
journalists see it, "is only to be expected," and thus barely rates a mention.

The Hidden Congress

"Decline and Fall of Congressional News" by Stephen Hess, in *Society* (Jan.–Feb. 1994), Rutgers–The State University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

Once a staple of front pages and nightly news shows, regular coverage of Congress is now scant, especially on TV. CNN is now the only TV news organization that has correspondents covering both the House and the Senate full-time, observes Hess, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution.

One reason for the change, he says, is a shift in power within many "mainstream" news organizations. Key decisions about what gets covered now are often made, not by a bureau chief in Washington, but by home-office editors, to whom the intricacies of the lawmaking process seem a good deal less fascinating.

The definition of "news" also has changed. In 1965, 84 percent of the front-page stories in the *New York Times* during one week were about government and politics; in 1992, only 55 percent

were. The trend has been much the same in TV news. Now, developments in business, health, and culture seem just as newsworthy as Washington doings.

Advances in technology also have had an impact. "When Washington had the only coaxial cable that fed directly into the TV networks' New York headquarters, often more than 60 percent of the items on the evening news programs originated in the capital," Hess points out. Satellites, tape, and portable equipment helped change that in the early 1980s.

At first, the use of satellites increased TV's focus on the nation's capital, as some local stations inaugurated their own Washington coverage. Membership in the Senate Radio and Television Gallery jumped from 750 in 1979 to 2,300 by 1987. Before long, however, many Washington bureaus were shut down. As one news director explained, "Government news is boring."

The problem with the decline of congressional coverage, Hess says, is that while the "boring" regular business of the nation's legislature gets less attention, any hints of official corruption draw throngs of reporters. The result: a distorted picture that suggests to the public that Capitol Hill is little more than the capital of scandal.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

The Crackup of Philosophy

"American Philosophy Today" by Nicholas Rescher, in *Review of Metaphysics* (June 1993), Catholic Univ. of America, Washington, D.C. 20064.

Early in the 20th century, American philosophy was dominated by a handful of giants—men such as William James, John Dewey, and George Santayana—and their writings affected the thinking of people in many walks of life. For better or worse, observes Rescher, of the University of Pittsburgh, American philosophy today has become "democratized"—and the influence outside the academy of its leading thinkers is virtually nil.

Books such as John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971), Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror*

of Nature (1979), and W. V. Quine's *Word and Object* (1960) have produced "large ripples" in the pond of academic philosophy, Rescher acknowledges. But even the most influential philosopher is, these days, just "another—somewhat larger—fish in a very populous sea." The odd fish without approved credentials is not even welcome to join in the swim. A Spinoza or a Nietzsche, he says, "would find it near to impossible to get a hearing in the North American philosophical world of today."

The number of academic philosophers (and, thanks partly to the "publish or perish" ethic, most professors of philosophy can claim to be not just teachers of philosophy but "philosophers") has grown enormously. Membership in the American Philosophical Association has in-