

Editor's report

Angles in
the news

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NEW YORK — There were two unconnected, non-headlined stories this week which struck me as commentable (if that's a word) here today. One involves that now well-known Washington character, Sen. Sam Ervin, while the other concerns the faceless masters of Marxism in the Kremlin who are supposed to be cooperating with us in the spirit of detente.



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Both stories are noteworthy for what they reveal, but the first one has the added attraction of being something of a mystery story. It started, for me, when I was looking through a copy of the New York Daily News of last Tuesday. There, on Page 6, was a picture of Big Sam and another man. The caption below it said:

"Sen. Sam Ervin Jr. and Sen. Howard M. Metzenbaum leave Severance Hall, Cleveland, on Sunday

after speech by Ervin. Ervin said the Watergate investigation did not indicate to him that President Nixon had committed an impeachable offense."

To me that was pretty startling news. Big Sam, after

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all, is the Bible-quoting sage from North Carolina who presided over the Senate Watergate hearings and delighted anti-Nixonites with his pointed sermonettes on the evils of sin and power in high places. And here he was declaring in summation that impeachment is unwarranted.

Real front page stuff. Right?

A real break for the President in his desperate battle against political enemies determined to topple him. Right?

Certainly as important as the headline stories when Rep. Wilbur Mills predicted that Nixon would be forced to resign over undisclosed tax trouble. Right?

Wrong. Almost a thousand percent wrong. No New York newspaper carried the Ervin bombshell on the front page. A careful search of editions for several days, in fact, disclosed no stories at all in any other New York paper — unless they had been buried some place in want-ad size and thus defied detection.

To a life-long newspaperman, the absence of attention to the Ervin declaration was all but incredible. A check with United Press International and the Associated Press showed both had covered the extemporaneous speech. Here, for the record, is the UPI night lead on the story, sent on Monday, March 11:

"Cleveland (UPI) — No evidence was produced in the Senate Watergate hearings to support impeachment of President Nixon, Watergate Committee Chairman Sen. Sam Ervin (D.-N.C.) said Sunday.

"I think this is one section of the Constitution on which Dick Nixon and I agree," he said."

So the mystery of the all-but-lost-story remains. You can't charge that there was any kind of deliberate plot to kill it. It could have been lost in the shuffle, as many extemporaneous Sunday night speeches are. Remember that the picture in the Daily News didn't appear until Tuesday.

On the other hand, it certainly is no secret that many members of the press and electronic media, including editors, have it in for Dick Nixon. He is quite right in charging that their hostility has produced a widespread overplaying of anything unfavorable to him, and vice versa.

You will have to draw your own conclusions as to what happened to the Ervin story and why it was so generally ignored.

I have done so — and on the evidence before me must cast my vote for impeachment of the news media.

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THE OTHER STORY which got my goat this week told how the Soviet Union, in Arabic broadcasts throughout the Middle East, were hammering away at one central theme — do not give in to American pressure to lift the oil embargo. The broadcast barrage, of course, was intended to influence the Arab leaders who were then meeting to consider ending the oil cut-off.

As monitored in London, according to the UPI, one such broadcast typically underscored the fact that the embargo was imposed primarily to force Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands. It continued:

"If today some Arab leaders are ready to surrender in the face of American imperialist pressure and lift the ban on oil before those demands are fulfilled, they are challenging the whole Arab world and the progressive forces of the whole world, which insist on the continued use of the oil weapon."

How's that as a sample of communist-type detente in action — this free swing at the United States and all its allies?

How's that as an example of Moscow's professed desire to promote a peaceful settlement of Mideast differences?

All this business about detente has been bugging me for a long time. Up to now I have mostly laid off commenting in order to help the Administration in its idealistic attempts to shape a better world.

But idealism is not synonymous with — and therefore no substitute, unhappily, for — realism.

Just as it takes two to tango so it takes two nations to make detente work. The trouble with trying this particular dance with the Russian Bear is that the bear isn't really trying to cooperate at all. Detente has largely been an excuse to get claws deeper into our back while stepping all over our good intentions.

The prime purpose of detente was to substitute negotiation for confrontation. Even in this it has hardly succeeded. When the crunch came in the recent Mideast warfare, Russian military intervention on the Arab side was averted only when Moscow was confronted with a retaliatory full military alert by the U.S. President Nixon himself called it the most dangerous showdown since the Cuban missile crisis.

If Russia is really serious about detente and avoiding confrontations, how come it keeps desperately building up its massive naval and atomic missile power?

If it is really serious about reducing military forces in Europe, how come it has added 9000 tanks and 4000 personnel carriers to its forces there in the past three years?

As for the second round of the SALT talks — up to now all they have been is just talks and no strategic arms limitation action. Maybe it's just as well because we took a licking in the first round.

Russia's lack of real cooperation with the U.S. can be documented almost endlessly. Meanwhile the Communists have been playing us for suckers in every way possible — from our great grain giveaway last year to their taping of all manner of priceless American know-how in science and industry. Negotiations haven't replaced confrontation nearly so much as appeasement.

The last statesman who sought to appease a growing and threatening world power was Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of Great Britain some 35 years ago. Adolf Hitler was unimpressed and unappeased.

It's a chilling thought — but we had better keep it in mind. always.