

The Saturday Review

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Diplomacy, Press, and China

EDITOR'S NOTE: This week's guest editorial is by Edward W. Barrett, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. Mr. Barrett was formerly Assistant Secretary of State and editorial director of News-week Magazine.

BACK in December 1949 the dictators of Red China expelled non-Communist newspaper correspondents. The United States protested lustily, then and thereafter, against the suppression of free news reporting.

Today Red China has reversed itself, offering visas to American correspondents. The State Department, in turn, has obdurately opposed their going into China.

After a procession of strange events and stranger argumentation, we appear to the world as opposing a free flow of information, which the Red Chinese now profess to favor. To some, we and they seem to have battled our way into each other's shoes.

The State Department is not utterly without a case. Any American correspondent in Red China, however much he professes to be on his own, automatically becomes a *cause celebre*, engaging the prestige of his country as soon as he is jailed or shot up. "Freedom of the Press," that sometimes abused term, should not automatically be accepted as an argument without examination. And anyone who has ever been a State Department official groping for ways to free Americans held hostage by Communists can understand the Department's tendency to clutch desperately at any bargaining device it can find.

But basic, far-reaching issues are involved. They make it wise for responsible citizens to weigh the question with care.

THE present chapter began last August, when Red China suddenly offered visit visas to some thirty American correspondents, most of whom had sought entry for months or years. The State Department announced it would not permit such visits so long as Communist China continued to hold as "political hostages" ten American citizens whom it had previously promised to release. Moreover, it argued, it couldn't provide any protection for news reporters in China.

In telegrams and editorials, leading press figures protested that Communism thrives on darkness and that the retention of an Iron Curtain of our own violated basic American principles. Press associations and newspapers laid plans to send correspondents into Communist China, irrespective of the ban.

At that point the State Department announced that the President had indicated his "full concurrence" in the State Department's new policy. The great majority of the press protests subsided—leaving the odd impression that a wrong principle somehow becomes right as soon as President Eisenhower concurs in it.

Actually, the subsiding followed a large amount of backstage wire-pulling. In private, top-ranking officials had pleaded with editors and publishers. They said Alexis Johnson, United States representative in the interminable Geneva negotiations

over the release of Americans held prisoner in Red China, was in a tough spot: He had insisted that no Americans would be permitted to enter Red China until the captives were released; he was using the issue of correspondents as a bargaining weapon. If the press now went ahead and sent correspondents anyway, the officials argued, it would undercut Johnson's whole case and even "jeopardize the lives of American citizens."

Reluctantly key editors agreed to cooperate, at least one of them specifying that he would do so only if the President himself publicly concurred in the State Department's argument. Mr. Eisenhower's "full concurrence" followed. In succeeding months the press held its tongue—with the notable exceptions of the trade journal *Editor and Publisher*, Herbert Bruckner of the *Hartford Courant*, and a few others.

Finally three reporters, two from *Look Magazine* and one from the *Afro-American Newspapers*, went into China anyway. They scouted around, sent cables without censorship, interviewed at least one of the American captives, and departed. State Department representatives made awkward, ineffective efforts to pick up their passports, and the Department repeatedly mumbled threats of canceling passports and of seeking prosecution under the Trading with the Enemy Act.

At a press conference early in February, Secretary Dulles stuck to his position, marshalling a rather astounding array of arguments for doing so. In effect, he said American newspaper organizations could not send reporters to Communist China because (a) the United States doesn't recognize Communist China and hence cannot protect any reporters there; (b) the Red Chinese are seeking to hand-pick reporters and use them as channels for its own propaganda; (c) the Communists are now trying to "blackmail" us by offering to free the captives if we send correspondents, and we don't propose to knuckle under; (d) the Chinese Communist government is an untrustworthy, inhuman regime that doesn't deserve cooperation or "respectability."

Incredulous Washington correspondents scratched their heads at the implication that the Chinese were now seeking to "blackmail" us into doing what Alexis Johnson had been trying to do all along.

THE whole subject is a fascinating, if complex, test of the hitherto basic American policy of advocating the greatest possible flow of competently re-

ported news. Broken down into its component questions, the issue looks about like this:

1. *Knowing that Communist China is inhuman, untrustworthy, and vicious, why should we lend it the respectability it is seeking by sending in correspondents?*

It is precisely because the Communists are disregarding the basic decencies of civilization that news organizations want to send reporters to learn and tell all they can about what is really going on. Conceivably, the best way of freeing the ten American captives is to report every available fact about them and their condition. Throughout history, the news that has warranted public attention and aroused the public to action has been news about scoundrels. Any other course, as has been said, would be like a newspaper refusing to report the doings of a crooked politician because he isn't nice to reporters.

If the civilized world were to follow to the extreme the policy now indicated by the State Department, it would withdraw reporters from Russia and Hungary and thereafter rely for information on the official Communist propaganda output. Indeed, the free world knew of last year's outrages in Hungary mainly because of reporters who took risks. Our Government itself had to rely heavily on press reports during the crisis weeks.

2. *Should we permit reporters to go to an area where the State Department cannot afford protection?*

We always have. We did so in the Soviet Union and its satellites for years. War correspondents have never been under an illusion that our defense forces guaranteed their safety.

3. *Would American correspondents obtain the full truth even if they were in Communist China?*

The answer is clearly No. Obtaining news is always difficult in an authoritarian state. But they would bring the American people far more of the truth than now comes through roundabout channels and through official Communist propaganda. Even the most ruthless censorship, incidentally, cannot prevent the reporter from telling all when he leaves the censoring country.

4. *What about Mr. Dulles's argument that the Chinese Communists are handpicking the correspondents in order to use them as a channel for propaganda?*

Among those seeking and now offered Chinese visas are some of the most respected individuals in Ameri-

can journalism. They are the kind who are not easily taken in by public figures here, let alone by Communists abroad. (American journalists as a class are as skeptical a group of citizens as exist.) An occasional correspondent is gullible, including perhaps a small minority of those on the Chinese visa list. But the idea that a government must protect the gullible press from being "used" is enough to cause our Founding Fathers to spin in their graves.

5. *Why yield to Communist "blackmail" by letting correspondents go into China in return for the freeing of American captives?*

If Red China were indeed seeking such a "deal," it would be a remarkable occurrence. It would be, as James Reston expressed it, "the best offer from the Communists since the invention of vodka."

The theory that we should steer away from doing anything that the Communists are willing to have us do presupposes Communist omniscience. If carried to the logical extreme, it would mean that we would never cover the news in a hostile state that permits us to do so.

6. *Have the Communists really adopted this new "blackmail-deal" approach?*

Neither the CIA nor the President knew about it at the time Mr. Dulles used it as an argument in his press conference.

No one who has worked with Foster Dulles entertains doubts about his knowledge and mental capacity. We find ourselves, therefore, concluding that at least in this case he is indulging in the lawyer's practice of "inconsistent pleading"—the technique of presenting to the Court every conceivable argument, without regard to consistency, on behalf of a client and inviting the judge to take his choice. Some able lawyers have attached more importance to this technique than to factual precision. Mr. Dulles may have forgotten that a press conference is not a court.

7. *Isn't it true that any correspondent in Communist China, even if he*

formally foregoes government "protection," can involve his nation in an international incident?

Obviously it is true, and the point clearly deserves attention. The ability of the American people to be informed, however, will be seriously impaired when we drop the principle of permitting reputable reporters from entering, at their own risk, unsafe areas abroad or at home.

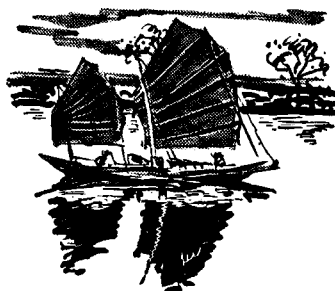
8. *Is the right of a citizen to travel abroad an item to be granted, withheld, or rescinded according to the judgment of one man or one department?*

The courts are casting increasing doubt on this. Long before the Eisenhower Administration took office a legally dubious practice developed within the Department of State. Individuals considered as holding extremist views were denied passports without hearings and without any formal proceedings. The courts have now started whittling away at such administrative practice. There is a growing belief that the passport and the right to roam the globe should be denied only in cases of clear and present danger to the nation, provable in open hearings and subject to judicial review.

ON BALANCE, the State Department's new policy appears clearly ill-advised. The sound course obviously would be for the Department to announce simply that any reporter entering Red China does so at his own risk, with no right to claim official United States protection.

Perhaps this is one of those rare cases where a Government should and could admit to an error and frankly reverse itself. If it won't do so, the American press can force the issue in the courts. It is time for a highest-level clarification of whether the right of citizens to roam the globe and the obligation of the press to pursue news everywhere can be used as pawns in a diplomatic chess game, however important the match.

The Founders of the nation believed deeply that truth could stand against all comers in the marketplace. They wove the principle of an unimpeded flow of information into our Constitutional fabric. Throughout most of the Cold War our Government, including President Eisenhower, impressed the world by stoutly opposing iron and bamboo barriers to the flow of information. The principle is basic. It is doubtful that even the highest-minded official should be permitted to use a fundamental principle as an item of bargaining in international negotiations. —EDWARD W. BARRETT.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COTERIE LEADER?

SINCE READERS have invoked the name of my father, William Rose Benét, in protesting John Ciardi's review of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's poetry, and since Mr. Ciardi seems to oppose my father's policy as Poetry Editor with the remark "when I took over . . . I began systematically to uproot Genteel poetry," I would like to comment.

I am as certain as one can be in such matters that my father would have endorsed Mr. Ciardi's plea, "Poetry is more important than any one poet. Serve poetry." But I think he would have been dubious about Mr. Ciardi's half-expressed distinction between "Genteel poetry" and "whatever you want to call the other kind." (For myself, I think such phrasing is just about as feeble as Mrs. Lindbergh's poetry.) While he had strong likes and dislikes, and fierce opinions, he thought a magazine like SR should be as far as possible a friend to all poets.

He would, I think, have been most unlikely to use such a phrase as Mr. Ciardi's "pernicious poetry." He didn't conceive of any poetry, or even rubbishy attempts at verses, as injurious. It seems to be this extravagance in Mr. Ciardi's language that has offended even readers who might share his opinions.

I don't know what my father would have said of Mrs. Lindbergh's latest book. For myself, I think it's worthless, and so I am that far on Mr. Ciardi's side. But then I don't care much for Dylan Thomas, so he will have to cast me into the outer darkness, too. And once he has started casting it is hard to know where he will stop, and I believe he may end in a position that seems undesirable for a Poetry Editor, as leader of a coterie.

JAMES BENÉT.

San Francisco, Calif.

HEBREW FREEDOM

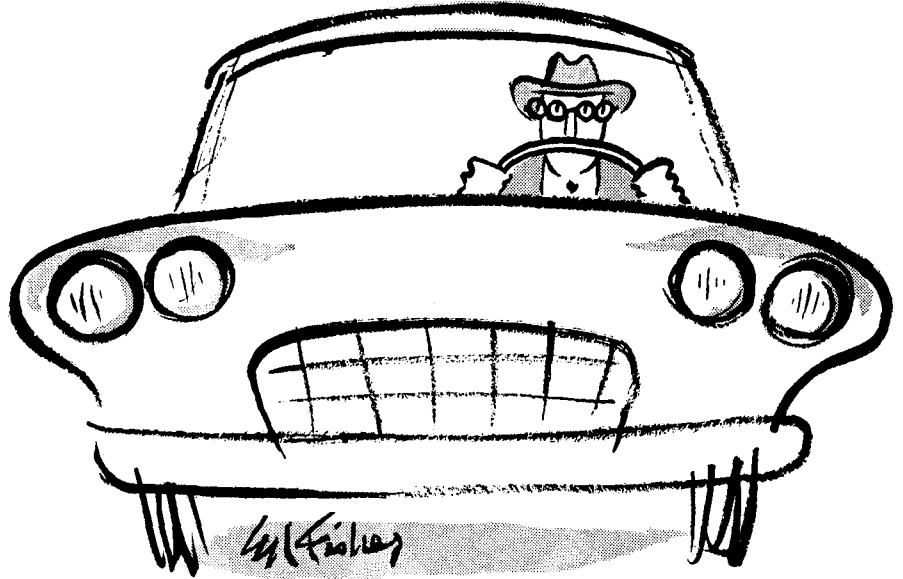
THERE IS NO DENYING Edith Hamilton's love for "The Greek Freedom" (SR Jan. 12). But to claim for the Greeks sole credit for the "idea that only man who holds himself within self-enforced limits can be free" is to forget the Bible (on which Miss Hamilton has written so well). Consider the laws of the Pentateuch and you find that they are rooted in freedom of choice—the choice to accept a discipline which will grant true freedom. If anything, the Hebrews went far beyond the Greeks in the matter of self-discipline. They conceived how self-discipline may be self-enforced—namely, through the acceptance of "revealed legislation."

ABRAHAM J. KARP.

Rochester, N. Y.

A VOTE FOR TVA

IN VIEW OF SR's awards for distinguished advertising in the public interest (SR Jan. 19), I was particularly disappointed to see in the same issue the irresponsible advertising which you allow by "Amer-



ica's independent electric light and power companies." Since TVA is bringing a profit to the government beyond what it pays in taxes, I doubt that I am, in this sense, "helping to pay other people's electric bills." Even if I am, I'm sure the sum out of my pocket to make up this deficit is not nearly as great as the one I pay to compensate for the "unfair tax favoritism" enjoyed by independent power companies, among others. Considering the almost preposterous number of dollars the local independent power company demands of us each month, I'm surprised they don't have to pay far more than 23 per cent of it in taxes.

ETTA LINTON.

San Diego, Calif.

LIKE AS LIKE SHOULDN'T

IS IT BEING TOO much of a purist to hope that in the losing battle we are waging against the use of *like* as a conjunction SR will not prematurely join the team of Winston cigarettes? Twice in a current issue your staff writers were guilty of such a use of *like*.

B. B. GAMZUE.

New York, N. Y.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

MR. CRAWFORD GREENEWALT, in "The Culture of the Businessman" (SR Jan. 19), observes that "the educational process does not end with the diploma"—that college is not the end of a man's education—"Education is the never-ending process of exposure and experience." What Mr. Greenewalt did not say is that college is not the *beginning* of a man's education either. What of the first eighteen years—or the last twelve of them? Are these not the years when curiosities are awakened, interests developed, talents uncovered, when the fundamentals and background for college are laid? What of our independent secondary schools and their financial problems, which are ex-

actly the same as those of the independent colleges? Should we not consider the needs of these institutions at the same time we consider the needs of the colleges?

G. B. MONTGOMERY.

Radnor, Pa.

SPACE-SHIPS AND PENICILLIN

F. R. COWELL'S "A Republic and its Natural Diseases" (SR Jan. 26) is one more sign of the grave concern over the future of democracy which agitates intellectuals today. It begins to look as if the cultural level required to build space-ships is greater than a cultural level which implies self-extinction of the species. The same process which produces morality and principle, which develops sympathy and kindness at the same time as it develops penicillin and Christianity and hydrogen bombs, is going to be the death of us in the end.

ALFRED B. MASON, M.D.

Concord, Calif.

NEIGHBORS AND CIVILIZATION

IT IS A CONSIDERABLE service to bring to us the scholarly writing of Mr. Cowell. But I want to offer a conclusion to his thoughts. As we meet in groups, whether organized or not, *desiring* integration of interests, we tend to discover and expose the injustices in each other's claims. That climate of "neighborly" discussion produces several important results: (1) We tend to see where we can alter our own demands or claims which are revealed as inconsiderate or worse; (2) We tend to learn the qualities of analytic ability, of responsiveness, of patience and tact—and thus (3) as a *byproduct* of pursuing our own aims we not only move toward the justice Cicero sought but also acquire those civilizing attitudes on which justice ultimately depends.

FRANCIS GOODELL.

Yarmouth Port, Mass.