

sortment. The impression that they had their inspiration in rumor rather than in fact, it must be added, is heightened by contrasting them with what has actually happened subsequent to their publication. Five months have passed since January. But it was Poland, and not Russia, that first started an offensive. Soviet troops have indeed been landed in a Persian port (Enzeli), but there they went in pursuit of a Russian fleet which had landed there before them—Denikin's—and a dispatch to the London *Herald* states they have subsequently been withdrawn.* There has been no uprising in India. Nor has there been an invasion of India. There has been no invasion of Mesopotamia. The most sensational, in fact, of all these January dispatches, was as sensationally contradicted on the very day following its publication. January 16, a first-page headline in the *Times*, eight columns wide, announced:

BRITAIN, FACING WAR WITH REDS, CALLS COUNCIL IN PARIS

And the following morning came the news:

NO WAR WITH RUSSIA, ALLIES TO TRADE WITH HER

The first report, then, was not reliable. So swift

* See the *Times*, June 19, 1920.

a contrast between rumor and fact would—even were there no other reasons for doubt—raise legitimate suspicion concerning the accuracy of other news pitched in a similar key.

It is on the note of the Red Peril that this study ends. It has appeared at every turn to obstruct the restoration of peace in Eastern Europe and Asia, and to frustrate the resumption of economic life. The Allied proposal in January to open trade relations was speedily labelled "nothing more than a tactical political move" on the part of the Allied Governments (special dispatch from Washington to the *Times*, January 22). In that way, too, have been tagged successive offers coming from Russia. "There has been no doubt at any time in Washington official circles," said a special dispatch to the *Times*, March 14, "that the Soviet 'peace' drive represented nothing more than a scrap-of-paper policy of the Soviet leaders, a mere tactical move, and that what they really sought was a breathing spell in which to concentrate their energies for a renewed drive toward world-wide revolution."

Each peace proposal, whichever side first launched it, a tactical move . . . Meantime the Red Peril. That, with armed intervention no longer a possibility, was the propaganda in the news. And if the peace of the world had not hung in the balance it would have made an interesting stalemate.

Deductions

Assuming that the preceding chapters constitute at least a *prima facie* case for saying that the run of the news on one matter of transcendent importance to Americans has been dubious, what deductions are there to be drawn by the constructive critic of the press? Primarily, we believe, that the professional standards of journalism are not high enough, and the discipline by which standards are maintained not strong enough, to carry the press triumphantly through a test so severe as that provided by the Russian Revolution.

First as to standards. The analysis shows how seriously misled was the *Times* by its reliance upon the official purveyors of information. It indicates that statements of fact emanating from governments and the circles around governments as well as from the leaders of political movements cannot be taken as judgments of fact by an independent press. They indicate opinion, they are controlled by special purpose, and they are not trustworthy news. If, for example, the Russian Minister of War says that the armies of Russia were never stronger, that cannot be accepted by a newspaper as news that the armies of Russia are stronger than ever. The only news in the statement is that the

Minister says they are stronger. By any high journalistic standard, the Minister's statement if it deals with a matter of vital importance is a challenge to independent investigation.

The analysis shows that even more misleading than the official statement purporting to be a statement of fact, is the semi-official and semi-authoritative but anonymous statement. Such news is fathered by such phrases as:

"Officials of the State Department"
 "government and diplomatic sources"
 "reports reaching here"
 "it is stated on high authority that"

Behind those phrases may be anybody, a minor bureaucrat, a dinner table conversation, hotel lobby gossip, a chance acquaintance, a paid agent. Dispatches of this type put the editor at home and the reader at the mercy of opinion that he cannot check, and it is time to demand that the correspondent take the trouble to identify his informants sufficiently to supply the reader with some means of estimating the character of the report. He need not name the individual source but he can 'place' him.

The analysis shows that certain correspondents are totally untrustworthy because their sympathies

are too deeply engaged. Mr. Harold Williams's reports from Denikin's army were obviously queer at the time and are ridiculous in the light of events. A reporter is not entitled to hold an assignment when his disinterestedness is open to question. One is not able to avoid the impression that in the selection of correspondents the virtue of conformity is at least balanced against the virtues of objectivity, insight and credibility.

The analysis indicates also that even so rich and commanding a newspaper as the Times does not take seriously enough the equipment of the correspondent. For extraordinarily difficult posts in extraordinary times, something more than routine correspondents are required. Reporting is one of the most difficult professions, requiring much expert knowledge and serious education. The old contention that properly trained men lack the "news sense" will not stand against the fact that improperly trained men have seriously misled a whole nation. It is habit rather than preference which makes readers accept news from correspondents whose usefulness is about that of an astrologer or an alchemist. Important as it is for the press to read lessons in efficiency to workingmen, employees and politicians, it is no less important for the press to study those lessons itself. Measured by its responsibility and pretensions the efficiency of the newspapers is not what determined men could make it.

The analysis shows further that at critical periods the time honored tradition of protecting news against editorials breaks down. The Russian policy of the editors of the Times profoundly and crassly influenced their news columns. The office handling of the news, both as to emphasis and captions, was unmistakably controlled by other than a professional standard. So obvious is this fact, so blatant

is the intrusion of an editorial bias, that it will require serious reform before the code which has been violated can be restored.

Where is the power to be found which can define the standards of journalism and enforce them? Primarily within the profession itself. We do not believe that the press can be regulated by law. Our fundamental reliance must be on the corporate tradition and discipline of the newspaper guild. It is for them to agree on a code of honor, as the Bar Associations and Medical Societies have agreed, and for them to watch vigilantly for infractions of that code. As citizens they cannot escape this duty, and as members of a profession they are forced to it by the growing distrust which everywhere greets them. They know that to-day they are feared but not intimately respected, and the sins of some are visited upon all.

But while the technical code of journalistic standards, the tradition and the discipline belong to the guild, newspapers must be prepared for an increasing supervision from the readers of the press. Those readers will not simply "write letters to the editor" effective as such letters are. They will speak through organizations which will become centers of resistance. The report on the steel strike made by the Interchurch World Movement is an example of such resistance to the newspaper reports of that strike. The report on the activities of the Attorney-General by twelve lawyers for the Popular Government League is an example of resistance to the red hysteria of 1919-20. They illustrate the point that a powerful engine of criticism is appearing in the community which will no longer naively accept the current news on contentious questions. With that fact the profession of journalism will have to make a reckoning.