

# UNDER FIRE AT THE UNITED NATIONS

By ROBERT SHAPLEN

AS A SOURCE of news, the United Nations is enjoying one of its periodic peak periods, thanks to the Congo, Angola, Laos, Cuba, and other crises. The second half of the Fifteenth General Assembly now in progress can't compare, however, to the first half last fall, when a record number of 1,600 representatives of news organizations from sixty-three countries converged to cover the visits of Messrs. Khrushchev, Macmillan, Nasser, Nehru, Tito, Sukarno, Castro, and other heads of state. While that was the U.N.'s gaudiest moment since its birth fifteen years ago, the three or four hundred correspondents now in attendance, most of them year-round regulars, agree that the current session is one of the most critical in the organization's history, and not only because its reputation as a forceful instrument of mediation is at stake. Just as important for its future usefulness is the crisis of strength being waged by the Russians against Secretary Dag Hammarskjöld and an inner contest within the Secretariat that notably involves the reorganization and re-orientation of the Office of Public Information.

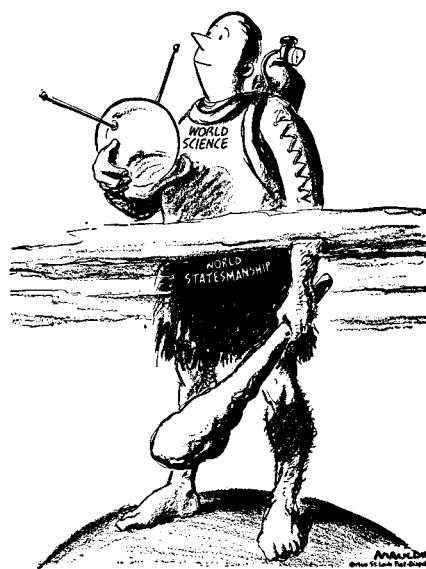
When Khrushchev issued his edict urging nonrecognition of Hammarskjöld last fall, and combined it with an attack on the alleged inordinate degree of bureaucratic influence maintained in the U.N. by the Americans, he was adopting an old Communist tactic of divide and conquer. If the Russians can't control an organization, they always stand ready to torpedo it. It seems doubtful they would go that far at the U.N. in flouting world opinion—but "the Khrushchev poison," as one veteran bureaucrat put it, "has now begun to seep through." Morale in the Secretariat is not high and there are rumors abounding of reorganizations in other sections than the OPI, one effect of which, through a process of gradual "de-Americanization," might serve to answer the Khrushchev complaint.

The U.N. may be an international arena, but the atmosphere in its towering glass home on the East River is as parochial as that of a small town, which, in effect, it is. An experienced correspondent there recently described

it as "the spookiest place I ever saw." He had reference not only to the political power plays, to the jockeying for influence among the old and new nations, but also to the personal back-biting and rumor-mongering that are endemic in the organization and that make covering it a combination of police reporting and gossip-columning, as well as serious analysis.

The correspondents themselves are currently involved in the behind-the-scenes maneuvering as a result of pending shifts in the Press Services Section, where four key veterans are slated for job shifts under the new OPI regime headed by Tavares de Sá, a Brazilian, and George Ivan Smith, an Australian. The four men include Matt Gordon, the popular head of the press section, who has been at his job since the U.N.'s inception in 1946. Gordon, who a fortnight ago was given a party and a plaque by the U.N. Correspondents' Association in recognition of his services, has been offered the job of running the U.N. information office in Tokyo, which, challenging as it is, is like covering a beat after operating a city room. The other three to be shifted are Len Berry, head of the central news desk, who is supposed to go to Bangkok, and Oscar Faura, a Peruvian, and Norman Ho, both scheduled to go to the Congo.

THE question being asked around U.N. corridors is: how much of what is happening is the result of the Khrushchev attack and how much is simply due to the legitimate sweepings of the new broom brought into OPI by Tavares and Smith? It could, of course, be a combination of both, and it probably is. Although Gordon is to be replaced at headquarters by another American, his influence has been such, in view of his long tenure at the U.N., as inevitably to make his successor a less powerful press figure. Tied to the impending transfers is the knotty revived issue of an official report prepared two years ago which, among other things, would cut down the scope of press services afforded correspondents. In 1958 the pressure of U.N. correspondents, working individually and through their association among delegations, caused the report to die in committee. The correspondents were chiefly against it



—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

"Split personality."

because it would have put the U.N. in the propaganda business around the world—the word "propaganda" was openly used; other stated aims, which were less opposed, were to have men at headquarters moved into the field at intervals and to obtain more geographical representation in the press section. Among those who strongly favored the report at the time was Smith, who recently succeeded Wilder Foote as director of press and publications and consequently as Gordon's direct superior; Foote had strenuously opposed the report. The correspondents generally feel that, while they have no right to interfere with administrative changes, they should protect themselves by assuring that some continuity of press facilities will be maintained. As one fifteen-year veteran put it, "We certainly aren't happy at the prospect of seeing the 1958 report implemented in its original form, and we don't want to be put in the position of buying a pig in a poke by going along with anything the new regime does." Constant conferences are being held by Tavares and Smith, but so far, despite efforts by correspondents to find out, no blueprint of the reorganization has been forthcoming.

The operation Gordon has created and directed at the U.N. is certainly unique in the annals of journalism. It must be regarded in the light of the U.N.'s growth from the early hectic

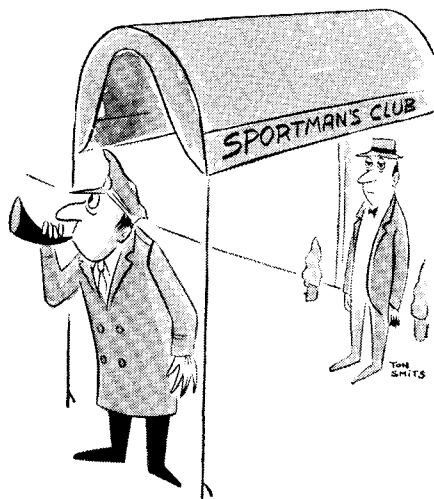
days in 1946, when, after meeting at Hunter College and the Henry Hudson Hotel in Manhattan, it moved to the old Sperry Gyroscope plant in Queens and then to Lake Success. Covering the U.N. in that period was like covering a war, with correspondents dashing madly from front to front in all kinds of political and actual weather. As one of them has recalled, "It was fun because, for one thing, it was the first contact a lot of us had ever had with correspondents from other countries, but it was pretty hard trying to keep track of what was happening. Things were a lot more informal then than now. Warren Austin, the chief American delegate, was even able to give Andrei Gromyko a birthday cake!"

Gordon and his staff in those days had to feel their way and test various systems of helping correspondents cover the news. In 1946, OPI, which also includes a public liaison and distribution division and a radio and visual services division, had a total budget of a few hundred thousand dollars and employed some forty people. In 1959, it had a budget of \$5.3 million and nearly 400 employees. About a third of the OPI staff works in press and publications. Back in 1946, even without the modern facilities it now uses, the press division managed to put out a 127-page summary of the General Assembly proceeding six minutes after the last meeting ended. Now, employing every possible modern mechanical device, Gordon's score of workers afford the press more than 3,000 releases a year. With so many meetings going on at the U.N., it is impossible for even the big bureaus to cover anything except the main stories, and, even for these, running texts and summaries are required to supplement the live broadcasts of simultaneous translations of speeches that are piped into the correspondents' quarters on the third floor of the Secretariat building. Official

U.N. reporters cover not only the Security Council meetings but also each of the seven U.N. committees when they are in session. Formal briefings on developments offer additional guidance to correspondents, and background material is always available. Aside from the fact that there is less space devoted to day-by-day committee work than there used to be, the big running political stories (e.g., the Congo) are so complicated, and the number of delegates so great, that most correspondents have to spend their time buttonholing delegates in the main lounge, which is undoubtedly the most colorful as well as the largest news-gathering "pit" in newspaper history. A regular correspondent at the U.N. now figures that he has to see at least fifteen spokesmen from the different delegations a day.

ONE of the reasons Gordon has been so popular with all but a handful of correspondents, and also such a powerful influence, has been his willingness to meet their special problems as they arise, from providing space in the third floor "bullpen" for visitors to offering special guidance on stories during slack as well as frantic periods. "In many respects, it's harder when the slack periods set in and there's no news," Gordon says. "The natives get restless; they come to us begging for stories. We have to know their special wants. The interests of the AP and UPI will be world-wide, but Reuters, for instance, will be particularly interested in South Africa; Agence France Presse in Latin America, where it has a large service; the Japanese—and they have become the fastest-growing group at the U.N.—in radiation; the Negro press in African developments of all kinds, and so on. After a while, you get to know where the news is by osmosis. What we really run here is a small school."

How much of this would be continued under the pending reorganization remains a moot point. For most correspondents at the U.N.—the Russians, who work close to their own delegation (although they have just been invited to attend American briefings for the first time), are the major exception—the whittling down of the services of the press division would represent a significant loss. The unfortunate thing about it is that the matter has become intertwined with the larger political attacks being waged against the U.N. by Khrushchev and other Communist spokesmen and with the behind-the-scenes maneuvers of the organization's shifting bureaucracy. This is not the first time correspondents have been in the line of fire, but the current skirmish is an unusual one that bears watching.



## Letters

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he concedes have already been disciplined by PRSA. The only other unethical practice he mentions is "distorting facts for national publication to make a more sensational story," an accusation which is hardly limited to public relations people; after all, great newspaper and magazine circulations have been built on just such flimsy and objectionable techniques.

What, actually, does SR consider the abuses we now have such a golden chance to clean from our house? We are the last to deny that faults and excesses exist among our membership, but your editorial does public relations a disservice when it neither hits the nail on the head, nor gives us proper credit for our intentions and actions.

RALPH H. MAJOR, JR.,  
Vice President—Public Relations,  
Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, Inc.  
New York, N. Y.

THIS IS MY personal evaluation of the article "Public Relations' Golden Chance to Clean House": If the violators were fly-by-nighters, one-night-standers, or the hocus-pocus variety, it would not be overalarming. However, it is amazing how supposedly reputable companies and their agencies, with memberships in professional organizations, bend their ethics to fit their needs. This is written from personal experience for we have had this treatment from one of our competitors. Four years ago, we filed legal action against Competitor X. The suit is still in court and a matter of court record. Yet Competitor X has released publicity to the effect that they not only started the original suit but have filed additional ones. Although this has hurt our marketing operations to a certain extent, we refuse to wallow in the mud with them.

Undoubtedly, a strong code of ethics—and stronger methods to enforce the code—would help to eliminate this type of practice. In the meantime, articles such as yours will give public relations practitioners the opportunity to evaluate their own practices and perhaps to work for a stronger code.

JOSEPH J. GRAVES, JR.,  
Director of Advertising  
and Public Relations  
Sparton Corporation.

Jackson, Mich.

### **BRAVO!**

CONGRATULATIONS on your new by-liners—*more please*, especially from Robert Manning. His use of totally unrelated subjects to sharpen his point is devastating, e.g., "one of the larger Freudian land masses" and "deadline sentinels—David Lawrence and George Sokolsky."

We need this kind of information from Washington and it is generally available but usually from a lesser pen. Good writing is one of the supreme stimulants of life, so let's have more of it.

VIRGINIA P. LANSNER,  
Providence, R. I.

## RECIPE FOR PANIC

By JOHN LaFARGE, S.J.

THE other day the marquee of our neighborhood movie theatre advertised a film called "I Married a Teen-ager from Outer Space." I didn't get a chance to see it, but the ridiculous title seems to me to raise a significant question about life in America today.

Specifically, I wonder just how much scaring the public can take without developing some form of panic. The movie title, a minor cultural landmark in itself, nevertheless seems to symbolize a process to which we are all being subjected. The question is: Is there a saturation point beyond which our *sang-froid* will begin to weaken?

Current news provides enough items to spark a general demoralization. It is easy enough to list some of them: the international arms race; quietly implacable Communist China; the Cuban confusion and Latin dictatorships; world poverty and economic despair; the as yet unabated series of horrifying accidents, on the highways and in the air; juvenile delinquency and other forms of social decay and relaxation of public morals; the alarms, genuine and fictitious, over the population question; racial and religious hatreds, with their actions and interactions.

Every epoch could make out a fairly respectable list; today we are perplexed that the ease of communication, the developments of mass media, which *ought* to bring reassurance through general enlightenment, achieve precisely the contrary effect, and plant us daily in the midst of physically remote and horrifying events. Indeed, we have developed a taste for dread itself.

Perhaps you shouldn't talk about panic, for its prophecy could be self-fulfilling. Yet a great many people, for a great variety of reasons, are interested in promoting panic, not in allaying it.

Any doubts I might have had on that matter were dissipated a few weeks ago when I received communications from various irate white school patrons in New Orleans, along with transcripts of incredible mental gyrations at a recent TV hearing held in that city. The line was familiar: complete hys-

teria, panic in full swing, curiously similar to the excitement that prevailed in seventeenth-century Germany during the witchcraft craze, not to speak of later Teutonic events. These alarms one could understand, and in the case of the individual forgive, for the words were presumably written or spoken from some sort of conviction. What did upset me was the knowledge, based upon no small previous experience, that such a panicky state of mind is deliberately promoted by interested parties, and is being systematically circulated around the United States and Canada. Nor is the fear propaganda confined to the Negro-white situation. It fans the flames of religious or class hatred as well. Whether it is of the leftist or the rightist variety—to use a couple of moth-eaten labels—makes little difference. The coolly calculating eye or pocketbook is interested only in the emotional result.

Honest but shortsighted or preju-

diced sources can also nourish panic flames. Panic's pessimism is an easy alternative to starry-eyed hope, especially in such a desperate situation as the present crisis in the Congo. Yet a wise man will tread cautiously between the two extremes of overoptimism and despair.

Sheer panic over Communism, for instance, can be disastrous. Such an alarmist state of mind can paralyze genuine social reform; it provides a handy tool for demagogues. Panic over anti-Communism has, of course, its own pitfalls. Algernon D. Black, in his address at the New York Society of Ethical Culture on July 6, 1960, remarked: "If we are to face the realities of the changing world, we must overcome some of the obsession with Communism," and he cited the demagoguery of Mussolini and Hitler as examples. Yet as Leo Cherne pointed out in a rather sharp critique of Mr. Black's discourse, recently released by Freedom House, New York City, it likewise makes no sense blandly to equate our American shortcomings with the relentless tyranny of world Communism, and thus blind ourselves to very real dangers. As Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy said on "The Great Challenge" TV program for February 6, Communism as a political party does



"The Panic Button is out of order!"