

ADVANCE COPY

Not for publication before 7:30 P. M.
Friday, October 21, 1960

A LAY CRITIC LOOKS AT THE PRESS
IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

Address of Cyrus Eaton
Chairman of the Board
Chesapeake and Ohio Railway
and
Steep Rock Iron Mines Limited
At Presentation of Bowater Awards of Journalism
Rideau Club, Ottawa, Canada

(For Background Data on Cyrus Eaton, See Last Three Pages)

Introduction of Cyrus Eaton

By Bruce Macdonald, President of The Parliamentary Press Gallery
Bowater Journalism Awards Dinner, Ottawa, Canada, October 21, 1960

We are honored in having as a guest tonight a barefoot boy from Nova Scotia, who left his Pugwash home for the United States to beat the Yankee at his own game.

We are doubly honored in having with us, as well, his charming wife.

Mr. Eaton is a man who in his lifetime has played many parts. He needs no introduction here, as a financier or as the head of a vast industrial empire.

Although he became a citizen of the United States in 1913, he has played a major role in the development of Canada's natural resources. He was the driving force behind the opening of Steep Rock Iron Mines west of Lake Superior during the last war. Since then he has turned his attention to tapping the great iron ore resources of faraway Ungava.

Mr. Eaton is a farmer, a founder of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, a trustee of the University of Chicago and, at 76, still an ardent skier, to name only a few of his diverse activities.

It is recorded that, in his youth, Mr. Eaton had a yearning to become a man of the cloth, but was convinced by one John D. Rockefeller that would be a mis-spent life.

If he has not put his collar on backwards, he has at many times in his life been a man with a mission.

Today he has become widely known as a powerful capitalist, who has made it his mission to help promote understanding between East and West before misunderstanding ends in mutual destruction.

In 1954 he began the Pugwash conferences of intellectuals from all corners of the globe. He has travelled widely through the Communist world and met many of its leaders. Recently he became the holder of the Lenin Peace Prize.

His efforts to promote peace have brought him fame and, in some quarters, infamy. But if the means he has adopted are a source of controversy, there are few who would not give heartfelt support to his goal, a world in which man may continue to live.

1

Let me begin with a word of warm thanks to the distinguished members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, for honoring me with the opportunity to participate in the presentation of this year's Bowater Awards for Journalism. Congratulations should certainly go to the Parliamentary Press Gallery for fostering and developing the Awards and for acting as their custodian. Through these annual awards the Parliamentary Press Gallery is making an important contribution to its profession. As I shall point out later, at greater length, I am convinced that the modern agencies of mass communication, particularly the press, are in a position to control the decision between peace and annihilation in this complex nuclear age in which we live. To reward reportorial proficiency accordingly appeals to me as a singularly important means of encouraging journalism of the superior calibre required in these critical times.

Bowater an Outstanding Example of Free Enterprise

Congratulations should also go to the Bowater Corporations for providing the Awards. As a practicing capitalist, I should also like to pay tribute to Bowater for the outstanding example of free enterprise it sets among British Commonwealth corporations. I am happy to claim some small kinship with Bowater: when the late I. W. Killam was laying plans for Nova Scotia's Mersey Paper Company, now a prosperous Bowater subsidiary, he sought my counsel, and I was sufficiently impressed with the potentialities of the proposed project to make a substantial investment in it.

Doing a thriving business in a dozen or more countries on four continents, Bowater demonstrates the opportunities open to private investors and private management for the profitable development of natural resources and upbuilding of industries throughout the world. For entrepreneurs with vigor and vision,

-3-

During my boyhood in Nova Scotia, my father served as postmaster, in addition to being a farmer, country merchant and lumberman. Through our post office passed not only the newspapers of nearby Amherst, Halifax and St. John, but also the Montreal journals and, when American vacationers were sojourning in our vicinity, the Boston Transcript. If I cannot boast of being born with printer's ink in my veins, I can at least testify to having absorbed the message from considerable quantities of it through my own eyes over a long period of years.

Broadening the Journalistic Horizons

At the end of the last century, when I went away to preparatory school and college in Ontario, I rapidly broadened my journalistic horizons. My uncle, the late U. S. Congressman Charles Eaton, had been writing editorials for the old Toronto Globe. Through him, I met Sir John Willison, who had just left the Globe to found the News. I saw considerable of his successor on the Globe, Macdonald, and of Joe Atkinson, who was energetically bringing the Star to the forefront. I was a staunch if more distant admirer of the Telegram's John Ross Robertson, and I read the Mail & Empire and the World. The three surviving papers, The Globe and Mail, The Star and The Telegram, still come daily to my desk.

Our school library, at the turn of the century, afforded such leading British periodicals as The Economist, The Illustrated London News and Punch. I have remained a faithful reader of all three, and subscribe besides to a select list of English daily and weekly newspapers.

-4-

As I had a chance to travel and work in the Canadian west on school vacations and later, I came to know the papers of the Lakehead, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary and on the Pacific Coast, and I still watch them closely. The Financial Post and Maclean's Magazine have also become favorites. When I was in Regina a year ago, the editor of the Leader-Post told me I knew more of the paper's early history than anyone in its present organization. That, no doubt, is one of the accidents of a long life.

Canadian Greats in Newspaper Publishing

Canada has given many great figures to the field of newspaper publishing. Two modern names that come immediately to mind are those of Roy Thomson and my lifelong friend Lord Beaverbrook. These Canadians have captured journalistic immortality by demonstrating their genius in the fiercely competitive British newspaper arena.

From the time of my first visit to the United States in 1900, it goes without saying that I have been a diligent student of American journalism, east, west, north and south. With the passage of years, I have also come to add a careful cross section of key publications from France, Germany and the Soviet Union.

Having started out to qualify myself as a lay expert on journalism, I am sure I have at least succeeded in showing why I have never become addicted to the movies, and seldom find time to listen to radio or look at television. This is not to say, however, that I fail to keep informed of trends in these other influential fields of public communication.

Now, never in history has our press exercised so much influence as it does today. It takes precedence over the church and the school in shaping our

-5-

opinions. In the crucial sphere of foreign affairs, moreover, we are at the almost complete mercy of the press for our information. In our western countries where those responsible for the formulation of foreign policy must be able to carry the voters with them and win elections, the press bears a special responsibility for accurate and understandable foreign reporting and interpretation. How well, then, is our press measuring up in its execution of this arduous assignment?

Canadian Journalism Excels in Objectivity

Canadian newspapers, in my estimation, are by and large performing a highly creditable job. Their over-all objectivity commands admiration, as does their literary competence. American political leaders, to whose attention I constantly call Canadian news articles and editorials on international affairs, frequently comment on the favorable contrast to the counterparts in the American press.

Journalism in the United States, I fear, has fallen to a comparatively low estate in its foreign coverage. Blind and unreasoning fear and hatred of communism, on the part of press, public and politician alike, have lead to inadequate reporting of conditions and events in the socialist countries, and to slanted editorial comment, as well.

On my recent trips abroad, I have visited the Soviet Union and a number of other eastern and western European countries, to see for myself. What I observed in the socialist nations simply does not match most of what I have been reading about them in the American press.

I live happily and I hope productively by the doctrine that intelligent and enlightened private ownership and operation provide the ideal system of econom-

-6-

ics for my country, and that the greatest possible separation of politics from economics is desirable. At the same time, I am prepared to concede that, in some countries under some circumstances, socialism can succeed if it enjoys popular approval and able leadership. After a firsthand view, I am convinced that these conditions are to a large extent being met in many socialist nations. I consequently think the American press is doing itself and its readers a serious disservice in pretending otherwise. The American press is, I submit, endangering the peace of the world by these unworthy tactics.

Is the American Press Losing its Freedom?

In the socialist countries, journalism is a recognized arm of government. We in the western world have prided ourselves on the freedom of our press. In the United States, in fact, the First Article of the Bill of Rights, which is an integral part of the Constitution, expressly protects freedom of the press from governmental abridgement. Recent years have seen the American press adopt so obliging an attitude to the State Department as almost to become an agent of the Federal Government. How long a step is it from obliging to obeying?

The American press has also shown itself supine in accepting the State Department subterfuge that has barred newsmen from the People's Republic of China. There, in a nation with more than three times the population of the United States, events of the most dramatic character are occurring daily. How can the American people and their government reach a rational policy on China without full and fair information from objective eyewitnesses?

The American press has, with a few rare exceptions, displayed itself at its inflammatory and sensational worst in its coverage of the Fifteenth General

-7-

Assembly of the United Nations. Distortion and misrepresentation have reached new peaks in the reporting, cartoons and editorials accorded the presence in New York of the communist leaders who have been a small part of the largest gathering of heads of government in history.

American Press Appeals to Mass Prejudice

At the behest of their editors, several thousand reporters have striven with all their might and main to outdo one another in appealing to mass prejudice and anger. Never mind, as far as they are concerned, that they have helped to threaten the very existence of the United Nations Organization, and pushed mankind further along toward the final tragedy in his long martyrdom. The hot headline is what helps swell circulation! That's what counts.

Let's examine the American headlines on the U.N. China vote. Most of them proclaimed the major "triumph" of the United States in its latest sordid maneuver to exclude the Chinese People's Republic from the U.N. The fact is that, on the first crucial test ballot, the United States was able to muster only 38 votes from the 99 member-nations. By an ironical coincidence, on the very same day, respected Nationalist Chinese magazine publisher Lei Chen and two of his associates in Formosa were given stiff prison sentences by American-supported Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's military court. Their crime: urging the introduction of some of the principles of democracy into Formosa.

The American press has not only misinformed the public, but also committed a gross strategic error in constantly hounding and hunting the socialist government leaders throughout their stay in New York, especially those visiting

-8-

the United States for the first time. I made a point of exploring this with Gomulka of Poland, Kadar of Hungary, Novotny of Czechoslovakia and Zhivkov of Bulgaria. Their first view of New York gave each of them an overpowering and inspiring sense of the strength and achievement of the capitalistic system. Capitalism could have delivered a stirring message if the marvels of Manhattan had been allowed to speak for themselves. Instead, after an unceasing barrage of calumny from the American press, the visitors go home with the impression that the United States, if it does not want war, is not interested in peace.

The American press has also failed to inform the public. On Sunday, October 2, when Polish-Americans were celebrating Pulaski day across the United States, Gomulka of Poland delivered an address of great significance in New York, and released the text to newspapers. The Gomulka speech was completely ignored by the American press, although the Polish-American parades and other festivities were featured in articles and pictures.

Serious-Minded Americans Are Concerned with Press Defects

These are but a few of many examples that could be cited to illustrate the present failure of the American press to exercise its freedom with due responsibility and honesty. They will suffice, I think, to show why more and more serious-minded Americans are concerning themselves with the problem of the press, and are casting about for ways and means to cause it to perform its proper function of providing the public with accurate intelligence of the news of the day. I may seem a little late in saying this, but I am not unmindful that one who assumes the role of a critic of the press is running some public relations risks.

Several suggestions are currently under discussion for press reform in the United States. The most drastic, and one to which I take emphatic exception, is repeal of the First Amendment, in the Bill of Rights, to permit government regulation of all forms of mass communication. In my long lifetime, I have seen scores of new government agencies spring up in the United States to regulate various sectors of the economy.

Will the American Press Escape Government Regulation?

From personal experience, I know well the workings of the Federal Power Commission, which deals with the electric power industry; the Interstate Commerce Commission, which watches over the transportation field; and the Securities and Exchange Commission, which supervises the investment markets. Like all regulatory bodies of the government, these three started off with paeans of praise for the miracles of reform they were going to accomplish. By the very nature of bureaucracy, no matter how ably administered, these governmental agencies have actually acted as a brake on the growth and progress of the industries over which they hold jurisdiction. I hope the press will escape this fate.

Another project for press reform now being actively considered is the creation of a privately endowed national commission, amply financed, ably staffed and perhaps associated with one of the great universities. This group, which would be composed of well-known people, would undertake a comprehensive and continuing survey of existing press practices, as the basis for periodic critical reports.

An idea I am inclined to favor is the formation of volunteer local committees to serve as firm but friendly critics of the press. Each community undoubtedly could come up with seven disinterested and public-minded citizens, including per-

-10-

haps an educator, a clergyman, a judge, a doctor, a businessman, a labor leader and at least one prominent woman. The only prohibitions would be on members of the press themselves and on politicians or candidates for public office.

Whether any of these proposals is realized soon, I have a strong feeling that the best and strongest safeguard for freedom of the press lies in self-reform. This will mean the painful institution of self-criticism and mutual criticism. It will accordingly require "repeal" of the present unwritten law by which the press scrupulously ignores the horrors and scandals of which its own members are guilty.

Western Journalism Can Keep Us from Nuclear Disaster

If I were not an admirer of the press and its infinite potentialities, I would not have dwelt on its deficiencies at such length. May I add that, while I have never aspired to be an editor, I have at times had newspaper as well as pulp and paper investments, so I know something of the financial and technological problems of publishing. I am optimist enough to believe that the press can operate at a satisfactory profit under private ownership and operation, while meeting the serious needs of the kind of society we traditionally cherish.

All of us must marvel at today's amazing instruments of mass communication. If these can be harnessed to useful service by those with the enviable ability to think, to express themselves and to influence others to noble deeds, then we may hope for ultimate relaxation of today's almost intolerable international tension. The question is, will the journalists lead the way from the brink of nuclear disaster to the soaring peaks of a richer and fuller material and spiritual life?