

THE VOLUNTEER CENSORSHIP.

Despite general opinion, censorship plays but a small part in the work of the committee.

The desires of the Government with respect to the concealment from the enemy of military policies, plans, and movements are set forth in certain specific requests. No law stands behind them. Their observance rests entirely upon honor and patriotism. There are violations, as a matter of course, and papers holding to the unwritten agreement have suffered injury from papers less careful and less honest, but, on the whole, the press has responded in the same spirit of unselfish service that animates the firing line.

The continuing weak spot is due to a persistent misunderstanding in the matter of regulation. When a violation occurs, such papers as have observed the agreement straightway demand that rebuke be

6

administered or penalty inflicted. Yet on the printed card that carries the desires of the Government there appears this significant paragraph:

These requests go to the press without larger authority than the necessities of the war-making branches. Their enforcement is a matter for the press itself.

The bargain is the bargain of the press, and it must of necessity provide its own discipline. As it is realized, however, that the requests of the Government are concerned with human lives and national hopes, as it is driven home that the passing satisfaction of a news item may endanger a transport or a troop train, the voluntary censorship grows in strength and certainty.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT ASKS OF THE PRESS.

The desires of the Government with respect to the concealment from the enemy of military policies, plans, and movements are set forth in the following specific requests. They go to the press of the United States directly from the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy and represent the thought and advice of their technical advisers. They do not apply to news dispatches censored by military authority with the expeditionary forces or in those cases where the Government itself, in the form of official statements, may find it necessary or expedient to make public information covered by these requests.

For the protection of our military and naval forces and of merchant shipping it is requested that secrecy be observed in all matters of:

1. Advance information of the routes and schedules of troop movements. (See par. 5.)
2. Information tending to disclose the number of troops in the expeditionary forces abroad.
3. Information calculated to disclose the location of the permanent base or bases abroad.
4. Information that would disclose the location of American units or the eventual position of the American forces at the front.

Photographs.—Photographs conveying the information specified above should not be published.

These requests go to the press without larger authority than the necessities of the war-making branches. Their enforcement is a matter for the press itself. To the overwhelming proportion of newspapers who have given unselfish, patriotic adherence to the voluntary agreement, the Government extends its gratitude and high appreciation.

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION,
By GEORGE CREEL, *Chairman*.

JANUARY 1, 1918.

The activities of the Committee on public information ..., 1918. Committee on Public Information, Washington Govt. Printing Office, Library of Congress.

Primary Source Analysis Tool Questions:

Observe

Describe what you see.

Reflect

What was the purpose of this text?

Who created it?

What can you learn from examining this?

Question

What do you wonder about...?