just seen him in Vienna, and he gave me his sense of how shaky he thought things were. The last two years have been fascinating for me because I've had the experience of trying to arouse the interest of some of my friends and former colleagues in the government and in the media about this part of the world, and I found the parallelism fascinating. After the Afghanistan coup in 1978, the *New York Times* covered it as 'cabal in Kabul' in a very light-hearted way, as did the *Post*.

**KARNOW:** Wait a minute, it wasn't treated in a light-hearted way.

**MENGES:** Yes, it was. 'It happens all the time. It's the 'nth' change in government, you know how that region is so unstable,' and so forth. That was April, 1978. After that, it seemed to me, the strategic connection among the countries and the Persian Gulf as an ultimate target of destabilization was something worth thinking about in its entirety. And it was at that point that I found, to my great surprise, that there was not more government attention to Iran—which I think was catastrophically incompetent—and more media attention.

**KARNOW:** Since you've linked the press with government here, let me make a point. Having been a correspondent, it's very interesting that the CIA guys at the stations I covered were very eager to

give me information, because that was their way of communicating their lines back to whoever the CIA director was. When I worked for the *Washington Post*, they knew that, whoever it was—Helms or somebody—would read the story in the newspaper and would get it a lot faster than if they put it in the bottle and threw it into the sea, which was what it was like sending it through the bureaucracy. So if you happened to show up some place and you were from the *Times* or the *Post* or the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Washington Star*, the door was open because this was their way of communicating back to their bosses, just as bureaucrats here communicate with each other through the newspapers. Somebody's so-called scoop is a message from one bureaucrat to another bureaucrat.

Government is similar to the press in other ways, too. In 1961 and 1962 on a trip back here from Asia, I went to see Bobby Kennedy and started talking about Vietnam. And he cut me short and said, 'Look, we've got 25 Vietnamese a day to deal with here in the White House.' So, government's not much different from the press in that respect. Where do the priorities come from? The priorities begin to shape up when the blood starts running in the streets. There's always that guy from the CIA or the third deputy assistant of some foreign desk who's going to get out all these reports and say, 'I told you so.' It's the banana peel school of journalism:



you stand on a street corner all day long, someone's going to slip on a banana peel and you'll have a scoop.

**RUBIN:** But I have to say that the articles the *Washington Post* ran in 1975-1976 pushed Congress to act.

**VALERIANI:** Toward what, act toward what?

**RUBIN:** Toward holding hearings, toward discussing, criticizing America's transfer of arms to Iran so that by the end of 1976, there was a lot of talk on the Hill, a lot of pressure on the Hill to reexamine this and to do something about it.

If the newspapers can no longer compete with television, then they can move in one of two directions. They can go do more style things—features, best restaurants. When I interviewed a lot of the editors, this was exactly what they told me people wanted—people didn't want foreign news anymore. That was before Iran and Afghanistan. The other direction they can go in, which Phil Foisie of the *Post* is fond of saying, is they can become journals of comment; they can do more serious stories, more analytical stories, so they can begin to develop the readership at a higher level because they are freed from having to cover some of these 'instant' stories. And I would hope that what press criticism would do would be to push them a bit in that latter direction.

**KARNOW:** But timing is extremely important. You cannot sell a story either to the public or to the editors before its time. Again, it's like those obscure telegrams that come in from Malcolm Toom or somebody else like that, all predicting disaster.

**RUBIN:** That's why Iran got a lot of coverage. That's why southern Africa and the Lebanese civil war did not get a lot of coverage.

**VALERIANI:** Wait, wait, wait! Southern Africa didn't get a lot of coverage?

**RUBIN:** It did not get a lot of coverage until all of a sudden we woke up one morning and the civil war in Angola was coming to an end, and there were all these groups running around, everyone was trying to nail down who they were. And Henry Kissinger was asking for money for Angola and nobody knew what was going on. Walter Cronkite was so upset his moustache almost fell off. That was a perfect example of a story that was not covered until the last minute crisis, and then everyone is running around and there is not a lot of knowledge of what the story is about.

**KARNOW:** How much time did you devote to reading that long story today about Timor in the *New York Times*?

**VALERIANI:** I read the whole thing, and Stanley, I don't care about Timor. But you're right, 99.99% of the American people don't care about Timor.

**RUBIN:** David Brinkley says we don't care about Lebanon. Why are we having this Lebanese civil war on TV?



Barry Rubin

**VALERIANI:** No, no. He's wrong. Listen, if you quote David Brinkley on American public thinking, you and I have a problem.

**RUBIN:** I'm not quoting him as an expert on American public thinking. I'm using him as a leading television newsmen.

**KARNOW:** Go back to my Timor example because this is a very good example. I didn't read that story today. I just didn't have time, and I'm like 99.99% of everybody else. There was no connection; it didn't have anything to do with me.

**WJR:** Let me try a different tack with you. Predictably, I suppose, the critics here tonight have criticized the press, and the press people have defended it. So let me turn it around and ask the press people what they think was worthy of criticism about the coverage in Iran.

**KARNOW:** Wait a second. I disagree with your posture with that. The people who criticized the press were criticizing it because it didn't say what they wanted it to say.

**WJR:** Is that right, Constantine?

**MENGES:** No, my criticism was that I thought certain facets of the story, very important to understanding what's going on, were left out. And the resources were there.

**WJR:** Any particular organizations or correspondents that you think did an especially good job?

**MENGES:** In the Iranian case, I was struck by the fact I could see in the coverage of some individuals that they be-

gan to get what I call second-level knowledge. First-level knowledge is you know where the country is and know roughly who the main people are participating. Second level, you begin to understand how they relate to each other. Third level, you know something about their past and can start analyzing and predicting something about future behavior. So I would see people like Jonathan Randal of the *Washington Post* who I thought showed an enormous insight and a learning process that went on over time as I would read him. And I would notice that and notice his coming to understand the reality of Iran.

**RUBIN:** The structure of the American press is to cover what happened that day, and if one wants to know the latest developments in what happened that particular day, there's no press better in the world than the American press. And American television. It's not even close. But when it comes to understanding the political trends, to analyzing them, the American press falls short. There are reasons for that. People are moved around, there's the pressure of editors, the fact that these are mass newspapers, so that the *Times* and the *Post* reach far more people and have to deal with local issues that, say, the *London Times* and *Le Monde* do not have to do. We don't believe in specialization. Nevertheless, it's a reality, and I think this is a reality which is making it more difficult for the American people to understand international issues.

**WJR:** It's also a reality that we're out of time. Thank you, gentlemen.

WASHINGTON JOURNALISM REVIEW

## TRY POLITICS TODAY WITHOUT OBLIGATION. GET IN THE WINNER'S CIRCLE.



Please enroll me as a Charter Subscriber, send the next issue and bill me \$5.95 for the year — over 30% off the regular price! If I'm not satisfied, I may write "Cancel" on the bill, return it unpaid, keep my magazine and not be obligated further in any way.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I prefer to enclose \$5.95 payment.

Please add \$2.00 for Canada, \$4.00 for foreign Countries, prepaid only.

Just fill in this card, tear it out and drop it in the mail — no postage is necessary.

5259

Now there's a magazine that offers authoritative answers to the questions most of us have about politics, the political process, political animals and the public policy issues that touch our lives.

**POLITICS TODAY** is a forum for many of our country's most astute, articulate and incisive political analysts and strategists. We publish trenchant interviews, behind the scenes analyses, score cards on legislators' performances, guides for untangling political rhetoric and the pros and cons of today's most significant issues.

**POLITICS TODAY** has already begun in-depth coverage of the 1980 elections and will continue to provide penetrating reports on the candidates, platforms, primaries, issues and prognostications. But we won't be ignoring the other areas of interest and concern. We'll be bringing you more articles like these:

- What's holding up fusion energy... and why it may end up costing over \$18 billion.
- How politicians use the Hollywood connection.
- The cases for and against a Constitutional Convention.
- Why the U.S. got everything wrong in Iran.
- How Presidents manipulate the economy for political gain.
- How politics fouls our drinking water.

If you're interested in politics and in the public policy issues that affect your life (everything from taxes to Social Security to energy) and would like to read about them without suffering from acute boredom or an uneasy sense of suspicion about

# OFF!

... **POLITICS TODAY** judge for yourself?

Fill in the coupon below, the mail. We'll send you **POLITICS TODAY**, enroll you as a Charter Subscriber, bill you just \$5.95 — over 30% off the regular price — for one year (6 issues). **POLITICS TODAY**, pay the bill and return it unpaid, keep your **POLITICS TODAY** and that will be that.



### CHARTER SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Please enroll me as a Charter Subscriber, send me the next issue and bill me \$5.95 for the year — over 30% off the regular price! If I'm not completely satisfied, I may write *cancel* on the bill, return it unpaid, keep my magazine and not be obligated in any way.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

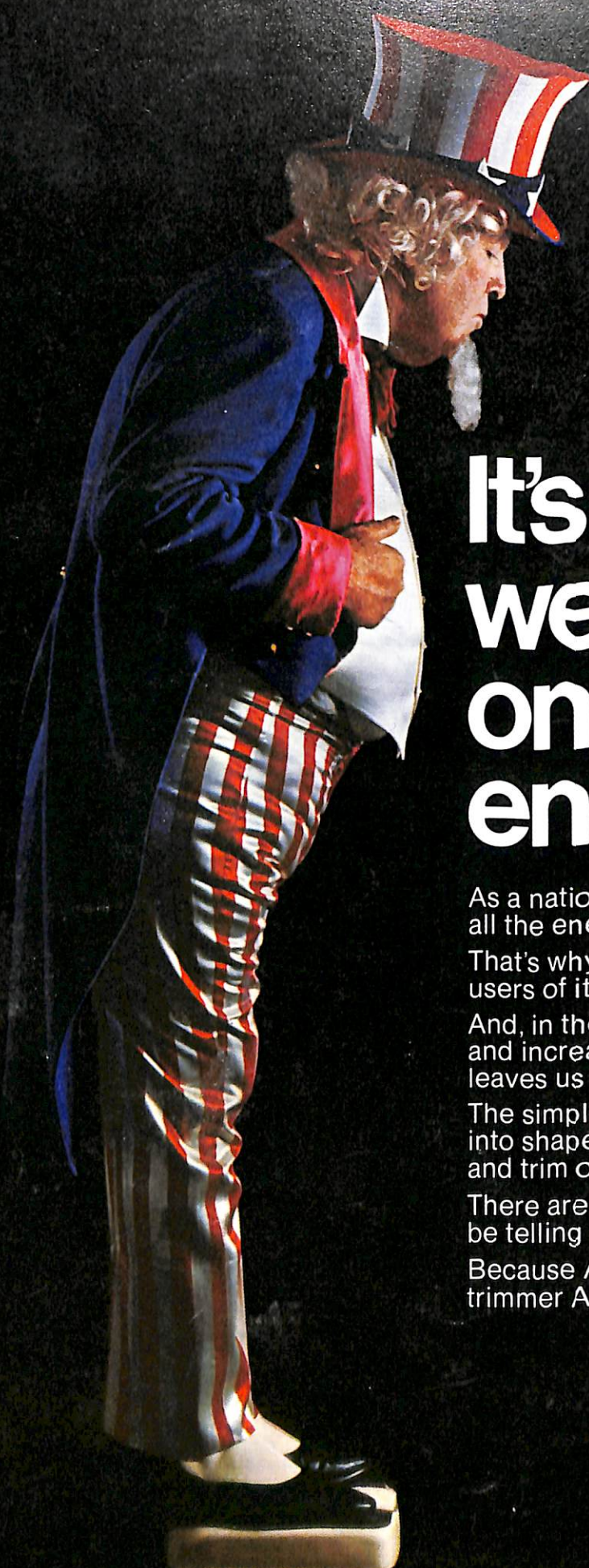
Send no money. Just fill in this coupon, clip it out and mail it. We'll bill you as indicated above.

**politics today**

P.O. Box 2655,  
Boulder, Colorado 80322

5258





# It's time we all went on an energy diet.

As a nation, we've grown accustomed to having all the energy we want.

That's why today we're one of the least efficient users of it.

And, in these times of shortages, higher prices and increasing dependence on foreign oil, that leaves us dangerously soft around the middle.

The simplest, quickest way to get ourselves back into shape is to change our consumption habits and trim our waste.

There are many ways it can be done. And we'll be telling you about them in our advertising.

Because Atlantic Richfield believes a leaner, trimmer America is a healthier America.

**ARCO**



**FREE:** For a booklet full of money-saving information on conserving energy, write for THE ARCO ENERGY DIET, Box 30103, Los Angeles, California 90030.