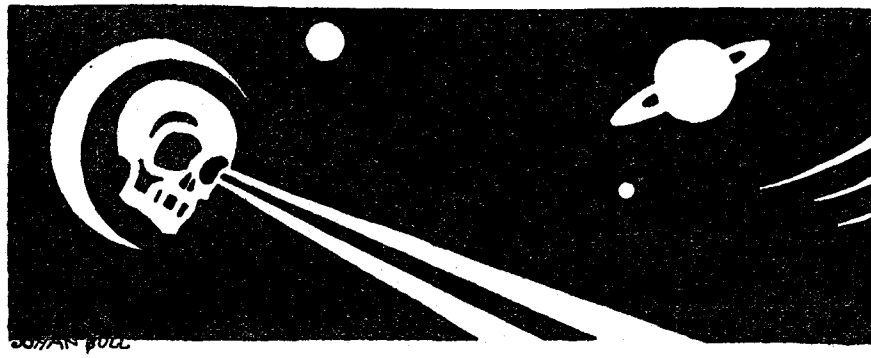

THE WAR AGAINST THE MOON

A Fantasy on the Coming Power of the Press

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

Chapter CXVII

THE DICTATORS OF PUBLIC OPINION

World Conditions in 1962. By 1962 the last traces of the havoc wrought by the World War of 1947 had at length disappeared. New York, London, Paris, Berlin, and even Peking had been rebuilt. The birth rate had been such that, — in spite of world-wide casualties exceeding thirty millions of men and women in 1947, — the globe as a whole had almost regained the pre-War population level, when the World census of 1961 was taken. The industrial and financial crisis had quieted down, and once more the interest of mankind was turning to the arts and to sport. Every house had its wireless movie. The balloon match between Tokyo and Oxford in 1962 attracted to Moscow more than three million spectators, who came from every corner of the globe, and was the occasion of a World-wide Welcome Celebration, at once stirring and astounding.

The Dictators of Public Opinion. It must in fairness be admitted that this rapid recovery, this exceedingly prompt healing of the moral and material wounds of the War was in large measure the

handiwork of the five men to whom the World at that time gave the title, "Dictators of Public Opinion." After 1930, political theorists had begun to realize that every democracy, — being a government of public opinion, — is largely in the hands of those who make public opinion, — that is to say, the newspaper owners. In every country the big business men, the great financiers, were being compelled to purchase influential newspapers and had little by little succeeded in doing so. They had been very clever in respecting the external forms of democracy. The people continued to elect their deputies, who continued to go through the forms of choosing ministers and presidents; but the ministers, presidents, and deputies could hold on to their positions only so long as they did what the masters of public opinion told them to do; and being well aware of this fact, they were duly submissive.

This tyranny in disguise might well have become dangerous if the new masters of the World had been unscrupulous, but as events turned out, the World was actually fortunate. In 1940 the last independent French newspaper was purchased by Count André de Rouvray, who thus completed his chain of papers, "Les Journaux Français Réunis." The Rouvray family were steel men from Lorraine, bred in the austere tradition of the province. André de Rouvray was regarded as a tremendous worker and a kind of saint, — in the Louvre you can see his portrait, painted when he was twenty, by Jacques-Emile Blanche. The thin face is that of an impassioned ascetic, and more than one feature recalls Maurice Barrès. In England, British Newspapers, Ltd., had since 1942 belonged to Lord Frank Douglas, a young man who beneath a casual air concealed an abundance of good sense and a truly Etonian respectability. His touseled blonde hair and clear eyes gave Lord Frank the appearance of a poet rather than of a man of action. The master of the American press was the aged Joseph C. Smack, an extraordinary individual, almost blind, who lived far out in the country, surrounded by an army of readers and stenographers. Smack was celebrated for the blunt brutality of his radiograms, but commanded respect throughout the World.

The owner of the German newspapers, Dr. Macht, and the Japanese proprietor, Baron Tokugawa, were the distinguished figures who completed the universal directorate.

From 1943 on, these five men had adopted the habit of holding a weekly meeting by wireless telephotophone. The invention was at that time rather new, and the apparatus still cost several millions of dollars. Indeed, the public was amazed to learn that the Dictators of Public Opinion could hold their conferences, even though they were thousands of miles apart, and yet be assured of absolute secrecy in their deliberations by requiring the Universal Hertzian Police to give rigid protection to a special wave length for their benefit.

Nobody knows who first used the title, "Dictator of Public Opinion." The brilliant monograph of James Bookish (*The Dictators of Opinion*, Oxford, 1979) relies on letters and newspaper clippings to show that the phrase was in current usage all over the Planet after 1944, though it does not appear in an official document earlier than 1945. (Chambre des Députés, Discours de Fabre-Luce, 4 Janvier 1945).

The War of 1947 and the Dictators of Public Opinion. Every source recently published and in particular the Journals of Rouvray and Lord Frank Douglas show that in 1947 all five of the Dictators had striven earnestly to head off the War. Rouvray wrote in his Journal under the date June 20, 1947: "Infuriating to think that in spite of our apparent strength we are powerless against the self-conceit of the nations." In Douglas's Journal: "A World War for Albania! The whole thing is too stupid for words. . . . The crowd is stupid even though the individual be divine."

On the eve of the declaration of war, all the newspapers in the World had published an appeal to common sense drawn up by Smack; but public opinion, rebelling against its masters for once, expressed itself in spite of the press and in defiance of it. In several cities the newspaper offices were ransacked. The pro-War sheets which suddenly began to issue from secret printing shops watched their circulation go up like wild fire; and once War was declared, of course, everything had to be sacrificed to national safety.

After the treaty of peace had been signed at Peking in 1951, the Directorate was reconstructed, Dr. Kraft succeeding Dr. Macht in Germany. The other four were still alive. The minutes

of their first meeting by telephotophone are now deposited in the World Archives in Geneva. This meeting was devoted to analyzing the causes of war and discussing the means for preventing future outbreaks. The five agreed once more to undertake the education of the public on this subject, to refuse to publish any news story that might create hatred or distrust between nations, and in the event, — which was always possible, — that international incidents should occur, to have an investigation made by reporters of a nation which was not involved, — the results of this investigation to be published exclusively by papers belonging to the "World Newspaper Association". As he came out from this meeting, Rouvray remarked to Brun, his secretary: "I am as sure of their good faith as I am of my own. If we can't strangle war this time, we must give up hope for the human race." (*Mémoires de Brun.* II, 343).

The Wind Crisis, May 1962. One month after the Tokyo-Oxford match, which had attracted such a fine representation of the entire world, Professor Ben Tabrit, of the University of Marrakech, invented the wind-accumulator, an apparatus which has since become so familiar throughout the world that there is no use describing it. The principle is simple enough: by means of an accumulator, which is at once thoroughly practical and very cheap and which is based on the decomposition of water and the use of liquid hydrogen, it became possible to store up the force of the winds, thus obtaining a form of energy infinitely less expensive than that secured from gasoline or coal. Several months passed before business men grasped the far-reaching results of this discovery.

It was clear enough, however, that industries which were concentrated in mining districts or near the water-power sites would move to countries where the winds were strong and steady; and that certain districts hitherto uninhabited had suddenly attained an incredible value. It was not long before the International Stock Exchange at Bagdad was listing the stocks of the Gobi Desert and Wind Concern, the British Wind Mill Company, and the Société Française des Vents Alizés; and in December, 1962, the struggle for factory sites suitable for accumulating plants burst out on land and sea.

Incidents of 1963. The year 1963 is marked by several serious incidents, the best known of which are the occupation of Mont-Ventoux and the seizure of the floating factory at Singapore. Mont-Ventoux, situated on the plain near Lyon, owes its name to the violent wind which is almost constantly roaring across its summit. At the beginning of the twentieth century a French scientist had estimated the capacity of windmills placed on top of Ventoux as equivalent in energy to Niagara Falls. A site of such value could not fail to stir the covetous instincts of big business. One should read in Harwood's book, which has since become a classic, (*The Mont-Ventoux Episode*, Boston, 1988), the story of the incredible bickerings which broke out about this time between France and Italy. The affair of the floating factory of Singapore was still more difficult. An industrial privateer flying the flag of the Russo-Chinese Empire cut the towing hawsers, whereupon cruisers of the United Dominions, escorting the island on which the factory stood, opened fire and sank her. An extraordinary session of the Assembly of the League was called.

The newspapers of the W. N. A. tried to calm public opinion, but unfortunately more powerful forces were working against them. The laboring masses began to understand that this scientific revolution would have the gravest possible consequences for workers. The miners knew that within five years, — or ten years at most, — they would no longer be needed. The Trade Unions brought pressure to bear on the national governments to make sure they would gain possession of windy territories. The Assembly at Geneva in June, 1963, was swept by violent storms, and if it had not been for the tact of the Prince of Monaco, who presided, it is probable that the Assembly, — which was intended to guarantee peace, — would have been the scene and the occasion of a whole series of declarations of war. Thanks to the pacifying influence of Prince Charles, however, the delegates left Switzerland without making any irremediable decisions; but all the experts in international psychology warned their governments that a World War once more seemed inevitable.

Smack directed his papers to run a scarehead:

RUSSO-CHINESE EMPIRE REJECTS
FRANCO-GERMAN OFFER

Intervention of Lord Frank Douglas. On his return from Geneva, Lord Frank Douglas landed in Paris for a talk with Rouvray. We do not know the exact terms of this conversation, which was destined to have so far-reaching an influence upon the history, not merely of the World, but of the entire Solar System. The substance of what they said has been preserved by Brun (*Mémoires de Brun.* III. 159), but his text is not regarded as a word-for-word transcript. The author himself admits that he reconstructed it from memory several hours after the conversation. To catch its tone, one must read through the transcript, — obviously honest, but rather dull, — which was made by a young secretary, and also the Journal of Lord Frank, which is remarkable for the sturdy and paradoxical, yet cynical, spirit of the author.

The two men first exchanged opinions on the general situation. They were agreed in believing that it was extremely serious. Rouvray was discouraged. Before the War of 1947 he had possessed an extraordinary confidence in the instrument he had himself created; but after he had seen that catastrophe come without being able to avert it, he had become sad and skeptical. We may quote from Brun's text:

"There is one thing in the world," said M. de Rouvray, "that people fear more than massacre, even more than death, — and that is boredom. . . . They are getting bored with the era of understanding and international reasonableness that we have set up. . . . Our newspapers tell the truth and are reliable, but they are no longer exciting. Smack himself admits that his front pages are dull. . . . We have tried artistic remedies, but without success; sport and the great crimes saved us for twenty years, but look at the statistics! Police efficiency is getting to be so perfect that crime is becoming rarer and rarer. The World is tired of everything, tired even of boxing. The last two aerial balloon races didn't get more than a million spectators. . . . We have educated the crowds, we have taught them to respect order, to applaud the other side. They have nothing to hate any more. . . . Now, my dear Douglas, it is regrettable but true that hatred is the only thing that can unite mankind. . . . People say France used to be composed of provinces and those provinces ended by being collected into one country; and they ask why it shouldn't

be the same way with the nations. My reply is: 'The French provinces united against a neighboring country, but what enemy is there against whom the nations of the whole World can unite?' Don't offer me any platitudes, my dear friend. Don't propose union against poverty, against disease. No, it is the popular imagination that is sick, and the popular imagination that must be taken care of. We need an enemy that we can see. Unfortunately, there isn't any."

"Well," said Lord Frank, "we have got into almost the same predicament, Rouvray, in my country. Just now, as I was flying over Burgundy, I was thinking about the battles of the Kings of France and the Dukes of Burgundy and I was saying to myself, 'They united at last, but they united *against* somebody. Against whom can the World unite?' The only difference between you and me is that I think I have an answer."

"There is no answer," said M. de Rouvray. "Against whom can we unite?"

"Well, why not against the Moon?" asked the Englishman, quietly.

M. de Rouvray shrugged his shoulders. "You are a witty man, but I have no time for joking. In a few weeks, perhaps in a few days, a fleet of giant aeroplanes directed by a pitiless general staff in Bagdad or Canton will no doubt be at work above this city, which to-day is so calm. These beautiful houses will be crashing down in a frightful mixture of concrete and human flesh. . . . And 1947 will begin again."

"I am not joking, Rouvray. My dear fellow, I am as serious as I can be. Listen! You know what our readers are like. You know how easy it is to make them believe anything. Haven't you seen them cured by remedies which had no merit at all, — except that they were well advertised? Haven't you seen them go crazy over books in which they could not understand a word, over paintings which appealed to them simply because a clever publicity campaign by publishers or art dealers had prepared them to accept anything? Why should they be any more able to resist a campaign conducted by us? We ought to know all about that sort of thing, — and we certainly control the most powerful instruments of publicity."

"I don't know what you are driving at," said Rouvray.

"What campaign do you want our newspapers to undertake now?"

"Look here," said Douglas, "you had the same experiences I had in 1947, and you have also read what happened in 1914. Each time the same thing happened in every country. Hatred of the enemy was created and then kept up by stories of crimes and atrocities, which were almost identical on each side. The critical spirit vanished completely, common sense became a crime, credulity became a duty. The most improbable yarn was immediately accepted by a public opinion which had gone mad. The people were so aroused that they were ready to believe anything about the enemy. Don't you agree?"

"Entirely," said Rouvray. "But I don't see anything in all this to help us out of our present predicament; on the contrary, it is just this sort of thing that we are struggling against."

"Wait," said the Englishman. "Just suppose that we could create this frenzied readiness to believe anything. Suppose we could get every country in the World into this frame of mind against an enemy who didn't exist at all, — or who at least could never come into contact with us. Don't you suppose that we should then manage to infect these countries, — this time without any danger at all, — with a war psychosis that would unite them? Don't you think that we should then at last succeed in creating a unity of the entire planet?"

"No doubt," said the other newspaper owner, somewhat irritated, "but again I ask, 'Against whom?'"

"I don't see any difficulty in your question. It doesn't in the least matter against whom we unite, because the chief characteristic of this enemy is precisely the fact that he does not exist at all. Against the inhabitants of the Moon, — or Mars, or Venus, it is all the same to me. Look here, Rouvray, suppose to-morrow morning we should tell our readers throughout the entire World that some village had been mysteriously destroyed by powerful rays from any one of the three. Would they believe it?"

"They would believe it all right, but if they were to make an investigation — "

"But, my dear fellow, what do you care who makes an investigation or whether the investigation is published?

(*Continued on page 133*)

ANIMAL POISONERS

H. Munro Fox

IN the past the zoologist has not studied poisonous animals very profoundly. He has been content to note that this kind of animal is poisonous, that the other kind is not so. He has satisfied himself that the poison is of use to its possessor as a means of defense and in most cases he has left the matter there. In other words, not much attempt has usually been made to discover how it comes that the well-protected animals possess the poison, how they manage to manufacture it, and why others do not do so. Yet these are profoundly interesting problems, and some of these very questions have been answered by the work of scientists in the last few years.

The use of poison to its possessor is often obvious enough. Scorpions, bees, and snakes have glands which prepare the poisonous liquid, and they have tubes to conduct it to sharp spines or teeth for inflicting a wound. Other animals, which have no offensive weapons, nevertheless derive protection by pouring out a poison on the skin. A toad, for instance, does this. This mode of looking on the question, however, does not go deep enough. We want to know the means by which the poison arises in the chemistry of the animal's body and the nature of the injurious substance.

Emperors and Poison Gas

Poisons are produced by very many different sorts of creatures, whose number includes both higher and lower animals, and it is remarkable that so many of these different poisonous products are used by savage races as arrow poisons. Snakes, lizards, toads, and fishes have provided such venom, and the juices of beetles, bees, wasps, ants, centipedes, and spiders have been used. Yet even to-day little is known of the real chemical nature of the animal poisons.

The poison gas of the skunk, — an animal said to produce the most nauseating odor known, — is a stuff which chemists call mercaptan. It contains sulphur. Now there is a curious example of how an unusual chemical substance may be found in widely dif-