

"THIS IS HOW WE GET YOUR NEWS"

L. RASKAY, distinguished Foreign Correspondent in London, here tells of the men and places from which newspapermen in crisis time get their "official information" in London—the hub of all politics.

IN these eventful days we, together with hundreds of other journalists and thousands of newspapers, have written countless times the significant introductory sentence: "As we learn from Downing Street . . ." or "In the opinion of Downing Street, the position is considered to be . . ." In each of the capitals of the Great Powers there is such a place, the competent authority for influencing world public opinion and the official source of information for the Press. In Washington, where the President himself really creates American foreign policy, news comes from the White House and Roosevelt himself frequently takes part in Press conferences. A statement of the President can, however, only be published as a direct quotation by special permission. In Berlin it is the Wilhelmstrasse, in Paris the Quai d'Orsay; but one of the chief centres of news in pre-war days, the now almost legendary Ballplatz in Vienna, has quite disappeared from the Press of the world.

Importance of Downing Street

As London is becoming more and more the hub of world politics, the mysterious renown of Downing Street grows greater from day to day; but when

numbers; these contain documents, but it may be assumed that the most vital secret papers are not kept behind those wooden doors. At the end of the corridor are two venerable plush sofas, where six to eight people can accommodate themselves at a pinch. Opposite is a notice, saying that smoking is strictly forbidden. As a result of this, the immediate vicinity of the said sofas is strewn with countless cigarette ends and the whole corridor smells of tobacco smoke.

An Unwritten Law

The Foreign Secretary or the Secretary of State only receives journalists in very rare cases, and the Press representatives are informed by the officials of the Press Office, who either themselves belong to the Press or else to the Diplomatic Service. It is a strict rule—and one that is never broken by reputable journalists—that the Foreign Office is never to be mentioned as the source of information; of course it is not forbidden to use a more or less clever paraphrase when referring to this office. This has given rise to the expressions: "It is learned from a reliable source . . ." or "In Downing Street it is ascertained that . . ." etc. The so-called official information is determined at a private meeting of the responsible officials on the instructions of the Foreign Secretary. It is thus evident that no matter which official receives the news-thirsty journalist, the text of the statements is always the same. The journalists wait by the above-mentioned sofas until summoned into one of the unassuming offices, where the gentlemen of the Press Department gladly answer questions, or generally seek to evade them. A friendly duel always takes place to extract more information than should really be said.

Beside these individual conversations, regular Press conferences take place every day in the Foreign Office. At mid-day the representatives of the large agencies, such as Reuters, Havas, British United Press, Associated Press, etc., forgoth, in order to secure an accurate and reliable account of the events of the past few hours. Members of the American Press are given a separate reception, and so are the so-called lobby correspondents, who are the political correspondents of the English daily newspapers.

Personal Contacts

Experience has shown, however, that the journalists obtain more information from each other than from the official quarters. Every journalist of repute is in some way connected with high circles in England or with a diplomatic representative, and on crisis days the corner by the two plush sofas is, so to speak, the world's stock exchange for news. However, the man in England who possesses the best information is never to be seen in the corridor of the Foreign Office, and very seldom elsewhere, for that matter. His name is Geoffrey Dawson, the 64-year-old chief editor of *The Times*, the most influential paper in the world. Even after living for years in England one finds it impossible to say what exactly are the relations between *The Times* and the Government. But Dawson is in direct touch with all the Ministers, and is a personal friend of Chamberlain. It is therefore frequently supposed that the leading article in *The Times* is often inspired by the Prime Minister. Dawson, who is a hard worker, not leaving his office until long past midnight, is the leader of publicity; yet shuns it. His name is never mentioned; it does not appear in the newspaper and his hatred of publicity is so deep-rooted that no photographs of him are to be obtained.

Nevertheless, other magnates of the English Press may be seen in the journalists' corner at the Foreign Office. Among the most popular is Vernon Bartlett, the Foreign Correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, who was recently elected to Parliament, although continuing to remain heart and soul a journalist. More



BEVERLEY BAXTER, another journalist M.P., and an expert on foreign affairs, being let into a secret—on golf

zealous than the youngest reporter, Vernon Bartlett, M.P., collects his information; and his assistance as a colleague is readily given.

M.P.'s Who Are Journalists

One of the most-quoted Press-men is the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, slim Gordon Lennox, a scion of the house of the Dukes of Richmond, who had the best information at his disposal, particularly during Eden's term of office as Foreign Minister. Even to-day, however, the reports of the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* constitute a very reliable source of information. A Russian journalist named Poliakov, who received the most intimate news from certain messengers, was responsible for a number of sensations in recent years. *The Evening Standard*, to whose staff he belonged, often caused a stir in the world. A short time ago his position was occupied by Sir Simon Harcourt, who forsook the diplomatic service for journalism. It is customary in England for members of Parliament to be active journalists, as are, for instance, Harold Nicholson and Beverley Baxter; the latter writes in the popular papers *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Graphic*. One of the sharpest critics of Chamberlain's Government is a very mild-looking gentleman with a rather professorial appearance, Mr. Voigt, the foreign correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*. He, too, is never missing from the daily gathering in Downing Street. The *Manchester Guardian* is published, it is true, in the provinces, and its circulation is relatively small, yet it has a greater political influence than many London papers with circulations of over a million. The same applies to the more widespread *Yorkshire Post*, a pugnacious, Conservative paper from the provinces, which to-day represents the views of the Churchill-Eden wing.

Of course it depends entirely upon the international position how crowded the corridor in the Foreign Office is. On quiet days, only the inevitable "regular patrons" appear, but on the now frequent days of high political tension, countless faces will appear in the course of an afternoon from many different countries. Until quite recently, and despite all political differences, the Foreign Press in London was a model of good behaviour and harmony. Professional duty, passion for news, and friendliness among colleagues were stronger than anything else. However, a gradual decline even in this respect was noticeable as the zero hour for the outbreak of war in September came closer. Now with war upon us, the distribution of news is arranged differently: but the two aged sofas are still at their posts in the Foreign Office and are likely to be still there when the war is over.



VERNON BARTLETT, one of the most famous British newspaper correspondents, who is also a member of Parliament

people abroad read about this, the chief warehouse of world politics, they hardly imagine that the historic name is borne by a narrow, quiet street. As a matter of fact it contains only three buildings, the imposing Victorian edifice of the Foreign Office, and on the opposite side of the street, two unpretentious, old-fashioned houses numbered 9 and 10 respectively, the first of which is the residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the second the house and office of the Prime Minister. It is characteristic of the English that the smallest and most unassuming of all the Ministries is the house of the head of the Government. However, although many of the most important conferences take place in the world-famed No. 10, only the Press Department of the Foreign Office is competent to give information to the Press on matters of foreign policy.

Press Department of Foreign Office

This office, the chief source of the world's news, is also far from being imposing. Journalists who are provided with a special passport, that is, those who are, so to speak, "accredited" with the Foreign Office, can without any formality ascend to the second floor by an automatic lift. Up there is a long corridor with a row of awe-inspiring cupboards bearing mysterious