

ACCURACY IN MEDIA, INC.

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Reed J. Irvine
Chairman of the Board

July 10, 1980

Mr. Arthur Ochs Sulzberger
Chairman and President
The New York Times
New York, N. Y. 10036

Dear Punch:

Thank you very much for giving Murray and me so much of your time on Tuesday. It turned out to be much more of a bull session than an interview, but I found it useful, and I hope that you and Sydney also feel that it was worthwhile.

One area that we did not get into to the extent that I had wanted was the defenses that exist to protect the Times and its readers from the Soviet disinformation and propaganda operation. The case exposed in Paris Match of the French journalist, Pierre Charles Pathe, is just the tip of the iceberg. I was a bit taken aback at Sydney's dismissal of this case as something that might merit a one paragraph story in the Times.

My feeling is that this is an area of warfare that is just as important as the one that is conducted with missiles and tanks. Indeed, it may be more important. We lost in Vietnam because of our inattention to this area, not because of military weakness. We are in a dangerous decline today only partly because we have let the Soviets surpass us in military strength. We are a nation that is extremely vulnerable to morale-sapping propaganda and disinformation campaigns. One reason for the slippage in the military, in my view, is because we have for so long been the target of the propaganda theme that we had nothing to fear from the Soviets and therefore did not need to spend all that money on arms.

The reason it is disconcerting that Sydney, and perhaps you, should show so little interest in the Pathe story is that it suggests a continuing lack of concern about the vulnerability of our media and of the Times itself to manipulation by persons serving the interests of our mortal enemies.

It seems to me that there is a tendency to acknowledge the possibility of such things in the abstract but to regard them as unthinkable when we come to concrete cases. I am sure that had a charge of serving Soviet interests been leveled against Pierre Pathe prior to his arrest, the editors publishing his stories would have reacted with horrified contempt. And yet it should have been possible to analyze his material and discover that it was disinformation or pro-Soviet propaganda.

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The chances of nailing a Pierre Pathe as the French did are slim. Indeed, as Sakharov said in his letter which your Magazine published, only one of the four groups aiding the Soviet disinformation effort includes people who have been directly "bought."

That being the case, what defense does a publisher have?

The obvious one is to observe the material and to see if a pattern is noted. Another is to take some interest in the ideological views of the writers. You said that was not a matter of interest to you, but as Sakharov noted, ideological commitment is a very important factor in motivating those among us who serve Soviet ends. You reacted to the statement that I quoted from Karen DeYoung of the Washington Post to the effect that young reporters like to interview the leftist guerrillas because they assume them to be the good guys. You said that was a foolish thing for her to say. But it is no doubt true, and she knows it to be true because she is talking about her friends and contemporaries. It reveals the ideological commitment of these reporters. It presents a serious problem, and we ignore it at our peril.

No doubt thirty years from now a lot of the Karen DeYoungs will write their memoirs and confess how mistaken they were in their youthful enthusiasm for the far left cause, but by then the damage that they have done might well be irreparable. They may unfortunately be in the same position as Eric Chou of China, Miguel Quevedo of Cuba, and Doan Van Linh of Vietnam--all journalists who found too late that they had helped bring about a nightmare, not the dream they sought.

It would certainly be wrong to attribute base motives to every writer of stories and articles that aids the Soviet cause. Some may be base. Others may be foolish. And still others may simply be inept. But would it be wrong for an editor to screen out such material, without first trying to ascertain the motives of the writer? Could not material of a questionable nature be discussed with the author with a view to determining what might be done to make it less serving of Soviet propaganda interests?

Enclosed is an example of an article that disturbs me by Philip Taubman on Louis Wolf. Wolf is a close collaborator of Philip Agee. Agee is on record as saying that the KGB is on the right side and he approves of their activities. Mr. Taubman's article shows no evidence that he tried to ascertain whether or not Mr. Wolf shares that view. I would suspect that Wolf does. Certainly, if I were doing an article about Wolf, I would want to try to inform the reader about Mr. Wolf's motives, as well as about his activities. I think that it is fundamentally misleading simply to present him as a Quaker and conscientious objector who is willing to see CIA agents killed in furtherance of some noble but not well-defined cause.

It may be that Philip Taubman does not know about Philip Agee's views on the KGB. Perhaps he doesn't read the AIM Report, where those views were laid out in our June II issue. But shouldn't the Times have editors who would look at an article such as this and ask, "Does this really tell the readers all that they ought to know about Louis Wolf and his associates?"

You said emphatically that the Times is not neutral in the titanic struggle between freedom and totalitarianism. That reassures me greatly. But I cite this particular article that, at best, is representative of a neutral position in that struggle. I think that Mr. Wolf would find it very much to his liking.

Sincerely yours,

