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Free Press For World Peace.

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Left—The front page of a 1939 French newspaper.

Right—Berliners line up for the latest news.

Free Press For World Peace

By Cpl. KLAUS MANN
Staff Writer

When Is It Free And How Free Should It Be Is The Big Problem

"Every soldier in this war has a right to expect a free press."—Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, in an interview with representatives of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

IT'S ONE of the things we have been fighting for. It's one of the absolute prerequisites to the maintenance and development of our American way of life. The Bill of Rights stipulates "freedom of the press," together with "freedom of speech," "the free exercise of religion," "the right of the people to be secure in their homes," and other basic rights and liberties. And when President Roosevelt offered to the world his Four Freedoms, he considered "freedom of speech and expression" (which includes of course the freedom of the press) essential enough to list it first in the Atlantic Charter. Without this "First Freedom" the rights of a people to worship, to be free from want and from fear, would be in constant danger. Some of the Founding Fathers of our Republic — especially Jefferson — regarded a free press as the cornerstone of the entire edifice of liberty.

THE CASE is now so clear — as far as American public opinion is concerned at least — that no defense of freedom of the press as a doctrine, is any longer necessary. If any additional argument was needed to prove the rightness and vital importance of this principle, the terrible examples of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperialist Japan should be sufficient to convince even the most obstinate skeptic.

Those countries have demonstrated, to the sorrow of the whole world, that a government-controlled press can indeed become a formidable weapon in the hands of an aggressive, militaristic clique. Propaganda in general, and the press in particular, played a decisive role in the setup of the totalitarian states. The Axis governments could not have started the war, if their nations had not been mentally prepared for such a deadly adventure. The plain people in Germany, Italy and Japan had to be fed with lies, distortions, exaggerations, inciting slogans, vicious prejudices; their minds had to be darkened, confused, poisoned and corrupted. The press, more than any other individual factor, was instrumental in creating the kind of atmosphere which the warmongers and war lords wanted for their sinister purposes.

IF THE dictators depended on their venal or intimidated newspapermen in preparing and carrying on war on a

world-wide scale — the democracies need a free press to organize and maintain universal peace. Living in One World, we have to know each other, lest we continue fighting. A free, unbiased world press could contribute decisively to the development of international understanding. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain peace without freedom of information.

Once we have accepted the fact that a free world press is desirable, or indispensable, in the interest of permanent peace — the great question remains: Does such a thing as a free world press exist right now? And if not — is it likely to be established in the not too distant future?

THE FIRST part of this question has been answered in the negative. World press freedom is not yet a reality. A recent survey on world censorship released by the Associated Press shows just how far we must travel before this lofty objective can actually be attained.

The United States is the only one of the five major powers which has lifted entirely restrictions on press and radio. Britain and France plan to lift restrictions soon, and the Chinese Government is considering a similar step. All in all, press freedom is now an actuality in only fourteen nations of the world. Besides the United States, the nations which permit news to flow freely into and out of the countries and exercise no censorship on their domestic papers are Canada, Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay, Panama, and Brazil.

SOME MONTHS ago, shortly before the end of the war in Europe, three representatives of the American Society of Newspaper Editors went 40,000 miles around the world to test and discuss freedom of the press and of communications in the postwar world. The main purpose of their journey was to get a pledge incorporated into the peace

treaties — obliging governments "not to censor news at the source; not to use the press as an instrument of national policy, and to permit a free flow of news in and out of signatory countries."

The three editorial writers said in their report that they did not find much press freedom under war-time conditions. They got many pledges from government leaders for postwar freedom, some of which they described as "lip service," and discovered in editors of most nations a real desire for more freedom of the press. Some of the statesmen they met considered the visitors' mission "idealistic but impossible." Forty-five Belgian editors were said to be "pessimistic about the free-press ideal." As for the top Soviet newspaper editors and Government press controllers with whom the three American journalists had "a full and frank mutual survey of their different problems and conceptions," they maintained that "their system was most representative of the wishes of the people and was a 'free press' because it represented only the people."

CLEARLY, the attitude of the Soviets will have a vital bearing on the future of the free-press idea. Although the Russian press has never been "free" in the sense that the American and British press are, there is an interest in, and maybe a tendency toward freedom of the press in the USSR. The Russians were insistent on a free press for Italy, when the peace terms were being drawn up. Some observers believe that the next years are likely to bring a relaxing of governmental control over the Soviet press.

Eugene Zhukov, an "Izvestia" correspondent covering the San Francisco conference, pointed out in an interview that "differences in conception between the press of Russia and that of the United States or other countries need not bar understandings between them for improving information and mutual communication." As for the "differences of conception," Zhukov was as outspoken as he could be. The American idea of freedom of the press, he said, "actually brings up a completely silly situation: calumny against private persons, and moreover the murder of an individual, is set upon by law, but calumny against a friendly country and starting a war with it—that remains unpunished!"

And again: "Pro-Fascist propaganda which is carried on in the United States under the disguise of 'freedom of the press' is not only directed against other countries but against, first of all, American democracy. In this case, for-

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Some 20,000 volumes of literature "contrary to the German spirit" were burned outside the University of Berlin by Nazi Storm Troopers.



Free Press

mal 'freedom of the press' creates absolutely undemocratic results. Scarcely anyone can envy such a situation."

THE THREE representatives of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, on their recent trip, heard critical remarks of a similar nature. "Some editors abroad," they disclose in their report, "are under the impression that the American press is dominated by the advertiser, and that much of American thinking is directed towards undemocratic policies by so-called newspaper 'trusts' or 'chains.'" Especially the leading newspapermen and Government press controllers in Moscow insisted "American papers did not always represent the wishes of the people," using the Roosevelt elections as examples. They also said that "many of the critical items about the Soviets in the American press were revealed to be untrue, but papers which had carried them never took the trouble to admit the untruths when revealed."

"We stated," the report continues, "the position of the American press—that they were newspapers and not organs of a party; that advertisers did not control them and did not want to do so; and that if they did they could not get away with it. We told them the people in America were very inquisitive about their papers, who owned them and what interests were behind them. We said that the test was the man with the three cents or the nickel. If he had no confidence in the paper he did not buy it."

AS FOR the last point, it might be argued that "the man with the three cents or the nickel" does not necessarily agree with the editorial policy of the paper he buys. Many of the most popular U. S. journals depend largely on comics, amusement features, and sports for their reader acceptance. But be this as it may—our faith in freedom of the press, as a principle and as an institution, is too deep-rooted and too well-founded to be marred by any criticism. Even if we must admit the soundness of some of the Soviet views—the supreme value of freedom, to us, remains unquestionable and absolute; which is as true of press-freedom as of any other essential liberty.

But in no other realm within the scope of our civil liberties is the element of clear obligation more closely woven with the existence of a right. All of us live hourly with the press. Its impact on our national life is direct, powerful and universal. Just as no one is excluded from the benefits of its virtues, no one can escape some injury when it ignores its responsibilities and moral duties. Byron Price, Director of Censorship, was right when saying, in an address at ceremonies incident to the installation of the original copy of the Bill of Rights at the Library of Congress: "A free press cannot endure unless it is a responsible press." And he was also right when he added: "The freedom of the press belongs to the people and not to the publishers."

THE AMERICAN press watches vigilantly and jealously over its cherished privileges. Whenever correspondents are excluded from any event, only editorial columns from coast to coast resound with indignation. In some cases this strong reaction against official secretiveness may be healthy and



Freedom of the Press has its meaning, too, for the American country editor.

justified. When the Big Three met at Potsdam to shape the destinies of the world, the press was completely barred from their history-making sessions. This was indeed an occasion to speak of "violation of the freedom of the press"—as did many prominent American commentators, including the former Under-Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, who declared: "There has been no comparable blackout of essential and legitimate news at any international conference in modern times."

But if our free press has the right to protect its liberties, it has also the duty to use them in a responsible and reasonable way. It did so during the war, as far as military matters were concerned—according to this statement of the Director of Censorship, Byron Price: "Unlike every other great power in the war, the United States has imposed no compulsory censorship upon publication of military information. Instead, the Government merely asked for cooperation, and the press has given it in overflowing measure, under a voluntary code."

IT HAS to be seen, however, whether our press will give the same "overflowing measure" of cooperation in the postwar world—especially when it comes to discussing the delicate issues of foreign policy. American public opinion, fully aware of the value of a free press, should become more conscious of the tremendous responsibilities and risks such a system involves. We must not forget that the abuse of

liberties almost inevitably leads to the loss of liberty.

Pre-Hitler Germany had a free press—which helped the Nazis to come to power; it was thanks to democratic laws that Goebbels could undermine democracy. And as for prewar France—there, too, the press was free: nobody interfered when the leading Paris gazettes accepted enormous bribes from Mussolini, Hitler, and other champions of liberty. It can hardly be this kind of press-freedom which Jefferson had in mind and which the Atlantic Charter promises the world.

THERE IS a possibility that the United Nations will try to establish some sort of Free World Press. The peacemakers will be faced with pressure from their own Governments, especially the United States, and from the press itself. Nearly every nation has expressed its desire—more or less officially—to see a free press of some kind operating among all the countries of the world. If this great project is to materialize, some of the eastern democracies will have to modify their present conception of "press-freedom;" while some of our freedom-loving journalists in the western hemisphere will have to accept a certain discipline, to which not all of them seem to be used to right now. A Free World Press will come into being and will function only if it submits itself to a "voluntary code" of common sense and ethics—a code which should be as valid and cogent in times of peace as it was under the pressure of war.

Krauts Walked

P-51 Mustang pilot from Goshen, Ohio, Lt. Col. Herschel H. Green, with the impressive total of 18 victories, became an ace in one day when he knocked six enemy planes from the sky over the Gulf of Venice.

THE 15TH WAS grounded long before the German surrender in Italy, for the rapid advance of the Allied ground forces had eliminated what few targets remained. Then the job of cleaning



Capt. John Voll, theater's top ace.