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Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 26, 1947

No. 2137

Subject: With Reference to a Recent Step by the Secretary  
General of the Union of Newspaper Vendors  
Directed Against La Prensa

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to inform the Department that there have been several significant developments in connection with the attitude towards the press in the Argentine recently. This Embassy constantly follows closely all developments in connection with the press in the Argentine and particularly any developments which might affect the complete freedom thereof. It has been particularly interested in noting any action, Government or other, with respect to the press which would indicate any endeavors to control or improperly influence the press or to limit its freedom of expression.

This Embassy has been following this situation with respect to the press all the more closely as before the present administration took office in June, 1946 there had been various and definite steps against sectors of the press. It is following the newspapers published in the capital, and as far as possible, those in the leading cities in the rest of the country. This is no easy task as the Department is aware that there are more newspapers published in the Argentine and a greater circulation than in any other country of the other American Republics.

There is no doubt that since June, 1946, the press in the Argentine has been free in the sense that it can print anything it pleases and the evidence of this is in the press itself. This aspect of the situation is not understood abroad where there is an increasing opinion that the press in the Argentine is not free and that there are definite controls placed by the Government upon the news in the press and the editorial comment. This erroneous conception is most likely based on the circumstance that there have been recently unquestioned efforts, indirectly by the Government and from other sources, to influence the press, particularly with respect to its attitude towards the Government. It is necessary, however, to stress at the outset of this despatch that there exists still today in the Argentine

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complete freedom of the press so far as the publication of news and editorial comment is concerned.

It is not intended in this despatch to review the entire situation with regard to the press but in view of certain developments here and of certain comment in the United States press and elsewhere with regard to the press situation in the Argentine, all of which show proper concern with regard to so fundamental a matter, it is deemed desirable at this time to bring certain facts and circumstances to the attention of the Department so as to present the situation as it exists today.

At the outset I would in this connection bring to the attention of the Department this Embassy's Despatch No. 2048 of March 13, 1947 entitled "Comment on Washington Post Article of January 31, 1947 and with General Reference to Freedom of the Press in the Argentine", this despatch having been prepared in reply to the Department's Instruction No. 534 of February 17, 1947 enclosing a copy of an article by Barnet NOVER published in the Washington Post of January 31, 1947. At the close of this despatch, during which this Embassy reviewed various alleged and various actual acts, the Embassy stated that while there is legally and technically and in practice, liberty of the press in the Argentine and it is obviously to the interest of the Argentine Government to keep it that way, there has been certain pressure on individual news organs in the manner outlined in the despatch.

Since writing that despatch there have been developments in the press situation which give cause for concern although up to this time there has been no step, direct or indirect, to limit the freedom of the press. That there has been freedom of expression in the press, and in fact full freedom at times to the point of license, is shown by the fact that Vanguardia which has a considerable circulation is violently critical of the Government and indulges in a type of criticism and statements which go beyond even license. There are other papers among the group with lesser circulation which indulge freely in that type of criticism of the Government. The two leading papers in the Argentine, La Prensa and La Nación, maintain a position of frank criticism and opposition to the Government.

La Prensa, which is the newspaper of largest circulation and of long standing prestige in the Argentine, has consistently maintained an attitude critical of the present Government. This, however, is nothing new so far as La Prensa is concerned for its attitude has been generally over many years critical of the Government at the time. It, however, in the past from time to time

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something good to say with regard to the existing Government while with respect to the present Government of the Argentine, the attitude of La Prensa has been consistently critical and at times, to many persons here who are not in sympathy with the Government, unduly provocative. Its principal colleague, La Nación, which has also assumed an attitude critical of the present Government and which does not miss an opportunity to criticize acts of the Government with which it is not in accord, on occasions has something to say editorially with respect to acts of the Government which it considers constructive.

This attitude on the part of La Prensa, probably because it is financially and otherwise the strongest of the Buenos Aires newspapers and because it is frankly closely associated with those elements in the country which made every effort in the last elections to prevent the Government now in power from coming in, has undoubtedly created resentments among many supporters of the present Government as well as among Government officials. There is no doubt that the officials of the Argentine Government, including the President, do not have any friendly sentiments towards La Prensa and would be glad to see its prestige and its circulation diminished. This in itself would not be any extraordinary situation for it is paralleled by similar situations from time to time in our own and other countries, if it were not more recently accompanied by certain measures which are undoubtedly intended to damage the position of La Prensa even if they may not be directly directed at the freedom of the press.

I have on various occasions since the present Government came into office discussed the freedom of the press with the President and with the Foreign Minister. There is no doubt that they recognize the importance of complete freedom of the press even when it means tolerating license such as that exercised today by Vanguardia and at times certain provocative criticism by La Prensa. The President of the Argentine has made a statement some months ago to the effect that he would not tolerate any infringement of the freedom of the press and there is no doubt that this statement was made in good faith and that so far the freedom of the press has been maintained. There is no doubt concerning the attitude of the Foreign Minister on this subject. Recent developments, however, have tended to irritate the officials of the Argentine Government and to stir up some of the passions created during the electoral campaign, and there is evidence that this irritation has found its expression in measures which are undesirable and which will be set forth in this despatch.

The Department will recall from the reports of this Embassy that some months ago a suit was instituted in a court in Buenos Aires by a private person which suit

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had for its purpose the elimination of the duty free entry now enjoyed by newsprint for all of the newspapers and that this suit was directly aimed at La Prensa as the paper with the largest circulation and most profitable circulation. At that time the Department will recall, a correspondent of a responsible United States newspaper reported that President PERON himself had instigated this suit and made reference in his dispatch to a conversation alleged to have taken place between President Perón, Mr. MIRANDA, the President of the Central Bank, and others, during which conversation this suit was instigated. The Department will recall that it was definitely shown later that this conversation had not taken place and that there was no proof whatever that Government officials, even though minor, had instigated the suit entered by this private person, and that the suit has not prospered. The circumstances surrounding this suit and the dispatch did a great deal to irritate high Government officials and aroused correspondingly deeper feelings among lesser officials of the Government and among party adherents.

Since that time it has become increasingly obvious that certain officials of the Argentine Government and supporters thereof have become more aggravated by the constant criticism of the Government by La Prensa and particularly its negative attitude towards most aspects of the industrial plans of the Government and a hostile attitude has been developing in those circles against the paper.

Several weeks ago there appeared a placard posted quite generally throughout the City, but particularly in the center of the City, attacking La Prensa and these carried the signature of an agency of the Government giving out information to the press. This first poster was shortly followed by another from the same source attacking La Prensa for what it called its ill-natured criticism of the Government. Undoubtedly recognizing the error which had been made in issuing such posters over the signature of an agency of the Government, a third poster appeared which attacked La Prensa and which carried the signature of the Peronista Party.

About the same time that these posters appeared, the President addressed a labor meeting in an improvised speech and made reference to the enemies of the Government and referred to a certain sector of the press which he said was improperly criticizing the Government and spoke of this sector of the press as an "enemy" of the Government. In his remarks he said that the way to deal with this unfriendly press was not by violence but by people not buying such papers nor advertising in them. In the foreign press, because the President, in speaking generically of the press, used the words "la prensa" it

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was reported that the President had made an attack against La Prensa when, as a matter of fact, he made mention of no specific paper. This, however, does not materially change the circumstance that without doubt the President had particularly in mind La Prensa. I make mention of this particular remark of the President of the Argentine for while there is no doubt that he is aware of the importance of the freedom of the press and his intention is to maintain it, his giving way to his feelings in an improvised speech is an indication of the degree to which these feelings with regard to certain criticism of the Government have augmented.

A further serious development in this situation and which has had wide repercussions in the press here and abroad is a dispatch which the Associated Press in Buenos Aires forwarded to New York on March 16. In this dispatch the AP from here stated that among other things the publication of the A.F. of L. report in Buenos Aires on March 10 had reportedly aroused President Perón's wrath and that of his sympathizers who objected to La Prensa's 7-column display of the report. The AP dispatch went on to say that on March 14 La Prensa was informed by the Sub-Secretariat of Labor and Welfare that it must discontinue its subscription lists and grant to newsboys handling and selling certain editions a considerable increase in compensation. This dispatch was distributed by the AP to its subscribers in the United States and the article undoubtedly received wide publicity in the press including the New York Times and the Herald Tribune, and this Embassy is informed that the New York Times carried the headline "Perón Cracks Down" on a leading newspaper.

As the Embassy realized that the publication of this AP dispatch would cause wide comment editorially and otherwise in the United States and as it had reason to believe that the dispatch in some respects was not correct, the Embassy took appropriate steps to adequately and accurately inform itself, and it was learned that what had actually happened was that a newly formed union of newspaper vendors had forwarded a petition to the Minister of Labor asking that La Prensa be obliged to do away with its subscription lists and to give larger compensation to certain of the newsboys; that the Ministry of Labor had sent the petition to La Prensa asking it to make an answer to the petition; but that the Ministry of Labor had given no instructions to La Prensa to take any action nor had the Government taken any attitude up to that time with regard to the petition.

As this was directly contrary to the statement in the AP dispatch of March 16 that the Ministry had ordered La Prensa to take certain action and as this had undoubtedly led the New York Times on its front page to carry

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a headline to the effect that President Perón was cracking down on La Prensa and in view of the fact that it was certain that such a dispatch, and particularly the part referred to above, would cause much concern, it seemed sufficiently important for me to bring the matter to the attention of the Foreign Minister in an informal way. As soon as I had verified the circumstances, I called him on the telephone in the late evening of the day that the AP dispatch appeared in the papers at home and said that I wished informally and unofficially to bring to his attention the fact that the impression was abroad through dispatches from Buenos Aires that the Ministry of Labor and the Argentine Government had ordered La Prensa, on the basis of this petition from the union, to discontinue its subscription lists, etc. The Minister replied that if such action had been taken by the Government it was without the knowledge of his Ministry, that he knew nothing whatever about it, and could hardly give credence to the correctness of the AP report. He said that he would appreciate any further information I could give him and that he would immediately take up the matter himself.

The following day I got in touch with the head of the Associated Press in Buenos Aires and called this particular statement above mentioned in his dispatch to his attention and asked him if he had verified it. I told him that the information which we had in the Embassy and which we had verified in La Prensa was to the effect that no order had been issued by the Government to La Prensa and that no attitude had been taken by the Government and that all that had taken place was that the petition of the news vendors had been transmitted by the Ministry of Labor to La Prensa for an appropriate reply. I was somewhat surprised that the head of the AP had not in the meantime made inquiries with regard to this matter for the incorrectness of the statement in his dispatch should by that time have come to his attention or that of his staff. The head of the AP afterwards informed me that he found he had made a mistake in his dispatch but he did not seem to be particularly interested in making a correction even so far as his head office was concerned, until I reminded him that the AP dispatch may have led the New York Times, an altogether responsible newspaper, to print a headline based on an AP dispatch which was not correct. The head of the AP then stated that he would send an informative message to the AP in New York correcting this, but I understand that this was not a message for publication and that the AP did not correct with its subscribers the original statement made by it.

In order that the Department might have adequate information on this matter and in view of the importance that any such step by the Government would have if actually taken, I transmitted in my telegram No. 291 of March 18, 5:00 P.M., preliminary information with regard to this matter.

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On March 18 La Prensa published an article stating that it had received through the Ministry of Labor a petition of this syndicate of newspaper vendors and it printed the contents of the letter which the newspaper vendors had sent to the Ministry of Labor. In a later edition La Prensa carried the statement that a representative of La Prensa had appeared before the Ministry of Labor and made a reply to the petition but not indicating any way what the reply was.

In the issue of March 19 La Prensa had a long article in the column "actualidad", which is a semi-editorial column of La Prensa, which started with the following paragraph:

"The reiterated attacks of all kinds which are being made for sometime against the independent press of our country are well known. It is a question of facts which, because they are so well known, it is not necessary to set forth in detail."

The article in question is almost a full column and I am not sending a translation as the principal importance of it lies in the fact that La Prensa in this article takes it for granted that this action of the newsboys came from the Government and was supported by the Government. This appears to be somewhat unfortunate as up to the time the article under reference appeared in La Prensa, there was no indication whatever, as there has not been since, that the action of the newspaper vendors was initiated in any way by the Argentine Government.

This Embassy continued to be concerned about this matter because it is of the opinion that the complete freedom of the press in the Argentine as well as elsewhere is of primary importance. It realized that the press had enjoyed complete freedom since the present administration took office but that a series of circumstances was developing which might create passions and feelings which could have very unhappy consequences. It realized that this particular AP dispatch which in part was not factual did not help the situation here and would create renewed articles in the press abroad to the effect that there was not freedom of the press in the Argentine.

Before continuing further with the account of developments in this matter, I wish to make a few observations which may be of interest. This Embassy, as I said at the outset of this dispatch, is convinced of the importance of complete freedom of the press and it considers that any steps by the Argentine Government to limit or restrict in any way the freedom of the press in the Argentine would be most serious. In forming an objective opinion on the matter of freedom of the press in Latin

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countries there are many factors which have to be kept in mind, and one of them is that the passions which exist in these countries, and particularly which are aroused during electoral campaigns, continue after an election is over. In our country and in some others, during a period of an electoral campaign, passions rise to a considerable height, but once the election is over, these passions to a considerable degree subside and criticism and opposition become more objective and constructive. The Department is also aware that in our country and in some others, political personages may have very acute political differences, but that these are seldom considered as personal and usually do not last after the elections so far as personal feelings are concerned. In Latin countries, and the Argentine is no exception, this situation is entirely different and passions and feelings continue after the election.

In the Argentine in particular, as a result of the last election which decided very basic issues in the country (issues which had long been simmering and which it was in the interest of the country should be decided) this came to a head, and it was natural that in view of these issues the passions which had been aroused would subsist even longer than is usual, and this must be borne in mind in connection with the attitudes of individuals and of the press. Under these circumstances there is a tendency in Latin countries which leads not to constructive criticism but to a great deal of destructive criticism which is based on these passions.

On the whole the editorial policy of La Prensa and La Nación has kept on a high level, but there is a marked difference in that in La Nación occasionally appears an editorial which takes note in a favorable manner of action by the Government which it can approve. On the other hand in marked contrast, La Prensa has consistently taken a highly critical attitude, and while this is more or less in line with the traditional policy of the paper of being in constant opposition, it is natural that in the present situation in the Argentine this should give rise to feelings and passions, particularly among thoughtless and passionate people, both in and out of the Government. Since I have been here I recall only one editorial in La Prensa, and that is very recently, which has had even the slightest favorable comment on any act of the Government.

I am not pretending in any way in the foregoing objective analysis, to criticize La Prensa for its attitude, but I am pointing out a factor which has to be taken into account for there is no doubt that some of the action which has been directed at La Prensa and other papers from time to time, while not instigated by high authorities of the Government, has been viewed by them with compacency.

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The attitude of these authorities, as I have already indicated, is unfriendly to La Prensa, but there is still reason to believe that they would not take any action against La Prensa or approve it. On the other hand there is no doubt that the statement of President Perón referred to in this despatch in which he said that the way to deal with certain papers was not to buy them or to advertise therein has helped to stir up lower officials and adherents of the Government.

It was obvious that a situation has been created which can do a great deal of harm. For the first time the Embassy sees the possibility of these passions rising to a degree where unwise measures may be taken eventually with respect to the press. It still believes that these measures will not be taken, but the present attitude of certain lower officials and supporters of the Government, as well as the attitude of La Prensa which in certain cases has been provocative, are not encouraging.

As I have used the term "provocative" in connection with certain attitudes of La Prensa, I should make reference to at least one circumstance which has already been reported to the Department. When the Kilgore Subcommittee of the Senate issued recently a list of persons supposed to be members of the Nazi Party in many countries, the UP sent a dispatch to its subscribers, and of course to La Prensa in Buenos Aires, merely stating that such a report had been issued, and in the case of La Prensa, the UP inquired whether it wished the names. La Prensa replied that it wished the list to be transmitted by cable, and as it consisted of over 900 names including address and occupation, it is obvious that it involved a considerable expense to La Prensa.

La Prensa published these lists, and because of their length, in three installments in successive issues of the paper. In the second installment it carried the heading that the list was issued by the State Department when it must have been known in La Prensa from the UP dispatch that it was not mentioned in the UP dispatch. Both persons who are interested in La Prensa and who are disinterested in it remarked on the action of La Prensa in publishing this list which they said did not have any significance in view of the fact that the persons in the lists were inconsequential, being almost all persons in very humble positions and who, if they had any leanings towards the Nazi Party in Germany or affiliations with it, had long since forgotten about it. These persons interpreted the publication of this full list by La Prensa as an endeavor to embarrass the Government by showing that it was not taking any action against people who had had Nazi affiliations in the country. Impartial observers, and among them persons deeply interested in La Prensa, stated that it seemed to be an unnecessarily provocative act on the part of La

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Prensa and would undoubtedly influence certain people in the Government. It may be observed in this connection that according to the information available to the Embassy up to this day, La Prensa is the only newspaper in Latin America which published the lists of the so-called members of the Nazi Party said to be resident in the country. The fact that La Prensa headed the second installment of the list with the statement that it had been issued by the State Department was considered by many as a deliberately provocative act of La Prensa. Whether it was merely the mistake of a writer of headlines does not change the situation for the effect was the same.

In considering the question of freedom of the press in the American Republics it must be borne in mind that the freedom of the press in many of them has for a long time been a relative matter or non-existent. I believe it is altogether correct to say that since June, 1946 there has been as great freedom of the press in the Argentine as there has been in any of the other American Republics. I would say from my reading of the press, and I have read it very faithfully in the Argentine since I came here in May, 1946, that there is complete freedom of the press to this date in the Argentine. This is not a statement which could be made concerning several countries in Latin America at this time, and any representative I think of the AP or UP will verify this. There are situations existing in several of the American Republics today of control of various kinds over the press, but there is no mention of this situation in our own press.

I would like further to observe that when we consider this question of freedom of the press at home and endeavor to interpret situations with respect to freedom of the press abroad, and more particularly in the countries of Latin America, we have to take into account certain factors in order to arrive at understanding conclusions. A newspaper at home may be owned and published by a person or group with strong partisan political feelings; it may be definitely and without any concealment a party organ. Such a newspaper, however, while it may support or criticize a particular administration or local government, will from time to time also make constructive and favorable comment and is not always definitely in opposition to everything. This is not characteristic of newspapers in Latin countries, and particularly in the countries of Latin America, with the consequent result that personal passions and feelings are aroused with respect to such papers which do not exist in the United States. There is also an entirely different situation in this respect so far as our country and the other American Republics are concerned. A paper may take an attitude of almost complete opposition and continued criticism of an administration, national or local, but it does not consider that it is engaged in a quarrel. It is fighting for a cause without being provocative or endeavoring to create disturbance. It hopes to influence public

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opinion for a coming election. In the Latin American countries a newspaper which is in opposition usually considers that it is engaged in a type of warfare. It is these factors which are not always taken into account by public opinion in our own country when passing judgment upon certain developments in others of the other American countries.

Whatever may be these circumstances and the factors which we must keep in mind, the freedom of the press remains fundamental, and if it was ever important, which of course it has always been, it is vitally important in the times in which we live and in which our country is faced with such enormous responsibilities. I have, therefore, not failed since I arrived in the Argentine to use every opportunity to discuss with the President, the Foreign Minister, and such other high officials of the Government with whom I could appropriately raise the matter, the fundamental importance of freedom of the press. I have already stated that immediately after we learned of the AP dispatch of March 16 I discussed it with the Foreign Minister. I have during the last week and again last evening had the opportunity to have a long conversation with the Minister of Foreign Relations on this matter. I have done this unofficially and informally as the relations which I have with him permit this. I have spoken to him about my concern with regard to these posters which recently appeared in the center of the City, and I know he has taken up this matter with the President. Since I spoke to him about these posters, no further posters have appeared and there is reason to believe that categorical instructions have been issued that such posters attacking the press will not be tolerated.

I continued my conversations with the Foreign Minister with regard to the step taken by the newly formed union of newspaper vendors, and last night he informed me that he was sure the Ministry of Labor would not take any action on this petition. It is known that the Foreign Minister is very friendly towards La Prensa which he considers a great paper, but he did not hesitate last evening to say that he considers the attitude of La Prensa highly egotistic and selfish. He said that in the petition of the news vendors, which, of course, was very improper in much of its language but that this was understandable because they were not educated and for the most part very young men, the news vendors had asked for additional compensation for the Sunday edition of La Prensa in particular and that this seemed to be a most reasonable request, but that La Prensa in its reply before the Ministry of Labor had denied even this modest and justified request. The Foreign Minister said that I must know how heavy the Sunday edition of La Prensa was and that the daily edition was heavy enough because of the advertising it carried but that the Sunday edition was tremendous, and that there seemed to be every basis, in his opinion, why there should be

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extra compensation for the handling of that Sunday edition. The Foreign Minister said that he quite understood that La Prensa could not accede to the request of the newspaper vendors that La Prensa should cease deliveries to its subscribers at their residences or offices. He said that this was a long-standing newspaper practice here and elsewhere, as he had verified after my statements to him in this respect, and that there was no reason why this practice should be disturbed. On the other hand, when he had discussed this matter with the President, the President and he were in complete accord that the action of La Prensa in refusing to give additional compensation was most unhappy and unfortunately characteristic of the arbitrary attitude which La Prensa had taken in other matters referring to workers and to the other newspapers.

Unfortunately in this connection, the Foreign Minister said, one of the curious things about La Prensa was the attitude which it took with regard to other papers, and which it had consistently taken. He said that it followed a policy of not collaborating in any way with other newspapers. He said that before the de facto Government came in and before the present constitutional Government, La Prensa had already definitely taken the attitude of not collaborating with other newspapers and that this was in marked contrast with the attitude of La Nación during the same period. Speaking of the alleged difficulties of certain newspapers because they could not get credit and the reports which had been current here and in the foreign press that these newspapers had been refused credit by the banks under instructions of the Government, he said that the reason these papers had not been given credit by the banks was not because the Government had refused them credit but because the banks could not consider the papers as a credit risk. He said that La Prensa, because of its very strong financial position, had had the opportunity of aiding some of these newspapers but that it had taken a completely negative attitude.

In my conversations with the Foreign Minister, I permitted myself to refer to the statement which the President had made with respect to not buying or advertising in certain newspapers. I said that I quite understood the circumstances under which the President had said this, but that it was useless to disregard the fact that it had had a very unhappy effect here and elsewhere and that in my opinion from my conversations with the President, it did not really represent his views for I realized he knew the importance of freedom of the press and of not bringing any direct pressures against it. I said I realized that the President in a speech before a group of workers had permitted certain feelings to find expression which were not really in accord with his better judgment and what had been his consistent attitude with regard to the press up

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to this time. The Foreign Minister said that I must know from the conversations which I had had with the President that he had this definite interest in the freedom of the press and his determination that at all costs it must be protected, but at the same time I must recognize that in the heat of a speech an indiscreet statement could be made which could be made in conversations but which did not do in a public address.

In the conversations which I have had with him recently and particularly last evening, I found the Foreign Minister deeply concerned with regard to this matter of the press, and he said that what had recently happened was the result of passions which had been aroused and which it was necessary to abate. He said that even if the feelings of some of the people in the Government with regard to certain attitudes of a part of the press were justified, this would not justify any action against the press even of the most indirect character. He assured me that the attitude of the President and of the Government with regard to the freedom of the press had not changed and that they were giving this matter their attention.

I did not fail to indicate to the Foreign Minister the extreme importance which I attach to this matter, and stated that while I was expressing my views informally and unofficially, I knew there was great concern in my country as indicated by the recent editorial comment which had been aroused by the AP dispatch. The Minister in this connection stated that he thoroughly understood this concern abroad but that it was too bad that this new wave of criticism had been aroused as a result of a dispatch from here which was erroneous, and he said that while it was important for governments to take every step to assure freedom of the press, it was equally important that press agencies and those who wrote for the press were factual in their reporting and measured and constructive in their criticism and comment.

Aside from the editorial comment which has recently appeared in the press at home with regard to this alleged action of the Argentine Government in making demands on La Prensa on behalf of the newspaper vendors and which, as stated in this despatch, is not correct, there have appeared editorials in Uruguay, Chile, and perhaps several other countries. In this connection the Minister referred to these editorials and said that he realized their importance but it was rather interesting that in some of these countries in which these editorials appeared and in which there was such criticism of the Argentine Government for certain acts, the writers of these editorials must have written with their tongue in their cheek for they must have known that presently there exists greater freedom of expression and liberty of the press in every respect in the Argentine than in their own country.

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With regard to the editorial comment which had, to the knowledge of the Minister, appeared in the United States press, he referred in particular to the editorials which had appeared in the New York Times, and then in the New York Post, and apparently also in the Louisville Courier Journal. He said he could thoroughly understand the apprehension which the AP dispatch had caused, but that he thought it would be so much better and so much more constructive if our papers at home and papers elsewhere refrained from editorial comment until they were certain of the facts on which they based their comment.

This Embassy is of the opinion that at no time in our history has it been more important that public opinion of the United States should be fully, adequately, and accurately informed concerning significant events which happen in every part of the world. With the responsibilities which we have in the world picture and with the responsibilities for decisions which every American citizen has thrust on him these days, it is of the most vital importance that this public opinion be well served. I am familiar through many years of experience and contact and association with a good part of our press at home, and no one holds it in higher regard than I for its objectiveness and desire to inform accurately and to comment constructively. I have viewed, therefore, with great concern some of the news which appears in the United States with respect to the Argentine situation and on which frequently editorial comment is made. I cannot particularize here for it would mean going into a great deal of detail, but I believe that at least so far as the American picture is concerned, our relations with the Argentine are of primary importance. For the first time in the history of the two countries, for many decades, there is a Government in the Argentine which has oriented its policy into collaboration with the other American Republics and with us. Concerning this there is no doubt. The Government is a new government constitutionally elected in as free an election as has been held in Latin America. The Government has determined to face financial, economic, and social problems in the country which previous governments had neglected, and as a result, it naturally has aroused all sorts of feelings in the country.

I hold no brief for this Government in the Argentine. I am here as an objective observer to report to our Government and to interpret developments in connection with my other functions. From my long contact with Argentine problems beginning with a two year stay as Consul General in Buenos Aires in 1928, 1929, and 1930, I am of the opinion, which I am sure is shared by most thoughtful people in the Argentine whether they are for or against the present Government, that this Government is facing resolutely problems which had to be faced.

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The Government is in many respects inefficient, but no more so than previous Argentine governments; it is in a measure disorganized, but no more so than previous Argentine governments; there is a certain amount of malpractice on the part of officials, but no more so than in previous Argentine governments and less than in some other countries of Latin America. There are tendencies on the part of the Government to go too far in the way of public initiative in business and commercial policies have been undertaken which must be carefully observed because in the hands of a bureaucracy they might become dangerous. These situations, however, do not fundamentally differ from those which exist not only in others of the American Republics but in countries of Europe with which we have the most friendly relations and to which we are giving all kinds of aid and comfort. So far as the controls on exports and imports are concerned which are pointed to in some of our papers at home as an indication of Fascist or totalitarian tendencies, it may be remarked that such controls exist of far wider scope and greater effect in England than in the Argentine. So far as property is concerned, while the Argentine Government is engaged on a program of recuperation of foreign owned public utilities, such which have been acquired up to now by the present Government have been acquired through negotiation with the owners and on the payment of what is universally recognized as adequate compensation and in cash. In the recuperation of foreign owned public utilities, the Argentine Government is following a tendency which is current and inevitable in every country of the Latin American states and which tendency is making itself felt in our own country. The marked difference between the practice of the present Argentine Government in this field and that of certain other Latin American countries is that the Argentine Government has definitely declared and so far adhered to the principle of making an adequate and immediate compensation for any public utilities acquired, and to do it through negotiation with the owners rather than by expropriation.

There are, as I have said, many things in this country which have to be carefully observed, but so far there have been no developments which need give any cause for concern to us, and there are developments in others of the American Republics which are fundamentally a cause for greater concern but which do not seem to arouse the attention of our press.

The immediately foregoing statement is a very inadequate one, and I cannot go into it in this despatch in more detail, but I have wished to emphasize the importance of factual reporting from this country in our press and the importance of accurate interpretation of events in this country, which interpretation should be made in perspective and not on the basis of prejudice or pas-

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sion. So far as the Argentine situation is concerned, it has become so important for us in the hemisphere and world pictures that we must view events in this country without passion and prejudice, which unfortunately have characterized feelings in both the Argentine and our country for some years.

Without wishing to give this despatch any personal tinge, for that is the last thing I would wish to do, but as explanatory of my statement with reference to accurate reporting, I would refer to my despatch No. 1852 of February 13 in which I referred to an AP dispatch from Buenos Aires on my return to this post from Washington on February 1. It will be recalled that in that despatch I reported that the head of the Associated Press in Buenos Aires himself sent a dispatch to the AP in New York and which appeared in the New York Times and in which the statement was made that on my arrival at the airport in Buenos Aires on February 1, Mrs. Perón chided me for remaining away for more than a month and that I replied "Yes, but I had to tarry because the situation was very grave." As I had not made any such statement or anything similar to it, I took this up with the head of the AP and found that the head of the AP had had this comment from an Argentine correspondent who was supposedly at the airport and who, it eventually developed, said he had not heard me make the statement but that he had got it from another Argentine correspondent he could not identify. I mention this because the statement above quoted carries many implications and was printed in the leading newspaper in the United States and came from a responsible news agency which had taken none of the most simple precautions to determine whether I had made such a statement which was put into my mouth in quotations.

Just the other day with reference to the speculation concerning the return of Dr. IVANISSEVICH, the Argentine Ambassador, from Washington to Buenos Aires, the AP sent in a dispatch from here which ended with the sentence that Dr. Ivanissevich was the personal physician of President Perón and Ambassador Messersmith. It is correct that during the month of July, 1946 when I was ill here, Dr. Ivanissevich gave me medical attention from which I greatly benefited and in the giving of which he showed an interest going far beyond that usually shown by even a conscientious physician, but he left here towards the end of July or early August for his post in Washington and has not been here since, and I have unfortunately continuously had to have the services of a physician and had the competent services of an Argentine physician here. It is difficult, therefore, to conceive

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that the AP office in Buenos Aires would send in a dispatch from here commenting on the return of the Argentine Ambassador to Buenos Aires and add the completely irrelevant and not altogether correct statement that Dr. Ivan-issevich was my personal physician. It would appear that the writer of this dispatch had some purpose in mind which was not constructive in making this irrelevant statement at the end of the dispatch in question.

In singling out these dispatches from the AP in Buenos Aires, I am not wishing to criticize the activities of the AP or any American news agency here, for on the whole their actuation has been factual.

In the Washington Post in an issue since January 1, the exact date of which I do not have, there appeared an article entitled "Argentina's New Hero - Ambassador Messersmith Finds Himself in Center of Organized Anti-Braden Campaign" which was written by John Herling. In this article it is stated that "So far as the Government of Juan Domingo Perón is concerned, Uncle Sam is no longer the symbol of the United States. Uncle George has succeeded Uncle Sam, and Uncle George is Ambassador George Strausser Messersmith."

The article then goes on to say:

"The technique of flattery by mass demonstration has been brought to a high peak in Buenos Aires, and Ambassador Messersmith recently received the full impact of such joy on returning to the Argentine from the United States. He was awaited at the Morón Airport by a throng of Argentines who managed to get out there, an hour's drive from the center of the city, in a fleet of buses, automobiles, and taxis provided by a grateful government. The greeters were aided by President Perón and members of the cabinet. For hours before the arrival of the plane, the crowd milled around yelling for Perón, shouting for Messersmith, and damning Spruille Braden, United States Assistant Secretary of State, as the symbol of Yankee imperialism. The Chief of the Federal Police, General Juan Filomeno VELAZCO, said to me 'Ambassador Messersmith is very dear to us.' In the meantime loud speakers were announcing the approach of the plane, bells clanged, and the spirit of carnival prevailed."

The article then goes on to make further statements in the same vein which it is not necessary to go into here but which for the most part are as inaccurate as the ones above quoted. I think the matter is of sufficient significance from the point of view of the information

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which is being given to our public at home to make the following comment.

I do not know John Herling. When this article appeared in the Washington Post, I was sufficiently interested to determine how such an inaccurate article could have been written, and inquiries showed that Mr. Herling is an American who was here with the A.F. of L. labor delegation together with some other correspondents from home who had been invited on the trip. Some of these correspondents who were on the trip came in to see me after my return to Buenos Aires on February 1, but Mr. Herling did not do so and I had no contact with him. If Mr. Herling was at the airport, which is implied by his statement that the Chief of the Buenos Aires Police, General Velazco, said to him "Ambassador Messersmith is very dear to us", then the article is direct and deliberate misrepresentation for in the first place General Velazco, so far as I know, was not at the airport on my arrival. The only high officials of the Argentine Government who were at the airport were the President, accompanied by Mrs. Perón, and the Minister of Foreign Relations, Dr. BRAMUGLIA, and as I have reported to the Department in another despatch, their presence there was a generous personal gesture of friendship rather than an official act, and one must understand the Latin temperament to appreciate that they did not associate official significance with such a personal gesture when it was really a gesture coming out of friendship which they felt. There were no other members of the Argentine cabinet there as stated by Mr. Herling. So far as the demonstration is concerned to which Mr. Herling refers, there was nothing of the kind. It is correct, as the Department is aware, that one or two afternoon newspapers in Buenos Aires before my arrival had suggested the desirability of workers organizing a demonstration to meet me, but there was nothing of this kind. It was still daylight when I arrived and there were without question no more than 75 to 100 people at the airport, and many of them were employees of the airport and regular hangers-on. There was no organized demonstration and no demonstration, and the only shouting that I heard was by a man who shouted "Viva Messersmith" and who was certainly doing it on his own initiative for he was alone in his demonstration.

Even if Mr. Herling was not at the airport himself, as implied in his article, there is no excuse whatever for such irresponsible writing for he was in Buenos Aires I am informed the day of my arrival, and he therefore should have been able to get full and accurate information concerning what took place at the airport.

With reference to his implication that I would be flattered and influenced by any demonstration which might have taken place, I can only add that if Mr. Herling knew anything of me, he would not make such a statement.

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I will have to leave it to others to determine what the motivation of Mr. Herling was in writing what he knows was a completely incorrect report in this Washington Post article under reference. I do not know whether this article was published in other papers as I have seen only the clipping from the Washington Post.

In making these personal references to statements with respect to me in this despatch and which are so distorted and incorrect, I have done so, not because I am personally concerned about such misrepresentation but because it is a serious thing for a Chief of Mission of our country to be put in an improper light which, under the circumstances and in view of the facts, is not warranted before the people of our country. If ever the conduct of our foreign relations was important to us, it is these days, and Chiefs of Mission represent our Government, and whatever is said concerning them in our press should be factual and not such extravagant and improper writing as that of Mr. Herling. It is most important that the news with regard to developments in the Argentine should be factually reported in our press.

In my telegram No. 291 of March 18, 5:00 P.M., I informed the Department in the closing sentence that this Embassy was continuing to follow closely any matters in connection with the freedom of the press and that it was our hope that the Government will stop any direct or indirect pressures on certain parts of the press. The conversations which I have had with the Foreign Minister recently and the attitude which I know is held by the President of the Argentine and by other high officials of the Government lead me again to express the opinion that the complete freedom of the press will be maintained in the Argentine because of the realization by the Argentine Government of the importance thereof. There is reason to believe that the result of the ill-considered actions of certain supporters of the Government and of certain lower officials has had the purpose of concentrating attention on this matter and emphasizing to the Government the importance of taking the appropriate steps to stop even the most indirect action which would affect the freedom of the press.

I have tried in this despatch to bring out some of the factors which have to be kept in mind in connection with any consideration of freedom of the press, and particularly with reference to the situation in the Argentine. I have brought out in this despatch, if inadequately, the fact that for a number of years there had been built up in the press of the Argentine certain feelings with respect to the United States, and in the United States there has been a lack of understanding in parts of the press with respect to the Argentine, and I have reference to periods going back as far as before the beginning of the last world war.

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It is to be hoped that in view of the importance of both countries in the American picture, and because of the necessity for close collaboration between them in the American picture, there will be the most constructive and factual handling of news and comment in both countries. It is only if news is kept factual and if comment is based on reasonable interpretation of facts that the freedom of the press can be maintained in any country. The freedom of the press is menaced indirectly in more than one country of greater importance than the Argentine. If freedom of the press merely implies license to disseminate information which is not factual or which is prejudiced, then indeed the freedom of the press would become the menace which we so definitely know and consider in our country the lack of freedom of the press would be.

I realize that in this despatch, long as it is, I have still inadequately covered this important matter of freedom of the press and developments in connection therewith in the Argentine, but I have wished this information to go forward without delay as I believe it supplements the information transmitted in our despatch No. 2048 of March 13, 1947.

The Embassy will continue to follow this matter closely and keep the Department fully informed.

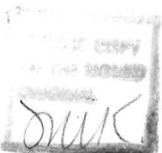
Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith

To Department in quadruplicate

File No. 891  
GSMessersmith:fmk

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March 28, 1947

Before forwarding this despatch by the confidential pouch this weekend, I am able to add the further developments.

Last evening, I was informed by the head of the United Press in Buenos Aires, Mr. CURRAN, that he had learned from La Prensa that it had received a telegram from the Minister of Labor to appear at the Ministry today with further reference to the petition of the news venders referred to in this despatch and also with reference to a further petition which had been received in the Ministry from the Sociedad de Distribuidores. Mr. Curran said that La Prensa was not able to understand why it had been asked to make a further answer to the petition of the news venders as it had already done so and that so far as the Sociedad de Distribuidores was concerned, it was an organization of some people who owned small trucks and who delivered newspapers in various parts of the city to news boys and venders and who usually owned their own trucks but who had no direct connection with La Prensa or any other paper.

On receiving this information from Mr. Curran of the UP, I communicated by telephone with the Foreign Minister with whom I have been in constant touch on this matter of the press, and he stated that he thought it would be desirable for the appropriate representative of La Prensa to appear in the Ministry of Labor today and to answer the petition. As La Prensa had already replied to the petition of the news venders, according to the information which I had given him, all that would be necessary, so far as that part was concerned, was to call attention to the reply which they had already made about a week ago or to leave a copy thereof. The Minister stressed to me the importance of a representative of Prensa appearing at the Ministry of Labor in reply to the Minister's telegram, indicating that failure of the Prensa to appear would make his task more difficult.

I passed the Minister's comment on to Mr. Curran of the UP who undoubtedly passed it on to La Prensa.

This morning, I took the opportunity to discuss this matter of the press with the Minister again, and although he had been up all night in the Chamber of Deputies answering questions on current matters, he received me and stated that he was giving this matter his constant attention and that the situation was developing satisfactorily. He repeated that the President and he and the higher officers of the Government were determined to stop any even indirect action against La Prensa, but that there was no way of stopping these labor organizations passing petitions to the Ministry of Labor and they had the right to do so. So far as

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the Ministry was concerned, it was merely following the usual procedure of passing them on to the papers concerned, in this case La Prensa, and it was the duty of La Prensa or any other paper to make an appropriate reply thereto, but that this transmission of the petitions did not involve any attitude on the part of the Ministry of Labor or the Government.

I wish to repeat that I have seen with what constant care the Minister of Foreign Relations is following this matter, and his understanding of the importance of maintaining in every respect the freedom of the press and which I repeat presently exists unimpaired in the Argentine. It would be unwise not to take into account that passions and feelings have been aroused and that it will be necessary for the Government to give the most constant attention to this matter or a situation could easily develop through which these passions could have a damaging and most unhappy effect.

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