



THE REPORTER'S NOTES

And a Time for Ecclesiastes

It is winter again and so we find ourselves obsessed once more with the President and the press. The tradition is a well-established one. It was in February, 1949, that Arthur Krock's exclusive interview with President Truman prompted one of the best-known and most memorable explosions of interest in the nature, ethics, and utility of Presidential modes of dealing with the press. That is to say, reporters who were not Arthur Krock were furious.

Down the years since that time, through the tortured musings on poolside news management in Palm Beach and the outcry over the undemocratic nature of impromptu kaffeeklatsches, the issue of privileged access to Presidential confidence has always maintained its seasonal quality. Why?

The answer is fairly simple: nothing else is going on, a situation which produces what is known among press secretaries as a "news void," which in turn has its own predictable dangers. One is that reporters begin to complain about the lull. Another is that they occasionally use the time to dig out stories that wiser heads would just as soon leave buried. Finally, there is the danger that some highly placed source from a cabinet member to the President himself will seek to fill the void by offering insights into his plans on an unattributable basis. What is particularly dangerous about this last move is that, having made ample use of all the proffered insights, the reporters will then turn their attention to the questionable role of the background session in a free society, and we'll be in for another bout of news management and news managers.

We could see it coming not long ago when we opened the papers and read "Johnson Policy Seen Prudent and Elastic" (the *Baltimore Sun*); "LBJ Seeks to Avoid Overuse

of Mandate" (the *Washington Post*); "President Charts a Soft Approach in Basic Policies" (the *New York Times*). It was obvious that the President had been chatting for background again and that within a fortnight the critical regeneration would begin. Thus the *Washington Post* by December 28: "LBJ's Strained Press Relations."

True to form, the strain in the relations has proceeded from a host of minor irritants and misunderstandings that always attend these events. For instance, the administration is said to have been displeased by the manner in which the *Times* emphasized the President's changed attitude toward the MLF and de Gaulle. One story going the rounds is that Secretaries Rusk and McNamara called in from Paris when they read the *Times's* version to see if there had been some fundamental policy change. There are some who say that even Drew Middleton called *New York*. Then there was poor *Time* magazine, which, having gained exclusive quotations for a yet-to-be-printed story on the President, saw most of the same quotes appear in the daily press. The AP, meanwhile, whose representative had missed a backgrounding chat, announced in violation of all that is holy in press relations that the background session had been held by the President himself and even named the reporters who had been there.

Washington takes very seriously the distinctions set forth between on the record, off the record, background ("highly placed officials believe . . ."), and what is known as "deep background." The last has certain similarities with hypnosis—you are going into a deep, deep background—since the reporters become outright expositors of the word as given out by the briefers. There are no sources or high officials to be found in the text at all.

Apparently all these intricacies

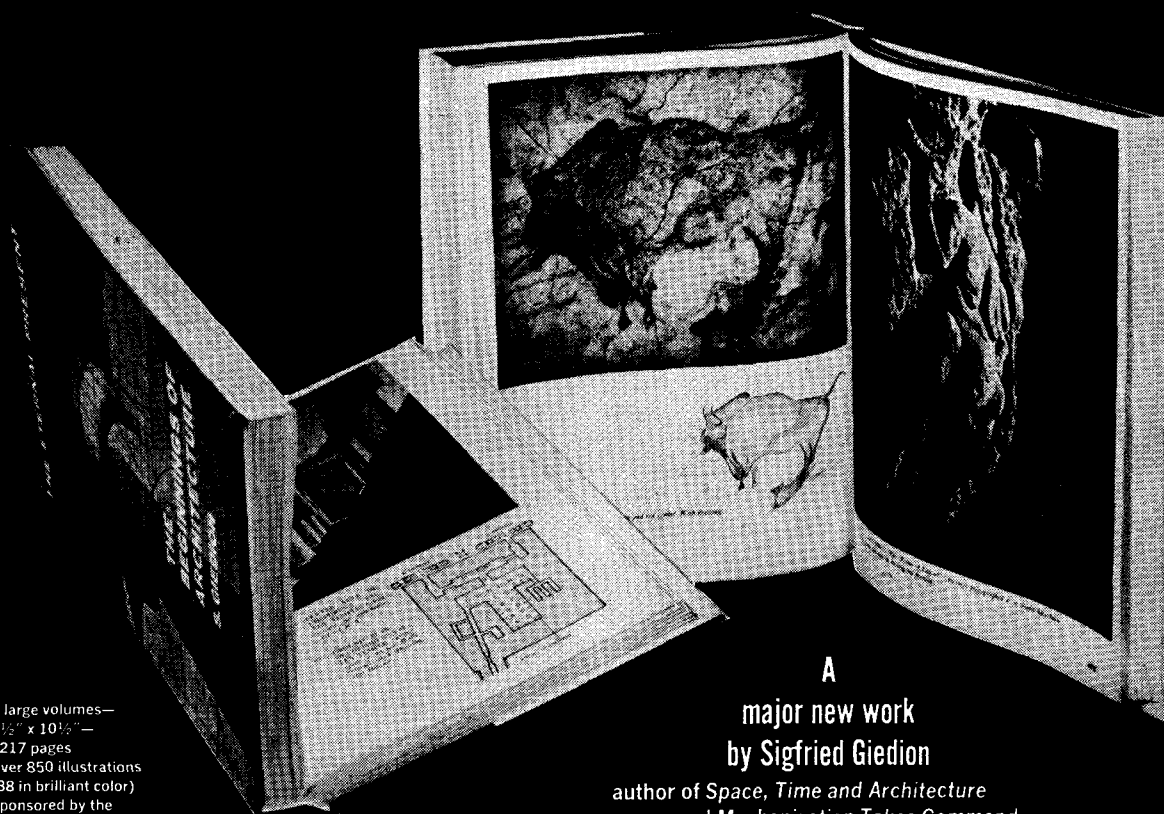
have escaped the attention of the public at large and a good part of the non-Washington press. (The President, the *Austin American* cheerfully and openly stated a while back, "held a combination press conference and 'backgrounding' session . . ."). While we see nothing whatever that can be done to call a halt to Washington's annual preoccupation with all this, we have after a good deal of thought decided that it serves at least one useful purpose: the debate on differential privileges is the only thing we can imagine that makes us look forward each year to what comes next, namely, the opening of Congress.

They Also Serve

If nobody else has given much thought to the problem of keeping journalists out of trouble during "news voids," the ladies of the USO apparently have. While cleaning out a stack of official papers, George Reedy, the President's press secretary, came across a letter from the USO addressed to what it took to be a lonesome military unit: the "White House Press Corps." "We have a reading lounge and a game table for cards or any other games that the servicemen might desire to play," the letter said.

Just then, the Washington recruits were setting up a bivouac in Austin's Hotel Driskill, sixty-five miles from the LBJ Ranch, in the event that a publishable item or two might be forthcoming from headquarters. A series of skirmishes over the next few days produced a briefing on the state of the weather at the ranch, an opinion by Dr. Donald F. Hornig, the President's science adviser, that "the moon is actually a very interesting place," some byplay between Secretary McNamara and Najeeb E. Halaby, head of the Federal Aviation Agency, about whether the President's proposed \$750-million giant

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military transport plane should be called the CX, CX-5, or HLS—and not much else. The press corpsmen might just as well have availed themselves of the USO's offer.

Science Giveth and Taketh

Those old job thieves the computers are not only stealing bread from workers these days, they are humiliating their masters as well. "I have been repeatedly shocked," Dr. Richard W. Hamming of the Bell Telephone Laboratories told the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Montreal, "to find out how often I thought I knew what I was talking about, but in the acid test of describing explicitly to a machine what was going on I was revealed to have been ignorant and extremely superficial." Mathematicians, it turns out, act pretty much like other people when they are embarrassed.

"When one attempts to put any of the well-known processes of mathematics on a computing machine," Dr. Hamming went on, "one finds that there is great vagueness, and waving of hands, and shouting 'Any fool knows!' and that in the long run a much more careful examination of the basic ideas and processes must be made before one can make much progress."

If math has become an art form remote from the real world, biology has become too mechanical, according to Professor René J. Dubos of the Rockefeller Institute, who spoke at the same meeting. Where the mathematician would downgrade such concepts as continuity and infinity because they cannot be explained to a machine, the biologist would downgrade the machine because it cannot explain human nature. Biologists, Dr. Dubos complained, have come to treat the human body as only a "complex but otherwise ordinary machine," and ignore man's "humanness," his uniqueness as an individual, his relation to the moon and stars.

Unlike the speech by Dr. Hamming, Dr. Dubos's was sprinkled with concepts such as "divine madness," the "voice of the deep," and even the "paleolithic bull" which survives in the inner self of the urbane city dweller and "still paws

the earth whenever a threatening gesture is made on the social scene." Imagine trying to explain *that* to a computer. Or to a computer man, who from all the available evidence never paws and snorts but merely waves his hand in the air and then shouts "You fool!" when things go wrong.

The Disadvantage of Being Earnest

Because he filed an honest report on his \$200,000 in campaign expenditures, the newly elected congressman from New York's 25th District is now being criticized by those persons who refuse to face the realities of financing a campaign for Congress.

Richard L. Ottinger, son of the founder of the U.S. Plywood Corporation, is a wealthy young man who worked for three years as a regional director in the Peace Corps and last March returned to his home town of Pleasantville in Westchester County to run for the House of Representatives. He was an unknown Democrat in an overwhelmingly Republican district, and his opponent was a three-term incumbent congressman. Most people in his area read the New York City newspapers, which had little free time or space to devote to one of the more than seventy Congressional candidates within the New York metropolitan area. To get his name and views known, he had to spend lots of money.

Luckily for him, Ottinger had family money he could use. He did not have to depend for financial support on special-interest groups who might compromise his stand on future issues. He even turned down one large contribution of this kind. He did try to raise funds from small contributors—with some success. But the American public, dominated by the unsavory image of politicians in general, isn't willing to contribute in the amounts needed today.

Ottinger's prime mistake, apparently, was to comply with antique Federal and state campaign-fund reporting and tax laws that in effect limit individual contributions to \$3,000 if the recipient is to avoid paying a gift tax—a totally unreasonable figure. To circumscribe this limitation, Ottinger employed a well-established technique of setting up

as many different committees as he needed \$3,000 contributions. In the recent Presidential campaign, dozens of wealthy men contributed \$3,000 for themselves and individual members of their families to similarly constructed "paper" committees. Henry Ford II's \$3,000 checks to the Johnson campaign turned up in more than a half-dozen Democratic committees. Five members of the conservative Pew family of Pennsylvania contributed more than \$60,000 in tandem to the 1964 Republican Presidential campaign, a contributing habit of the Rockefellers before the nomination of Senator Barry Goldwater. In Robert F. Kennedy's recent Senate campaign, Kennedy brother-in-law Stephen Smith, family friend K. Lemoyne Billings, and others also exceeded the legal limit of \$5,000 by giving to more than one such committee. Most of the time in the House and Senate races, the embarrassment that has befallen Ottinger is avoided by the simple technique of failing to file accurate and complete campaign fund reports. One of Ottinger's New York colleagues in his 1962 race avoided the individual contribution limitation for a candidate—\$8,000—by reporting after the 1962 campaign that he had "loaned" his own campaign committee \$80,000. The law put him under no obligation to report when or even if his "loan" was repaid.

The New York Times and the Herald Tribune, who "exposed" Ottinger's campaign funds after reading the public records, have since dropped the issue of political financing as quickly as they picked it up—but not before writing pious editorials about the need for reform. If the papers had directed a portion of their reforming zeal at getting Ottinger's delinquent political contemporaries to own up to what they had actually spent, the young Westchesterite's \$200,000 might not stand out as much as it does—and some real progress at reform might be achieved. Without facing the real facts of ballooning campaign costs, reforms will not reach the basic problem—the need for new sources of funds—and therefore will be bypassed by Congress. The legislators are not about to make things actually worse, through legislation that cuts down on existing fund sources, just to satisfy reformers who want things to look better.

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China Fans the Fires

DENIS WARNER

ACROSS PEOPLE'S SQUARE in Peking on October 1, 1960, students carried a model of the world ignited by a flaming torch. Following them with an immense replica of a volume by Mao Tse-tung enthroned on a bank of roses came the staff of the New China Printing Press. It was the eleventh anniversary of Communist rule, and two thousand foreign guests from seventy countries stood up in the reviewing stands to cheer.

Though they came from different corners of the earth, this was something that all could understand. The

flames were Mao's, and the Communist leader's book told how they should be ignited.

In the four years since this vivid declaration of international revolution, the Chinese have seen many of their fondest domestic hopes dashed, but the outward thrust of China's revolutionary policies has never diminished. In April, 1961, when the economic outlook could scarcely have been bleaker, the People's Liberation Army circulated a classified document to higher officers that stated: "The center of anti-colonial struggle is Africa. The center of struggle be-

tween East and West is Africa. At present Africa is the central question of the world."

Five months later, when the Sino-Soviet rift had become public, *Pravda* accused Mao of attempting to "re-carve the map of the world" and buttressed its charges that Peking had "imperialist ambitions" and was "inflaming nationalistic passions" in Central Asia. It then referred to a Chinese map, first published in a textbook in 1953, that showed Burma, Vietnam, Korea, Thailand, Malaya, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and part of the Soviet Maritime Far