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BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST IN COLD WAR MOSCOW

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PROCEEDINGS

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. In Assignment Russia: Becoming a Foreign Correspondent in the Crucible of the Cold War, award winning journalist Marvin Kalb tells the story of how, as a young reporter and student of Russia, he was present not only at the creation of a new way of bringing news immediately to the public but also doing so in the midst of cold war tensions between Eisenhower's America and Khrushchev's Soviet Union.

In this episode Brookings Institution Press Director Bill Finan interviews Kalb about his new book. The second volume of his memoir is published by Brookings. Also in this episode David Wessel, Senior Fellow and Director of the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy at Brookings discusses what a postpandemic economic recovery could look like in terms of GDP growth and job gains. This is not going to be another jobless recovery, Wessel says.

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First up, here's Wessel's Economic Update.

WESSEL: I'm David Wessel and this is my economic update. Most economic forecasters expect very strong GDP growth in 2021 as the 1.9 trillion dollar American Rescue Plan works its way through the economy and more people are vaccinated. The consensus is that real GDP will increase by about six percent between the fourth quarters of 2020 and 2021.

If that's right, output by the end of 2021 will be about to the level it would have been had the pandemic not occurred. This is not going to be another jobless recovery. If those GDP forecasts are accurate, my colleagues Louise Sheiner and Gian Maria Milesi-Ferretti, estimate

that monthly payroll gains over the next 10 months will average between 700,000 and 1 million jobs a month. That's huge, faster than ever before seen in the U.S on a sustained basis. And a lot more jobs than many private forecasters anticipate, even those who do see strong GDP growth this year.

What's going on? Importantly, the COVID-19 recession was unlike any previous recession. The government put the economy into a medically induced coma. Stores shut, ballgames were canceled, offices were closed, the U.S. lost 11 million jobs between February 2020 and February 2021. Many more than one would have anticipated based on past episodes of declining GDP. The lost jobs were disproportionately low wage, relatively low GDP per worker.

The post road COVID recovery will be different as well. Jobs are likely to return much more rapidly than they usually do when an economy rebounds from recession. Here's how to think about it. If, by the end of this year, the economy is right back where it would have been had there been no pandemic, we need to add 1.15 million jobs a month on average over the next 10 months. But that's not going to happen.

The postpandemic economy will be different from the prepandemic one. Some jobs lost may be lost for good because firms have automated or learned new ways to operate, more Zoom calls, fewer business trips, less business for hotels, fewer jobs in the hotels. Some jobs may take longer to return, particularly if health related restrictions remain in place for the whole year. And it may take time for offices to reopen and rehire even when it is safe to do so.

So not all the increase in GDP is likely to come from the reopening of these suppressed sectors of the economy. Some of it will reflect a more broad based increase in demand stemming from that very large fiscal stimulus that Congress approved.

If this had been a recession like all the other ones in the past, and a recovery produced six

percent growth this year, historical experience suggests we'd be adding 460,000 a month. That would mean that less than half the jobs lost as a result of the pandemic would be recovered by the end of the year.

Okay, so what will determine whether at the high end or the low end of the range? Basically it depends on how much of the rebound is reversing the effects of the pandemic? How many school custodians and bus drivers are rehired as schools open? How many restaurants hire wait people as they fill their tables? How many offices actually reopen? Versus how much of the rebound comes from people using their stimulus checks to buy new refrigerators or cars or TV sets or computers? Which amounts to a lot of GDP but many fewer workers, particularly American workers.

So is this huge job boom guaranteed? Of course not. For one thing, I'm assuming that the consensus GDP forecast is correct, six percent or more GDP growth this year. If social distancing remains in place, if there's another wave of lockdowns, maybe the variants don't work against the viruses, or if many people are reluctant to get the viruses, or even those people who get the viruses don't feel comfortable going out and about, the recovery will be slower. Less GDP growth, and especially less employment growth.

But even if the GDP grows as we forecast, we can't really be sure how consumers and businesses will behave, we've never done anything like this before. Still, all signs point to a hiring boom this year. This is not going to be another jobless recovery.

DEWS: You can listen to more of Wessel's Economic Update on our SoundCloud channel, soundcloud.com/brookings-institution. And now here's Bill Finan's interview with Marvin Kalb on his new book, *Assignment Russia*.

FINAN: Fred, thank you. Marvin, good to talk to you again.

KALB: My pleasure.

FINAN: Your new book is *Assignment Russia: Becoming a Foreign Correspondent in the Crucible of the Cold War*. It's the second volume of your memoir, the first is *The Year I was Peter the Great*. And although you don't need to read the first volume, but I would tell everyone please do because it's a beautiful book, as this one is too. At the end of *The Year I was Peter the Great* there's an enormously important episode that occurs that sets the stage for this book. Marvin, can you briefly describe that episode that you have at the end of *Peter the Great*?

KALB: Yeah, that was that time that Ed Murrow, who was my idol, did a broadcast every night on CBS at 7:45, and in the Kalb household we all sort of stopped whatever we were doing to listen to it. I'd never met the man but he was, as I said, an idol. And I had written an article for the *New York Times* about Soviet youth.

He liked it, read it, and on a Monday morning called me -- I was at Widener Library doing some research, and the librarian came over to me and she said, Marvin, there's a man on the phone who'd like to talk to you, he says he's Edward R. Murrow. I had never met Murrow. The idea of Murrow calling me I could not imagine. And I told her why don't you hang up on the guy, he's probably some wise guy.

And I don't know if she actually hung up but she walked away. I continued my work and then later in the afternoon she came back and said, you know, that same man is on the phone again and he does sound like Murrow, would you please answer it. So I picked up the phone and when I heard his voice I realized what a fool I had been. Of course it was Murrow, he wanted to talk to me about the article I had written for the *Times*. He invited me to come down to CBS the following morning and to be there at 9:00 o'clock.

I was thrilled, absolutely thrilled. I took a late train from Boston, went on down to New

York. Stayed overnight with my parents who lived there. And then got to his office well before nine. The secretary said this is going to run only a half hour because he's very busy. I said yes, ma'am.

The meeting between the two of us ran three hours. Murrow was incredibly curious about every aspect of Russia. He acted as if he were an eager graduate student and I performed as if I were a very eager young Harvard professor. And when it was all over he put his arm around my shoulder and he said that was terrific. How would you like to join CBS and work with us? Wow.

That was the thrill of my life at that point. It took me about three or four seconds to say yes, sir. And that was my introduction to CBS and to Murrow.

FINAN: And here we are in the second volume, where you were actually at CBS news, and you begin with your first day, or shall I put it your first night there. You're back in New York. You're a writer for the morning news show. And it was such a beautiful -- beautiful description of what it's like to be new on the job, doing something you've never done before, but being asked to do it, and trying to figure out how to do it. Can you relate that episode for us?

KALB: Yeah, what's wonderful about that night as I look back upon it -- I arrive there at exactly midnight, I was to be there from midnight until 8:00 a.m. in the morning. I had in my mind, because I was just hired by Edward R. Murrow, for God's sake -- I was thinking of CBS as a bustling huge news operation. I'd walk into a newsroom crowded with people. They would all be yelling at one another. The ticker tape machines would be blasting forth the news. Producers would be shouting for their copy.

What I found as I entered at midnight was absolute silence. And there is nothing more silent than a newsroom in the dead of night with no one there. It was totally unexpected, nothing like what I had imagined. And I sat there not knowing what to do. Because when they hired me

they never asked me whether I could write a radio newscast. Never done it in my life. I was expecting to be a professor of Russian history, not a reporter.

And here I was nevertheless with that responsibility. I was hoping somebody would show up and talk to me. No one did until about 4:30 in the morning, and the first broadcast was at 5:00. And I was very much, I think, like my mother. I kept worrying, my God, maybe the editor has a cold, maybe he fell. Who's going to read this broadcast?

I didn't know what was going on until this rather cheerful fellow walked in wearing a Yankee baseball cap. His name was Hal Turkel and he look at me and he said you're probably Kalb. I said yes, sir, and you? He said I'm Hal Turkel, I'm your editor. Well, relief, of course. I had written a script. I was hoping it would be what he would approve of. I gave him my script, he read it and then with about 10 minutes to go before the hour he put it aside. Put fresh paper in his typewriter, typed a whole new script.

I felt at that point that I had failed and I was not going to be at this job for very long. A man came in at about two minutes to five. He picked up the script that Hal Turkel had written, not mine, went inside the Broadcast Studio 9, read it. It sounded magnificent. Sounded like what I had imagined CBS to be like.

When it was over I must have looked like a fallen person completely. Turkel came over to me, put his arm around me, he said, Marvin, it's clear you can write, but what you can't write is a newscast. Now let me explain something to you. And then he explained what it was like to be a listener of a 5:00 o'clock newscast. What is it that you would want? Would you want a story about people who died in India, which is what you've led with? Or would you like a story about something going on in New York, which is where we live?

And I suddenly realized the difference between local and network, and he asked me to

write the weather and the sports part at the end of the broadcast, which I was delighted to do. And the third of the four broadcasts, he looked at me and said, why don't you write it yourself, which I did. And the same guy came in and he read it. It wasn't as good as Turkel's but I was beginning to get a sense of what it was like, and it was thrilling, truly thrilling. I was up and then down and then up again.

FINAN: And the thrills continue, in many ways, to the point where you're writing scripts for Edward R. Murrow himself. The driving narrative in the book, in the first half or so is that you want to get back to Russia. You have been in Russia earlier on, that's the story of *The Year I was Peter the Great*. Have come back and you want to become Moscow correspondent. What motivated you to want to be back to Russia to be a correspondent for a news program in Moscow?

KALB: Well, Bill, one of the things that I had spent the better part of my "adult life" doing was studying Russia, studying the Soviet Union in the midst of the cold war. We were at a very deadly time then, two super powers, each armed with nuclear weapons, each determined to block the ambition of the other to sort of dominate the world. I don't know that we were interested in dominating the world but it must have looked that way to the Russians. And it certainly looked to us as if, spurred on by the communist ideology, Stalin and the Russians were seeking to dominate the world and we didn't want that.

And I was fascinated -- my brother was the one who told me that if I was to ever become a journalist you had to have a story that was interesting. And Russia was that kind of story because I was interested in the cold war, my parents had both come from what had been the tsarist empire before it went communist in 1917. So I was sort of connected to the story --

FINAN: Uh-huh.

KALB: -- but only intellectually, not really emotionally.

And intellectually, when I was in the army, in army intelligence, I served in a capacity to look into the communist world. I had top secret clearance. When they needed somebody in Moscow in 1956 I had the clearance and the background and they sent me, and I learned a lot. And I got a good part of my PhD dissertation finished when I was there.

And that's what I came home to do at Harvard, fully expecting that. So I was absorbed in it and then when Murrow invited me to join CBS, the two came together. They were married in a sense. My desire to go back to Russia as a CBS correspondent because I felt as if I knew the story and Murrow seemed interested in sending someone who was not a professional journalist, but someone who could become a journalist, but someone who already knew the story, knew about Russia. And I sort of fit in to his plans and I was thrilled to be the one selected to go.

FINAN: And it does happen and you're in Moscow and it's 1960 when you arrive?

KALB: Yes. May of 1960.

FINAN: Yes.

KALB: And, by the way, Bill, that was the time that CBS wanted me to go to Paris before I got to Russia because in Paris there was to be a summit meeting where the subject was Berlin. And I was there to cover Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union, and Khrushchev arrived on a Saturday. The meeting was to open on Monday morning and they wondered what I would do on Sunday. And I came up with the idea that Khrushchev generally, when he was in a foreign country, would go for an early morning walk. And so I suggested to the boss who was there at the time, give me a crew and let me go to the Soviet embassy. I'll be there at 6:00 a.m. Let's see if he comes out. If he does we've got an exclusive. If he doesn't then we've sort of wasted the time of the crew.

My boss was not that interested but my colleagues, wonderful CBS reporters, based all over Europe, thought it was a terrific idea. I went there and lo and behold, at exactly 7:00, the doors of the Soviet embassy opened, Khrushchev and two security guys walked out. He saw me, I saw him, and he looked at me and he said, ach, here comes Peter the Great. Going back to what happened in 1956.

FINAN: Yes.

KALB: I was thrilled that he remembered me and he did. We walked down the block and past a boulangerie, a place of the magnificent odors, aromas I should say, of baked goods, and they were fantastic. I stopped in front. I said, Chairman, have you ever tasted a brioche, have you ever tasted a croissant. He said no, does it taste good? I said delicious. I went in and I bought a bunch of them for his security people, for him, and for me and our team. And I watched his face as he ate a croissant and it burst into Slavic joy. He loved it.

And I then proceeded to interview him, an exclusive interview about Berlin, about whether we were going to have a summit or not, and it was a feather in my cap. It was pot luck, but it was putting together what I sort of knew about Russia, and knew about him. And it was very much to the benefit of CBS. It was a wonderful experience.

FINAN: One of the delights of the book is these exquisite moments like that you just related. These episodes where talent, skill, and luck all come together to capture a moment. There are two things in the book that I come away with. One, you were at the very forefront of the beginning of broadcast television, a broadcast television correspondent in a foreign country. What then is so different from what is now being a correspondent?

KALB: Well, the difference then, Bill, is that we were really starting. We did not know exactly how the technology was going to function. They gave me a two-week course on how to

use a camera. I had no idea how to use a camera. They gave me a two-week course, the same two weeks, about how to write a radio broadcast as distinct from a writing assignment. In other words, if you were writing a book, that's one way to use the language. If you're writing a radio broadcast you have to write it in a different style. If you're doing television it's yet another style.

And we were all learning. It was new to all of us. Murrow had it instinctively. I did not. I had to learn it, but learned it well enough so that it was able to be used in a professional way. We were thrilled, I think all of us, as we entered the world of television news. Radio news was the key thing. There were great names, Eric Sevareid, Howard K. Smith, Richard C. Hottelet, Douglas Edwards, Robert Trout -- they were great people known to the American audience on radio who suddenly were being introduced to them on television.

And for me, I had to take my own photographs in Russia and send them to New York. It was very hard to get it out of the country, the Russians wouldn't let you just take a photograph and send it out. It had to be processed in Russia. But if you did that, the Russians had total censorship control over what you did. So it was two worlds, sort of the world of reality and the world of a new business like radio and television news. It was exciting. We knew it was new, but we didn't know that we could yet do it, and do it in a satisfactory way.

FINAN: Something else that comes through for me too is this very portrait of what it was like to live at the height of the cold war in communist Russia at that time. And the bureaucracy you had to face. The censorship that could have been imposed at any moment. The wiles it took to get material out of the country back to the United States. All are told in great colorful detail. But there's one theme amidst this theme that comes through and that's the story of your bed, which I think illustrates so much about what it was like to live in a bureaucratic state.

KALB: Thank you, Bill, for raising that. When my wife and I got to Russia we were put

in a very small bedroom at the Metropole Hotel. The bed was 5 foot 10 inches in length and about four and a half feet wide. I am, or was anyway, in that time, 6 foot 3 inches tall. I didn't fit into the bed. I could not sleep. I'd get an hour or two a night and that was about it.

And then I wanted so much to do a good job and had to be alert and sharp and all of that. And I argued day after day with the people who ran the hotel, could you please give me a larger bed. And this went on day after day, and they kept on saying no. And I got terribly frustrated at one point in early June of 1960, and I sent a note to my boss in New York, a guy named Ralph Paskman, who was the foreign editor.

And a said, Ralph, I know you're not going to go for this thing but I have to have my bed. I've got to have my bed that I had at home. It's in South Orange, New Jersey. You've got to get it for me or I can't sleep in this place. I think it's horrible. I did not in a million years imagine that Ralph Paskman, who was such a tough guy, really, who was made of steel. He never yielded on anything. You were always wrong and he was always right. So I thought he would simply throw out my plaintive letter.

And much to my surprise I got a Western Union telegram from New York saying that Ralph Paskman has sent me my bed, my six and a half foot bed from South Orange to Moscow. And just imagine, Bill, living in that tight communist environment, and suddenly in customs you have to explain that your boss sent your bed right here to me in Moscow so I'd get a night's sleep.

I thought that was one of the nicest things Paskman could ever do. And is an illustration, by the way, of how foreign correspondents were dealt with by the New York home office. They were dealt with, with not only respect, but a kind of fear. These guys were our voice, they were our image in a foreign country like Russia. And we had to treat them in the best way possible. That would never ever happen today. Today New York would say, don't sleep, that's not our

problem. That's your problem. You can sleep or not. That's tough.

FINAN: Wow, big difference. At the beginning of the book you call it a long letter home and in many ways it is that. But --

KALB: Yes.

FINAN: -- you recently said to me something about the book that comes through when you read it too. It's a story of a child of immigrants who did well. And what you said when you mentioned that to me, you said so eloquently, and it was so affecting.

KALB: Well, Bill, let me try to explain it this way. My father was a tailor. My mother was the woman, on whom we all depended, did everything at home. My father was a very, very hard working man who was born in a small town in Poland. Came to this country in 1914, just before the outbreak of World War I.

He was sent to this country by his mother, who felt that if she did not send him out of this town called Girardof (phonetic), in Poland, he would undoubtedly be put into the tsar's army and be killed almost on the first day. She was determined to get him out. Somehow he got to America, I'm still not quite sure how a 15-year-old kid traveling by himself, not speaking English, gets to this country, and yet through a program called the Galveston Experiment, he arrived not in New York but in Galveston, Texas.

Where they received him kindly and directed him to a job where as a tailor he could earn a living. They sent him first to St. Louis and a place called Rock Island, Illinois, then Chicago, and then New York. He loved this country. One of the things that stayed with me, and has all of my life, is that I didn't have to have a father who was a Yale educated lawyer to get me the job as CBS's Moscow correspondent in the middle of the cold war. I did that myself.

Because America had opened its doors to my parents and made it possible for me to do

what I have accomplished here. And so I always have that image of what America could be and I have that image with me right now at a time of trouble about what America could yet be. I hope that that will happen.

FINAN: I hope, and all our hopes, too. Another hope we have is that you're at work on a third volume of your memoir, too.

KALB: Oh, you can count on that, Bill.

FINAN: Perfect. Marvin, thank you for coming by to talk about this new second volume, *Assignment Russia*. Thanks.

DEWS: You can preorder Marvin Kalb's new book, *Assignment Russia*, publishing by the Brookings Institution Press in April, wherever you like to buy books.

A team of amazing colleagues helps make the Brookings Cafeteria possible. My thanks to audio engineer Gaston Reboredo; to Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings Institution Press who does the book interviews; to my communications colleagues Marie Wilken, Adrianna Pita, and Chris McKenna for their collaboration. And finally, to Camilo Ramirez and Andrea Risotto for their guidance and support. Our podcast intern this semester is David Greenburg.

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.

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