

Arrest of "the Six"

BY I. F. STONE

Washington, June 11

HERE are signs of considerable official unhappiness here over the arrest of the editors of *Amerasia*, two State Department aides, a young naval officer, and Mark Julius Gayn, a free-lance writer on Far Eastern affairs. Through friendly channels the news was spread this weekend that neither the Department of Justice nor the FBI was enthusiastic about this assignment, and that they acted on orders from above. It is implied that the "above" is the White House. I cannot vouch for the authenticity of this information, but I can for the reliability of the source. The fact that this story was put in circulation is significant, and indicates that law-enforcement officials are queasy about the whole affair. This queasiness is not at all difficult to understand.

The headlines have been very clear, perhaps too clear for the comfort of certain editors: "FBI Nabs Six as Spies," "War Secret Leaks Widespread." But the actual charges as disclosed to the press corps publicly and in off-the-record conferences are very vague; vague enough, for different reasons, to worry both Department of Justice lawyers and Washington correspondents. For although these arrests were made under certain provisions of the Espionage Act of 1917, it has not been alleged that the persons arrested were spies or that they had revealed military secrets or that they were engaged in anything other than the favorite Washington pastime of letting "confidential" information leak out. If this is a crime, all but a hopelessly inefficient minority of Washington's officials and newspapermen ought to be put in jail.

Fortunately it would be very difficult to put them there under the Espionage Act of 1917, which is far from being the equivalent of an Official Secrets Act. The United States has no Official Secrets Act. The only law under which action can be taken for disclosing confidential information is the Espionage Act. But the 1917 act is a law against espionage, not against gossip, and the provision under which these arrests were made refers to the unlawful disclosure of documents "relating to the national defense." It is difficult to imagine this being stretched by a court to cover memoranda discussing the Chinese political situation, much less transcripts of Japanese radio broadcasts and the other miscellaneous stuff, including even newspaper clippings, which circulate in government offices here stamped "restricted," "confidential," "secret," or "top secret," depending on the whim of the official who wields the stamp.

The best exposé of this case is to be found in the transcripts—available at the State Department—of the press conferences held on and off the record to explain the arrests and their purpose. I recommend a reading of these transcripts to members of Congress who are interested. If anyone thinks I exaggerate when I refer to whimsicality in classifying official documents, I suggest he reads the question and answer

at Friday's press conference on the leak of confidential documents from the State Department to Ernest K. Lindley and Edward Weintal for their article in *Harper's* for last December. Acting Secretary Grew was asked, in view of the action taken against the six, whether "any investigation was instituted last December to determine the sources of Lindley's and Weintal's information."

This was, in a sense, a foolish question, since there was one difference between the article in *Harper's* and the articles in *Amerasia*. The former was defending State Department policy toward Franco, while the latter were criticizing recent State Department policy toward China. The department's top officials are constantly "leaking" to their friends, as the writings of Lindley, Arthur Krock, David Lawrence, Frank Kent, and others bear witness. The department objects only when there are leaks to its critics. Grew explained, in reply to the question about the Lindley-Weintal article, that top officials of the department have authority at any time to declassify, on their own judgment, information from "top secret"—the highest, hush-hush—to open information. He would not answer a question as to how far down this right to declassify extended, but it seems obvious that if documents marked "top secret" can be so easily declassified, many of them must contain nothing that is genuinely related to security, unless it be the security of the State Department from criticism.

Irrespective of whether the six arrested are innocent or guilty of something or other, State Department officials have said enough and done enough to indicate their purpose in this prosecution. They have exposed some people of decent and honorable record to a cruel and deadly smear in the rightist press in a campaign the purposes of which are (1) to stop leaks to critics of the State Department, (2) to frighten and get rid of younger officials who disagree with the new policy of giving the Kuomintang a blank check against the Chinese Communists, (3) to foment a red scare that must hurt relations with the Soviet Union, and (4) to prepare the public mind for a conditional "unconditional surrender" of Japan.

There is no reason whatever to believe that this is the President's policy, but it is the policy of the reactionary clique in the department headed by Grew. Some of these men in the years before Pearl Harbor were gulled by the "we-must-save-China-from-communism" line of the Japanese and are themselves spreading the same old line again. The consequences may be serious.

A reflection of this kind of thinking is found in Frank Kent's column *A Way Out for Japan*, published last Friday. Mr. Kent is an able, conservative journalist with excellent contacts in Washington. It is difficult to believe that he would have written as he did on so serious a subject unless he had authority in responsible sources for the views put forward. Mr. Kent said that if the Japanese surrendered they might be able to keep Korea and Formosa. He indicated that

he thought we would go easy on Japanese industry. He warned that if the Japanese did not surrender soon, the Russians would be coming into the war, that this would mean a drastic peace for Japan, that the Soviet Union would take Manchuria, and that this would lead to the communization of China. He clearly implied that in this respect the United States and its enemy, Japan, had a common interest against our ally, the Soviet Union. This is the kind of hobgoblin stuff that the Japanese used to hand the American embassy in Tokyo before the war. The State Department seems to be giving it out now.

I believe that the arrest of the six will prove to have been a very rash move on the part of the State Department and the FBI, and that in this case progressive forces have an unusual opportunity to expose and to purge the reactionary clique which continues to dominate the department and the Foreign Service. This is a chance to take the indictment of that clique out of the realm of abstract discussion in the complex field of foreign affairs. If the department drops this case or fails to prove the charges in court, it will stand convicted of a hysterical attack upon its critics in an attempt to prepare the way for a drastic change in our foreign policy. That change can only be brought about in the atmosphere of a real scare so intense as to overcome the lesson taught the American people at Pearl Harbor.

I don't think Grew and Holmes and Dooman and their collaborators of the Scripps-Howard and the Hearst-Patterson-McConnick press will succeed in this plan. To play power politics in the Far East as they propose to play it would cost many American lives. It would cost American lives to encourage the Kuomintang to take more time off from the Japanese war to crush the Chinese reds. It would cost American lives to discourage the Soviet Union from entering the Far Eastern war as our ally. And it would cost American lives in another generation or two if we let the old red bogey deter us from so decisively defeating Japan and so completely transforming Japanese society as to make the rebirth of imperialism there impossible.

In the meantime FBI men have been moving into every department suspected of "leaks" critical of the new trends in official policy toward the Far East. The embassy at Chungking is being purged of men hostile to the anti-Yenan and soft-peace policy. There is good reason to believe that the Kuomintang secret service is cooperating in both Chungking and Washington by providing dossiers on American civilian and military officials suspected of "dangerous thoughts" on Far Eastern policy. I am told in Congressional circles that the Chinese embassy took a hand in the attempt to smear one reputable American official recently with the Civil Service Commission here; the intervention of a Republican Senator forced the commission to lay off. This dangerous drift in Far Eastern policy can only be stopped by the vigorous intervention of the White House and by public pressure on the White House for a shake-up in the Department of State and a full airing of the case against "the six."

The same crowd in Washington that appeased the Japanese before are out to save them now from full defeat, and for much the same reason—the old bulwark-against-you-know-what line.

AMG Plans for Japan

[The letter from which the following excerpts were taken was not intended for publication, but it is so pertinent to the subject discussed by I. F. Stone that we are printing it with the author's permission. His identity must obviously be concealed.]

DEAR SIR: Being among the officers training for the military government of Japan, I have read the comments of your columnist "Pacificus" on the Far East with considerable interest. I write now in particular reference to the article in which Eugene Dooman of the State Department was mentioned in a rather disparaging manner. Several of us here who have met and heard Mr. Dooman are in full accord with the opinion of Pacificus. Incidentally, I wonder if you have noticed the allusions to Dooman in James R. Young's book, "Behind the Rising Sun." These give adequate substantiation to the view you published.

Some of us here have become increasingly aware of the subtle trend our training has been taking. It is much too shortsighted, too exclusively interested in military expediency, and seems extremely one-sided about political matters. For instance, we are told time and again that the Zaibatsu [an opposition group of large industrialists] will be our sincere friends, that they have always opposed the military, and that we as military governors will find it expedient to control the Japanese economy through them. Such men as Kurt Bloch and Dooman have presented that point of view quite strongly. Frankly, I do not go along with them and I have many reasons for not doing so. To work through the Zaibatsu and intrust them with power would be to fall right into a trap being carefully constructed and baited for us. If we do fall, another Pacific war is entirely conceivable—not a cheerful thought! The Zaibatsu have given financial support to the various militaristic organizations. As an indication of the close cooperation between the Zaibatsu and military groups, there is the fact that just prior to the 1936 mutiny of the young army officers, the members of the larger Zaibatsu families were warned to leave Tokyo.

The suggestion of the Institute of Pacific Relations that the leading industrialists of Japan should be considered war criminals has not been officially mentioned to us. In fact, none of the findings of the Institute's Hot Springs conference have been officially discussed. Why? Because they suggested that we turn to certain liberal groups in Japan for political leadership? To judge by what we are told, all the Zaibatsu are anti-militaristic and more or less pro-American and always have been.

Incidentally, you might be interested in this statement made by Mr. Dooman at the school. He was asked what would be the attitude of the United States should the Communists threaten to take power in Japan. His reply was in effect that we would use methods similar to those employed by the British in Greece. I am not an advocate of communism for this country, far from it. However, it might be that some of the men under Okana, the leader of the Japanese Communists outside Japan, would prove invaluable in the move to give birth to a liberal Japan. In any event I fail to see good reason for the United States to meddle.

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