

Could we have lost more or be in a worse position had we insisted that all of our diplomatic negotiations be conducted on top of the table for all to see and for the force of American public opinion to be exerted on the rest of the world in behalf of free government and the dignity of man, at the time and not after the fact, when it has been too late?

## NEWS CENSORSHIP ABROAD—AN AMERICAN PROBLEM

By EDWARD L. BERNAYS

Our future depends on a wise foreign policy. But even a wise foreign policy cannot be carried out effectively unless public opinion backs it up. No policy, for long, can run counter to public sentiment. Public opinion on foreign affairs should come from truthful and accurate information. Then our people can back up sound policy from informed conviction, or if leadership strays, be prepared to exert a healthy, corrective influence.

Today vast areas of ignorance in the U.S. on foreign affairs are a threat to our national well-being. Lester Markel, in his book "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," points out that about one-third of the voters are ignorant of almost any given event in our foreign affairs; about 65 out of every 100 voters admit that they hardly ever discuss foreign affairs; only about one-fourth of the voters are reasonably well informed.

If public ignorance, apathy, and misunderstanding are to be overcome in the future, American newspapers have a tremendous role to play in effecting the transformation. President Eisenhower, on September 29, in inaugurating this National Newspaper Week, said that ". . . free press . . . informs the people so that they may well discharge their responsibilities as citizens. It provides them and their elected representatives with a wide range of fact and opinion which must be weighed by all who are concerned with the well-being of our country."

One of the serious problems in developing an informed public arises from foreign news censorship abroad. Distortion of fact and values by public opinion results from the publication of such dispatches. What can be done to cope with this problem?

Let me give you an illustration, fresh in our minds. The distortion and suppression of news by the French preceding the fall of Dien Bien Phu prevented the American people from making realistic appraisal of the situation, prior to its surrender. The catastrophe came as a great shock. Censorship at the source had prevented our people from adequately preparing themselves to face the eventuality. And if our government had wanted to take action that demanded the immediate support of public opinion, we might have found ourselves in a difficult situation.

Just how widespread is censorship in foreign countries? Every six months the Associated Press asks its foreign correspondents to report on censorship and other conditions hindering the free flow of news within and between countries.

Here are a few highlights from their findings as published by Editor and Publisher last July 10. Mind you, these are only highlights. The report cited many more instances of news censorship in one form or another. In the Soviet Union, every outgoing dispatch—telephone, cable or mail—is censored. It is impossible to predict deletions in advance. In other countries behind the Iron Curtain no western newspaper men are allowed on normal assignment. The official newspapers and radio of those countries are necessarily the main sources of information.

In Spain there is strict censorship of the local press and tight control over news made available to foreign correspondents. In Portugal the government maintains strict press control. In Italy the ANSA news agency is supported by federal subsidy. Local papers are apt to exert self-censorship to avoid whatever might displease the government. In Yugoslavia news sources are difficult to reach. Domestic press and radio are under close government supervision. In France the principal news agency, Agence France Presse, is government subsidized. In East Germany, directives are issued daily to press and radio by the Communists stating how news events must be reported. The Governor General of the Belgian Congo has power to grant and withdraw permission for publication of all periodicals. In French Morocco and Tunisia, news transmission may be so long delayed as to render the stories valueless. In Iran correspondents have been called to account when their dispatches displeased the government. In Saudi-Arabia, King Saud has tightened the ban on foreign correspondents. As to Communist China, it is completely closed to foreign correspondents. Internal censorship is complete. In Nationalist China, though there is no formal censorship, correspondents considered unfriendly are apt to find many obstacles in their way. In Korea, all outgoing copy is supposed to be submitted to the Far East Command censor team in Tokyo. In Argentina some news agencies are cautious about sending out political news. Internally, the press does not criticize the government. In Peru authorities keep close tabs on correspondents' outgoing stories. In Venezuela the telegraph companies decide whether to submit dispatches to censorship. Severe political censorship is imposed on the local press. In Bolivia the two leading papers have been shut down by the government.

This pattern of censorship around the world, known only too well to our communications leaders, is not generally realized by American newspaper readers.

American newspapers and the American public both have an equal interest in dealing effectively with incomplete and "angled" news emanating from abroad. The public should have a basis for judging what is true, half true, and left unsaid.

How should such news be handled? I sought the judgment of outstanding leaders in journalism, in both the practical and academic fields, for authoritative answers. I queried Managing Editors of daily papers, members of the Association for Education in Journalism, and a few foreign correspondents. One hundred nineteen replies were received, about equally divided between Editors and Journalism teachers.

I asked these three questions of my correspondents:

- (1) "Should news from a source of origin where censorship exists, in whole or in part, be excluded or be so labelled?"
- (2) "If so, how should it be labelled? Often there is no way of knowing whether or to what extent the particular piece of news is censored."
- (3) "What, if anything, should newspapers do to safeguard the understanding of the reading public relative to censored news?"

Our respondents generally agreed that news from a source of origin where censorship exists in whole or in part should be so labelled. 74% of my Journalism teacher respondents thought so. 70% of the Editors were of the same opinion. None of the respondents believed news from such sources should be excluded. One, from a University Department of Journalism, believes, however, that unless our correspondents are given the right to work freely within a country we should impose similar restrictions on that country's representatives here. He advocates recalling our news gatherers in protest and expelling those of the restricting country. Certainly this would be partial exclusion of news.

Some people believed labelling is not advisable or practicable. 15% of the Editors said labelling has little value and favored various other devices to put the reader on guard.

The same proportion of journalism teachers (15%) were dubious about the value of labels.

As to the question how should news, subject to censorship, be labelled, suggestion varied all the way from heading the item frankly "CENSORED" to advocating that "all deletions made by censors should be clearly indicated."

Answers to question three suggested ways to safeguard the reading public's understanding. For example, some feel newspapers should publish articles on censorship practices to alert the

public. Others suggest newspapers rotate correspondents frequently in countries where censorship is strict. They could then return home and publish material previously deleted.

Going into greater detail on question one, suggestions from editors for labelling came within these categories:

- (1) A bold indent note at the beginning, in the body, or at the end of the dispatch.
- (2) A clear statement of whether the dispatch has been censored or comes from a censorship exercising country.
- (3) A direct statement that "accuracy is not guaranteed by this paper."

Typical of editors' comments on this point was that of Sam Rogan, Managing Editor, *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, N. C., who wrote, "Such labelling can be done with a parenthetical statement immediately following the first paragraph. In occasional interpretive articles or editorials a newspaper can point out that news from such and such a source is censored."

Paul S. Plumer, Managing Editor of the *Daily Kennebec Journal* of Augusta, Me., wrote, "It would be impossible to label every censored story as such because you can see from the Editor and Publisher review that practically every foreign story would have to be labelled. But I think when the censorship does have a serious bearing on the authenticity or completeness of any story, that should be pointed out."

Labelling suggestions from journalism teachers sum up as follows:

- (1) Direct labelling with some such line as "Passed by ..... Government Censors," "Censored," etc.
- (2) Plain indication of where deletions have been made.
- (3) Use of explanatory sentence or paragraph in parenthesis, or otherwise typographically displayed, calling attention to censorship.

One correspondent suggested that as a one-time stunt, a newspaper, for one issue, run censored news items upside down. "It certainly would emphasize the extent of censored news as well as suggest a doubtful authenticity," he said.

John Tebbel, Chairman, Department of Journalism, New York University, wrote, "In flagrant cases, a censored piece should be labelled, either by an italic precede, or by an insert of some kind that will readily be seen by the reader. An editorial insert, in parenthesis or italics, ought to be used to set the story in proper perspective, if the newspaper is in possession of enough facts to do it."

Victor J. Danilov, Supervisor, Public Information Services, Illinois Institute of Technology, states, "All stories coming from those countries which resort to censorship should be marked **CENSORED** or **NOT CENSORED**, depending upon the circumstances. This probably could be done most effectively through the use of an 8 or 10 point bulletin precede set in caps or boldface."

An interesting approach was suggested by John R. Whitaker, University of Oklahoma, who wrote, "I see no valid reason, however, why a newspaper could not devote a page or more to foreign news exactly as it has specialized sports, markets, society and other types of specialized news for many years. Then, by departmentalizing the foreign dispatches under such 'eyebrow' headings as 'USSR and Satellites,' 'Middle East,' etc., the foreign editor would be able to state in a very few lines of type under each such heading the censorship status of the various nations in which the current news originates. This information, together with such interpretative material as the foreign editor might feel should be included, would materially aid the reader in placing the story in proper perspective and giving it due weight."

Those opposed to labelling presented their arguments in forthright and forceful language. Objections of both groups may be summed up as follows:

- (1) Makes no allowance for fact that some censored stories may be true.
- (2) Labelling some news as censored implies that what is not so labelled is free from propaganda.
- (3) May cut off the source of news entirely.
- (4) Induces the reader to bypass such material altogether.
- (5) A warning flag become familiar loses effectiveness.
- (6) Identification of news source is preferable to a mere label.
- (7) Some stories from censorship countries are untouched by censor.
- (8) A general note to effect that censorship exists in certain countries is preferable to individual label.
- (9) Interpretation and explanation is better than labelling.

Typical of comments are the following:

J. Edward Murray, Managing Editor, *The Mirror*, Los Angeles, "... the fact or the suspicion of the censorship should be covered in the story through straightforward interpretation or explanation. The latter, when done with good judgment, is better than a straight label of censorship which is likely, in some cases, to give the mistaken impression that true news is propaganda."

Norman E. Isaacs, Managing Editor, The Louisville Times, ". . . many stories coming from countries where censorship is in effect are in themselves not censored. For this reason, The Associated Press has long felt that labelling stories, per se, is an untrustworthy system. And I agree with this viewpoint."

Willett M. Kempton, Chairman, Department of Communication, The American University, "Would the 'censored' label not also become a handy shield for the busy newsman? He would not feel the same deep responsibility for each story."

Charles T. Duncan, University of Oregon, "One or both of two results might ensue: (1) 'the warning flag' might come to lose effectiveness through familiarity, or (2) readers might assume that 'since it's censored it can't be trusted, so why should I read it?' and thereby defeat their own interests."

O. W. Riegel, Director, Lee Memorial Journalism Foundation, Washington and Lee University, ". . . I am not in favor of labelling such news with a reference to the censorship, at least not as a routine procedure. Such a label suggests to the reader that a story which has passed through one or another form of control is necessarily untrue or loaded. Such a story may be, and often is, true."

Now let us look again at answers to my third query. That was, what, if anything, should newspapers do to safeguard the understanding of the reading public relative to censored news. Suggestions fall roughly into the following divisions: (1) Indirect methods of offsetting censorship, including education of the public relative to its nature and extent; (2) Clarifying editorial comment and interpretation; (3) Particular handling of censored news by wire and press services; (4) Clear indication of story source. And some believed that the real problem was one of getting access to the real news rather than how to handle censorship of what is sent out by correspondents. Also, some respondents feel that the problem of censorship is equally great as regards domestic news, citing handouts, official U. S. government statements, restricted material, press conferences, etc.

What is advocated under indirect methods of offsetting censorship? Here are some suggestions: (1) A continuous fact-oriented news and editorial campaign against censorship, private and public, at home and abroad; (2) Press for an open channels policy in the U. N.; (3) Analysis of world's news sources by a committee of press service representatives or similar body; (4) Frequent reprints of the Associated Press Service reports on status of censorship in foreign countries; (5) Greater stress on factual news rather than on the running story and "hot" copy; (6) Publish informative

articles indicating the state of censorship in various countries; (7) Force of example to show how much better our own uncensored press is than one controlled by government or ruling factions.

Gene Currivan, former foreign correspondent of the New York Times and now in the Education News Department, wrote, "I would say therefore that we can combat censorship only by alerting our readers through (a) periodic publication of surveys from the field and (b) occasional references to censorship in editorials when the editor feels that the subject matter under analysis has been tampered with or the writer has obviously been restrained."

E. E. Roberts, Department of Journalism, Bethany College, replied, "If the newspapers would set aside a definite space or box with the heading 'Censorship' and tell something about various countries from day to day we could soon have a better educated public."

Now as to editorial opinion and comment as a method of meeting the problem, Editors suggested: (1) Source of every story should be given; (2) There should be interpretive writing by experts capable of piercing the censorship; (3) Readers should know the editor's judgment as to a story's value.

Erwin D. Canham, Editor, The Christian Science Monitor, stated, "I believe a better solution is for editors to bracket into dispatches the substantive information which would rectify the limitations of a censored dispatch. We do this regularly. Sometimes it doesn't work, but usually it does."

Richard A. Thornburgh, Night Managing Editor, The Philadelphia Inquirer, wrote, "What we try to do—and most American newspapers and press services follow the same plan—is to evaluate the news received from questionable sources and to so write or edit the copy that the reader knows where it comes from and is given the editors' judgment on its value."

Teachers of Journalism made the point that editorial comment by the Editor is essential, either on the Editorial Page, or below, or beside the end of the story.

Jay W. Jensen, School of Journalism and Communications, University of Illinois, said, "In order to safeguard the understanding of the reading public relative to censored news, publications should present known facts (not opinions) which contravene or clarify the censored news."

What can press services do to offset censorship? Educators and editors agreed that the press services should keep newspapers informed as to exact censorship conditions in all countries. They believe such information should be the basis for special articles

or precedes to particular news stories. It was suggested that the judgment of the News Service's Foreign Editor as to a story's reliability be teletyped along with it on the press wires. Another suggestion was to maintain closer liaison between home office editors and correspondents through some code. Alert wire services and astute editors should provide safeguards or explanations for the reading public.

Said Hinson Stiles, Managing Editor, The New York Mirror, "Mirror editors have believed for some time that where a strict cable censorship is maintained important stories which could be affected by censorship in any measure should carry a precede to that effect. As the Mirror views it, this would require that the press associations to which we subscribe must label their cable news."

C. C. Aldridge, Managing Editor, Beaumont Journal, Beaumont, Texas, advocated the same approach, "Which stories are censored before being transmitted by the wire services could be designated as such by the services so that editors could introduce the article with the lead-all."

Frederic E. Merwin, Director, School of Journalism, Rutgers University, declared. "The main lines of battle in the conflict, it seems to me must be drawn at the level where news is processed."

Bryce W. Rucker, Assistant Professor of Journalism, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, added, "I would favor, too, extremely limited use of vague sources of news such as 'highly placed authorities,' etc. This should be attempted by the wire services."

Journalism teachers were particularly insistent that all news should show its source of origin, and the reader be informed of circumstances surrounding the news gathering.

Charles E. Higbie, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism, University of Wisconsin, wrote, "My main faith would be in mature correspondents writing for an intelligent public in which the conditions around the news gathering of each news dispatch are made an easily understood part of the written news story."

Mitchell V. Charnley, Professor at the School of Journalism, University of Minnesota, writing in the same vein, stated, "To me, 'properly labeled' means qualified with some kind of explanatory matter that will let the reader know the conditions under which news is transmitted."

The problem of access to reliable news drew several comments.

Marshall Bannell, news correspondent in Costa Rica for the New York Herald Tribune, McGraw-Hill Publications and Vision Magazine, said in this connection, "... Editors taking several wire services must often be lulled into a sense of security by noting that often—even on important items—all the wires carry about the same story. He has no way of knowing that possibly the local stringers were under social, economic, personal, even police, pressures. And more important, neither does the reading public."

William Porter, School of Journalism, State University of Iowa, wrote, "... Most newsmen working abroad today will agree that, outside of the Iron Curtain countries, the big problem is control of access to news—another way to put it is to equate it with the rise of the government press officer; the man whose job is to keep the reporter away from the news in the first place, rather than the crude and not always effective device of censoring the material which he produces."

Though directed toward foreign news censorship, our query, nevertheless, drew some pithy comment on indirect censorship methods in this country. Norman E. Isaacs, Managing Editor, The Louisville (Ky.) Times, referred to the Federal Executive order permitting certain independent agencies to classify information. He said, "In actuality, however, the practice is that we of the press are permitted news as and when certain Government officials deem it proper that we should have this information and I consider this to be quite as effective a censorship as any devised by foreign governments. I would, therefore, consider it doubly unfortunate if the American Press, or any substantial segment of it, should move toward any labelling process—leading our readers to believe that all else was uncensored. My suggestion is that we move more rapidly toward cleaning up our own fouled nest."

E. C. Hamilton, Publisher and Editor, the Monroe (Wis.) Evening Times, said, "It happens that we and all other inland papers are more concerned with the stupid attempts of local authorities to control news than we are with world censorship."

J. A. Trebilcock, Associate Professor, School of Journalism and Communications, University of Illinois, wrote, "To me, a much more acute problem is trying to convince intelligent people that news is not censored by advertisers, our own government, and other free governments."

I have presented only a few of the many interesting comments on how to handle censored and possibly censored news. Many other problems, too, confront editors in their effort to bring true news of the world to their readers, to furnish them an intelligent basis of appraisal. Yet we know how increasingly vital it is to do so if we as a people are to adequately meet present-day conditions.

By reflecting to you and the public the suggestions of some of the leaders on how to improve the situation, the public interest may be served.