



1230-90

MAR 20 REC'D

MAY 09 ANS'D

3/10/90

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
Washington, D. C.

Dear Brian:

You project a personality that your viewers trust: integrity and respect for the audience. I was therefore surprised by the way you responded yesterday to the caller who found C-Span's press panels too predictably orthodox, and urged that you invite some critics like Gore Vidal. I can see why the example didn't fit: the program focuses on journalists. But the idea of including less establishment-oriented commentators has been raised before and dismissed out-of-hand by one or the other of your less graceful moderators. True, thinking does not play well on TV so the news has become a vaudeville act. But C-Span was created to counter that.

When Havel addressed the joint session of Congress, the contrast between what passes for reasoning power there and his speech was stunning. We have become accustomed to thinking that politics is authorized by any assumption it chooses to uphold. That is why our "experts" failed to predict the turbulence in Europe, and why, their credibility unimpugned, they fail to comprehend it now that they're busy "explaining" it to us.

When you introduce your guests, you list their credentials in terms of the press jobs they have held. But all they seem to be aware of is the drift of incidents; then they present these tidbits to us as readings on the weather. I would ask: what have such journalists studied in their lifetimes, what do they read regularly, what is the content of their reveries, that qualifies them to select the critical issues of our time and to evaluate them? I have seen no evidence of anything but the standard cloakroom gossip and personality focus, which is the pattern of most indentured figures on the political scene. The old ones are cynical and the young ones are so career-oriented they don't know any better.

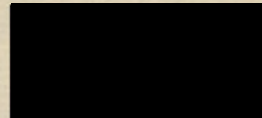
Reality is too dangerous for such innocence. We need imaginations to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives. Through the media, the world comes to us everyday non-stop. To understand even local matters we now need space-time maps that cover the planet. All over the world the relationship of the individual to the state is being newly tested. Yet, in the United States, the official world seems to demand more and more compliance, even submission, while the reporters diagnose rebuffs to substantive criticism as a president's psychological vulnerability, the thin skin of a one-time wimp.

San Diego, California 92109

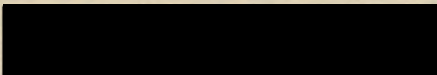
Pessimists argue that America has become a mass society, that we no longer have profound thinkers nor the populations who would attend to them. With respect to the first, I can say that if the number of new books and articles reflecting on our political dilemma is any indicator, we still have fine minds among us who have not been corrupted by the establishment. They are not on the best-seller lists, but they increasingly question the irrational logic of power. With respect to the second, I can say that if the number of your callers who ask for "more" is any indicator, we still have a prospective audience in our country for input beyond the standard politics and epistemology of the mass media. They are not in the majority, but they are the leaven in the loaf.

Dear Brian, you are in a position to summon the untethered intellectuals left and make them available to citizens not yet effectively brainwashed. It is a splendid possibility and a pivotal role to play.

Sincerely yours,



March 10, 1990
To Brian Lamb
C-SPAN



San Diego, California 92109

Brian Lamb