Buenos Aires, Argentina, December 2, 1946

No. 1365

Subject: With Reference to Articles in the American Press with regard to Alleged Plans of Mr. Fritz Mandl to set up a Chain of Newspapers in the Argentine and which would be Fascist

CONFIDENTIAL

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to an article which appeared in the Washington Post in Washington in either the issue of October 20 or October 21, 1946 with the headline "Mandl Sets Up Fascist Paper in Argentina." As only one clipping of this article is available in the Embassy, for the purpose of ready reference I send the text of the article herewith (enclosure 1.)

It will be noted that this article was written by Miss Virginia Prewett, an American correspondent in Buenos Aires, who contributes regularly to the Chicago Sun and occasionally to the Washington Post. It is my understanding that before this article appeared in the Washington Post a similar report of Miss Prewett had been published in the Chicago Sun, but if such an article was published in the Chicago Sun, this Embassy does not have available a copy thereof.

I am transmitting this article to the Department as it is characteristic of the reporting being done by Miss Prewett from Buenos Aires. It is most important in the interests of our government and of the Argentine, as of the other American countries, that the reporting by American and foreign correspondents in the other American republics with respect to developments in these countries should be accurate, complete, understanding, and objective. Without such accurate and adequate reporting, public opinion in the United States is not properly informed and the task of our government with respect to policy is made more difficult.

The reporting of Miss Prewett is unfortunately not characterized by accuracy, understanding, or objectivity. She has certain ideological concepts which I think most of us share so far as they are democratic and opposed to Fascism and any totalitarian ideas. Miss Prewett, however, is completely lacking in objectivity and takes sides in issues without adequately informing herself of the facts.

She
She is completely lacking in understanding, and although working in the Latin American atmosphere, has no real understanding of Latin America.

Her reporting is lacking in accuracy as she does not check on her information and is interested in sensationalism and in proving a preconceived attitude of her own.

I am transmitting this particular article as it is characteristic of her reporting. It is completely inaccurate. It is true that Fritz Mandl was a manufacturer of munitions in Austria and it is quite possible that he supplied munitions to Italy during the Ethiopian War. It is also true that he supplied arms to the Austrian Heimwehr which was combating Nazi influence and penetration in Austria and that he contributed large sums of money personally to the maintenance of the Heimwehr. It is not true, however, as Miss Prewett states, that he also supplied arms to the Nazi government of Germany.

The article goes on to state that Mr. Mandl "has selected newspaper publishing in Argentina as his field of postwar expansion." This is utterly incorrect. When this report first came to the attention of the Embassy before Miss Prewett sent in these articles, the Embassy made a very careful inquiry to determine whether as a matter of fact Mr. Mandl was interested in establishing a newspaper or a chain of newspapers. The Embassy has ample means and accurate means of determining any such activity, and it was found that Mr. Mandl had no thought of engaging in such activity. I meet the American correspondents in Buenos Aires once a week in order that they may ask questions for background purposes only and in order to be helpful to them. At one of these meetings at which Miss Prewett was present, this report that Mr. Mandl was starting a chain of newspapers was mentioned, and I stated that for the confidential background of the correspondents, the Embassy had made a very complete inquiry and had found that there was no basis to the report. In spite of this Miss Prewett sent in these articles, including the one to the Washington Post. If she had made any inquiry, even with the more limited facilities available to her, she would have found that there was no basis to this report.

The article goes on further to state that "Though blacklisted by the Allies for representing the Hermann Goering Works in Argentina" etc. he still has a "vast financial empire intact in Argentina, Uruguay and Peru, with holdings in Paraguay and Chile." It is true that Mr. Mandl was on the proclaimed list during the war, but it is equally true that the information on the basis of which he was placed on the list was not accurate and his being placed on the list was one of the injustices committed in connection with the proclaimed list. It is true
It is true that before the United States entered the war, Mr. Mandl was in touch with the Hermann Goering Works in Germany to determine if certain machinery could be imported from Germany for a steel mill which was at that time contemplated in the Argentine, but the correspondence in the possession of the Department and of this Embassy shows that at no time was he the representative of the Hermann Goering Works in the Argentine.

To say that Mr. Mandl has a vast financial empire in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile with holdings in Paraguay and Chile is complete exaggeration. He is a man of means and he has some interests in the Argentine as well as in a few other American countries, but his interests outside of the Argentine are very limited in scope and value and are not of a character such as to be improper in any way.

Miss Prewett makes the definite statement that Mr. Mandl's latest venture is backing a daily newspaper to be published in Rosario and that his agents are negotiating for equipment to start papers in Buenos Aires and Córdoba. This is sheer invention and there has never been any basis for any such statement.

It is, I believe, not worthwhile to comment further on the remainder of the article of Miss Prewett in the Washington Post.

Such irresponsible reporting has much greater significance than merely the irresponsibility of an American correspondent abroad. The Washington Post is one of the most important and responsible newspapers in the United States. It is, so far as I know, the newspaper which is read by most members of Congress, high officials of our government, and by persons in responsible positions in all agencies of our government in Washington. In view of the fact that the newspaper is considered as a highly responsible one, an article which appears in it carries a weight with the readers which it should have but which in the case of an article such as that by Miss Prewett under reference is dangerous because of the misinformation which it gives, not only with regard to an individual but also with regard to the situation in a friendly American republic and in others of the American republics.

In an issue of the New York Post in late November, I believe November 23, there appeared a leading article which, as reported in the Buenos Aires press of November 24, contains the statements: "The dictatorship of General Perón in Argentina is giving a demonstration of just how the freedom of the Press is being totalitarianised. Fritz Mandl, the former Austrian armament magnate who was on the Allied black list during the war, and who is a close friend of President Perón, is reported to be about to cover the country with the first newspaper chain." Etc.
It is very probable that the leading article in the New York Post under reference was based on this article by Miss Prewett published in the Washington Post. It is therefore indicative as to how dangerous such irresponsible reporting is as it gives the basis for editorial comment and opinion in other papers which is expressed in all good faith but which is not based on fact.

The article in the New York Post states that Mr. Mandl is a close friend of President Perón. The fact is that President Perón has seen Mr. Mandl probably only once since Mr. Mandl is in the Argentine and that was some years ago. There has been no real contact between the President of the Argentine and Mr. Mandl and in no sense of the word can Mr. Mandl be said to be a friend of the President of the Argentine or the President a friend of his.

The rest of the leading article in the New York Post under reference goes on to say that "Meanwhile moves are being made to bring the two great independent newspapers, 'La Prensa' and 'La Nación' under Government control—once the freedom of the press is gone, and they only know what the Government tells them it will become a great struggle for the people to regain their other freedoms."

What this article in the New York Post wishes to imply it would be difficult to determine for so far as La Prensa and La Nación are concerned, they are freely publishing whatever they choose to publish and there is hardly a day passes that they do not publish editorial comment critical of the government, and so far as the news content is concerned, I have not been able to learn of any control whatever which is exercised over it, and this is obvious from the reading of the papers themselves.

With reference to the restriction of the press by the government alleged by this article, the very fact that an American correspondent can send out such irresponsible news as that sent out by Miss Prewett in the article in the Washington Post under reference is an indication of the degree of the tolerance of the government and of there existing not only freedom of the press, but so far as such articles are concerned, undue license.

When the New York Post speaks of it becoming a great struggle for the people to regain their other freedoms, it leaves the inference that in Buenos Aires and the Argentine the Argentine people have already lost their freedom. Familiar as I am with the situation in the American republics and in a good many other countries, it is utterly impossible for me to determine what the New York Post means by its implication that the Argentine people have lost their freedom or that there is a question of their regaining their freedom. It is difficult to determine what course events will take in any part of the world today and I do not pretend to foretell what
what the course of events in the Argentine will be, but certainly if the New York Post is concerned with the loss of freedom by the Argentine people, one does not seem to be conscious in this country, nor do the people seem to be conscious of any loss of freedom.

I have wished to send this full information to the Department with regard to these two articles which are related in some ways for they are indicative of the character of a certain amount of correspondence from the Argentine which is not only completely inaccurate but misrepresentative of the situation in the country and therefore dangerous from the point of view of improperly informing public opinion in the United States.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith

Enclosure:

1. Copy of news article from the Washington Post by Virginia Prewett

To Department in quadruplicate
File No. 891
GeorgeSMessersmith:fmk