

The Saturday Review



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The Mummification of Opinion

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following is drawn from an address by Senator J. William Fulbright delivered at the dinner of the National Book Awards in New York, Jan. 25.*

AS FAR back as the 1830s freedom of discussion and the influence of the majority opinion thereon was a matter of real concern to thoughtful people. Alexis de Tocqueville put it well I think:

I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are restrained from acting. The majority no longer says: "You shall think as I do or you shall die"; but it says: "You are free to think differently from me and to retain your life, your property, and all that you possess; but you are henceforth a stranger among your people. You may retain your civil rights, but they will be useless to you, for you will never be chosen by your fellow citizens if you solicit their votes; and they will affect to scorn you if you ask for their esteem. You will remain among men, but you will be deprived of the rights of mankind. Your fellow creatures will shun you like an impure being; and even those who believe in your innocence will abandon you, lest they should be shunned in their turn. Go in peace! I have given you your life, but it is an existence worse than death."

The sharp edge of that prophecy cuts deeply into us today, not alone because of the Senator from Wis-

consin and not alone because of the driving pressure of his avowed followers. Restrictions on freedom of expression come from many sources, and in some cases for reasons unrelated to the ambitions of the Wisconsin revolutionary.

There is, for example, the narrowing effect inherent in the concentration of managerial control of the press, the radio, the movies—and, in the foreseeable future, television.

Within the last forty years, according to Morris Ernst, one-third of our daily newspapers have disappeared, and more than 3,000 weeklies have ceased publication. As of a recent date ten of our states did not have a single city with competing papers, and in the whole of America there are only a few more than 100 cities where one can find daily papers in competition. The pattern of concentration extends elsewhere. In radio one-fifth of the stations are interlocked with newspapers. Four networks dominate national radio, while less than two dozen advertisers account for 50 per cent of network income. And in the film industry five big companies exercise a dominant influence upon the industry.

Let me make one thing plain. I am not saying that what brought this to pass was in all cases the hand of monopoly grabbing for bigness as an end in itself. In some cases cost-account sheets compelled owners and managers to seek their survival by enlarging themselves through mergers. And it is to the credit of some of these that when they found themselves in a monopolistic position they tried to run the communications property as if it were a responsible public

utility. But men of this outlook are, unfortunately, in the minority.

The general effect of what approaches monopoly control is that people hear, see, watch, read, and listen to only one side of public questions. And this in turn can adversely affect the public man to whom the guidance of public affairs is entrusted. He may know the truth and want to speak it. Yet he doubts whether his views, as transmitted to his constituents by those who control communication channels, will be fairly presented, or presented at all. So there often follows from this a chain reaction of cynicism leading to corruption. This public man, to achieve anything at all, will not use the open road, but will crowd himself into the path of low intrigue. He will not boldly scout what lies ahead for the nation. He will bend his weight to the end of having everything stand still. He will voice no prophecies of what ought to be. He will speak only the sterile dogmas of the street, and only those bits of rumor which bear the general sanction of the lords of communication.

And what of the end result to all this? It can be a society shaped in imitation of an Egyptian mummy; a society where the embalmer holds the highest place of honor; a society of fixed, painted, and hard shells; a society feeding on its dry rot, until the fateful hour when a probing finger striking the shell from without makes it collapse on the empty center.

THIS vision of the future is not drawn from the thin air or from a fevered imagination. It came after reading the report on tax-exempt foundations issued recently by the Reece Committee of the House of Representatives. There, in one sentence, Chairman Reece put himself on the side of all the pharaohs from Rameses I to the gentleman whose solar ship was uncovered recently. "The trustees of the tax-exempt foundations" said the Reece report, "should . . . be very chary of promoting ideas, concepts, and opinion-forming material which run contrary to what the public currently wishes, approves, and likes."

I said a moment ago that in addition to Senator McCarthy restrictions on freedom of expression have been imposed by the most respectable sources. Recently, for example, our military academies banned all student debate on the question of the recognition of Red China. The cadets at West Point and the midshipmen at Annapolis, who are destined to be our military chiefs, presumably could discuss how many angels can sit on the point of a needle, or any other cele-

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IGNORANT OF VALUES

THE EXCELLENT REVIEW of the Second Industrial Revolution under the heading "Atoms and Automation" [SR Jan. 22] is revealing to me of only one great truth. Both the champions and the skeptics of the new age are entirely ignorant of values. Although values are mentioned here and there in some of the articles, it is apparent that all of them hold only to the commonly accepted belief that values derive from products—the obvious materialistic outlook. It makes one wonder where "educated" people get their education—or does anyone trouble themselves about an education nowadays?

For several hundred years, from the beginnings of the first industrial and commercial revolutions, scholars have applied themselves to the study of economics and were coming up with the idea that values derive from human labor and that the wealth of nations was dependent upon the full employment and free exchange of this labor. Today we find a "science" of economics discarding the labor theory of value and teaching in the universities that "value is the ability of a good to command other goods in exchange." The human being and his efforts are almost entirely by-passed in order to be more objective in the analysis of economic forces.

The result is that most economists and industrialists rush to embrace every new non-human force and every new labor-saving machine or technique, and labor leaders, who should certainly do better, are unable to find the words and ideas with which to combat this threat to the security and esteem of human labor—some are unaware of any such threat. The labor leader, you see, is also "educated" today. He sits next to the industrialist in the same schools, and in an insipid atmosphere of conformity he listens to the same economists. And yet, even an economist ought to be able to figure out this much: We can produce more things more cheaply, not because of automatic machines and atomic energy, but because these things do away with human labor. By doing away with human labor we do away with the very thing that imparts value to a product. Thus, a product is made cheaper because less human labor is used in its production. Simple? Not to the economist. He begins by defining value in terms of products, then, when products change in value due to the production-devaluation process of the "industrial revolutions" he gets himself and everyone else all involved in theories of production, distribution, and finance without ever coming near to the core of economics—the *value* of things.

As far as labor (which is to say, people in general) is concerned, there is less to fear from the Second Industrial Revolution than there was from the First, if we have learned anything by the experience. At first the labor cost of producing atomic energy and automatic



"Well, that settles it. There *was* intelligent life on Mars!"

machinery will be more than these can displace. So that the general level of wealth in the nation will remain high due to a high level of employment in new industries while workers in older fields are being displaced. As time goes on the level of employment may still be maintained by the increased consumption of new goods, although there is risk here of eating our cupboards bare by the despoilation of natural resources before our technology comes to the rescue with new fuels and foods. However, the same grave dangers exist in the Second as in the First Industrial Revolution. These lie in our disparagement or ignorance of human values.

And, because of this ignorance and carelessness of the importance of human labor, a few clever men (either from greed, profit motives, or simple ambition clouded by the general ignorance of values) will exploit labor and, without meaning to, will create injustice and poverty. The question will then arise for history to answer: How many more depressions and wars will be necessary for people to adjust their disruption of values caused by the Second Industrial Revolution?

FRANK MEMOLI.

Cincinnati, Ohio.

HENRY ADAMS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

HENRY ADAMS "belonged to a tradition that inquired about the meaning and not merely the function of things." This is a very interesting and basic point in N.C.'s editorial "Time to Think" [SR Jan. 22]. I think that is why, as he grew older, Henry Adams felt a closer sense of

identification with his Norman ancestors of the twelfth century than with his own nineteenth-century milieu. Its unity had meaning; all Europe was united in Christianity. Though Adams inclined more to stoicism than Christianity he was increasingly impressed by the high point of contemplation reached in the culmination of Chartres Cathedral.

The nineteenth century did not understand or appreciate Henry Adams, but with the release of atomic energy the twentieth century may. "If the acceleration, measured by the development and economy of forces," Adams said, "were to continue at its rate since 1800 the mathematician of 1950 should be able to plot the past and future of the human race."

The implication of Adams's theory does require a good deal of contemplation.

MRS. JOSE CASANOVA.

Hamden, Conn.

A SHUTTERBUG MISS

FOR THE LIFE OF ME, I can't understand how you missed out on one of the best photography books in existence in your "Guide for Shutterbugs" [SR Jan. 15]. "The Amateur Photographer's Handbook," by Aaron Sussman, is an honest up-to-date treatise on what to buy and why. There aren't enough books that describe in Sussman's understandable language the behavior of the lens, how to take a picture and how not to, and the thousand and one other so-called "secrets" of photography.

RALPH SAMUELS.

New York, N.Y.