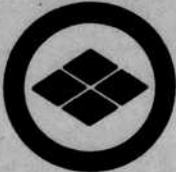


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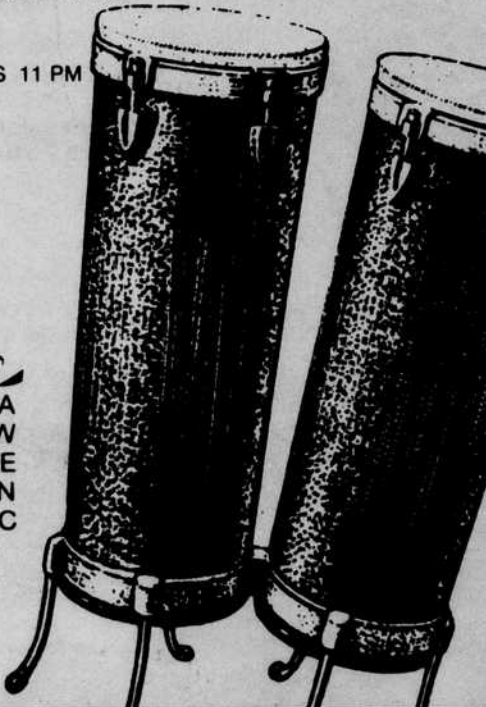


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Daniel Schorr:
Media Politics

PART II

by George Beres



Following is Part II of an article that appeared in the October 8 issue of What's Happening. In 1977, TV news veteran Daniel Schorr was forced to resign from CBS News and threatened with imprisonment for releasing a classified report on CIA corruption. Schorr spoke in Portland on September 30, and George Beres was there.

If—as Daniel Schorr suggests—the current generation of this country's politicians has a rendezvous with oblivion, the demands of television news may be the main reason.

When he spoke at Portland's First Congregational Church, September 30, he remembered one of the cardinal rules of the broadcast news business: make your copy current. He did so by quoting Congresswoman Pat Schroeder, who had just withdrawn her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president.

"She said," quoted Schorr, "that she knew that by running for president, every one of her human contacts would soon become a photo opportunity. That ties in with my belief that we in the media are not, as some charge, the manipulators. Instead, we are manipulated by public relations people who create photo opportunities to get free media exposure for their products or their candidates."

Schorr used the behavior patterns of two other former presidential candidates, Gary Hart and Joe Biden, to further illustrate how the medium has become the message in politics:

"Gary Hart did things in a risk-taking way that got attention—eventually too much attention. Joe Biden talked in streams of consciousness to exploit media opportunities—and that sometimes turned into streams of unconsciousness."

Schorr, once a prominent member of the cast for the CBS-TV nightly news, believes the chance for TV exposure has caused today's politicians to talk "with great facility before they know what they want to say. They do it for effect. They're performing. Politicians today try to invent themselves. There isn't any Joe Biden; there isn't any Gary Hart. They both were trying to be Jack Kennedy."

As Schorr complained that television "screams out the originality of real characters," he asked: "Where are the political figures we used to have—those with commanding presences, such as Franklin Roosevelt, Churchill and DeGaulle?"

He answered his own question: "Today's politicians feel they can't afford to lose the significant majority. So they can't risk antagonizing any group."

He said President Reagan is the one person most responsible for the trend toward media politics. That's partly because he is so adept in front of the camera and before a microphone.

"The secret of success in media politics is sincerity," said Schorr. "If you can fake that, you've got it made. Our president is a master at faking it."

As an illustration, he recalled the president asking his fellow citizens to share a dream with him:

"He has these fantasies; but they are nice fantasies. I think he has come to think they really can happen. The funny thing is that we didn't get upset when the fantasies didn't come true. We have gotten used to his parables, and accept them. His popularity stays up when the job performance goes down. That is show business, and we have bought show business—the hunger for our wishes. This passive president's wishes got translated into murder in the hands of someone like William Casey."

Schorr also commented on some of the administration's supporting cast: "The real Judge Bork is a man who really wants to be on the Supreme Court. His view is, 'I'll say whatever I need to say to get on that court.'" And "Magnet North (Oliver) is not true North."

One questioner from the audience asked if, in the era of "media politics," a candidate with "big ears, round glasses and a bow tie" can be a valid presidential contender.

Earlier, Schorr had asked a related question: "Will there be a real awakening in our electorate, or will we get someone else after Reagan just like him, another kind of dream for our VCRs?"

Now, in response to the audience question, he said that "in the interest of full disclosure, I should say that my 17-year old daughter is interning in the campaign office of the bow tie candidate. She said to me, 'I think Senator Simon is what he says he is.' I agree. He is more genuine."

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