

# UNCLE SAM, RADIO PROPAGANDIST

BY EARL SPARLING

TO MULTITUDES of Frenchmen, America is not Uncle Sam but Monsieur Thomas. In Germany it is Herr Marsching; in Italy, Signora Murray. Among the twenty Latin American republics it will be Senhor Deter to Brazilians, Senor Carvajal to Spanish-speaking peoples, or perhaps Senora Olga Andre.

Unknown and unheard by North Americans, these and a few dozen others sell American democracy to the world in easy daily doses. Sitting in a cluttered nine-by-twelve broadcasting studio, Monsieur Richard Thomas speaks casually across 3000 miles of ocean. His perfect French was learned while he was a student of dramatics at the Comedie Francaise. Chicago-born and barely 30, he speaks with linguistical and psychological effectiveness because he has lived or traveled in twenty foreign lands. His studio is the smallest in the place, for international short-wave broadcasting is still a stepchild of the broadcasting companies. It costs money, and as yet produces no income.

Monsieur Thomas handles by himself all the mechanical and production detail which ordinarily would require an operating staff of four to six. He sits in front of a complicated keyboard known to its intimates as the "announcer's delight." A dozen keys, various switches, a row of colored lights — and when Monsieur is neither pushing keys nor watching lights he plays music records or reads into the microphone from a script he has prepared himself.

Watching the performance you think inevitably of those one-man bands which once toured vaudeville. But this is not vaudeville: it is America's message to civilization — our answer to chaos and the heavy hand, our calm assurance that good will and common sense are still alive.

For a solid hour, 3 to 4 P.M., the message goes to France. Then with an "Au revoir, mes amis," Mr. Thomas slips out of the chair and another young man slips into it. The successor pushes the same buttons, watches the same lights.

But out in Bound Brook, N. J., where these programs are flashed into the ether, an engineer has thrown switches that shift the radio beam from Europe to Brazil. The daily broadside to Latin America begins. It continues from this one National Broadcasting Company studio for nine unbroken hours: an hour in Portuguese, two in Spanish, back for another hour in Portuguese, then two more in Spanish, one in English, and a final two in Spanish. Something similar is happening in a dozen other studios from Boston to Miami Beach, from Schenectady to San Francisco.

Senhor Arthur S. Deter, 32, who speaks to the Brazilians, was born in Rio de Janeiro of American Baptist missionary parents and was graduated from Parana University in Brazil with a medical degree. He has worked as a harvest hand and as an extra in Hollywood; he has sailed tramp steamers as an able-bodied seaman, has an amateur pilot's license. Senhor Deter starts his Brazilian hour with a digest of the world's news. Later he too becomes a concertmaster and wrestles with music records, but news on-the-hour-by-the-hour is a *must* policy for these foreign language programs. A straight, unbiased synopsis of what is happening in

the world is the best proof of American freedom and integrity and the most unanswerable propaganda.

Letters prove it. Four French soldiers spent 50¢ on airmail stamps to say they had learned from an American newscast that their outfit would get Christmas leave. They added: "Every day now we listen." An amazed Swiss wrote from Lausanne that he had learned first from America that German propaganda balloons had fallen on Swiss territory, that the Swiss press and radio had not confirmed the news until twelve hours later. Other correspondence is equally enthusiastic:

ENGLAND (LONDON): "Thank you for letting the world know about Mussolini's speech. Our own stations seem a little reserved about it."

ENGLAND (YORKSHIRE): "I must say how much I appreciate your news bulletins. One obtains a much clearer idea of how things stand when hearing an unbiased bulletin."

ITALY (PAVIA): "Your news arrives here before certain European stations, which are not ashamed to spread facts the falsity of which, if embodied in a person, would make one ashamed of himself."

GERMANY ("SOMEWHERE"): "Most Germans listen to foreign reports and not to those here. We are just as uninformed as in the Middle Ages, even with newspapers. The impudence with which they lie is unbelievable."

FRANCE (PARIS): "With much pleasure we listen to your French hour,

which informs us better than our own what is going on in old Europe."

FRANCE (LILLE): "On Thursday we witnessed an aerial combat over this area. We knew that an enemy plane had been shot down, but your program at 9 P.M. gave us the first details."

CHILE (TALCA): "I listen to your news bulletin every evening; in my estimation it is the only *true* news service in the whole world."

## II

All the major nations are engaged in this battle of the air waves. The United States has licensed fourteen stations for international broadcasts. Two of them — WDJM, a commercial station in Miami, and WCBI, the Chicago Federation of Labor station — are small. The major license-holders are NBC, Columbia, General Electric, Westinghouse, World Wide Broadcasting Corporation, Crosley Corporation in Cincinnati, and WCAU Broadcasting Company, Philadelphia. These stations operate at different hours on thirty-seven frequencies allocated to this country by international agreement. Our stations and foreign stations are sending at the same time. Without wave variation it would be a mess. But no domestic station wants to jam a foreign station, because the foreign station can retaliate. The Union Internationale de Radio, Brussels, watches for crowding.

All our stations, be it noted, are privately owned and operated, and, except for World Wide, all by commercial companies. Each station at large outlay and no profit has built costly sending equipment and organized large international staffs.

NBC, for example, has forty-two persons in its international department. Of these, eighteen are regularly on the air, the voice of America in six languages. In charge is Guy Hickok, for fifteen years a roving newspaper correspondent in Europe. In the midst of a heavy desk routine he listens constantly to a loud speaker, for he must not allow anything to get on the air that might raise a ruction. Most details, however, are left to the eighteen spokesmen themselves, who are expected to know exactly what to say about America and exactly how to say it.

Chief of the Spanish section is 39-year-old Charles R. Carvajal, born in the Philippines of an American father. He has crossed the Atlantic ninety-six times; the Pacific, three. Settled in a cubby-hole office in a New York skyscraper, he feels like a stay-at-home when he compares notes with his office-mate, Swiss-born Carlos Edward Bovet, 53, head of the music section. Bovet, now an American

citizen, has been in sixty-one countries. He led white men in a search for oil up from the Argentine, through Bolivia, Peru and Brazil, to the foot of the Andes but now he sits listening to music records, deciding how many of the seventy-five played each day shall be classic, how many swing. Still another example of what it takes to be a spokesman for America is Philip Lemont Barbour, 40, born in Louisville, Ky. He reads, speaks and writes Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese and German. He reads and understands Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Pali, Dutch, Czech, and Serbian. He has coached Italian opera singers in diction in Milan, been a banker in San Francisco, led a brass band in Ithaca. He has traveled and lived in fifty countries, understands twelve languages, and speaks five.

A stranger wandering into one of these international departments might think himself in a madhouse. The place looks like a combination newspaper office, travel agency, mail room, and research library. A loudspeaker blaring the current program competes with a teletype bringing the latest news. A dozen persons talk at various desks in half a dozen languages. Maps hang on every wall, for these workers live with geography. Eight o'clock

in New York is 8 also in Colombia and Peru, but it is 7 in Mexico, 7:30 in Venezuela, 8:30 in Uruguay, 9 in the Argentine, and 10 in part of Brazil. Time is decisive in deciding what kind of program shall be broadcast.

The international day at NBC ends at 1 A.M., with the final Spanish hour. Half an hour later the night editor arrives and the new day starts. All through the early morning he and his assistants read from the teletype what the world is saying, and winnow out what shall be used. Broadcasting in English begins at 9 A.M., primarily for British ears. Foreign language broadcasts start at 1 P.M. and, except for one evening English hour, continue until signing-off time.

During the morning Monsieur Thomas in clipped American has given "Highlights of Hollywood" on the British hour. Now at three he gives the news in his best Parisian and a talk, "The Franco-American Globe Trotter." At noon in English Fernando de Sa has discussed American aviation. At four he gives in Portuguese "The Parade of the States of Brazil."

None of this sounds like propaganda. The broadcasters insist they are selling America by avoiding anything that smacks of the word.

The German short wave stations constantly ridicule American dollar democracy in their broadcasts to Latin Americans. Our answer is to send the best entertainment possible, especially the finest music, and never mention democracy. Let it speak for itself.

Yet our spokesmen have their tricks. Plenty of innocent punch can be worked into a talk on "The American Home" or "America from My Window." Almost daily there is a talk on aviation, which will emphasize that aviation is constantly drawing North and South America closer. Most subtle of all is the handling of music. Network band music could be sent by throwing a switch, but swing would offend these Latin American music lovers and therefore the emphasis is more on opera and other classical works. Latin Americans love poetry and every little town has its laureate. NBC capitalized on this by asking all to send their masterpieces to be read weekly on the international ether. American stations are quick to invite visiting Latin American dignitaries to broadcast to their native countries. During the New York World's Fair more than 130 persons were coaxed from the Latin American pavilions to become international radio figures. All

stations devote time to describing the frivolities of Hollywood. NBC finds that something for nothing appeals to the Latins just as much as to the tear-the-top-off-the-carton customers up here. Any listener who writes in can have a photograph of a favorite star. The mail is booming, and it is with mail that NBC does its smartest work. All letters are answered and carry the latest commemorative stamp, for each issue tells something of our history. Postmaster General Farley has been prolific in ordering special issues, even of American poets. So many Latin Americans have wished to get Mr. Farley's latest, a dollar or two at a time, that NBC has turned the business over to private stamp dealers.

Selling America costs the privately-operated stations money. NBC spends some \$150,000 a year. Walter S. Lemmon, president of the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation and its University of the Air — a non-commercial enterprise sending from the University Club in Boston, helped by the staffs of Harvard and other universities — estimates its operating cost at \$100,000 a year, half of which has been supplied lately by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Private companies are willing to spend such money for two reasons:

first, to prevent government operation in international broadcasting; second, because there may be an eventual profit. Bills were introduced in the last Congress for establishment of government radio stations. If the government got into the international field it would soon edge into the domestic field as well. This is the only country in the world in which broadcasting is exclusively in private hands, and broadcasters want to keep it there.

Short wave stations, with certain restrictions, have recently been permitted by the Federal Communications Commission to accept advertising and send sponsored programs. No such program has

yet gone on the air, but the possibility explains why the stations lean to entertainment instead of high propaganda. Before long we may probably find the Ho-Hum Sleep Company selling its mattresses and American democracy in one lump.

To date democracy has nothing to complain about. Nazi government stations send only some twenty-seven hours to South America, more than half of it in the German language. Without the government committing itself, without taxpayers putting up a penny, the American story is told to the world something more than one hundred hours a day.



## MIDSUMMER NIGHT

BY EVA BEARD

NONE shall gainsay the mountain  
nor the smoky reaches of the cloud pouring out of it  
to the peak of heaven  
nor the spear of timothy  
thrusting with slender import into the night  
nor the pallid mullein  
nor the long shagbark looming immense and narrow.

I alone am incredible  
I, man, the malcontent  
speeding along the road where the mullein grows  
the tiger eyes of my chariot tearing the dark asunder.

## THE STATE OF THE UNION

### *Fellow-Traveler, What Now?*

SOME months ago we paid our unkind respects to the "totalitarian liberals" of America. The description must have met a real need, since it passed quickly into general circulation. It referred to a lop-sided liberalism that was shrill, intolerant, and obscurantist — a pseudo-liberalism in open partnership with one of the bloodiest and most illiberal dictatorships.

The totalitarian liberal was a product of economic depression. Panic-stricken by the loss of his sense of security, finding the pressures of a reactionary period too much for him, he ended dismally by embracing the Muscovite brand of reaction. He declared a moratorium on thinking and put his conscience in the keeping of Comrade Stalin's paid agents. The totalitarian liberals had their organs of expression: the more courageous of them in the *New Masses*, the meek and hypocritical in the *Nation* and the *New Republic*. They had their pressure groups and mass organizations in the League of American Writers, the Theatre

Arts Committee (TAC), the League for Peace and Democracy, endless committees and bureaus and unions with interlocking directorates and identical views. They knew *a priori* that everything out of the Kremlin was flawless, every critic of Stalin's sadistic butchery a "fascist."

These strange "liberals" subscribed self-righteously to a double standard of political morals. The exploitation of share-croppers in the USA was a crime, their exploitation on government estates in the USSR was socialism. Little purges in Germany were horrifying, but big ones in Russia were the birth-pangs of a better world. Cheka murders in Loyalist Spain were exempt from the judgment applied to political bloodletting elsewhere.

We are not overdrawing the picture. We have at hand a manifesto solemnly issued over the signatures of some 400 of these perverted "liberals" in which those who put Russia and Germany in the same category in the matter of suppression of cultural freedom are smeared