

## THE HIROSHIMA "NEW YORKER"

Sir:

May I add something to your comment on the Hiroshima *New Yorker*? The editors of that magazine imagined, and you yourself in your comment take for granted, that the Hersey piece was an indictment of atomic warfare. Its real effect, however, was quite the opposite. What it did was to minimize the atom bomb by treating it as though it belonged to the familiar order of catastrophes—fires, floods, earthquakes—which we have always had with us and which offer to the journalist, from Pliny down to Mr. Hersey, an unparalleled wealth of human interest stories, examples of the marvelous, and true-life narratives of incredible escapes. The grandness of the disaster and the smallness of the victims are ideally suited to the methods of journalism, which exaggerates and foreshortens simultaneously. The interview with the survivors, (Mrs. Margaret O'Reilly, of 1810 Oak Street, housewife, speaking to reporters, said: "When I first smelled smoke, I threw an old coat on and woke the baby," etc.) is the classic technique for reporting such events—it serves well enough to give some sense, slightly absurd but nonetheless correct, of the continuity of life. But with Hiroshima, where the continuity of life was, for the first time, put into question, and by man, the existence of any survivors is an irrelevancy, and the interview with the survivors is an insipid falsification of the truth of atomic warfare. To have done the atom bomb justice, Mr. Hersey would have had to interview the dead.

But of this Mr. Hersey is, both literally and temperamentally, incapable. He is the *New Yorker's* reporter-at-large, not Virgil or Dante—hell is not his sphere. Yet it is precisely in this sphere—that is, in the moral world—that the atom bomb exploded. To treat it journalistically, in terms of measurable destruction, is, in a sense, to deny its existence, and this is what Mr. Hersey has accomplished for the *New Yorker* readers. Up to August 31 of this year, no one dared think of Hiroshima—it appeared to us all as a kind of hole in human history. Mr. Hersey has filled that hole with busy little Japanese Methodists; he has made it familiar and safe, and so, in the final sense, boring. As for the origin of the trouble, the question of intention and guilt—which is what made Hiroshima more horrifying, to say the least, than the Chicago Fire—the bombers, the scientists, the government, appear in this article to be as inadvertent as Mrs. O'Leary's cow.

There is no question that the *New Yorker's* editors did not deliberately plan the August 31 issue as an anniversary celebration of the atom bomb (though one wonders whether they were not competing just a little with it in this journalistic coup that allowed a single article to obliterate the contents of the magazine). The point is that the *New Yorker* cannot be against the atom bomb, no matter how hard it tries, just as it could not, even in this moral "emergency," eliminate the cigarette and perfume advertising that accompanied Mr. Hersey's text. Since the *New Yorker* has not, so far as we know, had a rupture with the government, the scientists, and the boys in the bomber, it can only assimilate the atom bomb to itself, to Westchester County, to smoked turkey, and the Hotel Carlyle. ("Whenever I stay at the Carlyle, I feel like sending it a thank-you note," says a middle-aged lady in an advertisement). It is all one world.

NEW YORK CITY

MARY MCCARTHY

*Politicking*

The cost of putting out the magazine has risen so sharply since last spring that we now face a full-fledged financial crisis. Such of our readers as feel more than a casual interest in the fate of POLITICS can help us by:

(1) Giving subscriptions to their friends for Christmas (see the ad on the back cover).

(2) Sending in addresses of bookstores and newsstands in their home towns which might handle the magazine if approached by us.

(3) Sending in lists of likely people for us to circularize for subscriptions.

(4) Advertising in POLITICS, or getting others to do so. Our rates are: \$90 a page, \$50 ½ page, \$25 ¼ page, \$15 ½ page, \$7 for an ad 1 inch by 3 ¼ inches. Classified ads are \$1 a printed line (10 words average). (We'll be glad to mail, on request, one or more of our new rate cards.) Our present circulation is 5,000, divided approximately as follows: paid subscriptions, 3,200; newsstand sales, 1,400; complimentary subs (mostly to Europe) and exchange copies, 400.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE: *Gelo and Andrea* are French socialists, male and female, who took part in the Resistance, belong to no party. They are regular contributors to POLITICS . . . *Ralph Manheim's* translations are well known; he has contributed satire to "The New Republic" and other magazines . . . *William Petersen*, recently demobilized after four years in the army, is a graduate student at the New School for Social Research in New York City . . . *European* is the pen-name of an editor and scholar who took part in the 1905 Russian Revolution; his special interest is Byzantine and Hellenistic history; he lives in France . . . *James Blish* was trained as a zoologist at Rutgers, did graduate work at Columbia, served in the army as a laboratory technician, and is now a free-lance writer and the manager of a phonograph record company. He lives in New York City . . . *Marshall Hodgson* was a C.O. during the war, now works as a statistical clerk; he is a graduate student in history at the University of Chicago.

Lamenting, in the current issue of *Partisan Review*, the lack of "common presuppositions" among New York intellectuals, William Barrett contributes to fellow-feeling with this illustration of his thesis: "Mr. Dwight Macdonald manages to publish from the heart of New York a magazine which, for its crackerbox bluster, wide-eyed idealism, and ingenuous dogmatism, might just as well be put out at some tiny whistle-stop in Oklahoma. [For the benefit of our European readers: a "whistle stop" is a village so small that the train stops there only occasionally.—DM] Without wishing in the least to minimize Macdonald's extraordinary accomplishment in this, I do think it must be clear to any one that if there were such a thing as a New York intellectual climate, a New York intellectual atmosphere or current of ideas—if, that is, the metropolis really functioned as a cultural center—even he might find it immensely more difficult, perhaps impossible, to pull off such a trick."

Flattered though I am at this recognition of my editorial talents, I find Barrett's outburst a curious one for several reasons. For one thing, POLITICS evidently irritates him (and, possibly, his fellow-editors on PR) so much that he cannot even abuse it accurately: bluster and dogmatism are, I submit, more characteristic of the above passage itself than of POLITICS; and since when is idealism, whether wide-eyed or

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# POLITICS

Volume 3

1946



GREENWOOD REPRINT CORPORATION  
NEW YORK

1968

This reprint edition reproduces, in an unaltered form, the entire contents of the original publication, as far as it has been possible to determine.

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1946

*Introduction*

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Printed in the United States of America