

Spelling Out Words to Radio Listeners (Fall 1948): A Cryptic Reference Explained

*John Q. Barrett**

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When University of Pennsylvania Law School dean and former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts wrote at the end of September 1948 to his former colleague Justice Robert H. Jackson to invite him to speak at Penn, Jackson replied promptly and affirmatively, but with a curious caveat:

I would be very happy to come to the University of Pennsylvania and talk with your students and faculty, provided it can be done informally. I like to talk, as you know, if I can find an audience that will listen. There are certain kinds of speeches I am refusing to make, however: one is any kind of speech where they have a radio hook-up. My early education was defective and I can't spell very well, and when you have to talk to a radio audience by spelling out most of the words, as is the modern radio custom, it puts too much strain on me. So I have flatly refused anything that has a radio hook-up.¹

When I quoted that Jackson line in a previous Jackson List post,² readers expressed puzzlement. Two of their main queries are answered here:

Q. Was Justice Jackson really a terrible speller?

A. Not really. Robert Jackson did not, as he noted, have much formal higher education. After graduating from Frewsburg (NY) High School at age 17, he attended Jamestown (NY) High School for a post-graduate year but then never attended college and spent only one year in

* Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law, New York City, and Elizabeth S. Lenna Fellow, Robert H. Jackson Center, Jamestown, New York (www.roberthjackson.org). An earlier version of this text was posted to my Jackson Email List on December 4, 2009.

For a selected archive of Jackson List posts, see my homepage at www.law.stjohns.edu. To subscribe to the Jackson List, which does not display recipient identities or distribute their email addresses, send a note to barrettj@stjohns.edu.

¹ Robert H. Jackson to Honorable Owen J. Roberts, Oct. 5, 1948 (unsigned carbon copy), in Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. ("RHJL") Box 46, Folder 6.

² See John Q. Barrett, *Penn & Thanksgiving, 1948* (2009), available at www.stjohns.edu/academics/graduate/law/faculty/profiles/Barrett/JacksonList.sju.

law school. But Jackson was well-educated, including through the mentoring of teachers and senior lawyers and through his own voracious, wide and lifelong reading. His trail of handwriting contains regular spelling errors, but I don't think his error rate is extraordinary, especially given the speed and quantity of his writing—he did a lot of his thinking by moving a fountain pen across yellow legal pads.

Q. In fall 1948, what did spelling have to do with speaking on the radio?

A. Nothing, really (except on certain game shows). But the level at which one should properly address a radio audience was then a topic of much discussion.

Jackson signed and sent his curious comment to Owen Roberts on Monday, October 4, 1948. That day marked the start of the Supreme Court's new Term, but the country's attention really was focused on the impending presidential election. President Harry S. Truman, having served all but a few months of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's fourth term, now was seeking election in his own right. Truman's principal opponent, New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, was the Republican Party's nominee and was, according to all polls and virtually all commentators,³ sure to beat Truman (and the notable third and fourth party candidates, former Vice President Henry A. Wallace and South Carolina Governor J. Strom Thurmond).

But President Truman was going down swinging. In those fall weeks, he campaigned frenetically by whistle-stopping train across the country, delivering remarks that regularly were broadcast on the radio (as were his opponents' speeches). Late on the afternoon of Monday, September 27, 1948, for example, Truman spoke at Rebel Stadium in Dallas, Texas. (This was Truman's ninth extemporaneous speech of that day, and it was followed by three more addresses in Texas cities and towns

³ For just one example, which Jackson likely read, see Joseph Alsop, *Matter of Fact: Nothing Succeeds Like Success*, WASH. POST, Sept. 22, 1948, at 9 (reporting from Iowa on the campaigning there by President Truman and Governor Dewey that opened the fall campaign season, and including these observations: "The plain fact is that Truman has none of the stuff of political leadership about him, whereas Dewey possesses this queer, unanalyzed human chemical in increasing measure. Dewey in 1948 is a genuinely powerful figure, with genuine personal appeal to the masses of the voters.").

before his day was done.⁴) In his Dallas remarks, Truman lit into the Republican Party and its nominees:

The biggest lobby in the history of the country was at work in Washington the whole time that 80th Congress was in session, and they accomplished their purpose, that lobby did. You can't expect the Republican spokesmen to come out in the open and state clearly who it is the Republican Party is working for. They don't dare do that. You'd take them out and hang them if they did. That would be disastrous.

So in making their speeches they put them on a very high level, so high they are above discussing the specific and serious problems which confront the people.

Recent efforts have been made to throw up a smoke screen which they hope the American people cannot see through. Republican candidates are apparently trying to sing the American voters to sleep with a lullaby about unity in domestic affairs.⁵

The next morning's WASHINGTON POST, a paper that Jackson typically read, reported (and slightly overstated) the President's Dallas remark in this page one headline: *Truman Mocks Dewey for His Lofty Talks*.⁶ Jackson, when he dictated his letter back to Roberts less than week later, was somewhat mocking what press reports were portraying as Truman's desperate disparagement of the intelligence of American radio listeners. Roberts, reading Jackson's letter, got the joke—Roberts wrote back that he “was amused at [Jackson's] enumeration of the conditions on which [he] would talk to [Penn law] students.”⁷

On Tuesday, November 2, 1948, President Truman—and a lot of listeners with whom he had communicated, in person and through the radio, quite effectively—had the last laugh.

⁴ Transcripts of these Truman speeches are available on the Truman Library website. See www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/main.php?currYear=1948&currMonth=9&currDay=27.

⁵ President Harry S. Truman, Informal Remarks in Dallas, TX, Sept. 27, 1948, available at <http://trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/viewpapers.php?pid=1962>.

⁶ See Edward T. Folliard, *Truman Mocks Dewey for His Lofty Talks*, WASH. POST, Sept. 28, 1948, at 1. An image of this front page is attached at the end of this file.

⁷ Owen J. Roberts to Mr. Justice Jackson, Oct. 8, 1948 (original), in RHJL Box 46, Folder 6.

The Weather
 Today—Cloudy. High about 70. Some rain likely by night. Wednesday—rain likely. Yesterday—High 75 at 3:00 P. M. Low 45 at 5:30 A. M. Ragweed count, 6 grains.

The Washington Post

Have You Met "The Saint"?
 The famous modern Robin Hood of books, movies and radio now appears daily in The Post's columns.

NO. 26,402 WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1948 CARRIER DELIVERY PERMIT NO. 1054

Trial for Your Are Asked by Probers; 2 Scientists Included

House Group Says It Has So Far Only Scratched Surface on Spies

By Mary Spargo
 Post Reporter
 Spy trials for four persons were recommended yesterday by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in a 30-page report critical of the failure of the Justice Department to prosecute those the committee said were guilty of Communist espionage on atomic energy and related secrets.

The report, in which the committee said it has been so far only to "scratch the surface" of atomic spy activities in this country, recommended these legal actions:

1. Prosecution of Steve Nelson, Communist Party organizer in Pennsylvania, on charges of outright espionage, and citation of Nelson for contempt of Congress for refusing to answer committee questions.
2. Prosecution of Dr. Clarence B. Hickey, his former wife, Marie Hickey, and Dr. John H. Chapin on charges of conspiracy to commit espionage. Hickey and Chapin were atomic bomb project scientists during the war.

"Scientist X" Mentioned
 The committee accused the "late trio of conspirators" with Arthur Adams to pass along to Adams secret information on their Atomic Energy Act program of development of explosive derivatives of uranium. The report identified Adams as inactive spy. "Major X," Adams' presumed now to be in Russia.

Although it called for Dr. Chapin's prosecution along with the others, it called him a cooperative witness, and recorded his denial that he ever gave Adams any secrets.

The proposed prosecutions would be under the 1950 Espionage Act, which provides a maximum penalty of death or up to 30 years imprisonment.

It added that it may ask later for perjury charges against three others. The report also said Dr. Martin D. Kamen, now a professor at Washington University in St. Louis, "very definitely gave classified information to a Russian consulate official in San Francisco in 1945."

Adams Case Outlined
 One of the cases centered around Arthur Alexander, a Russian spy, whom the committee called "virtually a 'charter member' of Communist Party in the Soviet Union." Adams was in this country during the war and was "actively engaged in espionage activities for the Soviet government," the report said.

Adams "experienced considerable difficulty in the reporting of his 1944 Government agents found in his room 'highly secret information regarding the atomic bomb plant at Oak Ridge, Tenn.'"

Illinois Gets Presidential Check Tomorrow
 The voters of Illinois come under the Gallup-Poll's microscope tomorrow in the next pre-election report on presidential choices.

Army Solves Housing Problem

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Alger Hiss Sues Chambers On Red Charge

Former State Dept. Policy Maker Asks \$50,000 Damages
 By Edward F. Ryan
 Post Reporter
 Alger Hiss yesterday asked a Federal Court in Baltimore to make Whitaker Chambers pay him \$50,000 for saying "Alger Hiss was a Communist and may be now."

Hiss is a former top-level State Department policy maker, now head of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Chambers is an acknowledged former Communist underground courier, now a senior editor of Time magazine.

Chambers identified Hiss as a member, in the '30s, of a Communist underground ring. Hiss denied the charge through lengthy testimony this summer before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Hiss said he knew Chambers as a favor-seeking freelance writer.

Philadelphia Racket Trial Had to Join Union Before He Could Unload, Farmer Says
 Philadelphia, Sept. 27 (AP)—James W. Hughes, a farmer of Bamberg, S. C., today testified he was forced to join a union before he could unload a truckful of cucumbers here.

Hughes testified as the fifth day of the conspiracy trial of three individuals and three organizations in United States District Court. The trial is the result of a Department of Justice investigation into conditions in the produce market here.

Dewey Aims Peace Plea At Russians

Also Reminds Rulers Americans Close Ranks After Fight And Unite in Crisis
 By Robert C. Albright
 Post Reporter
 Seattle, Wash., Sept. 27.—Gov. Thomas E. Dewey to night, in effect, appealed to the Russian people, over the heads of Stalin and Molotov, for a peaceful solution of the Berlin crisis. He had a message for the "rulers," too. It was this:

Americans close ranks after every campaign and present a united front in every crisis. All day he pounded through Oregon and Washington, spreading pleas of reason for peace and power development to help wage the peace.

At Seattle tonight, he almost forgot to mention President Truman and their recent Western rodeo. He called again for prayers that "calmness prevail and the firm hand of justice" will peacefully resolve the United Nations showdown.

Without mentioning Stalin, Molotov or the Russian people by name, he told the Seattle audience: "Whatever some leaders may do, I am convinced that the people of all nations desire peace."

Returning to the Oregon setting of his May 21 primary campaign, then driving northwest to Washington, he spelled out at nearly every stop his idea of "peace through economic development. Everywhere his pledge of rapid expansion of power resources "would speed our own unity and desire for peace."

Truman Mocks Dewey for His Lofty Talks

By Edward T. Follard
 Bonham, Tex., Sept. 27.—President Truman took a come-out-and-meet today in Bonham, Texas. Thomas E. Dewey for his "high-level" talks about "home and industry" and "peace."

He said it was a smoke screen to cover up a Republican "surfer" on the job and "with in" industry. He said that it was "allergy" to put American voters to sleep.

Mr. Truman's journey through the heart of the Lone Star State today was a triumph for the Democrats. The crowds were big and friendly all along the line.

Wholesale Prices Dip to Lowest Since July, 1947
 New York, Sept. 27 (AP)—Wholesale commodity prices measured by the Associated Press index today touched their lowest level since July, 1947.

Senator Bushfield Is Dead of Stroke
 Senator Harlan Bushfield (R., S. Dak.) died yesterday in a hospital here after a long illness.

Russia Alone to Blame if War Comes, Bevin Accuses Soviet of Duplicitous

Under the rules of procedure of the 58-nation Assembly, its steering committee could decide to put Berlin on the agenda at any time during the present 10 or 12 weeks' session in Paris.

West's Protest On Blockade of Berlin May Go To Council Today

By Walter Kerr
 Paris, Sept. 27 (NYHT)—The three Western powers worked this afternoon on the text of their appeal to the Security Council of the United Nations and their complaint that Soviet action in the Berlin crisis constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Further secret negotiation with the Soviet government appeared futile when the Russians not only rejected the Western demand that it allow a "full-in" fill-in on Berlin, but demanded continued discussion but demanded intensified Russian control of air communications, then driving northwest to Washington, he spelled out at nearly every stop his idea of "peace through economic development."

On this basis the West broke off talks with the Soviet government on July 30 and 1 a statement throwing responsibility on the Kremlin for the blockade of Berlin.

World Bank Britain Urges Chiefs Weigh Bernadotte's Program Delay Plan in U. N.
 Effects of Unrest Discussed by Cripps, Truman, Wang Yun-wu

By John W. Ball
 The extent to which the world's recovery from World War II has been delayed by the ever-recurring international crises was emphasized at the first plenary session of the third annual meeting of the governors of the International Bank and of the International Monetary Fund yesterday.

A message from President Truman, read to the meeting by Secretary of the Treasury Snyder, made mention of it. Minister Wang Yun-wu, president of the boards of governors of both the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and of the Monetary Fund, emphasized it. So did Sir Stafford Cripps, governor for the United Kingdom.

"Two years ago," Mr. Truman's message read, "when the world was realizing in Washington that the Fund and the Bank had completed the organizational phase of their work, but were just about to start active operations."

"In this period of time the fund and the bank have made notable progress toward attaining their objectives. Federal aid has been provided under conditions which were not entirely favorable to their realization. Their achievements ever greater. But, much remains to be done."

"Conditions of world finance are more favorable than they were at the Bretton Woods Conference. It was true then as it is now, and it is hoped that the world will prosper throughout the years of the Marshall Plan."

Hunter Wounded By Father After 'Squirrel Bark'
 Wolfson, Md., Sept. 27 (AP)—Wesley Swope, Jr., was too realistic when he barked like a squirrel today. His father shot him.

Senator Bushfield Is Dead of Stroke
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