

War Morale and the Writer

To Keep Alive A Positive Fighting Faith in Democracy

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

A STATE of war unifies and regiments a people. You cannot have the advantages of unification without its disadvantages. It is absolutely necessary, at the present time, that the American people should work as one, with victory as a goal clearly before them; victory first; absolute and unquestionable victory over the Axis Powers. We are already making sacrifices, and we shall be called upon to make many more. We are, in fact, just at the beginning of the duties we must assume to bring victory to pass. Already the more cantankerous and selfish Americans are beginning to fidget and complain about "not seeing the necessity" concerning a number of war measures. The old whine about dictatorship and bureaucracy is still heard in the land. Unfortunately the word "Liberty" can be seized upon, and has been cherished in the past, as license for the individual to say "To hell with the Community!" That is not and has never been the American ideal of Liberty; but it is what uncontrolled Free Enterprise has sometimes done to it. Today we are being reminded of our duties as good citizens and responsible human beings. It is about time too.

Will a state of war, in a democracy, regiment thought? Obviously, in a state of war, you cannot speak as freely as in a state of peace. You cannot tell all you know. You must be careful not to give "aid and comfort" to the enemy. Neither should the responsible citizen indulge in hasty and ill-considered criticism of the governmental effort. (Plenty are so indulging, nevertheless.) But constructive criticism of practical value is still welcomed. And, to judge by the flood of books discussing the war from almost every angle, our thought concerning it is noticeably free. It is inevitable of course, in any great effort of organization, that certain people in minor positions will, temporarily at least, abuse authority. There are always those who do so. The more limited the intelligence the more certain is it that the

possession of a little authority will inspire stupid action. No people is free from such self-elected censors. But they are in the minority.

Is the writer, however, to restrict his thought, to confine himself merely to certain lines of reasoning, in order to help preserve his country's morale? That is the way things work under a dictatorship. But in this country we are trying to spread the widest possible knowledge concerning this war, concerning its roots, and the actual facts that confront us in the world today. Any addition to that knowledge is welcome. For our best propaganda is to spread the entire truth.

As a certain foreign correspondent recently said in a radio discussion, "This is not a 'back to normalcy' war. People are not fighting to get back to 1938 or 1928 or 1918 or 1908. They are fighting for a brave *new* world, a world where ordinary, decent human beings have a greater freedom and greater opportunities, a world where people *believe* in ordinary, decent human beings and believe that they *must* have greater freedom and great opportunities, a world where people do things that have never been done before to secure this greater freedom and these greater opportunities. This is what this war means." Wallace Deuel, who said that, is no starry-eyed utopian,

but a hardbitten journalist who saw things at close range in Germany, and who wrote "People under Hitler."

In the same discussion, I recall that Louis Bromfield, whose name is known to every novel-reader, remarked, with regard to cartel monopolies in France just before France's downfall, that those chiefly interested and involved in monopoly were "interested entirely in their own profit and their own property and, with this in view, they ceased merely to be business men, for they also became politicians and they disrupted and corrupted the whole French government from the top."

It is against such monopoly, also, and such special privilege, that the actual fighting forces of the United Nations are arrayed in this war, for it is the great industrialists of Germany who are furnishing the sinews of war to Hitler. And inasmuch as this is a war in which the common people are on the march, it approaches the nature of a crusade. It is certainly the writer's function today to stress this greater significance. In fact, it is the duty of the writer to strengthen the people in a rational hope and faith.

The immediate problems connected with the prosecution of this war are weighty enough. The immediate concerns both of soldiers and civilians are their personal affairs, as their national duties affect them. The problems thrown in the lap of the world after the war will be tremendous. Confronted with these considerations, the average human mind and spirit is bogged-down and bewildered. But if, just as the pressure is beginning to be put upon us, we ourselves feel that way—what of those who have borne the burden and heat of the day, the brunt of the fighting up to this time?

There is a tough fibre in Americans. They not only do not wish to "be dieted with praise," they are immediately full of "Oh yeah?"s when you begin to paint any rosy picture for them. You are suspect before you start. Probably most of them would put it, in their hearts, "It's a hell of a



—Grano

tough job, and a dirty job. We've got to get on with it, we've got to go through with it. We may be let down at the end of it. If we *are* let down, by this and by that we are going to ask *why*, and we are going to find an answer!" That is all right too. That is what the war is about—to find an answer. This time, indeed, if the world doesn't find one, it is likely to be the end of civilization altogether.

The writer's magical and prophetic robes were long since stripped from him. He is no medicine-man! One of his problems in wartime, perhaps not the least onerous, is to maintain his *own* morale. After all, the reason he is a writer is because he possesses the ability to think out and put into words a good many things the average person doesn't bother his head about. He has "the old disease of thought." He is therefore more exposed than anyone else to violent revulsions against the errors and stupidities of mankind as a whole. He sees the world in a vast process of change, moving more quickly than in generations, but he also sees on every side evidence of persisting intolerance and prejudice. He believes in what the political adviser to Generalissimo Chiang-Kai-Shek recently called "a fresh high tide of liberation," and yet, because he has eyes and ears, he is fully aware of certain things in his own country that would seem to indicate the exact opposite.

His duty then is to speak the truth as clearly to his countrymen as, if he is an honest man, he speaks it to himself. Only in this way can he serve his country best. Not in mere contentiousness, not in malice, but with a deep and abiding concern for what our American notion of liberty really means, must he speak on any and all occasions that demand it. As never before is the obligation laid upon him not only to speak the truth but the *whole* truth. As never before does the future of the whole world tremble in the balance. Those that have imagination must use it to see as truly as possible *beyond* this war, into some lasting condition of equity for Mankind.

But who *are* writers? They are merely human beings very much like all the rest. They only possess a knack of expression of a certain kind. Nevertheless, upon them is laid a responsibility all their own. There was a day when they could, and did; luxuriate in rather irresponsible utterances. They cannot very well do that in the face of the present crisis. They too have enlisted for the duration. They have not enlisted to suppress or pervert their instinct for the truth. They *must* have enlisted to help frame a dynamic faith for the fighting men, a faith not in men as heroes—though the roll of

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Press and Morale

Only A Few Sour Notes Are Marring A Commendable Record

VIRGINIUS DABNEY

THE Axis realizes full well that the battle for the mind of America is as important to it as the battle for Middle Eastern oil. If Herr Doktor Goebbels can plant in the thinking of enough Americans sufficiently divisive counsels, if he can sow enough doubts and antagonisms among us, and can array labor against capital, white against colored, Irishmen against Jews, and Protestants against Catholics, he will have weakened our national fibre so fatally as to make successful allied prosecution of the war almost hopeless.

No agency can do as much to thwart the Axis in the pursuit of this objective as our press. It holds daily communion with the mind of America, and is in a position to influence national attitudes more importantly than the radio, the motion pictures or any other medium. Its immense responsibility, therefore, is obvious. As Archibald MacLeish said in a recent address, "the real battlefield of this war is the field of American opinion." To put it another way, the question is whether our morale can be maintained at a high pitch, irrespective of the dangers and discouragements which lie ahead, and which are sure to tax our resolution and our determination. The answer to that question must rest in considerable measure with the newspapers.

The performance of the press in this unprecedented crisis has been happy in some respects and unhappy in others. The great majority of newspaper publishers and editors are patriotic, and they are presenting news and comment concerning the war according to their lights. But a small minority of newspaper owners and executives are aiding the Axis, either consciously or unconsciously, and are undermining morale and promoting divisionism over wide areas of this country.

Most conspicuous among these divisive forces are the proprietors of the three newspapers which comprise the New York-Chicago-Washington Axis, and their ideological soul mate, the Sage of San Simeon. With immense circulations at their disposal, these four individuals keep millions of Americans befogged by doubt, harassed by questionings, and suspicious of the White House and America's allies. Captain Joseph Medill Patterson's New York *Daily News* tells its vast tabloid audience that there may not be any congressional elections this Fall, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding,

and says that we, too, are "grabbing territory and setting up protectorates" whenever we feel so inclined. Colonel Robert R. McCormick's Chicago *Tribune*, which blushing confesses that it is "The World's Greatest Newspaper," takes several below-the-belt swings at the Roosevelt Administration, implying that it is made up of communists or halfwits or both, and hinting strongly that it is to blame for Pearl Harbor. Mrs. Eleanor Medill Patterson, the third member of this family triumvirate, echoes the sentiments of her two kinsmen in her Washington *Times-Herald*, while adding new embellishments of her own. William Randolph Hearst, the fourth horseman who rides through these apocalyptic visions, tells the readers of his chain in words which follow the Axis line, that the British are swindlers, that the Russians are worse, and that America, as usual, is being played for a sucker by her supposed friends and comrades in arms.

Father Coughlin, William Dudley Pelley, and the other fascist-minded "voices of defeat" were, and are, sufficiently pernicious, but it is doubtful if all the assorted crackpots and professional anti-Semites from coast to coast wield more than a fraction of the influence that is commanded by the foregoing quartet of daily newspaper owners. The latter never weary of protesting their patriotism, but by carping constantly at our war effort, and delivering utterly irresponsible attacks on the administration and its foreign policy, they succeed in rendering aid to Hitler and Hirohito which those worthies must consider beyond



Colonel Robert R. McCormick, publisher, *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

price. The fact that none of the four publishers is even suspected of being on the Axis payroll makes their mulishness all the more invaluable to the Nazis and the Japs. If Goebbels himself was writing their editorials and "news," much of this material could hardly be suited more perfectly to Nazi designs.

In this connection, a special citation should go to the New York newspaper, *PM*, for its indefatigable and relentless crusade to unveil the parallel between the Axis line and that followed by some of the foregoing publications. Whatever one's opinion of *PM's* other attitudes—and that opinion is apt to be either strongly pro or strongly con—it deserves an accolade for this.

In justice to the American press, it should be said that the bulk of that press has been fair in its comment upon the war and this country's role as a belligerent. Its criticisms of the war effort have been mainly constructive in character and designed to strengthen, rather than to tear down. Since most of these dailies fought Mr. Roosevelt for re-election in 1940, the phenomenon is particularly significant and gratifying.

On the domestic front in recent months, the papers have a less consistent record of administration support. This has been especially noteworthy in the field of economic and industrial conflict, particularly where the part of labor in the war effort has been involved. There has been a tendency to overemphasize the role of strikes in slowing down war production, and to soft pedal the greed of certain industrialists. Anybody who remembers last winter's report of the Truman congressional committee must know that both labor and capital are guilty of stalling production, and that to overemphasize either to the neglect of the other is to promote disunity and undermine national morale. Actually, the excessive stress given in certain quarters to the undoubted misdeeds of some unions was disruptive of unity and, in fact, was camouflage for an effort to smash all organized labor.

The drumfire against the unions reached its apogee in the early Spring, apropos of the effort to amend the so-called "40-hour week." This drive centered in certain newspapers, and the impression was created, with their active assistance, that the law forbade workers in war industries to labor more than 40 hours in any week. The fact is, of course, that the issue was primarily one of overtime pay, rather than of limitation upon hours of work, and that in most of the important war plants, the men were working well beyond 40 hours. Since they were drawing time and one half for hours in