

# Izzy Stone From Outcast to Institution

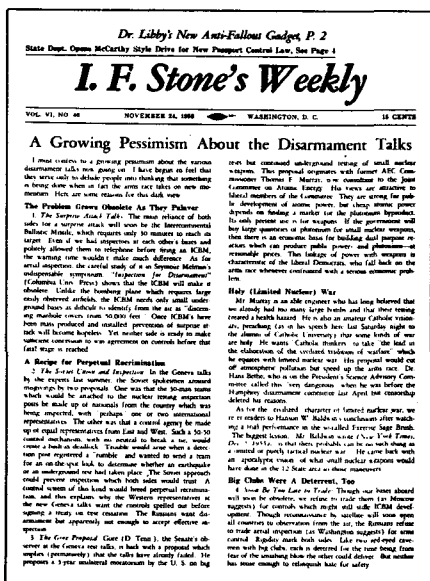
By Derek Shearer

On the evening of March 9, in the Grand Ballroom of New York's Plaza Hotel on Fifth Avenue, I.F. Stone—radical, muckraking journalist, and lifelong socialist—celebrated his 70th birthday, six months after the actual date.

Ostensibly the event—at \$50 a person—was a fundraiser for the Fund for New Priorities, a liberal citizens group, but there was an element of fraud in this, as Stone told the 350 guests.

"I worked in New York as a journalist for many years and I have so many friends here," Stone explained when given the microphone, "I wanted to have a party, so I called up the Fund and said, 'Why don't you get me a birthday party,' and they did, only I didn't know it would cost so much."

**Izzy Stone started writing at 14, and hasn't quit yet. From Israel to Korea to the backrooms of Washington, despite Cold War hysteria and harassment, he's covered the stories no one else would.**



I.F. Stone, known to friends, relatives and readers as Izzy, is—in addition to being a master writer—a very sociable character and an almost irrepressible entertainer and promoter. Recently, the *New York Times* Sunday magazine asked him to do a piece on Jimmy Carter. Stone told them the subject was too boring, but that he'd be happy to interview himself. He did and wrote the introduction to the interview as well. The *Times* ran it without changing a word.

Stone has puckish, almost pixie-like qualities that come out in public events like this. Part of him is Jewish humorist and Old Testament moralist. One writer describes Stone as having "the head of an owl on the body of a penguin." His face expresses his character. At the Plaza, he constantly broke into wide grins.

No one in my generation would dream of having a birthday party at the Plaza. The contradictions with all that Stone fought for over the years seem obvious, yet Stone didn't notice. He was having a great time, as if it were a wedding and he was the happy groom.

The crowd was old left-liberal. Prosperous and bourgeois in appearance, yet left in sentiment. Some liberal media luminaries were there—Kurt Vonnegut, Jules Feiffer, Tom Wicker, Anthony Lewis, Rev. William Sloan Coffin, Alexander Cockburn, and Murray Kempton. Ramsey Clark was the Master of Ceremonies, and historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. sat in the back of the room.

I asked *Village Voice* reporter Jack Newfield why he'd come. "Izzy Stone was the role model for my life," offered Newfield, "He taught me to read the small print."

After an introduction from Ted Thackrey, founder of the *Compass*, a liberal New York daily in the '40s where Stone had worked, the floor was given to Izzy.

Stone told the crowd, "I'm in a dangerously cheerful mood, and nothing is worse than an optimistic oracle, so why don't I just take questions."

## Straight talk.

The first question was a convoluted statement from a nervous young man who wanted to hear Stone's views on how to synthesize Marx and Jefferson.

Stone tackled the question head-on, in a way that made some of the audience a bit uncomfortable, but made me feel better about the event.

Stone didn't hesitate to expound on socialism. "Next to the problem of preventing nuclear war," He replied, "the greatest problem is to bring about a synthesis of socialism and freedom of thought. How can we have a more just and equitable society without running into the rigidity of bureaucracy and controls we see in the Communist world?"

"We live in a favorable environment with great natural resources. We have to be patient with what happens in the Communist world—yet we have to criticize what happens too. Movements toward Eurocommunism are favorable developments. They are not a charade for our benefit, but based on their own experience, on the ideas of Gramsci and Togliatti. Moscow fears it, because it's a

movement toward freedom; Washington fears it, because it's a movement toward socialism."

Another questioner, an older man, criticized Stone's recent *New York Review* piece on Israel. Stone, an ardent supporter of the establishment of Israel who risked his life to report on the 1948 war, has come under attack in recent years from the American Jewish community for his pleas for a settlement in the Middle East that includes substantial concessions to the Palestinians.

"Israel is clinging to a security blanket," said Stone, lacing into the subject full force. "The current government's position reflects rigidity; it is folly to prefer the certainness of preparation for war, rather than the uncertainty of preparation for peace."

"Sadat broke with the old rigidity. He risked his life in coming to Israel, and he was met with a lousy, warmed over UJA speech. It's going to go down in Jewish history as a disgrace."

## From pariah to institution.

Stone was interrupted for a moment while Ted Thackrey read a few congratulatory messages from journalists who couldn't attend. A note from Walter Cronkite called Stone's career a "blue print of honest and integrity as long as men honor freedom of the press."

Stone is fond of saying, "I started out as a pariah, graduated to a character, and if I live long enough I'll become an institution."

Maybe I.F. Stone is an Esquire success story—the self-made man, the independent capitalist who edited and published his own newsletter weekly and ran the circulation up to 70,000 at its height and made a handsome profit; the recipient of honorary degrees and subject of glowing profiles in the *Wall Street Journal*. But Stone's survival and current celebration by the straight press has greater meaning: the Cold War is finally over.

A few years ago my classmate from Yale, Jerry Bruck, made an award-winning documentary on Stone called *I.F. Stone's Weekly*. The movie shows Stone receiving the George Polk journalism award in 1971. Stone took the opportunity to remind the audience of journalists and editors that George Polk—a young reporter sympathetic to the left who died

while covering the Greek civil war—was the "first victim of the Cold War," killed by Greek rightwing police who blamed the murder on the left.

In the footage of Stone at the luncheon, there is a scene of Stone chatting with Walter Cronkite, who was present to accept an award on behalf of CBS for the documentary "The Selling of the Pentagon." Stone is going on rapid fire, praising CBS for taking on the military, while Cronkite looks visibly distressed, the way a person looks when he wants to escape from a talker who has latched on to him at a cocktail party. Cronkite mumbles something about "getting together for lunch the next time Stone is in New York" and moves away from him.

Later in the film there is CBS footage of Walter Cronkite "on location" in Vietnam, reporting the Pentagon's line on the war.

Now Cronkite celebrates I.F. Stone—a muted apology to all his viewers.

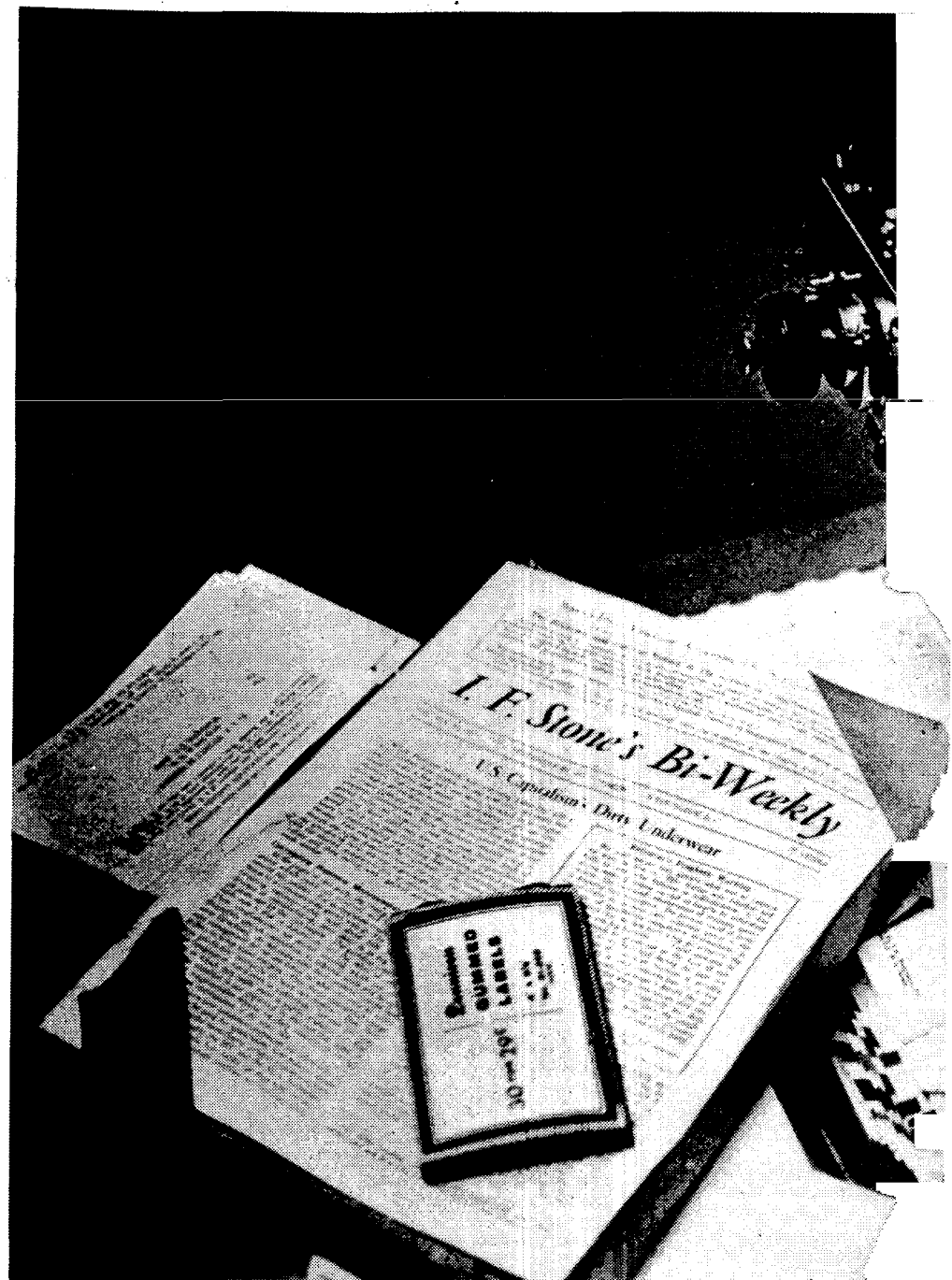
## New career.

In retirement, Stone has begun a new career as a scholar of ancient Greece. Every week day morning he walks two and a half miles from his home in north-west Washington to an office at American University, declining Greek verbs in his head as he goes along. On the door of the office is a small plaque that reads: I.F. Stone, Visiting Scholar. Stone has tacked up a quotation from Euripides in Greek which, roughly translated, means, "Only with great effort, are great deeds done."

In December 1971 Stone shut down his independent paper. The years of hard work were taking a toll on his health and his doctor told him that if he wanted to live he'd have to ease up his pace. Stone decided to write a book on free speech and his research led him back to Athens and the origins of democracy. As he got more into Greek history, he decided that working from translations was inadequate and he began to study Greek. Stone hopes to finish his book within the next year. He's carefully checking it, because he feels that it will, of course, be controversial.

"I'm really the first New Left revisionist Greek historian," Stone said proudly.

Stone takes great joy in his new pursuit. One night recently at dinner with







aries and bulky histories that he's using. Stone approaches Greek history with the same zeal he expended on Congressional hearings, State department White Papers, and Pentagon budgets.

"I'm having the time of my life," he said.

Over lunch at the American University faculty club, Stone ordered cottage cheese and peaches—he has been on an off-again/on-again diet the entire ten years I've known him—and reminisced about his early days as a journalist and how he started the weekly.

#### Always wanted to be a journalist.

Stone was born Isidor Feinstein (he later adopted Stone as his surname), son of Russian immigrants, in Philadelphia in 1907, and raised in nearby Haddonfield, N.J., where his father ran a dry good store. He always wanted to be a journalist. He published his first paper, *The Progress*, himself at the age of 14. Stone editorialized in favor of the League of Nations, attacked William Randolph Hearst and supported Mahatma Gandhi. After three issues his father made him cease because it interfered with his school work.

Stone got his politics by reading Jack London, Herbert Spencer, Prince Kropotkin, and Karl Marx. For a time, he was a member of the Socialist party of New Jersey and he worked for the election of Norman Thomas in 1928. He drifted away from organized left-wing politics because of the sectarian fights. He considered himself a kind of independent "communist-anarchist," and later a "radical-liberal."

Stone attended the University of Pennsylvania ("I wanted to go to Harvard, but my grades were too poor"), while working afternoons and nights doing rewrite and copy editing for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He dropped out after three years to work fulltime for the *Camden-Courier*, where he learned every aspect of the newspaper business. He quit the paper when the city editor refused to let him cover the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti.

In 1931 at age 23, Stone became the youngest editorial writer in the country on a major newspaper when he joined the *Philadelphia Record*. Two years later he shifted to the *New York Post*, a strong pro-New Deal paper, where he worked for seven years writing editorials. In 1940, after a falling out with the publisher who felt the paper was veering too far left, Stone moved to Washington as a correspondent for the *Nation*. The job lasted until 1946. Stone wrote two books in this period, *The Court Disposes* (1937) on the FDR-Supreme Court power struggle, and *Business As Usual* (1941) on the nation's lack of preparedness for World War II.

Stone also contributed to *PM*, a liberal daily New York newspaper founded by Chicago's Marshall Field. When *PM* expired in 1946 it was succeeded briefly by the *New York Star* and then the *Daily Compass*. Stone contributed columns and editorials to both.

As a Jew and as a reporter, Stone has had a special feeling for Israel. It was a good story and it was the story of his people. In spring, 1946, Stone boarded a ship in Europe carrying clandestine refugees to the Promised Land. He chronicled his adventures in *Underground to Palestine* published the same year. In 1947 Stone went back to Israel to cover the war, and wrote the text for another book, *This Is Israel*, with photos by Robert Capa.

#### Remembered in Israel.

Last summer, my wife and I went to Israel. At Stone's suggestion, we drove one Saturday to a kibbutz south of Tel Aviv, and inquired at the communal dining hall for a former American sailor named Haley. A sweet little woman from Brooklyn—Mrs. Minna Haley—came out of the kitchen. "You're friends of Mr. I.F. Stone's. He was on the ship with us. Of course, you'll stay for lunch. I'll get my husband, Haley."

Over the meal, Haley, who, as a member of a Jewish leftwing group from the States, had run the British blockade

on the same ship on which Stone had sailed, told us, "Izzy Stone is a part of this country. He loves Israel. He cried in my arms the last time he was here. He may criticize our government's policy, but he is one of us."

Throughout his career, criticizing government policy has been Stone's forte. During the winter of 1950-51, Stone worked out of Paris for the *Compass*. He studied the foreign press and noticed discrepancies between the releases issued by MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo and the stories filed by British and French correspondents. He began to inquire into the discrepancies, which led him to a full-scale reassessment of the Korean War.

Stone wrote *The Hidden History of the Korean War*, which called into question the accepted version of the origins of the war as an unprovoked invasion by the North Koreans, and showed how the American military and the South Korean oligarchy did their best to drag out and disrupt the peace talks. The book—published in the U.S. in 1952 by the Monthly Review Press—met with an almost complete press blackout. Two chapters were published in Jean-Paul Sartre's magazine *Les Temps Modernes* and editions appeared in England, Italy, and Japan.

Cold war liberals attacked Stone over the book as a fellow-traveler. In one of the reviews of the *Hidden History*, Richard Rovere wrote in the *New York Post*, that Stone had become "merely querulous," "a writer who thinks up good arguments for poor communist positions." Rovere labeled the book "worse than obscene and more sorrowful than farce."

Stone was, in one sympathetic writer's words, "a premature anti-Cold Warrior."

I remember discovering Stone's book on the Korean War in the library at college. It was out-of-print and I hadn't known it existed. I read it with great excitement. It was a case study of the official cover stories that a government gives out to hide its real actions. As such, it was a primer for clearly viewing the Vietnam war. When I finished reading the book I was certain that I was a radical. I knew that the changes necessary to democratize and demilitarize American society were fundamental and not cosmetic, that they went beyond the election of a good liberal like McCarthy or McGovern.

#### The Weekly.

When the *Compass* folded in November 1952, Stone, at age 44, was out of a job. He spoke with the *Nation* about resuming the post of Washington editor, but Freda Kirchway, the *Nation's* editor at the time, felt that Stone was too much of a loner, too independent, and that at any moment he might disappear to the mid-east or far east on a story. With few other options, Stone decided to start his own paper.

"It was easier in those days to do such a thing," explained Stone over lunch. "It cost less than one-eighth of a cent for mailing and now it's two and a half. Luckily, we owned our own little three-bedroom home on Nebraska Ave., which we'd been forced to purchase during the war, so our overhead was low. I had severance pay of \$3,500, which I'd wisely had Ted Thackrey put in escrow in case the *Compass* folded. A few friends helped with small loans totalling \$3,000."

Stone had the *PM* and *Compass* mailing lists. He sent out an appeal and got back 3,500 initial subscribers. He paid himself \$125 a week, and his wife Esther worked as the combination bookkeeper and circulation manager. For a few months, Stone had an office downtown, but no one called, so he gave it up and worked out of his house.

The first issue of *I.F. Stone's Weekly* appeared on Jan. 17, 1953.

"When we reached 5,000 subscribers (at \$5 a year) after the first year, I knew we would make it," said Stone.

"My idea was to make the *Weekly* radical in viewpoint, but conservative in format. I deliberately chose a conservative typeface, so a reader could give it to a friend who wouldn't immediately dismiss it as a radical sheet. I used documents, the government's own sources, to support my arguments. I couldn't get inside in-

*Continued on page 18.*



his wife Esther, Stone started to expound on the difficulties of translating Plato. Suddenly he banged his fist on the table, startling the waiter, and said, "You know that Plato's a real bastard. He's so undemocratic; he's a regular reactionary old aristocrat."

Later in the evening, Stone took me on a tour of his upstairs study which is now stocked with hundreds of books on Greece. He rummaged around in the small room, crowded with tables and a desk piled high with reference books, and pulled out Greek grammars, diction-



# IN THESE TIMES

Editorial

## High Court's unwarranted warrants

Last week the Supreme Court made it more difficult for the government to enforce occupational health and safety protections for workers and less difficult for it to police the press.

In one case, the Court ruled that the Fourth Amendment barred Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspections of business sites without a warrant (see story, page 5); in another that it permitted warrants to search newspaper offices for evidence without prior warning.

Beneath the fashionable rhetoric celebrating human rights, individual dignity and civil liberties in the western world, the two decisions exemplify contrary trends quietly entrenching themselves in American life. The human rights and dignity of workers are allowed to be sacrificed to the prerogatives of property and police powers are growing against a free press.

### Worst safety record.

In 1970 an almost unanimous Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act in response to the atrocious record of American business, the worst in the industrial world since the late 19th century. No other national capitalist class in an industrial nation has been so overindulged or granted such permissiveness in putting profits ahead of workers' health and lives. Nor are the costs of medical care, hospitalization, lost working time, and workers compensation as high elsewhere as they are in the U.S.

By 1968 American employers were reporting 1,000 job-related deaths per month. Six years after passage of OSHA the federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health estimated that 100,000 people were dying each year from work-related injuries and diseases. According to the Labor Department, about one in ten American workers each year—between five and six million—experience injury or disease resulting from work.

The OSHA legislation of 1970, for the first time, guaranteed the right of American working men and women to a safe and healthy workplace. It provided inspection procedures standard in other sectors of public health, and established agencies in the Labor Department to enforce the law. Or so it seemed.

From its inception, OSHA has been underfunded, understaffed and undermined by an Executive and Congress that worry more about "business confidence" than working people's health.

Congress appropriated money for a staff of only 1,500 inspectors, a force capable each year of examining, usually superficially, only 2 percent of the nation's five million workplaces. Only 400 of these inspectors have the skills for sophisticated assessment of chemical hazards. Congress has since weakened the law with exemptions and miniscule or suspended penalties.

### OSHA budget tied up in red tape.

The first OSHA head, Nixon-appointed George C. Guenther, as revealed in Watergate related disclosures, used lax enforcement to attract business support for Nixon in his 1972 re-election campaign. By executive order, President Ford required OSHA (and other health agencies) to prepare "inflation-impact statements" (i.e., estimates of costs to business) for each new regulation. President Carter has continued Ford's policy—most recently in holding up an OSHA regulation for fighting "brown lung" among 150,000 of the nation's 800,000 textile workers.

By last year, \$6.3 million of OSHA's



\$10.8 million budget was tied up in preparing inflation-impact statements, instead of being applied to enforcing the law.

Now comes the Supreme Court ruling. Presumably the same rule will apply to inspectors in meat, food, drugs, and in coal mining, railroads, and nuclear facilities, regulated by agencies other than OSHA.

As dissenting Justice John Paul Stevens said, given the already "enormous cost" of enforcing safety and health standards, "the new fangled inspection warrant" will impose "an additional strain on already overtaxed federal resources." It will further bog down enforcement in red tape and court litigation—the kind that business executives and right-wingers otherwise bitterly complain about but gleefully applaud when it comes to obstructing the protection of workers' health and lives.

The Court is stretching the Fourth Amendment (see box) to relieve property owners of social responsibility by considering workers employed on business premises, or business facilities and materials, the "persons, houses, papers, and effects" of the employers.

The Court's ruling and the ineffectiveness of OSHA vindicate the mineworkers' insistence on the right to strike over health and safety matters. They can rely neither on the tender mercies of the companies nor on the social commitment of their government. Other workers will draw similar conclusions.

The Court's ruling also cuts deeper. It dramatizes how good law protecting people from unreasonable searches and seizures is turned to perverted ends when committed to serving the prerogatives of property. It also illustrates the extent to which government protection of private property has been the main cause of the huge buildup of bureaucratic paperwork and red tape so much decried by the defenders of "free enterprise."

The day after its OSHA ruling, the Su-

preme Court construed the Fourth Amendment to enhance rather than restrain government power over the press. It permits police to obtain a warrant and, without prior notice, search newspaper offices (and other premises, including homes) for evidence in criminal cases. The Court made its first such ruling in 1967 in *Warden v. Hayden*, but now has applied it specifically to newspaper offices. The Court's ruling also applies to political criminal cases.

The Court held that the public interest

in stopping crime makes such intrusion on press freedom—and everyone else's liberty and privacy—reasonable. In so doing, it construes the Fourth Amendment in a manner that abridges the First Amendment, as dissenting Justice Potter Stewart pointed out.

The lower court federal judges whose ruling in the OSHA case the Supreme Court upheld, stated "Expediency is the argument of tyrants; it precedes the loss of every human liberty." Good dictum, wrong case.



### FOURTH AMENDMENT

*The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.*



### FIRST AMENDMENT

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*