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Loose Talk in Washington

THE Government has an effective poster to illustrate the slogan, Loose Talk May Cost Lives. Everybody agrees, but most of us associate loose talk with people who gabble in restaurants about when Captain So-and-So sailed for Australia, while a sinister character at the next table listens with attention. But this is only a fraction of the kind of loose talk that may cost lives, and is already causing delay and confusion. Some of the most damaging loose talk has come from officials of the Government itself.

Soon after the Japanese had cut off our rubber supply, Michigan's Highway Commissioner, G. Donald Kennedy, set about putting into effect an experimental plan to reduce the consumption of rubber on the highways. The city of Pontiac was selected for the trial because its war industries and other activities presented a typical American community. Commissioner Kennedy and his Transportation Conservation Committee found that automobiles taking workers to the defense plants in the area carried an average of 1.3 passengers each.

Thousands of workers lived on bus lines and did not need to use private vehicles at all. Others could double up when driving to work if they could find fellow workers living in their neighborhoods and working in the same factories. By mid-February the traffic conservators had persuaded factories to stagger their starting hours; schools, stores and public offices to follow suit. Many workers were

persuaded to use busses instead of their own cars, and a system was devised to acquaint workers with others who could double up in driving to the same factory. The average load per car was increased to 1.89 within a week.

Then appeared a headline in the Detroit newspapers: U. S. TO RELEASE 570,000 TIRES. That didn't mean much, except that one automobile owner out of every 334 in Pontiac could have one new tire if he could convince the rationing board that he was eligible. But it was enough to knock out Pontiac's tire-conservation program for some time. It took several weeks to recover from the effects of that one item of irrelevant cheer.

Of course, there have been other offenders in *re* loose talk. The sense of urgency needed to persuade us to plan to make our rubber supply last out the war has been dimmed by indiscriminate boasting about vast supplies of synthetic rubber that were about to emerge from factories as yet unbuilt. Gasoline rationing has been accepted with poor grace because the seriousness of the rubber situation has been disguised by double talk. The Senate's small-business committee didn't help the situation by its premature talk about allocating hypothetical rubber to retread 20,000,000 cars.

The way to get co-operation from the American people is not just to tell them repeatedly that the fifth column will get them if they don't watch out, but to tell the whole truth, reveal what sacrifices must be made and why they are necessary, and reduce irresponsible loose talk to a minimum.

Shall We Join the Gentlemen?

MISS SUMNER, of Illinois: Will the gentleman yield?

MRS. BOLTON: I yield to the gentleman from Illinois.—*Congressional Record*, June 3.

THE emancipation of women has produced some extraordinary social consequences, including the argument used against one feminine candidate for the United States Senate that her election would necessitate the construction of a new Senate cloakroom, thereby imperiling the national finances. As the colloquy quoted above suggests, there is also a certain clumsiness in the form of address considered appropriate for a stateswoman.

H. W. Fowler, in his great work, *Modern English Usage*, declares that the word "gentlewoman" has no meaning that does not belong to "lady." He adds that it is "an old-fashioned if not quite archaic word, and as such tends to be degraded by facetious use." It is a word "to be used with caution." But in the Senate, "gentlewoman" is being bandied about with all the recklessness which characterizes present use of the word "lady." You never hear traveling salesmen tell stories which end, "That ain't no gentlewoman, that's my wife."

Perhaps this explains why it has become the custom to use this awkward expression in the halls of Congress. A statesman who interrupted a speech to remark "Will the lady yield?" might feel guilty of making a personal remark. By substituting "gentlewoman" he imagines he has phrased his question in terms of high political debate.

Stop Nursing That Guilty Feeling!

ONE of the worst handicaps to our system of free enterprise has been the fact that so many of its beneficiaries have inferiority complexes.

Even convinced believers in individual initiative and free competition are disturbed by the fear that there may be something to the charges thrown at them by pinks and collectivists. They wonder if they haven't lacked the "social viewpoint" or "produced for profit and not for use," or been just plain predatory.

The result is that the system which has produced the greatest social gains for the largest number of people in human history has pretty much let its case go by default and permitted millions of people whose lives have been enriched by free enterprise in a democracy to regard themselves as "prisoners of starvation," chained and shackled by capitalism and awaiting deliverance by some bureaucratic mumbo jumbo. This failure of the apostles of free enterprise to dispose of the myths which have confused so many people is one of the strangest phenomena of the time. It suggests that familiarity with freedom and opportunity breeds contempt for ordinary logic and observable facts.

After all, it ought not to take unusual powers of observation to note that, if social gain is translated into terms of living standards, food, clothing, shelter, leisure and opportunity for

spiritual development, our free-enterprise system has produced more social gains than any other yet devised. Of course we have "produced for profit," but the measure of the profit has been the extent to which we have "produced for use." Who got the real profit from our automobile industry—the stockholders or the owners of 30,000,000 automobiles.

Nor has free enterprise been carried on without plan or direction—a libel which has been particularly effective in arousing the capitalist consciousness of guilt. The fact that the plans have been made by individuals with goods or services to sell, and not solely by bureaucrats instinctively concerned with maintaining the status quo, does not mean we live in a planless society. Quite the contrary, we live in a society in which survival and success depend on the best adaptation of private planning to public needs, not in a collectivist planned economy in which public need is satisfied, if at all, by bureaucrats acting on the theory that mother knows best.

Fortunately for the prospects of free enterprise in a generation susceptible to economic mythology, we have two important exhibits of the operation of collectivism to guide us. The experience of Soviet Russia, including the famine of the early 1930's, offers illuminating evidence of the limitations of centralized planning, even when backed by an all-pervasive

secret police. Nazi Germany, while performing miracles in industrialization, offers hideous evidence of another truth which anti-free-enterprise propaganda ignores, to wit: a collectivist society cannot permit personal freedom.

What free enterprise needs, in addition to some internal policing for its own good, is a new and better propaganda technique. Because free enterprise is the only system we know, we exaggerate its errors. Because there have been confusion, stupidity, bad distribution and "poverty amid plenty" under a free economy, we mistakenly assume that such things are not possible in a Socialist economy. Because men in a free economy often fail in business or walk the streets looking for jobs, some of us are over-tender toward collective systems which punish failure by a term in a concentration camp or even by death. The adjective "social" is attached by association to oppressive economic dictatorships while capitalist democracy, which has really important social gains to show for itself, must be content with adjectives like "chaotic," "unplanned," "ruthless," "greedy" and "predatory."

It ought not to be beyond the means of a great productive society to make its virtues so apparent that people will stop hankering for socialistic beehives. Up to now, however, the precise means of accomplishing this easy exercise in persuasion has eluded us.

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