

IV THE DOMEI NEWS AGENCY

No propaganda can get along without facts. News is the basis of all political warfare, whether it is true, half-true, distorted, wholly invented, or completely suppressed. It is the material from which all propaganda edifices must be erected, and propagandists who disregard it soon find that nobody listens to them. No Government can convince its people that its own assessment and interpretation of the news, that is, of events inside and outside the country, is the only valid and trustworthy one, unless it controls the reporting of such events and makes sure that only those facts become known which it wants to be known, and that they become known in the most suitable version and in no other. The complete centralisation of news in a Government-controlled monopoly organisation is, therefore, the first prerequisite for all totalitarian political warfare. If the news gets out of hand, everything gets out of hand. Conversely, as long as the news is under control, much that is already out of control can for a time give the appearance of perfect order. The German and Italian dictatorships realised this from the start and, suppressing all private traffic, concentrated the coming and going of news in their own hands—the D.N.B. in Germany, and the Stefani Agency in Italy, examples which were soon followed by a number of minor European dictatorships. The Japanese realised this necessity comparatively late. When they became aware of it, they made a thorough job of it.

DOMEI TSUSHINSHA

“Domei Tsushinsha” (Domei News Agency), the official Japanese news agency to which frequent reference has already been made in preceding chapters, was founded on January 1, 1936. Before that date two closely competing agencies had existed, the “Shimbun Rengosha,” which was semi-official, and the “Nippon Dempo Tsushinsha,” which was a private organisation. The Government, anxious to establish control over the press, decided to put an end to “Nippon Dempo.” Under official auspices “Shimbun Rengosha,” leading Japanese newspaper interests, and the Broadcasting Corporation of Japan were, therefore, brought together to form a new powerful company, using the existing organisation and machinery of “Shimbun Rengosha” as its nucleus. This new organisation is the present “Domei.” Faced with so greatly strengthened a competitor, “Nippon Dempo” soon found it impossible to carry on, and on May 31, 1936, merged its domestic and overseas news branches with “Domei.” Almost all city and provincial papers previously connected with it joined the new combine on the same day. The advertising department of “Dempo” was, however, retained and merged with that of “Rengo,” forming the new “Nippon Dempo” Advertising Agency. As a consequence both “Domei” and “Dempo” are now under joint Government control and only outwardly separate organisations.

The "Domei Tsushinsha" as now constituted is a public company with a special charter, with the Government taking a controlling interest by holding a percentage of the shares. The amount of the Government subsidy is unknown, but that contributed to "Rengo" before the merger was about 300,000 yen a year, Domei's budget for 1938 was stated to be 6,000,000 yen, but it must have increased considerably since. The Government certainly contributes a substantial part of it, another heavy contributor towards its expenses being the Broadcasting Corporation of Japan. In the early stages of their continental conquests the Japanese experimented with independent news agencies in the occupied territories, such as the "Teikoku Tsushin" in Manchukuo, but these experiments were soon abandoned. The "Teikoku Tsushin" was amalgamated with Domei in 1937, and they now cover the Chinese field together.

Domei receives all its political directives from the Board of Information, and through it is directly answerable to the Prime Minister. The Editor-in-Chief of the Agency is Matsumoto, who is also a member of the Advisory Committee of ten to the Information Board.

DISTRIBUTION AND TRANSMISSION

Domei collects and distributes both home and foreign news. Its foreign news service, as supplied to the Japanese home press and to the press in the occupied territories, is supplemented by material obtained through an international exchange arrangement which existed between all big news agencies in the world, and which continues to operate between Domei and the Axis agencies. Its home news service Domei distributes not only among the Japanese home press and in the occupied territories, but also to foreign countries, again by means of the international exchange arrangement already mentioned. In addition Domei supplies, of course, a complete service of home and foreign news to the Broadcasting Corporation of Japan and to the Broadcasting Corporations in the occupied countries.

The headquarters of the agency are in Tokyo, and they supply the metropolitan press and the Broadcasting Corporation by mimeo-graphed sheets delivered by messengers between fourteen and twenty times a day. Tickers and teleprinters are not in use. Provincial papers are served by telephone and telegraph, and the Japanese Empire and overseas countries by Morse wireless. While Japan's provincial papers depend for their news supply almost wholly on Domei, the great Tokyo and Osaka newspapers in the past preferred to make as little use of Domei as possible and to rely largely on their own correspondents. Some of them used their own aeroplanes for fast coverage of news events while, on the other hand, the carrier pigeon is still frequently employed to cover sporting events or to transmit news reports over short distances. There also existed, before the war, a telephoto service for transmission of pictures from abroad or from points within Japan, Since the outbreak of war much of this private activity on the part of the great metropolitan newspapers has been curtailed, and with a large proportion of all news matter being, in any case, official or emanating from official quarters, even the large papers have gradually resigned themselves to being fed by Domei.

The press of the occupied areas is supplied through regional distribution centres of Domei, which have been set up in all important areas. These branch offices receive the Domei service by Morse, and redistribute it among their regional and local subscribers either

by Morse or by ordinary short-wave and medium-wave radio transmission. An instance is the Shonan (Singapore) bureau of Domei, which announced on June 21, 1943, that it would henceforth transmit a daily radio news service for reception by newspaper offices throughout the south-western area. Transmissions would be in Japanese and English, the latter language being allotted five transmissions a day.

The overseas news department of Domei operates a large number of different services, transmitted by Morse and using English and French. There are at least four different Domei services in English; one for the European Zone (which is also served in French), one for the American Zone, and two for the Pacific Zone, emanating from Tokyo and Batavia respectively. By virtue of pre-war arrangements national news agencies in foreign countries pick these up, select such items as they believe of interest to their subscribers and incorporate them in their own services, quoting their source. Conversely Domei receives the services of these same agencies and makes parallel use of them in Japan. With the outbreak of war many of these arrangements have naturally broken down; all the same the various parties to the former agreement continue to pick up each other's services and make such use of them as they wish. The British Reuter News Service continues to include a number of Domei items, clearly marked as such, and Domei still carries a number of Reuter messages each day which it finds profitable to bring to the knowledge of Japanese newspaper readers. In addition, there is of course a good deal of pirating going on which is inevitable in times of war. Domei naturally tries to take as much advantage as possible of the fact that its service continues to be received in enemy countries, and frequently includes items which are deliberately misleading, false reports which it is hoped will produce a reaction from the enemy camp which in turn may reveal valuable information, and general propaganda material which, if it manages to slip into the enemy press, may influence public opinion in hostile countries. In the same way Domei uses news from Allied sources in all sorts of unscrupulous ways designed to further Japanese ends, just as does everybody else in war.

Co-operation between Domei and the two German news agencies, D.N.B. and Transocean, is naturally very close. Domei receives both services through the German "Hellschreiber" transmission system, but does not use "Hellschreiber" itself. It is, however, under no obligation to quote these sources, and issues the material to subscribers as Domei items. This has been a source of perpetual annoyance to the Germans, who are naturally bent upon making their own propaganda in Japan, and are not particularly interested in assisting Japanese propaganda at the expense of their own publicity. It was in order to get round this obstacle and to establish direct contact with newspapers, without Domei as intermediary, that the Germans introduced their "Transocean" service in Japan in addition to D.N.B. They first approached the Japanese, several years ago, with a request for permission to supply D.N.B. direct to the newspapers, but Domei's reply was of course that, if this request were granted, all other agencies with whom Domei had exchange agreements would ask the same favour, and this was obviously impossible. If the Germans wanted to supply the Japanese press direct, they would have to do it in another way which would not upset the existing agreements. The Germans thereupon brought in "Transocean," which, by agreement with Domei, supplied mostly feature and article material and very little actual news. But this venture met with considerable suspicion and hostility on the part of the Japanese newspapers, the attempt soon broke down, and in order to get their material

published at all, the Germans had to fall back on the Domei organisation, which now distributes both services for them. As Domei retains the right of selection and can discard whatever it deems unsuitable or of no interest, the amount of official German propaganda released to the Japanese public remains at the discretion of the Japanese authorities. It is interesting to note that while German propaganda agencies have, of late, made increasing use of Domei material, in order to deflect their public's attention from Germany's own misfortunes, the Japanese have become increasingly wary of German material and try to get along with as little of it as possible.