

as well as high concentrations of houses and other buildings. Moreover, the A-bomb attacks were needed not so much against Japan—already on the brink of surrender and no longer capable of mounting an effective counteroffensive—as to establish clearly America's post-war international position and strategic supremacy in the anticipated cold war setting. One tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is that this historically unprecedented devastation of human society stemmed from essentially experimental and political aims."

The ethical questions raised are the grim ones we must face and respond to today as we move relentlessly toward another such "justifiable" exercise. Can we learn from this experience? If so, what does it teach? The barbarism of the West? The racism of American society? The incapacity of mankind to recognize the terrible, inescapable doom hovering over us all in the awesome but comparatively tiny bodies of our nuclear weapons?

Auden wrote:

When Statesmen gravely say "We must be realistic",

The chances are they're weak and, therefore, pacifistic.

But when they speak of Principles, look out: perhaps

Their generals are already poring over maps.

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"Nuclear arms have become a mark of national power and pride."

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journalism are busy cranking out journalists whom departments of political science grandly ignore. Journalists themselves are notoriously shy about probing their own trade. All this, says Hess, is unfortunate; "journalists are great fun to study."

The Washington Reporters isn't much fun to read, though. It is devoid of character, incident, anecdote—all the qualities that can make books about the press a pleasure. Nor does it shed much light on the place of the press in the governing process. What the book provides is a wealth of survey information about the workings of one influential corner of American journalism, the Washington press corps.

Oddly enough, Hess's work is the first of its kind since Leo Rosten's pioneering 1937 study, *The Washington Correspondents*. Although Washington is vastly more important as a news center and the press corps has swollen in size, what Hess finds isn't substantially different from what Rosten found forty-five years earlier. Journalism still attracts the same personality types, and reporters go about their work in much the same ways, though changes in technology and corporate ownership may alter the system in the future. Washington reporters are still mostly generalists. Educated in the humanities, they are rarely intellectuals and are uncomfortable with abstraction. They are drawn to journalism—and Washington journalism especially—because it seems exciting.

This is perhaps the most important bias of the Washington press corps. It helps explain the impatience of most reporters with research and their preference for the Senate over the House, for the State Department over the regulatory agencies, for politics over management. Washington reporters, freer of editorial control than most reporters, generally cover what interests them—and what interests them is what is lively and exciting. They have few deep political beliefs. The lure of Washington has less to do with political ideology than with the excitement of being at the center of power and the summit of journalistic prestige and earning power. When reporters leave journalism—and a good many do—it is because the excitement has dimmed.

Within the world of Washington reporting there are, of course, important status distinctions. Hess marks out

an inner orbit of "influentials" made up of the television networks, the weekly newsmagazines, the wire services, and four newspapers (*Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Washington Star*, *Wall Street Journal*); a middle orbit made up of seven newspapers (among them the *Los Angeles Times* and *Christian Science Monitor*) and two chains; and an outer orbit that takes in everything else. Although positions shift, reporters know exactly where they are in the "solar system" of Washington news gathering.

Competition among reporters flourishes—for exclusive stories, for space in the newspaper or time on the air, and for status among peers. News work attracts competitive people, Hess notes, and reporters will invent competition if it doesn't exist. If the pressure of competition leads to abuses—witness the recent cases of Janet Cooke and Michael Daly—the situation can be even more dangerous for Washington reporters separated from the home office. There is often little control from editors and little response from readers and listeners. Washington reporters can become autonomous and isolated, associating with and writing for one another, while the common reader and plain fact drop from view. Moreover, the Washington press corps as a whole is white, male, Northeastern, well educated, and not young. If there is such a thing as an average Washington reporter and an average American, Hess concludes, "they do not look like each other"; or, as he puts it elsewhere, Washington news gathering is "an interaction among elites. One elite reports on another elite."

Hess ends the book by noting again that, because of relaxed editorial control, Washington reporters largely decide for themselves what is news and how it should be covered. If that is true, it is a sobering thought. Washington reporters, as Hess pictures them—pursuing the news that catches their interest, avoiding tedious investigation and research and seeking instead the bright personality and the lively story—aren't much concerned with ideas or ideology, have little sense of the country beyond the Potomac, and write mostly for the approval of peers. If Hess is right at all, the public need seems as little attended to in Washington journalism circles as elsewhere in American society. 

THE ETHIC OF DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM:

A MORAL REASSESSMENT

by Robert Benne

(Fortress Press; xi + 267 pp.; \$10.95 [paper])

Ernest H. Schell

Robert Benne's book is a refutation of Paul Tillich's assertion that "Socialism is the only possible economic system from the Christian point of view." Far from being unjust, capitalism is not only morally defensible, Benne argues, but in combination with a democratic polity is the optimal arrangement for realizing the promise of a Christian society. Those who dismiss the efficiency of the marketplace and the liberty of a pluralistic democracy, he warns, fall prey to the superficial moral appeal of utopian socialism that promises the benefits of modernization without its social costs. The Leviathan state that socialism entails is in the long run far more damaging to the body politic, more destructive of its essential spiritual tissue, than the democratic capitalist state could ever be.

In spite of the author's impatience with knee-jerk socialists, he is equally disdainful of libertarians who advocate limiting the state to the protection of property and the maintenance of public order and the national defense; his book is not an apology for the unregulated free market. Also, basing his position on the theology and ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr and the theory of justice of John Rawls, Benne acknowledges that his concern, like theirs, is with the distribution of property, not with the sources of production or the nature of property itself. Such a focus necessarily limits the book's scope. Take property, for instance. Proudhon, the nineteenth-century French socialist, while denouncing private property as "theft," supported it nevertheless as a countervailing power to the equally threatening power of the state. Benne, who takes a similar position with regard to countervailing power, dismisses the notion of property-as-theft, saying it is derived simply from the discredited labor theory of value. Moreover, he considers it irrelevant to his argument that past injustices in the distribution of property continue to influence its distribution. This ahistorical approach, combined with very weak generalizations about the international evolution