

# The People Will Not Act Unless They Know

REED IRVINE

I appear before this distinguished body today not as a representative of AIM a toothpaste, but as a representative of AIM, a large and growing body of Americans who are concerned about the way in which information is disseminated in our society through the mass media.

Your esteemed executive director, Dr. Nelsen, sensed quite rightly that my knowledge of the dental profession and its problems did not go much beyond what I might have gleaned from my twice-yearly visits to my dentist over my lifetime. He provided me with a thick package of orientation material to make up for that deficiency in some degree.

However, I am sure that Dr. Nelsen did not intend to make me into an instant expert in your field. And if I had any idea of trying to stray from my own turf in talking to you today, that idea was stifled when I read Dr. Nelsen's 1975 Swanson Memorial Lecture, where I came across these words:

"One would expect a speaker, if he is going to be worth the time to hear him, to have had some personal experience with what he advocates, and further, to be able to accomplish the procedures that he presents so that he can show positive results with some case histories that prove his point. He should present information useful to his listener. Otherwise he is engaged in entertainment."

That passage jumped out at me. I got the message. I read on to see what other clues I might find as to what I should discuss today. I found several. I knew that I would be addressing a select group, men and women who had been recognized as leaders in their profession and communities. As leaders, you might be interested, as I was, in one of Dr. Nelsen's editorials entitled, "Are Leaders an Endangered Species?"

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*Presented at the Annual Convocation of the American College of Dentists, Dallas, Texas, October 20, 1979. Mr. Irvine is founder and Chairman of the Board of Accuracy in Media Inc., Washington, D. C.*

It was written four years ago, but the question is even more timely today. There has been a precipitous decline in confidence in the political leadership of the nation. The President of the United States himself has recently passed through what appeared to be a crisis of self-confidence. It was interesting to me, and it may be of some significance to the dentists of this country, that when President Carter came down from the mountain to demonstrate that he had learned how to lead this country, the most notable change he made was to quit exhibiting his teeth, the most famous set of presidential ivories since Theodore Roosevelt. No longer did he appear to be a man who was constantly auditioning for an Ultra-Brite commercial. It seemed to have been decided at Camp David that the people wanted to see teeth in our policies more than teeth in the President's mouth.

Dr. Nelsen posed a good question about the seeming difficulty that we were having in producing leaders, even back in 1975. He said: "Perhaps the fault is not in leadership *per se* but in the unfriendly environment in which leaders attempt to lead. Who would attempt to lead when it is now popular to deride leadership, to bark and chase anyone who moves to select a standard or raise a banner to bring a better order into being."

I have the feeling that a lot of the barkers and deriders that he had in mind were those in the profession of journalism. There seems to be a growing consensus in this country that our mass media have become an important contributory factor in some of our most serious problems, including the weakness of our political leaders.

The other day a Texan visited me in my office in Washington. He said that he had turned his business over to his son and was taking a year off to devote his efforts to trying to wake up the American people. He was convinced that this country is in the gravest danger in its entire history and that we might well see the extinction of our independence and freedom in a matter of a few years.

A week before that the noted syndicated columnist, Robert Novak of the Evans and Novak team, had given a talk in Washington in which he sounded a similar note of genuine alarm. He outlined in stark terms the meaning of Soviet superiority in strategic nuclear weapons. He also pointed out our great vulnerability to a cut-off of oil supplies. He noted that while there had been some talk in this country of our mounting a mobile force to seize the Middle Eastern oil fields in the event of a threatened cut-off, that realistically the only country that could successfully occupy those fields today is the Soviet Union.

All of us are interested in threats to our survival, and it would be unfair of me to flash before you these grave fears, which are shared by

a large number of very well-informed people, without giving you some idea of the grounds for them. I will do that. But first I want to urge that you not take any comfort from the fact that you may not have heard of these grave dangers from Walter Cronkite, John Chancellor or Frank Reynolds on the television evening news. Nor should you discount these fears because they have not made the headlines in your local newspapers.

Years ago Harry Truman said that he took pity on the people who thought that because they read the daily papers they had some idea of what was going on in the world. That is something of an exaggeration. But it is rather easy to demonstrate through case histories that our mass media are distorting or withholding information from the American people that is not only interesting but important. Indeed, it may be information that is vital to our survival. If I convince you of nothing else today, I hope that I will be able to undermine the notion that all of us tend to harbor that if something really important happens it is bound to make the news.

I will try to show you that important stories are often suppressed, and I will try to explain why this is so.

Let's first consider a relatively simple, uncomplicated example of an important story that was deliberately suppressed by the major media in this country. In September 1976, there was an assassination in Washington. The victim was one Orlando Letelier, a former ambassador and later cabinet officer in the government of Chile under the Marxist president, Salvador Allende. Letelier was a well-known figure in Washington, and his assassination was big news all over the country. He was portrayed as a noble figure, a man who was struggling to restore democracy and freedom to his native country. Chile then, and now, was under the rule of a military junta which had ousted the Allende government in a coup. Allende had committed suicide, and Letelier, after a period of imprisonment, had been exiled, thanks to the intervention of influential foreign friends.

Three months after Letelier's car was blown up by a bomb in Washington, word began to leak out that the briefcase which he was carrying at the time had contained some very interesting documents. Among other things, these documents revealed that the "human rights" campaign which Letelier was carrying on in this country, was being financed out of Cuba. And far from being intent upon restoring freedom and democracy to Chile, Letelier's goal, according to these documents, was to establish in Chile a regime similar to Castro's dictatorship in Cuba. The documents also showed that Letelier was manipulating U. S. Congressmen and others, but that he was taking

care to conceal his true objectives and his Cuban connections and financing from them.

Here was a great news story. A man who had been lionized and eulogized as a great liberal fighter for human rights and democracy was suddenly revealed by his own correspondence to have been a paid agent of the worst police state in the Western Hemisphere, and his goal was revealed to be the duplication of that police state in his native land, Chile. The actual documents showing this were available to the press through leaks.

Not one word of this has ever appeared on a network television news program, even though those programs have devoted much time to the Letelier assassination. NBC even broadcast a special program on the Letelier case without mentioning anything about the Cuban connection. A movie about the case is now being made, and that too is guaranteed to ignore the important fact that Letelier was in the pay of Cuba. And what of the press? In December 1976, Jack Anderson mentioned the briefcase documents in his column. His brief mention excited no interest on the part of news reporters. Two months later, columnists Evans and Novak, devoted two columns to the matter, going into greater detail than Anderson had. Only one of these columns appeared in The Washington Post. It resulted in a news story—but a very peculiar news story. The Post said that the documents that Evans and Novak discussed in their column had been opened to the press by Letelier's friends. The story suggested that the Post reporter who saw these documents found that Evans and Novak had exaggerated their significance. This story did not contain a single quotation from the documents.

Accuracy in Media checked this out. Our investigation revealed that the documents had not been opened to the press. They had been shown only to Lee Lescaze of the Washington Post, who had the handicap of not being able to read Spanish, the language in which the documents were written. Other reporters who asked to see them were refused access. When Accuracy in Media wrote to the Post to expose the false claim that the documents had been shown to the press and to point out that the article was nothing but a whitewash, the Washington Post refused to publish the statement. When we tried to buy space to have the statement printed, the Post interposed so many objections, that we abandoned the effort.

We tried to buy space in The Washington Star to run our statement, together with a charge that it had been censored by the Post. The ad was accepted, but then canceled without explanation just before it was to appear. We next tried the New York Times, but they imposed an

unacceptable condition. We finally published the statement in The Wall Street Journal, with the note that it had been censored by The Washington Post, The Washington Star and The New York Times.

I should point out that the great New York Times steadfastly refused to print anything at all about the revelations that came from the Letelier briefcase. When I asked Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, the chairman of The Times why, he said, "I don't know. They tell me it isn't a story."

Finally in April 1978, a year and a half after the assassination, the briefcase papers were mentioned in a story in the Times by Wendell Rawls, a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter who had moved to The Times from the Philadelphia Inquirer.

I called Mr. Rawls to compliment him for finally getting this story into The New York Times. His response was most revealing. He said that in the absence of the reporter who had been handling the Letelier matter, he had been asked to do a story about a suspect in the case. Looking into the file, he found the material about the briefcase, thought it was interesting, and included it in his story as background material. What this shows is that a single reporter had been able to keep this story out of The New York Times by telling his superiors that it was a non-story. It got into the paper only because he happened to be on vacation when something happened that rekindled interest in the case.

And what of the wire services on which most papers around the country depend for this kind of news? The Associated Press refused to do a story about the briefcase papers. A North Carolina editor who had read about the papers in the AIM Report, put pressure on the AP to get them to turn out a story. AP headquarters in New York were unhappy about this and actually sent a complaint about this editor to his publisher. The publisher backed up the editor, and the editor persisted, and AP finally put a story on the wire, but it was a half-hearted effort that did not do justice to the documents. The only major paper that did do justice to the documents was the Washington Star.

I said that I would try to indicate why important stories of this type have been suppressed. The Letelier story is a particularly good example, because we can make a very good guess as to why the story was treated as it was by The Washington Post. Letelier's personal address book was found in his briefcase. It contained the names and phone numbers of several journalists. The most important of these was Laurence Stern, national news editor of The Washington Post. Letelier had both Stern's home and office number. The handling of the Letelier story by the Post came under Stern's jurisdiction as national news editor.

What manner of man was Larry Stern? We know a great deal about

him now, since he died a few months ago. At the memorial service for him, one of those who eulogized him and praised him as a "good friend" was Teofilo Acosta. Mr. Acosta has been identified by the London Daily Telegraph—but not by the Washington Post—as Fidel Castro's top intelligence agent in Washington. Mrs. Acosta told me that they regarded Larry Stern not only as a close personal friend, but also as a good friend of Cuba's. The veteran leftwing journalist, I. F. Stone, said at the Memorial Service that Stern "hated those huge mindless institutions that devour our substance and corrupt our fundamental ideals, like the Pentagon and the CIA." Another close friend, Alexander Cockburn, has noted that Stern's "heart and head lay on the left side of the political bed." Observing that Stern had been a follower of Leon Trotsky in his "hot youth," he said: "Larry knew what the facts were going to tell him long before he discovered what they actually were." He said he was not "one of those pallidly objective souls...who feel incapable of making up his mind until all the facts are in and until all the evidence has been judiciously assessed." Cockburn said Stern was very influential with other Washington journalists, and foreign journalists as well.

It is not at all surprising that this good friend of Cuba's should have used his key position at The Washington Post to try to whitewash rather than expose Orlando Letelier, a paid Cuban agent.

Nor is it at all surprising that with Larry Stern tending the national news desk at The Washington Post, deciding what national news stories would be covered, what stories would be written, and which would get into the paper, stories about the decline in our defense capabilities tended not to get into The Washington Post. In the past year the American Security Council and the Coalition for Peace Through Strength sponsored some half dozen news conferences in Washington featuring top-flight experts on defense to explain why in their view, our national survival was in doubt because of the neglect of our national defense. These experts made the case that SALT II would increase our danger. Not a single one of those news conferences was reported by the Washington Post as long as Larry Stern was in charge of the national news desk of that paper.

The suppression of the evidence that Orlando Letelier was a Cuban agent was serious, but not fatal. Suppression of the evidence needed by the American people to make an intelligent decision about a matter so vital to our national survival borders on the criminal.

Recently a New York Times/CBS News poll revealed that out of more than 1500 persons questioned, only 4 individuals said they regarded the SALT agreement as the most serious problem facing this

country. That is less than three-tenths of one percent.

Like Britain in the 1930s, when Winston Churchill vainly warned of the need to re-arm to counter Hitler's growing military might, America is asleep. We are enjoying the pleasant dream that nothing really bad can happen to us. That is a dream that has been nurtured by our news media—by editors like Larry Stern, who have viewed the danger to America as coming not from the gigantic Soviet military build-up, but from our own Pentagon and CIA.

In one of his candid moments several years ago, Walter Cronkite of CBS News said that there were always people in Washington who wanted to increase defense spending. "We don't report that," he said. "The story is those who want to cut defense spending." With the encouragement of the Cronkites and the David Brinkleys and the rest, we did cut defense spending as a percentage of our Gross National Product, to the point where that ratio is back to where it was before the Korean War. In the meantime the Soviet Union greatly increased its defense spending as a percentage of GNP, embarking on the most massive military and naval build-up in history in time of peace.

Those who have been warning that this spelled danger for the United States have been ignored and even ridiculed by our media—much as Winston Churchill was in the 1930s. The result is that today, for the first time in our history, we are confronted with an enemy who has not only the will to defeat and enslave us, but also the military might to do so.

And according to that New York Times/CBS News poll, less than three-tenths of one percent of our people seem to be sufficiently aware of this danger to have reached the conclusion that the whole issue of SALT II is our most important problem. We have heard for so many years that we are the most powerful nation on earth that we still believe it when it is no longer true. It is now almost universally agreed in military circles that the decade ahead will be a period of the gravest danger for our country. This is because the Soviet Union will have achieved the ability to destroy virtually all of our land-based inter-continental ballistic missiles in a first strike.

It is agreed that it will be six or seven years, at least, before we will be able to deploy mobile ICBMs that will not be vulnerable to a Soviet attack. This period is known as "the window"—a period in which we will be vulnerable because of the Soviet superiority in strategic nuclear weapons.

Our military experts, in and out of uniform, are deeply worried about this "window." They have tried, with almost no success, to awaken the people to the danger. One reason they have not succeeded is because of the lack of cooperation from the news media.

Let me give you an illustration. Early this year, some of the best of these experts came out with a book which described the danger posed by the "window" and suggested some ingenious measures that would reduce our vulnerability if they were implemented quickly. They presented their proposals to the press at a luncheon in Washington, recognizing the importance of mobilizing public support for the measures they were suggesting. The following day not a single story about the problem or the proposed solutions appeared in the papers or on television.

I had warned them that this would be the likely outcome. If they had collectively marched down to the White House and picketed with placards they might have made the papers and gotten thirty seconds on the evening news. The media were not interested in the message. They might have been interested in some form of outlandish action by these brilliant and distinguished men.

I don't want to give the impression that the media alone are at fault, however. The president and his obedient servants on the Joint Chiefs of Staff bear a heavy responsibility for our dangerous national complacency. This is reflected in the incredible emphasis the Carter Administration is placing on ratification of SALT II, which gives the impression that this agreement is somehow going to reduce the danger and solve our problems.

There is very good reason to believe that the opposite is true—that SALT II will actually increase our vulnerability, not reduce it. This explains why, unlike our generals and admirals on active duty, our retired generals and admirals have almost unanimously urged the Senate not to ratify SALT II. Over 1,700 retired generals and admirals have signed a letter to the Senate urging defeat of the treaty. Only four refused to sign that letter because they supported SALT II. That interesting fact may not have come to your attention, because it has not been widely reported by the news media. The Washington Post, for one, ignored it completely.

The incredible complacency of the White House, the media and the great majority of our people in face of this awesome danger can be explained in large part, I believe, by the theory of nuclear warfare to which we have been committed since the days when Robert S. McNamara was our Secretary of Defense. This surfaced in the press not long ago when it was reported that President Carter had said that all we really needed to deter a Soviet nuclear attack was one Polaris submarine. The idea is that a single submarine armed with nuclear missiles would be able to destroy all the major Soviet cities.

The only trouble is that the Soviets don't see it that way. They have

an entirely different theory of nuclear war, and it is now clear that what they have been doing is preparing for a nuclear war that they intend to win.

We, on the other hand, have assumed that neither side could win such a war and that all we had to do was maintain enough force to destroy the major Soviet cities and they would not dare to attack us. This is what is known as the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction, MAD.

The Soviets don't believe in MAD. Their plan is this. They are developing an ICBM force that will be capable of knocking out virtually all of our land-based ICBMs in a first strike. They will have enough missiles left to also knock out all of our major cities if we should attack their cities with our submarine-based missiles. Our submarine-based missiles are not sufficiently powerful or accurate to destroy those remaining Soviet ICBMs. They can only be targeted on cities, on people.

The Soviets have a well-developed civil defense program, including comprehensive evacuation plans. Putting those plans into operation when they launch their strike against our missiles, they will be able to minimize the loss of life that will result if we should retaliate by attacking their population centers.

But we have no civil defense or evacuation plans worthy of the name. Our president will be informed after that first strike that if he launches an attack against their cities, our cities will be utterly destroyed, at a cost of 140 to 160 million lives. They will lose perhaps 20 million, the same number they lost in World War II. Under those conditions, what will our president do? The chances are he will not order the attack. That was what Dr. Kissinger warned the Europeans several weeks ago when he spoke in Brussels causing a great furor.

This is a grim picture for us. But experts have been telling us for years that the Soviets were perfecting their civil defense while we were letting our deteriorate. We have known that the Soviets were building mammoth missiles capable of destroying our missiles in their hardened silos. We have permitted them to build enough of these that they can destroy our missiles and still have enough power left over to take out our cities. The experts who know these things are frightened. They know we are in trouble. They know that the most dangerous period for us begins next year and will last until we can deploy a large force of mobile missiles, which will take several years.

Have the media been told this? Yes, by well-qualified experts. Have they passed this on to the public. No. At least, not adequately.

In one of his fine editorials, Dr. Nelsen said: "The people will not act  
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that we will persevere to overcome what is a flagrant and unwarranted attack on the ethics of a profession that has produced the finest quality of patient care in the world.

I ask each of you to proclaim your belief and announce for all to hear that you believe advertising to be unprofessional and not in the best interest of the public. Also, that you will support professional journalism and that you are willing to support the cost of dental education and continuing education in order to prevent the invasion and perversion of these areas by commercial and proprietary enterprises.

To paraphrase an historical quotation, I know not what others may do, as for me, I will uphold the long established and time proven ethics of the American College of Dentists.

Let us go forward together.

Reed Irvine

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unless they know. They must be told."

Perhaps some will say that this grim message is not exactly appropriate for a gathering of this kind, where you have met to pay honor to your colleagues who are to be inducted into Fellowship. But if this hotel were on fire, we would not want the management to wait until our meeting was over to inform us of the danger.

Knowing what I know of the danger that confronts us, a danger that in a few years time could mean life or death, freedom or slavery for all of us, I would be derelict in my duty if I did not come here to ask you to help bring the kind of pressure to bear on the news media to tell the people the facts they need if they are to act to insure our survival.

It is to aroused leaders such as you that this nation must look to accomplish this vital task. But this imposes upon you the weighty and often difficult task of becoming informed. It imposes the even more difficult task of being willing to speak out in what may seem to be an unpopular cause in some cases.

I have great faith in the American people. They won't act if they don't know the facts. But if we give them the facts and provide them with leadership, with your help and God willing, we can and we will overcome the dangers in the decade ahead.

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*Man's mind, stretched to a new idea, never goes back to its original dimension.*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes—