

The editor's notebook

It's a matter of trust

By BURT BLAZAR
Editor

There it was in black and white: The attorney general of the State of New York has the "absolute" right to lie.

It was hard to believe. I don't really understand it, even though the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court said so. Or maybe it's because the court ruled that. I have always found lawyers as hard to understand as newspapermen. Technically, the court

merely ruled that no one can sue the attorney general if he publishes a false statement.

It doesn't matter if the attorney general knew it was false. He has what the court called "absolute privilege."

What the court actually said was this:

"The attorney general, being an executive official of cabinet rank, is absolutely privileged to publish false and defamatory matter of another in exercising the functions of his office."

That's ridiculous, and no amount of arguing by that five-judge panel is going to convince me otherwise.

It is the kind of so-called logic that President Nixon used when he tried to lead this country down the primrose path on his role in Watergate.

His view was that he could do or say anything. No one could take him to task. He was the president. Right?

The country responded to that in a chorus: Wrong!

The aftermath of Watergate still lingers, as we all know.

It's a legacy of distrust of all public officials.

We examine every statement, check every clever phrase, look behind every action.

It's not a good situation, either for the public or the politicians.

Still we were making some headway.

Each election since Watergate seems to be a little better, at least for those who went to the polls. Some were even beginning to believe that honesty would prevail again.

Not everyone feels that way, of course. We still have too many alienated voters who throw up their hands in frustration and say: "They're all thieves, so why bother to vote?"

This kind of court action doesn't help. In fact, it merely provides ammunition for the disbelievers.

And frankly, I don't blame them.

Now the court didn't say the attorney general lied when he accused some fundraising firm of improper action. What the judges did say, though, is that truth is not important in this kind of situation.

So now what?

I think the court has done

a disservice to the attorney general's office — and to all New Yorkers.

We now have been told that some state officials are above the law — at least, the law of libel.

We see that we have no recourse if one of those officials says untrue things about us and damages our reputation unjustly.

Support of the right to sue for libel may sound like I'm arguing against The Star-Gazette's best interests. But I don't see it that way.

I believe everyone must be responsible for his actions — and that includes this newspaper. So I don't think anyone should have an "absolute privilege" to lie deliberately.

Now that any executive official of cabinet rank doesn't have to answer for any statements, my question is:

Can I believe any state official any more?

A page of opinion

Islamic justice exacts a grisly toll in Iran

By THOMAS KENT
Associated Press Writer

TEHRAN, Iran — Despite Western protests, Iran's Islamic tribunals continue to dispense revolutionary justice in nightly rounds of executions. More and more, the victims, who at first tended to be generals and police chiefs, are diplomats, mayors and other politicians.

Perhaps only Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, architect of the revolution, knows how long the trials will go on or how many people eventually will be caught in the nets of Islamic justice.

More than 5,000 members of the old regime are believed to be in jail now. Thousands more Iranians held posts of some responsibility under the ousted Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The provisional prime minister appointed by Khomeini, Mehdi Bazargan, said in an interview published Thursday that he hopes the revolutionary courts "will stop within a year and... our Justice

Ministry will take over this work."

It was Bazargan's first comment on the executions since the firing squads resumed their work a week ago after a three-week suspension.

Last month his denunciations of summary revolutionary justice as "irreligious, inhumane and disgraceful" led to the suspension and a supposed review of the system by Khomeini.

As other officials of his government have done, Bazargan in Thursday's interview in effect washed his hands of the bloody purge, saying he supports the executions but "that's the business of the courts. We don't stick our noses in there." He was interviewed by West Germany's Bild Zeitung newspaper.

A government spokesman this week insisted the Bazargan government is not responsible for the special courts and often learns about their sentences from the radio.

The list of execution victims has now grown to include many with backgrounds similar to the 71-year-old Bazargan's: French- and British-educated professionals from the world of Iranian government and science, ranging in age up to their 70s.

Just before the latest series of executions began, Bazargan said a national preoccupation with revenge against the old regime would distract people from other business.

Although ordinary Iranians still appear to approve of killing off police and army men responsible for past murder and torture under the shah, the deaths this week of prominent civilian officials gave pause to some people.

Critics of the executions are still reluctant to speak in public,

but increasing numbers of Iranians talk of the need for authorities to devote time to other problems — particularly to unemployment and to unrest among the nation's ethnic minorities.

Some supporters of the revolution who have become disillusioned by the executions reportedly have begun to leave the country.

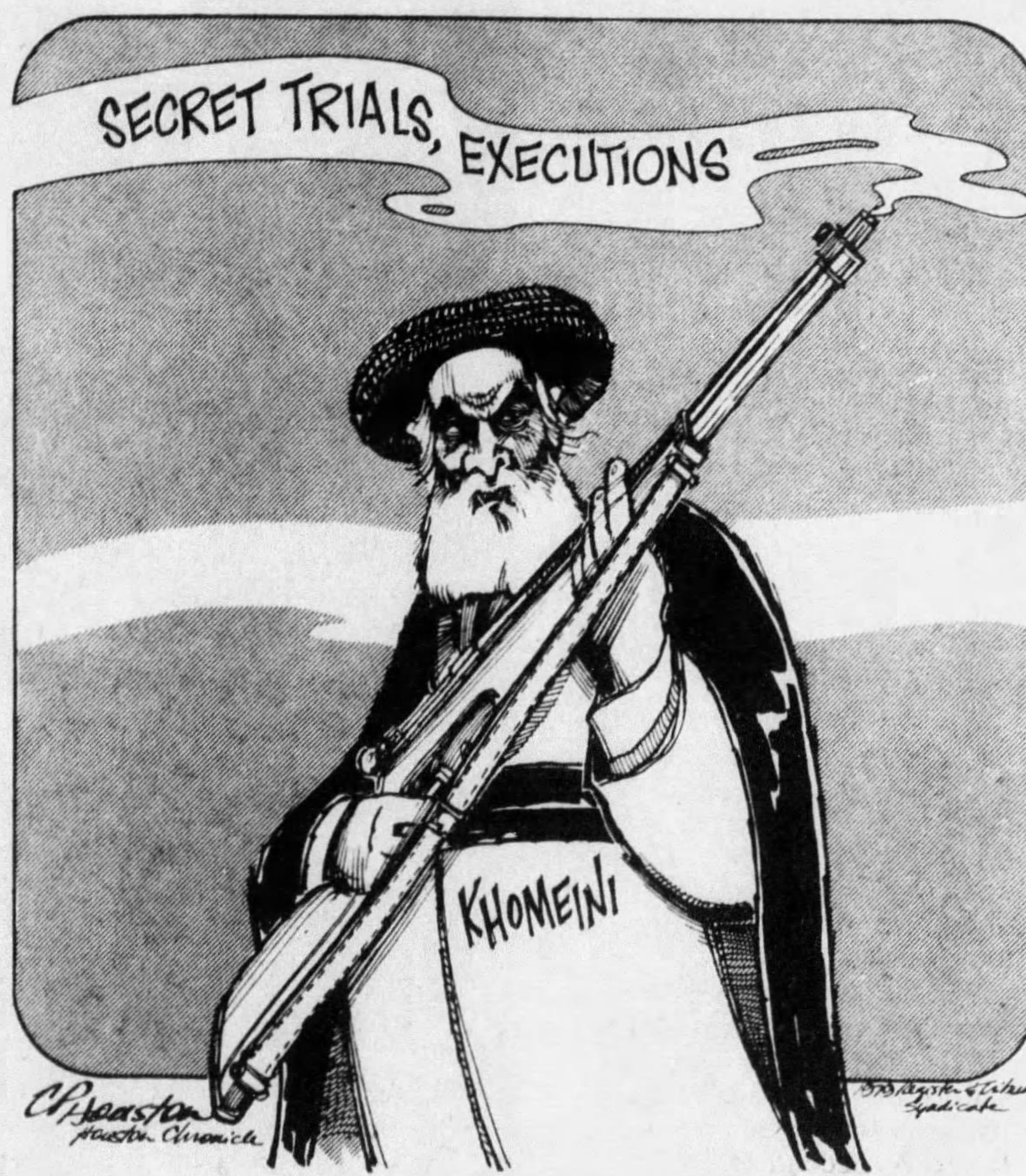
Revolutionaries see the Islamic courts' executions — more than 100 in eight weeks — as eye-for-eye retribution for the crimes of the monarchy, aimed now at political supporters of the old regime as well as its interrogators and executioners.

The ex-Cabinet ministers and members of Parliament now falling before the firing squads are generally charged with economic and political crimes, as well as with abetting murder.

The United States, France and other Western nations, and the human rights group Amnesty International have criticized the summary and secret nature of the trials, in which the defendants are not allowed defense counsel or the right to appeal and from which foreign reporters are barred.

Defending the executions earlier this week, a government official said speedy justice is "natural in revolutionary conditions" and claimed the Iranian executions are few compared with the many thousands guillotined in the French Revolution.

The Islamic justice of the executions is brought vividly home every day to readers of Tehran's newspapers, in which grisly photographs of Iranians tortured to death by the shah's police are often displayed alongside pictures of the bullet-riddled bodies of the revolution's own victims.



'Islamic rule grows out of the barrel of a gun'

Principle is bent to fell Amin

By SERGE SCHMEMANN
Associated Press Writer

NAIROBI, Kenya — The capture of Kampala by Tanzanian troops apparently spells the fall of one of Africa's worst despots. But it also marked the breach of one of post-colonial black Africa's most cherished principles.

Idi Amin's eight-year rule over the once-prosperous Central African country of Uganda was one of the most brutal in modern history.

Tens of thousands of his countrymen were butchered or tortured by the men of Amin's "State Research Bureau." Cabinet ministers, educators, professional men and clerics regularly disappeared. Thousands of foreigners were summarily expelled, and the economy crumbled.

All the while, Amin, bedecked with medals from neck to waist, entertained the world with outlandish antics and pronouncements, accumulating wives, children and titles and lavishing whisky, arms and power on his Nubian, Palestinian and Ugandan cronies.

But when Tanzanian troops and Ugandan exiles began their drive 2½ months ago to crush Amin, not an African government uttered a word of support for the invaders. None condemned them either.

The Organization of African Unity tried fruitlessly for a ceasefire that, in effect, would have rescued Amin, and African leaders kept silent when Libya sent a 2,600-man expeditionary force to the aid of Moammar Khadafi's Moslem ally in Kampala.

To Western observers, the lack of initial support for Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere — one of the most respected leaders in Africa — might seem unfair.

But to African leaders — saddled with random national boundaries drawn by colonial conquerors and torn by a mass of conflicting and constantly warring tribes, ideologies and factions — stability and security have evolved as the most cherished principles in the 20 years since the demise of European colonialism.

About the only principles the OAU has agreed on since it set out to forge African unity — apart from the struggle against white minority regimes in southern Africa — have been the inviolability of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Whether right or wrong, the capture of Kampala was the first time in post-colonial history that the army of one African state seized the capital of another.

And despot or not, Amin had been leader of a sovereign state that Tanzania had invaded.

On a continent where only a handful of states are over 20 years old, there is hardly a government not threatened by secession, rebellion or violent overthrow.

At least six wars have been fought over the past year alone, 4 million Africans live outside their borders as refugees, only two of 50 black African states have functioning democracies and there have been some 42 coups and civil wars in 20 years.

Under these circumstances, the only hope for the stability necessary for development was to live and let live, to accept the colonial boundaries as the starting point for fledgling nationhood and agree they were inviolable.

—Letters to the editor—
'Let's name arterial after the taxpayer'

To the Editor:

The Star-Gazette recently reported the proposal that the new arterial highway be named Mark Twain Blvd.

I believe that this community has been Mark Twained to death. There are already many more things named after him here than he actually deserves.

While he was not an Elmira native, he did marry a local girl and he did live here. While he was an excellent writer, his reputation as a cynical, agnostic, blasphemous hater of God and man should entitle him to no more memorial than any other cynical, agnostic, blasphemous, man-hating and

God-hating excellent writer. The proposal is more than a bit much.

May I constructively and seriously suggest that this new arterial be named to honor the most important person in Southport, Elmira, Elmira Heights and Horseheads, namely, the taxpayer, who is after all the builder of this road, regardless of what political subdivision the money is coming from.

In proposing Taxpayers Blvd., I believe that we would be the first community in the nation to honor the most important person in the country today, the taxpayer.

The Rev. JAMES P. COLLINS
St. John the Baptist Church
Elmira

Lake St. businessman makes reply on curbs

To the Editor:

I could not let the letter of Mrs. Kathleen Reilly pass without comment.

Mrs. Reilly feels that if we were "respectable" the curbs would not hurt our business. We run a very honest and straightforward business here at ECP. We rank in the top three for new automobile sales in the county and our percentage of complaints is very low.

However, I don't feel that this is her real complaint. It sounds as if she is upset solely because someone beat "city hall."

I wonder if she had been on Lake St. before the curbs were moved. Does she realize that they were not just in front of our business, but actually in the driveway as well?

And it wasn't just ECP's problem. These curbs made it very difficult to enter other locations on Lake St., such as Curly's Chicken, Tom Sawyer Motel, Wernick's Appliance, Brewer's Dairy and many others. There were well over 1,000 signatures of customers on Curly's anti-curb petition as well as ECP's petition.

The people who did business with us found it very difficult to enter our premises. This did not help make them happy and ECP is called the Happyface Place

because we are in business to make people happy.

I have not heard one person actually support having curbs in the driveways until Mrs. Reilly and, if she had seen them, she would have realized that maybe more thought could have been used before they were placed.

But, thanks to the openmindedness of the Chemung County Highway Department, the problem has been solved.

So, c'mon, get happy, Mrs. Reilly!

JIM MALEFYT
Elmira Chrysler Plymouth Inc.
2000 Lake St., Elmira

Why endorsed?

To the Editor:

Serge Schmemmann wrote in the April 3 Star-Gazette on Black Africa, especially on Ugandan President Idi Amin. Nyerere and a few other African leaders have described him as a murderer and liar (to say the least). Yet Amin is endorsed by many African leaders and he is popular among ordinary Africans.

Would Martin Luther King have endorsed him?

JED TAYLOR
64 College Ave., Mansfield

—We salute... Edward J. Doyle—

By JOHN GASTINEAU

An alcoholic has a tough time dealing with his problem alone.

A lot of help is required to overcome it, and Chemung County has a wealth of agencies to fill that need.

But as much as anything else, an alcoholic needs a friend, someone he can turn to any time a personal problem occurs.

Those who know Edward J. Doyle of 226 Home St. say he's that kind of man.

Doyle has been a counselor at the Alcohol Rehabilitation Program (ARP) for the last five years.

His job involves counseling individuals and groups, acting as a court advocate, obtaining public assistance when necessary and helping families of alcoholics.

"We try to take care of the total person," says Mary Huyler, the ARP director. That is enough to fill the hours of a working day, but Doyle spends almost all of his time outside his job helping alcoholics.

"He really is a friend as well as a counselor to those he works with," Mrs. Huyler said. "That's his life. He will go to any lengths to help."

Friends say an alcoholic with a problem can call him



Edward J. Doyle

anytime, day or night, to talk over a problem and often those calls will result in a personal visit from Doyle.

Alcoholics who have lost their drivers' licenses can always find a ride to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting or to an out-of-town clinic for treatment with Doyle.

Priscilla Ogden, director of the Salvation Army's sobering-up station, said when Doyle takes a person to a clinic, "he sees they get a room and keeps them busy so they won't go out and drink."

Doyle often helps out at the sobering-up station. "He's dropped everything and gone over and he's spent several hours," said Martin Wenzel, a county probation officer who has worked with Doyle.

Wenzel said Doyle's work is not limited to those who are his ARP clients. "It's not a question of having to know someone and having a file," said Wenzel.

As part of his ARP work, Doyle often counsels persons referred to the program by Recorder's Court Judge John D. Frawley. He is responsible for reporting to the court on their progress and occasionally taking them for treatment.

But Frawley said, "I've had to call him on weekends to go out and look in on situations that are pretty bad. He's always been very helpful."

Doyle seeks no glory for his activities. "He's a humble person who works miracles quietly," said Katherine Zaccarone, director of the Alcoholism Council of Chemung County.

"There are plenty of trained counselors," Wenzel said. "We're counseling people but there's another side. There's no substitute for reaching out a helping hand and that's what Ed does. He's always got that hand out."