

The New Age of the Journalist-Historian

As the pace of history accelerates, a combination of the reporter's and scholar's talents becomes essential to interpreting events; a noted commentator explains why.

By QUINCY HOWE

All things are double, one against the other: and he hath made nothing imperfect. One thing establisheth the good of another: and who shall be filled with beholding his glory?

—Ecclesiasticus, xlii, 24 and 25.

THE ACCELERATING PACE of the twentieth century has merged the functions of the journalist and the historian. Both have always summarized and interpreted the course of events—the journalist focusing on history in the making, the historian on history after it has been made. But so much has happened since 1900 that the journalist finds himself in ever greater need of the historian's perspective on the recent past while the historian of that same past finds himself increasingly dependent on the journalist's grasp of changing events.

The journalist does not spend all his time trying to scoop his colleagues with new information any more than the historian spends all his time reinterpreting

Quincy Howe, a news broadcaster and commentator since 1939, now does a news commentary five days a week for station WRFM, New York, and, via international short wave, station WNYW. He also has served as editor of *The Living Age*, as founding editor of *Atlas*, and now is writing the third volume of his *World History of Our Own Times*, this volume to cover the Second World War and its aftermath.

familiar material. Cornelius Ryan has devoted his journalistic talents to scooping the historians on events that took place twenty years ago. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has scooped the journalists with his account of the Kennedy Administration. This does not make Mr. Ryan any less a journalist or Mr. Schlesinger any less a historian. Each has displayed his ability in working the other's field, and the trend seems more likely to continue than to reverse itself.

American historians and journalists find themselves in agreement on one aspect of their country's past and present: Irony still plays as great a part in today's events as it did in yesterday's. Writing on "The Frankishness of History" in the Winter 1965 issue of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, the diplomatic historian Herbert Feis, who has specialized in the period of the Second World War, notes "how often in the annals of nations, consequences were the opposite of aims and expectations." Yet he also confesses that he hopes that his grave will not bear the inscription: HISTORY'S ONLY IRON LAW IS IRONY. Gerald Johnson, whose reputation as a journalist ranks as high as Dr. Feis's as a historian, chose irony as the theme of *American Heroes and Hero Worship*. In it he wrote, "There is an ironical touch in American history which has been pernicious." He cited as the crowning irony the career and legacy of Woodrow Wilson.

But irony gives expression to a positive, even an optimistic view of life.

Such clichés as "the irony of life" and "paradoxical as it may seem" sustain the unspoken, unprovable major premise that we live in a rational universe. Just as most humor depends for its effect on the violation or reversal of some accepted code or custom, so irony and paradox involve some departure from an accepted norm. North is more often north than it is south; right is sometimes but not always wrong. Without any codes or customs there can be no humor; without any norms there can be no departures from them. "The exception probes the rule."

G. K. Chesterton built a whole literary career on exploiting the paradoxical; he justified his conversion to the Roman Catholic faith by stressing the orthodoxy of his heresy from the Protestantism in which he was born and raised. The Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who is also a journalist and historian, wrote an essay called "The Irony of American History" which he made the title of an entire book. Here he observed: "The irony of America's quest for happiness lies in the fact that she succeeded far more brilliantly than any other nation in making life 'comfortable' only to finally run into the larger incongruities of human existence by the same achievements by which she escaped the smaller ones."

BUT as a Christian theologian, Dr. Niebuhr cannot accept irony as history's final, iron law. He prefers to regard it

as a helpful approach to a transcendent goal: "The Christian preference for an ironic interpretation is derived not merely from its conception of the nature of human freedom, according to which man's transcendence over nature endows him with great creative possibilities which are, however, not safe against abuse and corruption. It is also derived from its faith that life has a source and center of meaning beyond the natural and social sequences which may be rationally discerned."

Beyond the irony and the acceleration of history lies its transcendence, which need not assume a Christian or even a religious form. But between the irony and the acceleration lie the dialectics of history, which many European journalists and historians find more dynamic than the ironic approach. Whereas irony involves nothing more than contrast between promise and performance, appearance and reality, intention and result, the dialectical approach entails three steps: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Irony takes two steps and then stops; the dialectic takes three steps and keeps on going.

THE Hungarian-born Lajos Egri describes the dialectical process in his little modern classic *The Art of Dramatic Writing*: "Everything that moves con-

stantly negates itself. All things change to their opposite through movement. The present becomes the past, the future becomes the present. There is nothing which does not move. Constant change is the very essence of all existence. Everything in time passes into its opposite. Change is the force which impels it to move, and this very movement becomes something different from what it was. The past becomes the present and both determine the future. New life arises from the old, and this new life is the combination of the old with that which destroyed it. The contradiction that causes the changes goes on forever."

The ironies of history amuse or sadden, surprise or shock us. They make us think. They open new horizons. But they do not inspire action or chart the future. They present the fly of history in amber; the dialectical process catches it on the wing, and because history and journalism both deal with movement, the dialectical approach contributes to both. But, like any powerful weapon, it backfires. Look what it did to the masters of the Soviet Union, not to mention the Red Chinese.

Some Communists still insist that the dialectics of history, as interpreted by Marx, provide an infallible guide to world events and an invincible instrument to change them. But Marx went

off the rails when he also declared that Communism, in creating a classless society, does away with dialectics. At the very moment when the accelerating advance of science had begun bringing changes at a rate far beyond man's capacity to understand, much less to direct them, Marx announced that the time had come to stop trying to understand the world and start trying to change it. A century later, the dialectics of history backfired against Marxists and non-Marxists with fine impartiality.

During the first half-dozen postwar years, America's atomic monopoly kept Europe safe for democracy while nationalist revolutions—some bloodier than others—eliminated British, French, and Dutch colonial rule from most of Asia, often with American support, always with American approval. Yet the mid-1960s now find those same Americans, who for twenty years had encouraged Asian nationalists, bogged down in the same Vietnam war that the French lost in 1954. No longer does the American atomic monopoly hold the Soviet Union at bay in Europe. Now the Soviet-American balance of nuclear terror has become the world's chief bulwark against the aggressive Chinese—America's wartime allies and Russia's postwar protégés.

One Marxist maxim, however, has survived these years: "The consciousness of man does not determine his social existence; rather does his economic existence determine his consciousness." That apothegm has influenced American historians from Frederick Jackson Turner through Charles A. Beard to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. In Europe, on the other hand, historians and journalists have learned as much from Marxist dialectics as they have from the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism.

Of all the American historians who owe some debt to Marx, only Henry Adams appears to have relied as heavily on dialectics as on economic determinism. Of Marx's *Das Kapital* Adams wrote, "I never struck a book which taught me so much and with which I disagreed so radically in conclusion." Adams dissented from Marx's utopianism as sharply as he dissented from Marx's socialism. He shared Marx's contempt for the storytelling historians and his respect for the new science of economics. And while Adams rejected the Marxist dialectic, he succumbed to a dialectic of his own.

Marx foresaw the sharpening class struggles of the nineteenth century ending in a proletarian revolution that would establish an eternal Communist utopia. Adams—equally hostile to the nineteenth century—brought the intellectual, moral, and esthetic values of the eighteenth century to bear on the twentieth and con-



"Take it easy, Ursula, she's a corporate gift!"

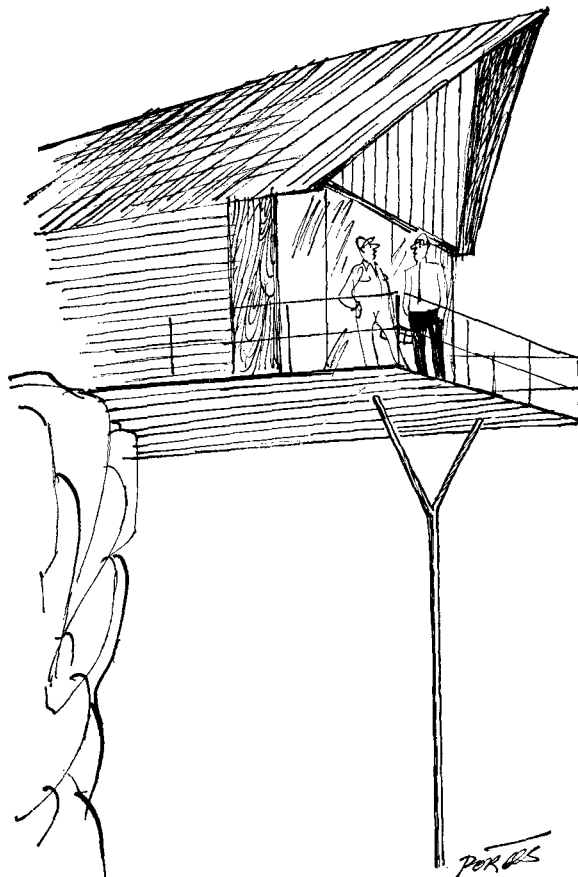
cluded that the accelerating progress of science would bring inevitable and universal disaster. Love of irony and paradox cast a spell on Adams just as revolutionary passion cast a spell on Marx. Both therefore found the dialectical approach congenial. And their errors proved more productive than the wisdom of more conventional minds.

If the making of history concerned Marx, the writing of history concerned Adams. But because Adams lived and worked half a century later than Marx, he witnessed changes that had destroyed the very foundations of Marx's world. Marx based his historical analyses and his political programs on the condition of industrial Britain during the mid-nineteenth century. It was this that led him to assume that the rich would continue to get richer while the poor continued to get poorer. Adams, on the other hand, waited until 1910 before launching his crusade to make history into a science. His attack took the form of a 30,000-word "Letter to American Teachers of History" and of an essay, "The Rule of Phase Applied to History," written the year before.

In the letter and the essay Adams contended, in brief, that the progress of science since 1900 had caused history to move at an accelerating pace. Instead of seeing all history slowly repeating itself in thousand-year cycles, as Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee later did, Adams divided modern history into three phases: the first, or mechanical phase, which had lasted for 300 years, from 1600 to 1900; the second, or electrical phase, which would last for seventeen years, from 1900 to 1917; and the third, or ethereal phase, which would last four years and, as he put it, "bring Thought to the limits of its possibilities in the year 1921."

FEW professional historians ever paid much attention to Adams's suggestion that they make history a science by incorporating its principles in their work. Many professional journalists, on the other hand, now have more than a smattering of science; many of them also find that their work compels them to double as historians about half the time. All of them have become increasingly aware of the impact science makes on each day's news from satellites to submarines, from cancer to automation, from nuclear to population explosions. But just as the ironies of history acquire a new dimension when they fall into a dialectical pattern, so the progress of science acquires a new dimension when viewed in the historical setting where it is applied.

Adams's "law of electrical squares," according to which "the average motion of one phase is the square of that which preceded," makes no more sense as



"You've got termites in your prop!"

science than Marx's "scientific socialism" makes sense as history. But just as a non-Marxist application of the dialectical process can illuminate all of history, so Adams's emphasis on the accelerating rate of scientific progress since 1600 helps to account for the accelerated pace of events in the twentieth century.

Historians and journalists have stressed the revolutionary aspects of the twentieth century's two world wars. "War is the health of the state," wrote the American pacifist Randolph Bourne during the First World War. Marx could not have been more wrong when he predicted the withering away of the state. Many of his followers labeled both world wars "imperialistic," but both wars fed the nationalist spirit everywhere, both enhanced the power of the sovereign state, and during both of them scientific research and development progressed as they never had in times of peace.

Hans Adolf Jacobsen, who teaches modern history at the University of Bonn, has offered an interesting suggestion in his book *On the Conception of a History of the Second World War 1939-1945*. "Although eighteen years have already passed since the Second World War ended," he writes in his opening sentence, "current developments keep reminding us how intimately the momentous, disastrous events between the years 1939 and 1945 remain intertwined with our own times and how deep an

imprint the consequences of that worldwide convulsion have made on the present aspect of things: the destiny of a divided Europe and of a disintegrating world split into two power blocs under the constant shadow of the atomic bomb and the challenge of Soviet Communism." Now that the two-power world of which Professor Jacobsen wrote in 1963 has become a three-power world it seems to confirm Henry Adams's law about the acceleration of history and to remind us that European historians still live in a European-centered world.

Professor Jacobsen's emphasis on the continuing impact of the Second World War opens two perspectives. In the first place, he suggests a starting point from which historians can trace the workings of the dialectical process down to the present day. In the second place, the scientific breakthroughs that the war brought forth have given journalists with scientific training new opportunities to trace the acceleration of certain postwar trends back to their wartime beginnings. But human nature, being what it is, will demand more. Dialectical processes and scientific accelerations that cannot always be brought up to date—much less projected into the future—will not satisfy human curiosity or satiate human enterprise. A third dimension—transcendence—must be explored.

Transcendence goes beyond dialectics
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A DIALOGUE WITH BONN

Some suggestions for what might—but won't—be said.

By THEODORE C. SORENSEN

WEST GERMAN Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger plans to meet soon with President Johnson in the White House. If the customary procedure is followed, the joint communiqué—which is to be issued by the two governments *after* the conference in order to tell the world of the progress achieved—will be drafted well in *advance* of the conference, borrowing phrases from a barrellful of previous such communiqués to describe the “atmosphere of mutual respect and cordiality,” the “frank and useful talks,” the renewed “pledge” to achieve German reunification, and the “increased understanding, friendship, and harmony” which was achieved without the need for any “new, specific commitments” by either government.

In this same spirit of planning ahead, I would like to suggest the following advance draft transcript of the top-level conversations themselves, not, in all probability, as they *will* be, but as in my fondest hopes I think they *should* be:

JOHNSON: Welcome to Washington, Mr. Chancellor! I appreciate this opportunity to talk with you and get your advice. Frankly, the Vietnamese war has required—because it is a war—so much of our time and attention that you have some justification for feeling neglected by everyone except Hubert. But I want to assure you that our responsibilities elsewhere have not in fact diminished our concern for Western European affairs or our obligations toward our allies. And let me also assure you that—while we welcome your understanding of our position in Vietnam—we are not in any way conditioning our regard for you, and our cooperation with your government or any other government, upon your endorsing every aspect of our Vietnamese policy.

KIESINGER: Thank you, Mr. President, for those words of welcome and friendship. We have needed to talk frankly for a long time and should not reserve consultations for moments of crisis or antagonism. I am reassured by your statement that Western Europe has not lost its place in your priorities by virtue

of the war in Vietnam; and we hope that your new consular pact, East-West trade bill, and other bridges to the East are forerunners of a renewed effort by your government to solidify the present détente in Europe. We recognize that Vietnam has understandably preoccupied your thoughts and we hope that the war can soon be ended; but we also know from recent experiences with the East Germans that it takes two to negotiate, and we have no wish to meddle in that matter.

JOHNSON: Why, then, have some Germans denounced our Vietnam policy?

KIESINGER: It is not popular, Mr. President, but only a small and sometimes noisy group is deeply concerned. There is an unease about American policy among West Germans but it is related to the war only in the sense that Vietnam has prevented you from devoting as much attention as you might otherwise to Western and Eastern Europe. My country has a fresh impulse now for seeking reconciliation with the East, and we intend to go ahead without waiting for you. Do not be angry. Germans are grateful for America's long years of aid and mindful of the importance of your military shield. But we want to be your partner, not your dependent, and we do not want our own initiatives stifled by your embrace.

JOHNSON: Far from being angry, Mr. Chancellor, we welcome the new vigor of your foreign policy. We see no reason to mistrust your contacts with the Soviets and hope you will not mistrust ours as some of your predecessors and colleagues have done. Neither one of us is going to betray the other or the alliance, or reach an accommodation at the other's expense, or for that matter forget that the Soviet Union, for all its new ways, still hopes to gain advantages for itself in Europe by splitting the West and isolating the United States. In that kind of peaceful but serious contest this government realizes that it has more to gain by having free and outspoken allies than simply submissive satellites who, having lost the taste for involvement, might prove to be useless at some critical moment of testing.

KIESINGER: I am delighted to hear you say that, Mr. President; and I will report

that to other West European leaders, for I think the Soviets have been particularly active in pressing their points with all of us lately while you have been looking the other way toward Asia. It is true that some Germans were afraid that you might, in exchange for the Kremlin's help in ending the war in Vietnam, make some deal which would possibly destroy our hopes for the future. But you're right, there is no more reason for us to be suspicious of your bridges to the East than there is for you to be suspicious of ours. We are going right ahead and building all we can. We no longer refuse diplomatic relations with those Eastern European nations that recognize the East German regime; we are expanding trade, travel, and talks with Eastern Europe; and we've tried to make it clear to the Kremlin that we are not doing this for anti-Soviet reasons, to weaken their role—we want to talk more with them, too.

JOHNSON: That is the same spirit in which we have approached the nonproliferation treaty some of your people have been grumbling about. If we cannot prevent a world in which a dozen or two dozen nations have nuclear weapons, then everyone—you and I and the Russians and the French and everyone else and their children—will be living in constant terror.

KIESINGER: We have been giving that some thought, Mr. President. We have accepted your assurances that you and the British intend to keep us completely informed on both diplomatic and scientific developments, that we will not be denied the opportunity to master the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and that we will not be left behind in the age of nuclear technology. So we have decided to support the treaty wholeheartedly.

JOHNSON: Wonderful!

KIESINGER: More than that, inasmuch as Soviet suspicions about our participation in a NATO or West European nuclear force are helping hold up the treaty, we have decided to renounce for all time any desire to have any kind of West German finger on a nuclear trigger . . .

JOHNSON: Pardon me, I'm not sure either the interpreter or I understood you correctly. Did you really say “renounce for all time”?

KIESINGER: That's right. We wouldn't like you or the Soviets pressuring us into doing that. We have our pride, too. But we have decided that our prestige is secure with our economic, cultural, political, and diplomatic leadership, and that our safety is secure with our allies. We don't need or want nuclear weapons. They would only cause more suspicions in the East, more disunity in the West, and more fear from those in both East and West who, I recognize, have some basis in history for fearing Germany as a military