

Freedom of the press has always been near and dear to America; consider, for example, the simple fact that the press is dealt with in the First Amendment, not the Second or Third. It may be banal to note that with freedom comes responsibilities, but overused or not, it is still true, and yet regularly disregarded in various ways. In Newhouse's case, newspapers didn't exist for truth, justice, the American way, or for any other purpose than that of making money, period. Editorial copy was overhead; ads brought in the revenue. The ads counted, the writing didn't. Consequently, Newhouse was less a "press lord" in the sense of a Lord Beaverbrook, and more of a cattle baron of 19th-century America. Newhouse let nothing stand in his way—not feelings, traditions, livelihoods—in his avaricious quest to acquire; no one ever thought about the feelings of the steers that were being driven to the markets either. One man, Meeker asserts, a competitor, was committed to a madhouse because of Newhouse's machinations.

A newspaper wasn't a cherished organ of news and opinion for Newhouse, it was a money-making machine. Standards were set by the bottom line, not by community concerns and standards. Newhouse, in a dubious manner, purchased the Patriot Company in 1947; it published two newspapers in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In 1949, there were no Sunday newspapers printed in the town. Meeker explains that it was then a Pennsylvania Dutch community where "there were still blue laws and, it was generally believed, strong sentiment against any commerce on Sunday." He adds, "To Newhouse, Sunday had an altogether different meaning—it was the best advertising day of the week." Newhouse created a Sunday edition, aided by the local businessmen who were assured that there was money waiting to be made. The former owner-publisher of the Patriot papers stood foursquare against ads for liquor and patent nostrums; that restriction—

which cost about \$1 million in lost ad space—went in 1951.

Another case is that of the *Long Island Press* in Jamaica, New York. It was one of Newhouse's early acquisitions but a paper that he, it seems, came to ignore when bigger treasures beckoned. During the mid-50's, Jamaica began to deteriorate; the neighborhoods began to crumble. Says Meeker, "There were



more burglaries, holdups, muggings. There was trouble in the schools. Small shops lost business." But the paper didn't comment on the threat to the status quo; indeed, Meeker claims that the paper instituted a policy whereby "No 'negative' stories [about local events] would be published in the *Press* unless they appeared first in other New York papers."

Stories about crime and the like are, after all, bad for business. The paper relented, ended its silence in the mid-60's, when the bad conditions became the norm—and folded in 1977.

The stories of employees—from press operators to editors—who lost their jobs on successful papers because newspapers were business to Newhouse are legion. Consolidation, cost-cutting, and other acts aimed at enhancing profits—which would be plowed back into doing more of the same elsewhere—while never alienating advertisers were a way of life. Quantity was the key; quality could go to blazes. The ultimate consequence is that there exists a pervasive mediocrity throughout the land, one that pops up on breakfast tables and which is picked up after dinner. This, then, is the real issue of mass newspaper ownership or, more accurately, communications empires. The dangers of a Rupert Murdoch are not found in the sensational headlines or the lascivious snapshots, but in the elimination of the freedom to report on events and to express opinions on subjects that may, in some way, be bad for the press business. In such a scheme, information, the basis of a true newspaper, is of little consequence; processing and packaging are key. Ultimately, readers become cattle. □

Harper's Redevivus

Almost a century-and-a-half in print gives a journal a specific cultural aroma: that of tradition. To be sure, there are those whose olfactory organs receive this sublimation as mustiness, or as an odor of unventilated chambers of Madame Tussaud's wax museum. To others, it signals the redolence of distinguished values of mind and heart, a bouquet of ever-beautiful norms. The title *Harper's Magazine* is still floating amidst symbolic whiffs which connote the best intellectual and literary substances. True, during the decades of its existence many transmutations and

incarnations were visible and decipherable in its pages. In the not-too-remote past, we witnessed how, by the end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's, *Harper's* fell into hands of young phony men who wished, at any price, to muster and demonstrate the righteous liberal anger—and the more they tried, the more their products came across as boring, stilted, and commonplace. They tackled issues, social images, and cultural messages from a platform of tedious predictability, they praised writers who, over the subsequent years, proved to be either inconsequential, or flimsy, or irresponsible, or just liberal hacks sustained by the popular press's everlasting hunger for mediocrity. In those days, *Harper's*, its illustrious history notwithstanding, promoted perspectives on arts and letters, or on social dilemmas, which mightily contributed to the general dissolution of criteria, to the all-American feeling of decrepitude that tended to overwhelm anyone who still

craved dignified cultural meanings and contents. It promulgated positions which from our present distance seem both wrong and trite. As such, it had reneged on its own cherished tradition.

The March 1984 issue of *Harper's* seems to announce *urbi et orbi* that the time of incertitude, sham, and vacillation is over. It bears the unmistakable imprint of its editor's, Lewis Lapham's, idea of a journal of enlightened opinion. Mr. Lapham, whose intellectual silhouette and personal vicissitudes as the magazine's helmsman are familiar to the American reading community, is once again in charge of *Harper's* fortunes. Thus, a spirit of innovation and freshly refined responsibility seems to suffuse Lapham's *Harper's*; it features a renewed sense of quality in both form and content. Since we believe that the ramparts of cultural and moral quality are the last lines of defense in the Great War for our civilization, we find that the old/new *Harper's* is a very welcome arrival. ☐

the Internal Revenue Service ruled that the magazine was commercial rather than educational and challenged its tax exemption. The I.R.S.'s finding must have given *Mother Jones's* business department pause. The magazine lost \$500,000 last year, and it has been in the red since its founding in 1976. Losing its nonprofit status would cost the magazine an estimated \$200,000 a year in additional postal fees—and would probably put it out of business.

To our mind, *Mother Jones* is not an educational magazine but a political agitprop sheet. However, what's most interesting is *where* it comes from, or *who* has been giving *Mother Jones* that \$500,000 a year for the last seven years? Its circa 200,000 copies circulation obviously does not cover its publishing costs, thus—*who* is giving the subsidy? *The Nation* is less interested in that part of the story. It concludes its nasty little tale:

This Administration's record of harassing advocacy groups, whether by withholding Federal funds or attacking their tax-exempt status, demonstrates the need for some legislative buffers.

Knowing our legislators, we may expect that "education" a la *Mother Jones* will continue. ☐

Vicious Gauchisme

In *The Nation* (where else?), one Daniel Singer argues that the *nouveaux philosophes*—that is, the French intellectuals, who began to bitterly criticize communism and the Soviet Union during the 1970's, were not motivated by knowledge and conscience, but were somehow commissioned by someone to perform such a heinous task:

The powers that be realized that such a unification [had to be] prevented. They had to discredit not just the Russian experiment but the idea of revolution itself. This dirty job had to be carried out by young ex-leftists whose ideological wounds were still bleeding.

In the same journal, we read under the title "Power to Destroy" an account of its editors' wrath at the Internal Revenue Service for investigating the finances of *Mother Jones*,

a strongly leftist magazine, devoted to relentless politicization of every human impulse and to eradication of "American imperialism"—be it in Vietnam or San Salvador. According to the grieving *Nation*:

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