

Chips Off the New Herblock

IN WASHINGTON, D.C., where Herblock's cartoons have been appearing in the *Post* since 1946, many Republicans and Democrats in high places turn to Herblock before they reach for their first cup of coffee—even though they realize they may then be unable to drink said coffee.

The man who signs himself "Herblock" and is responsible for daily explosions (either of anger or mirth) among readers of more than 200 newspapers around the world is Herbert L. Block, a native of Chicago, where his first cartoons appeared in the *Daily News* in 1929. Since then he has won just about every award around, including two Pulitzer prizes.

The cartoons on these two pages are taken from his fourth book, *Straight Herblock* (Simon and Schuster, 224 pp., \$5.95). In addition to 456 cartoons from his work of the past six years, it contains a hitherto unpublished 37,000-word commentary that proves Herblock as perceptive and incisive a writer as he is a cartoonist. Even the chapter titles tend to stimulate the smile muscles. These cartoons, for instance, were taken from those called: "Self-Government for Americans!" "Readin' and Riotin' . . .," "Goldwaterland," "Frontier Town," "Rich Man, Poor Man. . .," and "Economics and All That Stuff."
—HELEN NELSON.



"As I was saying, a test-ban agreement might have resulted in a fatal gap."



The Good Earth



Animal Farm.



"We can't burden our children with deficit spending."



"It's all right to seat them. They're not Americans."

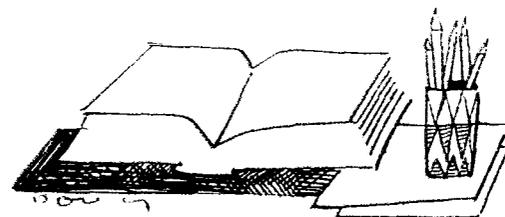


"Now has everyone got one of these little figures and a set of pins?"



"Careful you don't set the whole dormitory on fire."

A LOSS FOR WORDS



By MARIO PEI

TWO VOICES are raised throughout the land with the same frequency and insistence as that of the Turtle. One is the voice of the Advocates of Usage, the other that of the Custodians of the Language.

The first, be their name Philip Gove, Bergen Evans, or any of a dozen others, tell us that language is what people speak, not what someone thinks they ought to speak. They are willing to distinguish between what they call "standard" and "substandard" usage, but with the corollary that at any time, and under almost any set of circumstances, the substandard may turn into the standard. Without actually saying so in so many words, they hold that language should be subjected to a sort of "democratic" process similar to the one that prevails in our political life. If enough people say a certain thing a certain way, that is the way to say it (not, however, the "right" way, because "right" and "wrong" do not apply to language). Language is forever changing, and who are we to hold it back?

The Custodians of the Language range all the way from grammarians like the Fowlers to educators like Jacques Barzun and writers like Dwight Macdonald. They hold that there is a right and a wrong way of expressing yourself,

and that the right way should be prescribed by works of a certain description, chief among them the dictionaries of the language.

The most recent clash between the two tendencies came with the appearance of Merriam-Webster's Third International Dictionary in 1961. This new edition, in many ways admirably complete and up to date, had been compiled by workers of the Advocates of Usage school.

The new version of the book that many Americans revere as the language's Bible differed from earlier versions in many particulars. It did not merely list, with what seemed at first glance remarkable completeness, all of the language's neologisms, colloquialisms, vulgarisms, and substandard forms, illustrating their use with quotes from speakers and writers as often living as dead, and from all walks of life. It also removed from most of these entries such telltale descriptions as "slang," "vulgarism," "colloquialism," even the new and euphemistic "substandard." Many words that had appeared in earlier dictionaries, but always with a warning, were now dispensed to the seeker after linguistic knowledge as coin of the realm on a par with words and expressions sanctified by the literary and spoken usage of the more educated classes.

This constituted the main bone of con-

tention and the chief source of criticism in a controversy that raged for months in newspapers, magazines, book review sections, and even on radio and television stations across the country. It was not that the critics objected to the inclusion of the incriminated words. They could hardly have done so, in view of the dictionary's accepted function as a record of the living language. What they expected, and missed, were the customary condemnatory labels, the descriptions of certain words or expressions as lower-class slang, or rank vulgarisms, or even mild colloquialisms. How would a schoolboy, they argued, be able to tell whether a certain word he was in the habit of using on the sports field or in the locker room was fit to include in his English composition? How would the writer, in doubt about the correctness of a certain spelling, be able to decide, if that spelling, though born of etymological ignorance or even of semi-literacy, were given as a legitimate variant of another, more legitimate form?

THERE was far more to the controversy than met the eye, for the battle was not merely over language. It was over a whole philosophy of life. Should there be a directing class, qualified as such by reason of intellect, education, and general culture, or should there be unbridled democracy, with a nose-counting process to determine what was good and what was bad?

It was argued that no matter how big a majority says that two and two make five, the undying truth is still that two and two make four. It was replied that language is not mathematics, a statement of principles that lie outside of and beyond man, but an instrument fashioned by mankind itself for mankind's own use, and subject to whatever changes its makers and users wish to make, even to the point of degradation rather than enhancement. It was also pointed out that whereas an error in a field like mathematics, medicine, or engineering might lead to such dire consequences as the destruction of a multimillion-dollar rocket, the death of the patient, or the fall of a railroad bridge, no such drastic outcomes could attend "errors" in speech or writing. At the worst, you might not be invited to tea again. But the opposition was equally prompt to point to historical incidents in which ignorance, misuse, or incomprehension of language had led to rather serious results, though

HALF OF THE TOP California incoming college freshmen flunk an English composition test, forcing the University of California to give "bone-head English" to almost 5,000 students each year.

In revealing the startling figures yesterday, Dr. Edward W. Strong, Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, said: "These kids have been through elementary and high school. Presumably they should have command of their mother tongue—but they don't. I'll bet that you find the problem on every campus in the country, and it goes right on into graduate school."

The University of California, with its 72,500 students spread across the state on seven campuses, admitted 9,000 freshmen this year. The state university takes only the top one-eighth of the state's high school graduates, and requires that all students pass the three-hour English test before graduation except for a few who are exempt.

The test consists of a two-hour essay, with a choice of ten subjects, plus one hour of multiple-choice questions.

In an interview with visiting education writers, Dr. Strong said the composition flunking figure has not changed over the years "despite the revolution in the classroom. Students are better prepared in science and mathematics—but not in English. We have some students coming here who have had calculus and other advanced mathematics. But they can't write."

—TERRY FERRER, Education Editor, New York *Herald Tribune*.