


The Saturday Review

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America and the Face of N. Khrushchev

THE CBS team's TV-interview of Nikita Khrushchev has resulted in one very interesting question for debate: Are Americans intelligent enough to face political reality or aren't they? For after this fine piece of journalism had been sent into the archives of space certain critics seemed to suggest that one hour of the smiles and wiles of Mr. Khrushchev may be more than the common sense of Americans can be expected to survive—despite years of anti-Communist exposés and sermons, despite the floods of news and indignation following the Russians' rape of Hungary, despite the hundreds of spokesmen on every level of sophistication who for twenty years have been warning us of the evils of Communism as an ideology and the Soviet Union as a polity.

It seems to be widely assumed that we Americans are so shaky in our grasp of our own convictions, or so moronic, that this representative of a detested government and a detested philosophy, merely by grinning and grunting, will lure us right off our tracks. In a news-conference, President Eisenhower acidly remarked that the interview was the act of a "commercial" company, done for "commercial" advantage; he clearly implied that there was something faintly irresponsible in CBS's decision to go out and get this great scoop. Would he prefer, in defiance of the Constitution's spirit, that reporters submit their projects to the Government for approval? Numerous Congressmen denounced CBS for bringing Communist propaganda into American homes. Do they presume that their

constituents are in danger of imminent conversion? Mr. George Meany, of the united labor movement, refused to appear on a rebuttal-program when he found out that film-clips of the original interview would be re-run. Mr. Meany, according to Irving Gitlin, director of public affairs for CBS, "suggested that excerpts simply be read on the program and then be commented on. He did not want to appear [if actual excerpts of the film were used], because he felt [they] would give further broadcast exposure and propaganda advantage to Mr. Khrushchev."

What are these gentlemen afraid of? No doubt Mr. Khrushchev is a clever operator, but isn't it better for Americans to see him for what he is—not just the rough and noisy peasant at vodka parties, not just the super-ruthless collectivizer of the Ukraine, not just a Russian roly-poly—but, from what we can tell, an extremely intelligent and imaginative personality, a man probably deeply certain of his own rightness, a dangerous and formidable antagonist? No doubt Mr. Khrushchev distorted the truth in his interview, if he didn't lie outright. Well, people do lie in the real world, don't they? Are Americans incapable of discerning truth from untruth? Have our own reasoning powers so deteriorated into slogans and platitudes that we cannot confront Khrushchev's lies—look at them, take them part, throw them in his teeth? No doubt Khrushchev's cunning performance on the peace-harp strikes at our most vulnerable wants and needs. But isn't it time for Americans to realize that it

is just this peace-music which forms the most effective, if not the only effective, part of the worldwide Soviet propaganda campaign? This is the bit in the Bulganin-Khrushchev act that goes over biggest in Asia and elsewhere, and we may as well see it for what it is.

It is true that television, a young medium, is probably more startling and more moving than older, more familiar means of communication. Certainly no one would dream of disputing the propriety of *The New York Times's* printing a Khrushchev statement in full; this is part of the proper function of a newspaper, and intelligent Americans should be expected to read such a text. But to see this old sinner in his all-too-human flesh—actually to hear him tease our universal appetite for peace, and our abhorrence of the idea of a next war—this seems to enter a new dimension of persuasiveness. Nevertheless, television exists, and we must live with it. Khrushchev is not Medusa; he is only a man, and it won't hurt us to look at him.

Fundamentally, the whole criticism of CBS's initiative in putting on this Khrushchev interview can be traced to a nervous mistrust of the American people's ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, to distinguish a good man from a smiling man, to distinguish slickness from integrity. But if, after all that has happened since 1945 on the international scene, the American people are in any danger of being duped by one hour of Khrushchev, then what hope is there that the American people can think sensibly on any subject? What's the use of debating anything—or voting on anything—if all experience and argument and instinct must crumble into dust before sixty minutes of sly smiles? What's the use of a Republic, if the people must be patriarchally protected from every mendacity or disturbance? And who's to do the protecting?

The Soviet Union is a fact; Mr. Khrushchev is a fact; and it is a fact that the United States has decided to try, if it is at all possible, to live on the same planet with these facts and not to plunge everyone into the horrors of a thermonuclear war. We believe that it is the American way to face facts—to fight to change them, if we must, but to face them. And we congratulate CBS for showing us the face of Nikita Khrushchev.

—GILBERT SELDES.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEW LIBERAL

"THE ISMS IN 1957" (SR June 8) I found very interesting and stimulating. I have discovered that I am a liberal, according to A. M. Schlesinger, Jr.

ROY L. MYERS.

Eagle Pass, Texas.

MORE REPRESENTATIVE?

I ENJOYED the "Isms" until I got to William Buckley, Jr.—and the incredibly sublime irrationality of his unthinking spiritualism: "Certain problems [and] certain questions are closed . . . The answers to these are matters of faith—truths incorruptible and imperishable" (and presumably not subject to thought, analysis, and change). Surely you could have found a more representative spokesman for the sophisticated conservatism of a Hamilton or Clarence B. Randall than Buckley.

KURT L. HANSLOVE.

St. Clair Shores, Mich.

USELESS SUMMERS

I WOULD LIKE to see blazoned in headlines across the country Joseph Wood Krutch's statement that, "there are few to whom it ever occurs that putting more money into schools is not a sure way of getting more education, or that any deficiencies which happen to become manifest will not be remedied by putting more money into school buildings" (SR May 18). It is as necessary in our society to be in favor of school levies as it is to be against sin. Let us hope the time has almost arrived when we can stop pouring ever-increasing funds into an antiquated educational structure. What is the point, for instance, of building more facilities to be locked up, unused, for three months out of every year?

GRACE M. WATSON.

Seattle, Wash.

BRAVO

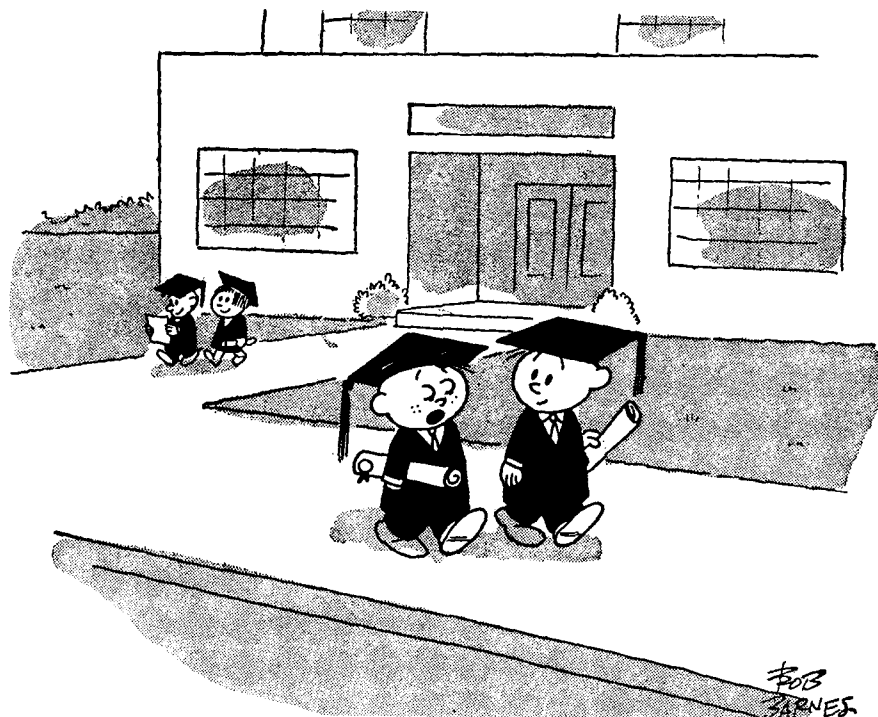
"BRAVO" FOR Robert L. Shayon in "What Would You Do?" (SR June 8).

LEON MILLER.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

GET OUT OF ACTING

I THINK THAT Robert Lewis Shayon missed a point. The American public is not unaware that among its prominent business, professional, and public men there are a substantial number whose intellectual aspirations and attainments are notable. Such men are, nonetheless, admired in measure of their success as business, professional, and public figures. What happened in Van Doren's case was the glorification of a man whose career is based on the consumption and distribution of knowledge and thought for its sake alone, without regard for "practical" results: a scholar and a teacher. It must be admitted, I think, that it has been a long time since these pursuits have been held in so high esteem as they are since Van Doren's reign as "21" champion. My



"It's pretty frightening to know that you know all there is to know, isn't it?"

own reservations about Van Doren are based on entirely different grounds. They concern his transparent and increasingly hambone agonizing over the questions. Acting is still a game for professionals.

DONALD KAHN.

Rose Valley, Pa.

VALUABLE COMMENT

WE ARE ONE of those offbeat families whose rooftop does not support a television antenna. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, let me offer a firm vote of thanks to SR and Robert Shayon. Mr. Shayon has presented not only a perceptive criticism of the present-day mania for categorizing, commercializing, and proselytizing everything from laxatives and religion to human intelligence, he has offered indirect but valuable comment on the current and future need for more liberal-arts education.

E. T. ALLEN.

Hamden, Conn.

LET'S HAVE LOOKS

N.C. PUT THE finger (SR May 25) on why today's books aren't memorable—the characters aren't. But his selection of models is open to criticism. Emma Bovary—who can tell me what she looked like? And Hemingway's people—well, for instance, what did Lady Brett Ashley look like? ("Brett was damned good looking.") And Jake Barnes, or Robert Cohn—he'd had his nose worked on, true—Harvey, Bill, nobody could describe them because Hemingway didn't.

I nominate W. O. Gant as the most

flesh-and-blood fictional character of the past half-century. And trailing him are all of Thomas Wolfe's other characters, whom he not only described initially but kept describing whenever they appeared. And McTeague, of "McTeague." Why is it considered a weakness to portray a character's appearance?

C. J. SARVIS.

Boise, Idaho.

HOW TRITE IS MOM?

IN SR JUNE 8 Phyllis McGinley closes her review of Mary McCarthy's "Memories of a Catholic Girlhood" with the sentence, "One can picture her in any number of difficult, sharp-witted, fervent roles; but as the happy wife and mother, no. There is not that much triteness in her."

Just what characteristics does Miss McGinley think the "happy wife and mother" exhibits? There are those (and they are neither unthinking nor unfeeling) who would use just these adjectives to describe the role of successful wifehood and motherhood.

MRS. R. P. DuMONT.

Washington, D. C.

MORE THAN ONE STRING

AN item in TRADE WINDS (SR May 18), identifies me as a writer for *Reader's Digest*. I have written for the *Digest* but I also write for several other magazines, all of them good customers I don't want to offend, or lose.

VANCE PACKARD.

New Canaan, Conn.