

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN ECONOMIC MOBILIZATION

8 December 1950

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION--Colonel E. E. Barnes, USA, Chief, Mobilization Branch, ICAF.....	1
SPEAKER--Mr. Eric Sevareid, Chief Washington Correspondent for Columbia Broadcasting System News.....	1
GENERAL DISCUSSION.....	11

Publication No. L51-68

INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE OF THE ARMED FORCES

Washington, D. C.

RESTRICTED

950

Mr. Eric Sevareid, Chief Washington Correspondent for Columbia Broadcasting System News, was born in Velva, North Dakota, 26 November 1912. He received his B.A. degree from the University of Minnesota in 1935. In 1937 he was a student at the Alliance Francaise, Paris. He was a reporter on the Minneapolis Star in 1936-1937; reporter and city editor of the Paris edition of the "New York Herald-Tribune" in 1938-1939; night editor of the United Press, Paris in 1939. He became European correspondent of the Columbia Broadcasting System in August 1939 and was with the French Army and Air Force in France and Belgium. He broadcast the French capitulation from Tours and Bordeaux. In addition, he has also broadcast news from England, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Mexico and Brazil. He is the author of the book, "Not so Wild a Dream," and was this year's winner of the George Foster Peabody Award for the reporting and interpretation of news by radio. He is at present Chief Washington Correspondent for CBS News.

RESTRICTED

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN ECONOMIC MOBILIZATION

8 December 1950

COLONEL BARNES: The subject of the lecture this morning is the importance of public opinion in support of national policy, particularly economic mobilization.

To point up the problems in this area we have prevailed on Mr. Eric Sevareid to come over to talk to us. Although this is his first appearance here, I am certain everybody in the audience feels he knows him already. His daily broadcast has brought his voice and his pertinent comments on the news and world events over the air into our homes so that it has come to be a "must" in our daily routine to listen to Eric Sevareid.

For a subject as important as this, I felt that we must have the best to talk to us on it. We tried several weeks ago to get Mr. Sevareid to come over, but he was at that time up in the United Nations in New York and could not accept. Finally, we did make him reluctantly agree to come over. Now he is rather sorry he has accepted for this time because of the "rat race," as he calls it, that he is in on the daily news, in trying to keep abreast of it. As a matter of fact, he could not even stay over as our luncheon guest. It has meant adding a big burden to an already overburdened schedule on his part. We want you to know, Mr. Sevareid, we appreciate your coming through on the commitment.

It is a great pleasure and privilege to introduce to the Industrial College, Mr. Eric Sevareid.

MR. SEVAREID: They tell me this is how Churchill dictates his books (referring to the microphone which was placed on his lapel). I have never tried that. I knew a man of "The New York Times," a very good writer, who got the idea one day that it was perfectly silly for him to write for the papers, for which he received a modest salary. He knew he could write pretty well and he came to the conclusion that the whole problem was simply one of production technique. So he went home. He said, "I bought myself a fancy dictaphone gadget--it cost a couple of hundred dollars--fixed it all up in my study and plugged it in. Then," he said, "night came. I sat down, arranged all my notes around me. I picked up that microphone and, believe it or not, all I could say was, 'hello!'"

I am suffering a bit from a feeling of inferiority in making this speech to you gentlemen, for a number of reasons. I could not help thinking, as I walked in here, about the discussion some of us radio people once had when we listened to a GI, who was a kind of monologist--a very funny one, too--tell us about his first day in the Army. He was taken out to Fort Dix or some other place. He said, "The next morning they got us up about five-thirty. We all stumbled out of bed. They took us out on this cold, miserable parade ground. There was a big, tough sergeant there who lined us all up. He said, 'Now, we're going to do someth'ing here. I want all you men with college education to step over here,' A bunch of them stepped over there. 'All you men with high school education step over here.' Most of them stepped over; some were left standing in the middle, 'Now,' said the sergeant, 'we're gonna spend the day policing this yard. All you people with high school education are going out and spend the day picking up leaves and bits of paper--all the t'ings what move. All you guys with a college education are going to spend all day out there picking up cigarette butts and bits of chewing gum--all the t'ings what don't move. And,' he said, 'all you guys that ain't got no education you are going to just sit there, see; maybe you're going to learn someth'ing.'"

So we have the thing reversed here today. You fellows with a college education are going to sit there but I don't think you are going to learn anything for the reason that, as Colonel Barnes indicated, the Chinese have moved much too fast for my purposes here this morning. I postponed, I'm afraid, until rather late an effort to organize some notes on this subject, only to find myself almost entirely without any time in which to do it. I will have to try to speak from some rambling notes and try to make some sense out of what I say.

I suppose the prime and basic fact, which should be obvious to all of us, about the problems of modern war, such as the mobilization and conduct of it at home and in the theaters of operation, is the totality of it. Even the aims of war are totally different in our time. It is no longer the soldier class alone that fights. It is no longer a conscript class that does the fighting. It is no longer just the intellectual class that defines the struggle. And it is no longer just the statesmen and the diplomats who decide the limitations of victory or defeat. In fact, because of its totality now, in our time, there really are no limitations to it at all. The older I grow and the more I think back on the last war and what has followed since, I think that probably it is our greatest problem.

When we fight war on a total basis as we do now, when an entire country, an entire people is plunged into it, then all conditional limitations seem to be gone. Everything is black or white. It is total virtue against total evil, and so on. That is what we did, really, in the last war. Out of that situation, the necessities of

that kind of a war, came the Roosevelt idea of unconditional surrender. It seemed very logical at the time. It seemed sensible and natural. And yet, I am afraid, in a way, we are paying a terrible price for that. In previous years, generals and diplomats could halt a war, or give terms and conditions at certain places and times. That no longer is being done. We have ended up, of course, with these enormous vacuums of power in central Europe and in eastern Asia. I think a good case can be made that this is the real basis of much of the trouble we have suffered in the last five years.

So public opinion, so-called, which I suppose means the totality of people's views and feelings, has become a kind of shrine at which everybody bothered with these things seems to have to worship, and toward which all of us must work, whether it is to sell a gadget to someone at a profit, to finance a government, or to ask the supreme sacrifice of life itself.

This has meant, in a way, following the example of the American commercial world that even for the elective choice of national leaders or for calling upon men to fight, the tendency has been to appeal to the lowest common denominator of awareness and intelligence. We have seen this phenomenon, as easily as anywhere, in things like the radio commercials. We have seen it in the recruiting slogans--you know, the "sunny South" approach: "Join the Army and See the World," and have a beautiful girl in your left arm. They tell me they have singing commercials now to advertise the United Nations. In that sense, what the amusement industry calls "box office" has become a kind of guiding rule. And that is true in direct ratio to the size of the enterprise involved. It is far more true of radio, the movies, and big magazines than it is with a smaller business such as book publications and the stage, which is one reason why books and the stage, in my mind, have remained really the freest expressions of public opinion that we have left in the country. It seems to be freedom in inverse ratio to the size of the institutions. In small institutions immediate box office is not so much the terrible premium that it is in these other great institutions. Your operating costs, profit, or losses are so much less.

We can see this sort of mass common-denominator appeal operating in politics. We saw it in the last election in a great many ways. There were appeals to certain general, basic feelings. The Democrats, for example, in a great many states appealed to the people on the fear of loss of security. The people were told the Hoover depression was coming back, and so on. A great many Republicans played on the fear of war, which is a natural and permanent fear. Everybody used these mass general appeals to their own purposes however related they were to reality.

RESTRICTED

And where, in this country, appeals are broken down and put into categories, it seems to me they are directed at what we call special interest groups. These are groups of people divided not on the basis of their mental or educational differences, but on the basis nearly always of their special economic interests. There is a basic difference, I think, between this society and a good many older societies, particularly in Europe. We are not really a class society. We are what I would call a special interest society. The pressures of modern times have compressed many European class societies into socialist societies, socialist governments. That really has not happened here. The essence of socialism is public ownership in means of production. There has been very little of that in this country. But here these pressures of modern times have produced a kind of government welfare society to a fairly considerable degree. But that is not socialism. I do not think you can call it leftism or rightism.

Originally, this Government was to stay aloof entirely from economic forces and to preserve only civil freedom so far as government interference went. Then the conception, as the years went by, was that it was to be a kind of balance wheel, preventing any economic force from overwhelming others. However, the conception in relatively recent years is that it is to provide benefits for all groups. It is to provide benefits for the farmers, laborers, veterans, aged, and so on. Our original motto was, "Equality for all and special privilege for none." Now, it is to try to preserve a rough kind of equality which seems to mean special privilege for all.

This pattern has gone pretty deep in government thinking and in the expectations of people generally. A great many of our techniques and basic concepts of public opinion have been based upon them. But there are times in our national life when you can ride this group concept a little too hard and a little too far. I think that one of those times is now coming about very rapidly. Before I get into that, I would like to state a couple of basic principles and one maxim.

The first principle is that there really is no such thing as "the public." They are only people, each of them a little different from the last one, not one of whom ever thinks of himself, in my experience, as a member of the public. So, really, there is no such thing as "public opinion." There are only private opinions which vary and at times coalesce into a pretty extensive body of feelings.

The maxim I wanted to quote was one that was frequently quoted by the late, lamented Ray Clapper, who wanted always to remind his colleagues in the news and radio business that we should never underestimate the intelligence of the American people and never overestimate their information.

RESTRICTED

The longer I have gone on in this business, the more I think that is true. We all know it is pretty difficult to bluff, kid, or fool very many people in this country for any length of time. For example, whenever I go out on a trip around the country and talk to people, or listen to questions, or sit about with people, I realize more and more the necessity to simplify and simplify and simplify the information I am trying to put across on the radio. Most people are too busy during the day; they can devote only a small portion of their attention in any one day to the news of the day. They do not get so saturated and soaked in it as so many of us here do. We tend sometimes to take off, in discussing the news, on the assumption the readers and listeners have information which they in fact do not have. This lack of information has resulted in some rather serious successes on the part of rather tough-minded people in getting away with a lot of assertions in campaigns. I think one of them is the current charge that this Government is trying to appease the Communists in the Orient. I do not think the record shows that at all. There is that feeling, and only simplified, logically laid out information on those matters can meet that argument and that feeling.

This business of group appeals seems to produce different results at different times. In 1948 the Democrats, you will remember, won. In my opinion, they won largely because they accurately hit a certain marginal group that could carry the margin of victory for them. That group was the Midwest farmers. They approached them accurately and with great effect in the last two or three weeks of the campaign on the particular question of storage facilities. It was a pocketbook appeal--admittedly a very pointed one--and from the results in a great many of the Midwestern States there was not much question but that this just pushed the thing over for them.

This fall, probably the most spectacular special interest appeal that was made was made by the labor people in the State of Ohio and it failed. It failed pretty completely. Why did it work so well in 1948 and work so poorly this time? I suppose there are secondary reasons--a great many of them--but I think the primary reason is that the times are just a lot more serious. People are a lot more worried. They know things have been going wrong. We are in a dangerous predicament in the world. I don't think that the pocketbook appeal this time really had much to do with the outcome of the election. It comes to the point where everybody, whether he is a labor man, farmer, businessman, or anybody else, realizes, after all, he is, first and last, an American citizen; that if this country is really in a bad way or gets in one, the special enterprises or special interests will go too and they cannot sustain him.

RESTRICTED

I think that Franklin Roosevelt understood this business very clearly. He knew that in the normal course of things, in normal years this was a kind of federation of different racial, religious, economic, intellectual, and regional groups; it took a great deal of maneuvering, extraordinary skill of a complex nature to hold them together on any one particular problem, proposal, or program. But he knew that there are certain threads that run through the whole thing that do hold us all together when the chips are down. And once they began to go down he did not make the mistake of trying to talk to them in terms of their own special private interests. That worked, I suppose, partly because of his kind of personality.

I have been leading up to saying that I think the way the dam has broken in the last few days, the time is arriving fast--and in some degree is already here--when the people in this Capital, with its military problems, economic mobilization problems, and so on, really have the green light now. I think they can pretty well go ahead without worrying too much about a great many of the group interests, pressures, and bodies.

But it is by no means all in the clear. We haven't that kind of unity yet. You still have, as witnessed yesterday, a good many Senators and Representatives who are going to fight things like the extension of rent controls. You do not really have any chance of rent control by the Federal Government going, from here on out. The people would not tolerate it. You can make arguments in certain places--I think you can--that landlords have been discriminated against; but it is perfectly clear that it is going to be done. The people will not have it otherwise. There are still a good many people on the Hill who are going to fight that.

We have a big fight now on wage and price controls. Labor unions still insist there must be price controls but insist there must be, as yet, no wage controls. Industry people, on the whole, insist there must be wage controls but no price controls as yet. We are still pretty much in that stage, but the thing is beginning to change.

I think one of the interesting straws in the wind was the action yesterday of the Economic Stabilization agency which, for the first time, asked the big industries in this country to roll back prices. They asked Ford and General Motors to cancel out these new car price raises they just announced. Two or three weeks ago, I do not think the climate would have been such that they could have any hope of success in doing that. Now, maybe they can.

Another straw in the wind, I would say, was the attitude of two very conservative Senators, Millikin and George, a couple of days ago. They interrupted representatives of business groups who were against

RESTRICTED

the excess profits tax proposal. They just interrupted them to say, "Well now, be careful. Don't fight this too long or too hard, making this too tough for yourselves, or you are probably going to find yourselves with a tax you are going to like a lot less." That was rather significant coming from those two particular men. It certainly would not have come from them one month ago.

Nor do I think a month ago you would have had a speech by an arch conservative like Ira Mosher, of the NAM, as you had a few days ago in New York when he told that powerful industrial group we simply have to put an end to this 16-year bickering between business representatives and the Government. It was a generalized speech. There was no great specific proposal, as I remember. But still this is quite a different thing.

I think it would be a mistake for all groups, agencies, and individuals in this Government to start worrying now, whether it is about recruiting volunteers, selling war bonds, organizing or converting industry, or whatever it is. I think boldness is the thing that will pay out. The faster it is done, the better.

I do not think we have to worry too much about the special interest appeals. I think it would be a mistake, for example, for the Treasury Department to try to sell war bonds on the appeal--you know the poster--"Have a Nice Nest Egg for a Vacation in Bermuda," and that sort of thing. I think the alarm is such at the present time that the higher the appeal is--appealing to the best instincts of people as Americans and not as labor men, farmers, businessmen, or whatever it is--is the appeal that is going to work.

We are coming to the stage where I think we are not going to play much longer with this illusion of voluntary cooperation on metals allocations or on prices and wages. Maybe there is a kind of curious anomaly here in this sense: When the time becomes so desperate that you would think all groups would subordinate their special interests quite willingly, it happens to be the time, so it seems, when you can "oblige" them to subordinate them by force of law, and it will be sustained by the country generally.

I have always felt that in this matter of group interest there was a curious kind of group tyranny on the individuals concerned. Last spring I went out around the Midwest for three or four weeks. I made it a point to talk to a lot of Main Street businessmen, groups like Rotarians, Kiwanians, and so on. I knew perfectly well the group attitude, so to speak, of those people. That was the time of the big McCarthy-Acheson Communist business here in the State Department. There was such a great emotional battle going on, with enormous confusion. I would get up in these organizations and tell them what I

RESTRICTED

felt about this. I understood what their feeling was. The whole atmosphere and tendency of these groups was rather to be very suspicious, to go along with McCarthy on this thing. I knew Acheson and some of these people who had been accused, like Owen Lattimore, whom I have known personally for a long time. I made it a point to say, "This is all wrong. I know it's inaccurate, it's dishonest. So-and-so, whom I know, has been falsely accused."

Well, there would be a kind of chilly silence almost every time. People would look at one another. Mind you, they are all businessmen down the street, who must live and work with one another. But almost every time there would be people who would come up to me afterward, or would drop in the hotel to see me, or write me a note, or something, as an individual really speaking his own conscience. For example, one of them would say, "You know, I didn't get up in the meeting and say this. I know a lot of the boys might not agree with me. I guess they think I'm kind of eccentric, or something, but I think you're kind of right." They were troubled by those things. That happened so many times. Then I realized that just the very groupness of the thing exercised a kind of tyranny over their own individual feelings.

I was talking about this out in Oklahoma last spring with Mike Monroney--he has just been elected Senator--and he rather agreed with it. He said, "But you know, it's a different thing with farmers." I had not been out trying to talk to the farmers at all. But he told me he had been over the State and had talked to hundreds and hundreds of them. He said, "They're a little different. They are not attached to these groups so much. It is far more of an individual operation for a farmer. They sit around at night in their farmhouses and they really turn the dial on their radio. They will turn to Elmer Davis, Fulton Lewis, or whoever, and sort of go across the spectrum, radiologically speaking. They are hard to push around, kid, or stampede very much." I suppose there must be considerable truth in that.

Well, I think one of the difficulties at the moment is that in making this national appeal to the people instead of these group appeals you do need symbols. If you are going to appeal to the best instincts of the people you need the best possible symbols. I think FDR, by and large, was one. Churchill certainly was one, although I must say the British do not seem to need them as much as we do. For example, if you go to the average political meeting in a borough of London, let us say, you will find the attitude and motivations of the crowd there rather different. It is not so much to see the personality or to say they listened to so-and-so; their concentration is really on the issue. It is much more on what is said than on who says it. Maybe that indicates a little bit more political maturity. I don't know. I suppose it does. But pure demagoguery, oratorical fireworks, and great histrionic demonstrations which can impassion and panic a lot of American audiences, in my experience, do not happen much there.

RESTRICTED

You see the same thing operating between British and American radio. I know I do not care much for the BBC System, its programming or the way it is run. But people over here turn on the news, to a great extent, because it is so-and-so on at that hour. They listen because of who it is. They do not do that at all in England; they turn on the radio to hear what the news is.

I think we are weak in this Government in that respect--great symbols of the moment. The President certainly is not the kind of symbol, his person, for my money, that his predecessor was. Of course, Acheson is not in the sense that Cordell Hull was. General Marshall seems to be about the only one left who seems in his nature, appearance, and character somehow to symbolize something that appeals to all Americans no matter what their group affiliation or interest. But he, unfortunately, is a rather inarticulate man. In fact, I think we have been far too much an inarticulate government. I have never seen it quite so stultified in its efforts to communicate with people generally.

The President's speeches have been far too much a matter of platitudes. They are infused with a sense of our moral righteousness in all this. But there has not been really much information that he has given in them. He has given no real kind of analysis of the position we are getting ourselves in. I think that is what people desperately want to get clear in their minds.

Now, Acheson can do it. He has that kind of mind better than anyone else in the Government. But he has been so cut to ribbons in terms of his standing and position in the public mind that it is almost impossible for him to do it. He certainly pitched himself into a terrible speech last week. It was full of far too many intellectual subtleties about our position and programs in the world which was exactly what the people did not want to hear. They want to hear the hard, blunt truth as to where we are and where we think we are going. There has been too much holding back on this sort of thing. The President has not really talked personally to the country since this crisis began.

Another example of the kind of thing that we fall into, it seems to me, is this conference with the British here this week. The same thing is happening that I have seen happen many times before at these international meetings. The British are masters of this business of putting out information, then keeping the story running, running it their way, if there is a serious disagreement involved, although there is not too much this time.

Mr. Attlee himself, for example, briefs the British correspondents every night as to what is going on, his position, the position of their government, and all these things. There was no briefing at all for most of us here on the American side until the State Department people

just stepped into it and tried to do it themselves regardless of what they were doing over in the White House. Steve Early, now in the White House--at least temporarily--has picked up the ball as best he could. The position was so bad when this started, most of the American correspondents here were so blocked at American sources that they were going to see an old friend of mine named Philip Jordan, who is Attlee's personal pressman and is well acquainted with a great many of us.

Churchill used to do this thing wonderfully well. Even during the war he would come over and they would have a meeting of their whole Embassy staff. He would talk to them, 50 or 80 people. He would say, "This is our line. This is what we want to put across." By George! that would pop up at dinner parties even among your best British friends. They were so aware of this and so disciplined in that sense. We have never quite worked it that way.

Well, I guess I have been trying to say, in a sense, that Washington, is isolated from the country and its feelings a good deal. But I also think that the country is isolated from Washington and the facts far too much. I think the politicians, this fall particularly, certainly have not helped to close those gaps. They are always representing the feelings of their constituents in the country to this Capital, but they also have a great responsibility, it seems to me, to represent the facts as they are known here--and they are best known here--back to their people. I think that on both sides pretty generally in this campaign they did evade the real issue, which is not a Hoover depression, communism in the State Department, or anything of that sort. Nonsense! The real issue was whether we are to be politically defeated everywhere in the world; whether this country itself is to be physically assaulted and possibly defeated at home. That is all it comes down to.

I think the press and radio have contributed a good deal of misunderstanding as well as understanding and information to this, partly because of their techniques--the headline and the lead technique--which lead to all kinds of miserable distortions and exaggerations. I suppose a famous example was the President's statement just the other day about the use of the atomic bomb. There were great headlines on this; broadcasts blared around the world. There was absolutely no justification for it when you read his statement. He was not really saying a thing except that the situation was where it always had been. We simply had a weapon, we always considered it a weapon, so it was under consideration. That was all. There was no change. But there was great confusion.

One thing that leads to bad stories, bad headlines, misinformation, and alarm sometimes is this business of bottling up information. When you do that you just create a situation where you create rumors. General Bradley, last Monday or Tuesday, got very upset about this. He had just been a victim of it himself in a speech to a Senate committee.

His remarks went out in a very distorted fashion. The headlines said that he (Bradley) had said there would be a "Dunkirk," and so forth. He told Charley Ross privately, "This thing has got to stop. Somehow the information has got to be put out or else there is going to be a good deal more of this." Unfortunately, Charley died that afternoon.

I think, on the whole, we have now reached the time when the people have to be told as much of the truth, just as bluntly, frankly, and straightforwardly, as can possibly be done. They are crying for it. They are waiting for it. If they do not get it, if further speeches are around the point, if the people of the country feel they are being talked down to or being led along quietly, if they think the real predicament we are in is being withheld from them, I would say there is going to be a pretty explosive reaction to that.

We are paying an awful price on this business of censorship, whether it is military, wartime, overt censorship, or just a kind of censorship through lack of organization on telling the story. That is true here now. We paid a great price on that in the war, in my personal experience, because we were never allowed, until the war was almost over, to tell the full story of China and China's part in the war; the fact that, really, for seven years it had done nothing and had no intention of doing anything. I tried to tell that all along the way until I was finally stopped by the State Department. As you remember, the whole thing blew sky-high. There was tremendous upheaval and confusion about it.

I am told that Mr. Stuart Symington, who, I guess, is our head man in mobilization now, talked to a group of industrial leaders just the other day about it. Because he is the kind of blunt, straightforward person he is, he just got up and said, "Gentlemen, there is about a fifty-fifty chance that your children are not going to grow up to be Russian slaves." For my money, that was about the measure of what this thing is. I wish he had said that publicly. I wish he had said it to the whole country. I only wish the President would do so. I think that is our trouble. I think that is the only way we are going to get the people of the country to react as they can and as they must.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Mr. Severeid, we in the military have, on occasion, been asked to confer with reporters on certain subjects. Presumably, it was to be in confidence. The story was to be checked prior to its publication. And we have, on several occasions, had our fingers burned by talking off the record, and having the thing exposed to the public in the newspapers the following day.

I wonder if some of this is not a two-way deal, where the military and also the politician have gotten their fingers burned so many times that they are reluctant to speak completely off the cuff and to talk frankly to reporters.

MR. SEVAREID: I was not talking so much about speaking frankly to reporters. Most reporters who are worth their salt know what the story is. I am talking about a few people who can speak for the country, for the Government, speaking to the people at large.

But you are perfectly right; I think that is very often happening with the military and with other people, so far as certain people in the press are concerned. It is not very often happening to the politicians. There are very few politicians who put a premium on silence. I think, on the whole, there are far more careless leaks of specific bits of information from Capitol Hill than there are through irresponsibility or deliberate breaking of word in the press. That was my experience, anyway.

I might try to document that by going back to 1942 and 1943. General Marshall used to see about 12, 15, or 20 of us maybe once in two months in his office and he would talk for a couple of hours. The people present were picked rather carefully. He was often amazingly frank about where we were in North Africa, what the next step was, and so on--things that you would not even discuss with anybody in a taxicab. In a way, you did not want that knowledge. You did not want that responsibility. But to my mind--in fact, he has said so since--there was never one case of any of that information leaking out.

At the same time General Marshall was having enormous difficulty with various committees on Capitol Hill. In fact, he said once that Stalin had told us one of the reasons we could not get any information from the Russians on things we both should have known since they were our allies was that Stalin and Molotov complained, "We can't tell you this. We would tell you that but you are responsible to your Congress and it's going to leak out. We won't do it." That may have been just a pretext. I suppose maybe it was. At least that was a notorious enough pattern so that Stalin in the Kremlin was aware of it, according to General Marshall.

I do not mean to exculpate the press completely at all. We had a case late last week where a very important military officer had talked to a number of us in a small club about southeast Asia from whence he had just come. There was apparently one French correspondent, or perhaps an American working for a French agency, who misused that information. It went out to Saigon and immediately flashed back to our State Department. There was all h--- to pay for a while. It happen to General Bradley in just the same way by just the same people, a year

or so ago when the question of arming the Germans came up. The very mention of that by anybody in authority was fighting words. He talked supposedly in complete confidence off the record. Two hours later the French Embassy protested to the State Department.

There have not been an awful lot of those cases. During the war, in my own experience and from my own judgment, there were far more examples of harm being done by military suppression of information from people whom I thought were entitled to know and must know than there were by leaks, deliberate or inadvertent, by the press. The most famous example of the latter was "The Chicago Tribune" story about breaking the Japanese code which, you remember, almost resulted in legal action. That is an awful problem, but I do not know what the whole solution to it is.

I do not know what the solution is right now to the question of censorship of the Far East war theater. We have the problem of United Nations command, with reports coming in from many countries. I am inclined to think we should have had from the beginning compulsory censorship on military information, not on political. We never did have it, although for a time the command tried to go along on the principle they would take no responsibility for military information that was written or broadcast, but the reporter who made the mistake would suffer for it, probably by being thrown out; but they would lay down some rules about political information and criticism of the command or troops which, to me, is the one thing you must not attempt to censor, except in rare circumstances. But two days ago the command in Tokyo itself put out under its own label the exact positions of this new defense line south of Pongyang. No reporter had attempted to tell that; in fact, the understanding had been that it must not be told. Why this was then told by the authorities concerned, I have no idea.

Now, where you have a free press and radio, it is not such a problem. There is no easy answer to it at all. I would rather have it that way than the way it is in some of the other countries.

QUESTION: Mr. Sevareid, if I understand you correctly, you are basically talking about educating the general public as to the current situation, or what appears in your view or the views of others to be the situation.

I wonder if it is not possible to carry that thought one step further, possibly along this line: As you indicated, people in official position should make available to the public factual data to satisfy their yearning for education along those lines. Isn't there a reciprocal function on the part of the press, perhaps the radio, to assist in the education of the public along the lines that they are not thoroughly informed about with respect to situations in other countries?

We, here in the college, are privileged to hear lectures on various and sundry subjects and various and sundry countries. But rather, it seems to me, than waste our time reading stories about felonies and misquotations of people in official capacity, isn't there some place in the public press where you could have editorials, or something or other, of an expository nature as to conditions in various parts of the world that would pretend to educate the public rather than to play down to the lowest level?

We have been predicated on the system of freedom of the press and also of great education in this country--the two keystones upon which we have built our present success. Yet, the newspapers seem to appeal to the lowest level rather than trying to raise the level to the intelligence of the group.

I am just wondering if there isn't a reciprocal burden on the part of the press, the public information services, to do something along this line as well as on the part of the officials to divulge information on their part.

MR. SEVAREID: I think it is not only a reciprocal burden. I think the primary burden is on the press and radio. The privilege of being free, it seems to me, entails that responsibility. But I do not think there is quite the blackout of serious informative news in this country that your remarks seem to suggest. I think, on the whole, it is about as good a press as any I know anywhere in the world. You have to read on a very selective basis. It is hard, too, for the average person to find the paper or magazine that can give this information, although they do exist. But the unfortunate thing is there are not enough publications of limited appeal to certain levels of education. For example, there are almost no big popular weekly magazines that do a very really serious adult job--very few. The problem is so different in recent years of economically supporting either a daily paper or a weekly magazine. The cost, for example, is about 100 percent higher than it was a few years ago. Therefore, the pressure for circulation which brings advertising is more tremendous than it has ever been before. That is one unfortunate thing.

Now, "The Washington Post" in this town, for example, which, I think, has a pretty good editorial page and a lot of pretty good serious stuff in it, is caught in this fight all the time. It would like, in its best instincts, to be a second "New York Times" down here; yet it is caught in a relatively small city with a triple newspaper situation where it is constantly in this circulation fight and it has to try to survive, to keep trying to build circulation in all parts of the area on all different levels of intelligence and economic standards, and so on. I think that is why it is a split newspaper. That is why it does not have a real kind of form, personality or character of its own. Its employees are quite aware of that. There is

always a struggle between the managing editor and the circulation man who wants to print the picture of the little girl and her lost dog on the front page and the people who are concerned about the Truman-Attlee conference, or whatever it may be.

That has caused some casualties in this country. I think one is the "Chicago Daily News," which used to have the greatest foreign service, I suppose, in the entire country. For several years its whole aim has been greater circulation advertising. The whole character of the thing has changed.

Then along comes a little magazine like this one called "The Reporter," which comes out every two weeks and which tries to fill this gap in the spectrum of the weekly series of publications. I think it is a pretty good effort. There is frequently a lot of information in it, but it has a very limited sale. I do not know how long it can go on. Its owners obviously are losing money hand over fist. I took part in the original discussions about that before it started. It tries to fill this gap between the sort of doctrinaire, sectarian, left-wing papers like "The Nation," for example, which always have a definite position on everything that comes up. You know what they are going to say about any issue before you open it. And on the other side of the spectrum, with publications like "Time," "Life," "Collier," "The Saturday Evening Post," or what not, you know what they are not going to say. All the big magazines are politically pretty conservative, which may reveal something important; I do not know.

Now, that little magazine was an effort not to sit in any particular ideological position on the spectrum, but to try to follow the facts wherever they might lead. A paper like "The London Economist" does that I think, quite well. I do not know whether that little magazine, "The Reporter," is going to survive or not. I hope so.

QUESTION: Mr. Sevareid, I would like to suggest another possibility on this matter of censorship.

About 20 years ago I was working for a former competitor of the Associated Press. I had a chance to observe then a form of censorship or suppression on the part of the press itself which strikes me as potentially evil.

If you will recall, in the thirties we had Father Coughlin, who was a radio priest speaking from Detroit. We also had the rising effort to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment. There were those two things. The Associated Press prided itself on being objective and prided itself on representing all political views. That is still one of its prime criteria. I think there was evidence in the Associated Press at that time actually to suppress various statements made by Father Coughlin,

even though there were certain member newspapers which wanted them. The member newspapers, however, were given this material not over the Associated Press wires but separately. It was not carried on the wires for the reason they felt the majority of the membership was not in sympathy with Father Coughlin.

Now, leaving out Father Coughlin's particular sentiment one way or the other, it occurs to me that there was a case of voluntary suppression of news on the part of the press which seemed to me rather dangerous. I wonder if you would like to comment on that?

MR. SEVAREID: Yes, I think I would like to comment on that. I guess I wasn't old enough to be aware of that problem at that time; but I do remember Father Coughlin's broadcasts.

I think what you come down to there sir, is the problem of the definition: What is news? There isn't any real slide-rule that you can always apply on that. It is a matter of your own judgment. Let me give you another example of much the same thing. I am not sure at what point Father Coughlin's remarks ceased to be news, or ceased to be important news. How long, in that case, could he go on saying these things--which were essentially the same kinds of things--and still merit a commanding position of any kind in the newspapers? That is something any press agency or distributor pretty well has to follow his instincts on.

Another case was McCarthy last spring. What McCarthy said, by reason of the very sweeping and dramatic nature of his accusations, was certainly news, however you looked at it, whether it was right or wrong. It got a tremendous play by AP and everybody else.

Now time went on--weeks and weeks went on. This was on the front pages every day. These cases were not being proved out. He was keeping himself on the front pages by new accusations all the time, or new rejoinders of one kind or another. He paid no attention to denials. He paid no attention to any discrepancies pointed out in his own accusations. He did not pay any attention to accusations against himself. He never paid attention to those because he discovered if he came out with something fresh and new for the AM and PM papers every day he would pretty well lead this publicity fight, which is what it really got to be.

But time went on, and then he said something one night--I forget what it was--and the Associated Press would not use it. He accused the AP of suppressing news. I am sure the directors of the Associated Press had many long soul-searching meetings and discussions about this.

At what point is this stuff no longer legitimate news? Arthur Sulzberger of "The New York Times" put the question this way: When a responsible man in a responsible position does an irresponsible thing,

makes an irresponsible statement, or so it seems to us, what does a responsible newspaper do? I think that is what the thing comes down to after a while.

I do not know whether you call that censorship or not. I think it is a matter of news judgment. That is all.

QUESTION: Would you say the time has come for us to establish again a kind of domestic office of war information that has proved in the past necessary when the crisis deepens? It was necessary in World War I and World War II.

MR. SEVAREID: I am inclined to think that the time has arrived to look at the other side of the coin, that is, the censorship side on military things--whether it is to be voluntary here or compulsory over there in the war theaters as it was. The time probably better come fast.

Now, I am not at all sure yet about the OWI setup here for the reason this is so much a United Nations thing. There are so many governments, other people, and military units involved in it. I think it would be very difficult, diplomatically and every other way, for us to organize a government agency to put out news on this whole world struggle without all kinds of implications and coordination with other people. And on what basis would you do it?

I would imagine that probably the time has arrived at least to create a skeleton, shadow organization for a new office of information to be used when the air is cleared here and the lines are cleared and we know who is at war with whom. I am not sure you could do it now; but I might be entirely wrong.

COMMENT: Mr. Severeid, it seems that when this country has gotten really into difficulty in its history strong characters have arisen who have gotten us out of it in one form or another. It seems, though, right at the moment very few, if any, strong characters have arisen. It seems to me that someone as capable as you of acquainting the public with the capabilities, characteristics, and strength of certain individuals would have a better opportunity than anybody else to help bring out these characters in a time of crisis such as we have at the moment.

MR. SEVAREID: You mean I should appoint a commander in the Far East?

STUDENT: No. I mean simply an adjective here and an adjective there; saying what you think of an individual; giving attention to his views. Certainly newspeople must come into contact with so many of them that you are capable of judging better than other people who do

RESTRICTED

not get around so much what individuals are really strongest, most competent, most intelligent, and possibly capable of making the best leaders from the point of view of appealing to the people generally.

MR. SEVAREID: That is certainly very flattering, sir. It is quite a responsibility. I think the way we do that in this indirect sense is that those reporters, broadcasters, or writers who have enough of a position or enough freedom to do so do exercise very considerable discrimination in what they use and do not use--as to what is said about what we should do on a particular problem.

Now, for example, a thing like this will blow up, or maybe you have a problem of whether to drop an atomic bomb or something else that has a lot of special knowledge concerned with it and on which decisions have to be made.

There is an old kind of habit, especially in the news-wire agencies, to go around and stop every congressman you can find and say, "What do you think about this?" Well, he has to say something, so he says something. They collect a whole list of these things and they are then printed as news.

I try not to do that; so do a lot of other people here. One thing we can do, however--and I think it is legitimate, justified, and necessary--is to take out of all this the remarks or the statements of certain people whom we have learned to know over a period of years as responsible people and people who know what they are talking about. So far as my own experience is concerned, I think that is about the only real service I can perform in that way. I do think it is a useful one.

QUESTIONS: Mr. Sevareid, would you enlarge a little on your remarks about China fighting for seven years without any intention of doing anything? I am not for one moment challenging that; I am simply interested in that.

MR. SEVAREID: I could enlarge for hours on that subject. I was not long in China. I was there in 1943 for a number of weeks. Very quickly it was apparent to me that despite the daily communiques at that time about their battles and how many of the enemy had died in such and such a place, none of this was really happening. They never allowed us to go to see these battles. We really could not travel at all except in the American areas.

Well, there was considerable cynicism in all the foreign press colony about all this partly because on one or two occasions when they said they had a big battle nearby, and consented to take some of the boys down, they almost never could find traces of anything. But that

RESTRICTED

is a long, long story. I came away absolutely convinced in my own mind they meant to do nothing about the Japanese. They did not have to do anything about it. We were doing it for them.

I would recommend that if you are really interested in this you go over to the Pentagon and look at the official records of Japanese casualties in China throughout the seven-year period ending with the end of the war. The Japanese had quite a force in China. Chiang had-- I don't know how many--one or two million, whatever it was; you never could tell. The only way to determine what happened was those records of the Japanese themselves after the war. According to my information, those records now show that in that seven-year period the very large Japanese force in China suffered a total of 20,000 casualties. That is less than 3,000 a year. That is about one-half in seven years that we ourselves have suffered, alone, in Korea in five months--that is, dead, wounded, and captured.

Now, what does that mean? It means not only that Chiang's armies all through that period never did fight these people, neither did the Communist armies. During my time in China there was a general feeling on the part of Stilwell that the Communists were fighting up in their area, but we couldn't really get there. I think that is final proof that they were not; but neither was Chiang.

All that time, while the American people had this big picture built up by pro-Chinese propagandists and the truth was throttled by very severe censorship--the picture of millions of fighting Democratic Chinese holding back these tides of Japanese invaders, which was utterly false--the Japanese used this occupation to train troops, lived off the land, which did not hurt the Japanese economy at all, and they never tried to go terribly far back into China. They kept the big city areas and railroads and certain points useful to them. This was a great feed lot for them. It strengthened them enormously toward the end. Not until they became worried about our intentions did they do much in south China at all. I think that is pretty much the proof of the pudding. That is why I personally--I may be wrong; I hope I am not too bitterly prejudiced about Chiang-kai-shek and his people--at this very moment am very skeptical about this idea of sending Nationalist troops to Korea to fight. It seems perfectly sensible. The Russians are using satellites, why shouldn't we use satellites? Why should we do all the dying? But my instinct on this, based on that experience, is simply that one-half of them would desert just as they did when they did fight the Communists. I can see no reason why these Chinese on Formosa, all of them simply dying to get back to China, are going to go under a foreign command and fight their own countrymen especially when their own countrymen are demonstrating that they are winning, and fighting not for their own country but for an international principle, something called the United Nations that they could not locate on a

RESTRICTED

970

map if they had to. I think the chances of general collapse of troops on the very first contact would be great. I could be wrong.

COLONEL BARNES: Mr. Sevareid, we are much in your debt for giving us your time this morning and for this very fine discussion. Thank you very much.

(10 Jan 1951--350)S.

RESTRICTED