

Sept. 22, 1980

THE

One Dollar

NEW YORKER



Sempé.



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

IT is often said that the technique of nonviolence used by Mahatma Gandhi in India's struggle for independence could never have been successful if the adversary had been a determined totalitarian regime rather than constitutional England. But now without firing a shot, and without any threats of violence, Polish workers have—for the time being, at least—successfully defied the Polish state and the Soviet Union, both of which *are* totalitarian, and won the right to set up trade unions that are independent of the Communist regime. This victory, though it falls far short of Polish independence from Soviet rule, is of great historical importance, for it establishes and legitimizes a rival center of power in a system in which a state monopoly on power is fundamental, both in theory and in practice. A comparable event in the religious sphere would be an acknowledgment by the Catholic Church that in some matters the Protestants had better access to religious truth. The workers in Poland are now formally permitted to set up only what are called trade unions, but the very logic of the situation forces those unions into a political role. Under capitalism, individual unions ordinarily strike against individual employers or, at most, against individual industries. Under Communism, where all the people ordinarily have a single employer, the state, strikes will be against that one employer, and, to be fully effective, must be widespread strikes, of the kind recently organized by the Polish workers. And strikes of that kind are in their nature political. Moreover, in a Marxist state, where economics is deemed to be at the very heart of politics, no independent center of economic power can be anything but political. At first glance, one is tempted to regard the

peaceful methods of the Polish workers as a new form of passive resistance. But nonviolence and passivity are not the same. It is true that from an economic point of view widespread strikes are a form of passivity, since workers quit their jobs and turn their factories and shipyards into vast "unproductive" meeting halls. However, this economic inaction is at the same time political action—and political action in one of its purest and most powerful forms. You might say that in Poland a half-million or so workers took two weeks off from their jobs in order to pour their energies into the political transformation of their nation. They kept away from the arena of violence, where they were hopelessly overmatched by the state, and joined battle on the ground of public opinion, where the state was pitifully weak. Before they were done, they had worked a chemical change in the allegiance of the people which military force was apparently powerless to reverse. By a stroke of imagination, they simply skipped over the stage of violence and began to deal with their government as though the battles on the streets had already been won.

No doubt a number of fortuitous circumstances, including the Soviet Union's preoccupation with Afghanistan, contributed to the miracle in Poland. It is notable, however, that another rebellion in recent memory—the one in Iran—was also carried out in the face of overwhelming military force with almost no recourse to violence, although with results depressingly different from those in

Poland; ironically, the nonviolent action in Iran brought to power a regime that sanctifies violence. The two different outcomes only go to show that nonviolent action, like any other powerful force, can be used to attain either good or evil ends. Yet in both rebellions this new means, at least, was not evil. And, on balance, it seems encouraging that, in our world, there are forces abroad that from time to time can prevail over the tanks and machine guns.

Book

MR. SIDNEY SHIFF, the ebullient new publisher of the Limited Editions Club, telephoned us one morning not long ago: "It's here," he said. "You've got to see it. Come on over. It's here on my desk in front of me."

We knew that Mr. Shiff was talking about the Club's limited edition of the late Rachel Carson's "The Sea Around Us," because he had been keeping us posted since early May on the book's progress through the production process. The Limited Editions Club was founded fifty-one years ago by the late George Macy and has been publishing fine illustrated books, mostly classics, for a limited list of member-subscribers ever since. Because no more than two thousand copies are printed, and there is nothing to membership except an obligation to buy a copy of each book, no more than two thousand people can belong. The price of a Club book, which, like the price of everything else, is higher than it used to be, has risen from ten dollars to sixty dollars, New York State sales tax not included. Yet most of the five hundred and thirty-four volumes that the Club has published are worth considerably more, in mint condition, than they cost originally, even after a correction for the dollar's inflation. That explains, if





"But surely, Jennifer, my steadfast support of the E.R.A. counts for something."

only in part, why for years the Club's membership was full, with a roster of applicants waiting for admission. Some of its most sought-after volumes, like James Joyce's "Ulysses" illustrated by Henri Matisse and Aristophanes' "Lysistrata" illustrated by Pablo Picasso, are worth from twelve hundred to two thousand dollars, if a copy is to be found at all. For that matter, the third book in the current series—Isaac Bashevis Singer's "Two Tales," designed by Bruce Campbell and illustrated by Raphael Soyer—is said to be worth about a hundred dollars, even though it was published only a few months ago. Each copy of a Club book has a colophon page at the back bearing its number and the signature of the artist, the author, or the designer, along with certification of the exact number of copies produced. Shiff brushes aside the idea that the members are merely investors in collectibles. Most of them, he argues, admire well-made, illustrated books, and quite a few appreciate the elements involved in their production—the book design, the type design, the typesetting, the letterpress printing, the paper, the

binding, the fine arts. They are looking forward not to selling their books but to holding them in their hands, admiring them, and reading them.

After Macy died, in 1956, his widow, Helen Macy, ran the Club until 1974, when she retired. By 1978, the Club had lost three-quarters of its members and was sliding into bankruptcy. In May of that year, Shiff organized a small group of fellow-bibliophiles and, with them, took responsibility for the Club's debts and set about the difficult task of winning back members or finding new ones. Shiff, who was fifty-four then, had considered himself a semi-retired Wall Street broker, but he soon found he was working full time as a publisher-promoter of fine books, or, as he describes it, "fighting the good fight."

We went right over to the Club's office, in the rear corner of the fifth floor of the Fred F. French Building, on Fifth Avenue at Forty-fifth Street. Shiff was standing behind a large desk in front of a wall of fine books and talking animatedly on the telephone. He looked tanned and fit, like a man just back from a vacation. He is tall

and thin, a jogger who remembers lunchtime Martinis with fondness, and he has a long, thin nose and wavy black hair. He was wearing a dark-gray summer suit. Shiff talks in fast bursts of enthusiasm, smiling, and then he pauses, looking a trifle doubtful, as if wondering whether his enthusiasm has been excessive. He motioned to a chair in front of his desk, cupped his hand over the telephone mouthpiece, and whispered to us that he would be finished in a second. While Shiff continued with his call, we studied the top of his desk—which was slightly cluttered—looking for "The Sea Around Us." It was there, in a manner of speaking. Its two hundred and eighty-four pages of text, unbound, were stacked in a neat pile. (We knew from our advance briefings that the creamy paper, six and three-quarters inches wide and nine and three-eighths inches deep, with an eggshell finish, had been made specially for the book by the Mohawk Paper Mills, in Cohoes, New York, and that, being acid-free, it ought to last practically forever. We also knew that the sparkling typeface, which had been chosen by the book's designer, Philip Grushkin, was thirteen-point Van Dyck with two points of leading and had been designed by one of the greatest of the seventeenth-century Dutch typefounders, Christophel Van Dyck. Its thick and thin strokes are sharply contrasting, its serifs finely bracketed, and its ascenders so tall that they rise above the tops of its capital letters—the whole offering an effect of extraordinary brilliance and clarity. Grushkin's choice of type for Miss Carson's titles and part numerals was Eric Gill's Perpetua, which was designed about 1930 by the English sculptor and woodcut artist, and is admired for its elegance.) Beside the stack of pages were proofs of the illustrations: color photographs by Alfred Eisenstaedt, who is now eighty-one years old—three glorious two-page spreads, and a splendid one-page portrait of Miss Carson sitting on a rock beside a Maine stream, oblivious of an army of flies that have settled on her pleated skirt. That is to be the frontispiece. For the volume's endpapers, there were two closeups, precise and mysterious, of seaweed, sand, starfish, and rocks. A dummy of the book, with blank pages—a big thing bound in heavy deep-sea-blue buckram, with a matching slipcase—sat beside the photograph proofs.

Shiff finished his call, hung up, and

smiled a broad smile. "It's beautiful, isn't it?" he said. "We are all very proud of it. This is the fourth book the Club has done since I came aboard—the fourth volume of the twelve volumes in the Forty-fifth Series—and I'll be surprised if the members don't love it. We expect it back from the binders any day now. It's being bound in Fairfield, New Jersey, by A. Horowitz & Sons. And what a great book! A true twentieth-century classic. Oxford published the first edition in July, 1951. By November, it was at the top of the best-seller list, and it stayed on the list for eighty-six weeks. It won the National Book Award and the John Burroughs Medal. It has been translated into at least thirty-two languages. And its success enabled Rachel Carson to retire from the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior and write full time, with the result that we also have 'The Edge of the Sea' and, even more important, 'Silent Spring.' If everything goes well, the members should be getting 'The Sea Around Us' within a few weeks.

"People sometimes say to me, 'What right do you have to be doing this?' They think it's pure fun—morning, noon, and night. I say to them, 'I haven't any right. The challenge came along, and I was ill equipped to do anything about it.' I got my master's degree from Columbia in public law and government. I had a small investment business down in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I ran for Congress there, in 1956. Didn't get elected. I moved to New York City, worked on Wall Street, made some money. Then I took a few years off to work on community projects, if that's the right word. I helped start the Small Business Development Opportunity Centers, which were part of the Anti-Poverty Program. I haven't any right, but my answer is 'Somebody had to put his finger in the dike.'

"Just as I had got myself involved up to my neck—in January, 1979, that was—we found a young man, Donald Sigovich, with marvellous credentials, who knew everything about the technical side. He loves fine books. He was a member when he was a student at the Rochester Institute of Technology, spending money he should have used to eat, and he had worked for two of the best presses—the Stinehour Press, in Vermont, and the Meriden Gravure Company, in Connecticut. He became our head of production. George Macy's great forte was his ability to persuade

wonderful artists to do the illustrations by letting them do the books they loved. We want to do the same. That wedding between text and illustration, because the artist is really involved, has been the Club's claim to fame. Soyer is a good friend of Singer's. He was eager to do the series of oil paintings for 'A Gentleman from Cracow' and 'The Mirror'—the 'Two Tales.' We asked Robert Kipness what his favorite book was. He said that when he was a student he walked around with a battered paperback volume of Rilke's poetry in his hip pocket. He loves Rilke, and he is going to do Rilke's 'Selected Poems' for us, in the C. F. MacIntyre translation. We got Eisenstaedt the same way. The Club had been thinking for a long time about doing Rachel Carson's first book, 'Under the Sea Wind.' I was up on the Vineyard, and I heard Eisenstaedt give a lecture at the Edgartown Methodist church. I knew he had been a great friend of Carson's, so I called him up and asked him if he'd do the book. He was excited by

the idea, but before long he said, 'You know, the book really should be "The Sea Around Us."'

"Good things are happening, and that is what life is all about, isn't it? We are at least part of the way back. The membership has doubled in a year and a half. I run scared, because I have never been able to function any other way, but I am telling myself that it is all worthwhile. I feel that doing good—whatever the field—benefits the whole society. And doing good books . . ." We could almost hear Shiff telling himself to take it easy. "Doing good books," he said, "seems like a reasonable starting point."

Pleasures and Palaces

MOROSE: In a large ballroom where some damage had been done—tables no longer neat, promotional material in disarray—scores and scores of people with a history in the business of rock and roll listened with little attention to the unfolding of the *Billboard Magazine* Sixth Internation-



"For heaven's sake, Melvin, why don't you pull into a filling station and find out where the hell we are!"