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Peking story - 1954

23 Dec.

Press reaction to the U.N. action on
American airmen imprisoned in China
and Sec.-Gen's mission to Peking.

PRESS REACTION TO THE UN ACTION ON AMERICAN AIRMEN
IMPRISONED IN CHINA AND SECRETARY-GENERAL'S MISSION TO PEKING

(Based on material available through 23 December 1954.)

INSTALLMENT I.

DENMARK

In its editorial on the sentences in Peking, BØRSEN, Copenhagen, 14 December, exclaims: "What on earth made the Chinese do this?", and the paper seeks the answer in an assumption that possibly the Chinese Government hoped by this affair to create the basis of a trade-in with the United States, as USA at present constitutes the only hindrance to further Chinese expansion in Asia and the Pacific area. The paper concludes, stating that Peking chose a miserable moment as of late the United States has been following a somewhat more conciliatory policy towards the Chinese People's Republic.

Note: For press reaction in Scandinavian countries see also under SWEDEN.

NORWAY

ARBEIDERBLADET, Oslo (13 December) says that Mr. Hammarskjöld will have a delicate task as he is to negotiate with a Government which is not represented in the United Nations, although it would be an overstatement to say that the exclusion is the actual cause of China's hostile attitude. However, it is undoubtedly correct, the paper goes on to say, that a detente is not possible unless China's real Government is admitted to a seat in the United Nations.

Note: For press reaction in Scandinavian countries see also under SWEDEN.

SWEDEN

The reaction of the press in Sweden, Norway and Denmark is described by UNIC, Copenhagen, as follows:

On 11 December the papers gave predominant space to the news that the General Assembly had adopted, with great majority, the resolution on the question of detention in China of military personnel of the United Nations Command. I.a. the part to be played by the Secretary-General of the United Nations was also discussed.

Under large headings the papers on 12 December brought the news item that Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in a "dramatic telegram" had informed Mr. Chou En-lai that he would be prepared personally to go to Peking in order to discuss the question of the American pilots. Front page articles and editorials zealously discuss the new situation and the Secretary-General's chances of arranging negotiations.

Practically without exception, and in a number of cases even with great enthusiasm, commentators praise the initiative taken by Mr. Hammarskjöld. It is generally considered that a possible failure cannot impair the prestige of the United Nations or its Secretary-General but only show the world that Peking is not willing to cooperate.

As China's reaction will show whether a detente is possible it is supposed that the outcome of Mr. Hammarskjöld's initiative is anticipated with equal excitement and anxiety in Moscow, Washington and London.

In this connection certain papers have interpreted the Soviet attitude as an indication of Moscow's actually disapproving of the Chinese sentences.

Like some other papers SVENSKA DAGBLADET, 13 December, believes that Mr. Chou En-lai will invite Mr. Hammarskjöld to come -- if for no other purpose at least to obtain thereby some kind of "certificate" that the Communist Government is the legal regime of China. A visit to Peking by the United Nations' Secretary-General might be interpreted as such a "certificate," it is felt.

GÖTEBORGS HANDELS- OCH SJÖFARTSTIDNING, 14 December, says that Mr. Hammarskjöld's offer to go to China might be apt to flatter the Communist regime's selfconfidence, but there are also other aspects to the matter, the paper adds. There is nothing to prove that the relationship between Peking and the United Nations has become more amicable after the end of the Korea war. The paper therefore fears that Peking's reply may be to the negative and that Mr. Hammarskjöld's initiative, in case the situation has been misinterpreted, may further weaken the authority of the Organization in the Far East.

DAGENS NYHETER, Stockholm, 14 December, which rarely lends itself to enthusiastic evaluations of the United Nations describes Mr. Hammarskjöld's initiative as an "energetic and unconventional" step and goes on to state that whatever the outcome will be there can be no doubt but that Mr. Hammarskjöld by this initiative has gained increased respect. Further DAGENS NYHETER considers that by the "spy sentences" Peking has evoked an extremely strong international opinion against herself. Peking's policy which recalls the propaganda war around the "bacteriological warfare" a few years ago has led the United Kingdom and the United States into a mutual line, says the paper and points to the fact that differences of opinion where Formosa's future is concerned and as to China's representation in the United Nations have been pushed to the background. The paper is firmly convinced that Peking had counted on a different development of this affair. Peking's present policy -- and particularly the "Airmen Case" -- seems to aim at a challenge to the United States and to provoke a change from a moderate to a "harder" policy -- in the hope of driving in a wedge between the United States and other Western powers. "Mr. Hammarskjöld's initiative instead implies that Communist China meets a wider front," the paper concludes.

Under the headline "True and fake prestige" STOCKHOLMSTIDNINGEN in its editorial on 15 December says that Secretary-General Hammarskjöld has given proof

of good will and ability to interfere immediately and unconventionally in a difficult situation. He has thereby emphasized the fact that the United Nations is not forgetting its foremost task: to be an organ for settling of disputes and maintenance of peace and an organ for arbitration and not only the representative of a certain party. The paper does not understand the pessimism by which a part of the press opinion in the world received the initiative at the same time expressing its high respects to Mr. Hammarskjöld for his resolute decision.

The paper concludes stating that the United Nations due i.a. to the Korea question has hardly any prestige to lose in Asia but that it is very likely that the mediating mission of the Secretary-General might restore the prestige of the United Nations.

UNITED KINGDOM

Wide publicity was given by the press of 11, 12 and 13 December to the Assembly's resolution. Long articles appeared in the SUNDAY TIMES, OBSERVER, DAILY TELEGRAPH, TIMES, MANCHESTER GUARDIAN, etc.

Several papers approve of the offer by the United Nations Secretary General to go to Peking to discuss the release of prisoners of war belonging to the United Nations' countries, including the eleven American airmen imprisoned as spies. THE TIMES 13 December calls the offer "a bold move," but both this paper and the NEWS CHRONICLE, same date, make the point that Mr. Hammarskjöld is the symbol of an organization which excludes Communist China from its membership, and recognizes the Nationalists on Formosa as China's legitimate rulers.

THE TIMES thinks there is little likelihood of Mr. Hammarskjöld being

received at all. "Indeed," it says, "the opportunities of a Chinese rebuff to the United Nations, based on the familiar arguments about her right to membership, would seem almost overwhelmingly tempting." THE TIMES states that a rejection of the Secretary-General's offer as an ultimate rebuff would circumscribe further good offices by the UN. The paper also refers to some reports from New York suggesting that the Secretary-General may possibly have decided to take the risk in expectation that the USSR may use its influence towards moderation in Peking.

THE GUARDIAN 13 December writes: "The UN has not failed in its responsibility to American airmen imprisoned by the Chinese" but "unhappily there is not much likelihood either that Chou will receive Mr. Hammarskjöld or that he will give the men their freedom."

On December 18, some papers note with interest that the Prime Minister of the Chinese People's Republic, Mr. Chou En-lai, has agreed to see the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Hammarskjöld. Mr. Hammarskjöld had offered to go to Peking after Christmas to discuss the release of the eleven American airmen imprisoned in China for alleged spying, and of all other United Nations' men still detained in violation of the Korean armistice agreement. The papers also note that Mr. Chou En-lai has dismissed as "absurd" the General Assembly's recent resolution protesting against the airmen's imprisonment.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH writes: "There is clearly a possibility that Mr. Hammarskjöld is being welcomed only for the prestige which his visit would bring to a regime which is refused membership in the United Nations." But the paper thinks it is right that Mr. Hammarskjöld should take this risk. It says: "He has frequently received assurances through Soviet or Indian intermediaries that at least a good hope exists of obtaining the men's release."

THE TIMES 18 December thinks it is unlikely that the Peking Government has

had second thoughts about the legality of the airmen's convictions and wants to tell the Secretary-General that it will release the Americans at once; more probably the Chinese intend to sound the possibilities of striking a bargain. The paper recalls Mr. Hammarskjöld has made it clear that he is not going to Peking to negotiate a bargain, and it says: "It would be embarrassing and improper for the Secretary-General to get involved in discussions about the Chinese right to United Nations membership or about Formosa, or even about exchanging the imprisoned airmen for the Chinese students now detained in the United States." - "But because Mr. Hammarskjöld is precluded from negotiation he is specially fitted to explain the United Nations case to the Chinese, and subsequent to the Chinese case to the United Nations, without committing either side."

THE NEWS CHRONICLE of the same day comments: "We can ignore the fact that while one Chinese cable welcomes Mr. Hammarskjöld another told the United Nations to mind their own business. Face-saving is an old Chinese custom. "The important point is that the ice has begun to crack. The talks can do much good, it is even more certain that they are the only means of conciliation available at the moment."

UNITED STATES

President Eisenhower's call upon the United Nations to secure the release of American fliers imprisoned in China received favorable comment. The press was almost unanimous in regarding the UN as the proper place to deal with the matter, and approval of the President's move came even from the quarters which had previously supported various suggestions for drastic actions against Peiping China.

According to the ST. LOUIS POST DISPATCH, 6 December, President Eisenhower would not have sent the issue to the UN had he not been certain that the US moral position was sound. "He must be confident," says the POST DISPATCH, "that the Chinese propaganda about the flyers being engaged in espionage can be effectively exploded The appeal to the UN is an appeal to reason, an appeal to justice."

The size of the vote on the General Assembly resolution assigning the Secretary-General the task of obtaining freedom for the 11 US flyers and other UN prisoners held in China was received by US press with satisfaction and with laudatory appraisal of the UN performance of its duties. The UN "has done honor to itself and to the principles of simple human decency by condemning Peiping, in a most resounding way," says the Washington EVENING STAR, 13 December. In the words of the ST. LOUIS POST DISPATCH, 11 December, the vote by which the resolution was passed "ought to be pondered very seriously by Peiping."

According to the WASHINGTON POST, 12 December, the overwhelming vote of the Assembly is testimony to an aroused world conscience. "No amount of propaganda could disguise the fact that the retention, trial and sentencing of men captured while in uniform were a flagrant violation of the Korean armistice."

The Assembly call upon the Secretary-General to bring about the liberation of the prisoners was termed by the EVENING STAR, 13 December, "an excellent and inspiring day's work." Whatever the outcome of Secretary-General's efforts, says the STAR, "the UN can take proper pride in itself for what it has done in dealing with this situation. It has moved fast; it has not hemmed and hawed, and that is all to the good."

William McGaffin (CHICAGO DAILY NEWS, 11 December) described the assignment

"World's toughest job" and claimed that "now even Dag Hammarskjöld's critics admit that he is in the toughest spot of his entire career." The writer thinks that if the Secretary-General "falls on his face, it will set the UN foes in this country baying louder than ever."

The EVENING STAR, 13 December, agrees with the CHICAGO DAILY NEWS' writer that the task Mr. Hammarskjöld has undertaken is perhaps "the most difficult and delicate ever thrust upon the organization's Secretary-General, but he can be counted upon to execute it with distinction."

The NEW YORK TIMES, 13 December, sees the significance of the situation created by the resolution in the fact that "in this world of fear and threatened violence the voices of men who act without fear and who threaten no violence can still be heard." The paper adds that "though no foreign troupes will attempt to enter Peiping as they did half a century and more ago at the time of the Boxer Rebellion, the opinions and votes of forty-seven nations condemning the illegal detention of prisoners will be heard there." With reference to the task of the Secretary-General, the TIMES says that Mr. Hammarskjöld is "a man who has scrupulously respected the explicit and implicit Charter requirement of neutrality in the Secretariat." As a servant of the UN "he has acted with earnestness, vigor and obvious goodwill. The Peiping Government had no right to take offense at the tenor of the dispatch he sent it, which did not recite the terms of the Assembly resolution, but which proposed that he reasonably consult with it."

Concerning the case of some thirty-five Chinese students in the US who have not been granted exit permits, the US press points to the fact that the students have a different status from that of eleven American airmen. However, there is no outright opposition to a possible barter agreement to exchange the Chinese

students for the eleven airmen and other military and civilian personnel held in China. Commenting on the issue, the NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, 17 December, notes that Peking has not made any offer of an exchange and that, therefore, it is impossible to know what the Chinese may have in mind. The paper concludes: "It would certainly be preferable to have all military prisoners released as a matter of international justice and good faith and to take up the civilian question on a separate basis. If, however, there were a general release of all persons detained on both sides, it would not affect the real merits of the case against Peking's unlawful detentions. Most Americans would see nothing objectionable in disposing of the matter thus quickly and humanely."

On December 18, the NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE editorializes upon Chinese reaction to the UN move. The paper maintains that "on the surface, the two cables which Red Chinese Premier has sent to Mr. Hammarskjold seem to cancel out." The TRIBUNE considers likely that Chou's invitation to the Secretary-General is more significant than the anti-American, anti-UN tirade which accompanied it. At least, says the paper, "it offers an opportunity for direct diplomatic exchanges whereby Mr. Hammarskjöld can point out to the Red Chinese the dangers of the course they are pursuing and the importance which the civilized world attaches to the release of the eleven Americans. In that effort, the United States will wish the Secretary-General every success."

Commenting on the same subject, the NEW YORK TIMES, 18 December, thinks that in view of Chou's answers it is problematical whether the Secretary-General's mission can yield positive results, and even whether Chou will deign to discuss the imprisoned fliers at all. The paper believes that the Chinese Communist regime has already won a considerable propagandistic success. In the first place, says the TIMES, the Secretary-General goes to the capital of a Power convicted as

an aggressor, and is doing so on the aggressor's terms. Secondly, Peiping was scored a point against the US by coupling the release of war prisoners with the repatriation of a few Chinese students.

The view expressed by the TIMES that the Peiping regime has benefited from the UN action has also been claimed in various Press Agencies' dispatches, allegedly interpreting the attitudes of Far Eastern countries. Thus, for instance, a UP dispatch appearing in some US papers on 14 December claimed -- among other things -- that according to "some Asian diplomats" the Secretary-General's visit to Peiping "would play into the hands of the Communists." The story also credited these sources with the view that the Chinese may succeed in convincing millions of Asians that "the UN has requested permission to come to Peiping and beg for a favor."

These views have not received any noticeable editorial support. However, the Secretary-General's statement that he is not going "to beg anybody for anything" has been widely reported. It was also approvingly referred to in at least two editorials in the popular press.