

The times demand that the media of communications be as free and as objective as possible. But our newspapers have betrayed their responsibility. Why?

## THE NEED FOR ENLIGHTENED JOURNALISM AND JOURNALISTS

### I

While admittedly science and technology have shrunk the world to such an extent that only hours separate the capitals of Europe and Asia from the regions of Africa, the abyss which separates men's minds is still as wide as it was when Rabelais, more than three centuries ago, observed that "half the world does not know how the other half lives." The bridges spanning that abyss, the media of communications which supposedly have enabled men to know one another better, are at best frail and at worst illusory and deceptive. They are frail because they are of bad materials, they are deceptive because often they give only the illusion that the abyss has been spanned.

The newspapers, which, more than the radio, television or films, reach the great-

er number of people, have often been the harbingers of that false sense of knowledge between men. The abyss between their minds, if we may be allowed to pursue the metaphor further, may also be taken as the abyss between the two worlds, the East and the West, which, both ideologically and culturally speaking, have never spanned that chasm with a suitable bridge which would bring them together. And in this pitiable state of affairs, the future, if ever there will be a future, will heap most of the blame on the newspapers.

For either wilfully or otherwise, the newspapers, in spite of the fact that they hold the power to bring East and West together and perhaps bring about a better understanding between men, have done nothing less than the opposite. In this they have betrayed

their responsibility, not only to nations or to groups of nations, but potentially to the whole world. For today when there is greater need for sanity, when the world stands at the brink — facing its greatest test of whether men will turn their rockets to heaven or to each other, the newspapers have saddeningly added only to the madness which threatens to possess us. They have fanned the waves of hysteria through false reports, they have set nations upon another through such examples of journalism which characterized the coverage of the Congo crisis.

The newspapers are the books of the people, and the people learn what to think, what to say, what to demand through the newspapers. The enlightened newspapers know that an enlightened people creates an enlightened nation, and an enlightened nation may bring enlightenment to the whole world, in this age when one example may turn the rest. But if the newspaper condones the prejudices of the people, and reports the news according to the conformist temper, then what enlightenment can follow?

The Cuban affair is not an isolated case. Just as the newspapers which reach us did not give us the full picture in Laos, or the Congo, or in Berlin, so did they present to us a lop-sided view of Cuban-American relations. Perhaps this is forgivable, if we presume — and indeed it is a presumption — that the majority of the people think for themselves and do not listen to one-sided interpretations of world or domestic affairs. If we may presume that this is so, then the picture becomes brighter, it seems, for given the information, one may draw his own conclusions.

But again in this regard we find ourselves against a wall: the newspapers, more often than not, have been proven to accept rumor as fact, opinion as actuality. For the cardinal sin of the newspapers is not that they do not inform, but that they mis-inform. Perhaps it would not be unfair to say that the muddled world situation, the spectacle of man on the brink of annihilation, can partly be blamed on the fact that the newspapers have unwittingly or otherwise failed to present

the accurate and complete picture of foreign situations.

But all this may sound too far-off, too unnatural. The world situation, one may say, is not that bad. This is the consolation of those who live in a fool's paradise: of those who hold the blanket of false security over their heads, refusing to accept that the blanket offers no protection at all. If the newspapers were accused before a court for the gravest crime they have committed against men and nations, the charge would most probably be not that of giving men a feeling of insecurity, but that of lulling them into a false sense of security, which is the more dangerous. It is the more dangerous in that it makes men content in their complacency, exultant in their ignorance. And ignorance, in this age when so much is at stake, is the sin against the Holy Ghost. If men are ignorant of such world affairs as the Berlin crisis (or of affairs in Laos where a Congressman at one time wanted to send Filipino troops to); unknowingly ignorant, but cajoled into believing that they are wise,

then they become content, reasoning thus: I know, I am wise, therefore, there is nothing to fear.

Knowledge brings security, one is secure in knowing what the stakes are, what may happen next, and how to remedy mistakes and to act accordingly. But if the knowledge is false, then one is led into a false sense of security: one merely thinks he knows what the stakes are, what may happen next, what to do. Such false knowledge leads to false remedies: a case of applying the wrong cure for the wrong ailment. Those blinded by the harsh light of reality will stumble into the pit. The Romans refused to heed the signs of collapse; the foundations crumbled before they could apply the appropriate remedy. Centuries later, the Germans were beaten up to a frenzy of hatred against the Jews, only to wake up four years later to find millions of Jews dead and burdens to their conscience.

One may well ask at this point: but it is possible that whole nations may be led to believe a false idea? The willful manipulation of pub-

lic opinion known as propaganda has proven this time and again. Hitler managed to stir a whole nation behind an irrational cause, was able to whip it into a frenzy of hate. At home, here in the Philippines, one has only to look around to answer this question: the witch-hunter prospers as he condones the prejudices of the mass and is condoned by the newspapers. The elite resists all efforts to be dislocated, as their benevolent images are flashed before the public eye, while they steal the shirt off the people's backs. The alien gains more and more power as he is painted as a wholesome image by the newspapers before the people he exploits. The intellectuals are at bay, the non-conformists pilloried. All this through those organs which form, remold and sway public opinion.

The greater mass of people cannot buy books, cannot afford radios or television sets. They turn to the newspapers. The newspapers, by condoning their prejudices, by clouding the facts, have helped create a people without identity, a

people still plagued by medieval fears, a people ignorant and complacent, fighting the wars of other people and an easy prey to exploiters, both national and alien.

One may well ask: why have the newspapers betrayed their responsibility?

## II

What is the ideal newspaperman? He is preferably a college graduate, has had a liberal education in the sciences, the arts, politics. His work requires a depth of feeling, an intellect of broad horizons capable of understanding.

Unfortunately, it seems that this ideal newspaperman does not exist, or if he does, may find himself lost among the not-so-ideal, and presumably corrupted by them. For perhaps the biggest factor to which we can attribute the failure of newspapers to live up to their ideals is ignorance. The newspapers are full of it everyday: narrow-minded editorials, smug, mediocre columns, slanted news reports, propaganda material taken for fact.

A case in point is the confusion in terms which mani-

fested itself during the celebrated witch-hunt of the last pre-election witch-hunting season: the newspapers did not bother to clarify the confusion but added to it. The isms were mixed up and made as one, producing the tongue-twisting combination of this ism: atheism-agnosticism-communism-socialism. The newspaper became, unwittingly or otherwise, an instrument to mirror the prejudices of the mass, an instrument to make them feel safe and arrogant in their ignorance.

And then one still remembers the American coverage of the Cuban "invasion" which was swallowed by the Filipino press with the gullibility of school children.

It is such ignorance that should be remedied, such gullibility that should be stopped in our newspapers. But if one will do this, then one must reform the members who make up the newspapers: the men behind it make the newspaper what it is. The uneducated, even those who have diplomas from some diploma mill, whose perspectives are limited to reading and writing and

adding a column of figures, should not become newspapermen. The world does not encompass merely one's self: one knows that there are other people, other feelings besides one's own: this the newspaperman must know. But when his prejudices are many and varied, his intellectual horizons limited, his misconceptions legion, then he has no place in a newspaper.

### III

The newspaperman's participation in the propaganda war is either unconscious or deliberate. In the first case it involves ignorance, the inability to distinguish news from propaganda. In the second, it is part of a campaign into which the newspaperman must be above even the cold war between East and West. Over and above his partisan feelings in his duty to report the news objectively, to comment on it and to interpret it regardless of his affiliations. But often, while the newspaperman may himself know this, other factors may force him to submit; to write or print propaganda material. The

publisher may stand to lose something or may have common interests with either side: in which case, the publisher takes a hand in the actual running of the paper, decides which editorials are to be printed, which news to be given prominence or suppressed. This is direct, unveiled control of the power of the printed word.

On the the other hand, the newspaperman may be pressured indirectly: he may censor himself, or may write according to what he knows the advertisers want. Or it may be more petty. It may be personal propaganda for the publisher and may take the form of suppression or manufacturing of news, or slanting it and weighing it down on one side's favor, or it may involve fuzzy logic in the editorial pages, or prejudiced opinion in the columns.

Thus the newspaper becomes, in the first case, an organ for the ideological war and in the second, a second shadow of the publisher, following him everywhere and bending to his will. Such an arrangement, in either case,

breeds the kind of newspapers which do not properly belong in any society which seeks to improve itself. For they are weak and timorous newspapers which take no sides but their own, they choose, to straddle the fence instead of being involved in issues as protagonists.

Thus the newspaper may take issue on such a thing as dope-peddling. Everybody hates dope: that is as safe a line to take as any. So they campaign against dope. Well and good. But it stops there. In issues where the lines are not as well defined, where the difference between colors is not as sharp as the difference between black and white, but is often subtle, the newspaper merely reports or chooses to be silent. Thus a big newspaper chose to be non-committal over the witch-hunt in 1961 in the State University. While the other newspapers were against it or for it, it chose to be silent. Such a newspaper is worse than that which betrays its prejudices for it allows for no formation of public opinion.

#### IV

Perhaps the historian who shall record this age will say, if indeed newspapers are the mirror of the age, that this was a confused age: an age of ignorance primarily. For if indeed newspapers must mirror the society in which they exist, then our newspapers will not speak well of our society.

But then are newspapers solely the mirrors of society? Are they not part too of society and therefore to a certain degree responsible in shaping it? The prejudices may exist but they can be given new form, new strength; or else diminished by the newspapers. The alien exploiters may already be strongly entrenched in the nation's economy, but they can still be strengthened or else weakened by the newspapers. But it has often been the former that the newspaperman chooses. This has been so, is so and probably will be so if newspapers and newspapermen continue to be vehicles of ignorance and of the will of their publishers. This will always be so

as long as the big publishers use newspapers to protect or advance their other businesses. This will always be so as long as the newspaperman voluntarily submits to censorship. This will always be so as long as the newspapermen continue to be as ignorant and as bigoted as the people they are supposed to enlighten. This we must consider: the newspaperman's profession demands not that he conform but that he think, that other than imbibe the vices of his society, he has the choice of attempting its improvement through the press whose power is almost unlimited.

The only remedy for ignorance is of course education: education in the arts, education in sciences, education in politics. But let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that the man offered such an opportunity for self-improvement will necessarily grow into a fine newspaperman. Education merely molds what is already there; it cannot supply what is missing. The newspaper therefore which would carry out its task of enlightening the people, will look not on-

ly at the diploma but at the man. The man will show himself as he really is: whether fanatic or liberal, ignorant or wise. The newspaper will have to be rigid with its requirements. The responsibility which accompanies the power of the writer is great but cannot be shouldered by the weak. The ability to write fast copy is not enough, as apparently it is today. The ability to think, must not be only one, but the primary consideration.

But even the educated will find himself against a wall often: he has to eat too and his children have to be fed. This can be remedied by the organization of newspapers subsidized by the government which will therefore be fearless both against the government and against the other segments of society. In the Philippines such a set-up is highly favorable. The freedom of the press in the country is such that the government, if it should subsidize a newspaper, cannot possibly restrict it. When strict codes and trustees in a newspaper are set up, the possibility of political pro-

teges entering the newspaper becomes nil. Independent from corporations and from businesses and able to survive without advertising, that newspaper will be ideal, with the newspaperman well assured that he will not suffer regardless of whom he hurts. He will be the ideal fiscalizer, the ideal chronicler of the age and the uninhibited thinker, able to view both sides of any issue and to take sides without fear of reprisal.

Such a government-subsidized newspaper will mean the nationalization of the press first, then its independence from the big publishers. Definitely, the need for nationalizing the press has never been greater than it is now. The aliens who would control whole nations through economic exploitation have certainly made use of newspapers for that purpose. Nationalization, as a first step, will mean at least that the media of communication will not be monopolies of aliens. It will be a step towards the rediscovery of ourselves and towards complete independence.