

Questions and Answers at Edward R. Murrow's Speech  
before the National Press Club, Washington, D. C., May 24, 1961

Q. First question, as America's Vice President in charge of international public relations, are you habitually consulted before the fat is in the fire?

A. I suppose the obvious answer to that would be to ask for a definition of both the fat and the fire, since there seems to be no shortage of either. I would answer it, however, by saying that it was suggested when I came down here that this Agency could operate effectively only if it had (1) prior access to information; (2) an opportunity to be heard on policy before policy was made. I have no complaints on that score. At the same time, I have no illusions that I am monopolizing the making of policy. (Audience laughter) But I do - I do have an opportunity to be heard.

Q. Is it true that you are resigning from USIA because you were not consulted in the Cuban fiasco?

A. Mr. President, this story that I am resigning was obviously the result of free journalistic enterprise. (Audience laughter) I have never spoken of resigning. I have never thought of resigning. I have not even had any dreams about resigning. I am happy in my work...the rations are adequate. I am in goodly company and, at least until I made this speech here today, Mr. President, I was not aware that I was in any danger of being fired. (Audience laughter....applause).

Mr. John Cosgrove, President of the National Press Club, who acted as master of ceremonies interpolated: There is one thing, Ed, things break fast in Washington, however. (More laughter)

Q. What do you say to reports that you are irked over lack of information given you by the White House, State Department and CIA?

A. Irked is not the word. Obviously, I am not able to contribute details as to the degree and frequency of consultation, but, inside this room, I was somewhat irked when after a considerable session with the President on Monday, he had me on the telephone the following morning before I had got to my office. I can only repeat that I have no complaints on the degree or the frequency of consultation. I would not care to rack up a box score as to how many I have won or lost, but the opportunity to go to bat exists.

Q. Could you please explain your statement that USIA was "truthful and complete" about the Cuban invasion, in view of the fact that the US Government at the time professed to know nothing about it and even now has not described its role in it on the record?

A. "Truthful and complete." I meant to say that we reported it - such evidence, such events, as were available. That we quoted the American press, the American wire agencies. We quoted foreign reaction. That we delivered the complete and absolute final historical version, one that will be accepted by history, obviously we didn't. I don't think any of us did. What I meant by that statement was that we did a full, straightaway job of reporting.

Q. How do you put a favorable light for the rest of the world on such news as the current race disturbances in Alabama?

A. The answer is that you don't. They happen. They are fully reported for a period of two days. The difficulties in Alabama led most of the European news bulletin and led the papers. They also led the Voice of America broadcasts. The thing that we did do was (1) to report what happened with, I hope, brevity and clarity, and also to put the emphasis on the speed and effectiveness of the action taken first by the Federal Government, and then by the State authorities, to restore order. Beyond that we could not go, and should not.

Q. Shifting gears here again, to meet the problem of housing African diplomats has the Government considered purchasing and renting suitable housing to these people?

A. Now this you will regard as a bureaucratic answer and it probably is. The Agency is forbidden to operate within the continental limits of the United States. The matter of proper housing for African diplomats is, I believe, indeed I know, under urgent study by the State Department whose responsibility it is.

Q. Since your mandate relates to communication with peoples abroad, what does USIA do to train its representatives in foreign languages in order to communicate?

A. This is a constant problem in a country where the teaching of languages is inadequate. We do now have training courses. In our recruitment we are putting increased emphasis on language training. We require to do much more of it. We require not only people who know foreign languages, but it is equally important that the people we send abroad have knowledge and information regarding their own country. If I had my way, I would insist that every American who goes abroad in an official capacity be required to purchase a secondhand automobile, guaranteed to break down at least eight times in a small town, as he drove from one coast to the other, because I think the information he would acquire would be of great value to him abroad.

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Q. Are you in urgent need of high talent volunteers from the US communications industry?

A. We are always in need of high class volunteers. The answer to the question is yes, particularly if they are familiar with the pay scale we are able to offer.

Q. Following that, do we understand that you need a larger appropriation? (Laughter)

A. When I first came down here I was advised by a man of great experience in Washington who said, in answering questions before committees, or elsewhere, (1) never try to be funny; (2) never lie; (3) never blurt out the complete truth. (Laughter from audience) This is, I am sure, not the forum to engage in a long-range discussion with the appropriation committees of the House and the Senate. I would say, however, that in our request for funds for the coming fiscal year we have asked for what we honestly believe we can spend effectively and efficiently and without waste. But as we study the program, as we acquire real estate for new facilities, new facilities for book publishing, then, in answer to the question I would quote friends of mine in Brooklyn who were wont to say "wait until next year," because we are going to ask for what we think the situation requires, and I would repeat again that the sum total of our request now before Congress represents what we think we can spend effectively and efficiently.

Q. What can be done to obtain recognition abroad for over 56 billion dollars investment in economic aid?

A. I think we all know from traveling abroad that gratitude is almost as rare a commodity amongst nations as it is amongst individuals. We in the Agency have tried through print, film, television, to make clear the degree and extent of American economic aid. It, however, ought to be remarked that one cannot hammer too hard on recipient countries in a demand that they should express, openly, their gratitude for our generosity. No more can we reasonably expect nations to which we have acted as both midwife and fairy godmother to imitate us in all respects in their social and economic organization. The aid is given, as I understand it, in large measure, to give them the economic, the educational opportunities to make a free choice without compulsion, just as the military aid is, in considerable extent, given in order that they may defend themselves. I do not mean to imply that we should downgrade our economic aid, but I do mean to say that to insist upon open expressions of great gratitude would in this wonderful, wonderful word I have learned since coming to Washington... It would be counter-productive... (Laughter from audience)... which, as I understand it in old fashioned logging terms, would mean it would backfire. (Laughter and applause)

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Q. Are there any plans for increased activities in South America, other than Voice of America, broadcasts?

A. There are indeed. Whatever happens to our amended budget we shall put major emphasis on Latin America and on Africa. So far as Latin America is concerned, we now have a weekly newsreel on television that is carried in 15 countries, estimated audience 10 million. (I am prepared to admit that estimate may be bloated, but I am familiar with bloated estimates from my domestic experience). (Laughter from audience) We place some 16 hundred hours of radio per week on radio stations in Latin America and this, in the vernacular, is where we put the hay in the barn, because when you can get a program on a local medium-wave transmitter then you are reaching the local audience. We shall increase our book translation program. We are going to start working, insofar as we can, with labor organizations. We hope to be able to do a certain amount of reporting of Latin America to itself, so that the increased emphasis on Latin America will by no means be confined to the Voice of America.

Q. Now continuing the broadcast view, moving to another continent however, do you think the "Courier" is a significantly useful instrument in the Voice of America program? Why?

A. The "Courier" was not a hundred percent successful. It was expensive to operate. Its signal was limited. And if pending negotiations are successful, we are going to move the transmitters ashore and either mothball or in some way dispose of the "Courier." The change will increase our signal and reduce our costs.

Q. Has a film of our Astronaut been sent abroad? If so, why the original indecision as reported in a newspaper column?

A. This is very embarrassing because the newspaper column was right... right in the sense that someone in our Agency said there was indecision. There was no indecision. We moved quantities of background material, both print and film, weeks ahead of the shot. Within roughly 26 hours of the shot we had a 10 minute film on the Jet to every post abroad. We subsequently moved another 8 minute film, which gave the highlights of Commander Shepard's visit to Washington, his news conference and his acceptance of the medal from the President. So, as I say, this is a case where we did our job; the individual who wrote the piece did his job. But someone who was uninformed in the Agency conveyed the wrong impression. We are rather proud of what we did with that.

Q. It has been charged that USIA serves as a cover for CIA. Any comment? (Continuing laughter from audience)

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A. No. (More laughter from audience).... Just no.

Q. If USIA prestige poll was good enough to be used in a Presidential campaign, why is it being dropped now, outside of the fact that there is no campaign?

A. It is quite true, as you know, that we have abandoned the so-called prestige or barometer poll. The reason we did so was that we had no interest in spending the tax-payers' money to run a rating popularity as between Mr. Khrushchev and Mr. Kennedy. We shall continue to do some polling, but the polling techniques will be used in an effort to discover and to determine the areas of interest, or curiosity, or apprehension, of misunderstanding. In short, an effort to find out what's bugging people about this country and its policies. And we shall also continue to make polls having to do with the impact of what we do, whether it be in films, television, or print, on the recipient country. We shall also weld into that information acquired from a variety of sources because, as you gentlemen all know from experience, if someone puts on his hat and coat and goes and talks to a half dozen cabinet ministers and to six or eight newspaper editors in a foreign country, he is likely to acquire information as to reaction, or potential reaction, to a given line of policy, much more clearly than if he relies on public opinion polls. We also did not want to create the impression that United States foreign policy is being determined by holding the finger on the pulse of a rather limited popularity poll in a foreign country.

Q. Returning to the Cuban situation for a minute, please assess the propaganda effects of the "tractors for prisoners" affair.

A. Mr. President, I anticipated that such a question might arise. As you know the President issued, shortly before noon, a statement on this subject, which is rather definitive. But it seems to me that, As Senator Smathers said I believe yesterday, that Castro's offer to exchange prisoners for tractors was a monumental propaganda blunder. The world-wide reaction was almost universally hostile. The obvious parallel was drawn all around the world between Castro's offer and the one made by Hitler when he offered to trade Jews for trucks. And this, I think, is significant - that Castro's offer has now been a running story for five days, and his friends in Moscow and Peiping have remained silent. Their radios are not commenting. The Communist press throughout the world is, in the main, observing what can only be described as a sort of embarrassed silence. Castro obviously is now attempting to recover from his blunder by saying that he wants the tractors as indemnification for damage done. What he did initially, of course, was to demonstrate again to the world in dramatic fashion that the Communist machine operates without regard for those human values and human beings that are the hallmark of civilized society. And it seems to me that had American citizens remained mute and refused to act, they

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would, one, have denied their heritage and caused much of the world to believe we value our dollars and machines above the freedom of men who are willing to risk their lives in an effort to regain freedom for their fellow countrymen.

I apologize for reading this, Mr. President, but I anticipated the question and rather wanted to say what I meant to say and sometimes in ad-libbing I know from bitter experience I do not. (Laughter and loud applause)

Q. Would a USIA Person-to-Person program, beamed into the homes of leaders of foreign states, be practical?

A. I really don't know. The program survived about seven years here, and then succumbed. Some of them were, in fact, done in the homes of foreigners. I should think if the language problem could be overcome, and it could, technically speaking, that such a program might have some degree of acceptance. I really have not given that particular program any thought in recent years. (Audience laughter)

Q. Here's a quickie! Is a drive-in movie a worthy gain to Italy at US-USIA expense?

A. I suppose I could answer that as someone did once with what was called "an affirmative maybe." But I do not know that the drive-in theater was financed by United States funds and I should think the answer would be determined, in large extent, as to whether, occasionally, films produced by USIA were shown in a drive-in theater. (Laughter)

Q. Mr. Moses was here Monday and reported on the New York World's Fair. What is USIA's attitude on the World's Fair and what is USIA doing to support the Fair?

A. I can quote to you from memory a letter from Charlie Poletti, who traveled pretty well around the world in promoting the World's Fair, and it said in substance that he had received efficient, effective and invaluable cooperation from the USIA posts around the world. It gives us pleasure to receive that kind of communication. We, ourselves, as you know, are engaged in small fairs and exhibits abroad. We have a Plastics Exhibit in the Soviet Union that opened in Tashkent yesterday and the initial response was good. The answer is that we have made a substantial contribution toward encouraging foreign countries to show at the New York World's Fair.

Q. I have about five questions here. I think they're rather ones that you can handle quickly and we'll beat the two o'clock deadline. If we run over I'm

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sure it will be all right. We have a pretty rapt audience here today. And this touches on the Press Club trip to Europe. Three hundred members will be flying over there September first, for a vacation, and the question is: Has the USIA or the State Department weighed the impact of dumping more than 300 National Press Club members in London, simultaneously, on a single day in September?

A. Well London, as I know from experience, is a hospitable and gracious city, and whatever hardships may be experienced by former colleagues on this journey, I should hate to see the day come when USIA, State Department, or anyone else, could say "Don't go. There are too many of you." I think the more, the better. (Laughter and applause)

Q. Isn't there some evidence that the New Zealers are beginning to display battle fatigue?

A. Sir, I regard that as a personal question. I accept it as such. And I'm afraid the answer may well be true. But I have noticed no signs of battle fatigue amongst my younger colleagues and a degree of tolerance for their more ancient associates. I have not noticed any slowing down of the tempo, although I must confess there have been times when I feel that we should commit ourselves to the proposition of the inevitability of gradualness. (Laughter) But I am much impressed with the stamina, the fortitude, and the steadiness of my colleagues. And the answer is I have not yet seen any signs of battle fatigue unless I see them while shaving in the morning. (Laughter)

Q. In a serious question, how can you explain the fact that some officers selected for your so-called Foreign Service Career Reserve suffered a pay cut for accepting what was supposed to be a form of promotion?

A. I said at the outset that when ignorance was obvious, I would confess it. My understanding is that this resulted as a result of a piece of legislation which did not turn out precisely as it was expected to turn out. The details of that I frankly am not familiar with, but as I have been taught to say, Mr. President I would be glad to supply it for the record...I just don't know.

Q. It has been reported that you have been able to play golf only twice on your new job. Was it at Burning Tree and what did you shoot? (Laughter)

A. It was at Burning Tree. Once it was in company with Bill Lawrence, so I am obliged to tell the truth lest he lie about it to you later. I pulled a tendon in my hand about a year ago, running a bulldozer. (Laughter) On one occasion, due to the bad hand, I failed to finish the round, and, on

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the other occasion I had 104. (Laughter)

Q. The handwriting is different, but it's in the same vein. Are you now, or have you ever been the best lefthanded putter in Christendom?

A. I have not traveled all over Christendom, or played all the courses. (Laughter) However, there was a time in my youth when I putted very well. That reference I think appeared in print under Scotty Reston's by-line. And this I'm sure arose as a result of certain experiences we had during the war when we played a few times on courses that had given hospitality to unexploded bombs, and they had little ropes around them. And I never played golf very well, but I could putt well. Reston was a much better golfer and, occasionally, I could hold him even just by putting, so I think that is the reason for that. I should like to think it's ture. (Laughter)

Q. And now before the last question, I have one here that you might have been prepared for. I don't know if you have a prepared note on it, but you might have expected it. I did. And the question is what do you think of Joe McCarthy now? (Laughter)

A. I did not expect the question. And I was taught... I think this is right... I was taught in my youth to say whatever one felt like saying about anyone who was living and had a chance to answer back. And I think that was pretty sound teaching. (Applause)

Q. Well Sir, I'd like to present you with this Certificate of Appreciation for your coming here today and with a copy of the Press Club's First Fifty Year Book, Etoain-Shrdlu. Thank you, Sir. And the last question is the job worse than with CBS in recent years? (Laughter)

A. The job is better. It is a combination of fascination mixed with occasional frustration. It is a mind stretching operation. It sometimes tends to strip the gears in the mind. I am, as I said earlier, happy in the work and in a goodly company, particularly here today. (Applause)

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