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Public Information Studies

19 October 53

Notes on Dinner given by Porul Hoffman (Chairman of  
the Board, The Studebaker Corp., Ca)

Mr. Hammerskjeld

Notes on Dinner given by Mr. Paul Hoffman

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Monday, October 19, 1953

Among those present, beside Mr. Hoffman, were: Milton Eisenhower; Elmo Roper, leading public opinion analyst; Mr. and Mrs. Gardner Cowles (Look Magazine); Samuel Goldwyn (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer); Ambassador Lodge; Wesley Rennie (Executive Director of the Committee for Economic Development and Chairman of the UN Conferences Group of NGO's); Milton Katz (Ford Foundation); Earl Newsom (Ford Motor Company, Advertising and Public Relations); John W. Hill of Hill & Knowlton (Studebaker Corp., Public Relations); Mr. and Mrs. M.T. Moore (Cravath, Swaine & Moore); T.J. Hargrave (Eastman Kodak Co.). Mr. James D. Zellerbach of the U.S. Delegation was also present for cocktails.

Although the discussion was of a very preliminary nature, the atmosphere was very friendly and promising for the future. The Secretary-General's absence was much regretted but the circumstances were fully explained and understood.

Several of the guests indicated their positive interest in participating in an informal committee headed by Mr. Hoffman to advise and assist on the problem of American public opinion towards the United Nations. Mr. Hoffman said that he would consider all those present to be members of such an informal committee to work with the Secretary-General.

After referring to his own strong interest in American public attitudes towards the United Nations and his desire to be of help to the Secretary-General and to the United States Government in this respect, Mr. Hoffman went around the table, starting with Ambassador Lodge, followed by Mr. Cordier and myself, and then Elmo Roper.

The latter gave, in confidence, some indication of the results of the most extensive analysis of American public attitudes towards the United Nations that has ever been made. The results of this survey will not be made public until December, but Mr. Roper said the main conclusions he drew were the following:

- 1) Contrary to a widely prevailing impression, isolationism and anti-UN sentiment were lower than they have ever been and support for the United Nations correspondingly higher.
- 2) Opposition to the United Nations was "considerably less" than 20 per cent of the total sample. Of the two extremes -- isolationism on the one hand and world government on the other -- more people were in favor of world government than of getting out of the United Nations.
- 3) The survey was conducted in such a way as to explore the reasons for the attitudes taken by those interviewed. In general the great majority who supported the United Nations offered better reasons for the position they took than those who opposed the United Nations.

In general, the other guests who spoke afterwards seemed to accept Mr. Roper's conclusions as accurate. He has a very high reputation for public opinion analysis. Much of the discussion therefore centered upon how to deal more effectively with the very vocal, well organized anti-UN minority of 20 per cent or less. Several of the guests stressed the need of persuading members of Congress that the majority of their constituents were in fact supporters of the United Nations. Many congressmen had a contrary impression because their mail was heavily loaded by the well organized anti-UN pressure groups and some of the biggest newspaper chains were generally anti-UN.

Some interesting side-lights:

Mr. Hoffman said he expected to see the Secretary-General on Wednesday and was going to Washington on Thursday to urge President Eisenhower in the strongest terms to accept an invitation to speak to the General Assembly. He also hoped the President would invite William Randolph Hearst, Jr. and the General Manager of the Hearst Enterprises, Mr. Berlin, to the White House for a heart-to-heart talk on the United Nations and America's role in the world. He paid a very warm tribute to the Secretary-General as a man whom he had come to know well in O.E.E.C., and as the best possible choice that could have been made for Secretary-General.

Ambassador Lodge gave the standard speech on the United Nations that he has given to Congressional committees and many other audiences. He added that Congress was always a distorted expression of American public opinion because of gerrymandered Congressional Districts and "rotten borough" representation from some states in the Senate. Ambassador Lodge left early and following his departure there were two or three favorable references to his performance as U.S. Representative and no unfavorable comments.

Gardner Cowles, while carefully excepting President Eisenhower personally, said there was great need for more positive leadership from Washington both in the Administration and in Congress. We needed to have policies based on hope, not fear, and enunciated and explained in terms of hope, not fear. He said he regarded the development of an enlightened American foreign trade policy as one of the most important immediate issues, one which called for an all-out campaign similar to the campaigns which sold Lend-Lease and the Marshall Plan to Congress and the American people.

Milton Katz was the only guest who referred to Charter revision. He raised the issue as a danger signal he saw ahead and feared the development of an atmosphere of total public confusion upon the question by the time 1955 rolled around.

Wesley Rennie, T.J. Hargrave, and one or two others stressed the importance of really effective NCO organization on the local level. This required enlisting the real leaders in business, church, labor and other groups in the community in active support of the United Nations and making this support both influential and articulate in relation to Congressional representatives and the local newspaper, radio and television outlets.

Earl Newsom and John Hill both thought more attention should be paid to programs of practical cooperation in the economic and social fields, and Mr. Newsom tentatively suggested that it was a mistake to pay so much attention to the United Nations as an instrument for preserving peace. Mr. Hoffman and several others strongly disagreed with Mr. Newsom on this last point.

Samuel Goldwyn said we were failing to reach the masses with our millions of words, that until the masses came to understand what the United Nations was all about we would continue to elect isolationists to Congress and said he was prepared to back financially a good program to reach the man in the street.

Milton Eisenhower, who spoke last and briefly, said he felt the basic public opinion problem did not center around the United Nations as such. It was the problem of bringing about wider public understanding of the implications of the American position of power and influence in an inter-dependent world and of the relationship of our position to the whole pattern of world developments. Once this was better understood, attitudes towards the United Nations would take care of themselves.

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