

# I. P. I. REPORT

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## FIRST SURVEY: IMPROVEMENT OF INFORMATION

### Editors in 41 Countries Evaluate Foreign News Flow Among Nations

What is the most important step that can be taken to promote world understanding through the free dissemination of information?

For the answer to this question, the International Press Institute, in its first IPI SURVEY, turned to the men who have the daily responsibility for the gathering and publication of news. Two hundred and forty-eight editors in forty-one countries have reported their views in answer to an IPI questionnaire.

The news of today's world, the editors agree, is "the biggest continued story in history," but it is not getting the coverage it deserves. By a 2-1 majority the editors believe that the average newspaper reader has an interest in world affairs. But they are in almost unanimous agreement that there are ways by which this interest could be more thoroughly cultivated by the press.

#### The Real Problem

The consciousness that every area of the world, given proper interpretation, is vital news in every community, has forced editors to discard time-honored conceptions of the news budget. A cardinal assumption underlying most of the 248 answers to the Institute's questionnaire is that the real problem is to make the news interesting.

A great obstacle to improving information on world affairs, say the editors, has its base in a growing tendency toward restrictions on news-gathering even in countries where censorship does not exist. The editors want to organize a continuous campaign to clear away government restrictions, in both democratic and totalitarian countries, which are hindering the free flow of information. They are not generally optimistic about what success such a campaign will have in removing the totalitarian restrictions.

Finally, many editors have become increasingly anxious about economic problems—particularly the shortage and high cost of newsprint—which are forcing large numbers of newspapers to cut their foreign news coverage below the barest minimum.

#### Purpose of Survey

Purpose of the first IPI SURVEY has been to get editors' estimates of the value and extent of present-day reporting of world news and to obtain suggestions as to what steps can be taken to facilitate the flow of news among nations. The editors' discussions of these topics have been analyzed in a 9,000-word report published this month by the IPI and now being distributed.

Despite many variations in approach and emphasis, the responses show a striking agreement on the major problems editors face in trying to print full, balanced and reliable foreign news reports in a world split by international tensions and complicated by delicate political and economic crises. These problems, as seen by the editors, fall into three broad classifications: (a) the professional, (b) the political and (c) the economic.

Professional shortcomings, the editors feel, are responsible for many of

the most serious flaws in the foreign news picture. While the editors admit that they themselves have contributed to the problem by frequently underestimating the reader, they also criticize the correspondents. They agree that world conditions require a brand of reporting distinctly superior to much of the current product and that it is time for newspapermen to revise traditional conceptions of what makes a good and significant news piece. A considerable proportion of the editors' criticism is directed at the large international news agencies, which supply the bulk of most newspapers' foreign material. The editors rate the news agencies first in value among their sources of foreign news because of the agencies' general world coverage, which cannot be duplicated.

#### Own Staffers Preferred

At the same time, the editors prefer the style and content of their own correspondents' material, wherever it is available, because of its special appeal to their particular audience and its greater use of background and interpretation. The material provided by the special newspaper syndicates is also rated highly by American editors for its interpretative value. In general, the editors consider all three sources of news (agency, special correspondence, syndicate material) extremely important, but consider only the news agencies indispensable.

In their criticism of agency over-emphasis on "spot" news, a number of editors say the wire services fail to give their readers a comprehensive and properly evaluated picture of assorted world happenings, and that the readers are often left in the dark about important foreign trends taking place below the surface of current events.

#### The Basic Problem

"We let great and important trends in international affairs develop without being reported until or unless a cork blows out of a bottle somewhere, and makes a story on which a more or less exciting news lead can be made.

"The next great genius in the newspaper world will be someone who can give more continuity to the greatest continued story ever told—the day's news . . ."

—FROM THE I.P.I. SURVEY.