

# Part I

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## *Press history*

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## *Whig press history as political mythology*

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The orthodox interpretation of the development of the British press has remained unchanged for over a century. 'The British press,' writes David Chaney, 'is generally agreed to have attained its freedom around the middle of the nineteenth century.'<sup>1</sup> This view, first advanced in the pioneering Victorian histories of journalism, has been repeated uncritically ever since in standard histories both of the press and of modern Britain.

The winning of press freedom is attributed partly to a heroic struggle against the state. The key events in this struggle are generally said to be the abolition of the Court of Star Chamber in 1641, the ending of press licensing in 1694, Fox's Libel Act, 1792, and the repeal of press taxation – the so-called 'taxes on knowledge' – in the period 1853 to 1861. Only with the last of these reforms, it is claimed, did the press finally become free.

This landmark in the history of Britain is also held to be the product of the capitalist development of the press. Indeed, some researchers place greater emphasis on the market evolution of the press than on its legal emancipation. 'The true censorship,' Professor Roach writes of the late Georgian press, 'lay in the fact that the newspaper had not yet reached financial independence, and consequently depended on the administration or the parties.' The growth of newspaper profits, largely from advertising, supposedly rescued the press from economic dependence on the state. This view has been restated succinctly by Ivon Asquith in a scholarly study of the early nineteenth-century press. 'Since sales were inadequate to cover the costs of producing a paper,' he writes,

it was the growing income from advertising which provided the material base for the change of attitude from subservience to independence. . . . It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the growth of advertising revenue was the most important single factor in enabling the press to emerge as the Fourth Estate of the realm.

Orthodox histories of the press, with their stress on the free market and legal emancipation as the foundation of press freedom, provide a powerful, mythological account with a contemporary moral. Thus, the historical account of the advertiser as the midwife of press freedom is invoked by journalists on the left as well as on the right to justify the role of advertising in the press. 'The dangerous dependence of newspapers on advertising,' wrote Francis Williams, a former editor of the Labour *Daily Herald*,

has often been the theme of newspaper reformers – usually from outside its ranks. But the daily press would never have come into existence as a force in public and social life if it had not been for the need of men of commerce to advertise. Only through the growth of advertising did the press achieve independence.

Similarly, journalists sometimes cite the historic struggle against state control as grounds for opposing any state-sponsored reform of the press. For instance, John Whale concludes a brief historical account of state censorship with the warning that politicians are still seeking 'indirect ways of bringing state power to bear on unsympathetic journalism'. The principal way this is being manifested, he cautions, is in proposals to curb concentration of press ownership.

However, while Whig history is invoked to oppose change in the press, it is summoned as an ally to justify the fundamental reorganization of broadcasting. For instance, the Peacock Committee – appointed by the Thatcher government to investigate the funding of the BBC – retold the history of the dismantling of press censorship<sup>2</sup> as a prelude to arguing for the eventual removal of all broadcasting regulation (which it equated with 'censorship'). In effect, it deployed a particular view of newspaper history to advocate the reconstruction of television along the free market lines of the press.

Orthodox accounts of press history thus have policy implications for the present day. Part of the ideological resonance of these accounts stems also from their powerful evocation of the part played by the free press in empowering the people during the nineteenth century. According to the *New Cambridge Modern History*, financially independent newspapers became 'great organs of the public mind' which expressed public opinion and made governments accountable. The emergent, free press, it is also argued, made a vital contribution to the maturing of Britain's democracy by becoming more responsible and less partisan. Even a Marxist such as Raymond Williams noted with approval that after 1855 'most newspapers were able to drop their frantic pamphleteering',<sup>3</sup> while the radical historian Alan Lee portrayed the late Victorian period as a 'golden age' of British journalism.

Agreement among historians is not total. There is a continuing debate about when newspapers became independent of political parties. A number of historians also express misgivings about the growing 'commercialization' of

the press, and are sharply critical of the first generation of press lords. But few contest the conventional wisdom, embalmed in a much acclaimed two-volume study by Stephen Koss, that there was 'a transition from official to popular control' of the press. Fewer still contest the central thesis of Whig press history that this 'progress of the press' was central to 'the broadening of political liberty'.

What follows is a long overdue attempt to reappraise the standard interpretation of press history.<sup>4</sup> It will indicate the need not merely to re-examine critically the accepted view of the historical emergence of a 'free' press but to stand it on its head. The period around the mid-nineteenth century, it will be argued, did not inaugurate a new era of press freedom and liberty; it established instead a new system of press censorship more effective than anything that had gone before. Market forces succeeded where legal repression had failed in conscripting the press to the social order.

### Notes

1. Notes for each chapter have been limited, although their number has tended to grow with each new edition. An extensive bibliography is provided at the end of the book.
2. The Peacock Committee's historical account is extremely simplistic, and ignores the revisionist interpretations advanced by historians of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century press.
3. R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1965), p. 218. He later modified his view in R. Williams, 'The press and popular culture: an historical perspective' in G. Boyce, J. Curran and P. Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History* (London, Constable, 1978).
4. A number of important studies of early nineteenth-century working-class politics – notably by the Thompsons, Hollis, Wiener and Epstein – provide evidence that, by implication at least, casts doubt on the conventional Whig thesis of the triumphant rise of a free press in mid-Victorian Britain. The wider implications of these studies for reinterpreting press history have been buried, however, because their focus is on early working-class struggles rather than on the long-term development of journalism.

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## *The struggle for a free press*

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The remarkably resilient Whig interpretation of press history is sustained by focusing attention upon mainstream commercial newspapers, while ignoring or downplaying the development of the radical press. Only if this selective perspective is maintained does the conventional view of the rise of a free press appear plausible.

During the second half of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century, a section of the commercial press did indeed become more politically independent partly as a consequence of the growth of advertising. This additional revenue reduced dependence on political subsidies; encouraged papers to reject covert secret service grants (the last English newspaper to receive a clandestine government grant was the *Observer* in 1840); improved the wages and security of employment of journalists so that they became less biddable; and, above all, financed greater expenditure on news-gathering so that newspapers became less reliant on official sources and more reluctant to trade their independence in return for obtaining 'prior intelligence' from the government. This shift was symbolized by *The Times's* magisterial declaration on Boxing Day, 1834 that it would no longer accept early information from government offices since this was inconsistent with 'the pride and independence of our journal', and anyway its 'own information was earlier and surer'.

However, the growth of advertising did not transform the commercial press into an 'independent fourth estate'. On the contrary, the development of modern political parties from the 1860s onward encouraged a closer interpenetration of party politics and commercial journalism. A number of leading proprietors in Victorian and Edwardian Britain were Members of Parliament, while some national newspapers were subsidized by party loyalists or from party funds until well into the twentieth century. This continuing involvement with government or opposition parties belied the often repeated claim that the press was an *independent* check on Parliament and the executive; in reality, newspapers long remained an extension of the party system.<sup>1</sup>

The conventional portrayal of advertising as the midwife of press independence is also directly contradicted by the emergence of the radical press as a political force in the early nineteenth century. As we shall see, pioneer radical papers did not obtain significant advertising support; yet they were independent both of government and of political groupings in Parliament. Their rise demonstrated plainly that newspapers could – and did – become autonomous from the state through financial support other than advertising.

The rise of the radical press as an extra-parliamentary force also revealed the limitations of official censorship. Successive governments sought to curb the radical press through the lawcourts. But although seditious and blasphemous libel law was framed in a catch-all form that made any kind of fundamental criticism of the social order a legal offence, it was not always easy to enforce. Juries, empowered by Fox's Libel Act (1792) to determine guilt or innocence, were often reluctant to convict. This was brought home to the authorities by the sensational acquittals of Eaton, Hardy and Tooke in the 1790s, Wooler and Hone in 1817, and Cobbett in 1831. The sharp edge of the law was further blunted in 1843 when Lord Campbell's Libel Act made the statement of truth in the public interest a legitimate defence against the charge of seditious libel.

Even before the 1843 Act was passed, the authorities had come round reluctantly to the view that libel prosecutions were often counter-productive. When the editor of *The Republican* was prosecuted in 1819, the paper's circulation rose by over 50 per cent. Similarly disillusioning experiences prompted the Attorney-General to conclude in 1843 that 'a libeller thirsted for nothing more than the valuable advertisement of a public trial in a Court of Justice'. This disenchantment was reflected in a shift of government policy: there were only sixteen prosecutions for seditious and blasphemous libel in the period 1825 to 1834, compared with 167 prosecutions during the preceding eight years.

Instead the authorities came to rely increasingly on the newspaper stamp duty and taxes on paper and advertisements as a way of curbing the radical press. The intention of these press taxes was twofold: to restrict the readership of newspapers to the well-to-do by raising cover prices; and to limit the ownership of newspapers to the propertied class by increasing publishing costs. The belief was that substantial stakeholders in society would conduct newspapers 'in a more responsible manner than was likely to be the result of pauper management',<sup>2</sup> and that it was potentially dangerous to social order to allow the lower ranks to read newspapers at all.

The stamp duty was increased by 266 per cent between 1789 and 1815. Publications subject to the stamp duty were redefined in 1819 to include political periodicals. In addition, a security system was introduced which required publishers of weeklies to register their papers and place financial bonds of between £200 and £300 with the authorities. Although the ostensible purpose of this requirement was to guarantee payment of libel fines, its

real objective was to force up further the cost of publishing and thus ensure, as Lord Castlereagh explained to the Commons, that 'persons exercising the power of the press should be men of some respectability and property'.<sup>3</sup> Ironically in view of the way in which newspaper costs were to soar subsequently in an unfettered capitalist market, the government was persuaded by the parliamentary opposition that its original intention of insisting on a bond of £500 represented an unacceptable limitation on the freedom to publish.

The government's reliance on taxes and securities as a way of containing the radical press worked for a time. The upsurge of radical journalism that occurred in the wake of the Napoleonic War weakened in the 1820s. But with the revival of radical agitation in the early 1830s, the authorities faced a more formidable challenge – the systematic evasion of the stamp duty by an underground press supported by a well-organized distribution network and able to finance 'victims' funds' for the families of people imprisoned for selling unstamped newspapers.

The government responded initially by seeking to enforce the law more effectively. Printers of unstamped newspapers were rounded up; supplies of paper were intercepted; sellers of underground papers were gaoled. At least 1130 cases of selling unstamped newspapers were prosecuted in London alone during the period 1830 to 1836, but, despite these measures, the radical press continued to flourish. 'Prosecutions, fines and imprisonments were alike failures', the minister in charge of the fight against the unstamped press later recalled.<sup>4</sup> By the summer of 1836 the government was forced to concede defeat. The Commons was informed on 20 June that the government 'had resorted to all means afforded by the existing law' but that it 'was altogether ineffectual to the purpose of putting an end to the unstamped papers'.

A crisis had been reached. By 1836 the unstamped press published in London had an aggregate readership of at least two million. According to government estimates, its circulation even exceeded that of the respectable, stamped press. The whole system of press control seemed on the point of final collapse, since leading publishers of stamped papers warned the government that they would also evade the stamp duty unless more effective steps were taken to enforce it.

The Whig government responded to the crisis with a well-planned counter-offensive. New measures were passed which strengthened the government's search and confiscation powers. Penalties were also increased for being found in possession of an unstamped newspaper, and the stamp duty was reduced by 75 per cent in order to make 'smuggling' less attractive. Thus what has been seen as a landmark in the advance of press freedom was manifestly repressive both in intention and effect. As Spring Rice, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, explained to the Commons, a strategic concession, combined with increased coercive powers, was necessary in order to enforce a system that had broken down. The aim of these new measures, he stated candidly, was to 'put down the unstamped papers'.<sup>5</sup>

The government's new strategy succeeded in its immediate objective. 'No unstamped papers can be attempted with success,' declared Hetherington, a leading radical publisher, shortly after being released from prison, unless 'some means can be devised either to print the newspaper without types and presses, or render the premises . . . inaccessible to armed force.'<sup>6</sup> By 1837 the clandestine radical press had disappeared.

Compliance with the law forced radical newspapers to raise their prices, even though the stamp duty was much reduced. Whereas most unstamped papers had sold at 1d in the early 1830s, most of their successors in the 1840s sold at 4d or 5d – a sum that was well beyond the means of individual workers. However, the government's aim of destroying the radical press was frustrated by organized consumer resistance. Informal groups of working people pooled their resources each week to purchase a radical paper. Union branches, clubs and political associations financed the collective purchase of newspapers. Even taverns were threatened with the withdrawal of custom unless they bought radical papers. Partly as a consequence of this concerted action, new radical papers emerged which gained even larger circulations than those reached by their best-selling unstamped predecessors.

Admittedly, after 1836, the radical press was not as strong in relation to the respectable press as it had been before. Between 1836 and 1855 there was a substantial growth in the number and circulation of commercial local weekly papers as well as in the readership of religious publications and of family and 'useful knowledge' magazines. However, since much of this expansion appears to have taken place among the middle and lower-middle classes,<sup>7</sup> it did not greatly diminish the radical press's influence within the working class.

The principal rivals to the radical press within the working class (of whom well over half were literate or semi-literate by the 1830s) were almanacs, printed ballads, gallsheets and chapbooks. However, radical newspapers far outstripped rival *political* publications read by the working class.

Indeed, the radical press was the circulation pace-setter for the nation's press throughout much of the period 1815 to 1855. Cobbett's radical *Twopenny Trash* broke all circulation records in 1816 to 1817. This record was probably beaten by the left-wing *Weekly Police Gazette* which, to judge from a government raid on its premises, had a circulation of over 40,000 in 1836 – well over double that of leading conservative weeklies such as the *Sunday Times* and *Bell's Life in London*. In 1838 the militant *Northern Star* gained the largest circulation of any newspaper published in the provinces and, in 1839, the largest national circulation of any paper apart from the liberal radical *Weekly Dispatch*. Its success was followed by the still larger circulation secured by the radical *Reynolds News*, the paper with the second-largest circulation in Britain after the liberal radical *Lloyds Weekly* in the early 1850s. Both publications were the first newspapers to break through the 100,000 circulation barrier in 1856.<sup>8</sup>

Newspaper circulations during the first half of the nineteenth century



seem very small by modern standards, but circulation statistics provide a misleading historical index of newspaper consumption, because the average number of readers per copy has declined markedly since the mid-nineteenth century. A copy of a leading radical paper such as the *Northern Star*, selling at 4½d in 1840, cost approximately the equivalent of almost £3 today. Sharing of high-cost papers, together with the widespread practice of reading papers aloud for the benefit of the semi-literate and illiterate, resulted in a very high number of 'readers' for each newspaper sold. Hollis and Epstein estimate, for instance, that radical papers in the 1830s and 1840s reached upward of twenty readers per copy. This compares with an average of only two to three readers per copy of contemporary daily papers. Yet even if a cautious estimate of ten readers per copy is taken as the norm for radical papers in the early Victorian period, it still means that leading militant papers such as the *Northern Star* and its successor, *Reynolds News*, each reached at their peak, before the repeal of the stamp duty, half a million readers. This was at a time when the population of England and Wales over the age of 14 was little over ten million. The emergent radical press was thus a genuinely popular force, reaching a mass public.

### The economic structure of the radical press

The circulation success of the radical press was a direct consequence of the growth of a radical trade union and political movement. However, this success was also facilitated by the prevailing economic structure of the press industry. Since this is an important aspect of the central argument that follows, it is worth examining in some detail the finances of the early radical press.

The initial capital required to set up a radical paper in the early part of the nineteenth century was extremely small. Most radical unstamped papers were printed not on a steam press, but on hand presses, which cost as little as £10 to acquire. Metal type was often hired by the hour and print workers paid on a piecework basis.

After 1836 leading stamped radical papers were printed on more sophisticated machinery. The *London Dispatch*, for instance, was printed on a Napier machine, bought with the help of a wealthy well-wisher and the profits from Hetherington's other publications. The *Northern Star* had a printing press specially constructed for it in London. Even so, launch costs were extremely small in comparison with the subsequent period. The *Northern Star*, for instance, was launched in 1837 with a total capital of £690, mostly raised by public subscription.

Financing a paper during its initial establishment period could often cost more than setting it up. Even so, early trading losses were minimized by low operating costs. Radical unstamped papers paid no tax, relied heavily upon news reports filed by their readers on a voluntary basis, and had small

newsprint costs because of their high readership per copy. Consequently radical unstamped newspapers needed to attain only small circulations in order to be economically viable. For instance, the *Poor Man's Guardian*, a leading newspaper of the early 1830s, broke even as soon as its circulation reached 2500.

Even after 1836, when a penny stamp duty had to be paid on each copy, the running costs of the radical press remained relatively low. The influential *London Dispatch* reported, for example (17 September 1836), that 'the whole expense allowed for editing, reporting, reviewing, literary contributions etc., in fact, the entire cost of what is technically called "making up" the paper, is only six pounds per week'. In the same issue it reported that, at its selling price of 3½d, it could break even with a circulation of 16,000. Similarly the *Northern Star* which, unlike its predecessors, developed a substantial network of paid correspondents, claimed to be spending little more than £9 10s a week on its reporting establishment in 1841. Selling at 4½d, it was able to break even with a weekly circulation of about 6200. This low break-even point meant that its run-in costs were very small. Indeed the *Northern Star* almost certainly moved into profit within its first month of publication.

Because publishing costs were low the ownership and control of newspapers could be in the hands of people committed, in the words of Joshua Hobson, an ex-handloom weaver and publisher of the *Voice of West Riding*, 'to support the rights and interests of the order and class to which it is my pride to belong'. Some newspapers, such as the *Voice of the People*, the *Liberator* and the *Trades Newspaper*, were owned by political or trade union organizations. Others were owned by individual proprietors such as Cleave, Watson and Hetherington, many of them people of humble origins who had risen to prominence through the working-class movement. While not lacking in ruthlessness or business acumen, the people they entrusted with the editing of their newspapers were all former manual workers like William Hill and Joshua Hobson, or middle-class activists like O'Brien and Lorymer, whose attitudes had been shaped by long involvement in working-class politics. A substantial section of the popular newspaper press reaching a working-class audience was thus controlled by those who were committed to the working-class movement.

This influenced the way in which journalists working for the radical press perceived their role. Unlike the institutionalized journalists of the later period, they tended to see themselves as activists rather than as professionals. Indeed many of the paid correspondents of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, *Northern Star* and the early *Reynolds News* were also political organizers for the National Union of the Working Classes or the Chartist Movement. They sought to describe and expose the dynamics of power and inequality rather than to report 'hard news' as a series of disconnected events. They saw themselves as class representatives rather than as disinterested intermediaries and attempted to establish a relationship of real reciprocity with their readers. As the editor of the *Northern Star* wrote in its fifth anniversary issue,

I have ever sought to make it [the paper] rather a reflex of your minds than a medium through which to exhibit any supposed talent or intelligence of my own. This is precisely my conception of what a people's organ should be.

The second important feature of the economic structure of the radical press in the first half of the nineteenth century was that it was self-sufficient on the proceeds of sales alone. The radical unstamped press carried very little commercial advertising and the stamped radical press fared little better. The *London Dispatch* (17 September 1836) complained bitterly, for instance, of the 'prosecutions, fines and the like et ceteras with which a paper of our principles is sure to be more largely honoured than by the lucrative patronage of advertisers'. The grudge held against advertisers by the *London Dispatch* and other radical newspapers was fully justified. An examination of the official advertisement duty returns reveals a marked disparity in the amount of advertising duty per 1000 copies (an index that takes account of circulation difference) paid by the radical press compared with its more respectable rivals. For example, in 1840 two middle-class papers published in Leeds (the *Leeds Mercury* and *Leeds Intelligence*) and the four leading national daily papers (*The Times*, *Morning Post*, *Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Advertiser*) all paid over fifty times more advertisement duty per 1000 copies than the radical *Northern Star*, a Leeds-based paper with a national circulation.

A similar pattern emerges in the case of the other leading radical papers for which returns are available. In 1817, for instance, Cobbett's *Political Register* received only three advertisements: its advertisement duty per 1000 copies was less than one-hundredth of that of respectable rival periodicals, although this disparity was somewhat reduced by the 1830s. The *London Dispatch* in 1837 was only marginally better off: it paid per 1000 copies less than one twenty-fifth of the advertisement duty collected from each of its main respectable rivals in London, also with a national circulation.

This lack of advertising support meant that radical papers had limited money at their disposal for editorial development. Some were even forced to close down, even though they had larger circulations than respectable rivals better endowed with advertising. The radical press was thus put in a position of competitive disadvantage at a time when the high price of newspapers, inflated by the stamp duty, was already a major deterrent against buying papers among the working class.

Yet despite these substantial disadvantages, the absence of advertising did not prevent the radical press from flourishing. While fortunes were not easily made, radical newspapers – both stamped and unstamped – could be highly profitable. Hetherington, the publisher of the stamped *London Dispatch*, was reported to be making £1000 a year from his business in 1837. Similarly the stamped *Northern Star* was estimated to have produced a remarkable profit of £13,000 in 1839 and £6500 in 1840, which was generated very largely from sales revenue.

This independence from advertising was itself a liberating force. Radical papers were, by the 1830s, increasingly oriented towards a working-class audience, and became more uncompromising in their attacks on capitalism. They were not forced to temper their radicalism or to seek a more affluent readership by the need to attract advertising. Instead they were free to respond to the radicalization of the working-class movement because they relied on their readers rather than advertisers for their economic viability.

### The impact of the radical press

The radical press did not merely reflect the growth of the working-class organizations; it also deepened and extended radical consciousness, helping to build support for the working-class movement.

One of the most important, and least remarked on, aspects of the development of the radical press in the first half of the nineteenth century was that its leading publications developed a nationwide circulation. Even as early as the second decade, leading radical papers such as the *Twopenny Trash*, *Political Register* and *Republican* were read as far afield as Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Midlands and East Anglia, as well as in the south of England. By the early 1830s the principal circulation newspapers like the *Weekly Police Gazette*, the *Poor Man's Guardian* and *Dispatch* had a distribution network extending on a north-south axis from Glasgow to Truro, and on an east-west axis from Norwich to Carmarthen. Part of the impact of the radical press stemmed from this central fact – the extent of its geographical distribution.

The radical press was effective in reinforcing a growing consciousness of class and in unifying disparate elements of the working community, partly because its leading publications provided national coverage and reached a national working-class audience. It helped to extend the often highly exclusive occupational solidarity of early trade unionism to other sectors of the labour community by demonstrating the common predicament of union members in different trades throughout the country. Workers attempting to set up an extra-legal union read in the radical press in 1833 to 1834, for instance, of similar struggles by glove workers in Yeovil, cabinet-makers and joiners in Glasgow and Carlisle, shoemakers and smiths in Northampton, and bricklayers and masons in London, as well as of working-class struggles in Belgium and Germany. Similarly the radical press helped to reduce geographical isolation by showing that local agitation – whether against Poor Law Commissioners, new machinery, long working hours or wage reductions – conformed to a common pattern throughout the country. The radical press further expanded its readers' field of social vision by publishing, particularly in the later phase from the 1830s onward, news that none of the respectable papers carried, and by interpreting this news within a radical framework of analysis. It was, in the words of the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor, 'the link that binds the industrious classes together'.<sup>9</sup>

The radical press also helped to promote working-class organizations. Movements ranging from early trade unions to political organizations, such as the National Union of the Working Classes and the Chartist Movement, partly depended for their success on the publicity they obtained from the radical press. O'Connor recalled that before the emergence of Chartist newspapers, 'I found that the press was entirely mute, while I was working myself to death, and that a meeting in one town did nothing for another'. Press publicity stimulated people to attend meetings and to become involved in political and industrial organizations; it also brought the activist vanguard of the working-class movement into national prominence, helping, for example, to transform unknown farm workers victimized for joining a trade union in the remote village of Tolpuddle into national working-class heroes. No less important, it also contributed to the morale of activists in the working-class movement who were confronted by what must have seemed, at times, insuperable odds. Without the *Northern Star*, declared one speaker at a local Chartist meeting, 'their own sounds might echo through the wilderness'.<sup>10</sup>

Above all, the radical press was a major mobilizing force in its own right. We have become so accustomed to the individualized pattern of newspaper consumption amidst a steady flow of information from a variety of media that it is difficult to understand the political significance of newspapers in the early nineteenth century. Newspapers were often the only readily available source of information about what was happening outside the local community and, in some cases, generated passionate loyalty among their readers. Fielden recalls, for instance, 'on the day the newspaper, the *Northern Star*, O'Connor's paper, was due, the people used to line the roadside waiting for its arrival, which was paramount to everything else for the time being'. The impact of the radical press was reinforced further by the discussions that followed the reading out loud of articles from newspapers in taverns, workshops, homes and public meetings, vividly described in numerous memoirs and reminiscences.<sup>11</sup> This social pattern of consumption (which continued on a diminished scale late into the nineteenth century) resulted in political newspapers having a much greater agitational effect than those of today.

The first wave of radical papers from the 1790s through to the late 1820s played an important part in the general reorientation that preceded the political mobilization of a section of the working class. They raised expectations both by invoking a mythical past in which plenty and natural justice had prevailed, and by proclaiming the possibility of a future in which poverty could be relieved through political means. It was this raising of hopes, combined with a direct assault on the Anglican 'morality' which sanctioned the social order, that most alarmed parliamentarians at the time. As Dr Philimore, MP, warned the Commons following official reports that servants and common soldiers had been seen reading radical newspapers,

Those infamous publications . . . inflame [working people's] passions and awaken their selfishness, contrasting their present conditions with what they contend to be their future condition – a condition incompatible with human nature, and with those immutable laws which Providence has established for the regulation of civil society.<sup>12</sup>

The radical press not only helped to erode political passivity, based on fatalistic acceptance of the social system as 'natural' and 'providential', but also began to dispel the collective lack of confidence that had inhibited working-class resistance. The least valued section of the community was able to obtain a new understanding of its role in society through its own press. 'The real strength and all the resources of the country,' characteristically proclaimed Cobbett's *Political Register*, 'ever have sprung from the labour of its people.' This novel view of the world, popularized through the more radical journals, provided a means of reordering the entire ranking of status and moral worth in society. The highest in the land were degraded to the lowest place as unproductive parasites: working people, in contrast, were elevated to the top as the productive and useful section of the community. The early militant press thus fostered an alternative value system that symbolically turned the world upside down. It also repeatedly emphasized the potential power of working people to effect social change through the force of 'combination' and organized action.

The radical press played a part in radicalizing the emergent working-class movement by developing a more sophisticated political analysis. The first generation of radical papers was trapped inside the intellectual categories of the eighteenth-century liberal attack on the aristocratic constitution. Conflict was generally portrayed in political terms as a struggle between the aristocracy and the 'productive classes' (usually defined to include working capitalists as well as the working classes), while criticism was focused mainly upon corruption in high places and repressive taxation that was said to impoverish the productive community. By implication, this critique left the economic reward structure of society fundamentally unchanged.

By the 1830s the more militant papers had shifted their focus of attack from 'old corruption' to the economic process which enabled the capitalist class to appropriate in profits the wealth created by labour. Conflict was redefined as a class struggle between labour and capital, between the working classes and a coalition of aristocrats, 'millocrats' and 'shopocrats'. This more militant analysis signposted the way forward towards a far-reaching programme of social reconstruction in which, in the words of the *Poor Man's Guardian* (19 October 1833), workers will 'be at the top instead of at the bottom of society – or rather that there should be no bottom or top at all'.

This new analysis was often conflated with the old liberal analysis in an uncertain synthesis. There was, moreover, a basic continuity in the perspectives offered by the less militant wing of the radical press, which gained in

influence during the 1840s. But such continuity should come as no surprise. It was only natural that the political complexion of the broad left press should reflect the ebb and flow of militancy within the radical movement. Nor is it at all surprising that traditional political beliefs should have persisted in view of what we now know about the resilience of belief systems. But so long as the activist working class controlled its own popular press, it possessed the institutional means to explore more radical understandings of society. It also had a collective resource for defining, expressing and maintaining a radical public opinion different from that proclaimed by the capitalist press, as well as a defence against the ideological assault mounted on the working class through schools, churches, mechanics' institutes and useful knowledge magazines.

The militant press sustained a radical subculture, which represented a potential threat to the undemocratic social order. Indeed in 1842, a General Strike was called to secure universal suffrage through the force of industrial action. It received extensive support in industrial Lancashire, much of Yorkshire and parts of the Midlands. While the strike was crushed, and some 1500 labour leaders were imprisoned, it was a sign of an increasingly unsettled society in which the radical press had become a powerful force.

In short, the control system administered by the state had failed. Neither prosecutions for seditious libel nor a tax system designed to restrict newspaper readership had succeeded in preventing the rise of the radical press. As we shall see, this prompted thoughtful parliamentarians to consider whether there might be a better way of containing insurgent journalism.

### Notes

1. In the past twenty years, six researchers – George Boyce, Alan Lee, Stephen Koss, Colin Seymour-Ure, Lucy Brown and Hannah Barker – have documented the press's continuing involvement in party politics long after the press is supposed to have blossomed as an 'independent fourth estate'. Their studies have thus modified one aspect of the traditional Whig interpretation of press history. For more about this, see Chapter 5.
2. Pelham, *Parliamentary Debates*, 11 (1832), cols 491–2.
3. Castlereagh, *Parliamentary Debates*, 91 (1819), cols 1177ff.
4. Spring Rice, *Parliamentary Debates*, 138 (1855), col. 966.
5. Spring Rice, *Parliamentary Debates*, 34 (1836), cols 627–34; 37 (1837), col. 1165.
6. *London Dispatch* (17 September 1836).
7. Report of the Select Committee on Newspaper Stamps (SCNS), *Parliamentary Papers*, 17 (1851); Milner-Gibson, *Parliamentary Debates*, 135 (1853), col. 1136, among others.
8. P. Hollis, *The Pauper Press* (London, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 95; *Parliamentary Debates*, 34 (1836), col. 627; SCNS Appendix 4; V. Berridge, 'Popular Sunday papers and mid-Victorian society' in G. Boyce, J. Curran and P. Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History* (London, Constable, 1978), p. 249.

9. *Northern Star* (16 January 1841).
10. *Northern Star* (26 August 1848).
11. For instance, W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom*, vol. 1 (London, Hutchinson, 1903), pp. 164–6; interview with Wesley Perrins, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* (1970), pp. 16–24.
12. Dr Philimore, *Parliamentary Debates*, 91 (1819), col. 1363.



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*The ugly face of reform*

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The parliamentary campaign against 'the taxes on knowledge' is generally portrayed as a triumphant campaign for a free press, sustained by an amalgam of special interests but motivated largely by libertarian ideals in opposition to the authoritarian legacy of the past.<sup>1</sup> The only discordant note in this inspiring account comes from the parliamentary campaigners celebrated in this historical legend. Their aims and, indeed, their public utterances are difficult to reconcile with the historic role assigned to them in liberal ideology.

Widespread evasion of the stamp duty in the early 1830s caused press regulation to become a major political issue. Traditionalists argued that the government should enforce the stamp duty with tougher measures, while a relatively small group of reformers in Parliament argued that the stamp duty had become unenforceable in the face of mass resistance and should be repealed. The two sides in the debate did not disagree over objectives so much as over tactics. As the Lord Chancellor succinctly put it in 1834,

the only question to answer, and the only problem to solve, is how they [the people] shall read in the best manner; how they shall be instructed politically, and have political habits formed the most safe for the constitution of the country.

Traditionalists alleged that abolition of the stamp duty would result in the country being flooded with 'atrocious publications'. Reformers countered by arguing that the stamp duty merely suppressed 'the cheap reply' to seditious publications from responsible quarters. Radical publishers were not being stopped by inefficient controls; instead they were being given a clear field in which to indoctrinate the people with 'the most pernicious doctrines' without encountering effective competition.<sup>2</sup>

Underlying this difference over tactics were divergent approaches to social control. Supporters of press regulation tended to favour coercion. Reformers, on the other hand, generally stressed the importance of engineering social

consent. As Bulwer Lytton argued when proposing the repeal of the stamp duty in 1832:

At this moment when throughout so many nations we see the people at war with their institutions, the world presents to us two great, may they be impressive examples. In Denmark, a despotism without discontent – in America, a republic without change. The cause is the same in both: in both the people are universally educated.

The parliamentary repeal lobby argued that the lifting of the stamp duty would encourage men of capital to invest in an expanding market and consequently enrol 'more temperate and disinterested friends of the people who would lend themselves to their real instruction'. In particular, many of the parliamentary campaigners of the 1830s believed that cheap newspapers, owned by business people, would become an educational weapon in the fight against trade unionism. Francis Place, the organizing secretary of the repeal campaign, even told a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1832 that 'there would not have been a single trades union either in England or Scotland' if the stamp duty had been repealed some years earlier. Similarly Roebuck informed the Commons that if the stamp duty had been lifted agricultural workers at Tolpuddle would probably not have been so ignorant as to have joined a trade union. Another leading campaigner, Grote, was even more sanguine about the benefits of an expanded, capitalist press: 'a great deal of the bad feeling that was at present abroad amongst the labouring classes on the subject of wages' was due, he believed, to 'the want of proper instruction and correct information as to their real interests' caused by taxes on the press.<sup>3</sup>

What these parliamentary campaigners for a 'free press' emphasized was not libertarian principle but the need for a more active approach to political socialization. However, their speeches occasionally betrayed anxiety that the time might not be right to lift controls on the press. This ambivalence perhaps explains why so few among the repeal lobby of MPs voted consistently against the government's counter-offensive in 1836 designed, as we have seen, to restore the stamp duty and destroy the radical press. In the revealing words of Collet, who was later to co-ordinate the campaign for a free press in Westminster, the government's attack on radical journalism was 'not a liberal, but it was in some respects, a statesman-like measure'.<sup>4</sup>

### **The new campaign**

A new parliamentary lobby against 'the taxes on knowledge' was organized in 1848. Although it claimed to be a broadly based group, it had a narrow social base. As Cobden confided privately, 'exclusively almost, we comprise steady, sober middle-class reformers'. The driving force behind the campaign were

Liberal industrialist MPs who saw in the repeal of press taxation a means of propagating the principles of free trade and competitive capitalism. In particular, they hoped that a reduction in newspaper prices, following the abolition of press taxes, would assist the growth of the local commercial press with which many of them were closely associated, and would undermine the dominant position of the 'unreliable' *Times* by exposing it to increased competition.

The campaign won the backing of politicians of all persuasions, as well as a variety of groups such as temperance campaigners, educationalists and publishers (though the latter were deeply divided over the stamp duty). While supporters of the campaign had different reasons for wanting to reach a wider public, they were united in believing that the social order would be rendered more secure if it was based on consent fostered by an expanded, capitalist press. 'The larger we open the field of general instruction,' declared Palmerston when speaking for the repeal of the stamp duty in the Commons, 'the firmer the foundations on which the order, the loyalty and good conduct of the lower classes will rest.' Repeal the taxes on knowledge, proclaimed the Irish politician Maguire, and 'you render the people better citizens, more obedient to the laws, more faithful and loyal subjects, and more determined to stand up for the honour of the country'. 'The freedom of the press,' argued Gladstone, 'was not merely to be permitted and tolerated, but to be highly prized, for it tended to bring closer together all the national interests and preserve the institutions of the country.' The new market-based press, in their view, would be a stabilising force.<sup>5</sup>

However, while the fundamental objectives of the campaign against press taxes were the same as before, its rhetoric was modified. Whig history was invoked more often to stigmatize supporters of press taxes as enemies of liberty and the heirs of court censorship. Opposition to press taxation was voiced more frequently in the form of abstract and elevated principle. Freedom of expression should not be taxed; truth will confound error in open debate; good publications will drive out the bad in fair competition; and truth will triumph in the free marketplace of ideas.

However, reformers sometimes combined libertarian and authoritarian arguments in ways that now seem incongruous. They seemed often to be unaware of any tension between the objectives of freedom and social control. Thus Alexander Andrews, editor of the first journalists' trade journal, argued that the great mission of a free press was to 'educate and enlighten those classes whose political knowledge has been hitherto so little, and by consequence so dangerous'. This theme of political indoctrination fused naturally and unselfconsciously with that of liberty. 'The list of our public journals,' Andrews continued, 'is a proud and noble list – the roll call of an army of liberty, with a rallying point in every town. It is a police of safety, and a sentinel of public morals.'<sup>6</sup> The very facility with which these dissonant themes could be conflated reveals the ideological universe within which the press freedom campaign was constructed. A tacit model of society which acknowledged no

conflict of class interest, only a conflict between ignorance and enlightenment and between the individual and the state, provided the intellectual framework in which a free press could be perceived both as a watch-dog of government and a guard-dog of the people.

Indeed, the respectable campaign for press freedom was never simply about press freedom; it was also motivated by a desire to stabilize the social order in Britain at a time when mainland Europe was rocked by the 1848 revolutions and their aftermath. The campaign may also be viewed as being part of a reformist drive to restructure that social order. Commitment to the principle of free competition, and its extension to new spheres of economic and public life, was the central goal of middle-class reform. The material blessings of the free market had been extensively invoked in the 1830s and 1840s in the campaign against the corn laws which restricted grain imports into Britain. The virtues of free competition were also widely aired in the 1850s in attacks on public appointments through social connection. This culminated in the 1870s in the overhaul of the civil service and armed forces, which widened middle-class access to influential and remunerative employment. The campaign against the 'taxes on knowledge' was thus part of a wider discourse deployed against protection of the landed interest and the unreformed, aristocratic state. It also reflected growing confidence among middle-class reformers (some of whom were involved in a parallel campaign to set up public libraries) that their version of enlightenment would prevail through the enlargement of 'public knowledge'.

The key members of the press freedom campaign were also under no illusion that a free market would be neutral. More sophisticated than their predecessors in the 1830s, they had a better understanding of how the press industry worked. The repeal of press taxes, declared Milner-Gibson, President of the Association for the Promotion of the Repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge, would create 'a cheap press in the hands of men of good moral character, of respectability, and of capital'. Fully aware of the rising capitalization of popular newspaper publishing in the USA, he believed that free market processes would favour entrepreneurs with large financial resources. Free trade, he stressed, in common with other leading campaigners, would 'give to men of capital and respectability the power of gaining access by newspapers, by faithful record of the facts, to the minds of the working classes'. The free market, argued Sir George Lewis, the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, would promote papers 'enjoying the preference of the advertising public'. Furthermore, reformers argued, responsible control over a cheap press would educate public demand. As one campaigner put it, 'The appetite grows by what it feeds on.'<sup>7</sup>

Some reformers also believed that an expanding capitalist press would raise the pay, status and quality of journalists, with the clear implication that this would promote moderation and good sense. The establishment of a cheap press, explained Hickson, a leading campaigner, would create a new

hierarchical system of communication in which journalists 'two or three degrees' above the labouring classes would enlighten them. To Gladstone, the principal attraction of repeal was that it would lead to more men of 'quality' working in the press, and consequently educating the people. 'A perfectly free press,' wryly commented the journalist J. F. Stephen, 'is one of the greatest safeguards of peace and order' since successful journalists belong to 'the comfortable part of society' and will 'err rather on the side of making too much of their interests than on that of neglecting them.'<sup>8</sup>

Reinforcing this commitment to creating a cheap, unrestricted press was a growing conviction that it was now safe to lift controls. The radical working-class movement was on the retreat in the 1850s. There was, proclaimed reformers, 'a great increase of intelligence among the people.'<sup>9</sup> Even those who were uncertain whether the working class would 'become the glory, or might prove greatly dangerous to the peace, of the country' agreed that it was a good time to attempt an experiment. Significantly, only those who were convinced that the lower classes were wedded to radical prejudices (and this group included not only entrenched traditionalists but also some distinguished liberals committed to free market competition in other spheres)<sup>10</sup> remained resolutely opposed to the repeal of the stamp duty.

The campaign against press taxes was conducted with remarkable skill and tenacity. Reformers packed the Parliamentary Select Committee on the stamp duty and largely determined the contents of its report. They attacked poorly briefed ministers and won the support of officials in the Board of Inland Revenue. They harassed the government through the law courts, exposed the inconsistencies in the way the stamp duty was enforced, organized public meetings, petitions and deputations, and attacked press taxes in sympathetic newspapers. Their political virtuosity was finally rewarded with the abolition of the advertisement duty in 1853, the stamp duty in 1855, the paper duty in 1861 and the security system in 1869.

However, the parliamentary campaign for a free press was never inspired by a modern libertarian commitment to diversity of expression. Indeed, the ruthless repression of the unstamped press in the mid-1830s had much the same objective as the campaign which set the press 'free' twenty years later: the subordination of the press to the social order. All that had changed was a growing commitment to positive indoctrination of the lower orders through a cheap press, and a growing conviction that free trade and normative controls were a morally preferable and more efficient control system than direct controls administered by the state. Underlying this shift was the growing power and confidence of the Victorian middle class, which dominated the parliamentary campaign for repeal of press taxes and recognized in the expanding press a powerful agency for the advancement of their interests.

The confidence of reformers in the outcome of free market competition proved to be justified. The radical press was eclipsed in the period after the repeal of press taxes. The reasons for this have never been adequately explained.

## Notes

1. For instance, G. A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society* (Harlow, Longman, 1978), p. 205. This view is contested in relation to the 1830s by P. Hollis, *The Pauper Press* (London, Oxford University Press, 1970) and J. H. Wiener, *The War of the Unstamped* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1969).
2. *Parliamentary Debates*, 13 (1832), cols 619–48; 23 (1834), cols 1193–1222; 30 (1835), cols 835–62; 34 (1836), cols 627ff.; 35 (1836), cols 566ff., 46 (1837), cols 1164–84. In actual fact the radical unstamped press did not have a ‘clear field’. The authorities harassed radical unstamped papers, while regularly turning a blind eye to ‘moderate’ unstamped papers in the early 1830s.
3. Place, Select Committee on Drunkenness, *Parliamentary Papers*, 8 (1834), question 2054; Roebuck, *Parliamentary Debates*, 23 (1834) cols 1208–9; Grote, *ibid.*, col. 1221.
4. C. D. Collet, *History of the Taxes on Knowledge: Their Origin and Repeal*, vol. 1 (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1899).
5. Palmerston, *Parliamentary Debates*, 127 (1854), col. 459; Maguire, *Parliamentary Debates*, 157 (1860), col. 383; Gladstone, cit. J. Grant, *The Newspaper Press: Its Origins, Progress and Present Position* (London, Tinsley Brothers, 1871–2).
6. A. Andrews, *The History of British Journalism to 1855* (London, Richard Bentley, 1859), vol. ii, p. 347.
7. Milner-Gibson, *Parliamentary Debates*, 137 (1855), col. 434, and *Parliamentary Debates*, 110 (1850), col. 378; Lewis, *Parliamentary Debates*, 137 (1855), col. 786; Whitty, Report of the Select Committee on Newspaper Stamps (SCNS), *Parliamentary Papers*, 17 (1851), para. 600.
8. Hickson, SCNS (1851), para. 3, 169; Gladstone, *Parliamentary Debates*, 137 (1855), col. 794; J. F. Stephen, ‘Journalism’, *Cornhill Magazine*, 6 (1862).
9. Bulwer Lytton, *Parliamentary Debates*, 137 (1855), col. 1118; Ingram, *Parliamentary Debates*, 151 (1858), col. 112; Digby Seymour, *Parliamentary Debates*, 125 (1853), col. 1166.
10. For instance, J. R. McCulloch, *Dictionary of Commerce and Commercial Navigation* (London, Longman, Brown & Green, 1854), p. 893.

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## *The industrialization of the press*

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During the half-century following the repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge', a number of radical newspapers closed down or were eventually incorporated, such as the *Reynolds News*, into the mainstream of popular Liberal journalism. Militant journalism survived only in the etiolated form of small circulation national periodicals and struggling local weeklies. Yet this decline occurred during a period of rapid press expansion, when local daily papers were established in all the major urban centres of Britain and a new generation of predominantly right-wing national newspapers came into being. These included newspapers such as the *People* (1881), *Daily Mail* (1896), *Daily Express* (1900) and *Daily Mirror* (1903), which have played a prominent role in British journalism ever since.

Most historians, on the left as well as on the right, attribute the decline of radical journalism to a change in the climate of public opinion. The collapse of Chartism in the early 1850s produced a wave of disillusion. Some radical activists were absorbed into the Liberal Party, particularly after the upper strata of the working class gained the vote in 1867. Trade unions also became more inward-looking, seeking to improve wages and working conditions rather than to restructure society. These changes were reinforced by the winning of significant social reforms and, above all, by the relative success of the British economy: most workers in employment became substantially better off during the second half of the nineteenth century. Intensive proselytization of the working class through schools, churches, youth clubs, and other socializing agencies such as the Volunteer Force also contributed to the spread of anti-socialist views.

These developments diminished the potential market for radical journalism. They also had another consequence which has tended to be overlooked. The reduction of support for the left made it more difficult to raise money within the working-class movement for new publishing ventures. As the TUC Congress debates in the early part of the twentieth century make clear, many Liberal and Lib-Lab trade unionists were reluctant to invest their members' money in setting up new socialist

publications because they had become reconciled to the commercial press.

However, while this *Zeitgeist* interpretation partly accounts for the fall of the radical press it is an incomplete explanation. It is generally based on the over-simplistic assumption that journalists are influenced by prevailing ideas of the time, and are forced to respond in a competitive market to the demands of the sovereign consumer. Consequently the press ventriloquizes, it is claimed, the views of the public.

In fact the evidence clearly shows that there was no close correspondence between the climate of opinion in the country and the political character of the press. What may be broadly defined as the radical press was still a powerful force in popular journalism in 1860 when the working-class movement was divided and defeated. In sharp contrast, the radical press was dwarfed by its rivals fifty years later, when the radical movement was gathering momentum.<sup>1</sup> The steady growth of general trade unionism, the radicalization of skilled workers, the spread of socialist and Labourist ideas, the rise of the suffragette movement and the revival of industrial militancy did not give rise to an efflorescence of radical journalism in the decade before the First World War, although it produced a few notable publications. The absence of a close correlation between press and public opinion is underlined further by voting figures. In the 1918 general election, for instance, the Labour Party gained 22 per cent of the vote but did not win the unreserved support of a single national daily or Sunday newspaper.

Lucy Brown has advanced a supplementary explanation for the decline of 'critical vigour' in the Victorian press. She shows that the political élite devoted more time and skill to cultivating the press, and became increasingly dominant as sources and definers of news. However, while this helps to explain the rightward drift of part of the commercial press, it still does not account for the eclipse of radical journalism. The militant press's adversarial style effectively inoculated it against the gentler arts of press management described by Brown. The defeat of the radical press was more fundamental: it was eclipsed rather than seduced.

Virginia Berridge has advanced a more compelling, if flawed, explanation of the decline of committed journalism.<sup>2</sup> This was due, she argues, to the 'commercialization' of the popular press. New popular papers came into being which were primarily business ventures, relying on sensationalist manipulation of popular sentiment rather than what she calls the 'genuine arousal' of militant journalism. In other words, they concentrated on entertainment rather than taxing political analysis, and consequently secured a much larger audience than politically committed papers.

Berridge's pioneering analysis focuses attention upon a significant change within part of the radical press. Its circulation during the 1840s was swollen by the emergence of the *News of the World* and *Lloyds Weekly*, both commercial papers whose initial radicalism was the product more of commercial expediency



than of political commitment. As the *News of the World* frankly stated in its first issue (1 October 1843), 'It is only by a very extensive circulation that the proprietors can be compensated for the outlay of a large capital in this novel and original undertaking.' Although the same issue contained an impassioned attack upon conditions in some poor-houses, where inmates were forced to wear prison clothes, the paper also made clear that its general orientation was to please as many people as possible by serving 'the general utility of all classes'. This led to the adoption of consensual views, and the growth of entertainment at the expense of political news. Yet, not very surprisingly, Sunday papers in the *News of the World* mould, with a professionally processed combination of news, sport, human interest stories and political commentary, proved more appealing than the didactic journals that were the principal organs of the left in late Victorian Britain.

This explanation is persuasive as far as it goes. But it glosses over one striking feature of the development of the radical press. During the first half of the nineteenth century left-wing papers evolved from being journals of opinion, based on a quarto format, into broadsheet newspapers carrying news as well as commentary. This change was particularly marked during the 1830s, and was accompanied by a significant broadening of news content. Some of these radical papers began to develop a wide audience appeal by drawing upon the popular street literature tradition of chapbooks, broadsheets, gallowsheets and almanacs. Indeed, Cleave's *Weekly Police Gazette*, the *London Dispatch* and the early militant *Reynolds News* were important partly because they started to rework this popular tradition in ways that projected a radical ideology through human interest news and entertainment as well as through political coverage.

Why, then, did the committed radical press retreat increasingly in the second half of the nineteenth century into the ghetto of narrowly politicized journalism? Why did it leave the field of popular news coverage and entertainment to the commercial press? Thus the question that needs to be asked is not why Victorian working people should have preferred the *News of the World* to rather arid socialist journals such as *Justice* and *Commonweal*, but why the radical press should have failed to live up to its early promise (or, in Berridge's terms, to its early indications of superficiality).

Her analysis is an historical version of a standard critique of mass culture. This assumes that communication processed commercially as a commodity for the mass market is inevitably 'debased' because it relies on the manipulation of public tastes and attitudes for profit. This is based on assumptions that are open to question. In the context of Victorian Britain, it also obscures under the general heading of 'commercialization' the complex system of controls institutionalized by the industrialization of the Victorian press.

### The freedom of capital

One of the central objectives of state economic controls on the press – to exclude pauper management – was attained only by its repeal. This was partly because a craft system of production was replaced by an industrial one. The lifting of press taxes set up a chain reaction: lower prices, increased sales and the development of new print technology to service an expanding market. Rotary presses, fed by hand, were introduced in the 1860s and 1870s and were gradually replaced by web rotary machines of increasing size and sophistication in late Victorian and Edwardian England. ‘Craft’ composing was mechanized by Hattersley’s machine in the 1860s, and this was replaced by the linotype machine in the 1880s and 1890s. Numerous innovations were also made in graphic reproduction. These developments led to a sharp rise in fixed capital costs. For example, Northcliffe estimated half a million pounds as ‘the initial cost of machinery, buildings, ink factories and the like, and this was altogether apart from the capital required for daily working expenses’ in setting up the *Daily Mail* in 1896.<sup>3</sup>

The rise in fixed costs made it more difficult for people with limited funds to break into mass publishing. It also generated a relationship of economic inequality since leading publishers were able to obtain large economies of scale (through spreading their ‘first copy’ costs over a large print run). In addition, major publishers such as Edward Lloyd gained significant economies of scope by diversifying into paper manufacture in the 1870s and 1880s. However, while new technology raised the level of investment needed to start a paper, and tended to strengthen the position of major publishers, it did not in fact constitute an insuperable obstacle to the launch of new publications with limited capital even in the national market. Newspapers such as the *Daily Herald*, launched in 1912, could be started with only a limited outlay by being printed on a contract basis by an independent printer.

A more important financial consequence of the repeal of press taxes was to force up the running costs of newspaper publishing. National newspapers became substantial enterprises, with growing newsprint bills and staff costs. They also cut their cover prices. The combination of rising expenditure and lower cover prices forced up the circulation levels that newspapers needed to achieve in order to be profitable. This raised, in turn, the run-in costs of new papers before they built their circulations to break-even point. New newspapers could be launched with limited funds and derelict newspapers could be bought relatively cheaply. It was increasingly the establishment of newspapers that required large financial resources.

Thus in 1855 Disraeli was advised by D. C. Coulton that a capital of about £20,000 was needed to start a London daily paper. In 1867 W. H. Smith estimated that about £50,000 was needed to fund a new London morning paper. By the 1870s Edward Lloyd needed to spend £150,000 to establish the *Daily Chronicle* (after buying it for £30,000). During the period 1906 to 1908

Thomasson spent about £300,000 attempting to establish the liberal daily, *Tribune*. By the 1920s, however, Lord Cowdray spent about £750,000 attempting to convert the *Westminster Gazette* into a quality daily. Even more was spent on developing mass-circulation papers during the same period.

Indeed, the full extent of the material transformation of the press is perhaps most clearly revealed by comparing the launch and establishment costs of newspapers before and after the industrialization of the press. As we have seen, the total cost of establishing the *Northern Star*, a national weekly newspaper, on a profitable basis in 1837 was little more than £690. It was able to break even with a circulation of about 6200 copies, which was probably achieved in its first month. In contrast the *Sunday Express*, launched in 1918, had over £2 million spent on it before it broke even, with a circulation of well over 250,000. Thus while a public subscription in northern towns was sufficient to launch a national weekly in the 1830s, it required the resources of an international conglomerate controlled by Beaverbrook to do the same thing nearly a century later.<sup>4</sup>

These statistics illustrate the privileged position of capital in the creation of the modern press. Even when the costs of launching and establishing a popular paper were relatively low in the 1850s and 1860s, they still exceeded the resources readily available to the organized working class. The *Beehive*, for instance, was started in 1862 with capital of less than £250 raised by trade union organizations and a well-to-do sympathizer. Its inadequate funding crippled it. Although it set out to carry both news and features and to reach a wide audience, it lacked the finances to be anything other than a weekly journal of opinion. Despite a small amount of additional capital put up by unions and other contributors, it was also forced to sell at double the price of the large-circulation weeklies it had been intended to compete against. In effect, its undercapitalization condemned it to the margins of national publishing as a specialist, if influential, weekly paper.

As the resources of organized labour increased, so did the costs of establishing a national paper. It was not until 1912 that papers financed and controlled from within the working class made their first appearance in national daily journalism – long after most national daily papers had become well established. The brief career of the *Daily Citizen*, and the early history of the *Daily Herald*, illustrate the economic obstacles to setting up papers under working-class control. The *Daily Citizen*, launched in 1912 with a capital of only £30,000 (subscribed mainly by trade unions), reached a circulation of 250,000 at its peak within two years and was only 50,000 short of overhauling the *Daily Express*. But although the *Daily Citizen* almost certainly acquired more working-class readers than any other daily, it still closed three years after its launch.

The more left-wing *Daily Herald*, started with only £300 and sustained by public donations, lurched from one crisis to another despite reaching a circulation of over 250,000 at its meridian before 1914. On one occasion it came

out in pages of different sizes and shapes because someone 'found' old discarded paper supplies when the *Daily Herald* could no longer afford to pay for new paper. On another occasion it bought small quantities of paper under fictitious names from suppliers all over the country. Later it secured paper supplies without a guarantee by threatening to organize, through its trade union connections, industrial action against paper manufacturers. While the *Daily Citizen* closed, the *Daily Herald* survived by switching from being a daily to becoming a weekly during the period 1914 to 1919. Lack of sufficient capital prevented its continuation in any other form.

The rise in publishing costs helps to explain why the committed left press in the late nineteenth century existed only as undercapitalized, low-budget, high-price specialist periodicals and as local community papers, an important but as yet relatively undocumented aspect of the residual survival of the radical press. The operation of the free market had raised the cost of press ownership beyond the readily available resources of the working class.

Market forces thus accomplished more than the most repressive measures of an aristocratic state. The security system introduced in 1819 to ensure that the press was controlled by 'men of some respectability and capital' had fixed the financial qualifications of press ownership at a mere £200 to £300. This financial hurdle was raised over a hundredfold by the market system between 1850 and 1920.<sup>5</sup>

However, although the heavy capitalization of the British press was an important factor inhibiting the launch of new radical papers, it still does not explain the ideological absorption of radical papers already in existence before the repeal of the press taxes. Nor does it fully explain why small-circulation radical papers could not develop into profitable mass-circulation papers and accumulate enough capital, through retained profits, to finance new publications. For an answer to these questions we need to look elsewhere.

### **The new licensing system: advertising**

The crucial element of the new control system was the strategic role acquired by advertisers after the repeal of the advertisement duty in 1853. Before then, the advertisement tax had made certain forms of advertising uneconomic. As John Cassell, the publisher of popular useful knowledge publications, argued before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Newspaper Stamps, 'It [the advertisement duty] entirely prevents a certain class of advertisements from appearing: it is only such as costly books and property sales by auction that really afford an opportunity of advertising and for paying the duty.'

Cassell exaggerated the impact of the advertisement duty for political reasons. The growth of trade, and the halving of the advertisement duty in 1833, had led to a substantial increase in press advertising in the 1830s and 1840s. Even before that, most commercial newspapers – but not the radical press –

had been reliant on advertising, but it was only with the abolition of the advertisement duty in 1853 that popular press advertising came fully into its own. Between 1854 and 1858, for instance, *Reynolds News* increased its advertising volume by over 50 per cent. This surge in advertising expenditure, combined with the repeal of the stamp and paper duties, transformed the economic structure of the popular press. The modal price of popular papers was halved in the 1850s and halved again in the 1860s. At the new prevailing price structure, nearly all newspapers – including those with very large circulations such as *Reynolds News* – depended on advertising for their profits since their reduced net cover prices no longer met their costs. Advertisers thus acquired a *de facto* licensing power because, without their support, newspapers ceased to be economically viable.

Rising circulations, decreasing print unit costs and, between 1875 and 1895, the sharp fall in the price of newsprint did not diminish the central role of advertising in the press. Advertising expenditure increased steadily in the Victorian and Edwardian period, rising to an estimated £20 million in 1907. This financed bigger papers, more staff and the introduction of sale-or-return arrangements with distributors. It also helped to underwrite a further halving of the price of most popular papers to ½d in the late Victorian period.

The political implications of newspapers' economic dependence on advertising have been ignored largely because it is assumed that advertisers bought space in newspapers on the basis of market rather than political criteria. But political considerations played a significant part in some advertisers' calculations during the Victorian period. In 1856 the principal advertising handbook detailed the political views of most London and local newspapers with the proud boast that 'till this Directory was published, the advertiser had no means of accurately determining which journal *might be best adapted to his views*, and most likely to forward his interests' (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup> Even non-socialist newspapers found that controversial editorial policies led to the loss of commercial advertising. The *Pall Mall Gazette's* advertising revenue dropped sharply in response to its 'Maiden Tribute' crusade in 1885 in which the editor 'procured' a 15-year-old girl as part of his paper's campaign to raise the legal age of consent to sex. The *Daily News* was boycotted by some advertisers in 1886 when it campaigned for Home Rule. Government advertising long continued to be allocated on a partisan basis. As late as 1893 the incoming Home Secretary, Herbert Asquith, was told that generally 'it is the custom to transfer advertisements according to the politics of governments'.

Political prejudice in advertising selection almost certainly declined during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of advertising agencies, the emergence of major, national advertisers and the increasing availability of circulation statistics encouraged the adoption of a more professional approach. Even so, the frequent remonstrations against 'mixing business

and politics' in advertising manuals published between 1850 and 1930 suggest that political prejudice continued to influence some advertisers.

However, even when political partisanship played no part in advertising selection, left-wing publications still faced discrimination on commercial grounds. As the head of a well-known advertising agency wrote in 1856, 'Some of the most widely circulated journals in the Empire are the worst possible to advertise in. Their readers are not purchasers, and any money thrown upon them is so much thrown away.' Newspapers read by the well-to-do were assessed differently. 'Character is of more importance than number,' advised an advertising handbook in 1851, adding that 'A journal that circulates a thousand among the upper or middle classes is a better medium than would be one circulating a hundred thousand among the lower classes.' Similar, though usually more qualified, advice continued to be given for some time. For example, Sir Charles Higham, the head of a large advertising agency, wrote in 1925, 'A very limited circulation, but entirely among the wealthy . . . may be more valuable than if the circulation were quadrupled.'<sup>7</sup>

Some advertisers also made a key distinction between the skilled and poor working class. Indeed, the latter were often excluded from the early market research surveys in the 1920s on the grounds that they were not worth bothering about. Once newspapers became identified with the poor, they found it difficult to attract advertising. As an advertising handbook cautioned in 1921, 'You cannot afford to place your advertisements in a paper which is read by the down-at-heels who buy it to see the "Situations Vacant" column.'<sup>8</sup>

This combination of economic and political discrimination by advertisers crucially influenced the development of left-wing journalism. In the first place, it exerted pressure on the radical press to move upmarket in order to survive. A number of radical newspapers redefined their target audience, and moderated their radicalism, in an attempt to attract the more affluent readers whom advertisers wanted to reach.

This process is well illustrated by the career of *Reynolds News*. It was founded in 1850 by George Reynolds, a member of the left-wing faction of the Chartist National Executive. Reynolds had urged a 'physical force' strategy in 1848 and opposed middle-class collaboration in the early 1850s. His paper was initially in the *Northern Star* tradition of class-conscious radicalism, and had close links with the working-class movement.

Yet despite its radical origins, *Reynolds News* changed under the impact of the new economic imperatives of newspaper publishing. The fact that it never provided, even at the outset, a consistent theoretical perspective doubtless made it vulnerable to ideological incorporation. Inevitably it was influenced by the decline of radicalism in the country during the 1850s and early 1860s, but an important factor in its absorption was the need to attract advertising revenue. The change was symbolized by the inclusion of regular features on friendly societies in the year after the repeal of the advertisement duty, as a ploy to attract advertising. Thus enterprises which had been

attacked in militant newspapers as 'a hoax' to persuade working-class people to identify with capitalism became a much-needed source of revenue for *Reynolds News*.

The paper continued to take a radical stand on most major events of the day, but it expressed increasingly the individualistic values of the more affluent readers whom it needed to attract. It adopted some of the tenets of liberal political economy that it had attacked during the 1850s, including the palliatives of 'prudent marriage' (i.e. sexual restraint) and emigration as solutions to unemployment. It became still more populist, focusing on the vices of the aristocracy, corruption in high places, and poverty as a source of melodrama (rather than as a condition to be overcome through socialist advance). Its early assault on the workings of industrial capital was modulated to criticism of monopoly and speculators, while criticism of shopkeepers as the exploitive agents of capital gave way to articles that tacitly accepted the market economy. *Reynolds News* became a paper that catered for the coalition of lower-middle-class and working-class readers necessary for its survival. Acquired by the Dicks family in 1879 and later by J. H. Dalziel, it gradually evolved into a conventional Liberal paper.

Reynolds was accused of commercial opportunism by contemporary critics (including Karl Marx); yet it is difficult to see what else he could have done if the paper was to survive the transition to an advertising-based system. Even the radical *People's Paper* boasted in 1857 of its appeal to 'high paid trades and shopkeepers' in its promotion to advertisers. Failing to attract affluent readers in sufficient numbers, the *People's Paper* was forced to close down with a circulation far larger than middle-class weeklies such as the *Spectator* and *John Bull*.

Radical newspapers could survive in the new economic environment only if they moved upmarket to attract an audience desired by advertisers or remained in a small working-class ghetto, with manageable losses that could be offset by donations. Once they moved out of that ghetto and sought a large working-class audience, they courted disaster. If they sold at the competitive prices charged by their rivals, they made a loss on each copy due to lack of advertising. If they increased their sales, they merely incurred greater losses and moved more heavily into debt.

This fate befell the London *Evening Echo*, which was taken over by wealthy radicals in 1901 and relaunched as a socialist paper. A special number was issued, firmly committing the paper to 'the interests of labour as against the tyranny of organized capital'. In the period 1902 to 1904 its circulation rose by a remarkable 60 per cent, leading to its abrupt closure in 1905. The *Evening Echo's* advertising had failed to keep pace with its growth of circulation, making its continuation impossible.<sup>9</sup>

The same thing almost happened to the *Daily Herald* when it was relaunched as a daily in 1919. It spent £10,000 on promotion – a small amount by comparison with its main rivals, but sufficient to ensure that it

sharply increased its circulation. 'Our success in circulation,' recalled George Lansbury, 'was our undoing. The more copies we sold, the more money we lost.' The situation became increasingly desperate when, aided partly by the unexpected publicity of attacks on the *Daily Herald* by leading members of the government alleging that it was financed from Moscow, the *Daily Herald's* circulation continued to rise in 1920. 'Every copy we sold was sold at a loss,' mourned Lansbury. 'The rise in circulation, following the government's attacks, brought us nearer and nearer to disaster.'<sup>10</sup> The money raised from whist drives, dances, draws and collections was not enough to offset the short-fall of advertising. The desperate expedient of doubling the paper's price in 1920 was not enough to secure its future. Money from the miners and the railwaymen prevented the paper from closing. But the only way the paper could be saved, in the long term, was by being taken over as the official organ of the Labour Party and TUC in 1922. A paper that had been a freewheeling vehicle of the left, an important channel for the dissemination of syndicalist and socialist ideas in the early part of the twentieth century, became the official mouthpiece of the moderate leadership of the labour movement.<sup>11</sup> Lack of advertising forced it to become subservient to a new form of control.

In short, one of four things happened to national radical papers that failed to meet the requirements of advertisers. They either closed down; accommodated to advertising pressure by moving upmarket; stayed in a small audience ghetto with manageable losses; or accepted an alternative source of institutional patronage.

Yet publications which conformed to the marketing requirements of advertisers obtained what were, in effect, large external subsidies which they could spend on increased editorial outlay and promotion in order to attract new readers. Rising advertising expenditure also provided a powerful inducement to entrepreneurs to launch publications directed at markets that advertisers particularly wanted to reach. Between 1866 and 1896 the number of magazines increased from an estimated 557 to 2097, many of which were trade, technical and professional journals aimed at specialized groups attractive to advertisers. The number of local dailies grew from only two in 1850 to 196 in 1900, falling to 169 by 1920 due mainly to the casualties caused by intense competition. There was also a substantial expansion in the number of local weekly papers from fewer than 400 in 1856 to an estimated 2072 in 1900, declining to an estimated 1700 by 1921. Above all, there was a substantial increase in the number of national daily and Sunday papers, mostly founded between 1880 and 1918, which catered for either mass, middle-market audiences or small élite audiences.<sup>12</sup>

This growth in the number of publications was accompanied by an enormous expansion in newspaper consumption. Annual newspaper sales rose from 85 million in 1851 to 5604 million in 1920. Only part of this increase was due to rapid population growth: the number of newspapers purchased *per capita* over the age of 14 rose from six copies in 1850 to 182 copies in 1920.



Even allowing for a reduction in the number of readers per copy, due to a marked decline in the collective purchase and reading aloud from newspapers, this still constitutes a remarkable increase in the audience reached by the press. Sunday and local daily papers achieved aggregate circulations of 13.5 million and 9.2 million respectively by 1920. In contrast the national daily press with a predominantly middle-class public had a circulation of only 5.4 million in 1920, while the local weekly press (which was particularly strong in rural areas) had 6.8 million circulation.<sup>13</sup>

This growth was facilitated by new print technology, rising advertising subsidy and lower cover prices. The rise of mass consumption was also a product of cumulative social and economic change. Adult literacy (as measured very imperfectly by the ability to sign one's name) rose from 69 per cent in 1850 to 97 per cent in 1900. The normal number of hours worked in many industries fell from sixty hours a week to fifty-four hours or fewer between 1850 and 1890, and average real wages rose by an estimated 84 per cent between 1850 and 1900. The resulting expansion of the capitalist press had important consequences for the political development of Britain.

### Impact of the industrialized press

At the turn of the nineteenth century, traditional educationalists such as Hannah More taught working-class children to read but not to write. The industrialization of the press led to a similar division of function. Workers became consumers but not the producers of meaning, save in the subjective sense of critically reading 'between the lines'.

Many of the new local dailies were started or bought by leading local industrialists. Both the *Northern Daily Express* and the *Northern Leader* were bought by colliery owners; the *South Shields Gazette* was acquired by Stevenson, a member of a local chemical manufacturing family; the *Bolton Evening News* belonged to local industrialists, the Tillotsons; the *Yorkshire Post's* principal shareholder was the Leeds banker Beckett-Denison; the *Ipswich Express* was owned by Colman, the mustard manufacturer, and so on. These papers offered a very different view of the world from that of the early radical press they supplanted. Papers such as the *Northern Star* had amplified class conflicts in the local community ('to talk of reconciliation between the middle and working classes in Leicester will, henceforth, be a farce'<sup>14</sup> was a typical lead-in to one of its news reports). In contrast the new local commercial press tended to block out conflict, minimize differences, and encourage positive identification with the local community and its middle-class leadership. Characteristic of this style of consensual journalism was a report in the *Leeds Mercury* (printed in the same city as the *Northern Star*) of a local dignitary addressing the annual public soirée of the Leeds Mechanics Institute on the subject of 'these popular institutions, sustained by the united efforts of all classes . . . thereby to promote the virtue, happiness and peace of the community'.<sup>15</sup>

The early militant press had fuelled suspicion of middle-class reformists with a barrage of criticism against 'sham-radical humbugs' and 'the merciful middle-class converts to half Chartism at half past the eleventh hour'.<sup>16</sup> In contrast the new local daily press encouraged its readers to identify with the political parties controlled by the dominant classes. Ten of the new local dailies that emerged between 1855 and 1860 were affiliated to the Liberal Party; eighteen created between 1860 and 1870 were affiliated to the Tory or Liberal Party, and forty-one of the local dailies created in the following decade were similarly linked to the two great parties. The new party press built support for the modern party system, helping to transform aristocratic factions in Parliament into mass political movements. This reinforced the division of the working class by entrenching opposed partisan commitments within it. It also led to the assimilation of some working-class activists into a parliamentary system that throughout the nineteenth century was still only quasi-democratic.

The new Liberal press, in particular, played a significant role in rerouting radical politics. It frequently diluted or adapted radical themes to such a degree that they acquired a new meaning. The co-operative ethos that would prevail in a radically transformed society, proclaimed as an objective by some militant papers in the 1830s and 1840s, was transmuted into the spirit of partnership between masters and men that would make the British economy prosper. The early radical stress on moral regeneration through social reconstruction became a celebration of moral improvement through the spread of middle-class enlightenment. In addition, the value formerly attached to self-education as a means of ideological resistance to class domination gave way to a stress on the undifferentiated acquisition of 'knowledge' as the route to individual self-advancement and economic progress. Admittedly these transformations drew upon a radical tradition that contained contradictory elements within it. However, by emphasizing the liberal rather than more radical lineaments of this tradition, the new press contributed to the restabilization of the social order.

There were of course important differences between individual newspapers, not least in their reporting of trade unions and the emergent women's movement. But notwithstanding these differences, all national newspapers launched between 1855 and 1910, and the overwhelming majority of new local daily papers, encouraged positive identification with the social system. The shift that this represented is perhaps best illustrated by the way in which Queen Victoria was portrayed. Most radical papers in the period 1837 to 1855 were aggressively republican: the Queen was vilified as politically partisan and reactionary, the head of a system of organized corruption, the mother of a brood of royal cadgers, and the friend and relative of European tyrants. In contrast the new press portrayed the Queen particularly from the mid-1870s onward as a dutiful and benign matriarch, who symbolized in an almost talismanic way the moral and material progress of her reign. Projecting her as a

living embodiment of national unity, they also played a key role in converting the jubilee celebrations of 1887 and 1897 into popular, mobilizing rites of national communion.

Above all, the new popular press fostered the wave of imperialism that swept through all levels of society. Popular newspapers tended to portray Britain's colonial role as a civilizing mission to the heathen, underdeveloped world, and as an extended adventure story in which military triumphs were achieved through individual acts of courage rather than through superior technology. Common to both themes was pride in Britain's ascendancy: as the *Daily Mail* (23 June 1897), the most popular daily of late Victorian Britain, enthused:

We send out a boy here and a boy there, and the boy takes hold of the savages of the part he comes to and teaches them to march and shoot as he tells them, to obey him and believe in him and die for him and the Queen. A plain, stupid, uninspired people they call us, and yet we are doing this with every kind of savage man there is.

This celebration of Britain's dominion sometimes struck a more atavistic note, as in this report of the 1898 Sudan expedition in the *Westminster Gazette*:

A large number of the Tommies had never been under fire before . . . and there was a curious look of suppressed excitement in some of the faces. . . . Now and then I caught in a man's eye the curious gleam which, despite all the veneer of civilization, still holds its own in man's nature, whether he is killing rats with a terrier, rejoicing in a prize fight, playing a salmon or potting Dervishes. It was a fine day and we were out to kill something. Call it what you like, the experience is a big factor in the joy of living.

The paper which celebrated 'potting Dervishes' was, in terms of the political spectrum represented by the contemporary national press, on 'the left'. It was, for example, one of the few papers not to join the press campaign for vengeance during the Boer War. However, it joined all other daily papers of note in providing Hun-hating support for Britain's involvement in the First World War.

### Conclusion

The radical press was defeated decisively after the abolition of the 'taxes on knowledge'. Its defeat cannot be attributed solely to the changed climate of opinion, following the collapse of the Chartist Movement. This *Zeitgeist* or 'sovereign consumer' interpretation, though often invoked, fails to explain why the press, taken as a whole, moved further to the right than public opinion; nor does it explain why the subsequent revival of the radical movement did not give rise to a stronger revival of radical journalism. Both the extent and

permanence of the eclipse of the radical press as the dominant force in national popular journalism was due to structural changes in the press industry. The industrialization of the press, with its accompanying rise in publishing costs, led to a progressive transfer of ownership and control of the popular press from the working class to wealthy businessmen, while dependence on advertising encouraged the absorption or elimination of the early radical press and stunted its subsequent development before the First World War.

### Notes

1. For the relative weakness of the radical press in 1910, see A. J. Lee, 'The radical press' in A. Morris (ed.), *Edwardian Radicalism, 1900-1914* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).
2. V. Berridge, 'Popular Sunday papers and mid-Victorian society' in G. Boyce, J. Curran and P. Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History* (London, Constable, 1978). This interpretation has since been developed by J. Chalaby in *The Invention of Journalism* (London, Macmillan, 1998) and M. Conboy in *The Press and Popular Culture* (London, Sage, 2002).
3. R. Pound and G. Harmsworth, *Northcliffe* (London, Cassell, 1959), p. 206.
4. A. J. P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1972), p. 175.
5. The costs of market entry for mass publishing were particularly high in Britain due to the dominant role of the national press. This explains partly why the radical press in Britain was much weaker than in some other European countries, where the press remained decentralized and entry costs were lower.
6. *Mitchell's Newspaper Press Directory* (Mitchell, 1856). It should be noted, however, that Mitchell himself cautioned advertisers against political bias.
7. *Mitchell's Newspaper Press Directory* (Mitchell, 1856); Anon., *Guide to Advertisers* (1851); C. Higham, *Advertising* (London, Williams & Norgate, 1925), p. 166.
8. C. Freer, *The Inner Side of Advertising: A Practical Handbook for Advertisers* (London, Library Press, 1921), p. 203.
9. F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate Has Been Kind* (London, Hutchinson, 1943), pp. 65ff.
10. G. Lansbury, *The Miracle of Fleet Street* (London, Victoria House, 1925), pp. 160ff.
11. H. Richards, *The Bloody Circus: The Daily Herald and the Left* (London, Pluto, 1997).
12. The figures for regional dailies relate to Britain and for other categories of publications to the UK, as reported in *Mitchell's Newspaper Press Directory*.
13. N. Kaldor and R. Silverman, *A Statistical Analysis of Advertising Expenditure and of the Revenue of the Press* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 84.
14. *Northern Star*, 7 May 1842.
15. *Leeds Mercury*, 14 June 1851.
16. *Northern Star*, 26 February and 11 June 1842.

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*The era of the press barons*

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The era of the press barons is often seen as a maverick interlude in the development of the press when newspapers became subject to the whims and caprices of their owners. According to this view, the press barons built vast press empires and ruled them like personal fiefdoms. In the hands of men like Beaverbrook and Rothermere, newspapers became mere 'engines of propaganda', manipulated in order to further their political ambitions. As Stanley Baldwin declared in a memorable sentence (suggested to him by his cousin, Rudyard Kipling), 'What proprietorship of these papers is aiming at is power, and power without responsibility – the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages.'

The despotic rule of the press barons is usually compared unfavourably with a preceding 'golden age' when proprietors played an inactive role and 'sovereign' editors conducted their papers in a responsible manner. In some accounts, too, the era of Northcliffe and Rothermere is contrasted with the period after the Second World War when journalists became more educated, independent and professional. The press barons have thus become favourite bogeymen: their indictment has become a way of celebrating the editorial integrity of newspapers, both past and present.

But in reality the reign of the press barons did not constitute an exceptional pathology in the evolution of the press, but merely a continuation of tendencies already present before. Indeed, insofar as the barons may be said to have been innovators, it is not for the reasons that are generally given. They did not break with tradition by using their papers for political propaganda; their distinctive contribution was rather that they downgraded propaganda in favour of entertainment. Nor did they subvert the role of the press as a fourth estate; on the contrary it was they who detached the commercial press from the political parties and, consequently, from the state. What actually happened is, in some ways, the exact opposite of historical mythology.<sup>1</sup>

### The creation of press empires

The newspaper chains built by the press barons were not a new phenomenon. Multiple ownership of weekly newspapers had developed as early as the eighteenth century. Local daily chains had also emerged shortly after the regional daily press was established in the mid-nineteenth century. By 1884, for instance, a syndicate headed by the Scots-American steel magnate Carnegie controlled eight dailies and ten weeklies.

Although some papers controlled by the press barons gained a dominant market position, this too had happened before. *The Times*, for example, had dominated the respectable daily press during the early Victorian period. This recurring pattern arose from the unequal competitive relationship that developed between strong and weak papers. As soon as one paper gained a market lead, it was in a strong position to move further ahead because it had more money than its rivals from both sales and scale economies to invest in editorial development.

While the press barons reached a growing audience as a consequence of a rapid increase in circulation, this was also not new. There had been a sustained growth of newspaper consumption ever since the seventeenth century, and this growth was already accelerating before the press barons made their mark.

The large empires created by the press barons may thus be viewed as a continuation of three well-established trends – chain ownership, an expanding market and a tendency for a few papers to become dominant. All that happened was that some of these trends became more pronounced during the period of their ascendancy. In the first place there was, between 1890 and 1920, a rapid growth of newspaper chains which incorporated national as well as regional papers. By 1921 the three Harmsworth brothers (Lords Northcliffe, Rothermere and Sir Lester Harmsworth) controlled newspapers with an aggregate circulation of over six million – probably the largest press group in the western world at the time.<sup>2</sup>

Between the wars, concentration of press ownership entered a new phase, with the spectacular consolidation of the regional chains. The percentage of provincial evening titles controlled by the five big chains rose from 8 to 40 per cent between 1921 and 1939; their ownership of the provincial morning titles also increased, from 12 to 44 per cent during the same period. The power of the chains was extended further by the elimination of local competition. Between 1921 and 1937, the number of towns with a choice of evening paper fell from twenty-four to ten, while towns with a choice of local morning paper declined from fifteen to seven.

The principal pace-setters in the expansion of the regional chains were the Berry brothers, Lords Camrose and Kemsley. Their group grew from four daily and Sunday papers in 1921 to twenty daily and Sunday papers in 1939. This was achieved only after a long-drawn-out and costly 'war' with Lord

Rothermere, which was eventually resolved in a series of local treaties in which the three lords divided up different parts of the country between them.

There was also, during the inter-war period, an enormous increase in the sales of national dailies which for the first time overtook that of local dailies. Between 1920 and 1939 the combined circulation of the national daily press rose from 5.4 million to 10.6 million, while that of the local daily and weekly press remained relatively static. This major expansion of the London-based press meant that some proprietors gained enormous audiences even when they owned relatively few papers. This applied in particular to Lord Beaverbrook, controller of the *Daily Express*, the leading popular daily of the late 1930s.

These changes meant that, after the death of Lord Northcliffe in 1922, four men – Lords Beaverbrook, Rothermere, Camrose and Kemsley – became the dominant figures in the inter-war press. In 1937, for instance, they owned nearly one in every two national and local daily papers sold in Britain, as well as one in every three Sunday papers that were sold. The combined circulation of all their newspapers amounted to over thirteen million.

However, their pre-eminence was not in fact as great as that of their less well-known predecessors. In 1937 the three leading Sunday papers' owners (Kemsley, Beaverbrook and Camrose) controlled 59 per cent of national Sunday newspaper circulation – significantly less than the 69 per cent share of national Sunday circulation controlled by three less power-hungry proprietors (Dalziel, Riddell and Lloyd) in 1910. Similarly in 1937 Rothermere, Beaverbrook and Cadbury controlled 50 per cent of national daily circulation – again, much less than the 67 per cent share controlled by Pearson, Cadbury and Northcliffe in 1910.

This relative decline was due partly to the re-emergence of a significant labour press. The Co-operative Movement bought *Reynolds News* in 1929; the TUC formed a partnership with Odhams to relaunch the *Daily Herald* in 1929; and the Communist Party established the *Daily Worker* in 1930. The rising capitalization of the press led also to an increased dispersal of shareholdings. Two important papers, the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*, ceased to have a controlling shareholder in the mid-1930s. The press magnates' hegemony over the press was, in fact, waning during the period celebrated for their ascendancy.

### **Press barons and proprietorial control**

Not all press proprietors were interventionist. For instance, Astor, joint owner of *The Times* after 1922, was teased by his friends for not reading his own paper. Even the quintessential press barons – Northcliffe, Rothermere, Beaverbrook and Kemsley – did not exercise a uniform degree of control. They tended to lavish attention on their favourite papers, while taking a lesser interest in others they controlled.

Thus in the late 1930s Beaverbrook deluged the *Daily Express* with instructions to support appeasement ('No War Talk. NO WAR TALK' read one telegram of that period), but did not seem to mind that its sister paper, the *Sunday Express*, expressed growing disquiet about Germany's remilitarization, or that another of his papers, the *Evening Standard*, under the socialist editor Percy Cudlipp, urged a popular front against fascism. Similarly Northcliffe was mainly concerned in his later years with the *Daily Mail*, a pre-occupation that his brother Rothermere later shared.

The two archetypal press barons, Northcliffe and Beaverbrook, had very different personal styles. While Northcliffe was notorious for personally harassing his staff, Beaverbrook's remoteness was legendary. In *Scoop*, Evelyn Waugh satirized a visit to him:

The carpets were thicker [as one approached Lord Copper's private office], the lights softer, the expressions of the inhabitants more careworn. The typewriters were of a special kind: their keys made no more sound than the drumming of a bishop's finger-tips on an upholstered prie-dieu. The telephone buzzers were muffled and purred like warm cats. The personal private secretaries padded through the ante-chambers and led them nearer and nearer to the presence.

Yet despite their differences of personality, both men exercised detailed control over their favourite papers through a constant barrage of instructions. Beaverbrook sent 147 separate instructions to the *Daily Express* in one day. Northcliffe would sometimes phone his staff at 6 in the morning: 'Wake up! Have you seen the papers yet?' he would demand. One editor, who replied that you could not get the *Mail* in Northlake at 6 a.m., was woken at 5 the next morning by a copy delivered to his door by a pantechnicon.

The press barons maintained their personal domination with extreme ruthlessness. Northcliffe, in particular, had a brisk way of dismissing employees. 'Who is that?' Northcliffe said on the phone. 'Editor, *Weekly Dispatch*, Chief,' came the reply. 'You were the editor,' responded Northcliffe. When a luckless subeditor filled a lull in conversation over lunch with the information that he had been shipwrecked three times, Northcliffe said abruptly, 'Four times.' Beaverbrook also had a fearsome reputation. 'Fleet Street,' recalled one of his employees, 'was strewn with the corpses of *Express* editors.'<sup>3</sup>

The barons combined terror with generosity. Journalists' memoirs and official histories are full of anecdotes about the sudden gifts, holidays and salary rises which were showered on staff. As a genre these stories could be called 'courageous underling gets his reward'. They usually take the form of the plucky journalist standing up for himself (or, more rarely, for what he believes) in the face of the baron's fury. They are clearly intended to enhance both the baron, who is revealed as discriminating and fundamentally right-minded in his judgements, and the journalist, whose independence is



demonstrated by his courage. But what they actually reveal is an almost continuous process of humiliation. Bernard Falk, usually rewarded with a cigar when he took down Northcliffe's dictated social column for the *Mail*, was once allowed to choose the one he wanted. 'What!' said Northcliffe, 'You have the nerve to pick on those cigars! Don't you know, young man, that they cost 3/6 each?' 'Yes,' said the fearless reporter, 'but they're worth every penny.' Another editor who dared to disagree with Northcliffe recorded gratefully the telegram he received: 'My dear Blackwood, you are grossly impertinent to your affectionate Chief.'

Losing a battle with a press baron hardly made such a good story. Buckle, the editor of *The Times* (whose editorial independence Northcliffe had promised to uphold), was eased out of the editorship when he failed to adapt to the political views and managerial strategy of the Chief. Lewis Macleod, literary editor of the *Daily Mail*, received a communiqué from Northcliffe: 'This is the last occasion on which I can tolerate Macleod's gross neglect and carelessness. He will read this message out to the editorial conference on Monday.' When Northcliffe was angered by what he thought were defects on the *Daily Mail's* picture page, he lined up all those involved in its production and put the tallest man in charge. Feeling dissatisfied with the *Mail's* advertising department, he appointed the commissionaire to vet advertisements. Beaverbrook was also unpredictable, though not on the scale of Northcliffe.<sup>4</sup> Yet behind both men's seemingly random acts of ferocity and generosity, there was often a careful regard for their self-interest. Beaverbrook insisted, for instance, that some of his best journalists write under pseudonyms so that, if they left the *Express*, they could not take with them the goodwill generated by their copy.

Northcliffe and Beaverbrook shaped the entire content of their favourite papers, including their layout. Thus Northcliffe raged at an employee at *The Times*, 'What have you done with the moon? I said the moon - the *Moon*. Someone has moved the moon! . . . Well, if it's moved again, whoever does it is fired!' (The position of the weather report had been changed.) Beaverbrook and Northcliffe constantly pestered journalists about the language and phrasing of their reports. 'To Eastbourne's balding, myopic, Edinburgh-trained physiotherapist, William John Snooks, 53, came the news that . . .' parodied Tom Driberg, a former *Express* journalist, in the approved Beaverbrook style. Both press barons also interfered in the choice of pictures. 'Alfonso' (King of Spain), complained Northcliffe, 'is always smiling. This smile is not news. If you get a picture of Alfonso weeping, *that* would be news!'

The barons' personal foibles influenced the selection of news stories, thereby helping to shape the news values of the national press. Northcliffe had a lifelong obsession with torture and death: he even kept an aquarium containing goldfish and a pike, with a dividing partition, which he would lift up when he was in need of diversion. His obsession was reflected in his first magazine, *Answers*, which dealt with such enquiries as: 'How long is a severed

head conscious after decapitation?' The first feature article Northcliffe wrote for his first evening newspaper described the day he spent with a condemned murderer in Chelmsford Prison. He later briefed *Daily Mail* staff to find 'one murder a day'. Similarly Beaverbrook, a hypochondriac, told the editor of the *Daily Express* that 'the public like to know . . . what diseases men die of – and women too'.

Proprietors' perceptions of their readers set the tone of their papers. The *Daily Express* aimed, in Beaverbrook's words, at 'the character and temperament which was bent on moving upwards and outward', reflecting Beaverbrook's North American admiration for self-made success. The *Daily Mail*, on the other hand, projected a more static, hierarchical world appealing, as Northcliffe put it patronizingly, to 'people who would like to think they earned £1,000 a year'.

The proprietorial control exercised by the press magnates did not represent, however, a decisive break with the past. Indeed, Lucy Brown's revisionist account of the Victorian commercial press even argues that 'what is an important and unvarying generalization is that the sovereign powers of decision were exercised by the proprietors and not by the editors'. Many of the Victorian editors celebrated for their independence, such as C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* (1877 to 1929), were either owner-editors or members of the proprietorial family. Other leading editors prove, on close examination, to have been less autonomous than has usually been claimed. Even Delane of *The Times*, often seen as a model of the sovereign editor, was repeatedly excluded from key planning decisions affecting the development of his paper. Indeed, he was so convinced that he was going to be sacked at one stage that he started 'taking dinners' in order to become eligible to practise as a barrister. Others were less fortunate: Cook, Gardiner, Massingham, Greenwood, Annand, Watson and Donald were only some of the distinguished editors who were compelled to resign between 1880 and 1918 as a result of political disagreements with their proprietors.

The tradition of editorial sovereignty which the press magnates allegedly destroyed was, to a large extent, a myth. The press barons were no different from their immediate predecessors in involving themselves in the editorial conduct of their papers. What made them innovators, to some degree, was that they were heavily involved in the business side of their papers. Yet even this difference should not be overstated since some of the earlier pioneers of 'popular' journalism, notably Edward Lawson and Edward Lloyd, were also active business managers.

### Profits and politics

However, the press barons are usually portrayed as journalist-politicians – a view of themselves which they publicly cultivated. Beaverbrook, for instance, told the first Royal Commission on the Press that he ran the *Daily Express*

'merely for the purpose of making propaganda and with no other motive'. Yet this simple image of propagandist has tended to obscure another, more important aspect of their dominion over the press – their demotion of politics.

Intense competition resulted in rising levels of paging, bigger editorial staffs and, above all, massive promotion. Northcliffe and Rothermere led the way by spending, up to 1928, approximately £1 million on the *Daily Mail's* readers' insurance scheme in order to attract more readers. Rival press magnates fought back with competitions offering lavish prizes and their own readers' insurance schemes. After a legal judgment in 1928 outlawed newspaper competitions as lotteries, promotion shifted towards free gifts. Teams of canvassers moved through the countryside offering housewives anything from cameras and wristwatches to silk stockings and tea-kettles, in return for taking out a newspaper subscription. The promotion for the *Daily Herald* alone is estimated to have amounted to £1 per new reader between 1930 and 1932. Even in 1937, when the 'circulation war' had abated, a typical national daily newspaper employed five times as many canvassers as editorial staff.<sup>5</sup> The effect of this heavy promotion and rising editorial outlay was to force up costs, and therefore the circulations that popular newspapers needed to achieve in order to stay profitable.

Publishers were consequently under increasing pressure to give more space to material with a general appeal to less differentiated audiences. The editorial implications of this were spelt out in market research, which most leading publishers commissioned during the 1930s, into what people read in newspapers. A major survey, based on a national quota sample of over 20,000 people and commissioned by the *News Chronicle* in 1933, revealed, for instance, that the most-read news in popular daily papers were stories about accidents, crime, divorce and human interest. They had a near-universal appeal. In contrast most categories of public affairs news had only an average or below-average readership rating. This was because, although some aspects of public affairs had an above-average readership among men and people over the age of 35, they had a weak appeal among women and the young. Public affairs content was thus, in marketing terms, a commodity with a sectional appeal. It lacked, moreover, the passionate following among a large minority commanded by sport, and it also lacked the appeal to advertisers possessed by some minority consumer features.

Pressure to maximize audiences consequently resulted in the cumulative downgrading of political coverage. By 1936 six out of our sample of seven papers devoted more space to human interest content than to public affairs – indeed, in some cases three or four times as much.<sup>6</sup> Among popular papers, the one exception to this trend towards depoliticization was the *Daily Herald*, which allocated 33 per cent of its editorial content to public affairs in 1936. This reflected the socialist priorities of the paper's TUC-nominated directors. To the press barons, by contrast, profits mattered ultimately more than politics.

This shift away from the traditional concept of a newspaper was part of a long-term trend dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. It accelerated, however, during the inter-war period. Thus between 1927 and 1937 home political, social and economic news almost halved as a proportion of total news in the *Daily Mail*.<sup>7</sup>

The quality press remained more faithful to the traditional concept of the newspaper, despite the fact that market research showed that the most-read news items in quality dailies were very similar to those in popular papers.<sup>8</sup> However, quality newspapers continued to give high priority to public affairs as a consequence of a felicitous conjunction between professional and commercial concerns. By the mid-1930s, over two-thirds of quality newspaper income came from advertising. This was generated by charging high rates to reach small but affluent audiences: diluting this select readership with working-class readers, attracted by a popular editorial strategy, would have been economically counter-productive.

### The rise of the 'fourth estate'

The press barons are usually accused of using their papers as instruments of political power, but they were hardly unique in this. What actually made the more notorious press magnates fundamentally different from their immediate predecessors was that they sought to use their papers not as levers of power within the political parties, but as instruments of power against the political parties. The basis of the establishment's objection to men like Rothermere and Beaverbrook was not that they were politically ambitious, but that they were politically independent.

In the early twentieth century the majority of London-based daily papers were owned by wealthy individuals, families or syndicates closely linked to a political party. Between 1911 and 1915, for instance, funds from the Unionist Central Office were secretly paid through respectable nominees to the *Standard*, *Globe*, *Observer* and *Pall Mall Gazette*. A wealthy Conservative syndicate, headed by the Duke of Northumberland, bought the Tory *Morning Post* in 1924. Similarly, Lloyd George engineered the purchase of the *Daily News* in 1901 by the Cadbury family in the Liberal interest, and arranged the purchase of the *Daily Chronicle* in 1918 through a syndicate headed by Dalziel with money accumulated through the sale of honours and laundered through the Lloyd George Fund.

This pattern of political control was undermined by the growth of advertising expenditure (mostly on the press) which nearly trebled from £20 million in 1907 to £59 million in 1938. This funded an escalating rise in editorial and promotional spending, and increasingly made papers too expensive for political parties and their supporters to sustain. Pearson refused to dig deeper into his pocket to keep the *Westminster Gazette* going in the Liberal cause after 1928; Lloyd George and his associates were forced to sell the *Daily Chronicle*

in 1928; the TUC gave up financial control of the *Daily Herald* to the Odhams Group in 1929; no Tory syndicate could be found to prevent the *Daily Graphic* from closing in 1926 or the *Morning Post* from disappearing in 1937.

The enormous expansion of advertising weaned the national press from dependence on the political parties. Although most major press barons were Tories, they were first and foremost newspapermen. With the exception of papers controlled by Beaverbrook in his early days, all their publications were subsidized solely by advertising, and consequently were free to operate entirely independently of political patronage. An independent 'fourth estate', prematurely announced in the mid-nineteenth century, came much closer to reality under the press barons.

Beaverbrook and Northcliffe played an important role in the political revolt that unseated Asquith as premier in 1916, and established Lloyd George in his place. After the war they adopted a more unconventional, outsider role. Between 1919 and 1922 Rothermere, aided by Northcliffe, launched a virulent campaign against 'squandermania', urging extensive cuts in public spending, the abandonment of wartime planning controls and the sale of publicly owned enterprises. When the Coalition government partially rejected these policies, Rothermere appealed directly to the country by backing the Anti-Waste League in parliamentary by-elections in 1921. Three Anti-Waste League candidates succeeded in winning at Dover, Westminster St George's and Hertford. Although these victories were not matched by by-election gains elsewhere, Rothermere had demonstrated the strength of grass-roots Conservative opposition to government policies. Partly in response to this pressure, the Ministries of Shipping, Munitions and Food were abolished, a wide range of public controls was lifted, and publicly owned factories and shipyards were sold off.

The Anti-Waste Campaign petered out with the breakup of the Coalition government in 1922, and its replacement by a Conservative administration. However, Beaverbrook and Rothermere later became persuaded that Britain's economic problems could be solved by converting the Empire into a free trade zone protected by a high tariff wall. Unable to convince the Conservative Party leadership, they again made an independent foray into politics by backing the United Empire Party (UEP). In 1930 its candidate, Vice-Admiral Turner, won unexpectedly in the safe Tory seat of Paddington. His success was followed by another by-election upset at East Islington where Labour won and the official Conservative candidate was beaten by the UEP into third place. This precipitated a revolt within the Conservative Party. Sir Robert Topping, the chief Conservative agent, wrote a memorandum saying that the party leader, Stanley Baldwin, should go. His view was endorsed by most leading Conservatives consulted by Neville Chamberlain, the party chairman. Baldwin agreed to go quietly, telling the chairman bitterly that 'the sooner, the better' suited him.

After further reflection, Stanley Baldwin decided to stay and fight, staking his political career on the outcome of the parliamentary by-election at Westminster St George's. Mounting a brilliant political campaign in which he shifted attention from empire free trade to the unaccountable power of the press barons, he helped the official Conservative candidate Duff Cooper to win with a comfortable majority. Thereafter Baldwin's personal position was safe, though he was sufficiently shaken to make what was, in effect, a private peace treaty with Beaverbrook shortly after the by-election.

The political impetus behind the empire free trade campaign was broken by the 1931 crisis, the collapse of the Labour government and the landslide election victory won by the Coalition administration headed by Ramsay MacDonald. It was also weakened by lack of enthusiasm in the Dominions for the press barons' grand design. Nevertheless, Beaverbrook and Rothermere succeeded in strengthening the imperialist wing within the Conservative Party and some imperial preference policies were implemented during the 1930s. This was more than Joseph Chamberlain, the great apostle of empire free trade, achieved during the nineteenth century despite his explosive impact on late Victorian politics.

Rothermere subsequently came out in support of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1934. His papers pumped out stirring calls such as 'Give the Blackshirts a Helping Hand' (*Daily Mirror*, 22 January 1934) and 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts' (*Daily Mail*, 15 January 1934). The *Evening News*, under his control, even ran a competition for the best letter on the theme of 'Why I like the Blackshirts'. This support from a mass-circulation press thrust a relatively obscure organization into the limelight and contributed to an increase in its membership. However, Rothermere withdrew his support after little more than five months, thereby helping to deny the BUF the legitimacy it needed in order to attract 'respectable' support.

### Press barons and social order

Some historians have interpreted the relative failure of the press barons to persuade people to vote for their right-wing political projects as evidence that they exercised no significant political power. However, this implies mistakenly that the influence of the press barons can be assessed only in terms of winning support for a change in public policy, as if they were merely the equivalent of a pressure group. In reality, their main impact lay in the way in which their papers selectively represented the world. This tended to strengthen the mainly conservative prejudices of their readers, and reinforce opposition, particularly within the middle class, to progressive change.

Their papers projected imaginary folk devils, the most threatening and prominent of which were Marxists whose secret allegiance was to a foreign power. Even the moderate and ineffectual administration, headed by Britain's first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, was branded in 1924 as

being subject to Marxist influence. In the subsequent general election battle, the 'red peril' campaign reached new heights. 'Civil War plot by Socialists' Masters' screamed the *Daily Mail's* (25 October 1924) front-page banner headline, heading a report of a letter supposedly sent by Zinoviev (President of the Third Communist International in Moscow) to the British Communist Party. Although the letter was patently a forgery, it was given massive, largely uncritical publicity by all the press barons' papers, and was shamelessly exploited to define the choice before the electorate as a simple one between moderation and Marxism, British civilization or alien domination. 'Vote British, not Bolshie' urged the *Daily Mirror* (29 October) in its front-page headline. Underneath it printed the question in heavy type: 'Do You Wish to Vote for the Leaders of Law, Order, Peace and Prosperity?' (with reassuring pictures of Lloyd George, Baldwin, Asquith and Austen Chamberlain), 'or to Vote for the Overthrow of Society and Pave the Way to Bolshevism?' (with sinister pictures of Russian leaders).

It is doubtful whether such crude propaganda deterred many would-be Labour voters – not least because the majority of working people did not read a daily paper in 1924 (unlike ten years later). Although the Labour Party lost forty seats, its share of the vote increased by 3.2 per cent largely because it fielded sixty-four more candidates. But the effect of the sustained red scare in the press was to polarize the election between left and right. The centre vote collapsed, with the Liberal Party being reduced from 158 to forty seats. The hysteria whipped up by the press also contributed to a massive increase in turn-out, which rose by over two million compared with the previous general election called only eleven months before. The combined effect of Liberal defections and higher turn-out increased the Conservative vote and resulted in a landslide Tory victory.

The press also tended to interpret conflict within a conservative framework. Most national newspapers portrayed retrospectively the 1926 General Strike, called by the TUC in support of coal-miners, as a contest between a minority and the majority. This majority-minority paradigm detached workers from their class backgrounds, and obscured the causes of the conflict. It also enabled trade unionists to be portrayed as being opposed to the democratically elected government and the 'rule of the majority'. This, in turn, justified retribution as an act of self-defence. 'Trade unionists in this country,' declared the *Observer* (16 May 1926), 'are and always will be a minority, and if they seriously try to break the majority, they make it quite certain that the majority, if further provoked, will break them.' The portrayal of trade unionists as an unrepresentative minority also facilitated their identification with communist subversion. 'The defeat of the General Strike,' thundered the *Daily Mail* (14 May 1926), 'will end the danger of communist tyranny in Europe.' A similarly persuasive and traditionalist framework was deployed in explaining the deepening Depression. It was portrayed widely as a 'natural catastrophe',

comparable to a hurricane or flood. In this way, the appropriate response was defined as national unity in the face of a common calamity.

The press controlled by the barons helped to sustain the social order by stigmatizing its radical opponents. Thus, the communist-dominated Unemployed Workers' Movement received hostile coverage when it organized marches of unemployed workers from Scotland, Wales and the north of England, all converging on London early in 1929. The *Daily Mail* (24 February 1929) called it 'a weary tramp to advertise Reds', while *The Times* (11 January 1929) called it 'heartless, cruel and unnecessary'. In common with most other papers, they deflected attention from the issue of unemployment by defining the protest mainly in terms of the threat it posed to law and order. Significantly, the press provided much more sympathetic coverage of the 1936 Jarrow March, which had the support of both Conservative and Labour councillors and a much more limited political agenda. The press thus helped to police the boundaries of legitimate dissent.

However, the central core of the conservatism expressed by papers under the barons' control was a deep and emotional attachment to Britain and her empire. This intense patriotism sometimes shaded off into open racism and, particularly in the case of the papers controlled by Rothermere, aggressive anti-semitism. The *Daily Mail* (10 July 1933) interpreted Hitler's rise as a response to 'Israelite' provocation. As it patiently explained:

The German nation was rapidly falling under the control of its alien elements. In the last days of the pre-Hitler regime there were twenty times as many Jewish government officials in Germany as had existed before the war. Israelites of international attachments were insinuating themselves into key positions in the German administrative machine.

Such interpretations fanned anti-semitism in Britain, and were linked to a campaign against Jewish asylum seekers. 'The way that stateless Jews from Germany are pouring in from every port of this country is becoming an outrage', *Daily Mail* 30 August 1938. This campaign exerted pressure, in turn, on the authorities to deny refuge to people later slaughtered in the death camps. As many as ten times the number of European Jews were blocked as were granted asylum in Britain during the later 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

### **Modification of economic controls**

Although the press became more independent of political parties and of government, it still operated within an economic framework which limited the range of opinion that could be heard. The rise in publishing costs during the inter-war period, funded largely by advertising, sealed off entry into the national newspaper market. With one exception, no new national daily or Sunday newspaper was successfully established between 1919 and 1939,



largely because of the prohibitive cost of starting new papers. The one exception – the communist *Sunday Worker*, launched in 1925 and converted into the *Daily Worker* in 1930 – was boycotted by distributors, and was so under-financed that it existed only on the margins of publishing with a small circulation.

The easiest way to break into national newspaper publishing was to buy an established newspaper. However, a substantial outlay was still necessary if the acquired title was to be developed and promoted. This was beyond the readily available resources of the Co-op when it took over *Reynolds News*. Indeed, the triumphant rise of the *Daily Herald* would never have happened on such a spectacular scale if Odhams had not acquired a 51 per cent interest in the paper in 1929 and spent £3 million on its relaunch. Carrying twice as many pages as before, equipped with a northern as well as a London printing plant, and very heavily promoted, the *Daily Herald* increased its circulation from a little over 300,000 in 1929 to two million in 1933. Without this backing by one of the country's largest publishing corporations, Labour's official voice would have been muzzled by underinvestment.

The persistence of advertising discrimination against left publications still acted as a further brake upon their development. *Reynolds News*, for instance, received only 0.82d per copy in gross advertising revenue in 1936, less than half that obtained by the *Sunday Express* (1.9d per copy) and less than one-eighth of that bestowed on the *Sunday Times* (6.4d per copy).<sup>10</sup> Left publications were also forced to close down with circulations far higher than some of their more right-wing rivals. Thus the *Clarion* closed in 1933 with a circulation of over 80,000 copies – more than four times that of the *Spectator* and ten times that of the *Economist*. Even massive circulations were not enough to attract some mass-market advertisers. In 1936 the *Daily Herald* obtained less than half the gross advertising revenue per copy of the smaller-circulation *Daily Mail*.

However, advertising hostility to the radical press was not as great during the inter-war period as it had been before. The standard advertising textbook of the 1930s advised that 'the first test that must always be applied to a press advertising medium is the cost of placing an advertisement of a given size before a given number of suitable readers'. This precept could be followed because the information became available on which to make such a calculation. Circulation figures became more reliable during the 1920s and this trend was consolidated by the establishment of the Audit Bureau of Circulation in 1931. More importantly, survey research into the size and social composition of newspaper readership was introduced on a commercial basis in 1924 and obtained official endorsement from the advertising industry in 1930.

This encouraged a more impersonal approach to advertising selection, based on quantifiable cost criteria, in which political value judgements played a less important role. Readership research also caused advertisers to reassess

stereotypical images of left publications as being read by the 'down at heel'. For instance, the 1934 official readership survey showed that the *Daily Herald* was read by more middle-class people than *The Times* (largely because the *Herald's* readership, though predominantly working class, was so much bigger).

The development of market research in the 1920s also helped radical publications by underlining the economic importance of the working-class market. Typical of the shift of orientation among some advertisers during this period was Sun-Maid Raisins, which changed its advertising from high-class women's magazines to mass-market media in 1929 because research 'shows that 91.2 per cent of the families of Great Britain have incomes of under £400'.<sup>11</sup> The adoption of more sophisticated methods of analysis reinforced this more positive valorization of the working-class market. 'Inequalities of consumption', concluded the principal marketing manual of the mid-1930s, 'are less than inequalities of income, and inequalities of income are less than inequalities of wealth.'<sup>12</sup> A similar message was put rather less abstractly in the trade promotion of Odhams, the publisher of the *Daily Herald*, *John Bull* and other working-class publications. As one of their advertisements proclaimed, 'If the housewives who read *John Bull* put their purses together next year, they could buy the *Giaconda* diamond or *Da Vinci's* "Mona Lisa" hundreds of times over, then they could spend the change on the richest treasures of Bond Street or the Rue de la Paix.'

Selling the working class to advertisers was made easier by the growth of working-class purchasing power, and the related growth of consumption of mass-market goods. *Per capita* annual consumer expenditure at constant (1913) prices rose from £42 in 1921 to £54 in 1938, a large increase that reflected the rise of real wages among working people in employment during the Depression. This contributed to an enormous increase in the purchase of heavily advertised, branded products such as cosmetics, medicines, bicycles and electrical appliances.

These cumulative changes were of crucial importance in enabling the *Daily Herald* to survive as a successful daily. Even in 1933, when the *Daily Herald* became the largest circulation daily in the western world, it was still trading at a loss, but by 1936 it had picked up over £1.5 million in gross advertising receipts. Its rise was not stalled, as before, by a precipitous, unilateral price increase. This was because the paper had ceased to be an advertising pariah.

Changes in the orientation of advertisers contributed to another important development in the press – the relaunch of the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*. In the early 1930s the *Daily Mirror* seemed to be a dying paper. Although it had a disproportionately middle-class readership, it was denied the usual benefits of reaching an affluent audience because, as a tabloid, it was mistakenly believed by many advertising agencies to be read only sketchily. In addition, its circulation was declining by about 70,000 a year and

had dropped below 800,000 by 1933. In anticipation of the paper closing, Rothermere sold most of his shares in the *Daily Mirror*.

Rothermere's disengagement enabled the paper to change direction. Bartholomew was created editorial director in 1933, and skilfully reoriented the paper towards the lower end of the market. This had been neglected by dailies due to advertising pressure, and was waiting to be exploited. Moreover, downscale media were no longer shunned by the advertising industry due to its growing recognition of the importance of working-class consumers. The inspiration behind the paper's relaunch was essentially a marketing one, and this was reflected in the close involvement of a leading advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson (JWT), in every stage of the paper's rebirth. JWT carried out market research into readers' preferences; advised on layout; supplied staff to become key members of the new *Mirror* team; and, most important of all, advised clients to advertise in the rejuvenated paper.

A change in market direction for the *Daily Mirror* required a corresponding shift in the paper's politics. As Cecil King, the paper's advertising director, put it:

Our best hope was, therefore, to appeal to young, working-class men and women. . . . If this was the aim, the politics had to be made to match. In the depression of the thirties, there was no future in preaching right-wing politics to young people in the lowest income bracket.

However, the *Daily Mirror*'s make-over was more cautious and gradual than legend suggests. The paper in fact backed Baldwin as Prime Minister in the 1935 general election, gradually adopted an anti-appeasement policy, but drew back from anything as extreme as support for the Labour Party. It also developed an ambivalent social identity that mirrored its political uncertainty. It published simultaneously features about the aristocracy and 'show business' stars aimed seemingly at very different readerships.

This caution was dictated partly by a desire to recruit new readers without alienating old ones. It also reflected a concern about not being typecast as a working-class daily in the eyes of advertisers. The *Daily Mirror* constantly emphasized its continuing appeal to middle-class readers in its self-presentation to the advertising industry. Indeed, in 1938 it even mounted a promotion campaign in the advertising trade press boasting of its upper-class 'A' readership (the top 5 per cent of the country). 'Only one of the six popular national papers,' the *Daily Mirror* proclaimed, 'can claim more "A" class readers.'

The really important change represented by the *Daily Mirror*'s make-over, however, was not its anxious flirtation with social democracy, but its relegation of politics in favour of content with a wide appeal to women and young readers. Between 1927 and 1937 the *Daily Mirror* cut by half the proportion of its news devoted to political, social, economic and industrial issues.<sup>13</sup> The

shift meant that, in 1936, the *Daily Mirror's* coverage of domestic public affairs was less than half that of its sports coverage, and little over one-third of its coverage of crime, sex and other human interest content. Even more striking, its analysis of public affairs, whether in the form of editorials or feature articles, accounted for a mere 2 per cent of its editorial content.<sup>14</sup> The *Daily Mirror's* relaunch constituted a key moment in the incorporation of the press by the entertainment industry.

The *Daily Mirror's* circulation rose to 1.5 million by 1939 and, after an initial period of difficulty, its advertising revenue also increased substantially. The *Mirror's* success inspired a similar marketing operation on its sister paper, the *Sunday Pictorial*, in 1937, under the aegis of Cecil King and Hugh Cudlipp. The *Sunday Pictorial* also moved away from right-wing politics and a middle-class social identity without becoming left wing or working class.

In short, advertising patronage still inhibited the development of radical journalism. Yet the rise of working-class living standards, and changes in the way in which advertisers selected media, had encouraged part of the popular press to drift from its conservative moorings. The foundation had been laid for the development of a powerful social democratic press that would push for reform in the different social and economic context of the Second World War.

### Notes

1. A useful, recent assessment of the press barons, not mired in mythology, is provided in P. Catterall, C. Seymour-Ure and A. Smith (eds), *Northcliffe's Legacy* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000).
2. Circulation figures for the inter-war period are not entirely reliable. The principal sources for circulations used in this chapter have been T. B. Browne's annual *Advertisers' ABC*; Royal Commission on the Press 1947–9 Report (London, HMSO, 1949); N. Kaldor and R. Silverman, *A Statistical Analysis of Advertising Expenditure and of the Revenue of the Press* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1948); W. Belson, *The British Press* (London, London Press Exchange, 1959); the Audit Bureau of Circulations; and individual publishers.
3. In fact most of Beaverbrook's senior editors kept their jobs for exceptionally long periods of time, though this was less true of his more junior employees.
4. Northcliffe's unpredictability increased to the point of insanity, possibly induced by syphilis.
5. *Report on the British Press* (London, Political & Economic Planning, 1938), p. 132.
6. The relative proportion of space devoted to different categories of article is what is significant in discussing the evolution of the newspaper as a genre. For a different view, see Ralph Negrine, *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain* (2nd edn) (London, Routledge, 1994). Our content analysis was based on a sample of twelve issues of daily, and six issues of Sunday papers, in 1936. Public affairs is defined as political, social, economic, industrial, scientific and medical affairs. For a summary of the results, see Chapter 7, this volume.

7. *Royal Commission on the Press 1947-9 Report*, Appendix 7, p. 250.
8. *A Survey of Reader Interest (News Chronicle, 1934)*.
9. L. London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-48* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).
10. 'A statistical survey of press advertising during 1936' (London Press Exchange Ltd records). The figures exclude certain forms of classified advertising.
11. 'The Sun-Maid plan 1929-30' (J. Walter Thompson Ltd records).
12. G. Harrison and F. C. Mitchell, *The Home Market: A Handbook of Statistics* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1936), p. 6.
13. *Royal Commission on the Press 1947-9 Report*, Appendix 7, pp. 257-8.
14. See n. 5. This represented a reduction in real terms during the period 1927 to 1937, notwithstanding the increase in the size of the *Daily Mirror* and the rise in the proportion of its editorial content devoted to news.

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*The press under public regulation*

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Nostalgia has encouraged the belief that the British people closed ranks with bulldog determination under the unchallenged leadership of Churchill during the Second World War. This mythical view obscures the political and social crisis of the early war years, which led to a major confrontation between the government and the left press.

Many senior politicians and officials doubted the commitment of the British people to winning the war. A significantly named Home Morale Emergency Committee of the Ministry of Information reported in June 1940 on 'fear, confusion, suspicion, class feeling and defeatism'. Even the Ministry's parliamentary secretary, Harold Nicolson, confided in his diary during this period, 'It will now be almost impossible to beat the Germans.'<sup>1</sup> For at least the first two and a half years of the war, the relationship between the authorities and the press was dominated by a constant and probably misplaced concern about the state of public morale.

This anxiety was combined with growing concern among conservative politicians and civil servants about the growth of radicalism in Britain. In February 1942 the Home Intelligence Division reported a wave of admiration for Soviet Russia and a growing suspicion among sections of the working class that financial vested interests were hampering the war effort. A month later it commented on what was to become a familiar theme – the flowering of 'home-made Socialism' of which important elements were 'a revulsion against "vested interests", "privilege", and what is referred to as "the old gang"' and 'a general agreement that things were going to be different after the war'.<sup>2</sup> Left-wing press criticism, in these circumstances, appeared to some to be especially damaging. It was strengthening political division at home when the country needed to be united against a common enemy, as well as undermining military discipline and impeding efficient production. Indeed, the maintenance of public morale came close to being equated by some ministers and officials with suppressing radical criticism of any kind.

Yet a succession of military defeats provoked mounting attacks on 'the old gang'. In 1940 Neville Chamberlain was forced to resign as Prime Minister.

The new Coalition government under Churchill also came under growing attack as the military situation deteriorated. A cumulative political crisis developed which was only partly defused by changes in the Cabinet and leadership of the armed forces in 1940, 1941 and 1942. Press censorship thus became part of a beleaguered administration's battle for survival.

The Second World War was also different from previous wars in that the British people were in the front line for the first time. The strategic objective of the blitz was to both physically impede war production and destroy psychologically the will of the civilian population to service the war effort. Extensive censorship controls were needed, it was claimed, in order to combat the new, deadly technology of aerial warfare.

### **Censorship and resistance**

Amid mounting fears of invasion in the summer of 1940, the government issued regulations which gave the Home Secretary sweeping powers to control the press. The most important of these was Regulation 2D, conferring on the Home Secretary the personal power to ban any publication which published material 'calculated to foment opposition to the prosecution to a successful issue of any war in which His Majesty is engaged'. The regulation also denied the offending publication any automatic right of appeal or recourse to the law courts. As one angry MP declared, 'Its effect will be to put the Ministry of Home Security in a position by no means inferior, as regards the scope of its powers over newspapers, to that occupied by the distinguished Dr Goebbels in Germany.'<sup>3</sup>

A major campaign was organized against these new measures. Leading members of the old political establishment, including Lloyd George, were mobilized, and much of the press joined in the protest. Concerted opposition was mounted in the Commons with the result that the government secured ratification of the regulations by only thirty-eight votes – the smallest majority on any issue gained by the new government. This opposition was important because it secured two vital concessions that limited the way in which the regulations were subsequently implemented. First, Sir John Anderson, the Home Secretary, gave an undertaking that the regulations would not be amended without parliamentary consultation. Cabinet memoranda show that three months later this pledge was effective in blocking moves to ban publications which were deemed to 'disrupt the unity of effort' in the country.<sup>4</sup> Second, Sir John Anderson indicated in the Commons that the regulations would apply only to papers opposed to the continuance of the war. When government ministers later wanted to close down a pro-war paper, they felt it necessary to reinterpret the scope and purpose of the regulations. This created a delay which enabled effective opposition to be organized.

### Silencing the communist press

The communist *Daily Worker* and the *Week* were closed on 21 January 1941. The *Daily Worker* had modified its anti-fascist editorial policy following the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939, and attacked the war as a struggle between imperialist powers. The ostensible ground for banning the two publications was that they were impeding the war effort by setting people against the war. This was not borne out by research undertaken by the Ministry of Information, which indicated that they had little influence on public attitudes. The *Daily Worker* accounted for less than 1 per cent of total national daily circulation, while the *Week* had even smaller sales.

But if the two papers did not damage public morale, they disturbed the peace of mind of some government ministers. The *Daily Worker* campaigned against a number of shortcomings, such as the lack of deep shelters, which the government was not in a position to rectify in the short term. The *Daily Worker* also published vituperative attacks – including a cartoon portraying Bevin, the Minister of Production, as being in the pay of capitalist bosses – which caused deep personal offence.

The ban on the two papers was also part of a wider government campaign against communism in Britain which was being organized by the interdepartmental Committee on Communist Activities, including representatives from the Foreign Office and MI5, strongly supported by leading right-wing ministers. That the ban was motivated, in part, by political prejudice – and not simply by a concern about the papers' impact on public morale – is confirmed by the unwillingness of the authorities to allow the *Daily Worker* to begin republication when the British Communist Party came round to full-hearted support of the war.

The government chose to close down the two communist papers by ministerial decree rather than prosecute them through the law courts. Summary execution was preferred, partly because the government feared that it might lose the case and partly because, as a private memorandum from the Home Secretary explained, a law suit would provide the *Worker* with 'a good opportunity for propaganda against what it would describe as the government's effort to "gag" the press'.<sup>5</sup> Although the government's actions clearly amounted to an attack on press freedom, public 'watch-dogs' were mostly silent or approving. When the Home Secretary informed the Newspaper Proprietors Association of the ban, only one person objected. In Parliament the more successful of the two motions opposing the government's actions attracted eleven votes.

### Harassment of the left press

The assault on the communist press was part of a wider move to curb criticism from left papers. The *Daily Herald*, which had been outspokenly critical



during the early stages of the war, moderated its tone when the Labour Party joined the coalition. Pressure was brought to bear upon the paper through its TUC-nominated directors. Appeals to loyalty also helped to subdue criticism of the government in *Reynolds News*, the paper of the Co-operative Movement, but the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*, which moved sharply to the left during the war, were much more difficult to deal with. They were not controlled by the labour movement, nor were they answerable to a dominant shareholder (as the Cabinet discovered after authorizing an investigation into the shareholders of the two papers).

At first, pressure was exerted informally through a series of meetings between senior members of the government and directors of the two papers. When this failed, Churchill urged a more direct approach. Both papers, he argued in a Cabinet meeting on 7 October 1940, published articles that were subversive. He went on to suggest that a conspiracy lay behind this criticism. 'There was far more behind these articles,' Churchill warned, 'than disgruntlement or frayed nerves. They stood for something most dangerous and sinister, namely an attempt to bring about a situation in which the country would be ready for a surrender peace.'<sup>6</sup>

The new Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, asked for time to consider the issue. The next day he circulated a sharply worded memorandum to his Cabinet colleagues in which he suggested that 'there is much in the papers [*Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*] which is calculated to promote a war spirit. They seem to be clearly anxious for the defeat of Hitlerism.' After arguing that government action would be counterproductive, he concluded: 'It is a tradition of the British people that they still remain obedient to the constituted authorities while retaining their liberty to ridicule and denounce the individuals who are actually in authority.'<sup>7</sup>

An unlikely struggle developed in which Morrison, the archetypal machine politician, vigorously defended press freedom against Churchill, a former journalist famous for his eloquent speeches in defence of liberty. In the next Cabinet meeting, Churchill accused the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* of 'trying to rock the boat' and demanded 'firm action to deal with this menace'. He was strongly supported by, among others, Sir John Anderson who was in favour of issuing a warning to the two papers and then closing them down if they did not change. Morrison opposed this, arguing that such action would divide the Commons on party lines and amount to 'interference with the liberty of the press'.

In the end the Cabinet agreed, at Beaverbrook's suggestion, to exert pressure on the two papers through the Newspaper Proprietors Association (NPA). A meeting was arranged between Beaverbrook and Attlee, representing the government, and the NPA. The proprietors were warned that compulsory censorship might be introduced if the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* were not more restrained. The proprietors protested strongly at the meeting, but subsequently urged the senior management of the *Daily Mirror*

and *Sunday Pictorial* to exert a moderating influence on their staff. The effect of this intervention was limited. 'We shall pipe down for a few weeks,' Cecil King, a director of both papers, commented in his diary.

Churchill's allegations that the two papers were motivated by a desire to secure 'a surrender peace' was unjustified. Both papers were totally committed to winning the war. Indeed, they had opposed appeasement with Germany before anti-appeasement had become government policy; they had also backed Churchill for the leadership on the grounds that he would push for a more vigorous prosecution of the war. Indeed, at times, the *Daily Mirror* assumed almost the John Bull style of the Prime Minister: 'We appeal to every worker and every employer to play the man . . . stick to your job unless it is foolhardy to do so' (30 September 1940). The *Sunday Pictorial* was no different. Pillorying Lloyd George as 'the Marshal of the weak and the terrorized' when he proposed a negotiated settlement, it had even less time for pacifists. 'Put the lot behind barbed wire,' it urged.

The real reason for the attack on the two papers was that they had become increasingly critical of the government. The *Sunday Pictorial* (29 September) called the reverse at Dakar 'another blunder' while the *Daily Mirror* referred pointedly to 'futile dashes at remote strategic points'. Both papers began also to urge for social reform at home. But they left no doubt in the minds of their readers that victory against Hitler was what mattered most. 'However bad the "pluto-democratic" world may be,' declared a *Daily Mirror* columnist, 'it is at least better than the depravity that would suppress all independent action and thought under the devilish way of life commended by Nazi fanatics.'

Clashes between the government and the *Mirror* and *Pictorial* recurred throughout 1941 and early 1942, largely because both sides had irreconcilable understandings of the national interest.<sup>8</sup> Leading Conservative ministers believed that criticism of officers in the *Daily Mirror* – including a reference to them as 'brassbuttoned boneheads, socially prejudiced, arrogant and fussy' – served to undermine the respect for rank that was the basis of good discipline in the army. They also felt that the *Daily Mirror's* calls for post-war reconstruction were needlessly introducing political controversy and dividing the nation at a time of national emergency. The *Daily Mirror*, with an average circulation of 1,900,000, had become in their view a serious obstacle to winning the war.

*Daily Mirror* journalists, on the other hand, saw themselves as contributing to the war effort. They argued that Britain, in its hour of need, could not afford the incompetence that arose from snobbery and privilege: responsible jobs should go to those selected on the basis of ability rather than of birth. And plans for a new deal after the war were not divisive in a society already divided by class inequalities; on the contrary, a programme for 'winning the peace' would help win the war by motivating people to contribute even more to the war effort.

These differences flared up into a full-scale confrontation in March 1942. The occasion, though not the cause, of the confrontation was a cartoon published in the *Daily Mirror* by Zec which showed a torpedoed sailor adrift on a raft in the open sea with the caption: 'The price of petrol has been increased by one penny – official.' This was interpreted by Churchill and many of his Cabinet colleagues as an irresponsible attack upon the government for sanctioning oil company profiteering at the expense of people's lives. Its real intention was quite different: Zec meant it as an attack upon the needless waste of petrol by dramatizing the human sacrifice involved in shipping oil to Britain. This was how it was understood by most people, according to a Home Intelligence Report, as well as by most MPs who commented on it in a subsequent Commons debate.<sup>9</sup>

Ministers' misunderstanding of the Zec cartoon was a symptom of their growing demoralization. In the three months preceding the confrontation with the *Daily Mirror*, the allies had suffered defeats at Guam, Wake, Hong Kong, Manila, the Dutch East Indies, Rangoon, Benghazi and Singapore. In the embattled atmosphere of Cabinet discussions, the press came to be blamed by ministers on the left as well as the right for some of the things that were going wrong. Bevin, the Labour Minister, demanded in a highly emotional state, 'How was he to "press" people almost into the Merchant Navy if they were then to see the suggestion [in the Zec cartoon] that they were being "pressed" in order to put the price of petrol up for the owners?' The *Daily Mirror's* staff had become scapegoats for failure. 'We will flatten them', Churchill told his Information Minister, Brendan Bracken.<sup>10</sup>

The assault on the *Daily Mirror* was part of the government's struggle for political survival. A *Daily Mirror* editorial on 16 February 1942 came very close to demanding a new administration:

The assumption that whatever blunders are committed, and whatever faults are plainly visible in organization, we must still go on applauding men who muddle our lives away, is a travesty of history and a rhetorical defiance of all the bitter lessons of past wars.

This indictment was published at a time when a number of insiders believed that the government could be forced to resign. Churchill himself believed that he might be ousted. 'My diary for 1942,' writes a member of Churchill's personal entourage, 'has the same backcloth to every scene: Winston's conviction that his life as Prime Minister could be saved only by victory in the field.' Even the general public, previously more loyal to the premier and his administration than the political élite, showed signs of turning against Churchill in early 1942.<sup>11</sup>

The attack on the *Daily Mirror* was thus a pre-emptive strike against the government's principal critic. Its purpose, as discussion among Cabinet

ministers made clear, was not only to silence the *Daily Mirror* but also to intimidate the rest of the press into being less critical. Churchill demanded the immediate closure of the *Daily Mirror* in a full Cabinet meeting on 9 March 1942. The matter was referred to a Special Committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Anderson. The committee was advised by the law officers (rather surprisingly in view of the terms in which censorship regulations had been introduced) that it was legal to close down the *Daily Mirror* because, although it supported the war, it impeded its 'successful prosecution'. Indeed, the Lord Chancellor urged immediate suspension of the paper since the experience of the last war suggested, in his view, that quick, decisive action would be effective. 'When the then Home Secretary quite illegally suppressed the *Globe* newspaper,' he recalled inaccurately, 'there was a row in the House in one debate in which the government received overwhelming support, and nothing was ever heard of the *Globe* newspaper again.'<sup>12</sup>

The committee did not, however, endorse this proposal although it agreed that 'it would be helpful if an example could be made' to curb press criticism. Those opposed to an immediate ban stressed that 'it was clear from the debates in parliament at the time when Regulation 2D had been enacted that it would be used to deal with Communist, Fascist or Pacifist Anti-War agitators' – but not, they pointed out, 'for the purposes now suggested'. There had to be a public redefinition of the government's censorship powers before anything could be done.<sup>13</sup>

At this stage a near consensus had been reached in favour of banning the *Daily Mirror*. The hawks, who wanted immediate suspension, had been strengthened by the recruitment of Bevin, the only trade union leader in the Cabinet. The opposition of the doves, on the other hand, had weakened. They stood out for giving the *Daily Mirror* one last chance in which to reform itself, while at the same time seemingly consenting to the paper's suppression if it did not 'improve'. Even Morrison, the principal dove and the minister who would be responsible for carrying out Cabinet policy, apparently agreed that if the *Daily Mirror* people 'did not amend I would suppress them'.<sup>14</sup>

Morrison announced that Defence Regulation 2D empowered the government to ban pro-war papers which undermined the war effort, even if the offence was not intentional but merely arose from a 'reckless and unpatriotic indifference' to the interests of the nation. He added that the *Daily Mirror* would be banned without further notice unless 'those concerned recognized their public responsibilities'. The same warning was given personally to the *Daily Mirror's* senior management, and a report of the meeting was released to the press.

Most members of the government clearly did not anticipate the storm of protest that followed. A large group of MPs demanded a special debate in the Commons. In a packed House a Liberal MP, Wilfred Roberts, aptly quoted an article published in the USA by the Minister of Information, Brendan

Bracken. In this Bracken had argued that 'the savage censorship imposed on the French press played no small part in the fall of France. It encouraged defeatism, and bred complacency. A blindfolded democracy is more likely to fall than to fight.' A Labour MP, Frederick Bellenger, then cited an article written by Herbert Morrison during the First World War in which he had urged all soldiers not to fight 'your German brother' in an imperialist struggle. Morrison was pointedly asked why he was not now extending the same freedom of expression to others.

As the debate progressed, the government rather than the *Daily Mirror* was placed in the dock. While loyal Conservative MPs rallied to Morrison's defence, the great majority of Labour and Liberal MPs who spoke were sharply critical. The Coalition administration was confronted, as Morrison had feared, with an issue that divided the Commons along party political lines.

Newspaper proprietors and editors were also not as compliant as they had been over the closure of the *Daily Worker*. While many Sunday and local papers supported the government, the majority of national daily papers sided with the *Mirror*. It thus became clear that closing down the *Daily Mirror* would lead to a major confrontation with a powerful section of the press.

The strength of opposition was such that the *Daily Mirror* was never really in any danger of being closed down after March 1942. Thereafter official displeasure took the form of harassment, such as Churchill's personal request that Cecil King be conscripted into the armed forces.<sup>15</sup> The victory was not, however, entirely one-sided. The *Daily Mirror's* outspoken radicalism became more subdued and the paper's most controversial columnist, Cassandra (Connor), decided it was time to join the army.

The defence of the *Daily Mirror* overlapped with a major campaign to lift the ban on the *Daily Worker*. Mass rallies were organized in Trafalgar Square and in London's Central Hall. The Labour Party Annual Conference voted down its national executive's recommendation by backing the ending of the ban. The Cooperative Congress and the Scottish TUC followed suit. In the face of this escalating pressure from the organized working class, the government relented. The ban on the *Daily Worker* was lifted on 26 August 1942 – more than a year after the USSR had become one of Britain's closest allies.

### The defeat of censorship

The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Worker* campaigns were part of a wider victory. The government rejected general schemes for compulsory censorship of the press. It also turned down an insidious proposal for allocating rationed newsprint to publications according to their contribution to the war effort. The notorious Regulation 2D was never invoked again after the closure of the *Daily Worker*.

Admittedly, the government drew back from taking full advantage of its censorship powers partly because the press proved, on the whole, to be co-operative. The Chairman of the Newspaper Emergency Council, for instance, wrote to the Ministry of Information in 1939 that 'our respective tasks and duties are complementary'.<sup>16</sup> Some editors even took the Ministry of Information to task for being too permissive in its advisory guidelines. The press, including critical and independent-minded papers such as the *Daily Mirror*, consciously sought to bolster public morale at the expense of objective reporting. Coercive censorship was made, to some extent, unnecessary by self-censorship.

The authorities also refrained from exercising greater control over the press for purely pragmatic reasons. Military censorship of dispatches sent by war correspondents accompanying the armed forces provided a discreet means of filleting uncomfortable news. A number of senior Ministry of Information officials also became convinced that compulsory censorship was unnecessary, once they came round to the view that public morale was holding up. Some also believed that the credibility of a largely co-operative press would be undermined if it was seen to be directly controlled by the government. These arguments from the Ministry of Information helped to deflect more authoritarian attempts to censor newspapers. When the military situation improved after the summer of 1942, and the position of Churchill's administration became secure, ministers also became notably less sensitive to criticism.

However, widespread commitment to the ideal of a free press also played an important role in preventing illiberal politicians such as Churchill and Anderson from silencing their press critics. Press freedom was one of the symbols of democracy that Britain was defending against Nazi Germany. Indeed, this was the central theme of anti-censorship campaigns, and was not something that the government could readily ignore. When a senior official in the Ministry of Information wrote that 'it would be improper to propose in this country either a moral or a political censorship of opinion, for that would be contrary to the last 300 years of English history', he added a significant postscript: 'It would also be perilous in view of the recent events surrounding the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Worker* and the parliamentary and public attention that has been paid to them.'<sup>17</sup> In resisting the abuse of arbitrary censorship powers, relatively obscure politicians such as Bellenger and Roberts, along with a large number of now-forgotten labour movement activists, kept alive the tradition of an independent press. The political processes of a democratic society saved the government from itself.

### **Freedom from commercial controls**

Ironically it was partly the government's economic intervention in the press industry that caused leading politicians to be subject to such critical scrutiny.

Newsprint was rationed, on a statutory basis, in 1940 in order to husband a scarce resource and ensure its equitable distribution. Its unintended effect was to liberate the press from some of the economic pressures that had previously inhibited radical journalism.

Newspaper managements voluntarily curtailed in 1940 the amount of advertising they took because newsprint rationing reduced papers to less than one-third of their pre-war size. This self-imposed rationing was formalized in 1942 by new regulations which restricted the proportion of newspaper space that could be allocated to advertising. As a consequence, the money that people paid for their papers once again made a substantial contribution to the finances of the press. London-based dailies, for instance, derived 69 per cent of their revenue from sales in 1943, compared with only 30 per cent in 1938.

Newsprint rationing also redistributed advertising expenditure. Newspapers which had difficulty attracting advertising before the war found agencies begging them to take their placements due to the general shortage of advertising space. This meant that radical editorial policies and low-paid readerships no longer carried a financial penalty.

These changes did not in themselves account for the sharp move to the left made by some papers during the war. The experience of the war changed the outlook of some journalists and expanded consumer demand for radical journalism. As A. C. H. Smith has shown, a radicalizing rapport developed between the *Daily Mirror* and its audience. Readers' letters and documentary-style reporting influenced the tone and orientation of the whole paper, helping it to acquire a distinctively working-class voice. However, while economic controls did not cause the wartime transformation of the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*, they provided the economic environment that made it possible.

Economic pressures had restrained both papers from moving further to the left in the late 1930s. But the wartime liberation from advertisers meant that they could aim exclusively at a working-class public. They could also develop clear political identities in keeping with the greater social homogeneity of their readers. Survey research shows that the *Sunday Pictorial* entered the war with a disproportionately middle-class readership and re-emerged after the war with a mainly working-class one. Similarly the *Daily Mirror* had the most cross-sectional readership of all national dailies in 1939, but its readers were solidly proletarian by 1947. The readers of both papers were overwhelmingly Labour immediately after the war.

Newsprint rationing also reduced the polarization between quality and popular papers. Popular papers were no longer under intense pressure to seek ever larger audiences because circulation levels were 'pegged' during much of the war. By reducing costs and redistributing advertising, newsprint controls also increased the profitability of many newspapers. These changes coincided with a new interest not only in war news, but also in public affairs

in general. As a consequence the proportion of space devoted to public affairs doubled in all wartime popular national dailies, save in the already news-oriented *Daily Herald*.

Wartime controls thus contributed to the development of a radical, repoliticized press. The aggregate circulation of the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*, combined with that of the *Daily Herald*, *Reynolds News* and *Daily Worker*, amounted to nearly nine million copies in 1945. This formidable grouping of papers was supplemented by the progressive *Picture Post*, an illustrated weekly with a readership (as distinct from circulation) of well over four million people. Not since the mid-Victorian period had the left enjoyed so much press support.

These publications provided a strong impetus behind social democratic change in wartime Britain. This can be illustrated by the reception given to the Beveridge Report, published in 1942, which provided the basis of many of the reforms later implemented by the Attlee government. The report was hailed by the left press with banner headlines, congratulatory editorials and detailed summaries of its recommendations. It 'will so much break the old order', proclaimed the *Sunday Pictorial* (6 December 1942), 'that it will rank as little short of a Magna Carta for the toiling masses in Britain'. According to the *Daily Herald* (2 December 1942) the report was a 'massive achievement'. The *Daily Mirror* (2 December 1942) was equally lyrical. Shrewdly anticipating counter-arguments, it also published a sober article by Beveridge entitled, 'Britain Can Afford It'. The report also received sympathetic coverage from liberal papers such as the *News Chronicle* and *Manchester Guardian*, and even from the conservative *Daily Mail*. As Cecil King noted at the time, 'The volume of press support is so great that it seems to be assumed in the House that it will be politically impossible to drop the Report.'

What might have been a relatively obscure official document, which the Tory Minister of Information had initially wanted to be published quietly, was transformed with the help of press publicity into a cornerstone of the new consensus. Indeed, a British Institute of Public Opinion survey in 1943 found that no fewer than 86 per cent of people wanted the Beveridge Report to be adopted. Radical newspapers were thus helping to lay the foundation for Labour's 1945 landslide victory more than two years before Labour's election campaign even began.

In short, public regulation during the Second World War helped rather than hindered the growth of radical journalism. Government attempts to silence the radical press were eventually stopped by public protests, while official economic controls had the effect of making the press more responsive to changes in the public mood. State intervention proved to be, on balance, a liberating rather than a repressive influence.



## Notes

1. Ministry of Information (INF) 1/250, Report to Policy Committee (June 1940); H. Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-45* (London, Collins, 1967), p. 96
2. INF 1/292, Home Intelligence Weekly Report 73 (16-23 March 1942), Appendix.
3. *Parliamentary Debates*, 363 (1940), col. 1307.
4. CAB 66/12, WP 402 (40) (8 October 1940).
5. CAB 66/14 (23 December 1940).
6. CAB 65/9, WM 267 (40) (7 October 1940).
7. CAB 66/12, WP 402 (40) (8 October 1940).
8. See, for instance, W. Armstrong (ed.), C. King, *With Malice Toward None* (London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), pp. 94-9 and 103-7.
9. H. Cudlipp, *Walking on the Water* (London, Bodley Head, 1976), pp. 134-6; INF 1/282 Home Intelligence Weekly Report 78 (23-30 March 1942); *Parliamentary Debates*, 378 (1942), cols 2233-308.
10. Simon, CAB 66/23, WP 124 (42) (17 March 1942); Bevin and Churchill cited in A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Off the Record: W. P. Crozier, Political Interviews 1933-43* (London, Hutchinson, 1973), pp. 311 and 325.
11. Eden cited in J. Harvey (ed.), *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1941-5* (London, Collins, 1978), p. 94; Churchill cited in Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill* (London, Sphere, 1968); INF 1/292 Home Intelligence Weekly Report 72 (February 1942).
12. In fact the *Globe* was suspended only briefly.
13. CAB 65/25, WM 35 (42) (18 March 1942).
14. A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Off the Record: W. P. Crozier, Political Interviews 1933-43* (London, Hutchinson, 1973), p. 325.
15. Cecil King was medically unfit for the armed forces. This was the reason why he had not joined up in the first place.
16. INF 1/187, Letter to Censorship Bureau (10 September 1939).
17. INF 1/238, Memorandum from R. H. Parker (15 April 1942).

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## *The press in the age of globalization*

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The leading historian of the British press, Stephen Koss, portrays the post-war period as the apotheosis of political journalism. 'By 1947,' writes Koss, 'the party attachments of papers – as they had been understood to operate over the preceding hundred years – were effectively abandoned.' The press became fully independent of political parties and hence government, thus completing the 'halting transition from official to popular control'.<sup>1</sup>

This supposedly resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of political reporting and analysis. According to Koss:

Newspapers grew steadily more catholic and less partisan in their ordinary news coverage. When confronted by a general election, they usually expressed a party preference, but always with at least a gesture of pragmatism and often for a different party from the one they had previously endorsed.

This more open-minded style of journalism is attributed by Koss to the emergence of a new type of proprietor who was 'a businessman first and foremost', oriented towards what sold rather than what furthered a party interest or ideological viewpoint. The man who 'personified' this pragmatic, undoctinaire approach, in Koss's judgement, is Rupert Murdoch, whose 'papers, both in Britain and elsewhere, lurched from one party persuasion to another for reasons that were seldom articulated and manifestly more commercial than ideological'.

This analysis is broadly echoed by many other accounts of the post-war press. Their common theme is that newspapers were emancipated not only from party tutelage but also from the personal dominion of press magnates. According to John Whale, for instance, 'the newspaper's staff is left to get on with the job' in the modern press because many of the new proprietors 'have global problems of trade and investment to occupy their minds'. Like Koss, he sees control of the contemporary press as residing increasingly in the marketplace.

Like all persuasive mythologies, these portrayals connect to an element of

truth. But their overall assessment is misleading because they inflate short-lived trends into permanent transformations, and ignore developments which run counter to their conclusions. The post-war press was not transformed, in reality, by the arrival of 'market democracy'.

### Growth of press autonomy (1951 to 1974)

During the immediate post-war period a substantial section of the press remained subject to the personal control of interventionist proprietors: the second Viscount Rothermere, Beaverbrook, Camrose, Kemsley and, after 1948, David Astor. The labour movement papers, the *Daily Herald* and *Reynolds News*, were also tethered to the editorial line laid down by their political masters.

However, this hierarchical pattern of control gave way to a greater delegation of editorial authority in the regional press and in a growing section of the national press. The person who typified this change was Lord Thomson, who acquired the Kemsley empire in 1959 and *The Times* in 1967. Within the framework of an agreed budget, his editors enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Publicly he declared, 'I do not believe that a newspaper can be run properly unless its editorial columns are run freely and independently by a highly skilled and dedicated professional journalist.' His British editors have broadly corroborated this statement. Harold Evans, for instance, could recollect only one occasion in his fourteen years as editor of the *Sunday Times* when he received political guidance from Lord Thomson: the proprietor, he was told in 1974, would be unhappy if the *Sunday Times* supported the Labour Party in the forthcoming general election.

Fleet Street became less hierarchical in the 1960s and early 1970s. The *Daily Herald* was freed from following the Labour Party line; Sir Max Aitken proved to be less dictatorial than his father, Lord Beaverbrook; Astor's proprietor-editor regime at the *Observer* came to an end; and, perhaps, most important of all, Cecil King was ousted in 1968 after authorizing a front-page article in the *Daily Mirror* calling for the removal of the Prime Minister and the establishment of a national government without discussing the matter with the paper's editor. King's lordly action was in the seigniorial tradition of his uncle, Lord Northcliffe: his dismissal by his fellow directors in response to what they called his 'increasing preoccupation with politics' seemed, at the time, to signify the end of an era.

These changes in the control of the press coincided with the rise of specialist correspondents. Their number increased and they acquired a greater degree of autonomy than general reporters. As Jeremy Tunstall's research in the late 1960s showed, specialist correspondents tended to hunt in packs and to regularly exchange information and ideas with each other. This fostered the development of a group consensus and encouraged journalists to resist pressure from their news desks.

The devolution of authority within newspaper organizations, at a time of broad political consensus, encouraged a more bipartisan approach to political reporting and commentary. This was reflected, for instance, in the growing number of newspapers which invited politicians to write articles opposing the editorial line of their leaders during general election campaigns. However, although the interventionist tradition of proprietorship waned during the 1960s, it did not disappear. This was highlighted by a private management inquiry commissioned by publishers, which concluded in 1966:

When all allowances have been made for variations within the industry, its most striking feature, and possibly its greatest problem, is its dominance by a small number of highly individualistic proprietors with their own personal interests and philosophy of management.

This was clearly a reference to the proprietorial regimes at the *Telegraph*, *Express*, and *Mail* groups.

The extent to which political partisanship declined has also been overstated. Thus Stephen Koss's sweeping claim that national newspapers 'often' supported 'a different party from one they had previously endorsed' was not in fact true of the period under consideration. Between 1945 and February 1974, the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Herald/Sun* supported with unwavering loyalty the same political party in every general election (as did the *News Chronicle* and *Daily Graphic/Sketch* before their closures). Only the pre-Murdoch *Times* and the *Guardian* approximated to Koss's mythical norm.

### **Increased partisanship and centralized control (1974 to 1992)**

Moreover, national newspapers became markedly more partisan between 1974 and 1992. This was partly in response to the growing polarization of British politics, but it also reflected the cumulative impact of a new generation of partisan, interventionist proprietors. The extent of their editorial involvement has perhaps been exaggerated by a succession of journalists' memoirs and reminiscences which have tended to focus on untypical periods of conflict between proprietors and editors caused by changes of ownership and editorial strategy. However, they leave no doubt that Koss's portrayal of Murdoch, and other proprietors, during this period as market-led pragmatists is deeply misleading.

Indeed, Koss's claim that the political orientation of Murdoch's papers fluctuated in response to the shifting currents of public opinion is, for this period, wrong. Murdoch's British papers moved to the right because their proprietor became increasingly right-wing, and this shift was imposed regardless of the views of their readers. The *Sun* switched from Labour to support for an all-party coalition in October 1974, and became strongly Conservative

thereafter despite the fact that over half of its readers were Labour supporters. Indeed, it evolved into a partisan Thatcherite paper *in opposition* to its readership (only 40 per cent of whom supported the Conservatives even in the landslide 1987 general election).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* became Thatcherite papers under his control at a time when political partisanship was weakening and the political centre was gaining in support. Only *Today*, acquired by Murdoch in July 1987, exhibited some independence, though within strict bounds. It developed a green tinge, returned to the Conservative fold in time for the 1992 general election, strayed briefly to the left and was then closed down.

Murdoch imposed an editorial reorientation of his papers in Britain through a personalized style of management reminiscent of the earlier press barons. 'I did not come all this way,' he declared at the *News of the World*, 'not to interfere.' Stafford Summerfield, its long-serving editor, found to his dismay that the new proprietor 'wanted to read proofs, write a leader if he felt like it, change the paper about and give instructions to his staff'. A series of clashes with Murdoch, partly over the issue of whether the editor should be accountable to the paper's board or to Murdoch personally, hastened Summerfield's departure.

A subsequent editor of the *News of the World*, Barry Askew, also records Murdoch's extensive editorial interventions when he was in London. 'He would come into the office,' Askew recalls, 'and literally rewrite leaders which were not supporting the hard Thatcherite line.' Askew, who was not a Thatcherite enthusiast, lasted for only nine months.

Murdoch reconstructed the *Sun* by working closely with a talented but compliant editor, Sir Larry Lamb, whom he had handpicked for the job. However, he adopted a more circumspect approach towards *The Times* and *Sunday Times*. During his bid for Times Newspapers in 1981, he was asked whether he would change their character. 'Oh no, no, I would not dream of changing them at all', he had replied. But to assuage sceptical critics, Articles of Association and independent directors were imposed at Times Newspapers with the intention of preserving their editorial independence.

Although Murdoch never issued a direct editorial instruction to the editor of the *Sunday Times*, Frank Giles, he made his views forcibly known. 'Murdoch, the paper spread out before him,' Giles recollects, 'would jab his fingers at some article or contribution and snarl, "What do you want to print rubbish like that for?" or pointing to the by-line of a correspondent, assert that "that man's a Commie".' Further pressure was funnelled through Gerald Long, the new managing director appointed by Murdoch, prompting the editor to establish a dossier called the 'Long Insult File'. Undermined by a series of calculated humiliations (on one occasion, Murdoch entertained guests by firing an imaginary pistol at his editor's back), Frank Giles retired early. His replacement was a more reliably Conservative journalist, Andrew Neil, who moved the paper further to the right. According to Neil, 'Rupert

expects his papers to stand broadly for what he believes: a combination of right-wing republicanism from America mixed with undiluted Thatcherism from Britain.<sup>7</sup>

The editor of *The Times*, Harold Evans, recalls similar pressure from his proprietor. Murdoch 'creates an aura', recollects Evans:

The aura he created in 1981–2 was one of bleak hostility to Edward Heath and the Tory rebels, and contempt for the Social Democrats. He did this by persistent derision of them at our press meetings and on the telephone, by sending me articles marked worth reading which espoused right-wing views, by jabbing a finger at headlines which he thought could have been more supportive of Mrs. Thatcher – 'You're always getting at her' – and through the agency of his managing director, Long.

Long bombarded the editor with memos containing reprimands such as 'the Chancellor of the Exchequer says the recession has ended. Why are you having the effrontery in *The Times* to say that it is not?' Evans was also kept in a dependent position by not being given a fixed editorial budget. Consequently, he was compelled to seek permission for editorial decisions involving significant spending. As relationships soured due to the centrist political orientation of the paper, and its slow growth of circulation against a background of heavy losses, Murdoch actively fomented opposition among a group of journalists personally hostile to the editor. In an atmosphere thick with intrigue, in which Evans's personal aide was secretly reporting to the opposition group, Evans resigned in 1983 rather than 'be subjected to a thousand humiliations, challenged on every paperclip'. He was followed by a succession of editors, all of whom were right-wing. However, the launch of the *Independent* in 1986 forced *The Times* to respond to new competition by being less predictably Conservative and, later, by slashing its price. Peter Stothard, who became a successful editor (1992–2002), restored some of *The Times*'s tarnished authority, and greatly increased its circulation.

Another active interventionist, Victor (later Lord) Matthews, was head of the Express Group between 1977 and 1985. 'By and large editors will have complete freedom,' he promised, 'as long as they agree with the policy I have laid down.' During his first flush of enthusiasm as proprietor, he forced his editors to endure lengthy discourses of homespun political philosophy, which then had to be recreated as editorials. Only the most outrageous *ex cathedra* judgements seem to have been resisted. 'I had to plead against the *Evening Standard*,' remembers Simon Jenkins, its former editor, 'being expected to call for a nuclear first strike on Moscow, to rid the world of communism, just like that.' Lord Matthews's staff were also a little taken aback by his novel sense of news values. 'I would find myself in a dilemma,' he publicly declared, 'about whether to report a British Watergate affair because of the national harm. I believe in battling for Britain.'

However, what perhaps most clearly reveals how little Matthews conformed to Koss's idealized view of the new generation of proprietors was Matthews's troubled relationship with his new paper, the *Daily Star*, launched in 1978. Ironically this paper owed its existence to commercial considerations, since it was conceived primarily as a way of making better use of underemployed printing plant and staff. Matthews was persuaded initially that it had to be relatively radical since it was aimed at a 'downmarket', mostly Labour-voting audience. But when the *Daily Star*'s editor, Peter Grimsditch, argued that the paper should actually support the Labour Party in the 1979 general election, Matthews vetoed this on explicitly political grounds. Even after the election, he responded to the paper more as a partisan reader than as a market-oriented publisher. For example, on reading the proofs of a *Daily Star* leader critical of the Thatcher government's first budget, he angrily phoned the editor, 'There aren't any poor. You can take my word for it. There are no poor in this country.' The leader was duly modified to accommodate this insight.

In the end, Grimsditch was sacked and the paper became another Tory tabloid. It vigorously supported the Conservative Party in the 1983 election, even though only 21 per cent of its readers voted for Mrs Thatcher. Even when Lord Matthews was ousted by Lord Stevens in a corporate take-over in 1985, the *Star* continued to be a right-wing paper that reflected the Conservative views of its new proprietor rather than the predominantly centre-left views of its readership. As Lord Stevens explained, 'I would not be happy to be associated with a left-wing paper. I suppose the papers echo my political views. . . . I do interfere and say enough is enough.'

The third dominant personality to emerge in the national press was Robert Maxwell, a former right-wing Labour MP who acquired the Mirror Group in 1984. He brought to an end the relatively autonomous regime that had existed when the group was owned by Reed International during the 1970s and early 1980s. In the early days of his proprietorship he was in the office almost every night phoning, according to Alastair Hetherington, as often as six times in the evening staff who were working on political reports. 'I certainly have a major say,' he declared, 'in the political line of the paper [*Daily Mirror*].' Running newspapers, he added on another occasion, 'gives me the power to raise issues effectively. In simple terms, it's a megaphone.'

However, his control over the megaphone slackened when he became involved in ever more desperate attempts to save his heavily indebted media empire, including stealing from his employees' pension fund. Facing imminent ruin in 1991, he slipped overboard from his private yacht in what appears to have been a suicide.

The other dominant publisher to emerge was the right-wing Canadian businessman Conrad Black, who acquired the Telegraph Group in 1987. He adopted initially a hands-off strategy after appointing senior executives who were, as he put it, 'in general sympathy ideologically and philosophically' with his outlook. However, in 1989 he established a base in England, and

expressed concern about the *Daily Telegraph's* 'flirtation with incorrect thinking about Ulster and about South Africa'. The editor, Max Hastings, who had been appointed as a new broom editor and had presided over a major purge of journalistic staff, found himself the butt of increasing pressure. Eventually, he made way in 1996 for a more reliably right-wing editor, Charles Moore.

The rise of personal proprietorship was paralleled by the rise of authoritarian editorship. Thus Sir David English, editor of the *Daily Mail* (1971 to 1992), was a domineering force who reshaped the paper. Outside his office in the old Mail building, there was an iron post known sardonically to staff as the laughing column. It propped up sycophants helpless with laughter when the editor popped out to tell another of his triumphant anecdotes. English was unusual in that he acted relatively independently of his tax exile proprietor, the third Viscount Rothermere. Although Rothermere claimed to map 'the overall strategy my papers will take', he was probably less of a back-seat driver than he professed. More representative of the new style of assertive editor, albeit in an extreme form, was Kelvin MacKenzie, editor of the *Sun* (1981 to 1994). MacKenzie had a licence to bully and intimidate within the news-room providing he performed satisfactorily as his proprietor's *alter ego*, pushing up sales and giving vent to Murdoch's right-wing, anti-Establishment views. However, when the *Sun's* circulation declined and its excesses became a political liability, MacKenzie was squeezed out.

The two notable exceptions to this general pattern of resurgent proprietors and assertive editors in the national press, during this period, was the liberal regime at the *Guardian*, controlled by the Scott Trust, and the turbulent years of the *Observer*, under Lonrho's control (1981 to 1993). Lonrho's head, Tiny Rowland, never succeeded in dominating the *Observer*, though, as we shall see, this was not from want of trying.

### Palace revolution, 1992 to 2003

In the period after 1992, there was both continuity and change at the top. The two dominant right-wing publishers, Murdoch and Black, remained, while Paul Dacre assumed the mantle of his mentor, Sir David English, in perpetuating his authoritarian right-wing regime at the Mail group. The Mirror group passed into the control of Trinity Mirror without a controlling shareholder, and reverted to something approaching its pre-Maxwell mould. However, the ailing Express group passed into the hands of Richard Desmond, publisher of 'adult' and gossip magazines. The *Observer* was swallowed by the Scott Trust, while a newcomer – Independent Newspapers – came to be controlled by the Irish entrepreneur, Tony O'Reilly.

While editorial management remained largely centralized, something happened in this period that requires an explanation. The press – including the Conservative Mail and Telegraph groups – harried mercilessly the



Conservative administration headed by John Major (1992 to 1997). This was not entirely without precedent in the post-1945 period. Conservative newspapers had attacked the Conservative Macmillan administration in 1961 to 1963. Even the largely cheer-leading Conservative press during the Thatcher era had moments of difference with the government. What was new was that virulent attacks on a Conservative government in the 1990s was followed subsequently by the defection of a sizeable section of the Conservative press to the New Labour camp. Never before had Labour had the backing of the majority of the press, but in the 1997 and 2001 general elections it received respectively 61 and 70 per cent of national daily circulation,<sup>3</sup> even though in these elections it obtained no more than 43 per cent of the vote.

This defection partly reflected a growing crisis within the Conservative Party. The Major government lost authority, following Britain's forced exit out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992. It also became embroiled in conflict over Europe, and was caught up in sexual and financial scandals. Its travails were followed by a sustained collapse of the Conservative vote. This fell from 42 per cent in 1992 to 31 and 32 per cent in 1997 and 2001, respectively. A failing, unconfident party thus contrasted with New Labour – a party relaunched under a new name, combining a significant part of the Thatcherite legacy with a commitment to public services, united and electorally successful.

It is tempting therefore to explain the change in the press as a market-oriented response to a political shift in the country, but what actually happened was a good deal more complicated than this. The key defector was Rupert Murdoch, who transferred one-third of the national press's circulation from Conservative to New Labour, and thus transformed at one stroke the political affiliation of the British press. However, his papers did not change their underlying editorial orientation in response to a perceived change in the country; their argument was rather that Blair was the only credible conservative worth supporting in 1997. In addition, while continuing to support New Labour in principle, Murdoch's papers still pursued a right-wing agenda in the early 2000s. The Murdoch press thus changed its political loyalty, but not its politics.

This adjustment began with an elaborate courtship in the mid-1990s. Tony Blair was invited to address the massed ranks of New Corporation executives in Hayman Island, Australia in July 1995. In an eloquent speech, he made clear his commitment to an open and free economy. The meaning of this was spelt out when New Labour shifted its position on monopoly controls. It had supported, in a Lords debate, the then Conservative government's intention of blocking large press groups from buying ITV or Channel 5. It then attacked this policy in the Commons in April 1996 on the grounds that it 'treat[s] newspaper groups unfairly in their access to broadcasting markets'.<sup>4</sup> New Labour in effect proposed itself as Murdoch's champion. Further

political flirtation followed, culminating in Murdoch's support for Blair in the 1997 general election.

In March 1998, Tony Blair returned the favour by phoning on Murdoch's behalf his Italian counterpart Romano Prodi, asking him whether the Italian government would block Murdoch's proposed £4 billion bid for Berlusconi's Italian TV network. When information about the call leaked out, the Cabinet press office first denied it, then proclaimed that Blair was backing Britain.<sup>5</sup> However, Murdoch's bid for the football club Manchester United, was referred in 1998 to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, and subsequently rejected. There then developed an outwardly warm but wary relationship between Blair and Murdoch in which both sides sheathed their swords. Blair's government never exerted pressure on Murdoch's BSkyB to reduce its large import of cheap American programmes in accordance with the Television Without Frontiers Directive, despite nudges from the Independent Television Commission. New Labour also redeemed its 1996 pro-monopoly stand by making it possible for Murdoch, through the 2003 Communications Act, to buy Channel 5 (but not ITV). Murdoch's papers, in turn, occasionally snarled at but did not maul the New Labour government.

In effect a tacit deal was forged between two power-holders – one a market-friendly politician and the other a pragmatic businessman – in a form that sidelined the public. This was consistent with Murdoch's record over the past thirty years. He has at every opportunity promoted right-wing views and causes, yet has always been willing – when his economic interests were significantly involved – to draw back and make compromises. An Australian who became an American citizen, he showed no emotional attachment to the British Conservative Party when it fell on hard times. His conservatism was global rather than local: he was not a member of the Westminster village. In this he differed from the previous generation of Conservative press magnates such as Lords Camrose, Kemsley, Hartwell and, by adoption, Beaverbrook. A similar sense of critical distance seems also to have influenced the Canadian Conrad Black (at least in the early 1990s) and the tax-exile Viscount Harmsworth, who allowed their papers to undermine the Major government. Globalizing influences on the British press appear to have weakened local tribal loyalty.

The other architect of the press's realignment behind New Labour, though a much less significant one, was Richard Desmond. Attacked as a 'pornographer' whose vital assets included the adult Fantasy Channel and *Asian Babes*, he was the target of a 'stop Desmond' campaign when he gained control of the Express group in 2000. A number of MPs pressed for the take-over to be referred to the Competition Commission on the grounds that another soft-porn publisher, David Sullivan, had previously been declared 'unfit' to acquire the *Bristol Evening News*. Desmond's instinct, in this situation, was to gravitate towards official power. Bearing a gift (a large donation to the Labour Party), he was received warmly at the New Labour court. The

*Express*, though a Conservative paper in the 1997 election, rooted for New Labour in 2001.

### Concentration of press ownership

The reason why the decision of just two men changed the nature of the British press was because so many titles were bundled together in a small number of newspaper groups. There was a rapid surge of national press concentration in the early post-war period as a consequence of closures and mergers. This was followed by the development of increased joint ownership of daily and Sunday papers in the more recent period. By 2002, just three publishers controlled two out of three national papers sold in Britain (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 *Concentration of ownership of daily and Sunday newspapers, 1947 to 2002*

	<i>The three leading corporations' shares of:</i>		
	<i>Total daily and Sunday paper circulation</i>	<i>National daily circulation</i>	<i>National Sunday circulation</i>
	%	%	%
1947	42	62	60
1961	65	88	82
1976	53	72	86
1989	57	73	80
1995	N/A	74	81
2002	N/A	70	79

*Sources:* derived from *Royal Commission on the Press 1947–9 Report* (1949), Appendices 3 and 5; *Royal Commission on the Press 1961–2 Report* (1962), Appendices 2, 3 and 4; *Royal Commission on the Press 1974–7 Final Report* (1977), Annex 3; *Annual Report of the Press Council 1989* (1990), Table 4 and Audit Bureau of Circulation (1989, 1995 and 2002).

*Note:* The three leading publishing corporations have been defined in terms of their market share of *each* of the categories of publication listed in this table. Total daily and Sunday paper circulation has been calculated by multiplying daily paper circulation six times to obtain a weekly circulation of daily and Sunday papers. This gives lower but more adequate figures than those calculated by the Press Council, which treated Sunday and daily circulation as equivalent and merely add the two together.

What is less often noticed is that there was simultaneously a spectacular increase of regional press ownership. The top five publishers increased their proportion of regional evening paper circulation by over half between 1947 and 2002. Their share of local weekly newspaper circulation more than doubled between 1989 and 2002 – a trend given minimal attention in the mainstream press (see Table 7.2).<sup>6</sup> The biggest of these all-devouring regional chains, Trinity Mirror, also expanded by acquiring the second biggest national newspaper publishing group in 1999.

Table 7.2 Concentration of ownership in the regional press, 1947 to 2002

	The five leading chains' share of:			
	Regional evening newspaper circulation	Regional morning newspaper circulation	Local weekly circulation	Local weekly freesheet circulation
	%	%	%	%
1947	44	65	8	—
1961	53	70	13	—
1976	58	69	25	NA
1989	54	73	27	38
2002	69	85	70	75

Sources: derived from *Royal Commission on the Press 1947–9 Report* (1949), Appendices 4 and 5; *Royal Commission on the Press 1961–2 Report* (1962), Appendices 2, 3 and 4; *Royal Commission on the Press 1974–7 Final Report* (1977), Annex 3; and N. Hartley, P. Gudgeon, and R. Crafts, *Concentration of Ownership in the Provincial Press* (Royal Commission on the Press 1974–7, Research Series 5); *Annual Report of the Press Council 1989* (1990), Tables 4 and 5; Newspaper Society Intelligence Unit, 1 July 2002.

Note: The five leading chains are not all the same in each category of publication.

This consolidation of press ownership was part of a more general trend in which concentration occurred in a number of media industries including television, commercial radio, music, book publishing and video rentals.<sup>7</sup> Some newspapers are linked through cross-ownership to other UK media, or are part of international media empires (see Table 7.3). The most notable example of this latter trend is the Murdoch press. Its four leading British newspapers are merely a northern outpost of a worldwide group that includes newspapers around the world (such as the *New York Post*), a major publishing house (HarperCollins), a major film company (Twentieth Century Fox), and, above all, Fox TV in the USA, BSkyB in Europe and Star TV in Asia. Rupert Murdoch is, in Bagdikian's phrase, a 'lord of the global village'.

### Dependence and corruption

This trend towards concentration was accompanied for a time by the growing integration of the press into businesses such as engineering, transport, oil and banking. In some cases, corporations outside the press (such as Atlantic Richfield, Lonrho, Trafalgar House and Reed) acquired major publications; in others, established press groups moved extensively into other activities. This trend became particularly pronounced in the period between 1969 and 1986, causing the third Royal Commission on the Press to conclude (in 1977) that 'the press has become a subsidiary of other industries'.<sup>8</sup>

This change in the status of the press was partly a response to its financial difficulties between the ending of newsprint rationing in 1956 and the

Table 7.3 *The conglomeration of the British press*

	<i>Main British press interests</i>	<i>Selected other media interests</i>	<i>Selected non-media interests</i>
Daily Mail & General Trust (Rothermere)	<i>Daily Mail</i> <i>Mail on Sunday</i> Northcliffe Newspapers	Teletext IntoFrance British Patbé DMG Radio (Australia)	Risk Management Solutions (US) Bouverie Holdings Landmark Information Group property information
Guardian Media Group (Scott Trust)	<i>Guardian</i> <i>Observer</i> <i>Manchester Evening News</i> Trader Media Group	Real Radio Jazz FM <i>Mail &amp; Guardian</i> (S. Africa) workthing.com	
Hollinger International (Black)	<i>Daily Telegraph</i> <i>Sunday Telegraph</i> <i>Spectator</i>	<i>Jerusalem Post</i> <i>Sun-Times</i> (Chicago) Hollinger Digital (US)	
Independent News & Media (O'Reilly)	<i>Independent</i> <i>Independent on Sunday</i> <i>Belfast Telegraph</i> <i>Islington Gazette</i>	<i>Irish Independent</i> PeopleNewspapers (Ireland) APN News & Media (Australia) Wilson & Horton (New Zealand) Lusomundo Media (Portugal)	
News Corporation (Murdoch)	<i>Sun</i> <i>News of the World</i> <i>The Times</i> <i>Sunday Times</i> TES THES TLS	BSkyB Fox Broadcasting (US) STAR Asian TV and radio network Twentieth Century Fox <i>New York Post</i> <i>The Australian</i> HarperCollins publishers	Australian Indoor Tennis Championship National Rugby League (Australia) Broadsystem telemarketing

Northern & Shell (Desmond)	<i>Daily Express</i> <i>Sunday Express</i> <i>Daily Star</i> United Provincial Newspapers United Magazines	<i>OK</i> magazine <i>Forum</i> <i>Liverpool FC</i> official magazine
Pearson	<i>Financial Times</i> <i>Economist</i>	Channel 5 TV Thames TV Euston Films Grundy Productions Penguin Books Dorling Kindersley Recoletos media and publishing group (Spain)
Reed-Elsevier	Reed Regional Newspapers Reed Business Publishing IPC Magazines	Butterworth Hamlyn Reed Elsevier Nederland Reed Elsevier France Reed Elsevier US
Trinity Mirror	<i>Daily Mirror</i> <i>Sunday Mirror</i> <i>People</i> <i>Daily Record</i> <i>Sunday Mail</i> <i>Racing Post</i> Scottish & Universal Newspapers Ltd Western Mail & Echo Ltd Liverpool Daily Post & Echo Ltd Birmingham Post & Mail Ltd	Trinity Publications Ltd Inside Communications Ltd
		Lakeside Trading Estate Ensign Oil & Gas (US)

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Source: *Who Owns Whom 2001-2002*, London: Dun & Bradstreet, 2001; Trinity Mirror corporate website <http://www.trinitymirror.com>;  
Independent News and Media plc corporate website <http://www.independentnewsmedia.com>

introduction of cost-cutting technology in the mid-1980s. Thus in 1966 five out of eight national newspapers made losses totalling £4.3 million. By 1975 four national dailies and six out of seven national Sunday papers made an even larger loss. In 1982 the national press was reported to have made a net loss of £29 million. These financial problems encouraged publishers to diversify into more profitable areas. Loss-making papers also became relatively cheap to buy (though not to support).

However, when conglomerate controllers bought up the rotten boroughs of the fourth estate, they were seeking more than just an immediate return on their investment. Their motives were mixed. Some were lured by the social prestige that newspaper ownership brought or the excitement induced by what Leonard Woolf described as the 'magnetic field of highly charged importance, influence . . . and vocational delusions'. For other business leaders, newspaper ownership was little more than an investment in corporate public relations. It extended their range of business and political connections, increased their corporation's prestige, and, through judicious editorial appointments, contributed to the maintenance of public opinion favourable to private enterprise. As the Chairman of Atlantic Richfield (which spent approximately \$20 million subsidizing the *Observer* before selling it to Lonrho) explained to his shareholders in 1978:

Despite the social upheaval of the last few years, Atlantic Richfield's primary task remains what it has always been – to conduct its business within accepted rules to generate profits, thereby protecting and enhancing the investment of its owners. But . . . senior management recognise that the Company cannot expect to operate freely or advantageously without public approval.

The winning of 'public approval' tended to be linked to support for the Conservative Party during this period. A number of major press groups – Trafalgar House (which controlled for a time the Express group), United Newspapers and Pearson – gave substantial donations to the Conservative Party in the 1970s and 1980s. Owning (and subsidizing) newspapers and making political donations to the pro-business party were part of the same project.

However, while journalists on right-wing papers tended to accept that their proprietors' support for business interests *in general* was legitimate, they opposed any attempt to promote a particular company owned by their employer. This said, there developed 'grey areas' where journalists stepped gingerly for fear of treading on corporate toes. As *The Times*, then owned by the conglomerate Thomson Organization, candidly told the third Royal Commission on the Press: 'Coverage of Thomson organization activities [including oil and travel] in Thomson newspapers tends, certainly, to be drily factual.'

This period of conglomerate control contained seedy, unheroic moments when compromises were made and resented. However, one of the beneficial consequences of new technology introduced in the mid-1980s was that it restored the profitability of the press. This coincided with a general trend towards the de-conglomeration of industry, and led to the refocusing of the press around its core business, and related media and leisure activities.

But while conflicts of interest became less extensive, they did not go away. One form in which they resurfaced was in relation to cross-media promotion within the same organization. For example, when Murdoch's newspapers gave disproportionate coverage to the British launch of its sister company Sky Television in 1989, only journalists on one of his newspapers – *The Times* – made a formal protest. *The Times's* independent directors declined, much to their discredit, to investigate the protest beyond speaking to the editor.

Another source of pressure came in the area of international news, and related to the regulatory politics of global media expansion. Thus Rupert Murdoch was threatened by the Malaysian government in 1994 with reprisals against his business empire, at a critical moment in the development of his Asian satellite TV business, following prominent reports in the *Sunday Times* that senior officials and ministers had received backhanders in the building of the Pergau dam, funded with British aid. Murdoch remonstrated with the *Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil: 'You're boring people. You are doing too much on Malaysia. . . . They're all corrupt in that part of the world.' This contributed to a souring in the relationship between the two men, culminating in Neil's transfer to the United States. Murdoch is reported to have assured Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir that his 'rogue editor' had been 'sorted out'.

Yet right-wing newspapers never became, even in the era of conglomerate compromise, mere mouthpieces of big business. The desire of some press controllers to promote pro-market views was constrained by the need to win over readers with different viewpoints, or who wanted primarily to be entertained. The commitments of press controllers were also offset to some extent by the professional concerns of journalists.

### Compliance and resistance

If the trend after the 1960s was for more centralized systems of editorial control to be established in the national press, this did not go unchallenged. Strongest resistance occurred in the broadsheet press where journalists had become accustomed to a higher degree of autonomy than their tabloid counterparts, and where the new regimes represented a greater rupture with the past. Yet there was only one occasion when journalists actually succeeded in decisively defeating their proprietor.

When Tiny Rowland acquired the *Observer* in 1981, he intended to make substantial changes. The paper's liberal coverage of Africa, he warned, was



abetting the advance of communism. In traditional proprietorial style, he appointed a new roving Africa correspondent without consulting the editor.

However, he had been forced, like Murdoch, to accept new Articles of Association and independent directors at the *Observer*, designed to prevent him from taking editorial control. The independent directors at the *Observer*, unlike those at Times Newspapers, had been chosen by staff which made them more of an obstacle. And whereas Murdoch moved with consummate skill at Times Newspapers, first appointing caretaker editors and encircling them with people he could trust, Rowland blundered in with an ill-judged ultimatum that undermined his authority.

Donald Trelford, the *Observer's* editor, wrote an article in April 1984 reporting that Zimbabwe's armed forces were torturing and killing their own citizens in the dissident Matabeleland province. This put Rowland in a difficult position since his corporation, Lonrho, derived £15 million of its profit from investments in Zimbabwe. Rowland also had an uneasy relationship with the Zimbabwe Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, since he had backed his principal rival Joshua Nkomo in a recent election. Seeking to protect his commercial interests, Rowland told Trelford to withdraw the article.

Trelford refused and was backed in his stand by all his editorial staff and independent directors. In the highly publicized row that followed (in which Lonrho reportedly cancelled advertising in its own paper), Rowland had little real choice but to back off. Lonrho's corporate image had already been tarnished by the Conservative leader Edward Heath's celebrated attack on it as 'the unacceptable face of capitalism'. It would have been seriously undermined if Rowland had agreed, in these circumstances, to Trelford's offer of resignation.

Even so, this only proved to be the opening skirmish in a long-running battle. The *Observer* again came under pressure from its parent company, this time to attack the way in which the Al Fayed brothers had worsted Lonrho in a take-over battle for the House of Fraser group. 'In summary,' read one internal note, 'Mr Rowland [Lonrho's chief executive] would greatly appreciate any assistance in persuading Mrs Thatcher to publish the report of the inspectors into House of Fraser' that was strongly critical of the Al Fayed. Between 1985 and 1989, the paper responded by publishing a series of articles criticizing the Fraser take-over, and calling for it to be quashed. This culminated in the publication of an unprecedented midweek issue, dedicated to attacking the 'Phoney Pharaoh' Mohamed Al Fayed, to coincide with Lonrho's AGM. *Observer* journalists protested to their independent directors who, after a formal enquiry, concluded that the paper's reputation had been 'tarnished'.

The same pattern of pressure and resistance was repeated on other occasions. David Leigh, head of the *Observer's* investigative team, refused to return in 1989 to a story about British Aerospace malpractice in selling Tornado aircraft, on the grounds that it had been planted by Lonrho executives and was

being inflated for reasons of corporate rivalry. He eventually resigned over the issue, declaring that the *Observer* 'had become a sick paper'. His verdict was echoed by the paper's former deputy editor Anthony Howard, who declared that 'without any overt pressure being applied, there has developed a tendency to anticipate Mr Rowland's wishes and to cater for his interests'.

But perhaps the key point was that corporate self-censorship was actively opposed. In the event, Trelford survived as editor until 1993. He trod a difficult tightrope, balancing the demands of his proprietor with those of his suspicious and increasingly critical staff. An easier life beckoned as a media professor to which he 'retired' gracefully.

The partial success of journalists' resistance on the *Observer* was in marked contrast to what happened on the *Sunday Times*. This is worth reporting briefly because it draws attention to something that the academic literature tends to ignore: the pressures and sanctions that a determined new management can bring to bear in order to change the culture and ethos of a news organization.

The *Sunday Times* evolved into a neo-Thatcherite paper in the early 1980s partly in response to the increasing influence of new right ideas in the early phase of the Thatcherite era. However the principal cause of change was a management-imposed shift of editorial direction. Murdoch's appointment of Andrew Neil as editor in 1983 was part of a general shake-up in the editorial hierarchy of the *Sunday Times* in which section editors from the pre-Murdoch regime were gradually weeded out. This removed the buffer that had partly insulated reporters and feature writers from the full impact of the change in the paper's ownership. Neil's regime inaugurated, according to Claire Tomalin, the paper's former literary editor, 'a reign of terror'. 'I was extremely aware of a great deal of misery and bullying,' she recalls. Her recollection of this period is echoed by other journalists whom we interviewed. For example, Peter Wilby, the paper's former education correspondent, recalls: 'There was a tone of fear . . . a horrible, "totalitarian" atmosphere.'<sup>9</sup>

Certain sorts of story – what Neil called 'wet' or 'lefty' stories – were discouraged or downplayed. Thus Donald McIntyre, the paper's labour correspondent, had a running battle over his reporting of the miners' strike (1984 to 1985) in which he was regularly pressed by the editor to adopt a less critical attitude towards the National Coal Board and the government. Sometimes McIntyre felt that the editor's criticism was justified; sometimes he argued back; but at other times, he admitted, he censored himself 'to some extent'. The trouble with arguing back, McIntyre explained, is that it 'starts to become counter-productive and you get to the point where you either had to leave or you just become a sort of joke'. McIntyre chose to leave.

At times the pressure on journalists from the old regime was extremely abrasive. On one occasion, John Shirley, the paper's chief reporter (and right-wing Labour supporter), was denounced by Neil as a 'left-winger' and

'Trotskyist' in a voice so loud that the news-room fell into a hushed silence. Shirley became so enraged by changes on the paper that he cancelled its delivery to his home. 'A lot of people were being bullied,' according to the *Sunday Times's* former features editor, Don Berry. 'Life was deliberately made unpleasant for them in the hope that they would go.' Thus Joan Smith, who had complained about the way in which her report of the Greenham Common anti-nuclear protest had been altered, was told by the news editor, Anthony Bambridge, on 25 January 1984: 'The editor feels you have got in a rut on nuclear matters. He would like to see you broaden your range. He would like to see you in the paper more often.' Smith asked how often and was told every week, ideally. She then pointed out that she had had forty-six stories published in the past forty-four weeks. Bambridge replied, 'You are to be congratulated. I am having a terrible time. You are not the only one who is thinking of leaving.' Two months later, Smith left the *Sunday Times*.

But the principal way in which the paper was propelled editorially to the right was through a cumulative process of attrition. This is graphically described by Isabel Hilton, the Latin American specialist at the *Sunday Times* until July 1986:

What would happen is that you would write a story and it would disappear. The copy would vanish around the building and people would write little things into it and take out other things. It would eventually appear in a very truncated form with the emphases changed. It had all been done at stages along the way. To try and make a fuss about this on a Saturday when everything was very busy was very difficult.

The accumulation of pressures led some journalists to internalize controls. 'The sense of intimidation,' according to Hilton,

was so strong that people actually started censoring themselves because it is very unpleasant to get into this kind of argument all the time. It is not just a collection of incidents, it's a collection of incidents *and* the atmosphere, which in the end is so depressing. You stop functioning as a journalist. There are things you just don't bother to pursue because you know you just won't get them into the paper.

Hilton eventually left. Her example was followed by many others, although not all went for the same reasons. In early 1981, there were some 170 journalists on the *Sunday Times*. At least a hundred journalists left the paper between February 1981 and March 1986. This exodus included most of the best-known *Sunday Times* journalists from the pre-Murdoch era.

The changes in the *Sunday Times* during the period 1981 to 1986 were part of a more generalized assertion of hierarchical control in the national press. However, the level of overt conflict at the *Sunday Times* was atypical.

A number of factors generally minimize clashes. Proprietors usually influence the ethos of an organization in a cumulative way. They choose the editors they want, and get rid of them if they 'fail'. Editors' freedom of action is curtailed by the house tradition of the paper, budgetary controls, management guidelines, and an implicit framework of understanding about how the paper should develop. Increasingly editors in the changed managerial environment of the 1980s also came to accept proprietorial intervention as legitimate. As Max Hastings, then editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, put it: 'I've never really believed in the notion of editorial independence as such. I would never imagine saying to Conrad [his proprietor], "you have no right to ask me to do this, I must observe my independence."' Additional considerations perhaps came into it. When Hastings was woken up late at night by his proprietor and expected to converse fluently for an hour or more, his new wife would whisper to him: 'Think of the money, think of the money.'<sup>10</sup>

A variety of other influences cushion conflict in a newspaper. Journalists tend to be selected in the first place partly on the grounds that they will 'fit' in. Conforming to hierarchical requirements brings rewards in terms of good assignments, high exposure, promotion and peer group esteem. Resistance invites escalating sanctions. As Anthony Bevens, the late distinguished political journalist, wrote (with an element of overstatement):

It is daft to suggest that individuals can buck the system, ignore the pre-set 'taste' of their newspapers, use their own news-sense in reporting the truth of any event, and survive. Dissident reporters who do not deliver the goods suffer professional death. They are ridden by news desks and backbench executives, they have their stories spiked on a systematic basis, they face the worst form of newspaper punishment – by-line deprivation. . . . It is much easier to pander to what the editors want.

Accommodation was facilitated by other factors. While newspapers were exposed to contradictory influences, these were not evenly balanced. News-gathering continued to be based on routines organized around powerful groups and institutions adept at meeting the press's needs – most notably various branches of the state which were under the political authority of Conservative administrations throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Prevailing news values accorded particular weight to these accredited sources, thereby legitimizing heavy reliance on them. Single party rule was accompanied by a shift to the right in the political climate of opinion (though not to the extent that the Conservatives' political hegemony based on the first-past-the-post electoral system suggested). The structures of news-gathering and a shift in the political culture tended to reinforce the predominantly centre-right orientation of the national press. Most journalists re-adjusted without difficulty to managerial shifts. While there are no recent data about journalists' political attitudes, Tunstall's pioneering survey of

specialist correspondents in 1968 affords an indication of their outlook. He found that only 2 per cent of those working for right-wing Labour or centrist papers said that they were 'well to the left' of their publications.

Changes in the structure of journalism as an occupation during the 1980s and 1990s also seem to have exerted a 'moderating' influence. The national press came to make increased use of freelancers, stringers and those on temporary contracts who often found themselves competing against a growing reserve army of underemployed or aspirant journalists. At the same time, national newspapers offered well-rewarded berths for 'staff' journalists. This combination of economic privilege and a widening abyss of economic insecurity nurtured a more compliant workforce.

### Restoration of market controls

While market pressure to please consumers constrained proprietors, it did not automatically override their political commitments. This was because the market did not function in the idealized way imagined by neo-liberals. Market distortions caused consumer power to be curtailed.

A key change in the functioning of the market occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s when newsprint rationing was greatly reduced, culminating in its abolition in 1956. This restored the press's heavy dependence on advertising. It also led to a more unequal distribution of advertising since advertisers were no longer restricted in their choice by lack of space, and were free to respond to differences in the purchasing power of newspaper readerships.

Political prejudice played only a small part in this reallocation. A small number of advertising agencies admitted to the second Royal Commission on the Press (1962) that their clients sometimes vetoed left-wing publications. The ill-fated *Scottish Daily News*, founded as a radical co-operative in 1975, was told by an irate advertiser: 'I'm not going to keep a newspaper which, the first time I get a strike, will back the strikers.' A pre-launch feasibility study for another failed left newspaper, the *News on Sunday*, also concluded on the basis of interviews with agency executives that its politics would deter some advertisers.

However, political considerations played an even smaller part in advertising selection in the post-1945 period than they had before. Precise calculations of the cost of opportunities to see advertisements in rival publications, analysed in terms of the social characteristics and, later, buying behaviour of readers, became the main basis for drawing up press advertising schedules. Intuitive assessments of editorial influence, in which ideological judgements sometimes crept in, became less significant. This was reflected, for example, in the first two handbooks on advertising media planning published under the auspices of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. The first, issued in 1955, included a whole chapter on the 'character and atmosphere' of advertising media containing speculation about 'the

intangible effects of accompanying editorial and advertising'. Its successor, published in 1971, was openly disparaging about this approach.<sup>11</sup>

However, if, after newsprint rationing, the increasing inequality of advertising allocations was caused primarily by economic disparities in society, it still had political consequences. During the 1950s, advertising income was redistributed in favour of upscale and midscale publications. This operated against the left press because, generally speaking, its readers were less affluent than those of the right-wing press. Certain contingent factors exaggerated this distortion. The rapid growth of employment and financial advertising benefited primarily upscale papers, while downscale papers suffered more than others from the rise of television as an advertising medium because their readers tended to be heavy viewers of commercial television. Income inequalities also began to increase in the 1980s and 1990s, after a thirty-year period of little change.

### The death of radical papers

The redistribution of advertising in the 1950s coincided with a fall in national circulations. These reached a peak in 1951, dropped and then rallied, only to fall sharply after 1957. This induced, in turn, a rapid escalation of expenditure as newspapers desperately tried to escape the general circulation decline by spending more on larger papers no longer subject to strict newsprint controls. Detailed evidence shows that there was a marked deterioration in the financial position of the national press between 1957 and 1965 because its costs rose much faster than income.

Popular social democratic papers thus found themselves in a double bind. They were exposed like the rest of the press to the general deterioration in the cost and revenue structure of the industry. They tended also to be particularly badly hit by the redistribution of advertising, following deregulation. This was especially true of the *Daily Herald* which had three drawbacks in advertising terms: its readership was disproportionately working class, male and ageing. In the advertising space famine of 1945, its advertising per copy sold had been more than that of either the *Daily Express* or *Daily Mail*. By 1964 it was less than half of either paper.

The *Daily Herald* also lost readers partly as a consequence of its continuing commitment to the Labour Party during the Conservative ascendancy of the 1950s. But its loss of advertising far exceeded its loss of sales, and was a more important cause of its downfall. In 1955 the *Daily Herald* had an 11 per cent share of both national daily circulation and advertising revenue. By 1964 its share of circulation had declined modestly to 8 per cent but its share of advertising had slumped to 3.5 per cent.

Indeed, despite its loss of sales, the *Daily Herald* still retained a substantial following. It was not true, as Sir Dennis Hamilton suggested, that the *Daily Herald* 'was beset by the problem which has dogged nearly every newspaper

vowed to a political idea: not enough people wanted to read it'. When it closed in 1964, it had a circulation of 1,265,000. This was more than five times the circulation of *The Times* of which Sir Dennis Hamilton was then editor-in-chief.

The *News Chronicle*, a long-established Liberal daily, succumbed in 1960 with a substantial circulation of 1,162,000. This was roughly on a par with the highly profitable *Daily Telegraph* buoyed up by upmarket advertising. Similarly the *Sunday Citizen* (formerly *Reynolds News*) folded in 1967. This was a quality paper in terms of the relatively extensive coverage it gave to public affairs, but by 1965 it obtained per copy sold one-tenth of the advertising revenue of the *Sunday Times* because it did not appeal to an élite audience.

The closure of these three social democratic papers was part of an epidemic that also killed off the *Empire News*, *Sunday Dispatch*, *Sunday Graphic* and *Daily Sketch* between 1960 and 1972. All these papers succumbed to similar pressures to those that decimated the centre-left press. They all had a predominantly working-class readership and, in terms of mass marketing, relatively 'small' circulations. They thus fell between two stools: they had neither the quantity nor the social 'quality' of readership needed to attract sufficient advertising for them to survive in a deregulated economy.

### Adjusting to the advertising system

One response of downscale papers to the economic realities of post-war publishing was to try to break out of the working-class market. The editorial implications of this are graphically illustrated by the troubled post-war history of the *Daily Herald*.

The *Daily Herald's* management responded initially to the paper's growing shortfall in advertising not by modifying its editorial policy but by seeking new and more imaginative ways of selling the paper to the advertising industry. In particular, it sought to combat the negative image of the paper's readers as poor by initiating research which showed that they were heavy spenders on certain products such as canned meat, desserts, cereals and beer.

The diminishing success of this promotion encouraged the *Daily Herald's* management to undertake in 1955 a fundamental review of the paper's editorial strategy and market position. Two clear options emerged from this review. One, inspired partly by market research into what people read in popular papers, was to devote less space to political and industrial coverage and more to human interest stories, photographs and strip cartoons. This was identified as the most promising way to rebuild a mass circulation and, in particular, to 'bring in women – vital to the advertising department'.<sup>12</sup>

The second option, and the one that was eventually adopted, was to attract more advertising by seeking to upgrade the paper's readership both socially and educationally. This strategy led to the appointment of John Beavan as

editor in 1960 with the remit to lure former *News Chronicle* readers and, above all, to attract 'the intelligent grammar school boy'. The paper moved upmarket, and included features about books, classical music and even ballet. It also loosened its ties with the Labour Party and the TUC, and moved politically to the right.

Yet despite these changes, the *Daily Herald's* readership remained obstinately proletarian. Indeed, even by 1963 to 1964, only 13 per cent of its readers were middle class. Yet its owners were conscious that the traditional, loyalist union subculture from which the *Daily Herald* sprang was in decline. The paper's management, influenced by the Gaitskellite revisionism of the early 1960s, concluded that the cloth-cap, traditional Labour Party identity of the paper was putting off potential readers and that the only way to blast the paper successfully into the middle market was to relaunch it under a new name, the *Sun*. As a prelude to this, the TUC was persuaded to sell its share of the paper in 1964 to the International Publishing Corporation (IPC) which had acquired Odhams' shares in the paper three years earlier.

The intention behind the relaunch was to construct a new coalition of readers composed of working-class, 'political radicals' (the old *Herald* readership) and young, upwardly mobile 'social radicals'. 'The new paper,' according to an internal memorandum, 'is to have the more representative make-up essential to advertisers.'<sup>13</sup> But the difficulties inherent in this strategy were dauntingly revealed in prelaunch research which showed the enormous gulf that separated the two wings of the coalition. 'Social radicals', defined largely in terms of their attitudes towards race, hanging and issues such as increasing access to (but not abolishing) public schools, turned out to be only marginally more inclined to vote Labour than Conservative or Liberal, and to be not greatly more likely to read the *Daily Herald* than the *Daily Telegraph*. Ranking high among the favourite reading of 'social radicals' were the society gossip columns of the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* expressing social values fundamentally at odds with the class-conscious, often resentful attitudes of many *Herald* readers recorded by Odhams's previous surveys.

These findings suggest that it would have been more sensible for the *Daily Herald* to have been relaunched as a more popular, working-class daily. But this strategy was rejected by IPC because it would have meant spending money attacking another paper in the same group, namely the *Daily Mirror*. Instead the launch proceeded along its preconceived lines, seemingly unaffected by the corporation's own research.

In the event, the editorial staff of the *Sun* never succeeded in finding an editorial formula which reconciled the two very dissimilar groups that they were seeking to attract. IPC's market research showed that the paper failed both to please old *Herald* readers and to attract young, affluent, social radicals.<sup>14</sup> The paper struggled on as an underfinanced, deradicalized hybrid until it was sold to Murdoch at a low price in 1969.



The *Sun* was then reoriented towards a mass working-class market. The recasting was done with consummate skill, making the *Sun* Britain's best-selling daily. It greatly increased its entertainment coverage, in particular human interest reporting of show business and TV stars, developed a more explicit style of soft porn, and shrank its coverage of public affairs. It evolved a complex editorial formula – mistakenly dismissed by some critics as simple-minded – which was both hedonistic and moralistic, iconoclastic and authoritarian, generally Conservative in its opinions and radical in its rhetoric. It also anticipated the Thatcherite era by expressing new right arguments before Margaret Thatcher herself.

It was an ironic ending for a daily that had been the only consistent supporter of the Labour Party for over half a century. Revealed by market research to have had the most devoted readership of any popular daily as late as 1958,<sup>15</sup> it was first enfeebled and then converted into a paper which stood for everything that the old *Daily Herald* had opposed.

### Consensual pull of the mass market

Other reformist papers adjusted to post-war market conditions by muting their radical commitment in a bid to maximize sales. This pattern of accommodation is illustrated by the post-war history of the *Daily Mirror*. It emerged triumphant from the radical wartime and immediate post-war period to become the top circulation daily paper in 1949. But the 1951 general election inaugurated a long period of Conservative ascendancy. Other indicators registered a change in the market environment. The *Daily Mirror's* growth of circulation slowed down in the early 1950s, and began to fall after 1955. The paper also failed to maintain the substantial share of advertising it had won in the 1940s. Its management became increasingly aware that the tide of radicalism which had helped to sweep the paper to the top was receding, and began to worry about whether the paper was moving out of step with the times. It responded by steering the *Daily Mirror* more towards the centre of gravity in the mass market – the political centre. The class divisiveness of the paper's 'us and them' rhetoric of the 1940s softened in the 1950s and early 1960s into the more inclusive and acceptable rhetoric of 'the young at heart' against 'the old', the modern against the traditional, 'new ideas' instead of 'tired men'. The *Daily Mirror's* commitment to the Labour Party remained but it changed in character. Increasingly it took the form of opposition to the Conservative Party rather than positive advocacy of a socialist alternative.

In the late 1950s, the paper also pursued, for a mixture of motives, young and upwardly mobile readers. They brought in additional advertising because they were particularly sought after by advertisers; they seemed to embody important, new social trends; and they were an accessible part of the market because their newspaper-reading habits were relatively unfixed. The effect of this redirection was to make the paper's readership more socially and

politically heterogeneous. By 1964 one-third of the paper's readership opposed the Labour Party and its readership profile was considerably more upmarket than it had been in the 1940s. This was perceived by the *Mirror's* management to impose a limitation on the paper's radicalism. As Cecil King, then Chairman of the Mirror Group, explained in 1967:

Today newspaper circulations are vast assemblies of people of all social classes and all varieties of political view. A controller who tried to campaign for causes profoundly distasteful, even to large minorities of his readers, would . . . put his business at risk.

However, Cecil King's market fears, and those of his senior colleagues, perhaps rationalized their own personal inclinations. King's youthful radicalism had waned as he grew older. Hugh Cudlipp, his close colleague and successor as chairman of the Mirror Group, subsequently left the Labour Party to join the SDP. Their centrism was reflected in the choice of political advisers to the Mirror Group in the 1950s and 1960s – Alfred Robens, George Brown and Richard Marsh, all right-wing Labour politicians who subsequently defected to the Conservatives or Liberal-SDP Alliance (later Liberal Democrats).

The *Daily Mirror* succeeded in recouping the circulation it had lost in the late 1950s, and displayed flashes of its old radicalism during the 1960s until it was challenged by the renascent *Sun*. Between 1969 and 1985, its sales fell into almost continuous decline and this free-fall was resumed again in the early 1990s. The paper's successive managements responded defensively by cutting back on the *Daily Mirror's* campaigning journalism. The paper also experimented with different populist registers in an attempt to find a new voice that would appeal to a younger readership. Its inner uncertainty and waning radical commitment were symbolized by its changes of masthead. Under the Maxwell regime, its old campaigning masthead slogan 'Forward with the People' was resuscitated in a patriotic form, 'Forward with Britain'. This was replaced in turn with a slogan defining the paper's identity exclusively in market terms: 'Colour Newspaper of the Year'.

By the mid-1990s, the *Daily Mirror* had in some ways more in common with its rival the *Sun* than with its former incarnation in the 1940s as one of Britain's greatest radical papers. In the late 1990s, a brave attempt was made to recapture some of the *Mirror's* former radicalism under the editorship of Piers Morgan. However, this adjustment was contained within a package that was overwhelmingly entertainment-centred. This reflected another key change that took place in the press after 1945.

### **Depoliticization of the popular press**

The commercial pressures reshaping the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Mirror* affected popular papers more generally. These emerged from their cocooned

existence in the 1940s and early 1950s into an intensely competitive environment where the mounting pile of dead titles was a constant reminder to publishers of the consequences of failing to adjust to change. The decline of circulation that began in the 1950s continued in a seemingly remorseless way, with a temporary recovery of popular newspaper sales only in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Underlying this slide were three key trends: a reduction in the number of households buying more than one paper in response to newspapers' increased size and cost, a steady decline in the proportion of adults reading national papers after 1967, and the modest growth of quality papers at the expense of the popular press. Editors of popular papers became acutely aware that they were swimming against the market tide.

Although advertising expenditure on the national press steadily increased, popular nationals' share of advertising declined gradually after 1953. More important, their advertising profit margins were seriously eroded during the 1960s and 1970s because most popular papers failed to increase their advertising rates in line with rising costs in an attempt to fend off competition from ITV. Popular newspapers responded to their mounting economic problems by doubling cover prices in real terms between 1962 and 1985, but this policy merely fuelled publishers' anxiety about losing readers.

However, the principal driving force behind the pressure to maximize sales was a sustained rise in costs. National newspapers more than quadrupled their paging between 1945 and 1975 and almost doubled them again in the subsequent period up to 1996. Their staff numbers also increased and were paid substantially more in real terms. Between 1946 and 1974, the annual costs of the average national and London daily increased fourteen-fold.<sup>16</sup> The circulation war that began in 1981 and led to the largest ever give-away prizes of £1 million in 1985, before switching to lavish advertising promotion in the late 1980s, further fuelled the rise in costs. Soaring expenditure intensified the need to stay ahead in the circulation battle.

How this could be achieved was spelt out in extensive market research commissioned by increasingly anxious publishers. This revealed a remarkable constancy in what people read in national newspapers over four decades. The most read items were found to be human interest stories and certain entertainment features because their appeal transcended differences of age, class and gender. Sport was popular among men, as were women's features among women. However, public affairs coverage attracted generally low average readership scores because it appealed less to women than to men and less to the young than to the over-35s.

The managements of popular newspapers responded by giving more space to content with a common denominator appeal. They expanded human interest content, entertainment features, sports and women's articles (see Table 7.4).<sup>17</sup> This growth took place at the expense of public affairs coverage which declined, as a percentage of editorial space, by at least half in all our

sample popular papers between 1946 and 1976. Indeed, public affairs took up less space than sport in all these papers by 1976.

In effect the make-up of popular papers reverted to their pre-war character in response to similar market pressures. However, the downgrading of political coverage was carried to even more extreme lengths in three sample papers – *The People/Sunday People*, the *Sunday Pictorial/Mirror* and the *Daily Herald/Sun*. In the latter case, public affairs as a proportion of editorial space was down by almost two-thirds in 1976 compared with thirty years earlier. A supplementary content analysis also reveals that public affairs stories were chosen less often as lead, front-page articles in popular newspapers in 1976 compared with 1936. Evidence for the subsequent period is contradictory.<sup>18</sup> What seems to have happened is that the depoliticization of the popular press deepened in the 1980s, but was at least partly reversed between 1987 and 1997.<sup>19</sup>

The increasingly frenetic pursuit of readers also led to a general lowering of journalistic standards, especially during the periods of most intense competition. This gave rise to a number of well-publicized excesses in the 1970s and 1980s: inventing an overnight love tryst between Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer on a lonely railway siding in the royal train (*Sunday Mirror*); fabricating a fictitious interview with Mrs Marica McKay, the widow of the Falklands VC hero (*Sun*); touching up a photograph of 'Lady Di' to give a hint of nipples in a low-cut dress (*Sun*); offering 'blood money' to relatives and friends of the 'Yorkshire Ripper', Peter Sutcliffe (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Star* and *News of the World*); pillorying a child as the 'Worst Brat in Britain' without mentioning that he was ill due to contracting meningitis (*Sun*); and, most notoriously of all, reporting as 'The Truth' misleading claims that football hooligans had urinated on police officers, attacked rescue workers and stolen from injured fans in the Hillsborough football stadium disaster (*Sun*).

### Gap between quality and popular newspapers

To a much greater degree than the popular press, broadsheet papers maintained a commitment to serious political coverage. Between 1936 and 1976, both the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Observer*, for example, actually increased their relative coverage of public affairs, while reducing or merely maintaining their human interest content (see Table 7.4). The very rapid growth in the size of broadsheets after 1985 contributed to a large *absolute* increase in entertainment content. However, as a percentage of the total, political stories only declined markedly in the early and mid-1980s, and rose again subsequently to a level that was higher in 1997 than in 1957.<sup>20</sup> A significant difference thus remained between a politicized élite press, and a relatively depoliticized mass press.

This difference is rooted in the historical development of the press, and is attributed usually to the chasm that supposedly separates the sophisticated preferences of educated élites and the more basic interests of the masses. In

Table 7.4 *The editorial contents of selected national daily and Sunday newspapers, 1936 to 1976<sup>a</sup>*

<i>Percentage of editorial space</i>	<i>Daily Express</i>			<i>Daily Herald</i>			<i>Sun</i>			<i>Daily Mail</i>		
	1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976
Advertising (proportion of total space)	43	18	44	42	17	40	46	18	36			
Editorial (proportion of total space)	57	82	56	58	83	60	54	82	64			
Photographs <sup>b</sup>	13	7	13	9	5	16	15	7	14			
Illustrations <sup>b</sup>	4	4	5	2	4	6	5	4	5			
Public affairs news <sup>c</sup>	14	29	12	23	34	8	15	27	12			
Public affairs features <sup>c</sup>	4	10	6	10	11	6	4	12	8			
Finance	10	4	7	6	1	1	9	3	10			
Sport	22	18	27	19	20	30	20	19	23			
Human interest news	20	20	16	14	14	14	14	19	17			
Human interest features	10	6	12	8	4	20	15	3	10			
Consumer and women's features	7	2	4	5	3	2	8	2	5			
Horoscopes, cartoon strips, quizzes and competitions	4	3	6	3	3	8	3	4	5			
Arts and entertainments	6	4	7	6	4	7	5	5	9			
Other features	5	5	4	6	4	7	7	6	3			

<i>Daily Mirror</i>			<i>Daily Telegraph</i>			<i>Sunday Express</i>			<i>People/ Sunday People</i>			<i>Sunday Pictorial/ Sunday Mirror</i>			<i>Observer</i>		
1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976	1936	1946	1976
29	16	42	47	35	48	51	16	56	38	22	44	24	25	46	46	36	49
71	84	58	53	64	52	49	84	44	62	78	56	76	75	54	54	64	51
21	8	18	8	2	9	14	4	13	11	4	21	26	25	20	3	3	12
7	15	8	1	1	1	4	6	9	2	2	2	6	6	6	1	-	3
10	18	9	19	40	26	8	20	5	10	15	2	7	10	5	20	28	16
2	7	4	3	9	4	10	19	12	4	11	6	10	16	6	6	19	14
4	-	1	20	8	20	5	2	2	1	1	1	2	-	2	7	2	10
15	9	28	14	11	18	21	20	25	25	28	30	18	20	27	17	12	16
21	29	17	14	12	13	15	11	12	18	15	13	11	14	13	7	5	5
27	5	16	10	10	2	23	9	17	23	17	22	15	26	28	6	7	8
6	4	2	3	1	5	4	2	10	3	3	5	8	5	5	4	2	11
6	16	10	1	1	1	4	6	6	8	8	6	14	3	5	3	5	1
4	1	8	6	3	10	3	4	6	3	2	6	7	3	6	25	20	15
7	10	5	9	7	3	8	7	4	7	2	10	9	3	4	5	4	5

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Sample 252 issues. <sup>b</sup>These are also tabulated in terms of their content.  
<sup>c</sup>Defined as political, social, economic, industrial, scientific and medical affairs.  
All figures have been rounded off to the nearest whole number.

fact, studies commissioned by publishers over a period of sixty years regularly revealed that quality and popular paper readers were rather similar in their likes and dislikes. Thus to take but one example, the most read stories in Sunday quality papers during the period between 1969 and 1971 were human interest stories about ordinary people, followed by human interest stories about celebrities – precisely the most read stories in the *Sunday People* and *Sunday Mirror* during the same period.<sup>21</sup>

The polarization between the two sectors arose primarily from the divergent ways in which they were funded. The quality press generally derived over two-thirds of its revenue from advertising, secured through appealing to high-spending, niche audiences. The popular press, on the other hand, obtained over half of its revenue from sales and its value to advertisers was rooted in its circulation success. Thus one sector needed to ‘select’ its readers as a way of safeguarding its advertising income, while the other needed to build and retain a mass circulation.

These divergent economic pressures affected the way in which each sector related to the market. Popular papers catered for the lowest common denominator of mass demand, in the process ignoring the preferences of a significant minority of the readers who would have liked more public affairs coverage. By contrast, quality papers privileged the politicized minority among their readers as a way of avoiding the indiscriminate expansion of circulation. This often coincided with the concerns of senior journalists in the quality press.

Failure to respect these different market rules could produce bizarre consequences, as was demonstrated when *The Times*, under a new owner, Lord Thomson, went for promiscuous growth. Between 1966 and 1969 the paper increased its circulation by 60 per cent through heavy promotion and a more popular editorial approach. However, a significant number of its new readers were indigent students, lower-middle class or even working class. Advertisers objected to paying premium rates for the privilege of attracting readers from outside their advertising target group, many of whom could be reached more cheaply through other publications. Consequently, advertising failed to keep up with the rise in circulation, and the paper incurred steeply increasing losses. Thoroughly chastened, *The Times* reversed its policy by raising its price, adopting a more austere editorial policy and changing its promotional message in a successful bid to lose 96,000 unwanted circulation between 1969 and 1971. When *The Times* went for growth almost a quarter of a century later, it targeted its appeal very deliberately to affluent readers of papers such as the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail*. Even so, its spectacular rise in circulation between 1993 and 1996 also produced heavy losses.

More far-reaching than advertisers’ indirect influence on the market orientation of newspapers was their direct impact on the structure of the press. By 2002, five out of ten national dailies served the top end of the market, and accounted for 20 per cent of circulation.<sup>22</sup> The other 80 per cent

of the market had to settle for what remained. Under this bifurcated system, the only significant minority papers to survive were those that served advertising-rich audiences. For example, *Today* closed down in 1995 with a circulation of 573,000, significantly more than that of the upscale *Guardian* or *Financial Times* but not enough to keep it alive.

Representation was unequal in terms of weight as well as numbers. The only papers offering detailed coverage of public affairs reflected the concerns and interests of élite publics. This tended to reinforce élite domination of politics.

Economic power was thus converted into ideological power. Yet this came about not through blackmailing pressure exerted by advertisers on editorial content – the usual concern of radical critics – but through an impersonal process in which influence was largely unsought. Economic inequalities in society gave rise to unequal advertising outlays on the press. This influenced, in turn, the structure of the press, its balance of contents and definition of desired readership.

### **Curtailment of choice**

The escalating costs of publishing in the first four decades after the Second World War imposed a further limitation on the ideological spectrum of the press. The rise in staffing, paging and promotional expenditure had the effect of stifling competition. Only established national newspaper enterprises, able to economize by making use of existing print capacity and services, were able to incur the enormous cost of launching a new national paper. Others were excluded or were deterred by the high cost involved. During the 1970s and early 1980s the trade union movement discussed the possibility of starting a new national daily, and even commissioned a detailed feasibility study through the TUC. Reluctantly it concluded in 1984 that it lacked the funds to go ahead with the project despite the fact that its privately commissioned consumer research indicated that there was a substantial market demand for a new left daily.

The only new voices to be heard in Fleet Street before the advent of new technology merely amplified the existing chorus. In the half century before 1986, just four new national papers were established: the *Sun*, *Daily Star*, *Sunday Telegraph* and *Mail on Sunday*. All these papers originated from leading press groups, and consolidated their oligopoly. Politically, they were all on the right and strengthened Conservative domination of the national press.

### **Mythologizing of new technology**

Between 1986 and 1989 a technical revolution took place in the national press. Digital typesetting with direct input by journalists and advertising staff



was introduced, and photocomposition fully replaced the manual casting of copy in hot metal type. Pages were designed and made up on computer terminals linked to plate-making rather than being pasted up on a board. Powerful, new web-offset machines, requiring fewer production staff, were installed and colour printing was introduced. Facsimile transmission was adopted, enabling the physical separation of editorial and production processes and the simultaneous printing of newspapers at different sites. This reduced distribution costs and facilitated the more intensive use of printing presses.

These technical innovations were accompanied by a revolution in the social organization of production. Thousands of printers were made redundant between 1986 and 1988. The old system of production, in which shop-floor control was effectively subcontracted to trade unions, was streamlined into a low-cost, mass-production process controlled by management. After 1989, a number of national publishers also enforced individual contracts with journalists, and derecognized the National Union of Journalists.

The introduction of new technology was funded principally in two ways. Reuters, owned jointly by leading press groups, was floated in 1984 and produced a windfall sale of shares. Most national publishers also sold their historic properties in the centre of London, and moved to cheaper sites. In 1989 the last national newspaper rolled off the last printing press in Fleet Street, marking the end of a historic tradition that went back almost to the beginning of British journalism.

A skilled public relations campaign prepared the way for this transformation. Press managements argued that computerized technology would transform the national press by reducing costs. New papers would be easy to set up, and minority journalism would flourish with the aid of low-cost technology. These arguments were echoed by distinguished journalists and politicians on the centre-left as well as the right in a general mobilization of public opinion against Fleet Street's printers. 'Murdoch may have done more for the freedom of the press than a dozen Royal Commissions,' enthused Bill Rodgers, Vice-President of the SDP, after the press tycoon shed his Fleet Street production workers. Only the intransigence of some in the print unions, argued Ian Aitken, political editor of the *Guardian*, prevented the emergence of 'entirely new newspapers representing all points of view'. His counterpart at the *Observer*, Robert Taylor, also wrote enthusiastically about how new technology would undermine 'the tyranny of the mass circulation press, with its mindless formula journalism appealing to the lowest common denominator'.

The man who initially embodied all these hopes for the future was Eddy Shah, a publisher of freesheets in the north-west and the victor of a famous confrontation with the National Graphical Association. He announced in 1985 to general acclaim that he was setting up a new national daily and Sunday paper in a green field site, miles from Fleet Street, using the latest in print technology. He was widely hailed as the harbinger of a new era.

But it was in fact Rupert Murdoch who made the first, decisive move by building a new printing plant in Wapping, East London. Although he told the print unions that he intended merely to print a new local daily there, he secretly established a large, new plant, costing over £66 million, capable of printing all his national newspapers. An alternative production workforce was recruited with the help of the maverick electricians' union and trained to operate the new technology. An alternative distribution system was also established through an Australian transport company, Thomas Nationwide Transport, to prevent effective sympathy action by organized labour. As a final precaution, Murdoch reconstituted his Wapping plant as a separate company so that picketing by his Fleet Street employees outside Wapping would be technically illegal.

Murdoch then issued an ultimatum to the print unions requiring them to accept a legally binding, no-strike agreement in which 'new technology may be adopted at any time with consequent reductions in manning levels' and in which anyone involved in industrial action during the term of the contract would be dismissed without appeal. The print unions, although agreeing belatedly to new technology and voluntary redundancy, refused to sign an agreement which effectively removed union protection. A strike was called and Murdoch's Fleet Street production workers mounted a forlorn, nightly vigil outside the coils of razor wire surrounding the Wapping plant. Their frustration flared into occasional violence during ritualized mass pickets, which resulted in some print workers being gaoled and their unions heavily fined. After more than a year, the strike was called off amid bitter recriminations.

Murdoch's success was followed by a wave of redundancies in Fleet Street as rival press groups introduced new technology. New papers were also launched in the period 1986 to 1989, seemingly fulfilling optimistic predictions about the impact of new technology. But these predictions were based, as it turned out, on a myth: the widespread belief that overpaid and underworked print workers accounted for the major part of newspaper costs. In fact, production wages comprised only an estimated 21 per cent of Fleet Street costs before new technology was introduced.<sup>23</sup>

'Downsizing' the production force thus did not change fundamentally the economics of publishing. The launch and establishment of new national newspapers still required large resources. *Today* and *Sunday Today* were launched with an initial outlay of £22.5 million; the *Independent* with an establishment fund of £21 million; the *News on Sunday* with around £6 million; the *Sunday Correspondent* with £18 million; and the *London Daily News* with an outlay of well over £30 million in its first year.

Outlays remained high because new technology was relatively expensive and had only a limited impact in lowering non-wage costs. Newspapers still had to attain relatively high circulations in order to break even. The run-in period when new papers were building circulation, and trading at a loss, added to the effective establishment cost.

Just how little things had changed was revealed by Shah's supposedly mould-breaking launch of *Today* and *Sunday Today*. Shah's central problem – apart from lack of editorial insight – was shortage of money. A substantial part of his launch fund was spent on setting up a modern plant. This led him to economize on prelaunch preparations which contributed to the production problems and indifferent editorial quality of the early issues of his papers. He then ran out of money after only ten weeks and found it impossible to secure further credit, largely because the equity proportion of his capital amounted to only £8.5 million. As a consequence the first national newspapers to be launched by an outsider in half a century were taken over by a leading press conglomerate, Lonrho. Along with other subsidiary backers, Lonrho injected a further £24 million into the *Today* group in 1986 to 1987, effectively doubling the establishment outlay. *Sunday Today* was closed down and *Today* was acquired by the leading monopolist Rupert Murdoch, who attempted to resuscitate it as a commercial proposition and failed.

One problem Shah shared with other would-be publishers was that he had to leap over the publishing equivalent of a high jump from a very short run-up. The length of the run-up was affected by how much money the publisher was able to spend on getting the paper right, and building a following. The height of the jump depended on the advertising bounty that readers brought with them. A paper aimed at the working class, such as the *News on Sunday*, needed in 1987, using the latest technology, around 800,000 circulation to break even. A paper aimed at the affluent, such as the *Independent*, required approximately half this amount in 1988.

The net impact of new technology was modest because it did not lower entry costs substantially or change the distorting role of advertising. Of the small shoal of minnows that swam for a time near the hulks of the established press, only two survived. Casualties included two left papers, *News on Sunday* (1987) and *Sunday Correspondent* (1989 to 1990), the first of which was editorially dismal and both of which were undercapitalized. Shah again attempted with too little money to launch a new national paper, *The Post* (1988), which lasted for only thirty-three issues. The *London Daily News* (1987) was killed off with the help of a short-lived, spoiling paper launched by the monopoly *London Evening Standard*. The only mainstream newspapers to stay the course were the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*. However, they only avoided closure by surrendering their independence. Initially, the *Independent* attracted talented journalists, breathed new life into a bi-partisan tradition of journalism, and made great headway in building circulation. It then depleted its limited resources by launching a Sunday paper during a recession, lost momentum, and was finally torpedoed by Murdoch and Black who slashed the prices of rival papers. The *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* limped into harbour, and were taken over ultimately by an international media group based in Ireland.

The only partial exception to this record of relative failure was the launch

of *Sunday Sport* in 1986, and its expansion into a weekday title, *Sport*. These caricatured the excesses of tabloid journalism, with invented stories such as 'World War II Bomber Found on the Moon', and its predictable follow-up 'World War II Bomber Found on the Moon Vanished'. However, their diet of sport, crime and pornography, without public affairs coverage, make them specialist publications rather than national newspapers. They are also not very popular: their survival has been due to their paring down of costs, with skeletal staffs, no general news service, and a heavy reliance on cheap, bought-in material.

The expansionary period of the national press is now probably over. The major press groups forestalled the threat of further challenges by forcing up costs. They multiplied newspaper sections, held down prices and in the late 1980s poured money into promotion. No new national newspaper has been launched since 1989, apart from the specialist *Sunday Business* started in 1996, and the Sunday stablemate of the *Star*, launched in 2002. The latter – the product of a powerful press group – probably typifies what at best we may expect in the future.

In short, the technical transformation of the press never produced a corresponding editorial revolution. It led to a cleaner, cheaper system of production; it gave rise to fatter newspapers with new sections; and it added two centrist titles to the already crowded top end of the market. But what it did not do was enrich popular journalism through the proliferation of viable, minority newspapers, or by significantly extending the ideological range of the press. The Fleet Street 'revolution' was a rainbow that came and went, though not before dazzling gullible and impressionable journalists.

### Retrospect

The shift towards a delegated pattern of control in part of the national press during the 1960s and early 1970s was reversed during the later 1970s and 1980s. A new generation of predominantly right-wing proprietors emerged who adopted a more interventionist and personalized style of management. Yet even in those papers where proprietors were relatively inactive, control was still exercised through the selection of senior management and mediated through traditional structures of news-gathering and the influence of dominant political values.

The impact of managerial change was reinforced by the impersonal operation of market forces. Rising costs and the redistribution of advertising, following deregulation, helped to decimate the social democratic press, and contributed to the taming and depoliticization of the popular radical papers that survived.

The rightward shift of the press during the 1970s and 1980s was also a response to a sea-change of opinion. However, the changing complexion of the press overstated the public shift to the right. This was demonstrated by

the yawning gap that developed between editorial and electoral opinion, particularly after 1970. In the 1983, 1987 and 1992 general elections, the Conservative Party never secured more than 43 per cent of the vote, yet the Conservative press's share of national daily circulation fluctuated between 64 and 78 per cent. When a large part of the press subsequently realigned itself to New Labour, the shift represented a change of political affiliation rather than of orientation. The press still remained predominantly right-wing.

Partly as a consequence of increasing concentration of ownership, the press failed also to reflect the growing diversity of public opinion. Indeed, the national press – although numbering seventeen or more titles during the period 1969 to 2003 – had unanimous editorial opinions on a surprising number of issues.<sup>24</sup> For example, every national daily and Sunday paper supported the aborted union 'reforms' proposed by the government in 1969. During the 1975 referendum every national newspaper supported Britain's entry into the EEC. In 1980 every national daily opposed the TUC's 'day of action'. In 1981 every national paper which expressed an editorial opinion supported the more right-wing candidate Denis Healey in the Labour Party's deputy leadership contest. In 1985 all national papers applauded Neil Kinnock's attack on the 'hard left' of his party.

Between 1974 and 1993, only two national papers (the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Times*) supported briefly the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland, even though this was favoured by the majority in most polls conducted during this period. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament won significant minority support, yet lacked the backing of a single national newspaper. Only one national (the *Independent on Sunday*) in 1996 was explicitly republican, despite the fact that one in five at that time favoured the abolition of the monarchy. However, the press did diverge to some extent in relation to the 2003 Gulf War.

The rightward drift of the press had significant political consequences. In particular, the closure of large-circulation, centre-left papers removed key institutional props that had helped to sustain a popular radical tradition in early post-war Britain. The *Daily Herald* had provided reinforcement for a Labourist, trade union subculture; *Reynolds News* had celebrated the collectivist self-help tradition of the Co-operative Movement; the *News Chronicle*, a paper which had periodically upset its post-war owners by being too radical, belonged to an older, ethical Liberal tradition. Together, these three papers reached, on their deathbed, an average issue readership of 9.3 million people.

The trade union movement was also weakened by a sustained press campaign against it during the 1970s and early 1980s. Reporting of industrial relations tended to focus on conflict, framed in terms of its harmful consequences rather than its causes. Thus Denis McQuail found that the three most frequently recurring themes in national daily reports of industrial disputes in 1975 were loss of output, loss of work by those not involved, and inconvenience or danger to the public. Implicitly, strikers were portrayed as

being in conflict primarily with the public rather than with their employers. This selective definition was sustained further by under-reporting the role of management. Indeed, actions or statements by employers and their organizations accounted in 1975 for only 2 per cent of the main items of industrial relations reports in national dailies. McQuail found little difference in the pattern of reporting of industrial relations between right-wing Labour and Conservative papers.<sup>25</sup>

The press also mounted a sustained and effective attack on the Labour left. This culminated in the tabloid campaign against 'loony left' councils in 1996 to 1997, the impact of which stemmed from a series of seemingly factual reports featuring left-wing councillors doing manifestly dotty things. Thus individual 'loony left' councils in London were alleged to have banned black bin liners as racist, proscribed the nursery rhyme 'Baa Baa Black Sheep', spent almost £0.5 million on 'twenty-four super-loos for gypsies', and insisted that gays should go to the top of the council house waiting list. All these reports proved, on investigation, to be misleading.<sup>26</sup>

The national press generally endorsed the basic tenets of the capitalist system – private enterprise, profit, the 'free market' and the rights of property ownership. By frequently invoking the consensual framework of the national interest and by projecting positive symbols of nationhood (such as sporting heroes), the press fostered a national identity at the expense of class solidarity. The press also reinforced dominant political and social norms by mobilizing public indignation against a succession of public enemies portrayed in stereotypical ways – youth gangs, squatters, student radicals, muggers, football hooligans, union militants, urban rioters, gay carriers of the 'killer plague', asylum seekers and terrorists.

The press built support for the social system in less direct and obvious ways. Its focus on political and state office as the seat of power tended to mask the central influence of economic élites and global markets in shaping public policy. By regularly reporting political and economic news as disconnected events, it encouraged acceptance of the power structure as natural, part of the way things are. Embedded also in its entertainment features were values and assumptions that were not quite as apolitical as they appeared to be at first sight. Its expanding consumer and lifestyle sections concerned with music, travel, motoring, fashion, homes, health and personal finance tacitly promoted a seductive view that consumption is a way of expressing self in a real world far removed from, and transcending, structures of power. Above all, its greatly enlarged human interest and entertainment content tended to portray tacitly society as a structure of individuals, explain events in individual terms, and to offer individual-moral rather than collective solutions to problems. The press's support for a conservative, 'common-sense' view of the world may have contributed more towards maintaining an inegalitarian social order than its explicitly political content.

## Notes

1. S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, vol. 2 (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1984) p. 4.
2. MORI, June 1987. This excludes those who were undecided or intended to abstain.
3. D. Butler and G. Butler, *Twentieth-Century British Political Facts, 1900–2000* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 8th edn, 2000), p. 536; T. Austin and T. Haines (eds), *The Times Guide to the House of Commons June 2001* (London, Times Books, 2001), p. 46.
4. Amendment to Broadcasting Bill moved by Dr John Cunningham, *Parliamentary Debates*, 275 (84), col. 551, 16 April 1996.
5. N. Chenoweth, *Virtual Murdoch* (London, Secker & Warburg, London), p. 201.
6. Data are available in different forms. In 2001, the top five publishers' share of regional daily and Sunday, free or paid for 'sales' in 2001 was 72 per cent and of total paid for and free local weekly 'sales' 68 per cent, as computed in *Johnson Press plc and Trinity Mirror plc: A Report into the Proposed Merger* (London, Stationery Office, 2002), Table 3.1. Since the report, Johnston (ranked four) has acquired RIM (ranked five) in a process that seems to have attracted no public comment.
7. This is explored further in Chapter 18.
8. *Royal Commission on the Press 1974–7 Final Report* (London, HMSO, 1997), p. 149.
9. My thanks to Brendan Wall for help in conducting interviews.
10. M. Hastings, *Editor* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2002), p. 235.
11. J. W. Hobson, *The Selection of Advertising Media* (London, Business Publications, 1955); J. R. Adams, *Media Planning* (London, Business Books, 1971). There was, however, a reaction against overdependence on quantitative approaches in media planning during the late 1970s.
12. 'Daily Herald reader interest surveys recommendations', p. 8 (London, Odhams Ltd records, 1955).
13. 'Attitudes to newspapers and newspaper reading' (London, International Publishing Corporation (IPC) records, 1964), p. 3.
14. 'Report of an investigation into the transition from the *Daily Herald* to the *Sun*' (London, IPC records, 1968).
15. 'Report of a survey to study attitudes to daily newspapers' (London, Odhams Ltd records, 1958).
16. Estimated from *Royal Commission on the Press 1947–9 Report* (London, HMSO, 1949), Table 4, p. 82, and *Royal Commission on the Press Interim Report* (London, HMSO, 1976), Table E5, p. 96.
17. A representative sample (twelve issues of dailies and six of Sundays per year) was selected in a way that gave appropriate weight to each quarter of the year, each week in the month and each day in the week. A code–recode comparison of a representative sample of 1491 items yielded 83 per cent agreement in their classification.
18. Two essays provide evidence that is partly contradictory. See D. Rooney, 'Thirty years of competition in the British tabloid press: the *Mirror* and the *Sun* 1968–1998', and S. McLachlan and P. Golding, 'Tabloidization in the British press: a quantitative investigation into changes in British newspapers, 1952–1997', both in C. Sparks and J. Tulloch, *Tabloid Tales* (Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

19. S. McLachlan and P. Golding, *ibid.*, p. 86, figure 3.11.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 87, Figure 3.12.
21. *Sunday Times*, Marketing Research Studies, 1969 to 1971; Sunday Paper Readership Surveys, International Publishing Corporation Marketing and Research Department, 1969–71.
22. This does not include the *Morning Star* since it is usually unobtainable in newsagents.
23. The latest available figure for the national newspaper press in the pre-new technology period, as reported in *Royal Commission on the Press Interim Report* (London, HMSO, 1976), Table E11, p. 101.
24. This does not include the *Morning Star* since it is usually unobtainable in newsagents.
25. D. McQuail, *Analysis of Newspaper Content*, Royal Commission on the Press Research Series 4 (London, HMSO, 1977). The impact of this press coverage was reinforced by that of television. See Glasgow University Media Group, *Bad News* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976) and *More Bad News* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
26. Goldsmiths Media Research Group, *Media Coverage of London Councils* (London, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1987).