

The New Republic

Within a few weeks after I went to work on *Printers' Ink*, the United States entered the First World War. Having been rejected in the draft for bad eyesight, I spent most of the next two years acting as liaison man between the Government in Washington and the business community. I told industrial executives, through the pages of the magazine, what Washington felt they ought to be doing to aid the war effort.

But I wrote some articles on other subjects. One of them was an interview with the publisher of *The Globe*, an evening newspaper of modest circulation, the second oldest in New York. A few days later, the publisher called and invited me to become chief editorial writer for the paper—at double my salary. Since daily journalism had always been my first love, I was happy to accept.

My immediate task was to put together a staff of men for the expanded editorial department on which the paper had decided. I followed the general practice of those days, before union restrictions on hiring—I employed Stanford writers of my own generation. That I did pretty well is shown by the careers of these men after *The Globe* discontinued publication a few years later. Maxwell

Anderson, born in North Dakota, became a noted playwright, with thirty dramas to his credit, beginning with the famous *What Price Glory*. Robert L. Duffus rose to become associate editor of the *New York Times* and author of scores of books. William L. Chenery was editor, and then publisher, of *Collier's Weekly*. Frank Ernest Hill had a distinguished career in radio and as author of many books; he collaborated with Allan Nevins on the monumental biography of Henry Ford. Frank Taylor, a few years after me at Stanford, went on to become one of the country's most successful freelance writers.

One year after I went to *The Globe*, I was asked to become managing editor. I did not want to be an executive, I wanted to write; but I knew enough of the ways of the world to realize that you must not refuse a job that seems a promotion. I took the assignment and continued to write for the paper in my spare time, doing long signed articles instead of short unsigned ones.

From my point of view, *The Globe* was the best of the many daily papers in New York. We did not have the money for big, complicated investigations, but we printed all the news most people wanted to read. Our editorial page was the most consistently liberal in the city. The editor-in-chief, H. J. Wright, was sympathetic to our ideas, if not as vigorous in support of them as we were. For four years we had almost no pressure from the owner

of the paper, a recluse millionaire in a small town in Massachusetts, and none at all from anyone else. Only a newspaperman knows how rare such a situation is.

It was too good to last. The millionaire owner died and left his vast estate to his (male) secretary, including *The Globe*. Soon we began to get rumors that the new owner wanted to get rid of the paper. He was a timid man, influenced by his conservative financial advisers, who thought we were too liberal. I had made friends with Bernard M. Baruch, the famous Wall Street operator, who early in life retired from making money to become a trouble shooter for every president from Wilson to Kennedy. Baruch offered to lend me \$2 million to buy the paper and keep it going. But the new owner broke a promise to me and sold it instead, on less advantageous terms, to Frank Munsey. Munsey was a clumsy lout of a man who had himself made a fortune in Wall Street (in United States Steel stock). He fancied himself as a newspaper publisher, a role for which he was incompetent; he bought something like fifteen newspapers and ran them all into the ground.

Luckily, I had somewhere else to go when the blow fell. Moonlighting as usual, I had begun writing some time earlier for *The New Republic*, the leading intellectual weekly in the country, founded nine years earlier, in 1914, by the very wealthy Mrs. Willard Straight, heir to much of

the fortune of her father, William C. Whitney. The first editor was Herbert Croly, a shy, dour man but an able writer on politics. Croly's book, *The Promise of American Life*, published in 1909, was a landmark in thinking about the art and business of politics.

My best friend in the magazine's office was not Croly, however, but another Midwesterner, Alvin Johnson. He came from Nebraska with the same cultural background as myself; the four or five other editors were all from New York or Boston (except one man from Ireland). Alvin and I sometimes felt like strangers in a strange land. But we were good for the magazine, which sought a national readership.

Just as *The Globe* was going under, I came over to serve as managing editor of *The New Republic*. My salary was several thousand less than it had been on *The Globe*, but higher than that of any other editor except Croly, who gave me the same remuneration as himself. Though I did not know it then, I was to spend the next thirty years at my new editorial desk, until a heart attack in 1953 forced me to give up office work and New York.

Not many Americans in those days could tell the difference between Liberals, Socialists, and Communists. We spent a lot of time answering the false charge that we belonged to one or the other of the two latter sects. When pressure got strong, over the years, I used to get help from a

somewhat surprising source—J. Edgar Hoover of the F.B.I. He knew the paper, knew we were the Liberals we said we were. On several occasions I had him write a letter certifying to our good faith. He was the idol of the Far Right and photographic copies of his letter produced a magical effect. While we were being harassed from one direction for being too radical, we were equally under fire for thirty years from the Far Left for being mere wishy-washy Liberals—a situation I have always viewed with satisfaction.

In 1928, when I had been on the paper five years, Herbert Croly was felled by a massive stroke. While he lingered on for two more years, I became acting editor at once, and when he died, the owner of the paper asked me to become editor-in-chief. I had grave doubts of my own ability to lead the most prestigious intellectual journal in the country; but there was no one else in sight. I accepted—on the eve of the most terrible two decades in history—the worst depression ever, the rise of Fascism in Italy and its extension in Germany, the horror of Stalinism in Russia, and another World War that would leave thirty million dead.

But the paper survived—and so did I.

Probably every elderly man looks back on his youth as brighter and better than it was; but in my case, I have the yellowing files to prove that in some matters my colleagues and I were ahead of

our time. We opposed war at a time when many people thought it ennobled the human spirit. We advocated complete equality for all races and religions, and for both sexes, when many people openly talked racial and religious prejudice, and the general assumption was that "it's a man's world." We warned about overpopulation and the degradation of our environment—though we did not dream how terribly serious these matters would become half a century later.

In the 1920's we participated in all the chief civil liberties cases. We fought for Sacco and Vanzetti, who certainly had not received a fair trial, and lost. We fought for Tom Mooney, of whose innocence there was photographic evidence, and finally won. We strongly opposed Fascism in Italy beginning in 1923 and in Germany beginning in 1933. We attacked Mussolini for his adventure in Ethiopia, and Franco for the rebellion against the legal government in Spain. I wish very much that we had been equally critical of what Stalin was doing in Russia, but that bloody-handed tyrant had the world's best censorship and the world's best propaganda machine. Few learned until many years later what he was doing.

In my own case, the Communists sniped at me for years except during short periods when the party line shifted. I angered them most, I assume, in March, 1938, when I published a signed article in *The New Republic* in the form of an open letter

to Stalin, criticizing him as severely as I could in the light of what we then knew. The Moscow treason trials were in progress, resulting in the slaughter of all the Old Bolsheviks who, in the dictator's paranoid imagination, might endanger his rule. Stalin had just issued a call for a conference of all the non-Fascist powers, to consider ways of dealing with the menace of the Axis. I pointed out that the Moscow trials were having a bad effect on world public opinion, which in turn could help or hinder such a conference as he had in mind.

He never answered my letter.

Much of the "testimony" which convicted the Old Bolsheviks, was assembled for Stalin by the head of the secret police, G. G. Yagoda. When he had done this work, Stalin had him arrested and shot; the testimony against him was created by N. Yezhov, who was in turn liquidated. The total number of victims runs into thousands; Trotsky made a profound observation when he said Stalin was like a man who tries to slake his thirst with salt water. The number of army officers executed alone is estimated as high as 20,000.

Why did all these innocent men testify in court that they were indeed traitors to the Revolution to which they had devoted their lives, and especially when they knew they were to be killed in any case? Elaborate explanations have been offered, some of them probably too elaborate. The method

was simple: every variety of torture was used, with the threat that if the victim did not play his part correctly in court it would be renewed when he was back in his cell. In addition, the families of all these poor wretches were held as hostages; the victims doubtless hoped that if they were cooperative, their wives and children might be spared. (Often they were not.) One or two men did in fact have the courage to say before they were killed that their confessions had been all lies.

Today, with Stalin long in his grave, one must be very blind indeed not to see that Soviet Russia, in its foreign policy, is acting just as imperialist Russia had done for centuries. The almost-faceless men in the Kremlin are holding their satellite states by plain military power, with Czechoslovakia in 1968 the most conspicuous example. No group of nations in the world would be more abhorrent to Lenin, if he were still alive, than the Arab countries, with which Moscow has cemented an alliance based on the most materialistic possible considerations—including making the Mediterranean almost a Russian lake, satisfying a dream of the Tsars for centuries.

In the dreadful depression of the 1930's, we tried to tell the truth about what was happening, when many magazines and newspapers were being Pollyannas.

Six months before Pearl Harbor, with heavy hearts, we recommended that the United States

should openly enter the Second World War, a war in which she was already doing so much to win for the Allies. We believed there was imminent danger Hitler would conquer the world, and that this would be more tragic than frank American participation in the conflict. If I had this decision to make over again I suppose I should probably go the same way, though far less confidently than in 1941. Every war, no matter how noble the sentiments with which it is entered, soon takes on a new, unpredictable, and terrible life of its own.

During the war, I was functioning on two levels. As an editor, I was doing what I could to help bring the conflict to a successful conclusion, and to work for the terms of a lasting peace. But I was also the father of a soldier fighting in France, in a division with heavy casualties, praying that he might survive the war. He did, with no physical injuries, or mental ones either, so far as his anxious parents could discern. A few years later he was married, and a few years later still we had a grandson.

With my lifelong compulsion to kill myself with overwork, I took on the job of New York correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian* in 1927, sending them a daily news article, on a rigid deadline, usually from 300 to 1,000 words in length. This was utter madness, since I was already working full time as managing editor (and soon to be editor) of *The New Republic*. But I was flattered

to be asked to join the newspaper which was generally admitted to be the best written in the English-speaking world. *The Manchester Guardian's* policies agreed almost entirely with my own views; and this contact opened doors for me on both sides of the Atlantic that would otherwise have been closed. I wrote 6,000 articles in twenty years, until the pressure of my other duties made it obvious that I should have to give up the connection.

Among the doors the *Guardian* opened for me were a few that I shall always remember. One was a chance to spend some hours with the greatest man I ever met, an outstanding hero of our times—Mahatma Gandhi. He had been let out of a British prison in India to attend the Imperial Conference in London, and knew he would be locked up again as soon as it was over. I talked to him in a big, bare, cold room, with no furniture. He was sitting on the floor with the little hand spinning wheel that he carried everywhere; he was wrapped in a huge white blanket from which his tiny dark head protruded comically. I proposed to sit down beside him, but he demurred, pointing out that I was not used to sitting on the floor and would soon be uncomfortable. He had a single straight chair brought in for me and I sat on it while we talked. What he said is of no importance today; what remains with me is the impression of a man of overwhelming sweetness of character and love for his fellowman. I left the room feeling

not only that here was a very great man, but also that I had made a friend.

I interviewed several British prime ministers, of whom two are worth mention. Anthony Eden was intelligent, amiable, but he seemed to me to lack the iron will needed to guide a great nation through stormy times. The second was a man whose iron will all the world recognizes—Winston Churchill. I opposed his views on some subjects (India, for one), but I had to recognize the power of the man who carried England through its darkest hour, and by doing so perhaps saved Western civilization.

I was one of several correspondents for British newspapers to talk to Churchill early one morning when he had just come off a ship and was sitting in a canvas chair on the pier. He was smoking his usual stage prop, a big, expensive cigar. He never smoked more than an inch or so of it. As usual, no one could read the thoughts behind his large, pale, impassive countenance. When one of us asked him a question, he would be silent so long we thought he had not heard it; then at last, with a preliminary rumble like a volcano preparing to erupt, out came an answer beautifully phrased, carefully couched in diplomatic words, and always courteous to his questioner. He would finish with a slight wave of his cigar, like an orchestra conductor signaling with his baton the end of one movement in a symphony.