

# Thoughts on International Communication

By MITCHELL WOLFSON

(These excerpts are from the enlightening, but also entertaining, address at the May 4, 1959, Get-Together Luncheon of the Society at its Convention at Miami Beach. Mr. Wolfson gave a challenging address, "The Motion-Picture Industry," to the Society at its Hollywood Convention in April 1953 (May 1953 *Journal*, pp. 636-639). He is head of Wometco Television and Theatre Company. He speaks to the Society from a wealth of experience which has included the office of Mayor of Miami Beach from which he resigned to enlist in the U.S. Army in 1943; after service in England, Africa, France, Germany and Austria, he was discharged from the 6th Army Group at the end of the war as a lieutenant colonel.)

... As a native-born Floridian and a former Mayor of Miami Beach, I welcome you ... in a spirit of appreciation for the challenge you have accepted for the future. ... The theme of your Convention, "Films and Television for International Communication," poses both problems and possibilities. . . .

We may ponder this thought for a moment: We have reached a stage of technological development where only the radio signal, which includes television of course, when only this product of *your* development is capable of intercontinental travel which is faster than the world's weapons of destruction. We have increased our capability for destroying each other much faster than we have developed our ability to communicate with one another over the past decade.

It is fantastic to contemplate the catastrophe that could result in the trigger-happy world of today from just one simple blunder. . . . Can you imagine then the enormous value of having instruments by which the head of one state could be in immediate telecommunication with the head of another. To paraphrase an old proverb, here one picture might be worth 1000 ICBM's — and a hundred million lives. . . .

One of the items in your *Journal* in the last year was a map of the North Atlantic and Europe showing a plan for transatlantic television. . . . Actually, many of you probably believe that so far all this is just a scratching of the surface of the problem. . . .

There's a compelling fascination in the ideas with which you are working in automatic language translators. This is a project which should have not only the devoted attention you are giving it, but the attention of governments so that, through subsidy if necessary, it would have the dedicated effort of electronics experts everywhere . . . and we, the people of the world, would be assured of standardization from the outset. . . .

The word "ultimate" is one that has to be used with caution, but it would certainly come close to describing an efficient, dependable electronic language translator. . . .

I believe it would take perhaps a thousand years for all the peoples of the world to learn a common language. . . . A thousand years, and we don't even hope for that possibility. So you can see why I feel expansively encouraged at knowing that you are on the threshold of overcoming mankind's most frustrating and so far hopeless social inability to communicate our simplest and purest hopes and thoughts to all the different language speaking people of our world. . . .

If I seem to dwell on the language factor — the communication of ideas — rather than the physical establishment of an international television network, it is partly because I am not enough of an expert to get technical with you, though I have had some considerable experience in using your media to convey ideas; also, your own papers tell me that bridging the Atlantic with microwave relays, for example, can be accom-

plished with the greatest distance that has to be spanned only 290 miles. Just thirty miles south of Miami, at an elevation of almost zero, stand two 60-foot reflectors which comprise one end of a troposcatter relay which covers 185 miles . . . and which has been in successful operation since 1957, at Florida City just south of here. . . .

## *The Role of Motion Pictures*

There is no known yardstick to measure the value, both commercially and idealistically, of the communications the American motion picture has established with the peoples of the world. It was announced just a week or so ago that the annual world film gross of the eight major producers alone had reached \$590 million dollars. Of this amount, 310 million, or well over 50% of the studios' income, came from the foreign market. This is a tremendous acceptance from people who are not merely twirling a dial looking for something free, but who, by choice, are putting their hard-earned shillings, francs, marks, and lira on the counter.

This is a little recognized but extremely important tribute to American Democracy that is performed every day in the foreign countries reached by our films. You, and your predecessors, provided the technical excellence with which to tell a story, and it's to our everlasting national glory and gratification, that our purity of purpose — our intention only to entertain — has paid off so handsomely in supplemental benefits — not only to our economy, but to our national purposes and ideals as well. . . . American films are overwhelmingly preferred because they do the most honest job of entertaining; however, because they capture the attention of these people, the films also create an intense desire for American products. . . . People all over the world would still be scraping burned bread over the sink each morning if Hollywood hadn't sold them pop-up toasters. . . . It's small wonder that our Government is considering an increase of its support program for the showing of our films. . . .

But I don't want to dwell too long on the uses of the motion picture as an art form, as a political tool, and as a super-salesman. Your interest in motion pictures is as a science. . . .

In summing up my remarks on "Films and Television for International Communication" I would like to give you a comment which was made by Thomas Watson in *Forbes Magazine*: "With the proper flow of commerce across the borders of all countries, it is unnecessary for soldiers to march across those borders."

You people deal in scientific experiment — and as scientists, I salute you. But more than that, it is your work which will make possible the commerce that may prevent combat. Because you continue to bring the media closer and closer to perfection, you have created the two hottest merchandise movers in the world; and as you expand your services to reach greater numbers of the world's people, you will bring to all of us, to all mankind, an enrichment of both his purse and principles.

In closing, I would like to tell you of Albert Einstein's first comment after he had hit upon his profound equation,  $E=MC^2$ . He came downstairs in his sweatshirt and bedroom slippers and said, "Mama, I have a little new idea."

I can't exhort you gentlemen to come up with another  $E=MC^2$ . But your work is so terribly important that I do ask you, please, to come up with some little, little new ideas. The whole world is waiting to thank you.