

Newspaper Guild Convention
Excerpt by HRP
June 28, 1950

Just this final word and I recognize that you have heard a great deal about it, and that is this whole issue of monopoly. I am not only concerned by what I see as monopoly of the press. I am concerned by what I see of an ever-growing tendency of economic monopoly and of power, monopoly all over the American scene, and monopoly is not compatible with free institutions. Economic monopoly is a mortal enemy of the individual, political, economic, and cultural freedom, and the job of our government and a job that has not been done too well is not merely to fight against monopoly but to promote the conditions which make it possible for every man and every person to have an area of opportunity. Monopoly in the press is particularly bad, and I would say this without being too critical or being too caustic, the American people have left the press of America. They have left it. If I were a publisher of a great newspaper, if I were an editor of a great newspaper, I would do some soul-searching, some re-examination of the kind of opinion and attitude that I hold, because surely over the long period of time, now almost twenty years, a full generation, the American people have not listened to, and let me say they have even grown to not respect many of the attitudes and the opinions expressed in that all-important page of the American daily and weekly newspaper, the editorial page.

These, who are the masters of public opinion should remember that basically public opinion is their master. Those who would mold public opinion, and in their fruitless efforts to mold it, ought to try to examine what has happened in American life. The American people are no longer content to be told what to do by a

single newspaper in a large metropolitan area. The American people repudiate this kind of monopolistic power over the forces or over the mechanisms of communication, and if I were a publisher in a great city, I would welcome petition. I would go out of the way to welcome competition, because I say categorically that democracy and freedom depend upon competition of ideas, not monopoly over the formulation of economic, political and cultural attitudes. This is a basic problem in America today. More and more newspapers are disappearing from the scene. More and more are being gobbled up into what we call a chain. More and more are being liquidated in terms of their independence by shareholding control, economic control and policy-making control, and this is not good for democracy. This is not good for human freedom, this is not good for what we call the American way of life, and if the Newspaper Guild has one contribution that it can make in behalf of freedom at this critical hour, it is to state forthrightly and clearly so that everyone can understand it, that it looks upon the ever-growing tendency of economic monopoly in the field of newspaper publications as an evidence in our society that needs to be eradicated. (Applause)

Lest anyone misinterpret my remarks, may I say this: We still have in this great nation of ours a good deal of freedom of the press. We still have in this great nation of ours possibly the most free press that the modern world knows. I recognize that that statement may be well challenged by men and women from other parts of the world, but in a sense we have not lost the cause, in a sense we have not lost the fight, but the time has arrived to take what I call preventive action to see that this trend and that movement which is now going on for the concentration of control over the means of communication and the means of newspaper publications is put to a stop, and whatever your organization can do in behalf of that program will be a worthy step.

Mr. Chucker, I want to thank you very much for giving me this privilege of addressing this convention. May I say that I had no prepared remarks. I came to you as a friend. I came to you recognizing that some of the points of view that I hold are not very popular these days. Once in a while I gather from that press that I read around the country that some of us are looked upon as rather dangerous radical people. Well, I would say that my radicalism is just this: It is a sincere and devoted belief in the creed of the American system. It is a sincere and devoted belief that man is more important than economic independence. It is a sincere belief that somehow there are certain truths that every man recognizes as being self-evident. It is a belief that every person ought to share in the responsibilities and the privilege and duties of government. It is a belief that any means, any method of discrimination, any form of intolerance, any degree of bigotry is a social and political cancer in our society that needs to be checked, and about which there needs to be preventive action. It is a belief that basically the wealth of this nation and the strength of this nation is in the people. I am never very much influenced by the fact that the cash in a bank is strong and powerful. What I am primarily concerned about is what about the condition of the depositors? Now about the folks: It is a belief that somehow or other the economic solvency of America is not determined by the Federal budget, but that the economic solvency of America is determined by the number of jobs that are available at decent wages and under good working conditions for the industrial workers of America. What is the economic condition of the American farmer in terms of his products and his prices? What is the economic condition of the trades men and the draftsmen, and the small manufacturer and the small businessmen, and I am here to state quite categorically that never has America in all of its history been more economically solvent, more economically strong than it is at this very day on this 28th day -- I believe that is the date -- of June, 1950, all the critics to the contrary. (Applause)

If it is radical to believe in collective bargaining, free collective bargaining, if it is unAmerican and socialistic and radical to believe in the right of the working people of this country to organize, then I stand convicted. If it is radical, unAmerican and socialistic to believe that every person, regardless of his race, color or creed, native origin, or his religion, should have an equal right to participate in the fruits of democracy, then I stand convicted. It is radical to believe that the people are capable of governing themselves and that the majority over the long period will make fewer mistakes than any selected minority, then I stand convicted. I just happen to believe that mankind is capable of solving its problems, and I happen to believe that the quest of freedom is a quest which is a noble one and which every decent, respectable, intelligent citizen in America and all parts of the world ought to dedicate himself to. I happen to believe corruption, totalitarianism, special privilege wherever it may be found, is a mortal enemy of democratic institutions, and I am happy to know that this Guild, this fine organization, has seen fit to take a firm stand at this critical hour of human history and long before this hour on the issue of totalitarian philosophy. There is no room in this world, nor is there any room in this great nation of ours, for a totalitarian mentality, and the way to defeat that totalitarian mentality is not to curse it, is not to investigate it, is not just to charge it with this and with that, but to create the conditions of economic and political opportunity so that people do not fall into the trap and into the insidious philosophy which would devour them and destroy their individual liberty, and you folks can do something about this. You can do more about it than a Congressman or a United States Senator. You speak through the printed word to millions of people, and your printed words are priceless gems, or they can be a toxic ingredient that will destroy us or save us.

Good luck to you. It has been fun to be here. I want to thank you very much.



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org