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When The New York Times Had Integrity

The New York Times accomplishments have ranged from admirable to deplorable. But no matter how questionable the “newspaper of record” can be, it’s always been esteemed by fashionable people.

A regrettable phase occurred in the early 1930s when most everyone from hairy intellectuals to society matrons admired Communism. A 1990’s FEE article outlined that the USSR in the 1930s had a persuasive lobby going on the East Coast. And the NYT published a series of articles about how wonderful full-on central planning was in Russia. In publishing glowing articles, the editors ignored the atrocity of deliberate famine.

Some 7 million Ukrainians perished in a tragedy called the Holodomor. Even farmers on the land starved, because Moscow confiscated the grain, the ultimate in class warfare.

But in 1932, news of the atrocity was stifled. Which was when Moscow-resident journalist, Walter Duranty, was awarded the Pulitzer for stories about how well things were going. The NYT thrived in glory, but both knew of the famine.

Blind admiration for central planning is still fashionable, but this article is about the NYT performing a service by bringing down a corrupt and authoritarian government.

Through the 1860s, Manhattan’s notorious political operator Boss Tweed rose to immense power and staggering personal wealth. In 1870 a carpenter made \$24 for each 60-hour week. That was \$1200 annually, or \$24,000 today.

As part of the new courthouse contract, a carpenter was paid \$4.9 million in today’s dollars for one month’s work. Tweed’s take?

In 1871, in knowing the NYT was investigating corruption Tweed offered the publisher, George Jones, \$5 million to end the crusade. Worth \$100 million today, but integrity turned down a fortune calculated in any century.

The paper’s break was obtaining the accounts that showed how Tweed was ripping off contracts for the courthouse.

Through unrelenting work, the scandal of Tammany Hall, as the Democratic political machine was called, was finally exposed in July 1871.

Public opinion needed to be aroused. To get through to different ethnic communities, for example, hundreds of thousands of pamphlets were published in German.

Contributing to the success, another formidable character was involved, the cartoonist Thomas Nast. He was with Harper's and as his drawings became more scathing of Tammany Hall, Tweed tried to divert him. With bribes up to \$500,000 in 1871 dollars in order to "study art in Europe", but Nast in his own words was determined "to put some of those fellows behind the bars".

Many of Tammany's supporter/victims couldn't read, which enhanced the impact of Nast's images. Apparently, Tweed shouted: "stop them damned pictures!". Indeed, through Democrat channels he threatened to boycott Harper's important textbook business.

Today's Democrats threaten law firms working to expose election fraud.

At the height of his reign, Tweed was the third largest landowner in Manhattan. He served on the boards of important companies as well as a term in the State Senate. But his real power was in controlling civic commissions.

Tweed encourage a riot, resulting in some 60 deaths and 150 injuries. The Tammany Hall political machine began to lose regard.

Tweed was convicted of stealing some \$25 million to \$45 million from New York City taxpayers. In 1877 the amount was estimated at \$200 million, in 1870s dollars.

Untiring investigations by The New York Times and Harper's brought one of America's biggest political scandals to justice. Being local it was minor compared to today's compulsion to trash the Constitution and the middle classes.

Going the other way, in the 1930s The New York Times was deplorable in its corrupt reporting of the centrally planned Soviet Union. Indeed, their man in Moscow was Walter Duranty who while knowing of the millions of deaths wrote articles denying the famine.

But not The Nation that described Duranty's reporting as "the most enlightened, dispassionate dispatches from a great nation in the making."

Showing how appealing garbage can be, in 1932 Duranty was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

And this seems to result from a certain mentality that considers central policymaking as always outstanding. In 1989 Tom Bethell in the National Review reported that leading economics textbooks celebrated the wonders of the Soviet Union's economy. Despite having no data, the assumption was that because it was a command economy it had to be good.

Ironical, because beginning in November 1989 with the tearing down of the Berlin Wall ordinary folk began to overwhelm Communist governments.

Why?

Because they could no longer suffer the hardships and personal restrictions of central planning without limits.

Interventionist textbooks were wrong.

Eventually, The NYT had second thoughts about Duranty. In 2003, the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association urged the Pulitzer Board to renew its inquiry into the scandal. Publisher Sulzberger said that Duranty's work "should have been recognized for what it was by his editors and by his Pulitzer judges seven decades ago."

In the 1870s, The New York Times and Harper's had integrity. In the 1930s the NYT in blindly celebrating authoritarian central planning got it tragically wrong. Very much later the newspaper suffered remorse and tried to correct its deliberate error.

Duranty still has his Pulitzer.

When reviewing political passions, it is best to have accurate terms and there is one from physics. The definition of an authoritarian system is "That which is not prohibited, is compulsory." Which elegantly describes everything from communism to schoolboards.

Lately, The New York Times is again uncritically promoting the latest fashions of control freaks. Authoritarian edicts cover any policy that prohibits or compels almost everyone's behavior. Those in power flaunt the double standard. Another pandemic influenza has been effectively gamed. However, controlling the temperature of the nearest planet is audacity without precedent.

It is time for today's versions of Boss Tweed, Walter Duranty and Tammany Hall to meet today's equivalents of Thomas Nast, George Jones as well as the rule of law.

Professionally run riots are profound policy disasters, and ordinary folk are attempting another reform.

Recent article on Duranty and the famine:

<https://expressdigest.com/how-war-reporter-walter-duranty-covered-up-a-kremlin-created-famine-that-killed-millions/>

Thomas Nast Cartoons:

