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W. D. D. - *Ch. Ross* *May 28*
You may be interested in this.
May 25, 1951. *[Signature]*

Miss Caroline L. Pfeiffer,
46 Riverside Drive, 5-S
New York 23, N.Y.

Dear Caroline :

With further reference to your note of May 9 and my acknowledgment of May 12, I thought you would be interested to know that I have read the cover story on the Peróns, and I must say that it is much better than I thought it would be. I must tell you frankly that I do not think it is a good story, because a story of that kind can be written best, naturally, by someone who knows them, but I think on the whole a better job was done than I thought would be done, and I think greater restraint was shown in the story than is usually the case in stories of this kind when the paper has it in for someone. We must not forget that TIME starts out with a positively unfriendly and prejudiced attitude concerning the Peróns, and it is given all that, that I think the story is not as bad as I thought it would be.

As a matter of fact, I do not know what the reaction to this story will be in the Argentine, but I do not think that it will be too bad. I am naturally interested in TIME going back into the Argentine, whether I approve or not always of what TIME publishes and of the way it handles things. The fact remains that TIME has a very wide circulation and has its influence, and I certainly put it in the category of responsible publications. God knows that there are enough that do not have any sense of responsibility. When you get to be as old as I am, you will realize more fully that publishing houses are just as commercial as anyone selling turbines or potatoes. I know that one of the great news agencies in our Country for years colored the news which came out of a particular country, with a particular slant that one of its principal customers wanted the news to have, and so as to leave no misunderstanding as to what I have in mind, I mention that it did it as long back as 1920. I know that two of our principal news agencies at home deliberately refrained from publishing news items from various

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parts of the world with regard to a certain important matter for several years, because they thought that the news sent in by their various correspondents abroad, would not suit a good many of their customers. A news agency that does that, fails in its function, as far as the public is concerned, which has the impression that the news agencies handle all the news and do it without prejudices or passion.

I do not hesitate to say that Reuters, even before it was controlled by the British Government, had greater prejudices and passions and engaged in distortions far greater than those the A.P. and U.P. ever thought of, and I consider that Reuters today is an irresponsible news agency from the point of view of what a news agency should be. Similarly I have no confidence in the so-called France-Presse, which too often permits itself to be used to give particular slants to the news that someone wishes it to have.

All of us who are really interested in the freedom of the press, must have this in mind, and all thoughtful persons are interested in it and realize that it is one of the liberties that have to be defended to the last ditch, if any of our liberties are to be assured. What worries me or rather concerns me is that there is too much hypocrisy on the part of some of our publishers and press agencies. As long as a newspaper is frankly partisan, such as many of our newspapers at home properly are, the intelligent reading public is in a position to judge what it reads. It is when a news agency or a publisher pretends to be completely objective and non-partisan and without passion, except for the truth, that they become dangerous, so far as public opinion is concerned.

I think that I have about as large an acquaintance among newspaper publishers and owners all over the U.S. as any American who is not in that sort of business, and I think I have a proper knowledge of newspapers and publications and their owner-

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ship and direction and a broader knowledge than anyone else I know. That is an accident of my life over many years. Because of that same kind of life I have led, I know how important it is that the freedom of the press be maintained. I know that the maintenance of the freedom of the press will mean that it enjoys too great liberty, in many cases too great license, but I would rather see that: too great liberty and license, than restrictions on the press.

I think you know that the freedom of the press is being threatened in almost every country today. A part of this is brought about by the situations which obtain in so many countries, when governments at all costs wish to maintain themselves in power without any regard for the real interests of the country. Great Britain is the last country, except our own, in which one would have thought that it would have such a thing as restrictions or even control over the press by the Government in time of peace. I think I reminded you that about a year or 18 months ago, the Labor Government in England was definitely planning to put the strictest kind of control over its press, and the only reason they were doing it was because their primary interest was to maintain the labor Government in power, rather than that the British people should be well-informed. Fortunately they could not get away with it and desisted.

There is no really free press in any country of Latin America. In Mexico the press is as free as it is in any country in Latin America and freer than it is in most European countries, and I mean west of the Curtah, as well. There are three daily newspapers in Mexico City which are as good as most of the good newspapers published in the U.S. outside of the N.Y. Times, The Herald Tribune, the Christian Science Monitor, and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. They are free to print really what they choose, and so far as the news is concerned, they do print it. When it comes to political news of an internal character which they know may not please the Government, they print it just the same. The Government exercises no direct control over the press, and so far as the indirect control is concerned, it is really not exercised by the Government

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but by the newspapers' owners themselves who use a certain discretion from time to time in determining the position they are going to take on certain matters. It is all rather subtle and is best defined by saying that with regard to certain matters the newspapers do not take an attitude until they have themselves determined what the Government position is. In the rest of the Latin American countries, with the exception of Cuba and the Argentine, the papers are really pretty poor, and there is in some of these countries as much direct control over the press as there is in the Argentine today. For some reason we have chosen to disregard this situation, when fundamentally it is just as important as the situation in the Argentine. Sometimes I think we do a great deal to feed the Argentines' opinion of themselves by the amount of attention we give to certain aspects of what happens there.

I am writing this letter at the office, as Helen Hall has her brother and sister here for the present and has been spending some time with them in Taxco. She is now with them in San Miguel de Allende. I think they are leaving for home very soon. We are still rather full up at the house, and at present Marion's niece Ann Scott from Wilmington with her husband are here with us, and they have with them a couple from Wilmington. Early in June, Sir Reginald Leeper and his wife will arrive from London and will be with us for several weeks. When they leave, I understand that we have some more people from home coming down. It is all very pleasant, but sometimes I think it must be a considerable burden for Marion.

I am flying to New York on June 14 or 15, more likely on June 15, and I will be there for a few days when I will go to Washington, and then I will be going on to Toronto for the last days of the month and will be back in New York probably on June 29. I will be able to stay a few days before returning to Mexico City. I look forward to seeing you.

Please do not think that I was delivering a lecture on the press in the first part of this letter, but

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I thought as someone genuinely interested in the news-business you might be interested in some of this comment. There are a lot of people who talk about liberty of the press, who are not really and fundamentally interested in it at all. I am really interested in the freedom of the press and have learned what it means and how important it is. What I am always afraid of is that the press is going to bring about restrictions on its freedom through abuses, just in the same way that some very important business interests which were really constructive, destroyed themselves by the license which they permitted themselves.

I still have not been able to get entirely rid of this grippe which I had in New York. I had been told how persistent it can be, but I did not realize how it really can hang on. I am still not entirely rid of it, and I think it is mainly my own fault and not that of my years, because I really put in too many hours a day, but the work here seems never ending and at times I get a little fed up with it, in spite of its remaining as interesting as ever.

I suppose you know that Dotty had an operation two days ago. We had one telegram and she seems to be getting on allright, but I will be glad when she is on her feet again. I am sure ~~that~~ she and Lee would be delighted if you gave them a call.

It has been pleasant to chat with you, and I really started out just to send you a line to say that the Perón story was not as bad as I thought it would be, and thank God for that. I am inclined to think that you had a good deal to do with keeping the train so well on the ~~reels.~~

reels
Marion joins me in affectionate good wishes.

Cordially and faithfully yours,

George S. Messersmith.

GSM/go