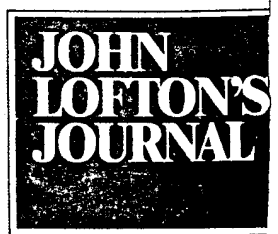


ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 2A

WASHINGTON TIMES
2 January 1985



Larry King takes it easy on Bradlee

It's 7 p.m. Saturday night. I'm watching Larry King's "Let's Talk" show on Channel 7. Mr. King's guest is a man a lot of us would give our eye teeth to interview — Ben Bradlee, executive editor of The Washington Post. The opportunity is truly golden, because Mr. Bradlee is very much in the news. His paper has run a front-page story about a military intelligence satellite that has caused Defense Secretary Weinberger to accuse the Post, in essence, of treason; that is, giving aid and comfort to our enemies. Even Sen. Patrick Leahy, a moderate Democrat from Vermont who is a member of the Intelligence Committee, has said the Post's story, if true, is "extraordinarily damaging" to our country.

As the King show begins, the graphics flash across the screen. A Wall Street Journal headline says of Mr. King, the host of Mutual Radio's national late-night radio talk show: "King Of The Night; Larry King Gives Fans A Big Lift." A New York Times story is headlined: "King Of The Airwaves." A big, booming voice says that Mr. King is a "nationally acclaimed" talk-show host. The voice says Mr. King is going "one-on-one" with the newsmakers and personalities "you most want to hear about." Mr. King himself introduces Mr. Bradlee as "arguably the most powerful newsmen in America."

But the interview is off to a flying stop. Mr. King begins by noting that the day he is conducting his interview (Dec. 19) is "one of those days when Mr. Bradlee is under siege over the stories in the Post about satellites and reconnaissance and the like."

And then, to my absolute astonishment, Mr. King says to Mr. Bradlee: "And we have agreed, as per your request, not to talk about it." That's right! Mr. King and Mr. Bradlee have agreed not to talk about the Post's controversial satellite story, even though Mr. Bradlee had issued a statement about this matter and had given an interview to CBS radio about it. Mr. Bradlee, nodding his head in appreciation for Mr. King's complicity in this blatant act of stonewalling, says: "I appreciate it a lot." Incredible!

The rest of the King interview is pathetic. More probing questions would have been asked by any of the kids who run "The Children's Express." For example, Mr. King wants to know if Mr. Bradlee was happy with actor Jason Robard's portrayal of him in the movie about the Post and Watergate titled "All The President's Men."

Well, yes, said Mr. Bradlee, he was. But you never get used to this kind of thing, he notes, saying that, at least, Mr. Robards "said nothing that embarrassed me." Mr. Bradlee says Mr. Robards is a wonderful man, a wonderful actor and he's "as lucky as can be" to have had Mr. Robards play his role.

Do you ever feel, Ben, your own power, asks Mr. King? Are you aware of it? Well, Mr. Bradlee guesses that "the office" — "if you abused it" — "would have power." For example, he speculates, it would be an abuse if you made "some absolutely nutty decision" to keep some person's name out of the paper or killed a story. But you couldn't do this more than once, he says.

Does this mean you can't have close friends in the business of making news? Mr. King asks. Mr. Bradlee laments that this is "awfully hard." Do you like the heat, asks Mr. King? Says Mr. Bradlee: "Yeah, I don't mind it. It's fun. It keeps you young, on your toes. It keeps your energy up."

Mr. King wants to know what it's like to be an "older father." Well, it's great, says Mr. Bradlee, who is 63 and the father of a 2½-year-old. So, the relationship is "fatherly," asks Mr. King, not grandfatherly? Yes, says Mr. Bradlee, the relationship is fatherly.

Do presidents call the Post? Mr. King asks. But enough already. Who cares what his answer was.

In the course of this embarrassingly sycophantic and inane conversation, Mr. Bradlee notes that at the Post, as regards his job, "the buck stops here . . . the buck stops at my feet." At another point, Mr. Bradlee says he "gets out of bed competitive" and he would "drop off the vine in a month" if he retired.

But Mr. Bradlee is a buck passer par excellence. He has already dropped off the vine. If he likes the heat because it is fun, it keeps him young and his energy up, then why did he ask Mr. King not to question him about the Post's military intelligence satellite story? And why did Mr. King agree to be a party to this cover-up?

Ben Bradlee is an arrogant phony, a typical bully who can dish it out but can't take it. In his interview, he told Mr. King that the Grahams, who own and publish the Post, are getting their money's worth by employing him. Maybe so. But those of us who watched Mr. King's program Saturday night sure didn't. It was a disgrace from start to finish.