

Will the inaugural protests be covered?

NEW YORK, JANUARY 18, 2005 – Some of us are old enough to remember that bright day in January 1977 when Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter got out of their limo and strolled down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House. We remember it now with nostalgia because that more hopeful American moment is long gone. Now we have elections deemed “brief accountability moments” and a garrison state to insure the trains of social order run on time.

Homeland security?

Homeland insecurity is more like it, as new state of the art police state tactics are introduced to protect the president from protesters who plan to try to give his Administration as hard a time as they can.

This year’s re-inauguration promises to be more fun and games and who knows what repressive tactics will be introduced if somehow the event turns into a street fight or worse. Will there be another Chicago or Tiananmen Square or just mass arrests like at the RNC in New York?

The FBI uses a sports metaphor to describe its overkill approach even as it waves a stick bigger than any Teddy Roosevelt carried. They can’t wait to test out their souped up contain and control strategies. The testosterone is pumping among the G-Men. They want to engage.

Reports the Washington Post: “This is the Super Bowl for us,” said FBI Supervisory Special Agent James W. Rice II. “Everyone on every team is dressed up and playing in the game. And the bench is very, very deep.”

“The agents and officers at the swearing-in and along the parade route will have access to the latest tools. Every piece of technology that exists will be a part of this,” said Rice, who oversees the National Capital Response Squad.

Underscore that line “Every technology that exists.”

But this is more than a boys-with-toys-chasing-the-militant-black-bloc-around-Dupont-Circle moment. It could be a turning point in the history of the

republic since the “Sun King,” as Marc Crispin Miller calls GWB, has already made clear that in his mind at least the election gave him a mandate to do whatever he wants to do.

Full Stop.

Not surprisingly, the protesters will be out in force as they were in 2000. Back then, the press barely took notice of the biggest inaugural protest in American history. Writer Dennis Loy Johnson wrote a must-read little book called “The Big Chill” on “The great unreported story of the Bush Inauguration Protests...” (Melville House.)

The protests were ignored, he charges, “There seemed to be a determined and almost paternalistic effort by the media to soothe and assure the populace that everything was fine, that the democracy was running smoothly (as if that was the obligation of either print or broadcast journalists) that there was, in any case no dissent except from the usual suspects ...”

That was then. That event signaled a new media paradigm for marginalizing dissenters.

Last year, the Post’s ombudsman Michael Getler investigated complaints that the Post had been downplaying protests and minimizing their numbers. He concluded that the complaints were valid. And it was done as a matter of policy. The paper carried a mini-mea culpa about its prewar coverage. And then it was back to news business as usual.

So here we go again as David Admin wrote on RedefeatBush.com on January 15: “The Post’s coverage of the counter-inaugural in today’s paper uses only 5 of its 1822 words to describe why anyone might wish to protest the inauguration of George W. Bush – “Ohio is a battle cry.” The rest trivializes the motivation of the protesters. An intelligent reader who wishes to discern the answer cannot grasp why they are protesting. The only possibility the post offers is that they do so to be cool.

“We look forward with great anticipation to the Post’s ridicule of the Bush inaugural itself, since surely the pomposity of that event will engender a similar level of jocularly and arrogance on its part.”

The blog at Democrats.com anticipates the worse: “the protests will be large but will be subject to a media blackout.”

Some protesters fear the lack of coverage may be their own fault, that it is they who are turning off the press. Here is a comment by someone called “citizen” on the DC Indymedia site: “How can we expect to be taken seriously

without good typography...please I implore you, consult a trained professional graphic designer when creating any printed materials, particularly those that are to be seen by the press.”

I wish that our media decided what to cover on the basis of typography. There is more going in here. The Washington Post works in the bubble of the beltway. It shares the values and logic of those in power. To them, protesters come from a different country, perhaps even a different planet, and as such have no claim on legitimacy or their attention.

So as media critics pounce on the Bush Administration for subsidizing the likes of conservative pseudo journalist Armstrong Williams to get its spin into the media, they ignore the way that our media has allowed itself to be co-opted. Many don't need to be bought. They are already on board, fully deferential to the Administration as has been seen over and over again.

Their stance reminds me of a ditty about journalists often cited in the media in the UK. I am not sure who wrote it.

“You cannot hope to bribe or twist
Thank God, the British Journalist
Seeing what the chap will do for free
There's no occasion to.”

No wonder many protesters don't feel they can't trust the press corps (or is it corpse?). Activists feel they have taken sides even as they mask their agendas with the claims of objectivity. (Liberal Media, my a--)

In an age of information dominance, they are the ones being dominated when they are not just getting along by going along. Far too many in the corporate media world in the words of Senator Robert Byrd, “have bought it hook, line and sinker.”

Here is an example of how the reporters from the Post seek guidance from the Administration. As we know, the GOP and the Administration spends a great deal of time, with help from pollsters like Frank Luntz, in shaping the language used to popularize its agenda. We saw it clearly in the war when terms like “Iraqi Freedom” were on their lips every other second.

Now as the Administration promotes the privatization of social security, they depoliticize the issue by repeatedly referencing, “personal savings accounts” and avoiding unpopular words like “private.” Recently Post reporters spoke to

President Bush about this directly. This revealing exchange item in which a Post reporter explains that they have been arguing with the RNC over the proper language to use appears on the Democratic Underground site:

WP Reveals that WH propaganda Includes Pressuring Newspapers

The Post: Will you talk to Senate Democrats about your privatization plan?

THE PRESIDENT: You mean, the personal savings accounts?

The Post: Yes, exactly. Scott has been –

THE PRESIDENT: We don't want to be editorializing, at least in the questions.

The Post: You used partial privatization yourself last year, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes?

The Post: Yes, three times in one sentence. We had to figure this out, because we're in an argument with the RNC about how we should actually word this. Mike Allen, the industrious Mike Allen, found it.

THE PRESIDENT: Allen did what now?

The Post: You used partial privatization.

THE PRESIDENT: I did, personally?

The Post: Right.

THE PRESIDENT: When?

The Post: To describe it.

THE PRESIDENT: When, when was it?

The Post: Mike said it was right around the election.

THE PRESIDENT: Seriously?

The Post: It was right around the election. We'll send it over.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm surprised. Maybe I did. It's amazing what happens when you're tired. Anyway, your question was? I'm sorry for interrupting.

Someone on the site then comments: "What was that? We had to figure this out, because we're in an argument with the RNC about how we should actually word this. Why the hell would the WP bother arguing with the Administration about the language they choose to use? ... They start winning the issue when they get to frame the issue. Here we go again."

This type of negotiating may be one reason why one of Washington's great reporters no longer can stomach working for newspapers like the Times or the

Post. He doesn't ask the Administration how to word things. Seymour Hersh is breaking stories all by himself for the New Yorker magazine.

His latest – out this week discloses that a new war may be brewing. Reuters reports: “The United States has been conducting secret reconnaissance missions inside Iran to help identify potential nuclear, chemical and missile targets.

The article, by award-winning reporter Seymour Hersh, said the secret missions have been going on at least since last summer with the goal of identifying target information for three dozen or more suspected sites. Hersh quotes one government consultant with close ties to the Pentagon as saying, “The civilians in the Pentagon want to go into Iran and destroy as much of the military infrastructure as possible.”

Here we go again again.

So if media outlets can't or won't cover a major war in the making, is it any surprise that they won't cover the political war at home, right in their own backyard?

UPDATE

Post Ombudsman Michael Getler reveals that The Washington Post Co. is among the more than 100 companies that have donated between \$100,000 and \$250,000 in support of President Bush's \$40 million-dollar inaugural gala. The Post has given \$100,000, Getler reports, saying that the company wanted to ensure that it would have enough tickets to events such as the inaugural balls. He continues: “Readers who wrote to me said they viewed this as inconsistent with the role of a hard-nosed news organization. I would say they have a good point.”