

Retreat from Radicalism

The Times It Is A-Changin'

Dinesh D'Souza

For the busy reader, there is no more accurate and complete summary of events around the world than the *New York Times*. Boasting "all the news that's fit to print," the *Times* represents journalism and New York liberalism at its most sophisticated—and arrogant. It also sets the standard for thorough, and in most cases objective, reporting under deadline. By almost every criterion it is the best general-interest newspaper in America, probably in the English language.

The *Times* has won 54 Pulitzer Prizes and has not had to give any of them back. Its roster of newspaper greats would make any rival publisher envious. The legendary managing editor Carr van Ande, probably the only newsman to discover a mistake in Einstein's equations while editing a story about them, helped to secure the worldwide exclusive story on Robert Peary's trip to the North Pole. Edwin James filed a set of spectacular reports on Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic in 1927. Meyer Berger won a Pulitzer for his eyewitness account of a mass murder spree in Camden, New Jersey. James MacDonald filed the first eyewitness account of a bombing raid, when he accompanied a Royal Air Force squadron over Berlin in 1943. And over the furious objections of the State Department, James Reston uncovered the details of the Dumbarton Oaks conference in 1944, revealing U.S.-British-Soviet plans for a postwar United Nations. In another famous scoop, Mr. Reston turned a bout of appendicitis while visiting Peking in 1971 into a firsthand account of Chinese acupuncture.

With a circulation of 970,000 the *Times* is exceeded in readership by the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Daily News*, *USA Today*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. But it wields huge political and intellectual influence. No paper's impact is as multiplied over other news outlets. A recent Gallup poll of reporters and editors nationwide showed that 66 percent read the *Times* daily, compared with 29 percent for the *Washington Post*. The *Times* also seems to be the only newspaper with a reserved seat in the State Department hierarchy for its national-security correspondent, whether Leslie Gelb, director of politico-military affairs under President Carter, or Richard Burt, current assistant secretary for European affairs.

The most glaring exception to the *Times*'s otherwise exemplary coverage has been its treatment of Communist movements and regimes in their early stages. From Stalin in the 1930s, to Fidel Castro in 1957 and 1958, to Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Cong in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua from 1979 to 1982, the *Times* has romanticized Communist leaders, sometimes even denying their Marxism itself and their connections to the Soviet Union. In the last two decades the *Times* has given far more attention to the repression under right-wing dictatorships than to the often more sanguinary consequences of Communist takeovers. This has undermined the legitimacy of the United States' anti-Communist foreign policy and advanced the interests of left-wing totalitarianism in the world.

Justifying Stalin

The first example of this misreporting is Walter Duranty's coverage of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. Duranty was previously famous for his reporting from France during World War I, and had been among the first Western correspondents to recognize the significance of the early Bolshevik uprisings in Russia. Transferred to Moscow, he seemed to view his mission as justifying the ways of Stalin to America. "Stalin is giving the Russian people—the Russian masses, not Westernized landlords, industrialists, bankers, and intellectuals, but Russia's 150 million peasants and workers—what they really want, namely, joint effort, communal effort," he wrote in 1931.

Duranty wrote off Stalin's barbarisms as the natural growing pains of a new republic. Some of the worst atrocities he did not even bother to report, the most astonishing of which was the indescribably tragic famine in the Ukraine, which drove people to cannibalism and claimed, in all, nearly 5 million lives. This man-made famine—the Soviets were exporting grain at the time—was part of an effort to break the back of peasant resistance to Communism.

DINESH D'SOUZA, editor of *Prospect* magazine at Princeton University, is author of *Before the Millennium*, a biography of Jerry Falwell.

But Duranty wrote only about a "famine scare," which he attributed to "partial crop failures." Food shortages that existed, Duranty suggested, were all the result of uncooperative monsoons and slothful peasants who abandoned their crops and went to the cities. In September 1933 Duranty wrote that he had completed a 200-mile trip through the Ukraine and could "say positively that all talk of famine is now ridiculous." No wonder that Malcolm Muggeridge, an eyewitness to the famine, called Duranty "the greatest liar of any journalist that I have met." No wonder that Duranty won the 1933 journalism award from the *Nation* and praise from Stalin himself. In a book published in 1941, *The Kremlin and the People*, he wrote of the forced confessions obtained during the Moscow purge trials: "It is absurd to suggest or imagine that men like this could yield to any influence against their own strong hearts. It is unthinkable that Stalin and Voroshilov and Budenny and the Court Martial could have sentenced their friends to death unless the proof of guilt were overwhelming."

One might wonder how a reporter of such sympathies could survive at the *Times*, which was then an emphatically anti-Communist institution under the aegis of Publisher Adolph Ochs, who was a Republican friend of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover. Actually Ochs received numerous complaints from readers about Duranty's reporting, but apparently could not bring himself to believe them, perhaps because of Duranty's aristocratic manner and impeccable English accent. Whatever the reason, the *Times* continued to feature Duranty.

Praising Mr. Castro

In 1957 the *New York Times* sent editorial writer Herbert Matthews to Cuba to cover what looked like brewing unrest. Matthews had earlier covered the Spanish Civil War, assuring Americans that "there is precious little Communism" on the anti-Franco side. In 1945 Matthews wrote an article in *Collier's* urging the United States to give the Soviet Union the secret of the atomic bomb. "By refusing to share the secret, we are bolstering Russian suspicions," he argued. In Cuba Matthews interviewed one of the rebels challenging the Batista regime, and profiled him in a series of articles that appeared in the *New York Times* starting February 24, 1957. "Fidel Castro is alive and well in Cuba," Matthews trumpeted. "Havana does not and cannot know that thousands of men and women are heart and soul with Fidel Castro. . . . Fidel Castro and his 26th of July movement are the flaming symbol of this opposition to

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 1931.

STALIN DOMINATES RUSSIA OF TODAY

By WALTER DURANTY.
Continued from Page One.

ment unrivaled since Charles Murphy died.

Stalin is giving the Russian people—the Russian masses, not Westernized landlords, industrialists, bankers and intellectuals, but Russia's 150,000,000 peasants and workers—what they really want, namely, joint effort, communal effort. And communal life is as acceptable to them as it is repugnant to a Westerner. This is one of the reasons why Russian Bolshevism will never succeed in the United States, Great Britain, France or other parts west of the Rhine.

Stalinism, too, has done what Lenin only attempted. It has re-established the semi-divine, supreme autocracy of the imperial idea and has placed itself on the Kremlin throne as a ruler whose lightest word is all in all and whose frown spells death. Try that on free-born Americans, or the British with their tough loyalty to old things, or on France's consciousness of self. But it suits the Russians and is as familiar, natural and right to the Russian mind as it is abominable and wrong to Western nations.

Key to Stalin's Power.

This Stalin knows and that knowledge is his key to power. Stalin does not think of himself as a dictator or an autocrat, but as the guardian of the sacred flame, or "party line," as the Bolsheviks term it, which for want of a better name must be labeled Stalinism.

Its authority is as absolute as any emperor's—it is an inflexible rule of thought, ethics, conduct and purpose that none may transgress. And its practical expression finds form in what is known as the five-year plan. The Soviet five-year plan is a practical expression of the dominant principle—which for convenience the writer will call Stalinism—although Stalin still terms it Leninism—which rules Russia today with absolute authority.

In a sense it is far more than a plan—and in another sense it is not a plan at all. It is a slogan for a national policy and purpose rather than the glorified budgetary program which it appears at first sight to be. Most persons outside Russia seem to think that if the five-year plan "fails" it will be the end of Bolshevism and that if it "succeeds" it will mean the end of capitalism elsewhere. Nothing could be more absurd or more wrong.

The five-year plan is nothing more or less than applied Stalinism, and its mass of bewildering figures is only the thermometer to measure the degree of heat engendered by the application of the plan, but is not otherwise intrinsically important. The figures have been changed so often and so considerably as to cease to have real value save as an indication of the "tempo," or rate, at which Stalinism is gaining ground.

Five-Year Plan Provides Goal.

To the rest of the world it is only a menace, in the sense that Bolshevism itself is a menace—which may or may not be true. To Russia it is only a hope or promise in terms of

what Bolshevism itself offers. But to the Russian people the five-year plan is infinitely more besides—it is a goal to aim at, and its inception cannot be regarded as a stroke of genius by any one familiar with the Russian nature.

Russians, ignorant or wise, have a positive passion for plans. They almost worship a plan, and the first thing any one, two or more Russians ever do about anything is make a plan for it. That, after making his plan, the Russian feels satisfied and seems to lose sight of the fact that a plan must next be carried out is of the great obstacles Stalin and his associates are now facing.

So, to conceive a whole national policy and everything in the national life as one gigantic plan was the political tour de force that put Stalin in the highest rank. Every one who has employed Russians or worked with Russians or knows Russians finds that if he wants them to jump on a chair, he must tell them to jump on a table, and aiming at the table they will reach the chair. The important thing is that they have something to jump at and make an effort—whether they actually get there all at once or not does not really matter in a country of such vast natural resources and with such a tough and enduring population.

What matters is that they keep on trying, and that is what Stalinism and its five-year plan is set to make them do. In other words, the five-year plan is something for the Russians to measure at, not for the rest of the world to measure Russians by. This sounds confusing, but it is true, and if you cannot understand it you cannot understand Russia.

Chief Purpose Is Direction.

The whole purpose of the plan is to get the Russians going—that is, to make a nation of eager, conscious workers out of a nation that was a lump of sodden, driven slaves. Outsiders "viewing with alarm" or hooting with disdain as they take and play with Soviet statistics might as well be twiddling their own thumbs for all it really counts.

What does count is that Russia is being speeded up and fermented—and disciplined—into jumping and into making an effort and making it all together in tune to the Kremlin's music. That is why the Soviet press utters shouts of joy about the five-year plan for all production being accomplished in two and a half years and does not care a rap when some meticulous foreigners comment about the fact that nothing like the five-year amount of oil has actually been produced.

What the Soviet press really means is that in two and a half years the daily production rate—or tempo—has reached the point set for the end of the fifth year of the plan—in short, that Oil has jumped on the table way ahead of time. That the said rate may only be maintained with the utmost difficulty has small importance to Russian logic, and rightly so, because a successful effort has been made and what a man has done once that man can do again.

Russia and Russians and Russian logic are different, but the fact that they are different does not necessarily mean they are wrong.

In succeeding dispatches the writer will try to show what this difference is and how it works. More immediately, how the five-year plan works in practice in this, which the Russians call, the "third and decisive year." And, incidentally, by "decisive" they do not mean critical or deciding of success or failure, but victorious—deciding success only.

the regime." Matthews pooh-poohed the suggestion that Mr. Castro was a Communist. "This is not a Communist revolution in any sense of the word, and there are no Communists in positions of control," he reported on page one of the *Times*. Shortly after Mr. Castro ousted Batista, Matthews wrote in a *Times* summary, "In the eyes of nearly all his compatriots, Doctor Fidel Castro is the greatest hero that their history has known." As for the prospect of democracy, Matthews wrote on July 16, 1959, "Most Cubans today do not want elections. The reason is that elections in the past merely meant to them the coming of corrupt politicians seeking the spoils of power." Meanwhile, the rest of the news media reported Mr. Castro's ascent with somewhat greater skepticism. Their skepticism angered Matthews, who attacked them in front of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April 1960, "In my 30 years on the *New York Times*, I have never seen a big story so misunderstood, so badly handled, and so misinterpreted as the Cuban revolution."

Matthews's fidelity to Mr. Castro was bitterly resented by Earl Smith, then U.S. ambassador to Cuba, who wrote, "The U.S. government agencies and the U.S. press played a major role in bringing Castro to power. Three front-page articles in the *New York Times* in early 1957 by the editorialist Herbert Matthews served to inflate Castro to a world stature and world recognition. Until that time Castro had been just another bandit in the Oriente mountains." President Eisenhower suggested that Matthews had "almost single-handedly made Castro a national hero." The historian Theodore Draper wrote a series of articles in the *New Leader* thoroughly refuting Matthews's assertions that Mr. Castro was not a Communist. And a former Castro official says his boss once turned down Matthews's request for an interview because "both Matthews and the *New York Times* could be considered practically in our pockets, so it was better to keep them in reserve for the future."

Like Duranty, Matthews was protected from rebuke at the *Times* because he was favored by the ruling family. His brilliant idealism and flamboyant personal style were admired by the quiet and influential Iphigene Sulzberger, daughter of Adolph Ochs and wife of his successor, Arthur Hays Sulzberger. (Later she would be godmother to Matthews's only son.) Matthews was also valued politically by Adolph Ochs's relative John Oakes, the left-wing editorial editor who used Matthews's reporting to justify his strident opinion pieces.

The View from Hanoi

At several key points during the Vietnam War, misreporting by the *Times* helped to weaken public support for the U.S. military presence. For example, in a series of articles from North Vietnam in late 1966 and early 1967, Harrison Salisbury gave the impression that the United States was deliberately bombing civilian rather than military targets, and he used casualty figures, unverified, from Hanoi. Shown around the city of Nam Dinh by its Communist mayor, Mr. Salisbury reported that she "regards her city as essentially a cotton-and-silk textile town containing nothing of military significance. Nam

Dinh has been systematically attacked by American planes since June 28, 1965. The cathedral tower looks out on block after block of utter desolation. . . . No American communiqué has asserted that Nam Dinh con-

Cuba Has a One-Man Rule And It Is Called Non-Red

Youthful Castro Regime, Beset by Problems, Is Learning by Doing

By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS

Special to The New York Times.

HAVANA, July 15—Half a year after the revolt against the Batista regime, Cuba is in the midst of the first great social revolution in Latin America since the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

The overthrow of the dictatorship of Gen. Fulgencio Batista Jan. 1, 1959 merely ended the political phase of the struggle for power. In the process, the entire structure of government as it then existed was destroyed and a revolution to establish a different social, economic and political status was begun.

For one who has followed the struggle closely from its beginnings two and a half years ago and has just spent nearly two weeks in Cuba, it is possible to draw an outline of the situation as it really is. This being a period of creation, gestation and transformation, such an outline cannot be simple or complete, but the main features are clear enough.

Premier Fidel Castro, the young man who headed the



Associated Press

Premier Fidel Castro

forces that fought and won the military phase of the struggle, is now so powerful personally that for all practical purposes

Continued on Page 2, Column 3

The New York Times, July 16, 1959

tains some facility that the United States regards as a military objective." In fact, as Guenter Lewy has shown in *America in Vietnam*, Nam Dinh was "a major transshipment point for supplies and soldiers moving south" and "on at least three prior occasions, American communiqués had referred to the bombing of military targets in Nam Dinh."

Asked recently why he only reported the North Vietnamese version of the war, Mr. Salisbury told *Policy Review*, "If you are reporting from North Vietnam, you are going to have their figures." He attributed criticism of his reports to the Defense Department's desire to discredit him "because I was devastating to them."

During the Tet offensive of 1968, *Times* coverage

helped give the misleading impression that the Americans and South Vietnamese were losing. Charles Mohr, who reported on Tet for the *Times*, now admits that the offensive was “a serious tactical defeat for the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese superiors.” At the time, however, as Peter Braestrup, former *Times* correspondent in Saigon, has documented in his book *Big Story*, the *Times* and most of the media presented Tet as a massive victory for the North Vietnamese. Mr. Mohr admits the veracity of Mr. Braestrup’s study. He concedes that “massive erosion of domestic American public support for the war” followed Tet. Yet he defends media coverage of Tet as essentially accurate.

Throughout the Vietnam War, the *Times* printed story after story about the corruption and brutality in the Saigon government, while playing down or ignoring inhuman acts by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. On September 4, 1969, for example, the *Times* published a front-page obituary of Ho Chi Minh. It would be hard to fault the newspaper for quoting Hanoi’s official statement on “the great, beloved leader of our Vietnamese working class and nation, who all his life devotedly served the revolution, the people, and the fatherland.” But there was no mention in the obituary of Ho’s bloodbaths, or of the millions of refugees who fled south from his regime, a foreshadowing of the exodus of the boat people after the conquest of South Vietnam in 1975.

Indeed, readers of the *Times* were so accustomed to reading about American excesses that they were poorly prepared for the atrocities that followed the U.S. pullout. *Times* reporter Sydney Schanberg won a much-deserved Pulitzer for his valiant reporting of Communist genocide in Cambodia. But shortly before the holocaust, he reported from Phnom Penh that “unlike administration officials in Washington . . . most Cambodians do not talk about a possible massacre and do not expect one.” And throughout the Cambodian holocaust the *Times* made sure its reports on the killings were balanced by cheerful features: “Vietnamese Salute Independence Day,” July 14, 1975; “Life is Peaceful in Delta,” September 16, 1975. According to a survey by Accuracy in Media, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* together mentioned human-rights violations in Southeast Asia only 13 times in 1976, at the height of the bloodletting. By comparison they had 124 stories on human-rights abuse in Chile and 85 such stories on South Korea.

Excusing the Sandinistas

Until recently *New York Times* coverage of Central America tended to italicize human-rights negligence in El Salvador while virtually ignoring greater suppression of freedom in Nicaragua. Alan Riding of the *Times* published without skepticism Sandinista claims that they sought a pluralistic, democratic society; when elections were repeatedly postponed he quoted various excuses. He praised the literacy program in Nicaragua but gave short shrift to its highly charged ideological content. Mr. Riding did concede that “some conservative groups have protested that the campaign is being used to promote the Sandinista National Liberation Front, and even to indoctrinate the population along leftist lines.” He did not cite

what was being taught in literacy primers—for example, that Yankees are “the enemy of humanity” or that “the guerrillas vanquished the genocidal National Guard.”

Warren Hoge reported in January 1982 that “it is indisputable that Nicaraguans today suffer less state repression of fundamental freedoms than do the people of countries in the region like Guatemala and El Salvador whose right-wing governments do not draw the same kind of critical comments from Washington.” This statement may have seemed plausible at the time, but the important point, which Mr. Hoge failed to make, was that the Sandinistas were moving in a totalitarian direction, while their neighbors were moving toward free elections, partly as the result of U.S. pressure.

Readers of the Times were so accustomed to reading about American excesses in Indochina that they were poorly prepared for the atrocities that followed the U.S. pullout.

Mr. Hoge dismissed the Reagan administration’s theory that Nicaragua was arming itself beyond its defensive needs, noting simply that this opinion was “not shared by Latin American and European diplomats in Managua.” He did not identify these diplomats. Asked today about his pro-Sandinista reporting, Mr. Hoge appears puzzled by the question. “I am a very nonideological person,” he says.

On January 11, 1982, Raymond Bonner, a former litigator for Ralph Nader, filed a story in the *Times* charging that U.S. military advisers had watched Salvadoran military personnel torture two teenagers. The article was prominently featured on page two of the *Times*. It turns out that all the information in it was based on charges made by a deserter from the Salvadoran military, whose testimony contained several contradictions. No attempt was made to confirm the charges, nor could the *Times* produce corroborating evidence when the U.S. State Department denied the allegations and asked for proof. Now Executive Editor Abraham Rosenthal concedes that Mr. Bonner’s story was “overplayed” and probably should not have been run. “Legitimate criticism of that story can be well taken,” he told *Editor and Publisher*.

The torture story was only the most conspicuous example of the credibility Mr. Bonner attached to any criticism of the Salvadoran government or U.S. policy. In fact, Latin-based journalists say that, given the sympathy Mr. Bonner developed for the guerrillas, he could not view the civil war with any degree of detachment. The *Columbia Journalism Review*, in a story favorable to Mr. Bonner, quoted one Central American correspondent

saying, "Ray allowed the outrage we all feel to boil over. He allowed his hate for the Salvadoran military to boil over. And he saw the left rather romantically." Mr. Bonner himself told *Policy Review*, "A lot of reporters have been stunned by the brutality of the El Salvador government and have been outraged that the United States has been supporting that government and deceiving the American people." But Mr. Bonner seems to have been so obsessed with the misdoings—both real and imagined—of a U.S. ally that he paid little attention to what was actually going on in El Salvador. The international surprise following the enthusiastic voter turnout in the Salvadoran elections of 1982 was an excellent indication that reporters such as Mr. Bonner had not been properly covering the country's politics.

A Generation of Left-Leaning Reporters

These stories somehow fell outside the *New York Times* tradition of speedy, accurate, and disciplined reporting. Founder Adolph Ochs promised his readers balanced coverage that would "allay, rather than excite, agitation, and substitute reason for prejudice, a cool and intelligent judgment for passion, in all public action." His editorial policy was sternly anti-Communist. In 1917 the *Times*'s patriotism was questioned when it advocated a negotiated settlement with Austria at a time when the Allies had all but beaten her into surrender. The *Herald* of New York made a bid for some of the *Times*'s readership with its advertisements, "Read an *American* paper," a scarcely veiled reference to Ochs's German origins. But it was Ochs's view that the United States could negotiate from a position of strength and stop the blood-bath. He was so aggrieved by accusations of apostasy that he considered having the *Times* appear without any editorials at all.

In 1945 Ochs's successor, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, declared that the *Times* "would not knowingly employ any so-called Communist or any other kind of totalitarian in our news or editorial departments, for we have a deep-rooted prejudice for democracy and a deep-seated faith in our capacity to develop under a system of law." In the early 1950s Sulzberger unhesitatingly fired a *Times* copyreader who pleaded the Fifth Amendment when asked by a congressional committee about his ties to the Communist Party. When the Soviets invaded Hungary in 1956 a *Times* editorial summed up its attitude toward Moscow: "We accuse the Soviet government of murder. We accuse it of the foulest treachery and basest deceit known to man. We accuse it of having committed so monstrous a crime against the Hungarian people yesterday that its infamy can never be forgotten or forgiven."

Today *Times* editorials have the same accusatory tone, but the scolding finger is more likely to be pointed at a president who saves Grenada from being turned into a Soviet satellite like Hungary. A *Times* editorial called the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 a failure of U.S. diplomacy; meanwhile, columnist Anthony Lewis wrote that "the West can help most by remaining quiet and calm." *Times* editorialists in recent years have bent over backwards to avoid criticizing the Soviets for arms control violations, for complicity in the papal assassina-

tion attempt, and for the horrifying use of chemical and biological warfare. Yellow rain charges against the Soviets, wrote the *Times* in 1982, "have not been fully confirmed. Besides, they describe small-scale use against unprotected people in remote areas." Nobody was hurt, that is, but little brown people.

Much has been written about how Watergate and the Vietnam War aroused an abiding press suspicion of the U.S. government. At the *Times*, distrust had been building since 1961, when the paper prepared an exposé of President Kennedy's plans for invading Cuba. At the suggestion of James Reston, *Times* publisher Orvil Dryfoos ordered the story moved to a less prominent place on page one, and any mention of an "imminent invasion" of

Until recently Times coverage of Central America tended to italicize human-rights negligence in El Salvador while virtually ignoring greater suppression of freedom in Nicaragua.

Cuba deleted. This caused resentment among several editors, whose grumblings were vindicated by the Bay of Pigs fiasco, after which even Kennedy admitted that perhaps the *Times* had been too diffident: If it had published all it knew, the invasion might have been cancelled and the tragedy averted. This incident was repeatedly cited 10 years later by *Times* editors to justify printing the Pentagon Papers against government wishes. In *Bad News*, a critical book on the *Times*, former *New York Daily News* correspondent Russ Braley argues that the Pentagon Papers case placed the *Times* in institutional opposition to the elected government; indeed, it had a vested interest in the humiliation and collapse of the government. That is why Watergate was so savory to the *Times*: It reinforced its sense of the presidency as self-serving, and the press as virtuous and the true protectors of the people's interest.

In this period it wasn't just the *Times*'s editorial pages that moved to the left, but also its news sections. The new ideal was for reporters to undermine those in authority. For this journalists searched endlessly for anyone disgruntled with the present leadership or seeking change, whom they pressed for denunciations and rewarded with favorable coverage or, where the occasion demanded it, anonymity. The Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, and Watergate also provided political *direction* for enterprising reporters. Stories revealing the moral and strategic folly of the use of American force, the inspirational value of Communism to the suppressed masses in the Third World, and the discrepancy between the heroic ideals and unethical behavior of U.S. leaders, brought high praise from the journalistic community.

Yet *Times* reporters and other newsmen were probably not being consciously ideological. As Hilton Kramer, former arts editor at the *Times* and currently editor of the *New Criterion*, puts it, "For most liberal journalists their political prejudices do not strike them as liberal. They feel they are simply reporting the state of nature. Those who disagree with them are viewed as ideologues."

Weary of Partisan Reporting

But one important man at the *Times* has grown weary of partisan reporting in the tradition of Duranty and Matthews, which, ironically, has reached its apogee during his own term as executive editor and man-in-charge. Abraham Rosenthal personally interviewed and hired a generation of left-leaning reporters for the *Times*, the vast majority of them from Columbia and other top journalism schools. He took them for their enterprise and skill, but seemed to regret their monolithic views as early as 1967, when at a seminar held by Professor Chris Argyris of Harvard he complained that "the editorial page has gone toward the left, the columnists are liberal to liberal-left, and many of the bright reporters have come out of an atmosphere of advocacy." Mr. Rosenthal was then assistant managing editor after reporting for the *Times* from Poland, Japan, and India. He argued that the *Times* had "to pull back to center. The paper should not be politically discernible."

Mr. Rosenthal became executive editor in 1969, but only recently has he acted to curb ideological reporting in the newspaper. Gay Talese in *The Kingdom and The Power* describes how Mr. Rosenthal triumphed over the various duchies and fiefdoms that fought among each other for control of the *Times*. Perhaps he wanted to consolidate his power at the newspaper before attempting to reform its news coverage.

Reporters at the *Times* also suggest that Mr. Rosenthal postponed his effort to restore balance because he believed, with some justification, that even though his reporters were liberal they were among the most talented and experienced hands in the business. All his colleagues describe Mr. Rosenthal as a perfectionist, so it is understandable that he would be reluctant to restore political centrism at the cost of losing news scoops to rival newspapers. Yet Mr. Rosenthal has always had old-fashioned views about journalism. "He hates ideological or emotional baggage," a *Times* reporter in the Washington bureau says.

Many *Times* reporters also say, often with regret, that Mr. Rosenthal has become more conservative. Charles Kaiser, former *Times* reporter now with the *Wall Street Journal*, describes Mr. Rosenthal as a "neoconservative." He has "shifted gradually to the right over the years," Mr. Kaiser says. Unquestionably he is anti-Communist. Recently he was attacked for printing Claire Sterling's 6,000-word summary of the Italian judiciary's investigation into Bulgarian connections with the Pope's would-be assassin Ali Agca. Mr. Rosenthal did not ask a *Times* staff writer to do the story, as is customary; his selection of Miss Sterling was particularly telling, because she broke the initial story in *Reader's Digest*, and *Times* reporters had been hostile to her conclusions.

Perhaps even more extraordinary, in 1982 Mr. Rosenthal sent a letter to the editor of his own newspaper, denouncing an obituary that appeared in his own news columns. The obituary stated that Wladyslaw Gomulka, the late Polish leader, had demonstrated that a Communist country could be ruled "without resort to overt police terror." Wrote Mr. Rosenthal: "That statement is incorrect and an insult to all the Poles who suffered under [Gomulka's] rule." The executive editor described Gomulka as "repressive, harsh, ideological, and his government stayed in power only because the Poles knew that its overthrow would mean invasion by the army of the Soviet Union."

A second explanation is Mr. Rosenthal's responsive-

"We accuse the Soviet government of murder. We accuse it of the foulest treachery and basest deceit known to man."

—Times editorial after the
Soviet invasion of Hungary, 1956

ness to the paper's market. The newspaper has proved time and again that it cannot be blackmailed by advertisers, but it is affected by its readership. One of Mr. Rosenthal's major accomplishments as editor was to avoid what his business staff predicted would be a financial debacle in the 1970s. He did this by breaking with the *Times*'s tradition of antiseptic reporting and unoriginal layout. Special sections such as "Sports Monday" and "Weekend" were introduced. The writing and headlines were livened up; for the first time salty features such as Erica Jong's recipes, titled "Fear of Frying," began to appear. Readership soared as a result of the less forbidding format. Mr. Rosenthal is also not above catering articles to targets of the latest circulation drive. He has been criticized for assigning fewer stories about run-down sections of New York, and more celebrations of life in the Hamptons. If Mr. Rosenthal can adapt his newspaper to the cultural preferences of his readers, why should he ignore political shifts? Surely he is aware of the rightward drift of New Yorkers, particularly Jewish and Catholic readers. The city now elects Edward Koch as mayor, not John Lindsay.

Rosenthal's Reforms

The most conspicuous venue of reform is the *New York Times Magazine*, once mostly independent of the daily newspaper, but now directly under the executive editor's control. This year, the magazine has published several reassessments of liberal enthusiasms. In "What Constitutes a Civil Right?" Morris Abram argued

against reverse discrimination and quotas. An article by Richard Bernstein on the United Nations was not only critical of the UN's anti-Israeli and anti-American positions but also questioned the desirability of the organization's continued existence. Anti-Communist articles have appeared frequently in the magazine, among them Victor Krasin's "How I Was Broken by the KGB," Nicholas Gage's "Looking for Eleni," and Mr. Rosenthal's moving evocation of Poland before and after Soviet occupation. Another remarkable piece that the *Times* would probably not have featured five years ago was Fox Butterfield's account last year of revisionist scholarship on Vietnam, which punctured every left-wing orthodoxy about the war. The *Times Magazine* has also featured the

The front page is less likely now to feature articles on suffering welfare mothers, and more likely to chronicle the resurgence of patriotism and family values.

second thoughts of feminist radicals who have rediscovered the institution of the family. Fran Schumer's "A Return to Religion" noted the increase in religious interest among intellectuals and the East Coast elite.

Since the news sections of the *Times* are not overtly opinionated, their rightward shift is much less evident. It should not be overestimated, but it is there, and can be measured by the increasing agitation over the *Times* on the part of Alexander Cockburn, who writes press criticism for the *Nation*. Foreign Editor Warren Hoge says that "if there is one phrase that Rosenthal uses over and over again here, it is 'We've got to get the pages straight politically.'" Mr. Hoge adds that "if there is a story that is naive or uncritical toward either right or left, we hear about it from Abe." As a result of this conscious effort toward balance, it is not unusual to find such stories as "America's Astounding Job Machine: Employment is Growing at a Record Rate—Even in Manufacturing. It's the Delight of Reagan and the Envy of Europe." This article, on page one of the Sunday business section, went on for several columns, and was in marked contrast to the Reagan-bashing slant of the paper's previous eco-

nomic reporting. The front page is less likely now to feature articles on suffering welfare mothers, and more likely to chronicle the resurgence of patriotism and family values in various parts of the country.

There are still some activist reporters on the *Times*, but they are in the minority, and none of them covers a major beat. Even those reporters who are liberal are careful not to let their personal views surface in their stories. The term that best applies to such men as Bernard Gwertzman, Thomas Friedman, Francis Clines, R. W. Apple, John Burns, Craig Whitney, Hedrick Smith, and Bill Kovach is *professional*. One media analyst observes, "These guys are not looking to save souls or overthrow governments. They are professionals of the old type." One of the best reporters, Paris Bureau Chief John Vinocur, has been denounced by Mr. Cockburn as a "sedulous Reaganaut" for his reports on the growth of French anti-Communism and the collapse of President Mitterrand's socialist policies. The most politicized reporters for the *Times* in the past are either retired, like Harrison Salisbury, on the op-ed page, like Tom Wicker and Sidney Schanberg, or employed outside the newspaper business, like David Halberstam, Seymour Hersh, and Raymond Bonner.

An American Comeback

What's in store for the *New York Times*? Abraham Rosenthal's effort to restore balance is welcome, but how long will it last? That could depend on whether his ideals of uniformly skeptical reporting are taken up by other editors. Mr. Rosenthal is only three years away from retirement, and though there are rumors about his staying on, he told *New York* magazine he would "probably" step down when he reached 65. The most commonly mentioned names for Mr. Rosenthal's successor are Assistant Managing Editor Craig Whitney, Foreign Editor Warren Hoge, Editorial Editor Max Frankel, National Editor David Jones, and Washington Bureau Chief Bill Kovach. Obviously the new executive editor's political and journalistic convictions will influence the future course of the *Times*.

But what we are witnessing now is a distinctly American comeback. The *New York Times*, America's greatest newspaper, is reaffirming its greatness by retreating from the radicalism of the last two decades and once again taking up responsible journalism. It is the first liberal institution to identify the excesses of liberalism, mainly its flirtation with Communism, and to seek to correct them. Many *Times* readers feared that the newspaper did not have such resilience. Abe Rosenthal is proving them wrong. ■

The American Spectator is nervy with impudent opinions about politics, culture, and ideology.



Literate in its writing, independent in its thinking, The American Spectator is predictable in one respect only: It appeals to your intelligence and your sense of humor.

While The American Spectator takes delight in being irreverently funny, it can also be deadly serious. Not only does it take on the liberal media's sacred cows—Betty Friedan, Ralph Nader, Tip O'Neill, Bob Dole, Environmentalism, The New Industrial Policy—but it presents thoughtful analyses of ideas and people the media denigrate—Supply-Side Economics, Deregulation, the new Civil Rights Commission, Marva Collins, Thomas Sowell, Arthur Koestler, and Ronald Reagan.

“ . . . nothing else
quite like it on the
American Scene.”

—Irving Kristol

Join the growing roster of subscribers to The American Spectator. The coupon contains an offer that will save you a heap of money. Mail it today.

Election
Year Special

THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR
P.O. Box 1969, Bloomington, Indiana 47402

Open my trial subscription (8 giant, tabloid-sized issues) at your special money-saving price of only \$11.95.

☐ Check for \$11.95 enclosed. In return for my prepayment send me an additional issue. Full refund guaranteed if I don't like the first issue.

☐ Bill me for \$11.95 (sorry, no additional issue). If I don't like my first issue I'll write cancel across the invoice, return it to you and owe nothing.

Name _____ (please print)

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

For subscriptions outside U.S. please add \$4 for postage.

PR4

Taking Liberties

The ACLU Strays from Its Mission

Richard Vigilante and Susan Vigilante

For over sixty years the American Civil Liberties Union has been the nation's most able and dedicated advocate of the liberties guaranteed us in the Bill of Rights.

It has defended free speech and opposed censorship; it has fought for racial equality; in labor disputes it has defended the rights of workers and "bosses" alike. In the 1930s it opposed the censorship of Joyce's *Ulysses*. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 case that ended legal segregation in public schools, it supported the NAACP with an amicus curiae brief. Throughout the 1960s it was active in the civil-rights movement, providing legal assistance for civil-rights activists of all races.

In defending what it sees as the principles of the Bill of Rights, the ACLU has never shrunk from unpopular causes. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, it defended the right of Communist leaders to free speech and free assembly. In the 1970s, the ACLU was instrumental in obtaining the right to abortion on demand. It also defended the right of American Nazis to demonstrate in various communities in the United States, some of them with large Jewish populations. The most widely publicized of these cases, involving Skokie, Illinois, cost the ACLU an estimated 35,000 members, at least 10 percent of its membership.

Though widely considered a liberal institution, the ACLU has long attracted the support of many conservatives. In recent years, however, conservatives have frequently complained that the organization has gone beyond the defense of civil liberties to do battle for partisan and even bigoted and anti-American causes. The most frequent charges are three:

1. That many members of the organization are anti-religious, with some carrying their hostility toward conservative religious denominations to the point of bigotry; and that the organization itself has sought to intimidate or penalize the exercise of religious belief;

2. That in the sphere of social conduct the ACLU has gone beyond advocating tolerance and now works to actively undermine traditional moral standards;

3. That in its foreign-policy cases the ACLU has consistently worked to hamper U.S. efforts to contain Communism.

Pursuit of the Absurd

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or restricting the free exercise thereof." In the ACLU's interpretation, this clause of the First Amendment not only forbids the establishment of a particular national church but also excludes virtually all religion from public life. This stand does not make the organization antireligious, says the ACLU's Executive Director Ira Glasser; in his view, a strict separation of church and state actually benefits religion. He contends that religious belief flourishes in societies that keep religious disputes out of public life.

Even if the ACLU is not hostile to religion, the objective effect of its efforts has been to reduce the place of religion in American life and to restrict religious speech in a way the ACLU would never allow other forms of speech to be restricted. And on occasion the ACLU's scrupulous pursuit of the separation of church and state has led it to the point of the absurd.

A perfect example is the ACLU's view of Christmas celebrations. Most cities and towns in the United States give Christmas some kind of public nod—wreaths on office buildings, fir trees strewn with colored lights, city sidewalks dressed in holiday style, silver bells, and so on. But the ACLU is constantly vigilant lest these holiday celebrations violate the establishment clause. In 1981 the Rhode Island affiliate of the ACLU sued the City of Pawtucket to stop the display of a crèche of the Christmas nativity scene. The ACLU lost the case this spring, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that portraying a historical event does not constitute an establishment of religion. In 1979 the ACLU sued the public schools of Sioux Falls, Iowa, to stop the singing of "Silent Night" at the annual Christmas assemblies.

The ACLU is relentless even outside the Christmas season.

In Minnesota the organization sued a high school to

RICHARD VIGILANTE and SUSAN VIGILANTE are members of the American Civil Liberties Union. Mr. Vigilante is coauthor of *Grenada: The Untold Story*, to be published by Madison Books this October.