

GOOD EVENING EVERYBODY:

It's a puzzling story that comes today from New London, Texas. The curtain rose on the sequel to the tragedy, the beginning of the inquiry by military court. The preliminary evidence presents a tale almost as bewildering as the tragedy itself. For, it turns out, the gas which provided the fuel in the Consolidated School House in New London was bootlegged gas. The school board, in order to save monthly fuel bills of a hundred and fifty dollars a month, had tapped a pipe line belonging to the Parade Gas Company, a company which does not seal its gas.

To most of the country this sounds utterly incredible, that an official body - a schoolboard - should deliberately tap

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a gas line to cut down its expenses a hundred and fifty dollars a month, two hundred at the most. This sensational admission was made first by a janitor at the school, Then ^{by} William C. Shaw, sixty-one year old superintendent of the school, who himself lost his seventeen year old son in the explosion, ^{He} went on the stand and admitted it. ^{Today's} ~~the~~ ^{said answers on the stand} ~~questioning reported in the~~ ~~proceedings~~ speak for ^{themselves:-} ~~itself~~ a grim, astounding story.

¶ Captain Coombes, Judge-Advocate of the Military Court, asked Mr. Shaw: "Who made the negotiations for taking this gas?"

Answer: "No one."

Question: "Did officials of the Parade Company whose line you tapped know of this?" Answer: "No."

Question: Did you discuss it at all with any officials of the Parade Company?" Answer: "No."

Question: "What did they say?" Answer: "They told me that if I connected with the company lines I'd be liable to be cut loose at any time."

Question: "Did they absolutely forbid you?"

Answer: "No. But they didn't tell me not to."

Question: "Then your understanding was that so long as you didn't get caught tapping the line, it was all right?"

Answer: "That's about the situation. They didn't give me permission, but they were not positively opposed."

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Question: "Was the subject discussed by the School Board?" Answer: "Yes."

Question: "Was anything said about the right or wrong of such an action or that it might be against the law?"

Answer: "We were a unit in deciding to make the connection. Five out of seven members of the Board were present."

From time to time, as he sat on the witness stand, Shaw passed his hand over his face, scarred where it had been struck by flying bits of metal and concrete from the explosion. His distress, his mental agony, was as obvious as it was natural. He winced as Captain Coombes obtained from him the admission that officials of the United Gas Company, the official company with a franchise to provide gas to the community, had warned him. In order to use bootleg gas, the Board had to have the United ~~Gas~~ Company's pipes disconnected. "You might

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get into trouble, they told me. You might be using dangerous gas." He also admitted that he had asked the United people to leave a skeleton connection in the school building in order to reconnect in case the Parade Company's foremen discovered that their line had been tapped.

The Judge-Advocate was about to ask more questions when the aged superintendent began to slump in his chair.

~~He~~
~~It was obviously~~ On the verge of collapse, ~~so~~ he was excused for the day.

To most people, outside ^{of} ~~out~~ Texas, ~~many details of~~ this story will be baffling. "Why should a school board, in order to save a hundred and fifty dollars a month, tap a gas line, the private property of a corporation with the intention of paying nothing for that gas? And why should that company be unwilling to sell its gas, especially to a school board? Why should officials of the gas company wink the other eye when they have every reason to believe that their line is about to be tapped?"

I thought this puzzle needed some explaining ^{ing} so

I called up a friend of mine, a woman who has lived in the Texas oil section. It turned out she used to live in New London a few blocks from the place where that explosion took place. Not only that but she taught as a substitute teacher in that ill-fated school.

What she told me reveals a weird and curious situation in those oil fields, an attitude peculiar to the conditions of the country. Nobody down there thinks anything of tapping a gas line. If you're caught, nothing happens except that you are disconnected and the foreman shakes a finger at you. Nobody thinks of prosecuting anybody, either a private individual or corporation, for tapping a gas line. As a matter of fact, there's so much of that gas that it's a positive nuisance. It costs the oil companies time, trouble and money to get rid of it. All over that region at night you'll see flares, openings in the ground or pipes with flames purging out just burning up the gas. So you're doing a company no harm if you tap its lines and get rid of some of that gas. At the same time, they cannot openly allow it, as that would be infringing upon the rights of the United Gas Company, the corporation which has the franchise to supply the community with fuel.

As an illustration of this attitude in the East Texas oil fields comes the testimony of another witness. That was E. W. Reagan, a member of the New London School Board. "Even churches," he said, "used bootleg gas, ^{and} ~~tapped~~ the pipe line of the Parade Gas Company. Captain Coombes asked him: "What churches?" And Mr. Reagan ^{named them,} ~~replied: "The Baptists and the Methodists."~~

Almost as dramatic was the story told on the witness stand by a school boy, miraculously a survivor ~~in~~ from the catastrophe. Young John Dow, a student in the manual training class, was ^within a few feet of the spark that lifted the roof off that school ~~xxx~~ building and destroyed four hundred and fifty lives. The manual training classroom, he said, was on the first floor, ~~of the building.~~ In the floor of that classroom a trap-door led to the sub-basement. It was a most modernly equipped place, fitted up with the last word in electric machinery. The switches that started and stopped the ^{mechanism} ~~machinery~~ were on a board directly by that trap door. The trap door was open.

Said young John Dow: "Professor Leo Butler, our

instructor, reached for the switch to turn on the sanding machine. The moment he threw the switch there was a spark, a flash. In that instant ~~he~~ I saw a big tongue of flame come out of that trap door." Leo Butler, the ^{manual} training instructor, was killed instantly. Young Dow was hurled to the floor, but not seriously injured.

~~Young Dow's~~ ^{The boy's} testimony confirms one theory about the cause of the explosion. That theory was that gas had accumulated in the sub-basement, ~~of the building.~~ As he told his story of ~~the~~ flame ~~he was~~ leaping from the trap door, a professor of chemistry, a civilian member of the board of inquiry, sat up in his chair and said: "That is the connecting link, the testimony we have been needing," *gas explosion in the basement,*

SUPREME COURT

(A new note in the Supreme Court controversy. The Court itself has spoken -- and through the mouth of none other than the Chief Justice, Charles Evans Hughes. And the declaration is:- "No." If you increase the number of justices in the country's highest tribunal, you will not make it more efficient, said he. And here are the Chief Justice's own words: "It would impair," said he, "that efficiency so long as the court acts as a unit.")

He goes on to explain: "There would be more judges to hear, more judges to confer, more judges to discuss, more judges to be convinced and to decide."

This is not merely the opinion of the Chief Justice alone or even of the so-called conservative majority. For here is what Mr. Hughes says about that: "On account of the shortness of time", he adds, "I have not been able to consult with the members of the court generally, but I am confident that it is in accord with the views of the justices." Then he adds this important explanation. "I have been able to consult with Justice Van Devanter and Justice Brandeis, and I am at liberty to say that the statement is approved by them."

Justice Van Devanter and Justice Brandeis have in many important decisions of the court been as opposite to one another as the North Pole to the South. Van Devanter, the conservative, the upholder of standfast traditions, and Brandeis, the liberal, once the active reformer.

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However, there's one vital point in the statement of the Chief Justice that we mustn't overlook. He confines his opinion strictly and rigidly to the question of efficiency. He refrained rigidly from any expression on the other phase of the problem. It's no secret that the President really wants the power of appointing additional justices in order to be sure to get enough new and younger justices who will be in accord with his own views so that the court won't knock out the laws which he considers necessary by declaring them unconstitutional. This issue the Chief Justice declines to discuss: said he:- "I have commented solely from the standpoint of efficiency and apart from any question of policy which I do not discuss."

All this was expressed in a letter to Senator Wheeler of Montana who had asked the Chief Justice's opinion. This

letter was read today to the Judiciary Committee of the Senate.

Never before in the history of the country has such a statement, any statement for that matter issued from the Supreme Court to the Congress of the United States. So the Honorable Charles Evans Hughes will go down in history as a breaker of tradition.

STRIKE

Slowly, but also it seems surely, the law has started to move in upon sit-down~~er~~ strikers in Detroit. It must be admitted that the law so far has achieved no sensational result in the enforcement of the order of the court. For the automobile workers are sitting pat, shouting defiance, repeating their threats of a general strike.

At the same time the Detroit police without violence have evicted the sitters from several small plants. One police raid was on a printing plant which had been occupied for eleven days. Fifty cops knocked on the door and were promptly admitted. The man who let them in said: "We've been waiting to surrender, some of the boys are pretty anxious to go home."

The United Automobile Workers applied to the City Fathers for a permit to stage a monster demonstration, a huge mass meeting tomorrow. The city council said no. Union organizer retorted: we are going to hold that mass meeting tomorrow afternoon at five o'clock in Cadillac Square, permission or no permission. It will be the largest of its kind in the history of Detroit, said he. At Lansing Governor Murphy, has been threatened with assassination. Governor Murphy laughed at the threats, and said: "That's all in the

day's work. I'm carrying on as before. Anyway, when was an Irishman unable to take care of himself?"

GERMANY

What we hear from Berlin today makes it look as though
^{Herr} Hitler's Nazi regime may soon be facing a twofold religious
fight. ~~On the one hand,~~ The Vatican, standing back of its
secular clergy in Germany, appears on the verge of an open
rupture with the Nazi Reich. On the other hand, the Fuehrer's
regime is in the throes of a bitter controversy with the
Protestants, the German Evangelical Church. It would be
historical, a sensational spectacle indeed, if we ever saw
Protestants and Romanists, Lutherans and Catholics, fighting
side by side in a kulture kampf against ^{one of the great powers.} ~~a German government.~~
The spirit of the Catholics was expressed by the Bishop of
Berlin, Count Konrad Preysing-Lichtenegg-Moos. "The Church will
fight for its rights," he declared.

On the part of the German government, ^{Reichs} Fuehrer Hitler
himself so far says nothing. But a high up official, a
prominent spokesman of the Nazis, gave out strong hints that
there'll be reprisals for that pastoral letter from Pope Pius
which was circulated throughout the Reich and read yesterday

from most Catholic pulpits. The immediate consequence, it was intimated, would be the denunciation of the Treaty, the Concordat between the Vatican and Berlin. One reference that it contained has been interpreted as an indirect but unmistakeable slap at the Reichsfuerher. Nor is this denied at the Vatican. The phrase reads:- "Anyone who attempted to replace God as the supreme religious being should be regarded as a senseless prophet of absurdity." So declares the Pope.

MUSSOLINI

When Mussolini went to Africa, it was news. Now he's on his way back to Rome. And that's news. It becomes a matter for grapevine speculation, because he has cut his African visit short. According to official schedule, he wasn't supposed to leave Tripoli for another two days. So the news of his departure from his north African colony comes with a dramatic suddenness.

What makes it a further subject for guesswork, is that all this breaks just after the world has learned that the Italian soldiers fighting for General Franco in Spain, have been sharply defeated. That, as a blot on the prestige of his elaborately built-up Italian army is more than enough provocation for the Dictator's haste to be back on the spot in Rome and find out for himself what's what.

Of course there's an official explanation for Mussolini's abrupt departure from Tripoli. A sandstorm prevented him from carrying out his plans for an airplane tour of the interior of Libya. The communique issued at Rome also denies scornfully that Premier Mussolini would think of cancelling any plans because of such a trifle as the Spanish Civil War.

NORMANDIE

This time of year usually provides blustery days on the North Atlantic, hardly adapted for ocean liner speed records. This Spring has been a ^{special} season of storm. Nevertheless the Normandie went ahead and did it. Today presents the facts precisely. The French queen of the seas made nearly 31 knots across the ocean -- 30.99 to be exact. It took her four ^{days} ~~hours~~ six minutes and 23 seconds to make the run from Ambrose ~~Lightship~~ Lightship to Bishop's Rock, Land's End, England, -- the first point of European land sighted on the northern route. This, the claim is, beats the record of the Queen Mary, and ^{once more} wins the blue ribbon for the French Line.

And I'd better set sail & make a few knots & s-l-u-t-m.

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