

A few months after completing my own study, I had the opportunity to discuss problems of the press with editors of communist newspapers in Eastern Europe. I would like to paraphrase the substance of their views for the sometimes unexpected light they shed upon the conflict of perspectives.

A high ranking editor in Hungary had read my research report on The New York Times and the Hungarian paper (published in the Journalism Quarterly). When I asked him what he thought of it, he hemmed and hawed for a while. Then he gave me this view of the needs and pressures which shape their own press perspective.

"Your findings appear quite flattering," he said. "But right now we are more concerned with the other side of the coin. We are concerned with the ways in which The New York Times makes actually better propaganda abroad, even if not the kind you like.

"To our minds," the communist editor explained, "the Western private press is so brutally irresponsible that it becomes entirely credible. Who would question the sincerity of an opponent who shows himself in the worst possible light? Who would discount as 'propaganda' the kind of talk which can afford to shock and alienate people, which can look at the world with the callous and calculating eye of conflict and violence?

"We, on the other hand, have made the great mistake of looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. Living in a badly split society, we thought we could achieve greater unity by harping on glorious aims while ignoring the wide gap between promise and performance. We lost our credibility before we could close the gap. Our illusions were smashed in 1956, and so were our rose-colored glasses.

"Now we have a new policy. Unlike The Times, we still relate major events to the goals of peace and colonial freedom because these are also the needs and goals of socialist societies. But, like The Times, we no longer make secrets of our blunders, failures, and shortcomings. This may lose us some friends, but it helps our credibility. So you see," he added with a rueful smile, "just when your study appeared I was trying to tell our reporters to act a little more like The New York Times!"

The foreign editors of a major Moscow daily paper also stressed their "new policy" -- described as a more honest look at the outside world. When I asked them why they don't permit readers to look at the United States through the eyes of our own newspapers, they answered without hesitation:

"Because it would do both of us a disservice. Our readers are not accustomed to such reporting. They might think that we fabricated these papers just to discredit you. Or, if they believed them to be genuine, they might become panicky or lose the will to live and to work.

"We don't need your papers to frighten and discourage our people or to embolden our Stalinists. We say that capitalism is a bad system but not a mad system. When Walter Lippman writes something responsible we cite him or print him. When the State Department sends an important diplomatic note we print it along with our reply. When a responsible head of state gives us a special interview we print it. Our new policy is to convince our readers that we can plan and work for the future, that responsible people in the West do not want to commit suicide, that they are rational men."

Handwritten notes:
Haber... - She - me. On the...
sub...
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*So we're
Cannibals*

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My final question is: are we?

We were the first to usher in both the anti-imperialist and the atomic eras. We seem to be among the last to accept their ultimate implications. The challenge of anti-colonial revolutions seems as foreign to our press perspective as the futility of the arms race.

We are so busy refuting communist arguments and keeping the score in the cold war that we miss the opportunity of transforming a game no one can win to a contest no nation can lose.

While some may continue to profit from both, economic dependencies and weapons of mass destruction are neither national assets nor sources of real world power in the second half of the twentieth century. They pose their primary threat -- and challenge -- to the intelligence, courage, and imagination of people possessing them.

being In the eyes of many, the cannibal may well be any cold warrior brandishing ~~atomic~~ boomerangs over the still bleeding body of mankind. Lacking from our press perspective is a compassionate view of the convulsions of this feverish body, and of the hope they embody as well as the price they will extract.