

# REVIEWS

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## **CIRCULATION OF NEWS IN THE THIRD WORLD: A STUDY OF ASIA**

**By Wilbur Schramm and L. Erwin Atwood**

(The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, distributed by the University of Washington Press; 352 pp.; \$25.00)

## **THE WORLD NEWS PRISM**

**by William A. Hachten**

**with the collaboration of Harva Hachten**

(Iowa State University Press; 133 pp.; \$8.95 [paper])

*Arnold Zeitlin*

I was the lone American reporter left in Dacca at the end of March, 1971. The Pakistani Army had forcibly whisked other foreign correspondents out of town in the back of a truck to prevent them from reporting the bloodbath that followed the military crackdown against the Awami League of Sheik Mujibur Rahman. As a result, I was the first to get out a dispatch reporting a death toll in Dacca in the thousands and the flight, after two nights of terror, of tens of thousands from the East Pakistan city that nine months later became the capital of independent Bangladesh.

Because the dispatch dealt with information the Pakistanis wanted suppressed, it was sent with some difficulty. When I flew from Dacca to Karachi in West Pakistan in the middle of the night, I was one step ahead of the military. My Karachi stringer, a veteran Pakistani reporter, advised me that my dispatch had preceded me in a report picked up in Karachi by the state news agency, The Associated Press of Pakistan.

Instead of transmitting the news to its subscribers, who were prohibited by law from directly receiving foreign news agency reports, APP immediately sent its copy to the presidential residence for the eyes only of General Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan, the martial law director. I didn't bother to undress that night. I rested wearily and fully clothed in my Karachi hotel room fully expecting Pakistani authorities to burst in and eject me from the country. The next morning *The Morning News*, a Karachi English-language daily, carried in a brief report about disturbances in Dacca a sharply edited version of my

dispatch. It had been boiled down to one line: "Arnold Zeitlin, a correspondent for The Associated Press of America, reported the Army was in full control of Dacca."

I knew then the government would not throw me out. In fact, it had me where it wanted me, backing Army claims to control. By cavalierly throwing out forty Western journalists from Dacca, leaving a news vacuum that their hostile Indian neighbors joyfully filled with rumor, the Pakistanis may have accelerated their loss of East Pakistan. But they certainly demonstrated that they had learned how to use the credibility of the Western press.

What Pakistan did then has become commonplace among governments today, particularly in the developing world and particularly among those who promote what has become known as the New World Information Order. By requiring world news agencies to distribute their news only through a state agency, the Pakistan Government controls the flow of information over and within its borders. Pakistan has sought membership in alternative agencies that are trying to crack the grip on world news distribution enjoyed by The Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, and Agence France Presse. These services are now frequently accused of misshaping, if not falsifying, news, particularly about the poor world. Safdar Ali Quereshi, for instance, who was the general manager of The Associated Press of Pakistan when my dispatch was served to Yahya Khan, now directs the Moslem News Agency sponsored by the Islamic Conference. For a de-

cade he has struggled to lift the fledgling agency from the mire of debates among members over such issues as whether to call the body of water separating Iran from the Arabian Peninsula the Arabian Gulf (which offends the Iranians) or the Persian Gulf (which offends the Arabs).

It is the New World Information Order these two books address. Both volumes were inspired by the very same muse: Mustapha Masmoudi. A former Tunisian information secretary, he represents his country at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. With broad accusations that international news services devote but 20 to 30 per cent of their reports to developing lands with three-quarters of the world population, and that what they cover distorts with a bias for negative news that often ridicules poor countries, he has made himself the articulate, influential Third World advocate of a New World Information Order. Masmoudi also has urged the media in the industrial world to carry more news from the poor nations and reporters to guard against prejudice and seek greater understanding of the countries they cover.

UNESCO has translated such complaints into the New World Information Order, seeking redress through such notions as licensing reporters (presented as a means to protect them), channeling news to international agencies only through easily controlled state agencies, and, in general, pitching politicians and civil servants into the business of journalism.

A New World Information Order may validly address problems of sharing satellites, frequencies, and circuits or seek ways to improve, deepen, accelerate, and promote news coverage through any medium and in any part of the world. But neither book faces the question of government intervention in the reporting of news. Schramm and Atwood assume, in fact, that news services developing in the Third World will be sponsored by governments. William A. Hachten, a journalism professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, alludes briefly to conflicting Western and Third World attitudes toward the role of government in news. He describes Third World complaints and offers suggestions, some general—"western

media should gather and report more news of the developing world..."—some more dangerous than the ill they were designed to cure, such as recommending that Western news organizations start their own Third World newspapers. "Such a course would be fraught with political risk," Hachten concedes, although "The World Paper," a newspaper supplement carried monthly by Third World publications on three continents, is edited in Boston.

Wilbur Schramm, a measurer of readership and listenership for a quarter-century, and L. Erwin Atwood, head of the Mass Communication Research Center at Southern Illinois University, cover the same ground and move a step beyond. They have tried to determine if Masmoudi's complaints have any foundation. They studied the flow and use of the copy of the four international news services for the week of December 4-11, 1977, in nineteen Far Eastern newspapers ranging geographically from *The Statesman of New Delhi* to *Dong-a Ilbo* of Seoul. Pleading funding problems, they measured readership in but one paper, *The Bulletin Today* of Manila.

Others, notably Robert L. Stevenson of the University of North Carolina, and Edward T. Pinch, have conducted similar studies that produced similar results. Schramm and Atwood conclude that the Western services provided their Asian subscribers, at least for that week, with more Asian news than they could print; and the newspapers, in turn, still printed more than their readers bothered to read. More than 50 per cent of agency news reports to Asian customers dealt with news of the developing world. Although they left unmeasured the quantity of Third World news flowing to the West, the authors concluded that statements demeaning the quantity of news of poor countries in Western reporting were "at the least extremely dubious, or simply incorrect." And they added: "There was greater richness available in the news than the readers of Asian dailies get to see. And by no stretch of reasoning or imagination can the blame for this be laid wholly upon the international news services."

But the authors seem to be so unaware of the political controls under which their specimen news-

papers operated that they undermine the credibility of their own conclusions. In seven countries representing fourteen newspapers, governments formally and informally control news content. Editors in Indonesia, Iran, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are not free to select news. Only in India, then emerging from Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency, and in Hong Kong did editors have freedom from government interference.

In reporting their readership survey, the authors describe *The Bulletin Today* as "one of the most respected newspapers in the Philippines." They neglected to point out that, under martial law, few Filipinos respected any newspapers permitted to publish; *Bulletin Today's* two rivals were owned and edited by relatives of Imelda Marcos, the nation's redoubtable First Lady; and its publisher, Swiss-born, Philippine-citizen Hans Menzi (not Menzel as spelled in the book) is a former aide-de-camp to President Ferdinand E. Marcos. As a result, the researchers appear to be remarkably ingenuous as they report how bewildered they were at the newspaper's low readership. Readers read 8 per cent of its news content, less than half the average indicated in 130 surveys in America. *The Bulletin Today* no more satisfied the interests of Philippine readers on the one day selected for the study—September 14, 1978—than *Pravda* reflected the Soviet Union.

Filipinos are intensely political. According to the survey, 25 per cent of readers, the highest single percentage, read what was categorized as "domestic political" news. But such news made up only 5 per cent of the paper's content. This can be explained in part by the fact that political news in the Philippines is almost totally government controlled. But "development news"—information associated with economics, finance, and development projects—is favored by the Philippine and other Third World governments. It is often supplied in quantity by the governments and is self-serving, making governments appear productive. Twenty-nine per cent of the *Bulletin Today* report was "development news." Six percent of its readers read it.

There's nothing new in the efforts of governments to control news.

Hachten recognizes such a tendency in his use of a quotation a century old from an editor of the *Times* of London: "The duty of the journalist is to present his readers not such things as statecraft would wish them to know, but the truth as near as he can attain it."

Government complaints about news coverage are not limited to the Third World, either. Caught in the crossfire between his secretary of state, Alexander Haig, and his then national security advisor, Richard Allen, Ronald Reagan suddenly noticed the world was watching...and he reacted to the press just as would the most manipulative of information commissars. "And I could appeal to your patriotism," Reagan told reporters to whom he was venting his anger over rumors of "absolutely no foundation," "because I tell you they're very destructive to our dealings worldwide..."

None of this is to insist that governments, politicians, civil servants, or ordinary citizens have no right to complain. They do, and should. The scope for improvement of news coverage, be it from a Boston neighborhood or an international summit, is infinite. The pressure of unhappy news consumers as an impetus for improvement is priceless. But whatever is wrong with foreign news coverage—or news coverage anywhere—it is not going to be helped by government intervention in the reporting and processing of news. Maybe, someday, someone will undertake a survey to prove that contention. [wv]

### **YELLOW RAIN: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE TERROR OF CHEMICAL WARFARE**

by Sterling Seagrave  
(M. Evans & Co.; 316 pp.; \$11.95)

Albert L. Huebner

At a press conference in Berlin last September, Secretary of State Alexander Haig charged that new agents of chemical warfare have been used in Southeast Asia, declaring, "We now have firm evidence of utilization of such weapons..." The "firm evidence" produced the next day by the State Department consisted of a