

FROM THE EDITOR

THOSE GENTLEMEN WITH MUGS IN THEIR HANDS

We live in a world where things are terribly mixed up. Though I do not enjoy cricket, I have respect for great cricket players who have come to personify a collective sense of pride, some kind of excellence and perhaps the spirit of sportsmanship. But I feel very disappointed when I see some of them appearing in advertisements, as salesmen for one consumer product or another. I feel let down. For a purely monetary consideration (and I am told that they are already very rich) they are showing disrespect to us, for they know that they have no greater qualification to champion a product than any ordinary man. I will still applaud their achievements in sports, but I will not respect them, for they are taking advantage of our respect.

We have great respect for freedom of the press. But I feel sad when I see a popular newspaper trying to brainwash the people by repeatedly portraying a politician, through its cartoons, as a giant and his opponent in power as a pigmy. Even if the politician now ridiculed by the newspaper is ultimately proved to be guilty, this process of brainwashing would not stand justified. First of all, the newspaper-owner cannot be so omniscient as to know in advance that the politician in power is really guilty to the extent he would like us to believe. Nor is he so omniscient as to know that the politician he favours is a moral god. The fact simply is, the newspaper-owner disfavours one and favours the other. But by repeated caricature, by violent diatribes used by his men against the disfavoured one, on one hand the freedom of the press is reduced to license and on the other hand the dignity of the high office the disfavoured one holds is damaged. Investigative journalism is fine, but billing out judgement before the investigation is completed and conclusions are objectively drawn, is mischief.

All kinds of writing flourish in a free society. There are some columnists who have graduated in the art of tickling us. They are intelligent and well-informed, intelligent enough to pass on a bit of vulgarity as frankness and informed enough to pour information into us which we hardly need. There is nothing grievously wrong in it. They are entitled to their way of survival and popularity, But when one of them is described by a widely circulated weekly as the father of modern Indian journalism, you feel uneasy. Modern Indian journalism which began with Tilak, Sri Aurototo, Gandhiji etc., all certainly deserves better consideration. An editorial writer should have a little wider knowledge of the history of his own profession.

The state of affairs is sad, but this is also a challenge to us. We must develop an ever better and keener sense of discrimination, must keep our head above the reach of those who are stretching themselves to reach our brain to wash it with mugsfuls of rubbish.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

THE CHARMING ART OF DAMNING

"In order to be a diplomat one must speak a number of languages, including double-talk," said Carey McWilliams. Indeed, double-talk is a language in its own right and for some years now the term has been modified to doublespeak (without the formality of a hyphen between the two words) and the 'language' has by now at least one reasonably comprehensive lexicographical work to its credit, namely the Doublespeak Dictionary compiled by William Lambdin whose "wife was a great influence on this book, being a sensible, plain-speaking woman from small Wyoming town. In fact he

says, at times she speaks so plainly that he wonders where she learned such words," we read in the blurb.

No doubt, honest or plain speaking is Greek to Doublespeak which may have become the world's most widely spoken language by now, though it is not a new one. For it has been the language of the politicians in general and diplomats in particular all the time. Camillo Di Cavour said in the last century, "I have discovered the art of fooling diplomats: I speak the truth and they never believe me."

(By the way, read Richard Feynman's autobiographical sketch, "Who Stole the Door?" in our October issue. He too spoke the truth—but see what happened.)

Here is a specimen of the language of Doublespeak as annotated by Lambdin.

"*No truth to the report* translates, 'The report is absolutely true.' The press secretary under Lyndon Johnson used this common bit of doublespeak, but he failed to fool the newsman who reported it:

President Johnson told a news conference last week that there was 'no truth' to reports that he was looking for a successor to Henry Cabot Lodge as ambassador to South Vietnam. White House Press Secretary George Christian was asked about that today. He said Johnson's statement was absolutely accurate—that the President had already picked Ambassador-at-Large Ellsworth Bunker to succeed Lodge."

One robust branch of Doublespeak rests on the art of balancing antithetical statements. The latest example of this was reported by the Los Angeles Times a few days ago and I must confess that I was charmed by the air of innocence it carried about it. The former US House of Representatives' Speaker Mr. Tip O'Neill expressed high admiration for Mr. Ronald Reagan's physical condition and his charm, but he had an impressive explanation for the President's lacking in certain respects. Says Mr. O'Neill indulgently, "Most of the time he was an actor reading lines, who didn't understand his own programme."

Mr. O'Neill then hurries to say that Mr. Reagan is an agreeable man, after all! "I hate to say it about such an agreeable man, but it was sinful that Mr. Ronald Reagan ever became President."

So far, the compliments and criticisms appear subjective. But Mr. O'Neill concludes masterfully on an objective, factual note, without any comment:

"I'll never forget that summer day in 1983 when Flight 007, the Korean airliner, was shot down by the Soviets. I was on Cape Cod, where the Secretary of State, Mr. George Shultz called me at seven in the morning.

"After telling me what had happened, he said he was sending down a plane to bring me to Washington for an emergency meeting at the White House.

"I'll be ready," I said, "But what does the President think about this?" "He's still asleep," said Mr. Shultz.