Valenti: He came, he spoke, he left

By KEN CARPENTER

Jack Valenti, Presidential Assistant for three years, President of the Motion Picture Association of America for six months, Defender and Apologist for the Great Society, appeared Friday afternoon, courtesy of Will Rice College. He gave no lecture, but fielded questions for 75 minutes. The questions concerned Viet Nam and trivia.

The Trivia

About the Connally—Yarborough feud: “I don’t know much on that.” LBJ likes both men: Connally because he is an old friend, Yarborough because “he is a man who votes right.”

About an LBJ backlash as Goldwater claims: “I can understand Barry Goldwater saying that.” Valenti does not think there was a backlash; the party out of power always gains in off-year elections. The Republican shift will not seriously affect LBJ’s program, for the Great Society’s greatest task is now to implement legislation already passed. “Congress will remain liberal, narrowly so.” “On the whole I think the election was a sad day.”

About admitting Red China to the UN: “I don’t think Red China wants to get into the UN!” Certainly no one is willing to kick out Nationalist China as a precondition for their admission. We must wait and see. “I’d be for having them come in.”

About the credibility gap: “I don’t think the credibility gap is credible.” There are about 70 White House reporters; 30 or 40 form a “ruling elite.” They get upset about small things, “minor vexing irritations of small consequence to the public.” Hence the credibility gap.

The War

About how long it will go on: We can’t predict when victory will come. We’ll fight “till we win. Can we win? Well, we rout and kill vast numbers of the enemy until there are only a few guerrillas left. There will always be guerrillas around, but they’re just pests.

About the imperative that we stay in Viet Nam: “I happen to believe we need to be there, because if we don’t stay, Southeast Asia will become inundated with a war of national liberation.” Or again, “We have to be there because if we get out abruptly, I don’t know where the flood tide will take us.”

About our having troops in Europe: “If we withdraw, every government there would fall. We’re the umbrella; we’re the shield of the world.” And, about our role in the world in general: “I think it’s in our enlightened self interest to save the world for democracy.”

More War

About our lack of foreign support in Viet Nam: We’re the only power in the world to balance off the Chinese menace. Other countries neither have more immediate problems or are not worried so long as we’re in there fighting.

About domestic effects of the war: There will probably be a tax increase. There may be cut in non-military spending; certainly, there will be no increase. It depends on the cost of the war.

About morality: “Well my young friend, if you get to Viet Nam, and you probably will, you’ll find immorality in the Viet Cong. The immorality in this war comes from what the V.C. does.” But paradoxically: Our situation is “like a man whose arm has been severed by a freight train.” We’re not concerned with how it happened; the problem is to do something about it.

Similarly, “events have moved us past whether it was right or wrong how we got involved.” We are there. We are concerned with winning security for South Viet Nam. “Security isn’t cheap. We have no moral right to be secure. It takes power to be secure.” “Survival of the fittest” — that’s how the world is. “When you’re in war, suddenly nobility flies you, and survival becomes important.”

Comment: Jack Valenti may sleep a little better each night knowing Lyndon Johnson is his President; I may sleep a little better knowing Jack Valenti is no longer his assistant.