TO: Mr. Elmer Davis
FROM: Arthur Sweetser
SUBJECT: A magnificent opportunity exists for starting the UNEC Conference off with a very friendly press and a favorable public opinion.

One of the first, and sometimes one of the most troublesome problems at international conferences is that of publicity and public sessions. The way this problem is handled sets the first pattern of public reaction to the meeting.

The Atlantic City Conference is in a somewhat special category in this regard. It is, of course, the complete opposite of the Quebec Conference, which was essentially military and hence secret. It is also different from the Hot Springs Conference, which was purely organizational and preliminary and for the purpose of trying to draft an agreement such as already signed for UNEC.

More important than all this, however, is that the Conference will deal with one of the world's greatest human tragedies and is dependent as is no other conference on reaching peoples' hearts. Indeed, if it does not, people are very unlikely to make the sacrifices necessary. If, on the other hand, the story is known and understood, people will almost certainly react generously towards it.

It is suggested, therefore, that the first sessions should be plenary sessions and open to the world's press. Later sessions can be executive, private, or divided in committees—it makes very little difference which.

This is in accord with practice in conferences connected with permanent agencies. The World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, infinitely more explosive than the Atlantic City Conference, held its general sessions and many of its committees in public. Similarly, the World Economic Conference in London opened with a series of public plenary sessions, where the various nations expressed their views, split them into private committees which the press largely ignored, and then reconvened in public session to adopt the final reports.

Give the press a few days public sessions to set the picture, let them see the broad issues and objectives, and they are perfectly reasonable about
subsequent business sessions, particularly if they know the results are coming back for review and adoption. Many, indeed, would be satisfied in this way and drift away, leaving the interim period to the agencies.

Close the conference, however, and the journalists become suspicious, resentful, and the prey to rumors which cannot be checked. Instinctively, they set themselves against the conference rather than for it.

If this policy of a series of open plenary sessions be adopted, it is suggested that it be carried out in a big and generous way in order to draw the full benefit from it. Nothing is more foolish than to end by giving the press what it wants, but only after a bitter battle which poisons public relations and averts public attention from substance.

The best way of carrying out this policy would seem to be for Governor Lehman, immediately after his acceptance speech, to ask to speak again on this particular point. He could point out that this is always one of the first questions to arise in the conference, that he necessarily had given some thought to it, that he felt the conference was in a somewhat distinct position of its own, owing both to the nature of its subject and the formal character of the organization, and that therefore, he would venture to suggest that the conference continue in plenary public sessions at which the press would be cordially welcome. Such meetings might continue during the time of the various nations were expressing their viewpoints and for the general outlining of the problems to be met. Subsequently, the conference would probably want to divide its work amongst the committees which would be working committees and hence private and which would subsequently report their findings to the full conference for adoption. At the same time, the conference would always reserve the right to go into executive session whenever necessary.

If it were possible to do something like this, I am sure that it would get the conference off to a better start than anything else that could be suggested.