

LIFE IN THE U.S.

Rooting against the home team

By Louis Kampf

Boston. The baseball season opened the other day. I thought you might have missed the news. After all, Jimmy Carter, the nation's number one fan (think of all the peanuts sold during a ballgame) made no public statement about it. Nixon or Ford would have done better, comparing the baseball diamond to the infield of life, exhorting all Americans to win, yet play fair, just as they did on the playing fields of Vietnam.

I was hoping Carter might at least tell us something about baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn's plan to send an all-star team to Cuba. Did the National Security Council really get into a big fight about it? Is it true that Secretary of State Vance is a Red Sox fan, and therefore pressured Kuhn into ordering the Yankees to decline Fidel's invitation to play in Cuba? Or is it, as Carl Ogelsby and other who support a northeastern "Yankee" versus a sunbelt "Cowboy" interpretation of contemporary history might suggest, that Carter is not about to let a team named the Yankees get the jump on the Texas Rangers?

Carter did not speak. Instead, here in Boston, we got the usual opening day extravaganza. A United States Marine color guard marched all the way to the outfield to protect the flag: after all, last year's near disaster in Chicago, where Rick Monday, a patriotic Cub outfielder, prevented a crazed freak from stomping on old glory, might be repeated. A soprano, quaveringly out of tune, whined the Star Spangled Banner while the players, right hand over heart, scratched their asses with the left. Some dignitary threw out the first ball, nearly decapitating Pudge Fisk, the Red Sox's clean-living, hard-fighting catcher. Then the ump cried "play ball" and another exciting (gripping? thrilling? heart-thumping?) season started.

Fans, I confess. Most of that opening day stuff I made up. I wasn't anywhere near Fenway Park. I haven't been to a live major league baseball game since 1962, when a student of mine who happened to be the sister of a Baltimore Oriole relief pitcher gave me a free ticket for a box seat right behind the dugout. Nor did I watch the game on television, which makes me feel guilty, since channel 38 paid the Red Sox \$2 million to allow me to cheer for Freddy Lynn in my living room. But I'm sure I got the proceeding pretty straight, though it

Don't these all-American fans like free enterprise? Probably they do. But there are other things to life, as old Tim's knuckles showed me—forty years of catching for little more than esthetic reward.

might have been a baritone doing the Star Spangled Banner.

I confess yet more. Though baseball stadiums revolt me, I am gripped by baseball. I care. Waking up during the night I watch Pete Reiser stealing home on an embarrassed Oscar Judd's triple-pump. It was 1946 at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn and I was playing hookey. Yes, I was really there.

So why does baseball still grab me, turning me into a child? I don't worry the matter too much: few fans do. But it's worth some thought. Let me get at it from left field or rather, the cliffs stretching behind the Polo Grounds, the New York Giants' homefield. Neither the team nor the ballpark still exist, of course. The Giants have moved, long ago, to San Francisco, and the Polo Grounds has been replaced by a typically brutal housing project.

During the 1940's some of us would sit on top of those cliffs in upper Harlem and watch the game inside the stadium. You could see second and third base, and pretty well make out what was going on.

We kids were usually joined by a group of old-timers, former semi-pros who, like us, could not cough up the twenty-five cents that would allow them entrance to the bleachers.

One trivial encounter has stuck in my memory for more than thirty years. Old Tim, grumpy and in his sixties, was arguing with me about the comparative merits of Gus Mancuso and Ernie (the Shnozz) Lombardi, both catchers. Suddenly he spread out his hands an inch from my nose. The fingers and knuckles were gnarled like the trunk of an ancient oak. "These," he said grimly,

"are from forty years of foul-tips." So much for my expertise.

Those hands. I promised myself never to be a catcher. Yet I admired the old bastard. He loved, really loved, the game. He was an ignorant bigot, hissing about that Hebe left-fielder (Goody Rosen), the damn Dago shortstop (Frank Crosetti), or the big Jig catcher (Josh Gibson). But during the baseball season his life had meaning, and his knowledge of the sport's art was exquisite and encyclopedic. He rooted for the Giants, though he belittled their skills: things were better in John McGraw's days.

I loved listening to him in spite of myself. I was a 15-year-old who had just read the *Communist Manifesto*, and felt contempt for this old man's childish concerns. Yet I knew that I shared his passions (what would Marx think?). And, to a degree, I still do—though by now I've read *Capital*. Occasionally I wonder what happened to Tim when the Giants moved to San Francisco for bigger bucks.

I found a sneaky way out of being a Marxist who yet shared Tim's passion: rooting against the home team. I still do. Since moving to Massachusetts in 1958 I have steadily rooted against the Red Sox. Except for 1967 and 1975, when they've won pennants, I've met with a good deal of success.

On opening day this year many fans joined me in my perversity: the Sox got booed noisily. The faithful bleacher rats had their own reasons. Yet their passionate anger is in league with my snooty cynicism.

SELL CAMPBELL. BRING BACK \$1.50 BLEACHERS. So read the legend on a sign carried by the faithful. Bill Campbell is a relief pitcher signed by the Sox for more than a million dollars.

That's how much his skills brought on the open market.

Free enterprise was belatedly (by 150 years or so) imposed on baseball last year by the courts. Players, the judge said, were no longer the absolute property of the teams they played for. The market rules: those who have skills can sell; those with capital can buy. Each day the sports pages are full of the latest news from the player exchange.

So one reason Campbell got booed is that he's a millionaire. The fans will continue to boo the other wealthy commodities in baseball uniforms—especially if they don't win.

"These people want production," says Captain Carl Yastrzemski, "and they want it now." Captain Carl, a management favorite during the players' strike, understands the nature of the market place.

Don't these all-American fans like free enterprise? Probably they do. But there are other things to life, as old Tim's knuckles showed me—forty years of catching for little more than esthetic reward; the wisdom of three score expended atop a cliff; the lack of 25 cents keeping first base and the outfield out of sight.

The bleacher rats might understand that. So they show up on opening day to express their resentment at passion and loyalty being demystified by a million dollars. When Shoeless Joe Jackson turned out to be involved in the betting scandal of 1919, a small boy approached him. "Say it ain't so Joe," he cried. Say it ain't so say the Red Sox boobbirds to Bill Campbell and anyone else who'll listen.

One day, perhaps, those fanatics in the bleachers — occasionally ignorant, often racist, prone to violence, yet sentimentalists over beauty—will absorb the lesson Tim taught me. Their anger is my anger; their obsession I share. They too might learn to stay away from the ballpark. Or better yet, take it over.

Louis Kampf lives in Boston and teaches at MIT.

STRETCH
retirement dollars
—Liberal Arkansas development—
Homesites, lake
Non-profit building
Information \$1.00 T.S.E.
P.O. Drawer 268, Naperville, IL 60540

YOU WON'T FIND IT ANYWHERE ELSE

"Good, solid labor reporting without the usual revolutionary rhetoric.

—Mike LaVelle

Labor columnist, *Chicago Tribune*

Essential coverage and views for all people on the left.

Send check or money order to:
In These Times
1509 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622

☐ Send In These Times for 4 trial months. Here's \$6.50

☐ Send me 50 glorious weeks of In These Times. Here's \$15.

Name _____
Address _____
City, State _____
Zip _____

Back issues available for \$1 each.

IN THESE TIMES

☐ Send In These Times for 4 trial months. Here's \$6.50

☐ Send me 50 glorious weeks of In These Times. Here's \$15.

Name _____
Address _____
City, State _____
Zip _____

Back issues available for \$1 each.

IN THESE TIMES

☐ Send In These Times for 4 trial months. Here's \$6.50

☐ Send me 50 glorious weeks of In These Times. Here's \$15.

Name _____
Address _____
City, State _____
Zip _____

Back issues available for \$1 each.

IN THESE TIMES

☐ Send In These Times for 4 trial months. Here's \$6.50

☐ Send me 50 glorious weeks of In These Times. Here's \$15.

Name _____
Address _____
City, State _____
Zip _____

Back issues available for \$1 each.

IN THESE TIMES

(off the record)

By Sidney Blumenthal and Danny Schechter

With this issue, IN THESE TIMES inaugurates a new column of media criticism. The column will appear every few weeks.

Bright Young Things

After the cinematic success of Woodward and Bernstein's *All the President's Men* applications to journalism schools have skyrocketed. The general impression is that every budding journalist longs to emulate a crusading, investigative model.

The first full-scale portrait of American journalists, on the other hand, paints a more complex picture. *The News People*, by John W. C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski and William W. Bowman (University of Illinois Press), estimates that there are 69,500 media workers scrounging around city halls state houses and PTA meetings for items their editors might regard as news.

Only 3.9 percent of all reporters are black, and one-third of these work in black publications; 39 percent are WASPS. Not surprisingly, most reporters also come from the middle or upper-middle class, are men and live in big cities.

"The affairs of established groups in the society are virtually always defined as more newsworthy than those of minorities and disadvantaged groups," the authors of *The News People* note.

The image of the profession that young reporters have is quickly dispelled by reality. In the end, *The Front Page* was more read than *All the President's Men*.

Perhaps a quarter of experienced young journalists wonder why they are working at this calling. They begin their careers hoping to become a Seymour Hersh, but after a short time on the job learn they must submit to hacks in positions of power above them. As *The News People* puts it: "The most promising and well-trained young persons being attracted into the field are inspired by an image of professional practice which in large part is incompatible with organizational realities." That is to say, the old journalism still thrives—the hack is back.

Of course, for the ultimately alienated or most committed journalists there is always the alternative press to turn to. When *The News People's* data was collected the alternative press was at its height; it was 1971. the median income of alternative reporters sampled was \$35 a week. That's an alternative?

Whose World?

On the streets of Boston and New York clean-cut youths are hawking a newspaper called the *News World* for a dime. If you don't have a dime they'll give it to you for free.

News World is a slick paper, with color photos illustrating UPI dispatches. There are sports and living pages, as well as comics. The op-ed page features syndicated columnists such as Michael Novak. Syndicated North American Newspaper Alliance opinion pieces also appear.

Nowhere in this sheet, however, is it

noted that it is the organ of the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

Judging from its straight, conservative tone the paper seems little different from most dailies published in medium-sized American cities. Yet the *News World* has hardly any advertising. It must be a costly venture for the South Korean CIA, which maintains close ties to the Moonies.

Among other things the *News World* demonstrates that the KCIA political perspective is not much different from that of run-of-the-mill American dailies. A major difference is that the US papers run neo-conservative blather without a subsidy.

Ideological Advisor

Objectivity is the watchword of the press. Without a rigorously detached, neutral point of view the media's credibility would be shot.

Editors always disdain what they call "ideology," something they consider heavy-handed and forced. They tirelessly point out that this "objectivity" is what distinguishes the Free World press from that of the rest of the planet.

Yet when professional anti-communist Bertram Wolfe died in March his obituary noted that he had the honor of serving as the Chief of the Ideological Advisory Unit for the International Broadcast Division of the State Department.

What exactly is an "ideological advisor?" Wolfe spent most of his life railing against the pervasive influence of commissars in the Soviet Union. Was he not a commissar in his own right?

Wolfe, in many ways, was a man of an earlier time, however. Although there are probably ideological advisors on the government payroll today, the true commissars of capitalism today are to be found in media advertising departments.

At the most recent conference of the Associated Press Managing Editors, 350 newspaper editors were informed that they had better listen more to their marketing directors, even concerning news, or face circulation losses. "The problem is that many editors bristle at the slightest attempt by advertising or market research people to make suggestions on editorial content," Harold R. Lifvendahl, vice president and director of sales at the *Chicago Tribune*, said.

Lifvendahl and his fellow media marketers evidently define freedom of the press as the freedom to sell and consume. This is their fundamental ideological principle, although they prefer to call it consumer targeting. "The First Amendment guarantees freedom of the press, but it doesn't require people to read newspapers," Lifvendahl said. "If we don't satisfy our readers, someone else will."

Reliable Sources

Well-known capitalist roader, John Rodney, associate publisher of *American Home* magazine, declares, "The masses

are getting classier and the classes are getting massier." We leave interpretation of this to more theoretical minds.

Junk News

What is the news equivalent of a Twinkie? Is it Wayne Hays' philandering? Any Carter's killer nannie? John Brademas, the Democratic Whip of the House of Representatives, recently complained that the press corps devotes too much space and time to running after "junk news, the sex and scandal...the gossip and soap operas." Trivial reporting, he felt, had taken precedence over serious information-gathering. Instead of slogging through obscure but important committee meetings, reporters are out hunting for the great white whale that might win them a Pulitzer—something, say, on the order of finding a key Senator in bed with someone other than his wife.

One wonders whether Brademas is equally concerned that there has not been enough coverage of Korean pay-offs to congressmen. Brademas himself has admitted to having received Korean favors.

Never to be accused of originality, NBC Night News news-reader John Chancellor took up the call several weeks after Brademas. He said too many media outlets were feeding audiences "editorial junk food." And who is responsible for this predicament? Chancellor, the schoolmasterly anchor man for the Kissinger/Ford network, blames the audience.

"Newspapers and radio and television stations are giving people what they want—editorial junk food," he says.

Chancellor, and others residing in high places—like the top of the RCA building—feel they must condescend to get the message across. Chancellor offers nutritional advice. "Journalists are charged with the responsibility to give nourishment as well as entertainment." What is the news equivalent of granola?

The New York Times Company, publisher of "the newspaper of record," apparently has not taken Chancellor's lesson to heart. While beefing up their daily paper with every kind of soft feature, they have also entered the "junk food" market with a magazine called *US*, intended to compete with *People*. *US* is all about people who are famous for being famous; the magazine gives them more publicity to satisfy the voracious appetite of a public that can't get enough of Farrah Fawcett-Majors. Undoubtedly, the *Times'* product will eventually be justified as the gossip of record.

Meanwhile, James Reston, the platitudinous *Times* columnist, gravely suggests newspapers shouldn't cover terrorists who take hostages. After all, it only encourages them.

A Word to Readers

Obviously, we cannot survey every publication in the country. We would appreciate seeing clippings from papers and magazines illustrating lies, distortions, editorial flip-flops, and other media virtues. Also, we'd like to see items highlighting media machinations. Send material c/o *In These Times*, 1509 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago 60622.

The authors are Boston journalists. Sidney Blumenthal is the editor of *Government by Gunplay* (New American Library). Danny Schechter is the news dissector/director of WBCN-FM radio.

Yiddish Marxist daily celebrates 55 years

What is probably the oldest Marxian socialist daily newspaper still in existence in the U.S.—the Yiddish-language *Morning Freiheit*—celebrated its 55th anniversary early in April with a rousingly successful banquet that also marked the 85th birthday of its still-vigorous editor, Paul Novick.

The paper was founded as an organ of the Jewish Federation of the Communist Party on April 2, 1922, some two years before the birth of the party's official English-language organ, *The Daily Worker*.

By the mid-1920s, CP language groups were publishing some 22 newspapers, eight of which were dailies. Of the handful that have survived, *The Freiheit* is the only daily. (The CP's English-language organ - now *The Daily World* - did not publish as a daily for about a decade, from early 1958).

For the past 20 years, *The Freiheit* has been an independent left socialist paper, at odds with the U.S. Communist Party in ways that have aligned it with the Communist parties of Italy, France, Spain, Japan and other departees from the Stalinist path. It is perhaps the only daily newspaper in the country with a political outlook sympathetic to what has been inaccurately labelled "Euro-communism."

In its early years *The Freiheit's* editorial leadership was buffeted by the factional conflicts that then rent the American party. Its founding editor, Moissaye Olgin, was shunted aside after a couple of years, but resumed the editorship in 1929 and served until his death in 1939. He was succeeded by Novick, who was associated with the paper from its inception. Novick received his baptism in the fires of the 1905 revolution as a youth of 13, and participated in the 1917 revolution in Russia. He is now in his 38th year as *Freiheit* editor.

Five years ago, at age 80, Novick was finally expelled from the Communist Party after repeated clashes over the *Freiheit's* insistence upon criticizing per-

sistent, officially condoned, anti-Semitic practices and statements in the Soviet Union (*ITT* Jan. 26-Feb. 1) and its position on Israel and the Mideast conflict.

In the 1920s and 1930s *The Freiheit* was influential in the organization of garment, fur, printing, Jewish theatrical and many other unions with substantial numbers of Jewish workers, and was an important factor in the development of left-wing caucuses in these unions. Many of the 800 who attended the anniversary banquet on April 10 had been participants in the union drives backed by the paper over the last half century. The Fur Workers Joint Council and the Jewish Actors Union officially sent representatives to the affair, which was addressed by Abe Feinglass, vice-president of the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen's Union, with which the Furriers Union merged some years ago. Members and retired leaders of the furniture, needle trades, painters and carpenters unions were also on hand.

During the McCarthy period Novick was hauled before both the House Un-American Activities and the McCarthy Senate Committee, and efforts were made to cancel his citizenship. More recently, he and *The Freiheit* have been assailed from another quarter—the Soviet Jewish bi-monthly publication, *Sovietische Haimland*—for apostasy. The Soviet publication's attack included the claim that *The Freiheit* is able to keep going because upper class Jews who can afford large contributions have replaced its workingclass readership. As noted by speakers at the banquet, the paper, always under constant attack from the right, is now also the target of a section of the left because, according to Novick, it is "Loyal to socialism with a human face." The attack appears to have inspired many of its workingclass readership to expand their contributions to the paper; over \$20,000 was raised at the banquet.

—Max Gordon