

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Bias threatens to undo media

Washington insiders are becoming increasingly aware that the media crusade against Sen. Dan Quayle (R-Ind.), the Republican vice presidential candidate, threatens to backfire against the media. Signals from Middle America are beginning to deliver a loud and clear message: The voting public is not being deceived by one of the more egregious cases of biased media efforts to influence public opinion in a major election. On the contrary, the public is overripe for a backlash.

The backlash may hit the Democratic ticket, too: On Aug. 25, at a Massachusetts veterans' conference, Quayle's rival Lloyd Bentsen was roundly booed when he talked about what Dukakis has done for veterans. The same day in St. Louis, Quayle received a standing ovation from a National Guard audience after criticizing Dukakis's defense policy.

For their part, the hopeless liberals of the press will go to their graves believing it is only partisan, narrow-minded ideologues who do not share their passion to smear Senator Quayle, or anyone else they decide to target. But recent history has repeatedly shown that it is the media which are out of step with the thinking of the mainstream of the U.S. citizens.

In my three and a half years in Washington, I have observed closely

the psychology of the dominant media attitude. Some commentators have termed the phenomenon, "Gotcha journalism." Potency for them is located in their ability to ruin someone, or to take credit for forcing an administration official to resign or the President to make a damaging admission.

ABC's Sam Donaldson, in his book *Hold On, Mr. President*, stated, as if he were proud of it, that he felt it his role to take an adversarial position with respect to his government. More than once, I have seen almost the entire White House press corps adopt the assumption that a statement by a Soviet official was true, and one from a U.S. official was suspect.

The way this often works at the White House is that the press corps will key off a rumor or leak that is planted on the front page of the *Washington Post* (and occasionally another newspaper). They will then badger White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, each asking him the same question 50 different ways.

Liberal bias and adolescent-style peer pressure are also important components of the personality make-up of many of today's journalists.

The liberal bias comes right out of the Vietnam War days. Perhaps the biggest single irony of the current media attack on Senator Quayle—for allegedly avoiding Vietnam combat duty by joining the National Guard—is that a very high percentage of those leading the charge were against the Vietnam war at the time. If they did not actively seek to duck military service, they supported those who did.

Opposition to the Vietnam war did not automatically make one a liberal, of course, but the ratio was pretty high among draft age youth at the time who went on to major in journalism in college.

College is no place to learn how to become a journalist, as those in the

trade who trained me during my high school days always stressed. I worked every free minute for years after school at my hometown daily newspaper, and some of the older professionals there despised the notion of going to college to learn how to write a good news story. You learned that by steeping yourself in it. College, they insisted, was for learning about what you would write about.

Writing, on the other hand, could only be learned by doing, and standing over the shoulder of an experienced editor who would show you why he was cutting your story to ribbons in order to improve it, as I did countless times.

At any rate, beginning in the early 1970s, a new breed started pouring out of the colleges and universities of the land. They started pouring into all the professions—an especially significant proportion into the media and churches. Their mission was not to become dedicated professionals, but involved an ulterior motive: to use their jobs to change the world into conformity with whatever fuzzy vision they might have adopted from a political science class or radical anti-war group they belonged to in school.

But for their controllers, who use these reporters to carry out their larger stratagems, there is a serious problem. Driven by their compulsions, the media have now overreached themselves so far as to destroy the basis of their own effectiveness: credibility. They have unleashed something that is blindly self-destructive, and could discredit one of the most important institutional structures of social control the U.S. Establishment has cultivated.

In that circumstance, the growth of the circulation of an independent voice of reason—*EIR*—is seen by the Establishment as a very grave threat indeed.