

THE NEED FOR PRESS STANDARDS

The first paragraph of the first chapter of *The Manila Times Journalism Manual* by Jose Luna Castro says:

"In 1937, the settlers of New England had nothing more impressive in the way of spreading the news than the lung power of a civic-minded town crier. The burghers of Boston and Cambridge now and then received news pamphlets and London corantos' — single-sheet, two-page newsletters — from slow boats from Britain, but they were old and dog-eared back issues. The first printing press to be installed in New England was still in London and it was not to arrive until next year. Printing, in England as well as in the American colonies, was regarded as an occupation for mischief makers. Free speech had no legal standing. Publishers were yet to assert themselves as men of stature on the community.

"In England itself, the publication of corantos had been suspended, and the licensed press suppressed. The Germans meanwhile were issuing their *Messrelationen*, which were semi-annual accounts of not very news worthy events.

"It is a remarkable thing, but it was in 1637 when Tomas Pinpin, the Filipino printer, issued a newsletter in Manila."

The above clearly shows that we have an older press tradition than even the United States. It is the responsibility of publishers to make this old tradition great. Unfortunately, most of the publishers in our news journals not only cannot lead the press world to greatness but cannot even follow basic journalistic principles. In his *The Revolt of the Masses*, Jose Ortega y Gasset laid down what he called "the characteristic of our time" as the following: "Not that-

the vulgar believes itself super-excellent and not vulgar but that the vulgar proclaims and imposes the rights of vulgarity, or vulgarity as a right." This perfectly describes the situation in our press today.

Again from Ortega y Gasset; "To have an idea means believing one is in possession of the reasons for having it, and consequently means believing that there is such a thing as reason, a world of intelligible truths. To have ideas, to form opinions, is identical with appealing to such an authority, submitting oneself to it, accepting its code and its decisions, and therefore believing that the highest form of inter-communion is the dialogue in which the reasons for our ideas are discussed... An idea is putting truth in checkmate. Whoever wishes to have ideas must first prepare himself to desire truth and to accept the rules of the game imposed by it. It is no use speaking of ideas when there is no acceptance of a higher authority to regulate them, a series of stan-

dards in which it is possible to appeal in a discussion. These standards are the principles on which culture rests. I am not concerned with the form they take. What I affirm is that there is no culture where there are no standards to which our fellowmen can have recourse. There is no culture where there are no principles of legality to which to appeal. There is no culture where there is no acceptance of certain final intellectual positions to which a dispute may be referred. There is no culture where economic relations are not subject to a regulating principle to protect interests involved. There is no culture where aesthetic controversy does not recognize the necessity of justifying the work of art... When all these things are lacking there is no culture; there is in the strictest sense of the word, barbarism... Properly speaking, there are no barbarian standards. Barbarism is the absence of standards to which appeal can be made." — *Alejandro R. Roces, In Manila Chronicle, Feb. 9, 1969.*