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P-Stone, I.F.
I.F. Stone's Weekly

THE PRESS

The Old New Lefty

The owlish little man minces few words. To Isidor Feinstein Stone, Richard Nixon is a "banal and shallow man," and Defense Secretary Melvin Laird "Washington's biggest liar since John Foster Dulles." As for John Mitchell: "Nothing is more dangerous than weak men who think they are tough guys."

Such harsh judgments pour forth from a four-page sheet titled *I.F. Stone's Bi-Weekly* and from a new book, *Polemics and Prophecies 1967-1970* (Random House; $10), published this week. The book is a collection of Izzy Stone's articles and essays, including such intense images as President Johnson paying a final visit to Capitol Hill "for a last boast-in and sob-in among his old cronies, those aged pygmies in aspic."

Naturally, Stone has been labeled a maverick, muckraker, Cassandra, curmudgeon, gadfly and guerrilla. All of which are pretty respectable terms these days. At 63, "I've graduated from being a pariah to a character," Stone says with a kind of inverse pride. "If I last long enough, I'll have a certain amount of credibility and weight." Politically, he considers himself to be just about what a leading adversary, Spiro Agnew, says he is: a well-ripened radic-lib. "I was a New Lefty before there was a New Left," he brags.

White Man's Burden. Of would-be bombers, Stone says, "Some are lunatics. I don't believe in salvation by cataclysm." His own niece, Kathy Boudin, is still being sought in connection with the underground bomb factory in New York's Greenwich Village that blew up last year. But Stone insists that Kathy is "levelheaded." He opposes kidnaping. "Sooner or later," he writes in the current *Bi-Weekly*, "some far-out group in this country is going to try it. When they do, it's going to set back the whole peace movement, just as the Wisconsin bombing set back the student movement."

Peace has been a Stone preoccupation for years. The latest *Bi-Weekly* notes archly that little-noticed congressional hearings reveal that $1.3 billion in Food for Peace funds has been used for military purposes in the past 17 years. That sets Stone off against military assistance: "It encourages the effort to confront political and economic problems with force. It exacerbates economic distress by imposing the burden of large armies, and intensifies rebellion by repression." He scorns military-assistance teams trained specially to get involved in the life of the country where they are stationed: "This is a distant echo of the white man's burden, of our smug belief we can govern other people's lives better than they can."

Fleabite Paper. In the heady '30s, Stone belonged to the Socialist Party. He insists, "I never was a Communist. But I was a Popular Fronter. I was then and I am now. I'd be prepared to join with anyone on the left, including the Communists, in the struggle against fascism." He started his sheet in 1953 after serving successively on such sinking leftist ships as New York's *PM*, and the *Star* and *Compass*. Deafness (subsequently cured by surgery) made it difficult for him to get much out of press conferences, so he turned to reading transcripts, looking for important items other reporters missed. Borrowing from Galsworthy, Stone calls them "significant trifles." Basic to the *Bi-Weekly* are the overlooked or understressed statements of public figures, the molehills that Stone reveals as mountains. Currently the *Bi-Weekly* is warning against voluntary repatriation plans for Viet Nam prisoners, noting that the "voluntary" qualifier produced a dispute in Korea that held up a settlement "by 18 months and 140,000 casualties."

Stone is often out of step with the old left, the new left and just plain liberals. He defended the Warren Commission Report, wrote a scathing report on Russia after a visit there in 1956, and lost Golda Meir's friendship by criticizing Israel's "callous attitude" toward Arab refugees and calling for reconciliation because "Israel's future depends on it." Overall, he feels "more loved than unloved." Loved or not, he is increasingly read. Circulation has climbed to a healthy and profitable 74,000, and the *Bi-Weekly* is included in a digest of 25 magazines that is regularly prepared for the President.

It was *I.F. Stone's Weekly* until 1968, when the fortnightly format was forced on Stone after a heart attack and an operation that left him with distorted vision in one eye. He still writes every word of the *Bi-Weekly*, aided only by a woman who "helps me read the *Record*" and a young man who "does legwork and looks up things." His wife serves as business manager. "I love this little fleabite paper," Stone says. "I'd like to stick to 65. In December 1972, it'll be 20 years old and I'll be 65." But he may have trouble stopping there. "I'd want a guy like me to carry on, and I can't find one."

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