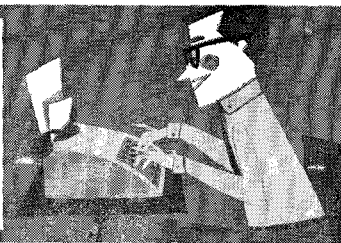


Top of My Head



Hell on Wheels

I WOULD like to say a few kind words about the taxicab situation in New York City. It's a tough assignment but I'll try.

According to the Unabridged, a taxicab is "a passenger-carrying vehicle, usually a motor vehicle, designed to seat five or seven persons, with or without a taximeter, maintained for hire on public thoroughfares, or at public stations or stands but not operated on a schedule."

Noah should have quit while he was ahead. That last line did it. The taxi drivers in New York City operate on a very tight schedule. Their appointed rounds are not made during rain or snow or gloom of night, or dinner hours or theater hours or to Brooklyn or on Yom Kippur. But before passing judgment or blowing a gasket let's look at it from the drivers' viewpoint. We must remember they, too, are human. Or as one driver put it to me the other night after only a brief ten-minute hassle, "I'm *only* human." To what higher plane he aspires deponent sayeth not.

As a rule taxi drivers are most cooperative. Most of them will take you

any place you want to go—especially if they happen to be going that way. Very few drivers happen to be going to Jackson Heights, a twenty-minute ride from Manhattan. I got into a cab and said: "Jackson Heights." The driver said: "Oh no. I'm not going there. I'm off duty." I said: "Your electric sign doesn't say off duty." Flipping it on, he said, "It does now." I said: "The sign wasn't on when I got in." And he replied: "It's like TV. It takes time for it to warm up." I got out. Obviously he had a point there.

A FEW days later, arriving by plane at Kennedy Airport, I got another driver. Or he may have been the same one. After a time they all begin to look alike. I said: "Jackson Heights, please." And he said: "Oh no. I want to go to Manhattan." So I said: "I don't want to go to Manhattan. The guy from Manhattan won't take me to Jackson Heights. Then I'll be stuck in Manhattan." And he said very quietly: "What do you want from me? You want I should be stuck in Jackson Heights?" So you see? They have a point. I apologized and got out.

That it's difficult to get a cab during theater hours is also understandable. One driver explained it to me the other night. (I could have sworn it was the same guy). He said, "I don't want to get caught in all that traffic." So I appealed to his civic pride. "The theater is one of New York's principal industries," I said. "People come from all over America to see our theater." And he replied: "They're the ones that cause all that traffic. Nickel tippers, too." And away he went.

So I took a crosstown bus. You think taxi drivers are—well, some other time. The bus got me as far as Forty-Seventh Street and Fifth Avenue. I walked three long blocks to Broadway in the slush and snow. It was tougher getting a taxi than it was getting my ticket to *Hello, Dolly*. But when I got there I realized the driver was right. The traffic was awful. I was glad I didn't get him mixed up in that snarl.

This taxi situation does not pertain to New York City alone. In Miami Beach I got into a cab at the Eden Roc Hotel and went to an appointment at another hotel some distance uptown. After my meeting I got into the first cab in a line at this hotel and said: "Imperial House." He said: "Imperial House! That's only eight blocks up the beach. You could walk it." I explained, "I'm in a hurry." And he said, "Walk fast." I said, "You want to take me or not?" He said, "Well, what can you do?" And we started. I give you an exact transcript of the conversation in that eight blocks:

"I've been waiting in that line nearly an hour," he said. "When I saw you coming out of the hotel I figured you were at least race track."

"You want to go to the races?" I asked.

He said: "Sure! I'll make a turn up at the next corner."

"You got any money?" I asked.

"No," he said.

"Neither have I. So let's go to the Imperial House. Does everybody have to go to the race track?"

"No, some people go to Palm Beach."

"You know anybody in Palm Beach?"

"No."

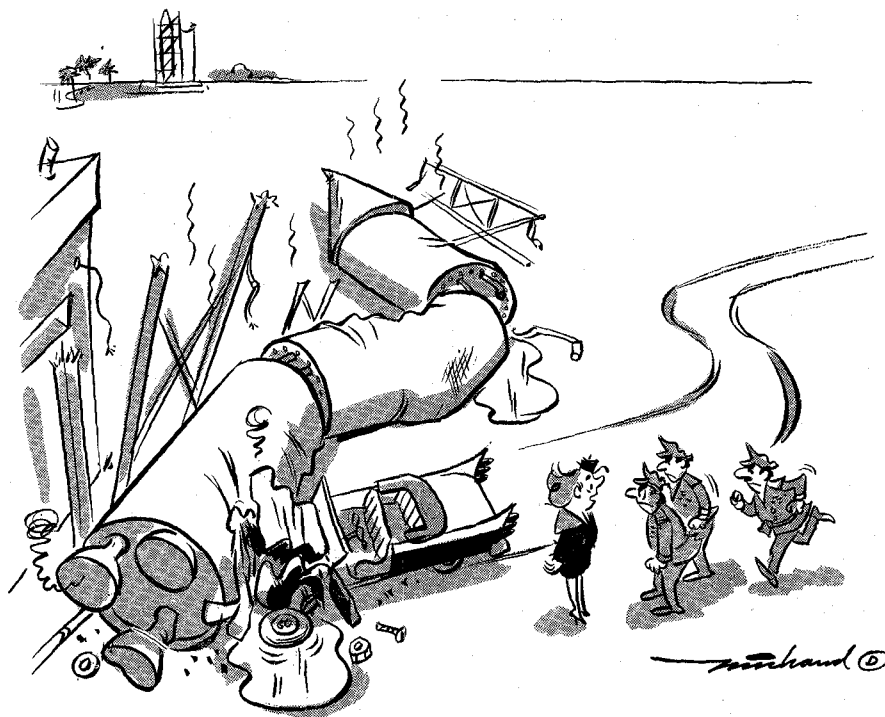
"Neither do I," I said. "So let's go to the Imperial House and cut out the conversation."

It's a sixty-cent ride. I gave him a dollar and told him to keep it. He didn't thank me. When a cab driver doesn't thank me I make it a rule to leave the cab door open when I leave. Which I did. As I walked away, he leaned way out to close the door.

" " he shouted. " !"

Suddenly I felt at home. The same guy who was not driving me in New York had come to Miami Beach for the winter.

—GOODMAN ACE.



"I suppose you're going to tell my husband?"

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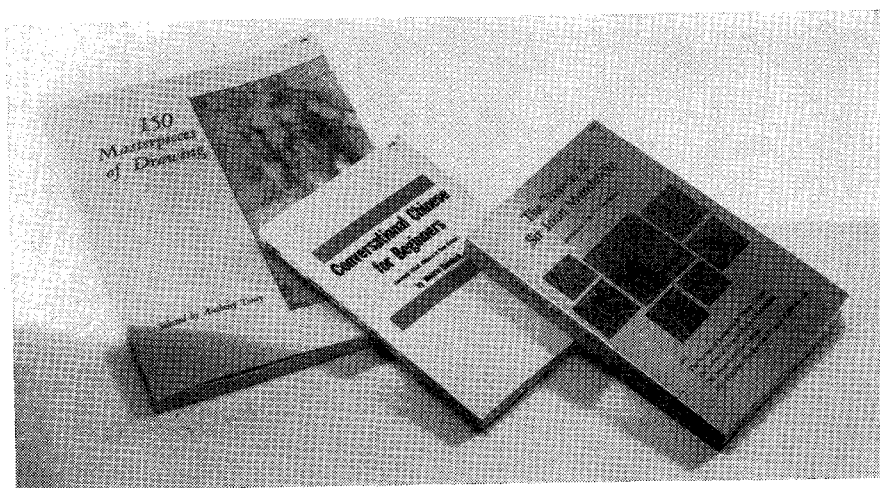
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State of Affairs



The Dangers of the Consensus

SHORTLY BEFORE the American retaliatory air strikes in North Vietnam more and more people inside and outside the government were asking the question put by Washington's best-informed newspaperman, James Reston of the *New York Times*, in one of his columns: "What goes on here?"

The perplexity was not limited to the press. It extended to high American officials, to the Diplomatic Corps, and hence also to foreign governments, both friendly and unfriendly. Another correspondent who speaks with authority, Allen Otten of the *Wall Street Journal*, summed up the "basic problem" of the press: "... a desperate dearth of information about the President's current thinking and intentions on a broad range of difficult foreign and domestic decisions." A ranking official a few weeks ago explained the puzzlement within the Administration: "We don't know

what the President is aiming at; he was presented with a virtually unanimous recommendation to initiate warning actions of a very limited character in North Vietnam, but he did not follow through." And foreign diplomats did what they often do when they cannot get answers to their questions in official quarters: they besieged certain members of the press to get some light on American foreign policy.

What surprised many was that the President, who had been presented by those who felt they knew him as a man "who knows how to use power," did not seem to want to exert strong leadership in foreign affairs; that he began to act as if he were also making "consensus" his byword in foreign policy.

One reason for the President's behavior was described by one high official as follows: "The President likes to listen to many voices, as every President in

fact should before making up his mind. But this President also likes to keep as many far-ranging alternatives open as possible. The danger of waiting until a crisis has almost reached the wire, of course, tends to limit the alternatives at his disposal, and one of these days as a consequence his hand may well be forced."

Whether the rapid deterioration in South Vietnam could have been halted is difficult to judge. But a year ago some of the highest officials were allowed to make some very firm, even militant, statements about American policy in that area. Later on, the much-emphasized Honolulu Conference and General Maxwell Taylor's return to Washington had both been built up as presaging important decisions—but none emerged. The President reacted forcefully in the Bay of Tonkin, but he shied away from any form of retaliation after the mortar attack on American bombers stationed near Saigon, or after the bombing attack against the military barracks on Christmas Eve.

This apparent indecision and uncertainty, the attempt to play for time, are certainly not the only reasons why things have gone from bad to worse in Vietnam, but they are bound to have had an influence. They may, in fact, have had an effect on the whole Pacific theater.

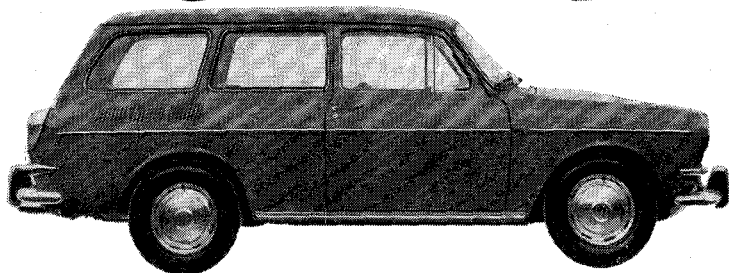
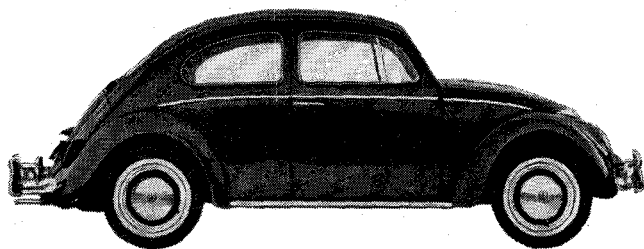
Asians are inclined to take the long view of history; they therefore tend to watch its tides closely. And should they gain the impression that the United States is an unreliable ally, they will orientate themselves accordingly.

The meaning of the retaliatory air strikes is that the United States possesses paramount sea and air power in the Far East. But by using power belatedly something is usually lost and a greater power play becomes necessary to impress the opponent. Retaliation in itself, of course, is not a policy. It is a tit for tat, a display of American might and a warning. John Foster Dulles is not one of my favorite examples, but he was correct in saying that it is important to make certain that the enemy knows what American policy is. President Johnson did not do that, and as of this writing has refrained from taking Americans into his confidence.

In Europe President Johnson has created the impression that he feels it is up to the Europeans to decide how they want to solve their nuclear policy problems, that he is aiming there, too, for a "consensus." It makes very good sense, as he likes to put it, "not to throw my weight around." But after heavy pressure in favor of the multilateral fleet last year—especially on the Germans and the British—the abrupt decision during Prime Minister Harold Wilson's visit to withhold *all* pressure and let the Euro-

(Continued on page 46)

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