

# BALLAD OF OCTOBER 16

*words* by The Almanacs

*tune:* Jesse James

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It consists of six systems of music. Each system has a treble and bass staff. The lyrics are written below the treble staff. Chords are indicated by letters (F, Bb, C, F) above the treble staff. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The lyrics are: 'It was on a Saturday night and the moon was shining bright, they passed the conscription bill, and the people they did say for many miles away 'Twas the President and his boys on Capitol Hill. (CHORUS) O, Franklin Roosevelt told the people how he felt. We damn near believed what he said. He said, I hate war, and so does Eleanor, but we won't be safe till everybody's dead.'

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When my poor old mother died I was sitting by her side  
Promising to war I'd never go.  
Now I'm wearing khaki jeans and eating army beans  
And I'm told that J. P. Morgan loves me so.  
(Chorus)

# CONSCRIPTING THE NEWS

*What the brass hats are trying to keep 100,000,000 newspaper readers from learning. The censorship technique and the men behind it. Shades of the Creel committee.*

Members of the inner White House circle are already saying privately that the time has come to invoke more than military censorship, that criticism has had its full day and national security requires it be impounded until the emergency has passed. Among the activities mentioned as fit for suppression are the speeches of non-interventionist senators and representatives against the successive policy steps under the lend-lease bill.—Arthur Krock, *New York Times*, April 2, 1941.

**A**N EXAGGERATION? Do not be too sure. During the past year there has been established in the United States a system of press controls potentially as sharp and effective as any that exist in warring nations. The President is demanding in effect that newspapers stop printing the truth. He has suggested that "ethics" should lead publishers to suppress facts which point to the imminence of war. Because a few publishers and editors have refused to participate in this deception, the administration feels the need of a more drastic censorship. The danger is not that details of military secrets will fall into enemy hands—for it is assumed that potential enemies are already well informed. The real danger, from Roosevelt's standpoint, is that the people will learn what Washington and Wall Street officials are saying in private.

The first threat of compulsory restriction on news came during the early months of the war. Months later, during the conscription drive, the press got hold of government data showing that the US Navy was stronger than Britain's, that America was not in danger of invasion, and there was no need of forced military service. Publication of this data made passage of the Burke-Wadsworth bill more difficult. So Army and Navy heads sent to the White House last June a censorship plan which would have placed under the control of the Military Intelligence services all news relating to defense. Only carefully expurgated news was to be released. News obtained independently was to be rigorously edited, and unsanctioned news branded as without foundation. Only a portion of the plan was put into effect last summer, but the President himself offered a good example of news-control technique. For the files show that Roosevelt announced his secret destroyer-bases deal with Churchill even while newspapers were still printing his denial that such a deal was so much as being considered.

IN JUNE 1940 Secretary of the Navy Edison had the task of pushing through Congress bills providing \$10,000,000,000 for naval expansion. Congressmen would have been much more resistant had they known that the US fleet far surpassed any other afloat,

and that with the ships then under construction, this country's naval tonnage would outweigh that of Germany, Italy, and Japan combined. Navy bureau chiefs appearing before the Naval Affairs Committee of the Senate had made it clear (in the words of the committee's report on HR 8026) "that the United States should not participate in the present European war under any circumstances now conceivable and that United States soldiers should never again be landed on a foreign continent." Statements of this sort by naval experts resulted in a ruling by the Secretary of the Navy which banned all public utterances unless made with the permission of the Department. This censorship at the source dried up the flow of information regarding the superfluity of naval expansion.

Secretary of War Stimson issued similar instructions governing speeches by army officers, and the Marine Corps banned comment from within. Last July Marine heads compelled the resignation of a major whose writings criticized internal policies. In that same month, the administration partially succeeded in forcing secret sessions of congressional committees considering bills related to the war program. Even General Johnson, fond as he is of heavy-handed military procedures, labeled this secrecy a form of press censorship.

By midsummer of 1940 the commercial newspapers forgot their usual cry for "freedom of the press." Meeting in New York in June, the editors were instructed by Col. Julius Adler of the *New York Times* to play up conscription. They applauded editors who emphasized the need for "self-censorship." How this worked in practice was speedily demonstrated by the *Times* censorship committee. This group of petty press dictators, which often establishes editorial policy for other New York non-labor newspapers, promptly began censoring peace advertisements. In one case they deleted all references to the munition profiteers of the last war, as well as to the Nye committee's revelations. Nearly every New York paper joined in this ban on the truth.

The tendency toward suppression grew with the war drive. Last autumn news about the newly created Defense Commission was curtailed, with a former newspaperman placed in charge to see that no employee was interviewed without permission. The Commission censorship worked well until Knudsen imported a brace of expert press agents from New York to keep his name in the headlines. Then other dollar-a-year men hired press agents and the Commission censors relaxed enough for the public to learn something about the war makers' activities.

This breakdown led, in the early months of 1941, to the revival of plans for controlling news at the point of publication. Secretary of the Navy Knox, ex-Hearstling and publisher of the *Chicago Daily News*, sent a confidential letter on January 15 to newspaper editors and publishers, radio and photographic agencies, and all Washington correspondents urging them to adopt a vigilant self-censorship. He requested suppression of certain facts relating to "defense" and listed subjects that he held taboo. Knox also urged the press not to speculate on facts when exact information was unavailable. The American Newspaper Publishers Association met in New York February 4, and drew up pledges of full cooperation in voluntary censorship. A picked lot of publishers entrained for Washington that night and spent two-and-one-half hours privately conferring with Knox the following morning. It is understood that Knox told them he and the administration were not trying to impose an ordinary censorship; they asked only a "voluntary" development of techniques which would condition the public mind toward certain aspects of war participation. The Secretary found his publishing colleagues adequately enthusiastic; he commented that the press was behaving in a "very gratifying manner."

FBI and Secret Service men set about fingerprinting, checking, and photographing all White House press correspondents. But the censorship takes on more specific forms. Already it is common knowledge that FBI agents had been assigned to investigate the ideas, political affiliations, and backgrounds of newspaper writers and editors. Wrote Walter Davenport, associate editor of *Collier's*, in the February 15 issue of his magazine:

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is reported to have made a rather wide inspection of the American press and to have compiled an interesting mass of dossiers on editors and writers. . . . We have it on authority that we trust that journalism has had quite an inspection by the FBI lads, *with particular attention being lavished upon editors and writers who do not always regard the status quo as holy.* [My italics—J. W.]

The next censorship flare-up took place two weeks later, after Chief of Staff Marshall appeared before a secret session of the Senate Military Affairs Committee. Senators told newspapermen Marshall had testified that matters in the Pacific had taken a war-like turn and that the situation was of the utmost gravity. He was also said to have made vague references to the massing of US fighting planes in the Pacific. The senators' version of Marshall's testimony was carried by the wire services and widely printed in the press. President Roosevelt devoted nearly all his