

# A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

**TAIWAN AND THE NEW YORK TIMES: STEADY AS SHE GOES.** In September, September 7 to be precise, a friend reading the *New York Times* was struck by an editorial page assertion that "the security of an autonomous nonnuclear Taiwan [is] the inescapable condition for normalization of relations with Peking." That, he thought, was a good deal more emphatic than the *Times* had been on Taiwan, and he opined that this stronger approach could be attributed to a changed climate of greater candor about the People's Republic of China—a candor represented, for example, by the articles by the Londons in recent issues of *Worldview* and by the dispatches of the *Times*' own Fox Butterfield. It was, he said, no longer fashionable to treat Taiwan as a minor irritant in the way of advancing the marvelous rapprochement between the U.S. and China.

Intrigued, we decided a trip to the public library was in order to check out the *Times*' editorial treatment of Taiwan over recent years. The results may be of wider interest.

April 8, 1973, and still in the afterglow of the "historic breakthrough," the editorial writer addressed himself in a very hopeful vein to "Evolution in Taiwan." "Sometimes diplomatic success consists of nothing more than converting an urgent situation into a tolerable irregularity." The question of Taiwan had evolved "from the flashpoint of war into a period of gradual adjustment." Six months before the Yom Kippur War and two years before the collapse of Saigon, the *Times* took heart from the larger international picture. "[A]round the world once bitter antagonists have found that any kind of peaceful contact is better than no contact at all. The Germans have discovered this, the Koreans are experimenting, even the Arabs exposed to Israelis are finding old antagonisms contradicted by daily realities. Perhaps the Vietnamese will find it too one day."

November 15, 1973, a few weeks after the Yom Kippur War, and hope was undimmed. Again addressing the issue of Taiwan the *Times* noted: "There may be a general lesson here of relevance to the Arab-Israeli dispute and other world confrontations. No matter how intractable and emotional the point of contention may seem at one time, the passage of years and circumstances can reduce it to the kind of disagreement that both sides may be willing to live with." In a tone that suggests Taiwan is a little issue that should not come between good friends, the *Times* noted approvingly that, if China and the U.S. "cannot reconcile their opposing positions, they seem at least not to be letting their differences get in the way of other matters." While stopping short of subscribing to theories of economic determinism, the editorial notes with enthusiasm that "the Chase Manhattan Bank estimates that trade between China and the United

States will reach the level of \$600 million this year, compared with \$92 million last year and \$5 million in 1971."

In the last editorial word of the year, December 31, 1973, the *Times* said that "the only real obstacle" to establishing full diplomatic relations "has been inability to agree about Taiwan." But Kissinger had just come back from Peking, and in a joint communiqué with Chou En-lai it was noted that the five conditions Peking had previously insisted upon in order to remove the Taiwanese "obstacle" had now been reduced to one, namely, that normalization "can be realized only on the basis of confirming the principle of one China." The *Times* notes, but evidently without any suspicions that Kissinger may have made some secret deal, that "Some of these [earlier] conditions evidently were not repeated because they were or are being substantially met." In any case, the *Times* states as simple fact: "The United States remains firm in its treaty obligation to defend Taiwan." And, with high satisfaction: "The Taiwan problem seems to have been tacitly—if temporarily—shelved on Peking's own initiative, which is all to the good."

Two years later, January 4, 1975, and the "problem" had clearly been taken off the shelf. "The problem now is that Peking seems to be pressing for an end to the contrived ambiguity which has been tolerated over Taiwan's status for the past three years." The editors are worried for Taiwan: "For the sake of smoother relations between two superpowers, an independent society which has developed a life, an economy, and perhaps a nationality of its own over many decades is in danger of being abandoned....Before the political deliverance of Taiwan to China is accomplished with the acquiescence of the United States...it might be appropriate to consider the genuine wishes of the island's whole population....By rights, the decision should be theirs alone, and neither that of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek or his followers, nor that of the Chinese rulers in Peking."

Seven months later, July 13, 1975, economic determinism rides again, and the "contrived ambiguity" mentioned above is celebrated under the title, "Rewards of Ambiguity." It seems those clever Taiwanese have done an end run around conventional wisdoms by making diplomatic recognition virtually irrelevant. Although Japan, the Philippines, and a host of others have switched formal recognition to Peking, the economic action is still with Taiwan. "Political abstractions that once had loomed so large were no match for the economic realities." "[T]he ill-defined status quo is not so dismal as it once seemed, as the 'unofficial' contacts multiply and thrive. The embassies may withdraw one by one, but the planes fly in, the businessmen and investors arrive in droves, and the trade flows

on." While security is mentioned ("after the collapse of Vietnam the United States needs to avoid any impression of pulling away from longtime Asian allies"), the impression left is that the Taiwanese will be able to take care of themselves after all.

A year later, June 17, 1976, and there is a different mood, or perhaps a different editorial writer. In any case, there are powerful suspicions expressed about "revived proposals in Washington to 'normalize' relations with Peking." (Normalize now war-rants quotes.) "It is acknowledged—but proponents brush over the fact—that this step would require termination of the American defense treaty as well as diplomatic relations with Taipei." The previously celebrated ambiguity now seems less ambiguous to the *Times*. President Ford, it is said, should be disabused of the notion that it is only "Reagan and the old pro-Nationalist 'China Lobby'" that stand between him and "a rapid move to downgrade relations with Taiwan to achieve full diplomatic relations with Peking." Such a move would mean that "the credibility of American defense guarantees to Japan and other countries might also be questioned." Even very minor changes should be viewed with caution, since they "might be the beginning of a slippery slope." The *Times* is clearly more troubled by initiatives from Washington than by those from Peking: "Significantly, Peking does not seem to be in as much of a hurry to 'normalize' relations as some Western analysts assert." The editorial concludes that improving relations with Peking is a good thing, "But there are many ways to do this short of abandoning 14 million Taiwanese."

No doubt our friend is right in detecting a "tougher" line on America's commitment to Taiwan. But, as the above survey indicates, that is hardly a sudden shift. Through its severely time-limited and sometimes contradictory pronouncements, the *Times'* editorial position has been, as the editors of that newspaper are prone to saying, one of gradual adjustment. It seems Taiwan has had a friend both at Chase Manhattan and at the *Times*. But now our friend is worried about the latest editorial's insistence upon "an autonomous nonnuclear" Taiwan. Does that mean, he asks, the U.S. will feel free to break its commitments if Taiwan goes nuclear? Our friend worries too much. After all, the *New York Times* doesn't make our foreign policy, does it?

**CREATIVE DESTRUCTION.** That gloomy prophet of capitalism, Joseph Schumpeter, used to argue that part of the genius of the system was its propensity for "creative destruction." If we understand him correctly, he meant that capitalist enterprises were systematically involved in destroying their past achievements in order to open up opportunities for new products, new capital investment, new marketing techniques, and the such. Whatever merits the theory has in understanding the general economy, it is eminently applicable to the history-writing industry. Although called revisionism, the methodology is that of creative destruction; assault-

ing the accepted and commonsensical, thus opening the way for another generation of "scholarship" devoted to putting things together again, thus setting up the field for yet another revisionist phase. A forthcoming book by Gabriel Kolko, which is rumored to argue that the U.S. invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, may seem just silly, until one understands the Schumpeter theory of creative destruction. Of course capitalist democracies are not the only ones that engage in revisionism, as witness the Soviet Encyclopedists. But politically directed revisionism is much less fun than when the game is played by our market-oriented anticapitalist revisionists. One of the most winsome instances of the latter is a new book by Professor Leo Hershkowitz of Queens College, New York. Taking on the monumental mythology associated with the cartoons of Thomas Nast, Professor Hershkowitz contends that Boss Tweed of Tammany was really an enlightened urban reformer done in by the corrupt Grant Administration in Washington and by the anti-immigrant nativist elements in New York's ruling élite. With one brilliant stroke Hershkowitz revives an important part of the market for urban history. Schumpeter would have been proud of him. And from the rehabilitation of William Magear Tweed, Richard Nixon may take heart.

**WHAT THEY SHOULD HAVE SAID.** Better the iconoclasm of the revisionists than the stuffy writers who stuff the past with every fad of current consciousness, as they say. We have in mind *The Adams Chronicles*, now rerunning on public television around the country. A recent episode had Abigail Adams playing Bella Abzug, engaging in long discourses about inequalities in the sex stereotyping of boys and girls. And Thomas Jefferson drops little asides about "watering the tree of liberty with patriot blood" and related matters. It is a mix of *Ms. magazine* and Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* stuffed into the framework of what may or may not be the story of the Adams family. Such reverent skewing makes one long for the creative destruction of a domestic Kolko who might, for example, have written a script exposing John Adams's collusion with George III to have himself appointed governor of the united colonies.

**NEWS, EDUCATION, AND UPLIFT.** For the first and last time we watched Barbara Walters in her new post with ABC evening news. In a bright-eyed and earnest little homily she promised viewers she would not only be reporting the news, but also "explaining what it means for you in your everyday life." She said that she would, for example, illuminate the connection between the daily Dow-Jones averages and the prices we pay at the supermarket, and implied that her mission was making us feel better about the state of the world. Paul Samuelson or Milton Friedman, maybe, but is Barbara Walters going to demystify the stock market? There is something wrong when reporting the news is replaced by

the attraction of celebrities who care so very, very much about making us feel better. We will stick to the news on the other networks where the message is less overt.

**DON'T LET THEM EAT CAKE.** Recently we participated in a conference on world hunger attended mainly by church-related types. One bold soul proposed we should take seriously the scenario offered by Herman Kahn and associates in *The Next 200 Years (Morrow)*. That scenario, it may be remembered, is one in which we move rather rapidly to a global situation in which four times the world's present population would be living at roughly the equivalent of living standards prevailing in Western industrial societies today. The suggestion was derided as both absurd and undesirable. "Do you mean to say," the bold soul insisted, "that if it were possible environmentally and otherwise, it would not be a good thing for everyone in the world to live at the level that middle-class Americans do today?" That is precisely what at least some of the participants meant to say. "Middle-class Americans are victims of a competitive, consumer ethic." "They don't read books," added another. Yet another, "They are alienated and incapable of real community." Perish the thought the whole world should be like us. In a conference on world hunger it seemed curious that nobody considered that in such a middle-class world nobody would be hungry, certainly nobody would starve to death. It was a thought-provoking exchange. Is it possible that much talk about a more just global order is motored as much by contempt for the American achievement as by compassion for the poor? We would not like to think so. But the exchange does help explain why proposals such as Kahn's have a hard time getting attention. It is not that a more prosperous world for everyone—based upon market, technological and democratic expansion—is impossible or implausible, although it may be both. It is rather that such proposals violate the orthodoxy, now firmly established in some well-meaning circles, that the American model is intrinsically evil, or at least very bad for anyone other than Americans. Better spiritually elevated poverty than a prosperity in which people don't read books. Needless to say, the poor are not consulted about this choice.

**ANOTHER VISION.** The Nobel Prize-winning economist Wassily Leontief has been heading up a U.N. study commission on the world economic order. The report, issued last month, challenges the doomsday economics that have been fashionable since the "limits to growth" discussion got started a few years ago. Sponsored by the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the report charts a course of cooperation rather than confrontation and holds out the prospect of significantly narrowing the gap between the developed and poor nations by the year 2000. What makes the report politically viable is that it does not assume the gap will be narrowed

by everyone sharing the poverty through economic redistribution. Backed by the clout of Leontief and other distinguished scholars, the new report may signal a watershed in thinking through the problems of poverty and inequality. One hopes so.

**GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS.** In the liberal lexicon "multinational corporation" is usually a term of opprobrium. But now a problem is posed by reports that multinationals are increasingly withdrawing from Third World investment. European and American corporations operating in, for example, Indonesia, Brazil, and India are growing increasingly impatient of red tape, corruption, and the obstacles to "repatriating" profits. "Why should we put up with this when the real opportunities are in the developed countries?" asks the chairman of one large French concern. Those who cast the First World in the villain's role are torn between deploring the "exploitation" or the "abandonment" of the Third World by multinationals. Others continue to entertain the possibility of a more *mutually* beneficial relationship in an economically interdependent world. That is the idea behind the Carnegie Center for Transnational Studies, affiliated with the Council on Religion and International Affairs. Businessmen, economists, ethicists, and others interested in exploring alternatives to exploitation and abandonment are invited to write the director, Michael Sloan, at 170 East 64th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021.

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**INTELLIGENCE INSULTS** (and entirely unrelated to the above). By now we've read a rash of articles (and of manuscripts rejected by the editors) from people who got their personal files from the FBI and CIA under the Freedom of Information Act. The most common theme is that the files are dreadfully dull. The most common complaint from the persons involved is that their danger to the national security is greatly underestimated by the intelligence agencies. One who claims to have been a leading radical of the sixties takes umbrage at the FBI's conclusion that "he is suspected of radical sympathies." Another observes that the CIA, on the basis of a newspaper story, has him down as "giving at least one impassioned speech against U.S. policy." In fact, says our slighted friend, he gave hundreds of such speeches, all impassioned, and many amply reported. The CIA and FBI, he sadly concludes, "are nothing but third-rate clipping services." We are glad to hear it, since we had heard elsewhere that these agencies pose some kind of threat to Constitutional rights. The inference one may draw from this, perhaps, is that the suspicion of the Right and the vanity of the Left are combined in demanding a much more efficient intelligence community.

*Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.*