

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"Doublethink"

► ELMER DAVIS's "History in Doublethink" [SR June 28] is another bit of evidence exposing the failure of our "liberal thinkers" to be just that when it comes to appraisal of Communism. Whenever anybody attacks it, somehow they find a way to defend it. This defense takes many forms. The commonest is discrediting the anti-Communists as this article succeeds in doing.

It is perfectly true what Davis has to say about ex-Communists and their hysterics. They are clearly as unreliable and one-sided as he says. The pertinent fact is that up to recently they were the only speakers against Communism. We all sought to have a better knowledge of the nature of the thing and instinctively tried to learn the facts. The only people that took up the problem were crackpots, mavericks, McCarthys, and ex-Communists. Our "thinkers" and liberal publications confined themselves to admittedly justifiable exposures of the weaknesses of these sources, but did nothing themselves to learn and present the facts until they became so glaring that no dodging was possible any more.

MILAN D. POPOVIC.

Califon, N. J.

Ex-Communists

► "HISTORY IN DOUBLETALK" is written in doubletalk, but it does introduce one sad fact: that twenty years ago not very many people paid any attention to the then Communists. Elmer Davis was not one of that intelligent and wary minority, but though he takes up three pages of your valuable space to slur the "ex-Communists" he says that we should pay no more attention to them now than we did then. It seems to me that we should have paid more attention to them then, and that we are quite justified in paying serious attention to them now. Certainly, they qualify as expert witnesses on the activities of the so-called Communist Party.

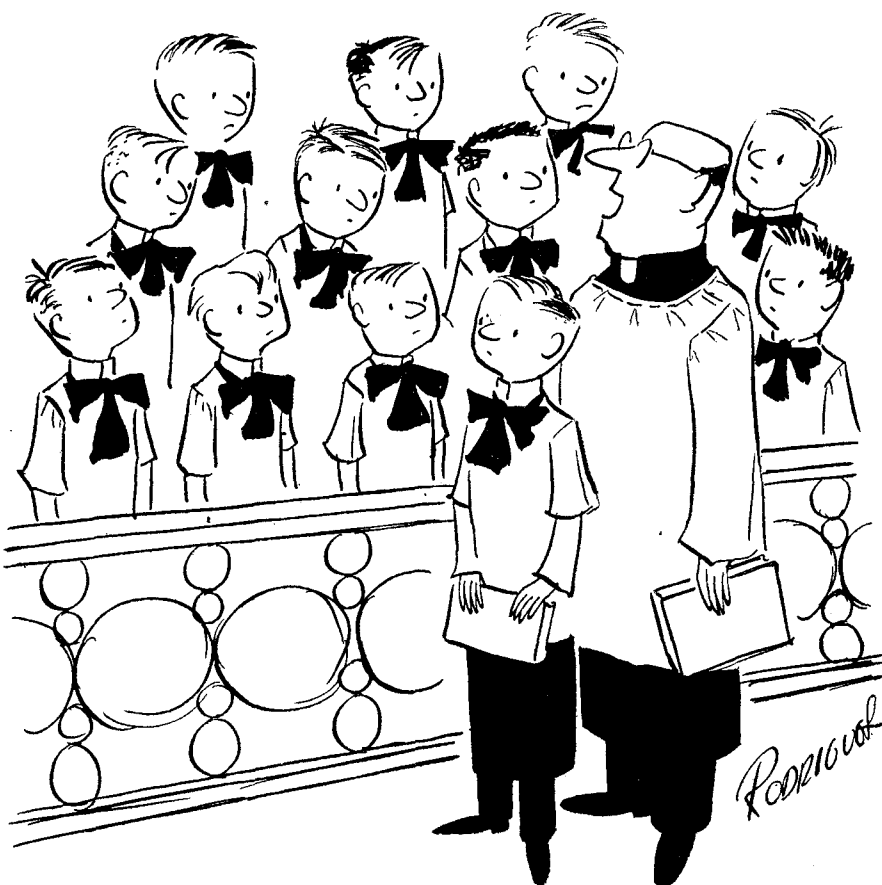
Davis asserts that the ex-Communists are now perverting history, though he is inclined to believe Whittaker Chambers (with some reservations). The gentleman winds up his screed by assuming that "ex-Communists" all "know" that press and radio and schools and colleges are all controlled by the Communists and that the Roosevelt Administration had its critics shot. What a synthetic target to shoot at! Pardon me—but "one becomes bored."

LAMBERT FAIRCHILD.

Committee for Republican Integrity,
New York, N. Y.

Backslide

► WITH AT LEAST 80 per cent of Elmer Davis's reasoning in his "History in Doublethink" it would be hard to disagree. But there is one element of illogic



"Craddock's voice has begun to crack. Let's all wish him Godspeed."

in the remaining area that needs attention.

It is not true that people whose status changes from Communist to ex-Communist must necessarily pass "through a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn in their opinion." On the contrary, any person who remained constant in his opinion for the last quarter-century found it impossible to remain Communist in his politics. To continue in the Communist faith through such switches in the Party line as occurred in August of 1939 and in June of 1941 would have required hundred-and-eighty-degree turns.

It is possible to pass from Communism to anti-Communism simply by standing still. As it happened, nobody ever solicited me very hard, but back in the days when Communism was associated domestically with racial equity, child labor reforms, and abroad with the Loyalist cause in Spain, it would have been at least as easy to sell me a Party card as to sell me a life insurance policy.

Inevitably, and amusingly, this is equally true of the obverse. To oppose Communist philosophy through every twist and turn requires the same sacrifice of consistency as blindly to support it. It is the man who supports Franco and opposes Stalin (as does Chambers) who is inconsistent, not the man who opposes them both. I almost wish I had

picked up a Party card in the 1930's. It would be fun to tell, and to prove to, a Senate inquiry group that the Communists had joined me for a while, but had thereafter backslid.

DIGBY B. WHITMAN.

Winthrop, Mass.

Paper Covers

► IAN BALLANTINE's letter [SR June 28] concerning his organization's plan for simultaneous hard-cover and paper publication of original material certainly strikes a welcome note. While his letter is primarily concerned with the benefits to writers, to me the most encouraging part of the plan lies in the prospect of relief for readers.

For some time now articles and letters have been appearing in SR bemoaning the perils and problems of publishing. All kinds of reasons have been suggested for the 10,000 to 15,000 copy sale of the average book. I have long been of the opinion that the primary reason is economic. With novels selling at three to five dollars, is it any wonder that it's difficult to sell more than 10,000 copies? I, for one, can't afford to pay it. Accordingly, the dollars in my book budget are being spent for paper editions, cheap hard-cover reprints, and used books.

The astronomical sales figures of pa-

per-bound editions show that there are millions of people in this country who still enjoy reading. The correspondingly miserable sales of hard-cover editions indicate that these same millions cannot afford three dollar books.

Three cheers for the man who's doing something about it.

TRUE A. RICE, JR.

Leavenworth, Kansas.

Eve's Coccyx

► MISS BLANCHE MULLEN writes [SR June 21]:

When man was first created
No *super-femme* was there
For Eve, the story plainly states,
Was made from Adam's "spare"!

Without wishing to appear irreverent may I endeavor to correct a long-standing error enshrined in this verse? It is the statement that woman was created from a spare rib of Adam. This represents, of course, nothing but another example of the myth-making propensity of the "superior" male. Every student of anatomy knows that the number of ribs in each sex is identical. Woman couldn't, therefore, have been created from a spare rib of the male—the evidence of human and comparative anatomy is entirely contrary to such a suggestion. The evidence, on the other hand, indicates that the male was created from one of the female's spare parts, namely, one of her coccygeal or tail vertebrae, for, on the average, women have only three coccygeal vertebrae whereas men have four.

ASHLEY MONTAGU.

Princeton, N. J.

Deterrent Force

► IN HIS GUEST EDITORIAL [SR June 21] Thomas Finletter has done much more than define the role of the military man in a democracy. He has also given a lucid exposition of the basis of our country's foreign policy.

So, we are waiting for the Soviets to come around to submit to an enforced system of disarmament. If there is a contradiction in terms in this statement of principle, it is not the fault of the Secretary of the Air Force, for he has correctly stated the Administration's position. Voluntary consent and use of force are the two horns of the dilemma we are facing. Are we going to sit on both of them? And for how long?

The controversy over the advisability of spending less for our defense tends to obscure the real issue. The issue is not the question of how many dollars will buy a deterrent force. The crucial issue is the question whether a deterrent force can be built at all.

Mr. Finletter admits that the attempt is "unique in history." I find this admission alarming. It does not indicate that we have a great chance of succeeding. Within a few years the Soviets will reach the stage—or perhaps, merely believe they have reached the stage—where they can deal our country as effective an initial blow as we can to theirs. What

will be the deterrent effect of our military power then?

The hope is that the Soviets will some day renounce aggression without being forced to do so, and the expectation is that the American people will still go on waiting for that day when the threat of an atomic Pearl Harbor is hanging over them. Can such a hope and such an expectation provide the basis for United States foreign policy? Time is running out. After having attained that much talked about position of strength, should we not be able to make the Soviets come around to enforceable disarmament?

WALTER W. MARSEILLE.

San Francisco, Calif.

Adolescent Illiterates

► AFTER ALL, the long slow process of lifting the United States en masse from illiteracy into an educated citizenry only started in earnest after the Civil War. Anyone who has ever lived over a period of years west of the Hudson River and south of Stamford, Conn., knows that two short decades ago there were individuals still unable to read, write, figure, and tell time. Through no fault of their own, education had not reached them.

In twenty years, some of the grandchildren of these illiterates have progressed to the writers, editors, critics, readers, and literary agents Mr. Strauss is writing about [SR May 17]. It is a tremendous leap made without benefit of the cultural background normally associated with the arts.

How many of these people had the opportunity to hear their parents or their grandparents recite Shakespeare, Tennyson, the Brownings; or to listen to Dickens and Scott being read aloud, to hear symphonic music, or see a painting—to know the world beyond their horizon? Few, if any. It is this education taken

along with mothers' milk which makes the culture Mr. Strauss is seeking.

What is being produced in the arts is what we are capable of producing at this stage. If it is adolescent, it isn't surprising. It takes time to grow up.

BETTY FIELE MARTIN.

Fairfax, Va.

Hutch

► NOTHING COULD HAVE made the humble and agitated ghost of our friend Hutch [SR June 21] feel more busily alive than you misprinting him as "Hutchinson" which (as I said in my brief tribute) was the error he struggled against in his own paper, *The New York Times*. His name, he continued to insist, was Hutchison.

There are certain misprints and mispronunciations that are obviously in destiny and duress; nothing can avert or avoid them. It was part of his fatality that dear old Hutch was always printed as "Hutchinson," as it was part of political comedy that J. Llewellyn Lewis should call R. Alphonso Taft's conduct "henious." I quit struggling against these matters years ago when my children always spoke of the second month (and they still do) as "Febuary" and the region Perry explored as the "Artic."

You have made both Hutch and me feel more assured of the absolute autogenesis of human error; your copyreader also schizophrened Brian Oswald Donn Byrne into two members. You can scarcely imagine how much innocent pleasure these misdemeanors give me. They confirm all my theology and philosophy and sense of pure malice; and no one else ever notices them. As Prospero said, there's no harm done. This was one of the most sombre optimisms, or euphemisms, ever shimmered against the lowering storm clouds of destiny.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

Roslyn Heights, N. Y.



"Had a good day today! I was all thumbs!"

Broadway Postscript

BOTTOM BANANAS

TOP BANANAS such as Phil Silvers, Milton Berle, Jimmy Durante, and Sid Caesar are amongst the hardest working men in the theatrical profession. Whether starring in a Broadway musical or emceeing their own TV shows, they must comply with a public demand that they remain visible and funny for at least 90 per cent of the running time of each performance. As a consequence their existence is no less hectic than indicated in that hilarious satire on TV comics, "Top Banana."

How the laughter sweatshop came to replace the leisurely era of comic stars who made one or two appearances an evening is not yet clear, but the results of a visit made backstage at the Winter Garden last week may throw some light on the matter.

Several flights above the congested stage-door area, which must always keep a free path for Mr. Silvers's mad dashes back and forth to his first-floor dressing-room, sit three non-descript men in pancake make-up. Two of them are playing gin rummy and they seldom speak except for the occasional three-letter word of victory. The third man occupies himself with reading a magazine (not *The Saturday Review*) or listening to a night ball game on a small portable radio. From the hallway the sound of

the downstairs proceedings drones through tinny loud speakers that make everything sound like a badly worn record.

The men seem to pay no attention, but they are listening with a third ear—for they are the "bottom bananas," and when they hear their cue, they must rush down the steps to complement their boss. They are Joey Faye (real name *Joseph A. Palladino*), Herbie Faye (real name *Falich*, "like in symbols"), and Jack Albertson (real name *Albertson*). Their association with Silvers dates back to early Depression days when Phil worked in burlesque. Albertson was a straight man, and the Faye brothers top bananas in their own rights. The term "Top Banana," incidentally, refers to the better-paid and better-billed burlesque comedian. Its etymology is in an old Minsky routine in which the first comic gets both a banana and the punch line, the second comedian gets a banana but no punch line, and the third comedian gets neither a banana nor a line.

While the rummy marathon has been going on thirty-five weeks and will probably continue into the next Silvers show, which is scheduled to be a musical based on the farce "Room Service," the men nevertheless play extremely rapidly; they want to

finish and record the results of a hand before their cues come up on the loud-speaker. The reader also reads quickly as he must be in readiness to jump into the game when his turn arrives. This permanent routine carried on week after week symbolizes for these members of the banana hierarchy the more stable existence that comes with Broadway jobs as opposed to the hectic moving about that is the lot of the burlesque wheel comic.

Herbie Faye, who at fifty-two is the oldest of the three, can remember working in burlesque in the early Twenties when it was considered family entertainment. There was no strip tease, the ladies of the chorus were required to wear opera-length stockings and dress more fully than their Broadway musical-comedy sisters of the same period, and the jokes were so clean that comedians could present their acts interchangeably in burlesque or vaudeville.

"Why in those days they wouldn't even let us use the word 'hell' in our routines," says the dour-faced comedian.

THEN, in the late Twenties, a man named I. Herk bought out the old Columbia Burlesque Wheel, and the ensuing changes included the introduction of the strip-tease, a shift to the predominantly stag audience, smutty jokes, and the deterioration of the chorus to the point where a girl's ability to keep time to music soon became secondary to her willingness to appear semi-nude in the "flash" or tableau finales.

In the early Thirties a new activity



Joey, Phil, and Herbie—"members of the banana hierarchy."