

said that in the wake of the Laura Foreman affair she was going through much anguish. Should she sleep with her reporters? Sometimes she wanted to, but felt she had to "draw the line" somewhere. The reporters, she added, were mostly unscrupulous about taking presents from her, in the form of the stories she gave them. Most of them wouldn't even give her receipts for the stories, saying they "did not want to get in trouble with the IRS."

"Of course they have no qualms about using my stories, once they've got them," she complained. "It just makes me feel used." In her department, she added, there was an informal rule that sources known to be personally attached to their reporters had to "declare their interest"—and there was a general honors system about accepting gifts. Most reporters felt that just by paying for lunch they had cleared their consciences, even though "the stories I give them are worth far more than a lousy hamburger." So far as she knew, only Steve Dunleavy had an iron rule against accepting any tips or stories. "He does the only honest, truly manly thing, and makes everything up."

Is All History Secret?

The way things are going they soon won't be able to give the weather reports without saying that the information is "based on secret documents acquired from the government under the Freedom of Information Act." And with the release this week of the FBI assassination files, it seems clear that the way to keep the press usefully and harmlessly occupied is to drown it in paper.

This brings me to a specific instance of the dangers in the paper avalanche: namely the "revelations" two weeks ago that the CIA knew of the great Soviet nuclear accident of 1957 and wilfully covered up the news. The saga indicates that the cult of intelligence in this country has probably gone far enough.

Critical Mass, a Nader subsidiary, announced with much fanfare on November 24 that it had extracted from the agency under a Freedom of Information Act suit a number of documents which "proved" there had been not one but two nuclear accidents in the Soviet Union—near the city of Kyshtym in the southern Ural mountains—between 1958 and 1961. One of these is alleged to have been caused, according to some of the documents, by the Soviets' detonation for experimental purposes of a 20-megaton nuclear device over a "mock village."

The reporters who dutifully recycled this "intelligence," including David Burnham of *The New York Times*, appeared to have been so impressed with the CIA documents they failed to spot a good deal of the material was questionable—particularly the "two-explosion" theory—or, as one former agency analyst who viewed some of the documents six weeks ago remarked, "rabbit shit."

For example, one report, quoted in the *Times* and elsewhere, is dated March 25, 1977, and cites a source whose name is deleted in the released documents. The source's report describes a trip he took through the area devastated by the accident in June 1961. His story is certainly vivid: "The land was empty, there were no villages, no towns, no people." But there was something curiously familiar about this account. It is, in fact, the text of a letter written to the *Jerusalem Post* and published in December of last year. The letter was signed by Professor Lev Tumerman, a Russian scientist now living in Israel, who wrote it to corroborate the original account of the accident as given by Zhores Medvedev, another exiled Russian scientist. By deleting the source, the CIA was presumably trying to conceal the obvious fact that it gets most of its "intelligence" from the press. Tumerman's account of his drive was in fact quoted extensively outside Israel last year, but nobody paid it much attention, presumably because he was not a CIA source.



This tremendous effort by the "Post" shook the entire city Monday. Many predicted that Sam's other natural functions would be given similar prominence on succeeding days. Down at the "Post," wags were suggesting that the photograph was in fact a comment on the Barnes headline at the foot of the page. But connoisseurs claim that the "Post"'s headline for last Friday (DON'T TURN OFF MY/MOMMY'S LIFE MACHINE; I WANT MY BROTHER / TO BE BORN . . .) was superior in rhythmic complexity, and indeed staffers spent the day setting the headline to music and singing it around the office. Anyway, "Sam Sleeps" tends to prove the point that popular journalism these days is really an exercise in high camp. They should hire Andy Warhol forthwith. He knew the aesthetic appeal of sleep. There is, of course, the problem of how the "Post" got the picture subsequently sold to AP. There seem to be some worries about the invasion of Berkowitz's privacy. But as he has the same status as an ape in a zoo, I don't suppose anyone cares too much about that.

Also reproduced was the assertion that there had been two accidents, based on the fact that in some of the CIA reports the "spies" had got the date wrong, leading journalists, heedless of the possibility of error in the documents, to postulate the "two explosion" theory.

The counter-productive aspect of these press reports on the CIA documents is that they miss the most important point of the whole story. When Medvedev originally broke the story in November 1976, he quoted evidence from fellow Russian scientists that the explosion had been caused by buried nuclear waste. Because of this, nuclear-power authorities in Britain and elsewhere hastened to dismiss Medvedev's assertions as rubbish. We have heard from the intelligence community before on this matter. Shortly after Medvedev's revelations, *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* published authoritative articles quoting "intelligence sources" of the highest calibre to the effect that it was not a buried waste explosion but a reactor melt-down (*L.A. Times*) or rupture of storage tanks by a distant earthquake (*Washington Post*). These latest documents would appear to be in the same tradition of misinformation.

The genesis of the *Critical Mass* scoop also tells us something about Freedom-of-Information-Act journalism. Some of these documents were obtained a year ago by the National Resources Defense Council. The NRDC passed them to my brother Andrew, who was making a television film for Granada TV in England on the Soviet accident. He in turn sent them to Richard Pollock of *Critical Mass* last August and asked him to refile for more documents, a process which Pollock somewhat tardily put in motion. He eventually obtained the additional documents and released them without checking with my brother. Pollock had better take care. The next time his request is filled he might be sent this story with his name blotted out and his actions ascribed to a "CIA source."

One final thought. It is these days chic to announce that stories are based on documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. But such documents—certainly in the case of the nuclear file—omit something very important: namely analysis by the relevant CIA officer of the raw data assembled in the file. Thus, one has no way of telling what the agency really thought of the hypotheses released to the press.

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