PRESS & TELEVISION

The Media Lobby

"The Powers That Be *Lobbying*" by Sheila Kaplan, in *The Washington Monthly* (Dec. 1988), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

On Capitol Hill, the "media lobby"—representing TV broadcasters, cable TV, and newspaper and magazine publishers—is one of the most powerful. Do these guardians of the Fourth Estate spend their time crusading for First Amendment rights? "Occasionally," reports Kaplan, a freelance writer. "But the day-to-day work of a Washington media lobbyist focuses not so much on the front page as the bottom line."

And the odd thing is that the average American seldom sees news reports on the activities of these powerful lobbyists.

"The clout that the newspapers and broadcasters exert is the desire of every elected official to have favorable press attention," notes Lionel Van Deerlin, a former U.S. Representative. "When you hear from these guys, you listen." Campaign contributions are also a factor. Between 1985 and August 1988, Kaplan reports, the National Cable Television Association's political action committee (PAC) donated $446,240 to candidates for federal office, and the National Association of Broadcasters' PAC gave $307,986. Newspaper publishers, who have no PAC, made many individual donations.

In 1987, media lobbyists "pulled out the stops" when two congressmen proposed to extend the ban on televised cigarette advertisements to newspapers and magazines. At stake: $460 million in advertising revenues. The American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) took up arms, calling the measure a threat to free speech. The measure ultimately failed; Representative Mike Synar (D-Okla.) complained that "the ANPA are (sic) the water carriers for the tobacco industry." Few newspapers covered the controversy, says Kaplan; rarely was the ANPA's role cited by those that did.

Recently, the National Association of Broadcasters battled against a revival of the Fairness Doctrine and snuffed out an attempt on Capitol Hill to require free television air time for candidates for federal office (who spent an estimated $400 million on TV ads during the 1986 campaign). Neither story got much play on evening TV news broadcasts; Gannet's *USA Today* called the Fairness Doctrine "stinkweed," neglecting to mention that its parent company owns 10 TV stations.

Quick to scrutinize other "special interests" and lobbyists, Kaplan concludes, journalists in Washington need to look at their own industry's role in politics.

Forget City Hall?

"Press Wars in Milwaukee" by Alan Ehrenhalt, in *Governing* (Jan. 1989), 1414 22nd St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

In 1962, Mayor Henry Maier of Milwaukee boasted of his excellent relations with the city's news media. *Time* magazine lauded the *Milwaukee Journal* for its intensive local coverage: "While *Journal* stories may seem too long and stodgy to outsiders, Milwaukeeans like the *Journal*'s Germanic thoroughness."

However, after his recent retirement from office, Maier complained bitterly about the *Journal*'s scant coverage of City Hall. Other local officials have joined in. Tom Donegan, president of Milwaukee's Common Council criticizes what he calls the "soap opera approach" of the local news media.

Such complaints "are all variations on a national theme," writes Ehrenhalt, an editor at *Governing*. Across America, metropolitan dailies are increasingly skimping

on coverage of city government.

One reason is the suburbanization of America. To keep advertisers' dollars, newspapers must pursue affluent readers in the suburbs. "Write more about suburban lifestyles," advised a 1988 report on the future of the press by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, "and less about government meetings."

Big city dailies also face increasing competition from suburban newspapers and, especially, local TV news. But TV journalists do not elevate the quality of reporting, observes Ehrenhalt. Kevin O'Connor, recently elected Milwaukee county treasurer, says of his experience during the campaign: "If you could stage something with color, you could get covered."

The *Journal*, Ehrenhalt notes, no longer seeks to be the local "newspaper of record"; it has cut its City Hall staff. Common Council meetings are reported, but there is no "clear picture of how the institutions are working, who forms alliances with whom, and which members are responsible for which policies."

In Milwaukee and other big cities, that leaves local politicians in good position to manipulate the news, and local residents in increasing ignorance.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Misunderstanding Wittgenstein

"The Philosophical Porcupine" by Roger Kimball, in *The New Criterion* (Dec. 1988), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) was one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. Ironically, says Kimball, a literary critic, this man who "detested the academy" unintentionally fathered today's school of highly abstract Anglo-American academic philosophy.

Wittgenstein was the youngest of eight children born to "the Carnegie of Austria," whose opulent Vienna household bubbled with talent and torments. Three of Wittgenstein's four brothers committed suicide; the fourth, Paul, who lost an arm in World War I, nevertheless enjoyed a successful career as a concert pianist.

In 1911, young Ludwig went to Cambridge to study philosophy with Bertrand Russell, who described him as "perhaps the most perfect example I have known of genius as traditionally conceived, passionate, profound, intense, and dominating." (And, Russell might have added, *angst*-ridden.) Before long, Russell was "dutifully taking down the reflections on logic that Wittgenstein [17 years his junior] dictated as he paced the room nervously." Wittgenstein's brilliant critiques of his work soon convinced Russell "that I could not hope ever again to do fundamental work in philosophy."

After serving with distinction in the Austrian army during World War I, Wittgenstein renounced his inherited fortune and held a variety of non-academic jobs—schoolteacher, gardener, architect—before returning to Cambridge in 1929.

For all of his profound impact, Wittgenstein published only one slim volume, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), plus the posthumous *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), a children's textbook, an essay, and a book review. Too impatient to present detailed arguments, Wittgenstein wrote in a seemingly disjointed, epigrammatic style: "The world is the totality of facts, not things."

Wittgenstein hoped to construct "an ideal language in which all true propositions can be clearly expressed," thus uncovering the propositions still in need of investigation. As early as the *Tractatus*, Kimball argues, Wittgenstein came to see conventional philosophy (including his own) as a ladder that must be climbed and then discarded, as he put it, to "see the world aright." Wittgenstein sought to re-