

THE GREAT GRAIN ROBBERY

by

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One of the functions of a free press in a free country is to make known to the public outrageous breaches of public trust by government officials. However, in a controlled country, a controlled press does just the opposite: it shields from public view the abuses of public "servants" and creates an "image" strictly for public consumption. We live in a country where the controlled press must keep up the pretense that it is still a free press. And so it must publish the facts, so that its heavy hand of control does not seem too obvious. But it manages to give the facts it doesn't like very little attention.

One of the most glaring examples of how the press deliberately underplays a story it doesn't like can be found in the press's handling of the sensational disappearance of 24 million bushels of surplus grain, probably the largest robbery in history.

It all started when an alert agricultural ~~attache~~ attache in our embassy in Vienna began to wonder what 7 million Austrians were going to do with 40 million bushels of U. S. surplus grain. He studied import figures and soon discovered that Austrian consumption was not the problem. Only 16 million bushels reached Austria. The other 24 million bushels had "disappeared." The attache notified the State Department, which in turn notified the Agriculture Department.



Now, ordinarily, like the Billie Sol Estes manipulations, news of this discrepancy—which had the makings of a major scandal—need never have reached the ears of the American people. It could have been hushed up in the offices of State and Agriculture. But somehow, through the work of a patriot in the Agriculture Department, news of the missing grain reached Congress. Now, once Congress gets its hands on such a scandal, the Press can scarcely ignore it. And so the first story of the missing grain appeared on page one of the New York Times of July 17, 1963:

U.S. BARTER GRAIN VANISHES ABROAD

24 Million Bushels Diverted and Sold Illegally While on the Way to Austria

by Felix Belair, Jr.

Washington, July 16—With the aid of half the governments of Western Europe, the State and Agricultural Departments are trying to discover the destination of 24,000,000 bushels of surplus feed grains sent to Austria in a barter deal. The grain, worth \$52,000,000 was diverted and sold illegally, Federal authorities said.

It has been established that a large part of the missing shipments was diverted at the West German ports of Hamburg and Bremen and sold commercially for huge profits. . . .

Senator Williams told the Senate that not only did the grain "never reach its destination but our government does not even know where it went." . . .

The most glaring disclosure, they suggested, was the flaw in this Government's delivery system that permitted the grain diversions to go undetected for nearly three years. . . .

He (Williams) told Senators that the diversion had begun as early as the fiscal year 1960 and suggested that some part of the supplies may have gone "behind the Iron Curtain." Federal investigators denied the latter suggestion.

Follow-up stories appeared in the Times on July 18 in the form of a tiny item on page 9; on Saturday, July 20, on page 6 (nobody reads the Saturday Times in the Summer); and on July 26 (page 2). Although the scandal, as Sen. Everett Dirksen described it, made Texas tycoon Billie Sol Estes "look like a Rhode Island piker," the Times did not consider it important enough to write an editorial on it. In fact, the main themes of the published stories were that the grain did not go behind the Iron Curtain; that the diversion was the work of West German profiteers; and that the United States Government lost nothing.

These themes were reiterated by Time magazine on July 26, 1963 and by Newsweek on July 29, 1963. Wrote Time: "Apparently a well-coordinated ring of German, Austrian, and probably Swiss and American grain dealers arranged to have the shipments moved from such ports as Hamburg and Bremen directly into West German and other European markets, where grain brings premium prices. . . ."

Newsweek wrote: "Though (Sen.) Williams hinted that some grain might have found its way behind the Iron Curtain, European officials pointed out that the Soviet-bloc nations have feed-grain surpluses, and are themselves exporters."

Anyone doing research on the vanishing grain would discover that there are no further references to it in the New York Times Index beyond July 26, 1963. And the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature only lists the two already cited in articles from Time and Newsweek. That, in short, is the entire bibliography



for a major national scandal of which only the surface was scratched. This is particularly curious in the light of the following story which appeared in the New York Herald Tribune on November 12, 1963. On that day this headline appeared at the very top of page one:

CONFIRMED: LOST U.S. GRAIN WENT TO REDS

The story was given on page 2:

REDS RECEIVED MISSING AMERICAN GRAIN

U.S. Sleuths Confirm Diversion

Bonn. American grain ~~surpluses~~, which "mysteriously" disappeared on their way to Austria, really wound up behind the Iron Curtain.

Despite a vigorous Agriculture Department denial this summer--and despite Washington reports that President Kennedy personally has been assured that the surplus shipments were not diverted--German authorities here have definitely confirmed that quite a few of the 24 million bushels bound for Austria landed in grain hungry Communist countries. . . .

The mystery was unraveled, the Germans said, by investigators working for J. K. Mansfield, the State Department's Inspector General. . . .

Evidently both Inspector Mansfield's office and House investigators were not satisfied with the results of previous investigations. They kept men in Europe tracing the missing shipments. Recently Mr. Mansfield's investigators came up with new evidence which clearly shows the path to Communist countries.

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The New York Times, of course, did not print the above story in any of its pages, nor was the story picked up by Time or Newsweek. The fact that our government might have been using barter deals to get surplus grain to the Communists was a fact the controlled press decided ought not to be too widely suggested. Which leaves us with one very burning question: If a lowly agricultural attache wondered what 7 million Austrians were going to do with 40 million bushels of grain, how come the Austrian Chancellor, Julius Rabb, and U. S. Ambassador Ellwellyn E. Thompson, both of whom signed the barter deal, didn't wonder the same thing? Was this barter deal and other similar deals deliberately devised in order to permit large-scale diversions of U. S. surplus grain into the Communist bloc? The answer to this question may also be the answer to why the controlled press has kept the lid so tightly closed on this explosive story,

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