

## PSYCHOLOGY

# Why Read Newspapers?

People want the news, they like to read, and some turn to it as an escape from boredom, interviews with people deprived of newspapers during a strike showed.

► IT IS the news that people miss when they fail to get their regular daily newspaper. And they miss it intensely.

In an effort to look behind this statement and get at the unconscious or basic psychological reasons why people read the newspaper, the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, conducted lengthy interviews with 60 people, a cross section of the different economic strata in Manhattan. The interviews were conducted during the strike of newspaper deliverymen in New York City which deprived the average New Yorker of his paper.

Results are reported in a new book by Drs. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, professor of sociology at Columbia University, and Frank N. Stanton, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, on COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH 1948-1949 (Harper).

Although almost all those interviewed said that they missed the paper because they wanted to be informed about what was going on in the world, only about a third could name a serious news event

which they wanted to follow up. Most of these mentioned the Far Eastern war. Half failed to name any news event on which they wanted the latest information. Others mentioned the then current murder case.

Many people, it was revealed, read the newspaper regularly because they like to read. When deprived of the newspaper, they would fall back on almost anything at hand—old magazines, even books. But the newspaper is preferred as a source of reading matter because it is most accessible, because it is cheap, and because the reading matter is divided into small units or capsules for easy consumption.

Some people read for escape from the boredom and worry of personal life. "When you read it takes your mind off other things," was a comment made during the interviews. The newspaper is particularly effective because of the variety and richness of its human interest content and because it is easily obtained. It is better for many than a mystery story because reading the newspaper does not cause any pricks of conscience. You tell

yourself that you need to be informed.

For some people the newspaper is a tool for daily living. These are the people that turn immediately to the news of arrival of buyers or the shipping news. Several women follow the advertisements closely in order to plan their household buying. A couple of women said they follow the obituary notices and were afraid that acquaintances might die without their knowing it. Some missed the weather forecast.

Another group of readers use the newspaper to make them appear informed in social gatherings—for its conversational value.

One comment on missing the paper was: "Not that I am uneasy about what's happening but I like to know about the country so when people ask you questions you don't feel dumb and silly."

Some read the paper, it was found, in order to be brought into indirect personal contact with other people, especially distinguished persons. Such readers follow the gossip columns and the society pages. They read the personal advice columns in order to know the problems of other people and compare them with their own. They like the human interest stories.

For some, reading the newspaper is almost a compulsion or a ritual. They read their newspapers at a particular time of the day, during breakfast, while traveling to work, before bedtime, and when the paper was missing they felt lost, could not sleep, felt out of place on the subway.

One man said, "I don't know what I am missing—and when I don't know I worry." Others reported that they felt "cut off," but worried because "things go on whether you know or not."

Such people missed the paper more the longer they were deprived of it, instead of getting accustomed to its absence.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1949



**WORLD'S BRIGHTEST LIGHT**—This is one of the three billion peak candlepower krypton lights being prepared for service at the Cleveland Municipal Airport.

## ENGINEERING

## New Lighting System Will Speed Air Cargo Service

► AIR CARGO service on the heavily used freight route between Cleveland and Newark, N. J., will be able to operate in spite of bad weather with a 1,650-foot-long row of the world's brightest lights just installed at the Cleveland airport. The key of the system is a series of krypton lights, able to penetrate fog for at least 1,000 feet.

These krypton lamps, developed by Westinghouse Electric Corporation, have already been tested there and at America's foggiest airfield at Arcata, Calif. They have also been tested in Germany to help pilots on the Berlin airlift. Krypton is a rare gas obtained from the atmosphere which permits a greater brilliancy than the widely used atmospheric rare gases, neon and argon. Each of the krypton lights installed in Cleveland has a flash brilliance of some 3,000,000 candlepower.

In the installation, 11 krypton lamps al-