

government and the press

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Rex Winsbury
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...which ...
...breath test ...
...at the police station also ...
...positive.

The court was told that Mr Read's
alcohol level was 113 milligrams of
alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood.
But the charge of driving with more
than the legal limit of alcohol was
dismissed by the magistrates.

His defence—drink

Chief Superintendent Burton of
Basingstoke police said yesterday: 'I
believe we were acting within our
rights. We carried out tests on Mr
Read because we had evidence of
drinking—not just because there had
been an accident. When the officers
arrived at the home Mr Read made
a statement saying he had not been
drinking at all. We knew nothing
about the drinks he had taken in his
house.'

John Clarke, the solicitor who
represented Mr Read, said: 'At first
the police evidence
showed that the car was locked
at the time Mr Read
was arrested. It shows that
his rights—
they

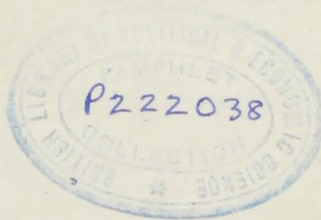
...out
...Roar
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...land and Wa
...drizzle today.

A 'Met' of
Weather Bureau
said we have
some days.
But the cha
began too late
for five years
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government and the press

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this pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as worthy of consideration within the Labour movement. Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SW1.
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1. introduction

Does it matter if several mass-circulation national newspapers close down? And if it does, what should be done about it? These questions are not new. But they are urgent. Ever since the now infamous economic "July measures" of 1966, the national press has been going through a prolonged financial crisis, due to the sharp drop in advertising revenue. This crisis situation has more recently been aggravated by two specific events. First, Aubrey Jones's Prices and Incomes Board refused to sanction a 1d increase in the price of the *Daily Mirror*—an increase which would have allowed all other popular national daily papers to do the same. Second, devaluation of the pound brought a sharp increase in newspaper running costs. Newsprint, most of which is based on foreign raw materials, and which is the largest single item in newspaper costs, is substantially more expensive: and the cost of keeping a large overseas news reporting staff is that much higher since devaluation. Then there has been the loss of the Selective Employment Tax premium, and union wage demands. With five out of eight national dailies losing money anyway, and with the aggregate loss increasing year by year, to around £4 million in 1967, the situation is clearly serious, and getting more serious. For 1968, the industry loss is expected to double, to a colossal £8 million.

There has therefore been renewed political pressure for some form of Government intervention. This wish undoubtedly lay behind the motion, tabled late in 1967 by 50 Labour MPs, asking for an inquiry into the survival prospects of national daily and Sunday papers during the next ten years. There is some speculation that Government financial intervention may in fact be on the cards for 1968, and Richard Crossman has hinted in the House of Com-

mons that this may be in the offing. Discussion about what forms intervention might take lead to a teach-in on the British Press held at the Camden Town Hall in April 1967 at which the editors of *The Guardian* and *Tribune*, the General Secretaries of the two big printing unions, the deputy editor of the *New Statesman*, Raymond Williams, and others, all advocated some type of Government action.

This pamphlet argues:

1. That as a cure direct Government intervention may be worse, from the point of view of the national interest, than the disease; that there are more limited but politically less glamorous ways in which the Government can help the Press and that even so the main burden of putting the Press back on a sound footing lies upon the managers and unions of the newspaper industry.
2. That such salvation as the national Press may gain in the medium (five year) term, lies in a general rise in prices. The PIB was therefore wrong to turn down the *Daily Mirror* price increase, national incomes policy notwithstanding.
3. That the basic aim of both Government and managers must be to pilot the industry through the dawning technological revolution in newspaper publishing, avoiding casualties among newspapers as far as possible, but accepting that there may have to be some.
4. That the real overall problem, for Government and the interested public, is the formation of a coherent policy for the mass media as a whole—Press, radio and TV. In particular, because TV is expanding and taking over (or at least sharing) many of the functions of newspapers, TV ought also to be

given the right and the facilities to share the most significant roles that national newspapers play in British society—those of critic and watchdog of central and local government actions, and of forum for the originating and airing of public issues of all kinds. In practical political terms, this means that TV must be prised away from Government control as far as the technicalities of the medium will allow.

5. Finally, and in some ways most important, there must be a conscious and deliberate diversification in the management and ownership (public and private) of an expanded number of TV channels, together with greater freedom of expression for the medium as a whole: and that, in this light, certain recent actions by the Government, apparently pointing to closer Government control of TV, must be watched carefully.

In short, the Labour Party, most of which has always been concerned to see a free, independent and critically minded Press (even when, with a Labour Government in power, that criticism hurts) must now try to see to it that those same characteristics are imported more securely than hitherto into the newer means of mass communication. Otherwise, with the likely contraction of the Press, the political and public life of this country may be that much the poorer.

the present situation

Public concern over the state of the national press really began in 1960, with the spectacular and tragic closure of the *News Chronicle*. That and the following year proved to be a grim time for the newspapers. Not only the *News Chronicle*, but also the *Star*, and three Sunday papers, the *Sunday*

Graphic, the *Sunday Dispatch*, and the *Empire News*, all died. Compared to that period, the present crisis has so far proved relatively uneventful. The ailing *Sunday Citizen*, formerly *Reynolds News*, closed down, along with the monthly *Statist*. *The Times* was propelled into the arms of Lord Thomson, and *The Guardian* had to make economies. A few magazines merged, and that was about all. Not, you might think, enough to cause a wave of concern.

Moreover it should be stressed that Britain still has a large and diversified national press, probably uniquely so. We have ten national morning newspapers, the same as in 1948, because the loss of the *News Chronicle* has been balanced by the rise of *The Manchester Guardian* as a national paper. Even as long ago as 1921, there were no more than 12 national morning newspapers, so we have a net loss of only two over the last 45 years, during which time individual circulations have risen enormously. The total of national Sunday papers has shrunk rather more. There were 14 in 1921 (these figures are from the report of the 1949 Royal Commission on the Press) and this came down to ten in 1948 and to seven now. But it is arguable that in the period since 1948, from the point of view of the performance of the press, the arrival of the "quality" *Sunday Telegraph* has more than outweighed the loss of the little-mourned popular Sundays that have closed. The end of the *Sunday Citizen*, sad though it was, did not after all amount to a national disaster. The paper had long ceased to play a role in national affairs.

With ten national daily titles and seven national Sunday titles, spread among ten different publishing companies, the plain fact is that Britain has a highly variegated national newspaper indus-

try, with a perfectly adequate array of separate titles and owners. There have, it is true, been large casualties among provincial morning papers, down from 41 in 1921 to 18 in 1948, and to 12 now. Against that, there has been a steady overall rise in the number of periodicals, especially in the trade and technical fields. Overall, as the Prime Minister remarked recently "we have still got 122 dailies, 16 Sundays, 1,259 county and local papers and 4,506 periodicals." This is a rich total, and would suggest that much of the alarm about the "decline of the press" was misplaced, were it not for certain other disturbing factors that have to be taken into account.

For real and justified apprehension arises over the financial vulnerability of at least half of the existing national daily papers, and of some of the Sunday papers as well. The *Sunday Citizen* apart, the national papers have so far weathered the current crisis. But the effects of the crisis have still to work themselves out fully, and no-one can yet tell how long the crisis will last, or how weak it will leave the newspapers if faced with other disasters (like devaluation). *The Sun* has been losing money at the rate of £1 million a year or more, and the recent £300,000 a year cut in costs negotiated with the unions does not, with due respect to Cecil H. King, really go to the heart of *The Sun's* difficulties. Neither the *Daily Mail* nor the *Daily Sketch* are in a financially happy situation. *The Guardian* had to make staff cuts of around 20 per cent at Christmas 1966, giving legitimate grounds for worry about its future. *The Times* was in trouble until it fled to Lord Thomson's ample bosom, and it may cost £5 million or more to get it out of trouble again. The *Morning Star*—the *Daily Worker* as was—relies on special contributions from readers and on

special fund raising to keep it going: this may not last for ever.

possible closures

In short, the closures which might happen are more alarming than those which have happened. Even if the recent fall-off in advertising revenue—amounting to 30 per cent in some cases—does not itself force some more closures, it is a fair assumption that some other circumstances, like for instance the inevitable opening of another commercial television channel at some date, will bring about one or perhaps all of them. This was the view of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in its 1966 Survey of the National Unit Newspaper Industry. In this it said that "it is difficult to see how this (advertisement) revenue can support four quality daily newspapers with the present cost patterns"—that is, of *The Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Times*, and *Financial Times*, not all may survive.

It also said that among popular national dailies "at least two newspapers in this group will close in the next five years." The EIU thought that one of the three quality Sundays (the *Sunday Telegraph*?) would probably die, and that two of the four popular Sundays would also face difficulties. In other words, on an intelligent and objective estimate, and making certain reasonable assumptions about future costs and income, even prior to devaluation, the number of national morning papers may go down from ten to seven or six, and the number of national Sundays decrease from seven to six, and just possibly lower. To rub the point in, the EIU added that "out of the 18 newspapers considered in this forecast, probably only nine can be reasonably certain of making a profit in 1970." Not a pretty prospect, and it is this, rather than the

present size of the newspaper industry, which is the real matter for concern.

reasons

How have the newspapers got into this plight? The story is a complicated one, and cannot be told in detail here. But briefly, the mid 1950s proved to be a watershed for the newspapers because of several events which, by a nasty historical accident, all occurred more or less contemporaneously. Up till then, newsprint had been rationed, leaving little room for newspapers to compete full-bloodedly with each other. Newspapers in any case virtually sold themselves, since the public bought everything a publisher could print, and so there was little incentive to be efficient, keep costs down, or to worry about (for example) manning standards. Then several things happened. Newsprint was finally derationed, so releasing competitive forces. Aggregate circulation of newspapers proved to have reached saturation point at about the same time, so throwing the burden of rising costs onto rising advertising revenue rather than rising circulation revenue. But commercial TV began in 1956, so cutting into the supply of advertising revenue: and by 1966 advertising revenue going to the press actually fell for the first time. Within the press, a shift has been taking place from the popular press to the quality press, although the size of the shift is less significant than its direction. With costs out of hand and managements made complacent by years of cushy living, it is not surprising that the new and tougher conditions produced casualties, and are likely to produce several more.

It is important to realise that Britain is not alone in this situation. All over the world, the newspaper as a product

is in difficulties. With their very different patterns of newspaper distribution, France and Germany both have their quota of struggling publications: a geographically more polycentric press, with smaller circulations than the British but higher prices, does not seem to have given these countries immunity. In America the position is much worse. Most US cities are one newspaper cities: there is no national press: even in New York the recent crash of the *World Journal Tribune* (itself a recent amalgamation) left the city with only one quality and one popular morning paper, and one afternoon paper.

a declining industry

The blunt truth is that national newspapers, in this country as elsewhere, are a declining industry, with an out of date technology and out of date distribution system, a static or even contracting market, fast rising costs, and an aggressive modern competitor for both advertising and customers, television. Along with coal, the railways, textiles, and shipbuilding, newspapers are one of Britain's problem industries, and the circumstances of all these five are remarkably similar.

All are traditional industries, dating back to Victorian times. All are now beset by younger rivals. Coal has been hit by the arrival of oil and natural gas: the railways by the motor car and the aeroplane: Lancashire textiles by man-made fibres and lower cost imports: the shipyards by more modern competitors in Japan and elsewhere: and newspapers by television. In all five cases there have been pleas for Government intervention to mitigate the effects of the new competitors, on the grounds of "the national interest." Some of these pleas have been partially successful. Textiles derive some protec-

tion from import quotas: coal has been protected by the tax on oil and the prohibition on coal imports: the railways have been (in effect) subsidised by allowing them to run at a loss: ship-building has had the benefit of special Government financial schemes to help its customers, and now to help mergers between shipyards. But so far, newspapers have had no Government aid of any kind.

So, on the analogy of the other declining industries, should there be Government intervention in the national Press also, to save it from its threatened contraction? Or if not, what else should be done? To answer these questions, the first step must be to decide what exactly it is that is to be preserved. There is no virtue in a given number of pits or a given number of miles of railway track. The coal industry is given help in order to prevent large unemployment problems in mining areas and to alleviate the strain on the balance of payments of importing substitute fuels. The railways have been subsidised on social grounds, to mitigate the effects of line closures on community life in certain districts. What are the equivalent arguments for special treatment of newspapers, and which of them are valid? This, after all, goes to the root of the question of why we want to have national newspapers at all.

2. reasons for concern

What do we want from the national press, such that it is worth special effort to preserve it at a certain size? The reasons usually given for concern about the state of the press divide into two groups—the internal reasons, concerned with the structure of the industry, and the external reasons, concerned with the role of the Press in society.

1. A big fear is that concentration of ownership in the Press may be getting excessive, leading to monopolistic powers in the hands of a few men, like Cecil King and Lord Thomson. It was this fear which, along with the closure of the *News Chronicle*, set in motion the 1961 Royal Commission on the Press. This was appointed just after the *Daily Mirror*—Odhams Press merger was announced, to form the present International Publishing Corporation under Cecil King; this is the largest publishing group in the world. As a result of the Commission's report, which said that ownership was not yet excessively concentrated, but might become so, a special tribunal was set up as a branch of the Monopolies Commission, to vet the more important future mergers between newspapers or newspaper groups. The dangers seen in concentration of ownership are that there will be too little variety in news and views; too much opportunity for one man to impose his opinion on the public or to withhold from the public essential information: and that it threatens the survival of what is often called "the independent press," taken to mean newspapers that are independent of any large commercial combine.

2. The process of closures seems to hit the left-wing Press harder than the right-wing newspapers. The *News Chronicle* and the *Star*, both left of centre, have both folded, and so now has the *Sunday Citizen*: the *Sun* plainly

remains an invalid, and the communist *Morning Star* is kept alive by the special loyalty and financial contributions of its readers: the *Guardian* is in a shaky position. In other words, shrinkage of the Press seems to mean a more right wing press, so that (it is argued by some) to preserve political balance and a left-wing voice, Government aid is needed. The weakness of the left-wing press is also often attributed to the conscious or unconscious bias of advertisers and their agencies, who are anyway a bogey of much of the Labour Party.

3. The interlocking shareholdings between newspaper groups and commercial television companies is also seen as a threat to free opinions, and as excessive concentration of ownership. This particular worry now has less force, as a result of the ITA's recent insistence that Lord Thomson sell part of his shareholding in Scottish Television as a condition of STV retaining the ITV contract for the area. This topic of interlocking press and TV groups was aired before the 1961 Royal Commission and the simultaneous Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, and as a result the ITA was given powers to watch the effects of newspaper holdings in ITV companies, and to act if necessary. It has now acted, in the only case where the newspaper shareholding was a majority one. The situation now is that most of the larger newspaper groups have some shareholding, but never a controlling one, in an ITV contractor. But the worry remains that newspapers may still be influenced by their shareholdings in ITV in their published opinions and editorials on the highly contentious and political matter of the future pattern and progress of broadcasting in this country.

4. Even though large tracts of every

newspaper are devoted to entertainment rather than to instruction—the entertainment may be more or less low-brow, according to the paper—nevertheless the politically significant function of the Press is to act as a sort of market place for news and opinions. Fleet Street is in some ways not unlike the Stock Exchange. A news story comes in, is evaluated by various news editors and reporters, is allocated space which may be revised in later editions, may be picked up and copied by other newspapers, may be followed up or knocked down, may run for days or disappear. By a strangely impersonal and highly unschematic process, a news story is allocated a value by Fleet Street, and hence a value for the country as a whole. Similarly, with the numerous arguments, guesses, scandals, attacks, revelations, and false starts that litter the pages of newspapers, each finds its level through the mechanism of a variety of people exercising their judgements and skills on a variety of newspapers in competition with one another. What one paper misses, another may get, and the first one follow up: and so it goes on. Collectively, the newspapers act as the chief forum in the country for new ideas, new controversies, heterogeneous opinions. This in effect means that for long periods the Press is also the chief opposition to the Government in power—this is especially so when Her Majesty's official opposition is numerically or ideologically weak. The role of watchdog on government and scrutineer of outside bodies of all kinds, business, military, church, recreational, the lot, has at least since the mid-nineteenth century been the most important contribution of the Press to the British social-political pattern. Its exercise stems directly from the competitive nature of a free and variegated press. But this is the very thing that is being or will be eroded by closure of

newspapers. In short, the press as Fourth Estate and main opposition to the government is one valuable part of the democratic process, and it therefore matters that the Press is in trouble.

5. Lastly, television is taking over from newspapers at least part of the function of disseminating news, and so is contributing to the decline in newspaper readership: but TV is not, for political reasons, taking on or even sharing to the same extent this other function of the originating or "breaking" of issues. Television, because of the onus on it to be impartial, and because its air time for current affairs is limited, is very uncreative in its approach to news and ideas. In a standard case, it will take an issue that has already begun life in the newspapers and mount a two-sided discussion about it. The newspapers, along with many other media, are source material for television. This may at the moment be a natural division of function. But if this view of the role of newspapers in a democracy (however imperfectly they may play it at times), is correct then it is important that the main competitor of the Press, which is in some areas displacing it, is not also taking on that role.

evaluation

These then are the areas of concern. How are we to evaluate them? It is surely the function of newspapers as forum for opinions and critic of anyone and anything, but especially of central and local government, that is the essential quality to be somehow preserved.

The other fears listed carry weight only in relation to this. Concentration of ownership, for example, does not seem *per se* to be so alarming. In an age of ever larger industrial units, it is futile

to suppose that the Press, or the communications business generally, can escape the national trend towards bigger groups. The question, as with industry at large, is how these new large conglomerates are to be kept under a measure of public accountability. This question has not been fully answered yet, for newspapers in particular, or for industry in general. But bodies like the ITA, the Monopolies Commission and its special newspaper tribunal, the Press Council, and measures like the new Companies Act, are all pragmatic advances towards this end. The "Press Baron" has after all been with us since the beginning of the century, and as a group these barons probably have less power now, relative to the other sources of power in British society, than they ever had before. Moreover, it is probably futile to suppose that the newspaper tribunal of the Monopolies Commission will somehow show up proposed mergers as unnecessary, and so prevent further concentration. Newspapers, or newspaper companies, only propose to merge these days when at least one of them is in trouble. The tribunal is hardly going to take upon itself the onus of barring a merger between newspapers which may at least create one strong publication instead of two weak ones.

Certainly even with the take-over of *The Times* by Lord Thomson, where it was a question of one group buying up another, and so getting bigger, the economic arguments for the take-over in fact proved unanswerable, and the tribunal despite an excellent report, was in effect a rubber stamp. The tribunal may deter some doubtful mergers: but in the present state of the Press, mergers between newspaper companies and between newspapers are a fact of life, and the best that one can hope for is that the full facts be made

known at the time—and that function the tribunal fulfills excellently.

cross - holdings

Nor are cross-holdings between newspaper and television companies undesirable. On the contrary, it is shortsighted to draw a rigid line between the two media and suppose that organisations can be kept to one side of the line or the other. Basically, if a company is in the communications business, at a time when the techniques of communications are changing as rapidly as they are today, it must have the freedom to adapt and expand in order to keep up with the trends. Increasingly, the boundary line between what is a newspaper and what is television will in any case get blurred. The growing use of electronics in printing is a simple sign of the merging of technologies that were once separate. A healthy company is one which sees these changes coming, and utilises them: and we need healthy companies in newspaper publishing. Restrictions would in the end merely stultify the newspaper groups without strengthening their newspaper interest. It is perfectly true that the acquisition of a holding in commercial TV may affect a newspaper's view on the desirability of that form of TV: this happened with the *Daily Express*. But to use this as a reason for artificially limiting the natural evolution of newspaper concerns is to crack a nut with a sledgehammer. The ITA has shown that control can be exercised of this form of cross-ownership, which is in any case such public knowledge by now that it is unlikely seriously to sway any future arguments between public service and commercial broadcasting interests. The BBC is after all not without its champions, both in the Press and outside it. And it is big enough

to look after itself in this particular battle.

It is a real possibility that the national Press, in its formal allegiances at least, will become more right-wing. As long as the *Daily Mirror*, the *Guardian*, the *Sun* and the *Observer* are there, there is a rough balance. But with perhaps two of these four papers not in the best of health financially, there is certainly grounds for concern about the future. But in real political terms no action that may be taken, by Government or by anyone else, is likely to single out left-of-centre publications as such for special treatment. The future of this section of the Press is therefore bound up with the future of the national Press as a whole.

conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is therefore that the contribution to British life of the national Press which must somehow be preserved (indeed, improved) is its role as forum and critic: and that the number of newspapers, and action taken to preserve some or all of them, matter only in relation to this.

3. proposals

During the latest Fleet Street crisis, a number of proposals for Government intervention have been put forward. Most of them involve Government legislation, and some of them Government money. They were:

1. There should be a state publishing or printing corporation, perhaps also a state newspaper.
2. There should be a tax on newsprint consumption, the main burden of which would obviously fall on the large circulation (and by implication richer) papers: the money so collected to be distributed to smaller and poorer publications, or perhaps according to the proportion of space devoted to editorial matter, since this proportion will be by definition larger for papers that do not get so much advertising.
3. There should be a tax directly on advertising revenue, the rate of the tax rising in stages for the larger amounts of such revenue, like the present ITV levy; the money so collected to be given out again according to circulation, but only up to a certain limit, which would be in the middle of the present range of circulations (2 million).
4. There should be a levy on commercial TV, to be paid out to deserving newspapers, on the grounds that it is ITV's fault (at least partially) that these newspapers are in a mess.
5. There should be a fixed limit on the proportion of space in a newspaper devoted to advertising.

a state publishing concern

The idea behind a state publishing concern—much favoured by Richard Briginshaw, general secretary of the printing union SOGAT—is that it

would either publish its own newspaper, or lease printing facilities to groups or guilds of professional journalists. There is no reason why the Government should not publish a newspaper if it wants to. But if it did, it would not help Fleet Street's problems, since it would inevitably be a Government organ of some sort, and not a proper national newspaper as generally understood. There are those who think that it could be made into a demonstration of efficient high quality journalism, to ginger up Fleet Street. To quote Richard Clements at the Camden Town Hall teach-in "a state newspaper could act as a catalyst inside the present newspaper industry . . . what you need is an economic catalyst which will operate in the same way that the Government is operating inside the shipbuilding industry, with Fairfields . . . of course, a newspaper of this sort would be a small circulation newspaper. Secondly, it would make a loss . . ." That surely is the nub of the matter. If it is small circulation, a state newspaper would surely have little impact on anyone: if it runs at a loss, its very existence, in real political terms, would be precarious. Yet to launch a large circulation, profitably a newspaper from scratch is impossible these days (the *Sunday Telegraph* has yet to prove otherwise).

Similarly, with professional groups of journalists using state printing facilities, it is surely illusory to think that these facilities would just be leased to the journalists to use as they pleased. For one thing, the newspapers so published would presumably have to show at least a modest profit: in other words, the same financial circumstances as now would still apply. For another thing, the launching of new newspapers is not just a question of having the printing facilities, expensive as those are: it is even more a question of offering some-

thing that people want—and it has yet to be proved that people in sufficiently large numbers actively want more than the present number of newspapers.

It has been argued that the state would not require the cost of the printing facilities that it leases to be recouped in the revenue of the publication (which might be an existing publication, saved from extinction by being transferred to the Government presses). But this surely is to deliver these publications and their policies straight into the arms of the Government, or at least of those pressure groups who can exert pressure in Government circles. Only in Utopia does the State benignly lease out expensive facilities to creative men, and leave them to it. There are, it is true, various forms of partial control by the Government, partial freedom from it—the University Grants Committee is perhaps an example. But in running a newspaper that the public is going to accept, partial freedom is not enough.

taxation schemes

In all the various forms have been suggested for a tax that would redistribute income between papers, there are two common elements. Irrespective of whether they are based on newsprint consumption or advertising revenue or circulation revenue, they all would involve deliberate Government action to impose such a scheme by legislation: and the scheme would involve deliberate discrimination against some papers and for others—against those papers at present financially successful and for those at present financially weak, which happens to coincide to some extent with the division between right-wing papers and left-wing papers, so giving the matter political overtones.

Short of an elaborate accounting opera-

tion, one cannot say exactly how such taxation schemes would work. But at a time when the newspaper industry as a whole is in a shaky position, and about to face expensive changes in technology, it seems odd to penalise those publications which are relatively profitable, and therefore the only ones able to afford such changes. Such a move might only result in further weakening the industry as a whole, without necessarily helping the weaker publications more than temporarily.

For the essence of all the taxation proposals is that they aim at a redistribution of income by means of cross-subsidies within the industry. Yet it must be pointed out very firmly that there is already heavy cross-subsidy within the industry: and the only effect of adding an extra statutory redistribution might well be to force newspaper companies to reduce their existing, voluntary subsidies. So the whole process would be self-defeating. At present, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sketch* are supported by the more profitable parts of the Associated Newspaper group: the *Daily Mirror* supports the *Sun*, with the help of the other IPC publications: the *Guardian* is helped by the *Manchester Evening News*: the *Daily Telegraph* supports the *Sunday Telegraph*: the *Times* is being carried by the rest of the Thomson Organisation, in particular the *Sunday Times*. Given that the national newspaper industry as a whole shows a margin of profit on sales of only about 6 per cent, a pretty low figure by general industrial standards, there is clearly not a lot of spare cash to play with anyhow. And for managements facing the difficult decision of whether to put into subsidising newspapers money which could with increasing urgency be needed for expenditure on new technical facilities, a new Government tax, however well intentioned, could

upset the present delicate balance the wrong way. And at least subsidies handed out by the newspaper proprietors themselves have the advantage of being independent of the Government, and therefore of having no strings attached.

Moreover, because the owners of the weak papers are, by and large, the same as the owners of the rich papers, a redistributive tax, whatever form it took, would be in many cases a peculiarly pointless accounting operation, involving the collection of money from the IPC, for example, because it had the successful *Daily Mirror*, and giving the money back to the IPC because it had the loss-making *Sun*. Perhaps only the *Guardian* would really gain from such a scheme.

The idea of a redistributive tax probably presupposes that the industry as a whole is prosperous, and could therefore readily bear the extra weight of such a tax: but it is not that prosperous. Similarly, the proposal to place a fixed limit on the space given to advertising (which the present author, among others, suggested to the last Royal Commission on the Press) presupposes that there is a sufficiently buoyant advertising income to the Press as a whole to ensure that money diverted from the richer papers would tend to flow towards the poorer ones, rather than, say, to TV. But this assumption, plausible in 1960, can no longer be taken for granted. Revenue diverted from a richer and larger paper may simply disappear from the scene.

There is another and more important aspect to this. A tax designed to redistribute income between newspapers may look as if it is based on a principle—say, the principle of supporting the weaker newspaper for the sake of preserving variety in the national Press—

but in fact it would mean a deliberate Government decision as to which newspapers are to be discriminated against. This decision would be implicit in the fixing of the level of the tax or the level of circulation at which the tax is to apply. It was on reasoning like this that the last Royal Commission rejected the most often quoted version of the taxation proposal, that put forward by Nicholas Kaldor and Robert Neild. The essence of the Kaldor-Neild version was that you could name a socially desirable maximum circulation, beyond which the advantages of scale begin to set in with a vengeance so as to drive out the less successful publications, to the general social detriment. The objection to this is that what might be made out as an abstract decision to favour circulations not exceeding, say, two million, would in practice be a decision to penalise, say, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express*, and where precisely the level of tax or the level of taxable circulation was set would enormously affect, one way or another, the fate of the *Daily Mail*, for one. It would then become a purely political decision as to whether the *Daily Mail* survived or not. It will be a sad day for Britain when the Government, rather than the public, makes that decision. The fact that the public at the moment shares that choice with the advertisers is no reason for handing the choice over to the Government.

In brief then, the fact that a tax or levy would be a Government act would surely deliver Fleet Street to one degree or another into the hands of the civil service and the Government of the day, so reversing that great turning point about 100 years ago when Government control over the Press by punitive taxation was finally removed, thus paving the way to the modern mass circulation independent Press. Some people ask at this point, what is

the difference between having a Minister and having a wealthy Press tycoon breathing down the necks of the journalists? The answer is that if you accept the idea of dispersion of power among institutions (unions, employers, House of Commons, Cabinet, political parties, churches, the Press and so on) as being a working definition of how a democracy actually functions, then it is obviously better to have newspapers which are not owned or influenced by the Government, and which depend for their support on other sources of income.

In any case, in real economic terms, one may doubt whether Government action can really, on the example of past experience, be expected to prop up the newspaper industry at a certain size. In other industries Government help has not in fact prevented contraction. The coal mines, after a decade of pit closures, are apparently heading for another drastic rundown: textiles, even after the scrap and modernise programme, are still on the way down: the rail system, after much slimming, is to be stabilised at a yet-to-be reached track mileage at the cost of large and politically vulnerable subsidies: in shipbuilding, Government-pressured mergers are being put through as a preliminary to closure of yards and general "rationalisation and modernisation." So, if precedent is anything to go by, Government help does not save an industry from contraction: rather, the function of Government help is to ease the transition to a smaller but more efficient and financially viable size for the industry in question. Admittedly that may not be what the politicians say they are doing at the time: but that has been, in most cases, the effect.

Government intervention, in the *deus ex machina* form in which it is usually advocated, is therefore to be rejected.

But there are more limited but more practical ways in which the Government can help, ways which are neutral in their political effects. These are dealt with in the next two sections.

PRICES

Last autumn, the Prices and Incomes Board turned down an application by the *Daily Mirror* to put its price up from 4d to 5d. At a time when all other producers of goods are being asked to hold down prices under the national prices and incomes policy, this rejection might not seem unreasonable. After all, on the *Daily Mirror's* own admission, it has some way to go in achieving full operating efficiency in terms of manning standards. So the case fell into the classic pattern of PIB refusals to sanction price increases—that is, a case where there were clear savings in cost that could (and in the Board's view, should) be made before prices are put up. The decision may have seemed tough on the *Daily Mirror*, which has in fact done more, and got further, towards eliminating surplus labour than most other newspaper groups. Even so, to say that the *Daily Mirror* should have been given exceptional treatment and permission to put up its price needs strong support if it is not to sound like special pleading. This is true even though the PIB now only has the power to delay the price increase, and the *Daily Mirror* seems sure to go ahead with a price increase soon after the compulsory period of delay is over.

But reading the PIB report does suggest that the Board failed to grasp the real importance of a general and large increase in the price level of national newspapers—an increase from, say, 4d to 6d, in two stages—for the long run health and indeed survival, of the

industry. Not that the PIB was unaware of the argument. Rather, it underrated the urgency of it, and seemed to see the solution of the industry's problems in, for example, a Government run redundancy scheme if the companies themselves prove unable to get efficient manning standards any other way. This is not, in itself, a bad idea. But even last autumn it ought to have been clear that the financial plight of the newspaper industry was far worse than simple manning reductions on the printing machines could cure. The EIU report estimated that even if the surplus men in Fleet Street were got rid of, it would only cut total costs by a few per cent: this is not an excuse for not doing it: but it puts the question of excess manning into perspective.

The PIB may, rightly, have wanted to put what pressure it could on Fleet Street managements, not a very progressive group at the best of times, to put their house in order. On the other hand, the PIB missed a golden opportunity to give its semi-official blessing and encouragement to one of the basic requirements for reform of Fleet Street—a higher general price level. This could have been especially important because the Restrictive Practices Act makes it illegal for the newspaper proprietors to get together to decide collectively on a higher price level. This means that the weaker papers must wait for the stronger papers (like the *Daily Mirror*) to set the trend—and that was precisely what the *Daily Mirror* was trying to do, when barred by the PIB. The full importance of higher newspaper prices perhaps only comes out fully in relation to the history of newspaper publishing — for it is only a reference to history which shows clearly that the important long-term change in newspaper economics, towards more reliance on circulation revenue, has in fact set in, despite

the PIB, and ought to be aided and hastened as much as possible.

The essence of what is generally called “the Northcliffe revolution” in newspaper publishing at the end of the last century was not just making the presentation of the news more readable and more vivid so as to attract more readers. It was also an economic innovation. The rising advertising revenue of the time, associated with the rise of branded consumer goods, was deliberately exploited in order to keep the face price of the newspapers down. This in turn brought newspapers within the pocket of large masses of people, and so was the indispensable economic corollary to the change in presentation. Because most other newspapers had to follow the example to one degree or another, this proved to be a great turning point in the history of the British Press. For it made possible the modern mass circulation British newspaper, cheap to buy, cheap enough indeed to allow many people to buy several different titles a day. National distribution, made technically possible by the railway network, also attracted the advertisers. So it came about that Britain acquired newspapers that were, and are, cheaper than in most countries, with bigger individual national rather than regional circulations.

The last Royal Commission on the Press produced a comparison of prices in 1961. The actual prices have, of course, changed since then, but the point remains. At a time when the popular national dailies cost 3d in this country (against the 4½d which on average they cost to produce) these were the prices on the Continent and in the USA: France 4½d; West Germany 4d and 6½d; Sweden 5d; USA from 4d up to 8d.

For a long time this low face price,

made possible by advertising revenue, was undoubtedly a good thing. Those who argue otherwise must also accept that newspaper circulations would have remained small, so weakening the mass participation and mass interest in politics which has been the biggest feature of British political democracy. For it was a low face price which made mass circulations, and therefore mass distribution of news and opinion, possible. So there is no question that the original decision, half a century ago, to keep down prices, was beneficial. The question is rather whether the time has come for an open reversal in that policy. For the dilemma in the last ten years or so has been that the weaker papers have rarely dared to put up their face price unilaterally, to compensate for the lower advertising revenue which resulted from their lower circulations. For this would cause even more people to switch to the bigger but now also cheaper rival, so creating a vicious downward circle.

For a long time the stronger publications merely saw this as the natural working of competition (which it was) and saw no reason why they should put up their prices merely in order to give weaker rivals a better chance of survival. The big, and in many ways welcome, change that has come about is that the stronger publications also now have an interest in a steady upward movement in prices. This is because advertising revenue for the Press as a whole, and not just for its weaker members, has been getting scarcer and more difficult to obtain, especially in relation to the inexorable rise in costs. This pressure has already had its effects. Compared to 1961 prices all round have gone up. The general level was 3d and is now 4d. The *Financial Times* during 1967 jumped from 6d to 8d. The quality Sundays cost substantially more than they used to: for ex-

ample, the *Sunday Times* costs 10d and consciously acts as price leader in its field, enabling the financially weaker *Observer* to charge 9d. If the *Daily Mirror* goes up to 5d from 4d, as it intends, this will undoubtedly be copied by most other popular dailies. And it would be surprising if the process stopped there. There is little doubt that the 6d daily paper is coming, and soon. In other words, in place of the trend of the previous 60 years, there is now a long-term trend towards bringing the face price of newspapers back nearer to the cost of producing them, and so lessening the gap between cost and price that has to be filled by advertising.

What does this mean for the newspapers that are less strong financially? There have always been two opposing arguments about this. One is that this is the way to salvation for them, because their readers will then be the sole arbiters of the fate of that paper—and will, it is assumed, support it. The other argument is that all-round price increases will in practice make the richer papers even richer, and therefore give them even more resources with which to compete: and that the pace of the price increases is in any case dictated by the needs of the richer papers, and not those of the poorer: and lastly that as newspapers get more expensive in relation to the other demands on the public's pocket, the tendency will be for the public to buy fewer newspapers in aggregate—and this will hit the weaker papers hardest.

The truth is that we do not know exactly what will happen. Probably by testing out the true preferences of the public for the first time, via their pockets, some publications may fall onto the safe side of the danger line, others may fall further on to the dangerous side. The harsh fact is that

it has got to be tried, for there is, in the medium term, no other way out. We will simply have to wait and see what happens as the strong papers like the *Daily Mirror* and the *Sunday Times* as market leaders force the pace on prices and bring the rest flocking behind them. The *Sunday Times* has been the most expensive Sunday paper for some years: and also the fastest growing. The *Daily Mirror* is both the biggest circulation popular daily, and the one that is seeking to lead a new round of price increases. It may just turn out that strong papers like these, which could once keep down their prices because they are strong, and so drive out weaker papers, may now have the best of both worlds and be able to put up their prices because they are strong, and continue to drive out the weaker papers. A lot may depend on how individual papers exploit the opportunity presented by a general higher price level. For example, the *Daily Mail* deliberately and expensively stayed out of the last round of price increases, and gained circulation accordingly: when it belatedly fell into line with the new level of 4d it lost all its new readers, and so had lost the revenue for nothing. Higher face prices will not necessarily prove to be a panacea. But as Denis Hamilton, editor in chief of the *Times* and *Sunday Times* has said: "My personal suggestion for alleviating the situation in England at least, would be for the national proprietors to get together and, despite the Restrictive Practices Act, agree on a higher minimum price, say 6d for the popular dailies and more for the quality papers. This would produce extra revenue for every paper and total many millions."

"After putting newspapers back into profit, some of the money could go to establishing a redundancy fund which would pay out major sums to the 5,000

men now over-staffing Fleet Street and to buy out those ridiculous restrictive practices once and for all and establish productivity agreements."

"This would stabilise the situation in Britain for some time. There should also be money available for the systematic study of the future role of newspapers, management training and technical research under the direction of the NPA."

He might have added that a secure financial position would keep the newspapers out of the hands of the politicians. For one implication of the PIB's ruling on the *Daily Mirror* case could be that the Government will in future be sitting in judgement on newspapers that may be opposed to it. For with the power to grant or withhold price increases, and so strengthen or undermine a newspaper's chances of survival, the Government, via the PIB has (in theory at least) the sort of weapon to use against the Press that it has not had since newspaper taxes were abolished a century ago.

TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

It is time to probe a bit deeper into the past and present of the newspaper industry. For the circumstances in which the newspaper as we know it today originated at the end of the last century were not just economic and stylistic: they were also technological. The rise of the mass circulation Press was ably described by John Beavan in his Fabian pamphlet *The Press and the Public* (Fabian tract 338) published in 1962.

"There was a whole set of technological developments. By 1895 we had a first class railway system in Britain. We had a telegraph system that could bring

news from all over the world. A linotype machine had been invented which speeded up the rate of setting type by six times and there was the rotary press which had multiplied many times over the number of copies that could be turned out. So a newspaper produced in London could be on sale almost everywhere in Britain on the day of publication. While this revolution was going on, there was another great revolution, in trade: that was in the branding of consumer goods. The old time grocer blended his own teas. Often he wrapped his own soap. Most things were supplied to him in bulk and he chose the quality. There were very few brand names . . . and then as the idea of brands developed, there began a search for a national market for national products. And the Press, the daily Press, was the means by which the brands established themselves. My own feeling is that the brands made the newspapers and the newspapers made the brands."

In other words, the mass circulations that were built up as the twentieth century developed, right up to the mid-1950s, were based on four Victorian innovations—in printing technology, in the distribution of information, in the distribution possibilities of newspapers themselves, and in the source of income of the newspapers which enabled them to be cheap enough for everyone to buy. With every one of those four Victorian innovations now under attack from mid-twentieth century innovations, it is not surprising that the Press should be going through, or be about to go through, a painful period of re-adjustment. To suppose that this period can somehow be ducked, and that the industry can be preserved in some perpetual fossilised state, is surely to be crying for the moon. What is important is that, far from hampering the newspaper groups by, for example, barring

their entry into television and other media, or by creaming off their profits, public policy should be to encourage them to experiment far more than they have done so far with the new technologies that are certain, before too long, to displace either entirely or partially the older technologies which were the very foundations on which the national newspaper industry was built 50 years ago.

printing methods

At the moment, all national newspapers, and most smaller ones too, are still produced by mechanical methods that have changed little since the turn of the century. It is often said that Caxton himself would not feel out of place in one of today's printing works. Hot lead is still the foundation of the process, and outsiders are rightly astonished to see how many stages still have to be gone through between the writing of a story by the journalist and its printing on the presses. The average printing works is a noisy, grimy and stuffy place. It is surprising that so little technological innovation has so far taken place.

The use of web offset lithographic printing, which cuts out hot lead and allows good quality colour on large production runs, is spreading among smaller newspapers and among magazines. But the system is still some way off being used in national newspaper production, although the experiment being carried out by the *Daily Mirror* in Belfast has much interest in this, as in certain other respects. For not only is the whole of the Irish edition of the *Daily Mirror* being printed there by the web offset litho system, as a sort of pilot operation to test it out for wider application in national newspaper production. But also the Belfast plant

is the first attempt to decentralise the printing of national newspapers and to get away from the railway distribution system. It must also be said that manning standards are much more realistic in Belfast than in London.

So in conjunction with facsimile transmission, which in effect means that you can compose and lay out a newspaper in London and send its form to some other centre to be printed out in quantity, and for which machines are now becoming available. Belfast opens up a new vision of what the structure of national newspapers might be like in the future. It would be produced in many different centres, each perhaps with its own variant on the same basic newspaper, in the form of local news or editorials. This would free the national papers from their present dependence on the highly conservative London printing trades, and on the now shrinking national railway system: and so cut costs in both these ways. The use of colour made possible by the printing system would also put the newspapers in a better position to compete for advertising with commercial television. This will be the more important when commercial television itself gets colour, perhaps in 1971; regional editors would also enable the newspapers to offer regional advertising, as ITV does at present.

the computer

Even further ahead technically are the projects being carried out by the Thomson Organisation to harness the computer to newspaper publishing. At Reading, two years ago, a start was made by using the computer to "justify" the type—that is, set it in equal lines. Pretrained linotype operators produce a punched tape, via the com-

puter which works out the justification of the lines, for the operation of a photographic typesetting machine: this produces on positive film galleys of the story, which are then stuck up into pages in the normal way and put into the normal web-offset litho system of printing. This is still a very primitive use of the computer, compared to its possible uses.

For instance, Dr. Tom Margerison, who devised the Reading system and other developments at Thomson's new Hemel Hempstead newspaper offices, recently had this to say:

"You will all have heard of the growing use of computers in composing rooms to justify and hyphenate lines. Let me say at once that this is a very limited computer application. . . ."

"Instead, I want you to think of the computer as being a vast store into which information can be fed and from which it can be retrieved at will."

"It is not the computer itself which acts as the store, but a peripheral device called a disc store."

"This consists of one or more discs like large gramophone records coated with a magnetic layer like magnetic recording tape."

"This disc spins and the computer can record or play back a pattern of codes similar to the holes in a paper tape, one pattern for each character, whenever required."

"This playback is almost instantaneous on demand, for we only have to wait, on average, half the time it takes the disc to make a complete revolution."

"This then is the key to the whole development. For if you can store infor-

mation as it comes in, and withdraw it for correction and editing, you can gradually build up on the disc a complete recorded version of the whole newspaper.”

“Then when the whole thing is correct, the editor can press a button and it is put out onto a high-speed photo-setting machine which can turn out a full-size page in perhaps 30 seconds.”

There are still problems here in how you edit copy already in the computer. Printing the copy out on a typewriter-like terminal is a very slow business, and Dr. Margerison calls for experiments using a television-type display tube (a familiar device in other sorts of computer use) coupled with a so-called “light pen” with which the operator points to the part of the article displayed on the screen which he wants to correct, and then types in the correction on an accompanying keyboard—this again can already be done in certain advanced computer installations in other industries.

Another idea is to use the massive information storage capacity of the computer to, in effect, replace the newspaper’s library, so that a journalist, wanting background information, can call for it sitting at his desk, and have it displayed on a screen in front of him. This is very much in the future, but is undoubtedly possible. The American company, International Business Machines, has been working on what it calls a “total newspaper system,” which uses the computer both for information retrieval for the journalist, and for editing and laying out copy for sub-editors, and for control of the printing presses.

Although this is a long way off yet, one can already see the outlines of a 1980-style newspaper, based on electronics rather than hot lead. Newspapers, in

short, are still at the very threshold of a technological revolution, which will take them no-one knows exactly where. This is the important point to be kept in mind in any discussion of the future of the press. For with a changing technology, the actual newspapers that appear are bound to change as well. To suppose that there will always be the same list of titles is in these circumstances absurd. What is important is to try to ensure that the essential characteristics that we value in the present day press—and I have tried to pin the essential one down in a previous chapter—should somehow be carried over into the future world of electronic communication, where the actual form in which the product is presented to the public may be either visual, as with television, or written, as with a newspaper, or a hybrid, as with a newspaper-like page flashed up on the home TV screen.

other developments

Already the Post Office are conducting experiments at Cumbernauld new town with an all-purpose main leading into each house, taking utilities like gas, electricity and water, and also the television and radio cables—and this could, as the Postmaster General has pointed out, eventually pipe in material both for display on the TV screen and for printing out in newspaper form by some printing device attached to the TV set. It is quite feasible to imagine the disappearance of the daily newspaper, (what is so sacred about news at breakfast time?) and a replacement by a newspaper that is being updated all the time with the ‘buyer’ simply calling for the latest edition by operating some button on his TV set.

There are those who prefer to be “down to earth” and say that printing methods for at any rate the big volume news-

papers are not likely to change much in the near future, except for the introduction of more colour. This may be true: a lot of work remains to be done before we get an electronically produced national newspaper. But this is surely the whole point, and it is here, in my opinion, that the Government could make another realistic contribution.

For the depressing thing about the newspaper industry—and this reflects the general low level of management—is the bitty way in which experiments are being carried on, despite the urgency of getting the industry into the 1970s by the time the 1970s are upon us. The Thomson Organisation is doing valuable work: in provincial papers, several groups have been very progressive in the use of new machinery. The IPC, besides its Belfast plant, is also experimenting with computer-linked photographic printing methods, through recently acquired subsidiaries. But it is not enough for a national industry. What the industry singularly lacks is a central research institute, which can work out new development projects to the point where they are practical propositions for day-to-day use. For with newspapers, as with industrial processes, it is difficult and financially dangerous to experiment 'on the job' and this breeds a conservatism that newspapers especially cannot now afford.

Newspaper managers and owners are a notoriously unclubbable, unco-operative group among themselves. It was well nigh impossible, until recently anyway, to get any systematic labour relations policy, let alone a common research policy. This lack of co-operation is the result of the very real rivalry that exists between newspaper groups, in which (for example) high and rising wages have in the past been deliberately used as an offensive weapon against poorer rivals—upping the ante, in fact.

Yet while this internecine warfare was going on, an outside rival, television, crept up on them almost unawares. Surely it is time for more co-operative effort in research, which is after all a field in which many industries have a common effort. Now that common bodies like the Press Council and others exist, there may be some hope. The little Neddy for the industry has recommended a levy on all firms for Research and Development, and this is being considered.

possible government action

This is where the Government could make two constructive moves, which would in a very real sense help to put the newspaper industry back onto a sound long-term footing. First, it could encourage the industry in this attempt to set up a common research and development effort, if necessary making a grant to help start it off. At the least, it could use its persuasive powers, using, say, officials of the Ministry of Technology to do the talking. Secondly (and this is perhaps even more easily carried out) the Government should make loans to specific projects that are using advanced newspaper technology, just as it does in other fields. The National Research Development Corporation already makes repayable loans on special terms to pilot projects that are technologically in the national interest, but which might not be implemented without special measures to alleviate the risk inherent in new developments. It has several such loans outstanding in the field of new computer uses, but not in the newspaper industry. But with the NRDC about to get a lot more money to give out, there is as good a case for an NRDC loan for computer-aided newspapers as there is for, say, the computerised paper mill which the Corporation has supported. Alternatively,

or simultaneously, the NRDC might perhaps extend the scheme for buying machine tools of advanced design, and then leasing them out to users on special terms, again to minimise the risk element. A similar buying and leasing scheme for electronic and photographic machinery for newspapers might work wonders.

Nobody has summed up the situation better than, again, Denis Hamilton : "The technological revolution in communications has hardly commenced, television has barely begun to realise its potential as a news and opinion medium, the development of the electronic newspaper is very much in the foreseeable future."

4. management and labour

In the quality of its management Fleet Street is still suffering from the after-effects of those long cushy years up to 1956 when newsprint was still rationed and the publisher could sell all the copies he could print. Rising advertising revenue, as yet untouched by commercial television, meant that there was little incentive to watch costs, which were in any case one of the few competitive weapons open to you—if you could afford higher costs than your rival, you survived and he didn't. It was a very negative (though, as with the *News Chronicle*, a very effective) way of competing, since it meant that managers could just sit back and let the newspapers sell themselves.

Management had therefore little except routine content to it. Promotion was by age and seniority—"dead men's shoes." Not surprisingly, when commercial TV arrived, along with the new competitive conditions that came with the end of print rationing, many managements (in so far as they existed at all) were not up to the challenge. Even today, as the EIU Report commented, only Thomson and the IPC have anything which in another industry would be recognisable as a professional management team. These two organisations have been creating a management for themselves, by promoting, by buying in, or by recruiting among graduates, and even they have still not completed the process. The printing subsidiary of the IPC, for example, has been carrying out a survey to find potential managerial recruits among its employees literally by sending round a van to which people could go for tests. The EIU comments that the Thomson and the IPC organisations "are moving towards a concept of management control of a publishing company which is a long way ahead of most other companies in the industry. Some newspaper groups like the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times*,

still depend basically on fairly autocratic one-man rule. It is only recently that the *Guardian* has taken steps to provide itself with a management as such, and its recent difficulties are partly to be explained by the lack of proper managers (and therefore proper managerial planning) in the past.

Fleet Street in fact is badly in need of a corps of professional managers. At present, apart from the owner or other prominent man at the head, the rest of those managers that exist are either promoted journalists or promoted advertising men. Few have been trained in newspaper management as a profession. There is still too big a divide between journalists on the one hand and advertising and management men on the other: the two rarely talk to each other, and do not on the whole even like each other. Newspaper management after all embraces at least a knowledge of both these skills, and others besides—marketing and sales, financial, technical. Outside Thomson and the IPC there is little systematic training of newspaper managers as such in Fleet Street. An ex-journalist or an ex-space salesman either makes out as a manager, or he does not. This is one area where something is being done, but much more ought to be done. Above all, it is an area where Fleet Street can help itself. The EIU commented here that "the quality of management is uneven and the industry is short of professionally trained managers. While the situation obviously varies from company to company, this is an industry problem. The strength of any chain is its weakest link, and in a closely knit industry like the national Press one poor management can create trouble for all. It is therefore important that the problem is solved on an industry basis." As far as I know, little has yet been done to meet this criticism: yet it is perhaps the most important

criticism in the EIU report on Fleet Street. The Newspaper Proprietors' Association has appointed an officer to deal with training and management development, and has drawn up a large report on the subject: but not much action has yet followed, although a beginning has been made.

trade union attitudes

For it must be recognised that much of the inefficiency in the use of labour in newspaper and other printing is due basically to bad management. The printing unions, thanks to various public inquiries and disputes, have come under heavy attack, not without much justification. But managers tend to get the sort of labour relations they deserve, and it is only in the last few years that some (and so far only some) of the managements in Fleet Street have got down to the job of tackling the fruits of two decades of neglect of proper managerial control over the organisation of printing work. Not surprisingly, this has led to friction with the unions. Printing unions, as has often been remarked, have a particularly strong bargaining position on newspapers. A daily paper is a once-only and unique product. There is no point in printing yesterday's newspaper: nobody wants it. So the threat of a lightning strike just before the evening production run can be singularly effective in extracting concessions from managements anxious not to lose the revenue from an issue and not to give a rival publication the chance to increase its sales. This has often been called "blackmail" by the unions: but the unions are after all in power politics, and can hardly be blamed for using their power. What was more reprehensible, at least until recently, was that managements gave way so easily. Recent sporadic strikes on the

Daily Mirror have been the result of a deliberate decision by the IPC management to reassert control, though this has led to their "losing" many thousands of copies (and pounds) on some issues of the *Daily Mirror*.

Other troubles recently have been the long inter-union dispute which held up for six months the publication of the two new Thomson evening papers based on Hemel Hempstead, at a cost to Thomson of several hundreds of thousands of pounds: and the prolonged difficulties at the new IPC web offset plant at Southwark, which led to the plant being virtually idle for long periods. Basically, all these disputes were about manning, and I have already quoted elsewhere Dennis Hamilton's estimate that there are still 5,000 too many men employed by the national Press in production, even after some years of reduction in manning scales by the *Daily Mirror* in particular (it was the *Daily Mirror* which had, according to the last Royal Commission on the Press, up to 30 per cent over-manning in some departments).

But too much can be made of this. Once again, the EIU's comment seems eminently reasonable: "There has been widespread criticism of restrictive practices in the newspaper industry and they have, to some extent, become one public image of the national Press. Restrictive practices are an easy theme for the writer or orator seeking popular acclamation, and published evidence of restrictive practices in newspaper production has supplied them with useful examples."

"There are restrictive practices in the industry, particularly in the Machine Room and Process Department, and no independent observer can fail to strongly condemn them. But in our opinion, taken in the perspective of the

newspaper industry as a whole, restrictive practices are not the fundamental weakness of the industry; they are the outward symptoms of more serious, deep rooted faults. Restrictive practices are obviously inefficient: they increase production costs, and are difficult to defend. Taken in the context of the overall costs of producing a newspaper, however, they have only a comparatively small impact on the overall costs, and are unlikely to have real influence on the success or failure of any individual newspaper."

Critics of the unions should re-read that last sentence, even though it does not, of course, absolve the unions from all criticism.

Perhaps the main adverse effect of union attitudes on demarcation and new methods, one not measurable in money terms is their effect on innovation. The *Guardian* (admittedly this is no credit to the *Guardian* either) simply did not ask the unions about introducing a new transmission machine in London to feed material to Manchester, because it assumed that there would be union opposition. Hemel Hempstead is another case where Thomson has carried on regardless, but a less wealthy proprietor could not. Again, the IPC can afford to risk disputes and their cost, where others could not. On the other hand, the unions have much to their credit. Amalgamations have reduced the number of major printing unions down to two, although one could wish that this had led sooner to amicable relations between them (and indeed, between the parts of the new amalgamations). As it is, inter-union rivalry is still a disturbing factor, and there is a good case for seeking, in the end, only one union for the industry. The unions have however agreed to large scale economies on both the *Guardian*

and the *Sun*, just as in a more gradual way they have been conceding more realistic manning scales on the *Mirror* and elsewhere. In short, the picture may be as good as one can expect in human affairs. But it would be refreshing if the printing unions gave more signs of being aware, and of making their members aware, of the technological challenges that face the industry. These are after all going to affect them as much or more than anyone. It is not that they do not know about them: of course they do. It is rather that too often in their dealings with management they seem to take a very short term view of what is going on in the industry.

Again, one cannot do better than quote the EIU: "We believe, however, that some union leaders can be fairly criticised for concentrating on short term benefits, and relying on excessive manning standards and no redundancy agreements for the long term security of their members. We consider this policy is almost bound to fail. We also believe that some union leaders have failed fully to control their more irresponsible and extreme members. The printing unions have obtained great power and authority but we believe that some have not fully accepted the responsibility that is indivisible from authority. We do not underestimate the difficulties facing the leaders of a democratic organisation, but the reputation of any union must depend to a large extent on the behaviour and action of its members and shop floor representatives."

The degree of union-management co-operation in newspapers is still far too small for an industry facing problems as big as those confronting the national Press. This is only partly the unions' fault. But it must be repeated that the unions in printing are immensely

strong, and comparatively rich—stronger and richer than the unions in most other industries, thanks to the high proportion of union membership, and the high pay scales. The unions to some extent control recruitment and run their own labour exchanges, for example. It is therefore reasonable to ask that with power should go even more responsibility than they have shown so far. In the end, neither managements nor unions can escape the onus of putting the industry back on a sound and viable financial and technological footing, and although both sides are waking up to this, neither is as yet wide awake to it.

In particular, it is sad that the talks on productivity between employers and unions that began after the receipt of the EIU report appear to have made little progress, and indeed, to have petered out. It would be a great pity if, now that the immediate financial crisis is past its worst, the two sides were to settle back into their bad old ways. But here again, a caution seems justified. Other industries, rightly, have had to pay out large sums in redundancy payments in order to slim down their work forces to realistic levels (and it must be added that even so it was a worthwhile exercise from the point of view of long term costs). There is no reason why the newspaper industry should not be expected to do the same. Equally, if the industry is to have, as it should have, proper pension arrangements, it is going to cost money. But can these legitimate costs be borne at the same time as many newspapers are losing large sums? If, as I argue elsewhere, the sums now spent on propping up failing newspapers would be better spent on technological and other development work, equally some part of them might be better spent on "buying" an efficient labour force. But this would demand a degree of co-

operation among the managements of the various newspaper groups which does not yet exist, although here again things are better than they used to be. But the inescapable conclusions of this chapter are that there is still much room for improvement in the management of Fleet Street, and that when Fleet Street gets a proper management with the proper objectives, both newspaper closures and large scale redundancies will be logical outcome. This is not a depressing picture, if it produces a more viable industry.

5. the press and TV

One of the gravest weaknesses in public discussion of the mass media is that people still treat the Press as if it were quite separate from broadcasting. The idea of "transport" is gradually taking over from disconnected discussions about road, rail and air: the idea of "energy" is more belatedly taking over from disconnected discussions about coal, oil, electricity and gas. But the idea of "communications" has yet to show itself, except in the vaguest way, to replace so far disparate discussions about newspapers and television. Parliamentary debates on the two branches of communications tend to be kept separate, and in people's minds there is very little direct association between the two. There are, of course, historical reasons for this. Newspapers are much older, derive from a different technology, are surrounded by a different set of ideas, notions, prejudices, ideals and expectations.

constraints on TV

But in a way this is the whole point. The difference in the set of notions, the "image" if you like, that surrounds the two media means that startling inconsistencies are tolerated in the conditions imposed upon them and in the expectations held about what they should do. Yet television undoubtedly shares large functions with the Press, such as the dissemination of news and the presentation of political and social arguments, and is in fact displacing the Press to a certain extent in these areas. (Of course, newspapers and TV also have some very different functions, and this is the justification for the continued existence of the two media side by side). The sorts of inconsistencies are these: a newspaper is expected to adopt a viewpoint, almost every publication having a political position of some sort, not necessarily a strict party

political one, and also a vaguer but still very important standpoint in the general reform-versus-tradition argument that permeates every aspect of British life: on the other hand, television is expected to be, indeed is instructed to be, impartial, having no "editorial" position of its own, presenting always both sides of the argument, keeping a long term balance between political parties, the spokesman directly employed by the medium preserving a careful analytical objectivity. Again, newspapers are expected to go out and search for scandals, to expose misconduct, to criticise freely, to chance their arm even if this sometimes degenerates into so-called muckraking. Television is expected to be altogether more gentlemanly, to follow rather than lead public discussion, to be "responsible in its use of the medium." Television is, moreover, held in some obscure but powerful way to be responsible for the moral state of the nation. Even those who do not go all the way with Mrs. Mary Whitehouse in her "clean up TV" campaign do nevertheless feel that TV has some special responsibility that newspapers do not to observe conventional decencies and avoid the obviously provocative or shocking. Once, newspapers were thought to have this "moral" obligation: then it was radio: now it is TV, although this feeling is perhaps on the wane.

But surely there is little logic in this differentiation between the media and still less logic is divorcing public policy about the one from public policy about the other. If a clear viewpoint is a healthy sign in a newspaper it cannot be altogether a bad thing on a television station; if a newspaper has a duty to protect society by its probings (and I have already emphasised that this is only one of the functions of a newspaper, which include much pure enter-

tainment; but politically it is the most important one), then it cannot be wrong for TV to do the same. Despite the almost complete lack of evidence, the belief persists that television has some unique power because of its direct access to people's living rooms (yet surely newspapers penetrate there as well) and so TV must be restrained and muffled to prevent abuse of this power. This power is probably much exaggerated, just as once the power of the Press was grossly overstated. Most politicians still have somewhere tucked away at the back of their mind the awful picture of a mass TV channel dominating the mass mind to vote massively for one party rather than the other if it fell into unscrupulous hands. This fear was once felt, say 40 years ago, about the popular Press, in the era of Northcliffe. It proved false. What evidence there is suggest that it is equally false about television, despite the fact that TV viewing occupies so much of the average person's time.

Unfortunately, this question of the control of television has got mixed up, emotionally and institutionally, with two other powerful factors in broadcasting. One is that because of the limited number of broadcasting channels, Government allocation of channels is inevitable: this immediately puts the Government in a powerful position to exercise control over the medium, and to give practical effect to its views about the desirable political and social functions of television. The other is that the contentious question of advertising on television has led to the creation of a strong body, the ITA, that ensures that commercial television behaves itself: and one aspect of this "good behaviour" is that ITV should conform to the same view of TV's political position as the BBC.

Of course, things have improved a lot

since the "old days"—which means, up to 1959—when TV simply pretended that general elections did not exist, and had to observe rigid rules about balance of presentation of party spokesmen. On a rather narrow definition of "political coverage," television has made much progress since 1959 and much credit is due to the various TV executives and controllers who often had to fight quite hard for this new, and still relative, freedom. That it is still relative can be illustrated by two examples (although there are many). The Panorama programme, a year ago, in which John Morgan, the commentator, openly advocated a public inquiry into the Hanratty case, on the grounds that he might well have been innocent after all, was widely thought by some politicians to have exceeded the bounds of the BBC's brief, even though many newspapers have frequently run editorials on the same subject, expressing the same view. It was in fact a rather rare instance of a television programme adopting a very positive "line" on a controversial topic — had the programme been exposing racial discrimination it would have aroused no such comment: but because it was about a subject that was causing the Government embarrassment, it rankled.

In a broader sense, one of the most notable absences from the British television screen is the independent political commentator, in the American sense. British television commentators are essentially questioners, analysers, and summers-up. They do not, as at least some of their American counterparts do, express an opinion in the way that a newspaper not only does, but is expected to do. American local broadcasting stations carry this further: they quite often run "editorials" of their own, in which the station expresses a view of its own about some topic, usually a local or regional matter of

current interest. This has not apparently brought the heavens down, nor impaired people's acceptance of the general objectivity of the news reporting of either the station or the commentator, although it must be admitted that often the editorials that are run on American TV are "against sin" and not therefore particularly provocative.

Many other examples, ranging from TW3 to the veto on Ian Smith appearing on BBC TV, could be adduced to support the main point of all this—that television in Britain is still exploring the bounds of the possible, still finding out by a long series of often small incidents what the limits on its activities are. The Press went through this many years ago, and although the matter is never finally cut and dried (witness the recent D Notice controversy), nevertheless once Northcliffe had finally established the concept of a profit-making mass circulation popular Press, the general area of operation of the Press was settled, and has remained on the whole unchallenged since then. Television is still going through this painful process, and it therefore matters which way the argument goes.

towards more independent TV

Here we return to the main thesis of this pamphlet—that the chief worry arising from a contracting national Press is that contraction may limit its performance of the role of independent scrutineer of social and political issues, and that therefore television ought to be enlisted much more than at present to help out this role, especially as the central powers of the State and of the large privately owned business corporations continue to grow. So it seems clear in which direction television must be encouraged to go—it is in the direction of more freedom of comment,

more original research, less sensitivity to the views of politicians. It is unfortunate that some Labour politicians do not see it that way.

Some of the practical consequences are also clear. A solution must be found to the question of the BBC's finances. For if there is one thing which limits the willingness of the BBC to stick its neck out in the search for new freedoms—and the Corporation is rarely given enough credit for its readiness to do this—it is the fact that it is heavily in debt. The paradox is that the licence fee system, instituted in the 1920s to give the BBC an assured source of income and free it from the day to day attentions of politicians, has in fact pushed the BBC into politics, because every time it needs a higher licence fee the BBC has to mount a political campaign to get it. Just as the debts of the railways and the coal mines inevitably invited detailed political interference, contrary to the original intentions of those who nationalised them, so inevitably the BBC is to some degree delivered into the hands of the politicians as long as it has to depend on them to meet the gap between its expenditure and its licence income. This situation must be remedied if the BBC is to remain a vigorous organisation. The decision to remedy it is itself a political one, and cannot be otherwise. That is what makes essential a wide public understanding of the issues indeed.

political control

Secondly, the new structural relations between the BBC and the Government need watching. When the late Lord Normanbrook took over as chairman of the BBC Board of Governors, it was a break with precedent. Formerly, the chairman had been a figurehead, real power resting with the Director General

of the BBC—this was a legacy from the days of Lord Reith's long tenure of office before the war. Normanbrook, however, was no figurehead, although his precise functions remained unclear, despite at least one public lecture on the subject given by him. Broadly, however, the BBC needed stronger representation in political circles because of its own greater involvement in pressure politics: and equally the Government needed a man who could keep an eye on the BBC and be responsive to official opinion. Quite how this two-way influence worked out in practice, is difficult to say for an outsider (although, to declare my interest, I was at that time working for the BBC). But the appointment of Lord Hill as chairman of the BBC to succeed Lord Normanbrook is in this same new line of "tough" chairmen, with the additional fact that Hill is an ex-politician. It has been widely speculated that Lord Hill has been put there to exercise the same strong control over the BBC that he exercised over ITV during his time as chairman of the Independent Television Authority. Only time will show whether this is true. The BBC needs some strong men at the top: but they need to be strong in the interests of the BBC, and not in the interests of the Government.

But the appointment of Herbert Bowden (now Lord Aylestone) to succeed Lord Hill at the ITA must strengthen the suspicion that political control of broadcasting may be increasing rather than decreasing. It is not that one questions the integrity of either. It is rather a question of their backgrounds, and the attitudes that their careers have inculcated into them. Both, as ex-politicians themselves, may be expected (until there is proof to the contrary) to listen more sympathetically to the view of other politicians than former BBC and ITA chairmen and directors-

general were apt to do. Very few people seem to have grasped the point that our two broadcasting organisations are now under the ultimate control of two politicians, and that this is a major break with past traditions. One must wait to see how it works out in practice, and it is not to be assumed that either Lord Hill or Lord Aylestone are anybody else's creatures. All the same, given Mr. Wilson's reputed hostility towards the BBC, it is a legitimate question whether no-one else of a more independent political stance could not have been found for both jobs. There must be some significance in the appointment of two politicians, and it remains to be seen what. But it should certainly be watched.

advertising now acceptable

Thirdly, it should now be openly and generally accepted that advertising is a perfectly legitimate way of financing television. The way that the ITA has evolved as an institution shows that it is perfectly possible to construct a commercial system that draws a balance between the needs of the advertisers and the needs of public policy. It is not that the final shape of commercial broadcasting has yet been settled—many people are still, rightly, dubious about programme breaks for commercials: there is a strong case for limiting commercials to the interval between programmes. But essentially we have a system that works, and has not delivered the programme schedules into the hands of morons, as many feared (of course, there is much room for improvement even so). Moreover, the pattern all over the world is for TV to depend on a mixture of licence fee money and advertising revenue: it is only the mixture that varies.

Lastly, the Postmaster General, Mr.

Short, has recently been dropping hints that the whole structure of broadcasting may come under review in the next few years, especially in the light of the deficits of the BBC and the wealth generated by ITV, which pays out about £40 million a year in various forms of tax to the Government, equal to nearly half its income from advertisements. This re-examination may be a good thing. But it will need to be watched, to see what effect it has on the relationship between broadcasting and the Government, and on the independence of the broadcasters.

variety of ownership

One solution might be a deliberate move towards more diverse forms of ownership and income, as the number of TV channels increases. In the present state of technology, there is a theoretical limit of six national TV channels in Britain, against the existing three. Scientific advances may well increase that number. Even if it does not, there is a strong case for introducing more variety of control over the six channels as they arrive, to give more variety of outlook, ideas, and opinions, just as the variety of newspapers ensures a certain diversity of approach which is one of the values of a national Press.

This is of course to look some way into the future. We shall not get more channels at least until the switch to 625 lines and colour TV is complete in the early 1970s. Nor am I suggesting that the BBC should be made to accept advertising against its will as a way of solving its present financial problems. Its tradition is all against taking ads, and Britain should at least try putting up the licence fee nearer to European levels (sometimes twice the present BBC licence fee) before ramming commercials down the BBC's throat. But

could we not have a new public corporation for the next new channel, partly taking advertising revenue, partly taking licence money, if only to see what would happen? It must be admitted that if this led to intensive competition for the same sources of revenue, it might depress programme standards. But it seems to me that more channels are bound to come anyway, and the money for one or more is already there, in the huge sum taken in tax by the Government.

Variety of ownership, control and source of income of a larger number of TV channels would at least give the opportunity for a wider variety of opinions and viewpoints, and at the same time loosen the present rigid confrontation between BBC 1 and ITV, which has become a bit like trench warfare in World War 1—a sort of slogging match in which neither side is the victor, but which forces both sides to adopt identical (and often crude) tactics. Of course, multiplicity of channels does not ensure a variety of view, or high quality, and some say that here, as elsewhere, "more means worse." But the fact that Britain has, on balance, the best television service in the world leads one to hope that the level can be at least maintained, while giving more opportunity for individual approaches. More channels would inevitably mean an extension of the use of advertising revenue, and this fact alone will arouse opposition in some parts. It is true that the licence fee, the only other type of non-Government income, is still too low in this country, and ought to be raised, in the fairly near future.

But the inevitable expansion of television is going to be (indeed already is) very expensive, and will probably demand more money than can ever be raised by a flat poll-tax of the popula-

tion (which is what the licence fee is): an increased licence fee may well achieve the desirable end of keeping the whole future development of broadcasting. So advertising—especially if the BBC in pocket, but it cannot sustain the Government chooses to use this revenue for the development of TV instead of taking so much of it in tax—will have to play a large part, and it is surely not beyond the wit of man to devise institutions which will, as the ITA is doing with some success for the present ITV structure, ensure that the interests of the advertisers coincide with the interests of the public in good television.

expansion

The fact must be faced that the expansion of television still has along way to go; that this is going to be very expensive; that both these factors are going to call into question the existing structure of broadcasting in this country; that the Government has promised a review of that structure; and that (not least because of the signs of greater political control over the medium) the outcome of that review is of concern to everyone. What is more, it is of great concern to the newspaper industry. The effect of one commercial channel on the revenues of the Press has been serious enough. What happens if there is (as there surely will be) a second commercial channel? And what happens if, say, broadcasting hours are extended and we have television at breakfast time, which is at present the great daily newspaper reading time?

In other words, there ought to be, but is not, a serious debate in progress about policy for the communications media as a whole, since they are so heavily inter-related. Just as we need, and are getting, an energy policy, a

transport policy, so inevitably sooner or later we must have a communications policy.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is better that there should be fewer national newspapers than that the Press as a whole should fall under greater Government (any Government) influence.

2. This can be secured by a continuing but faster shift away from reliance on advertising revenue towards reliance on circulation revenue: and by using the money at present used in expensive cross-subsidy of ailing newspapers by profitable ones, to get realistic manning standards and greater investment in new technology: even if this means closing down several papers.

3. Grandiose ideas for Government intervention should be rejected as endangering even the present degree of freedom of the Press. But Government could help by arranging a redundancy scheme, as the PIB suggested, sponsoring a newspaper industry research centre or allowing NRDC grants to go to experiments in printing technology.

4. The important thing is that the newspaper industry should get to grips with the electronic era: to suppose that in the process the present titles, lay-out, distribution methods and publication schedules of the national newspapers will remain intact, is unrealistic.

5. What must be preserved during the process are the valuable functions of newspapers, however imperfectly they are at present performed: in so far as television is displacing newspapers as the means of mass communication, there ought to be, within an overall communication policy, an attempt to

get both greater freedom of expression for TV on political and social topics, and greater diversity of ownership and finance of TV channels, to facilitate this. It is not inevitable (though of course possible) that more TV will mean worse TV.

6. Nothing will save Fleet Street from death if it does not help itself, by improved management, and by an end to the depressing "do-nothing" attitude that has persisted at industry level even after publication of the damning EIU report on newspaper efficiency.

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