

# Matter of Fact . . . . .

By Joseph Alsop

## Schlesinger's Silly Book *P of 11/16/67*

AN EXTREMELY clever man, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., has just published an extremely silly book about Vietnam. Not all the book's contents are all that silly, to be sure. Here and there, Schlesinger imitates the lady in the "Rosciad," who:



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"N e e r blushed un- less in spreading vice's snares, . . .

"She blundered on some virtue unawares." . . . . .

"The Bitter Heritage" is a silly book, in fact, simply because any bits of sense it may contain have been blundered upon, unawares.

In knowledge of Asia, Schlesinger compares with Professor Hans J. Morgenthau—a far from flattering comparison. He is no better off with respect to Vietnam, with which he had nothing whatever to do, by President Kennedy's own decision, during all his years in the White House.

Schlesinger's judgments on Vietnam are exclusively based upon secondary sources, many of them dubious, and all of them examined in the light of Schlesinger's strong and uninformed preconceptions. A book with such credentials is no more than a piece of partisan pamphleteering, in this case deceptively dressed up as a serious intellectual production.

On the book itself, therefore, only one footnote is needed. As might be expected, since the same feature appears in his "Thousand Days," Schlesinger grossly understates the active role played by President Kennedy in all the events and decisions that led on, almost inexorably, to the present stage of the Vietnamese war.

THIS IS PART of the attempt to transform President Kennedy, posthumously and by suppression of the real facts, into another Adlai Stevenson. The President would have resented

nothing more.

Rightly or wrongly, he had a very low opinion of the Stevensonian world-view; and for this very reason, in his own intimate circle, Kennedy frequently poked cruel fun at Stevenson.

In the Kennedy years, members of the Stevenson clique in the Administration—notably Professor J. Kenneth Galbraith—more than once attempted to inject themselves into Vietnamese policy-making. These attempts were sternly though politely repelled.

If the President had lived, moreover, it is certain that

his chief Vietnamese advisers would have been Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and McGeorge Bundy—precisely the same men who chiefly influenced President Johnson when he made his key decisions.

THIS FOOTNOTE is far less important, however, than the real question raised by Schlesinger's book. Divide the American intellectual community into the minority who really know something about Asia, and the majority who know little or nothing of Asian history, Asian society and Asian problems. You will then find that nearly every one of the President's more articulate critics on Vietnam come from the second group.

Among the critics, the vast majority have never even set foot on Asian soil, except, perhaps, for a sojourn, short or long, in beloved India. The question therefore is whether these eminent and eloquent persons are not being a bit presumptuous, not to mention a bit pretentious, to advise the country so loudly and persistently on a subject about which they know so little.

Their ignorance is more than once unintentionally illustrated by Schlesinger, for example by an approvingly quoted statement of an especially eminent Johnson-

critic: "There is not a single independent state . . . in Asia which follows our lead." The flat contrary happens to be the case.

THE MOST LEFTWING and probably the ablest independent Asian leader, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, publicly gives thanks for the U.S. effort in Vietnam in an admirable article by Robert Shaplen in this week's "New Yorker." To be sure, the leaders of beloved India have never been able to cure their propensity for pious public cant on Vietnam or any other subject. But anyone who has done his homework knows that in private, even the Indian leaders largely share the view of Lee Kuan Yew, as do just about all the other leaders of independent Asia.

That is one half of the question. The other half concerns the minority of the American intellectual community who really know something about Asia. Here you discover the phenomenon that so sadly surprised Sen. J. William Fulbright, when poorly informed as usual, he called for testimony before his committee from serious Asianists like John Fairbank of Harvard and Lucian Pye of MIT. He got what he did not want to hear, and was publicly enraged.

The academic community

would naturally be the most critical of Mr. Johnson; and all the academic Asianists naturally criticize this or that detail of execution of the President's policy. But the vastly more important fact remains that nine out of ten of the serious Asian scholars in our universities support both the principles and objectives of the President's policy, as Sen. Fulbright discovered.

You might suppose that this fact would impress the President's critics. You might even suppose that weight would also be given to the unanimous view of the quite outstanding corps of Asianists and sinologues in the U.S. Government. But you would be wrong. Ignorance, if not blissful, is at least complacent and eternally articulate.

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