

Newspaper Articles - Subject File

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

June 11, 1940.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Dear Mr. President:

Here is a copy of the article given you in confidence yesterday by Mrs. Roosevelt. The original has been returned to her.

Mrs. Roosevelt told me, speaking in confidence, that this article was written by the head of the Christian Science Monitor's bureau in Berlin to the Managing Editor of the Christian Science Monitor in Boston, Mass.

Mrs. Roosevelt said you wanted this copy.

S.T.E.

Berlin, May 8

The whole subject of the American press here is the greatest story which could be written but obviously can't for two reasons. One, it would bring instant expulsion, and, two, the code of American journalism would make it impossible for you to print it since it reflects to the discredit of our colleagues.

The best approach to the subject is the new technique evolved here for the treatment of correspondents who meet with disapproval. They shun the step of formal and public expulsion because it causes a sensation and reflects badly on them. We can assume that there will be no formal expulsions except in such drastic cases as that of Beach Conger where they have no choice. The new technique is to wait until the offending correspondent is out of the country and then refuse re-entry. This has now happened to Bill White and Warren Irvin.

The Tolischus affair is slightly different and very much to the discredit of the New York Times. The Times vies with the government here in its efforts to avoid an open break. They compromised to save their face and withdrew Tolischus. He is to be permitted to return for a few days to collect his belongings but is forbidden to write anything. In a last desperate effort to patch things up Guido Enderis proposed that he would personally censor Tolischus copy and guarantee to sterilize it if he would be permitted to come back. But they feel Tolischus has done them too much damage already and refused despite their complete trust in Guido and their fervent desire to do everything possible for the Times.

Coupled with the above-mentioned type of pressure are other internal policies towards the American press which has resulted in a demoralization of the American corps here. Trips, interviews, advance notice of news breaks are all used as bait or reward. The sad thing is that certain members of the group have decided to play the game this way, destroying any possibility of a common front of the group which alone could preserve the professional integrity and service of the group.

The most glaring single instance of how the system works is a special private press conference held one hour before the general press conference. The special conference is an invitation affair. At it, all the news given out an hour later is given to the favored few giving them an hour beat. This particular device was arranged primarily to handicap the UP. The AP and INS are invited, also the New York Times and Chicago Daily News. Those who accept put themselves under obligation to the regime here for the sake of the advantage it gives them over their competitors.

There have been specific attempts at bribery. Wally Deuell of the Daily News, was told some time ago that he could have an interview with Hitler any time he cared to change his attitude. On another occasion it was intimated to him that he would need to have no further financial worries if he would change. I do not necessarily conclude that from the fact that one American was offered money, that others have accepted it. But it is interesting how faithfully some of them play the game.

The technique is analagous to the general foreign policy technique of the government. By offering rewards at one end of the line and penalties at the other they succeed in breaking up the unity of the group and are able to pick off one at a time -- the famous Canham "Leaves of the artichoke" simile. At any one moment the majority are lulled into a sense of security and assured that there is only one "bad boy" and that as soon as he is taken care of all will be peaceful and harmonious. Thus there is never any rallying around one in danger at the moment.

The amusing aspect of "the private press conference" - press association situation is that despite all efforts Fred Oerschner and his UP staff manage to make an extremely good showing for themselves. They know they can count on no favors. The entire staff of the Propaganda Ministry is under formal instructions to see to it that the AP and INS get all the news well in advance of the UP. Knowing they have only themselves, Fred's staff goes to work diligently and so successfully that they have of late run up quite a score on news beats. The climax came yesterday when the AP and INS submitted a five-page letter of complaint to the Propaganda Ministry citing ten instances where the UP got "beats" and demanding more favorable treatment. The fact that the AP and INS would complain to the Propaganda Ministry is both a tribute of exceptional character to their competitor and also an illuminating instance of how these two bureaus here will not only accept but even request what are, unquestionably, improper favors for which they, of course, expect to pay.

If one were to probe behind the predicament you would probably discover in the background the demoralizing effect of Kent Cooper's attitude toward his subordinates which I have encountered in several places in Europe. They are hounded, bullied and badgered in a way which seems almost sadistic, sapping the morale of the organization and driving some of them to such devices as the pitiful plea here to the Propaganda Ministry for even more favors than the very substantial ones already arranged for them.

The specific result in news is to be found in such things as the Sylt story and the Copenhagen stories when the two favored organizations did yeoman service for the German cause here. When they went to Denmark they didn't attempt to write the real story but took a motor trip along the shore of the Island of Seeland and accepted a pre-arranged telephone call to a local official farther north and on the basis of such evidence wrote that no battle was going on in the Skagerrak.

Another device practiced almost flagrantly is to intrigue within an organization. For example, Sigrid Schultze has been a spirited thorn in their side for some time. Recently an excessively stupid protege of Colonel McCormick's arrived. They tested him out and found him to be amenable to suggestion. So they promptly offered him personally all kinds of special favors in the way of trips which were and still are denied to the rest of the Tribune staff. The hope obviously was to build him up to the point where the Tribune might recall Schultze and give the new man her job. The same thing was attempted when a woman named Breckenridge arrived for Columbia. They worked hard on her in the hope she might be given Bill Shirer's job.

These two efforts failed but they have been more successful with NBC. Warren Irvin was particularly distasteful to them. They threw across Max Jordan's path a young half-American living here. Once when Irvin was away for a time they proceeded to build him up with every assistance they could contrive, at the same time letting Jordan know that more favors would be going to NBC if Kirker (the new man) would take Irvin's place. Jordan took the bait and would have fired Irvin had the New York office not stepped in. But they now refuse to let Irvin back which suits Jordan, because their pet Kirker takes over. Kirker, although an American citizen, has lived here most of his life, is secretly a Nazi and there is some reason for suspecting that he is actually an S.S. member. When he doesn't know Americans are watching he gives the Nazi salute with great proficiency.

After watching this process in action it is possible to divide the Americans into two groups, those who play the game and write as favorably as they can, and those who respect their integrity and write as honestly as they can. In the first group are Guido Enderis and his Times staff (now that Tolischus is gone), Louis Lochner and the AP, Pete Huss and the INS and Max Jordan of NBC. On the other side are Sigrid Schultze of the Chicago Tribune, Ralph Barnes of the Herald Tribune and Bill Shirer of Columbia. Wally Deuell of the Daily News is the only one who manages somehow to retain his integrity while accepting some of the favors. Some of his writing has been excellent and thoroughly honest. Yet he is invited to the special press conferences. This is the only questionable favor he accepts

regularly. What he does is write honestly when he has occasion to and then taking pains to say things in their favor whenever he feels he honestly can. He manages to remain on friendly terms personally with them while refusing to accept the more improper type of favors.

This leads me to the question of my own position here. I recognize that a correspondent in a country at war should, and rightly does, respect the military necessities of a belligerent. Under no circumstance would I either attempt to secure or transmit information of military importance. I accept that limitation without question. But I do not feel that I can, or that you would want me to, lend myself to the propaganda cause of this country, or any country, for that matter. It becomes important for me to know, therefore, just how vital you deem it to have a correspondent in Germany. The issue is not immediate. I am not on the next on the list of objectionable correspondents. Both Sigrid Schultze and Bill Shirer are likely to be forced out before they come to me. But the time is almost certain to come when we will have to decide between compromise as Louis Lochner and Pete Huss and Max Jordan and Guido Enderis understand it, and honest journalism. I can defer that time for quite a while and will defer it as long as I can without damaging my own self-respect. But the question arises as to how much importance you attach to having a correspondent here when he is no longer able to write things like that Copenhagen story. As a matter of fact, I shall be very surprised indeed if I get another chance to do anything like that. And after all it is

only stories like that that compensate you for the long weeks when I produce nothing of real merit for you. It is costing you a lot of money to keep me here and the return you get in terms of copy are certain to be a diminishing quantity.