

Jack Anderson in Eugene

Columnist says Reagan didn't know

by George Beres

Like the prophet without honor in his own territory, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson got little attention from his fellow journalists in Eugene last Sunday.

One lone TV photographer was the only member of the official media to attend a news conference for the syndicated columnist responsible for breaking the story of the Iran-Contra debacle of the U.S. government. The news access came prior to Anderson's talk in the Erb Memorial Union Ballroom at the University of Oregon before some 250 persons.

A generation ago, Anderson—like his noted predecessor, Drew Pearson—might have gone under the uncomplimentary title, muckracker. But in this more sophisticated media era, he is recognized for the role he serves as one of the nation's pre-eminent investigative journalists.

"I tell my reporters that I want the facts as they are, not as we wish they were. I want to know what's happening, not what someone says is happening," said Anderson.

As he acknowledged the existence of a respected Journalism School at the University of Oregon, Anderson made it clear he has little respect for reporters who depend on official news "handouts" without digging for "the real story."

"Other correspondents can go to the newsmakers for the news, if they wish," he said. "But where I am in Washington, D.C., the newsmakers are politicians, and politicians are not reliable sources. I try to find out who is providing information for the newsmakers. I try to intercept the news earlier from the professionals who provide politicians with their information, which the politicians then distort to serve their own needs."

Anderson doesn't mind the infrequency of presidential news conferences. He depends little on what he hears at them.

"The president has the advantage he should have—that of having the latest intelligence available to the United States," said Anderson. "He then shades or slants the news to fit his policies. I like to find out the accurate news before the president has a chance to slant it. We want the facts as they are, not as someone tells us they are."

He said the task is easier said than done, and called investigative reporting "high risk journalism." But he urged the undergraduate journalists in his audience to pry for their stories at all levels, local as well as national.

The problem, he explained, is when sources don't want to talk for the record. Reporters should not talk to persons who request anonymity, unless the journalist is willing to grant that confidentiality.

"We keep our pledges of anonymity," he said. "A confidential source is just a tipster. One must go from there to verify the story with sources whom the writer can quote."

He said he believes the final result of the hearings on the Iran-Contra issue will be to "fully indict Ronald Reagan."

But he feels Congress deserves more criticism than it has gotten.

"Those in the Congress have run hot and cold on the question," he said. "They love to pontificate and beat their breasts. But they would not agree to a consistent policy. The vagueness of Congress made it possible for those who executed the Reagan policy not to know what the Congress would approve from day to day. I know most of what went on. What do you want to know?"

"I'm convinced Reagan didn't know there had been an illegal diversion of funds to the Contras. The man who really ran the operation was the late Bill Casey (CIA head). He tried to do things legally by creating loopholes in the law. He got other groups to do the

dirty tricks for him—an approach he probably learned from the late J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI.”

Anderson believes a federal administration ought to be responsible for what goes on, even when it doesn't know. "Still," he hedged, "I believe Nixon probably would have gotten off in the Watergate case if he had not had the tape recordings that proved he had known."

He said that because Reagan is a "believer in the law," he will not pardon those involved in the case in his behalf, even though he has great loyalty toward those who work for him.

He feels Douglas Ginsburg should not have been nominated for the Supreme Court because "it was an



Columnist Jack Anderson is syndicated by the *Washington Post*.

enormous violation of the law for a professor of law to smoke pot. We can't have individuals deciding which laws they want to violate and which they won't. Organized crime is supported by people who smoke pot or sniff cocaine. Criminals get away with that business tax-free, which enables them to continue their bribery, murder and corruption. Those who buy drugs aid these criminals. I'd almost support a law to make smokers of pot guilty of conspiracy to commit murder, because that's where the money goes—to those who commit murder."

Anderson also agrees with the denial of a Supreme Court seat to Robert Bork:

"Our founding fathers created the Constitution to protect the people from the government. Conservative judges—which is what Bork would have been—believe in protecting the government from the people."

He also invoked the Constitution in behalf of an investigative press:

"The founders of this democracy intended to protect the press. That's why the press is mentioned in the Constitution. No mention is made of the practice of law or medicine. But they recognized how important freedom of the press is to this system of government."

Anderson voiced both criticism and admiration for President Reagan:

"The president is a far greater violator of classified information than I am. He puts out information that suits his politics on a weekly basis. I talk to the same security experts who advise the president.

"Our government classifies information to keep it away from our own people as much as to hide it from the Russians. G. Gordon Liddy is supposed to have accused me of printing a story that resulted in one of our undercover agents in Russia being murdered. I publicly offered Liddy \$100,000 if he could name the person whose death I was responsible for. He couldn't do it."

But Anderson said he believes Reagan has to be given credit for knowing the direction he is going:

"Reagan may not understand the details, but he knows where he is going. Jimmy Carter would tinker with the details, but not know what direction he was headed. Reagan has been the first president since Franklin Roosevelt to be able to change the direction of the ship of state. FDR turned it to the left; Reagan to the right."

He was asked if a president still can be honest with the electorate.

"There will always be room in American politics for Abe Lincoln," he responded. "I think it is possible for a president to be his own man despite the temptation to play the game Daniel Schorr described as 'media politics.' But you have to remember that there can be some affectation even in wearing a bow tie. Lincoln himself used his ugliness to win sympathy."

Anderson said he spent many years writing on a manual typewriter "which I used to pounce on." He never tried an electric machine until his recent adjustment—with some resistance—to the word processor.

"But," he said, "modern equipment aside, people in my business should be encouraged that we're moving into what is called the 'information age.'"

For the most widely circulated investigative reporter, one thing remains the same, even if the tools of the trade change: "If you're going to be scared by a secrecy label, you had better get out of the news business."

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