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THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC

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ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE

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I. Introduction

AT present there is a great deal of criticism of the Press. I have always thought that critics make very heavy weather of their assaults on the popular side of the press and the heaviest weather of all has been made traditionally by left wing critics of the newspapers. The old assumption was that millionaire newspaper owners suppressed or distorted political news in order to deceive the masses and thus induce them to go on voting Tory or to cease voting Labour.

The British press is a dynastic business. It is still full of Astors and Harmsworths and Scotts. Newspapers are very largely family businesses even when they have become public companies. And the press in this country is a magnificent example of the concentration of power. In no country have the national newspapers, except I think in Japan, got such vast circulations as they have in Britain, and in no country is their control in the hands of such a small number of men. Nowhere, in fact, has the national press been so successfully commercialised as it has been in Britain.

Big Business

About 26 million copies of newspapers, morning and evening, are produced each weekday and almost every literate adult sees at least one newspaper a day. As Mr. Francis Williams pointed out in his book, "Dangerous Estate", no other product of modern civilisation has achieved so complete a saturation of its potential market. We are at the saturation point now and we have been for about the last ten years. Let me give you a few figures. On an average day, 77 per cent of all the people in this country aged 16 and over read a national daily newspaper. The average number of daily newspapers read per head is 1.3. Or, if we put it in another way, almost every other person in the community sees two papers every day. And on Sundays, almost everybody sees two newspapers. It should be understood that about three readers probably share each copy of every national newspaper which is sold. Readership is, in fact, about 3.2 times the circulation figure for national daily newspapers.

The process of commercialisation which has produced these newspapers, these vast readerships, has been going on for about 60 years since Alfred Harmsworth started the "Daily Mail". My own personal view is that commercialisation has been a response to trading conditions rather than a calculated policy to build giant business enterprises. At least, it was in the beginning. What has happened is that constantly rising costs have compelled the newspaper owners to seek constantly increasing circulations in order to attract constantly increasing advertising revenue.

Most of the newspapers which, out of sloth or out of more noble motives, refused to run in this race, have perished. Circulation, as they say in Fleet Street, is the life blood of newspapers. This rise in circulation has suited the most powerful advertisers, who are chiefly the producers or the distributors of consumption goods which they wish to sell in the mass market in all parts of the country. They needed a national daily press. Now the pressure of these advertisers, by the preference they show to newspapers that sell their goods most efficiently, has created the shape of the British press; it is responsible for the painful state of some parts of the industry today, faced with competition from commercial television and from the women's magazines, which have an enormous mass readership.

Royal Commission

At the moment a Royal Commission is sitting on the Press. This Royal Commission is quite different in its functions from that of 1947. The earlier Commission was chiefly concerned with the morals, the ethics, the social functions and the social accountability of the press. It came to the conclusion that popular newspapers were not giving enough unbiased information to enable the citizen to discharge his democratic duties. I have always believed that this conclusion was rather naive, that it failed to take into account the many other sources of information which are now open to citizens. The general idea, especially on the Left, used to be that citizens were deprived of information. This is no longer true. As Richard Hoggart once said, "We are perhaps the most over-stimulated country in the world".

The new Royal Commission which is now sitting arises out of the merger of "Daily Mirror" interests with Odhams, and it is entirely concerned with the economics of the press and the reasons for the growth of monopoly. Its terms of reference are to examine the economic and financial factors affecting the production and sale of newspapers, magazines and other periodicals. It is going to take into account costs, efficiency in production, advertising and other revenue which newspapers earn, including the revenues from the prudent investments that they have made in television. It is going to consider whether these factors tend to diminish the diversity of ownership or the number or variety of publications, having regard to accurate presentation and free expression of opinion. We know the answer to that one. Of course it does.

The demand for the Commission actually arose after the disappearance of the "News Chronicle" into the "Daily Mail", when people began to ask how a newspaper with a circulation of over a million and a readership of over 3½ millions could fail to be profitable. Why had it to close down? At the time people were also concerned about the position of the "Daily Herald". This has a circulation of one million, four hundred thousand and a readership of over five million people, and still, as is notorious, it is not profitable. So Mr. King's guarantee to carry on the "Daily Herald" for several years was, I think, a large-minded and public-spirited undertaking.

II. The Newspaper Revolution

I think it is worthwhile looking back into the history of newspapers to see how they got into the state in which they could fail in spite of having circulations which anywhere else in the world would be regarded as remarkably high. Anywhere else, on the Continent of Europe especially, the idea of a Socialist newspaper having a circulation of 1,400,000 and being rocky financially would seem to be absolutely amazing.

It all began 60 years ago with the revolution of Fleet Street, which is associated with the name of Alfred Harmsworth, better known as Lord Northcliffe, though he was not the only standard bearer in that revolution. Until the end of the nineteenth century the daily newspapers were solemn, low circulation, high-minded, highly political ventures—rather like “The Times” of today—catering for a small minority of people in the country. They were London newspapers rather than national newspapers. There was a strong provincial press and a strong London press, but the London papers, apart from “The Times” perhaps, were not really national newspapers in the sense that they are today. Northcliffe saw that there was a new market for newspapers which could cater for people who did not want to wade through long columns of political speeches and preferred something briefer, wittier, better organised—a kind of daily encyclopaedia. Northcliffe was right. Incidentally he did tremendous good for the serious press. If you look in the files of the “Manchester Guardian” before Northcliffe came along, you will see that it was a pretty badly organised newspaper, with bits of letters and corn prices on every page—they were really not technicians in those days—and, of course, not a terribly good world-wide coverage. It wasn't only the “Guardian” that was like that, all newspapers were like that. Newspapers, in short, were still not developed. X 1

Northcliffe smartened the whole business up. He was a remarkable man. He had what the historian of the “Times” newspaper describes as an eager bird-like mind stuffed with odds and ends, but it had many excellent qualities and he did want to provide a new public with more information. He started a revolution; I think the revolution has gone too far. I think that he himself, if he were alive today, would deplore the length to which the popularisation of newspapers has gone, though he would understand it. His own “Daily Mail”, as he designed it, would seem today to be a remarkably solid newspaper, rather like a “Daily Telegraph”, but it was revolutionary in its day. He was always telling journalists they must be asking how, why, when and where; that the exception must elbow out the rule; and that they must explain com-

plicated events in simple language; get rid of the pompous clichés of the Court and of Parliament with which the serious newspapers were stuffed and go after the people who had not had the benefit of the best education in Britain. A remarkable man. Later on, he bought the "Observer" but he quarrelled with Garvin, its magisterial editor. This is the only example I know of a row with a proprietor which the editor won. Garvin stayed and Northcliffe went.

Later, Northcliffe bought "The Times" which was a failing, shabby, down-at-heel paper, a run-down property, and he converted it into an efficient and profitable organ. If it hadn't been for him, we might not have had "The Times" today. He never really succeeded with it, however, because he never could impose his will on the old guard of "The Times" as he could on the "Daily Mail"; and he didn't like that.

But the national press was made possible by something more than Northcliffe's genius. There was a whole set of technological developments. By 1896 we had a first-class railway system in Britain. We had a telegraph system that could bring news from all over the world. A linotype machine had been invented which speeded up the rate of setting type by six times and there was the rotary press which had multiplied many times over, the number of copies which could be turned out. So a newspaper produced in London could be on sale almost everywhere in Britain on the day of publication—not at 7.30 in the morning—but on the day of publication.

The Branding of Goods

While this revolution was going on, there was another great revolution, in trade; that was, in the branding of consumer goods. The old-time grocer blended his own teas. Often he wrapped his own soap. Most things were supplied to him in bulk and he chose the quality. There were very few brand names. Soap was one of the first goods in this country to be branded. And then as the idea of brands developed, there began a search for a national market for national products. And the press, the daily press, was the means by which the brands established themselves. My own feeling is that the brands made the newspapers and the newspapers made the brands. And so the search for circulation, which all newspapers have always had at all times, no longer became a search for viability, through revenue from sales, with the object of enabling the proprietor and the editor to exercise political influence. There came into journalism the desire for profit and a need for larger circulations to sell the advertising space more profitably. Thus newspapers became big business. And now came the final revolution.

It was seen that newspapers had to attract not merely men, but also women, as it is women who spend money in the shops and who choose the brands. First, they began simply having a woman's page on home, beauty, bringing up children, but later on this feminine influence had to spread from the front of the paper until the sports pages began. You will see there is very little advertising on the sports pages of newspapers. They are the despair of newspaper managers because women do not read the sports

pages, or so advertisers believe, and so they are of little interest to the advertisers. They are produced at a heavy loss. The only people whom the advertisers believe spend money over a wide range of goods are women. Men spend only on beer and tobacco and pools, and that is the only advertising that you will find on the sports pages of the newspapers.

At the beginning of the century the national press began to grow, but slowly. The "Daily Mail" achieved approximately a million sale by about the Boer War, then slipped back again, and until 1914, I believe, it never got back to the million. But after the first World War it achieved a sale of about a million and three-quarters. This was regarded as utterly fantastic. The "Express" had only half that—Beaverbrook had just come into it. The "Daily Chronicle" had still less, the "Daily News" about half a million. The "Daily Telegraph", that fine prosperous paper today, seemed to be on the skids, with probably just about 100,000 circulation. The "Morning Post", a crusty Tory paper, was having a very hard time, and so was the rather wishy-washy paper, the "Westminster Gazette". The "Daily Herald" could never rise above 300,000.

The Circulation War

All the time production costs were increasing, especially in those years after the first World War. And there was fierce competition for sales in order to attract advertising. The theory was that prices to the reader must be held down to a penny and the extra costs recouped from advertising revenue, and this I think, was the fatal decision. This is where the Royal Commission on the Press I think should start—why that decision was made, why it came to be made and what are the results that flow from it. Eventually, it led to the great circulation war of the 1930s, when the newspapers canvassed the public from door to door with lots of unemployed men, who could be hired very cheaply. They tried to raise their circulation by free insurance, and by free gift campaigns. This was the time when newspapers were giving away sets of Dickens, which was a fine cultural thing to do, but also mackintoshes, flannel trousers, boots and shoes, ladies' underwear, mincing machines, teasetts and cutlery. All those things were available to the reader who would become a registered reader, guaranteeing that he would take the paper for about six weeks.

Then came the war and the end of all these artificial aids. Paper was very scarce, newspapers were very slim, prices were low, there wasn't very much to spend your money on and news had a special fascination. Apart from the grim news about the war, there was news about the home front, what your rations were going to be next week. Many people felt, for the first time, a real need to read a newspaper. After the war, newsprint rationing was maintained, and whenever there was a little more newsprint made available, the circulations increased. The circulation of newspapers in 1937 had been around 18 millions—that is morning and evenings—and by 1947 they had reached 28 millions.

The New Readers

A whole new reading public had been enfranchised. It was a great revolution in the habits of Britain that so many people should be taking a daily newspaper as a regular thing. I think it is fair to say that the new readers were those people who before the war had been too young, or too poor, or too politically indifferent, to be interested in a newspaper. So the newspapers which succeeded were those which my old editor of "The Guardian," A. P. Wadsworth, described as having gone farthest towards becoming an entertainment; those newspapers which were less bound by our historic conception of a newspaper or what in any other part of the world is regarded as a newspaper; they had become more like daily magazines. The most remarkable example of this was the "Daily Mirror" which had climbed steadily from about the year 1934 onwards, paused at the beginning of the war, then suddenly in 1941 took off from a circulation of under two millions and by 1949 passed the "Daily Express" at the four million point. The circulations of those two newspapers today are still above the four millions, but that is where the rate of growth has stopped, the curve has levelled off, ever since 1949. Saturation point, pretty well. Now, the other three papers had a more conspicuous political image. I think that everybody knew that the "Daily Mail" was a Tory paper, everybody knew that the "News Chronicle" was a Liberal paper, and everybody knew that the "Daily Herald" was a Labour paper, and these papers did less well. In fact, they did very badly in recruiting this post-war generation of new newspaper readers. The "Mail" didn't make the climb but stayed reasonably safe. The "News Chronicle" and the "Herald" circulations began, from about 1950, to ebb away. There was no sensational drop. It was just that their readers died off and they did not recruit new readers.

III. The Popular Press

There always has been a great deal of criticism of the popular press, usually in the old days from the left wing, who were appalled at the weight of the press criticism facing the Labour Party. There are still echoes of that about, but lately there has been a more sophisticated approach by the critics of the press. They don't look at it in isolation. It is merely one of three mass media, the others being broadcasting and television and films. There is a feeling that all these mass media are debauching the natural decency of the people (a rather romantic conception of the upright natural man) and they are debauching them by presenting them with a mixture largely compounded of frivolity and violence and containing too little serious information and comment. One thing strikes me as remarkable about the critics. Usually they present very little evidence of serious research into the mass media. As far as television is concerned, we have the studies of Dr. Himmelweit, Dr. Belsen of the London School of Economics, and Dr. Trenaman. This is really only a beginning of research into the mass media. As I think all these three workers in the field will recognise, we know very little about television, but we know less still about newspapers. As far as I know, no serious study to be compared with these studies has been done of the press ever, or indeed of the cinema in recent years.

Some of the critics of the popular press give the impression that they have only read the common newspapers over the shoulder of somebody sitting next to them in the bus and we very seldom hear anything about the excellent things in the popular newspapers. We can cite the political correspondence of Mr. Sydney Jacobson, or the daily column written by Cassandra, or Mr. Trevor Evans' industrial correspondence in the "Daily Express" or the leaders by Mr. George Murray in the "Daily Mail" which set a new pattern of seriousness without the loss of wide popular interest. There are many other examples. My own view is that the popular newspapers today are better than they have ever been and that they will become increasingly serious, always keeping a little ahead of the mass of their readers. There is no doubt that they are already ahead of many of their readers, and there are very few newspapers which would find it a disadvantage commercially to be less serious than they are today.

The popular newspapers will never become like "The Times" or "The Guardian" and I hope "The Times" and "The Guardian" will remain what they are today, the organs of a small minority, who take a particularly serious interest in the political and administrative life of the country. But I would like to add that the serious newspapers have improved over recent years. I think the leadership has come mainly from the "Observer"

and the "Sunday Times", which show that the highly educated minority is not exclusively interested in the arts, literature and politics, but also in fashion and kitchen and nursery techniques which were once largely the concern of the popular newspapers and the women's magazines.

Who Reads What?

But one of the most serious and sometimes the most frightening social facts in Britain is how small the readership of the most serious newspapers is, and how large a number of the better off, more successful and more highly educated people read the popular newspapers and apparently little else on weekdays. There are in Britain about 38½ million people over the age of 15, and 38 per cent of them read the "Daily Mirror", 34 per cent of them read the "Express", 20 per cent read the "Mail", 13 per cent the "Herald" and 11 per cent the "Sketch". It doesn't add up because there is, of course, multiple readership. Then we come to the more serious end of the table: 3 per cent read "The Times" and 2 per cent read "The Guardian"; and the "Daily Telegraph", which lives very skilfully and opulently on the borders of the popular and the serious, or between the two, is read by 9 per cent of the people aged 16 and over. The figures I am quoting, by the way, come from the National Readership Surveys of the Institution of Practitioners in Advertising (Jan.-Dec., 1961) and are based on questioning and sampling material which is as precise as some of the best academic minds in the country can make it.

In these elaborate reports the figures are broken down to show the social category of the readers. There are six categories and the custom is to group the first two together, the middle class and the upper middle class (managerial, administrative and professional groups). 4½ million adults fall into these groups. No less than 36 per cent of them read the "Daily Express"; 32 per cent the "Telegraph"; 28 per cent the "Mail"; 12 per cent the "Mirror" and 4 per cent the "Herald". "The Times" has 10 per cent of them—less than the "Mirror"—and "The Guardian" 8 per cent.

Sociologically the "Express" is the most interesting paper of all. Its biggest penetration is among the lower middle class, 41 per cent. But its permeation of the classes is remarkably even. Its lowest percentage is among the poorest people from £12 a week downwards; but even here it has 30 per cent of the readership. It is the closest thing to a classless or all-class newspaper we have in the daily field. But all popular newspapers are, or aspire to be, classless.

Let us look at the other end of the newspaper scale. While 47 per cent of the members of "skilled worker" families are reading the "Mirror", 33 per cent the "Express", 17 per cent the "Mail" and 17 per cent the "Herald", only 1 per cent are reading "The Times" and "The Guardian" and 4 per cent the in-between paper, the "Telegraph". So the idea that there are multitudes of people who are serious students of public affairs isn't terribly true. They are a tiny minority.

A Wide Audience

What about the poorest people in the country? They are vital to all popular papers because of the numbers involved. The "Mirror" has got 5 millions of these readers, the "Express" nearly 4 millions, and the "Mail" and the "Herald" around 2 millions. So this is the task that the popular newspapers are faced with: to be genuinely popular, to provide newspapers which can be read and enjoyed by people of all social classes, and of all grades of intelligence above sheer illiteracy. What has this got to do with the effects of newspapers on public opinion? My answer is that it has everything. The editors of "The Times" and "The Guardian" can assume that their readers form a homogeneous group. "The Times" has nearly a million readers—not purchasers—and over two-thirds of these are middle class; "The Guardian" has about the same proportion. The editors of these papers can assume that their audiences are pretty well educated even if they are not all very well and expensively educated. No such luxury is known to the editors of popular papers. Most of their readers left school at the age of 14. Many of them were in the lower streams at school. Quite a number of them are living on miserable incomes and in poor houses. Yet at the other end, quite a lot of them are well educated and pretty well to do. The problem is: what kind of a paper do you produce for an audience as wide as that? You haven't got the luxury the B.B.C. has of dividing up into light, home and third—you've got one programme and it requires enormous skill to do this kind of thing successfully.

When we come to the question of public opinion and the newspapers, we come up against a wall of ignorance. We do not know scientifically very much about the ways in which newspaper readers vote. The two Labour papers, the "Mirror" and the "Herald", have got 16½ million readers today who had reached the age of 24 in 1961, and so they must have been qualified to vote in the last election. The non-Labour papers, the "Express", the "Mail", the "Sketch" and the "Telegraph", have a total of 24 millions. As the votes at the election were almost evenly divided, one assumes that many Labour voters habitually read Conservative papers and it is quite possible that some readers of Labour papers vote Conservative. We are on uncertain ground; but I think that Fleet Street would take the view that people don't positively and wilfully buy newspapers which outrage their political opinions. What we have always to remember is that some people don't have very strong political opinions at all.

Practically everybody who can walk goes to the polls at a general election today, and there they have to make a black and white choice. But I think it would be nonsense to say that all the Labour people are a hundred per cent Labour and all the Conservative people a hundred per cent Conservative. If, instead of being asked to cast a vote black or white, they were invited to provide an appreciation index of their feelings about the parties, there would not be very many people who would give a hundred marks to one party and nil to the other. Quite a few people might give 51 per cent to one party and 49 per cent to the other. Such people are not likely to be politically outraged by a newspaper unless it is very one-sided.

The popular newspaper today is a real mass medium, facing the tremendously difficult problem of being interesting on two levels, of not rebuffing people at either end of the social scale who have many unshared tastes and experiences. This is a problem which hardly any other newspapers in the world have to face.

When you compare British newspapers to other newspapers, to the disadvantage of British newspapers, or allege, as Aneurin Bevan used to, that we are the most prostituted press in the world, I think that this fact must be borne in mind. The popular newspapers have been described as a federation of minorities and the first instinct of those who conduct such newspapers must be to keep the federation intact. This does not make for the strongest individual editing since what may move one minority of readers may leave the rest cold, or even antagonise them. Moreover, the kind of thing which moves one newspaper to indignation such as, say, Mr. Khrushchev's bomb tests, moves every other paper too. In these circumstances there is a tendency for newspapers to reflect public opinion and when they lead it, to do so along the path which public opinion is eager or ready to take. The press, I think, may stimulate the laggards and encourage the doubters, but I do not think that a newspaper alone can turn its readers away from one path and towards a contrary one, unless the issues are very delicately balanced.

A Double Morality

At this point I would like to say that all newspapers in this country have opposed racial discrimination—some with more energy than others, it is true—but none of them has tried to foment race hatred. It would have been the easiest thing to do. My own feeling is—and I think all journalists would share it—that most newspaper readers are more racially prejudiced than the newspapers themselves are. There is another thing we have to bear in mind: on all moral subjects in this country there is a double morality—people will talk one way in a public house and another way when they are confronted with real problems or when they are appealed to on a different level. They may be all for flogging or for hanging, but not, as a rule, when it is a lad in their street who is in trouble and they are confronted with reality. Nor do they maintain this tough line when they are discussing privately with somebody of a different point of view, but whose moral outlook they respect. What evidence we have suggests that the ordinary readers want their newspapers to take a high-minded view even if they sometimes find it too high for personal acceptance. They may not hold with religion, but they do not expect a parson to be on the side of sin. We have found in our reader research at the "Daily Herald" that even those readers who say the paper has rather more politics than they can bear, will not agree that it should have less. Politics is something they like to have around, perhaps like the church at the end of the street. It's a sign that they are reading a serious newspaper. There is something to this—they may not want the political items very often, but they like to have them available for the days when they are feeling politically interested.

IV. The Press and the Public

When we ask what the effect of the press on public opinion is, we do not know. As far as I am aware there has been no sustained scientific attempt to measure the changes in public opinion caused by newspaper campaigns or by sustained propaganda over a period. I myself doubt very much whether such changes are measurable, because I don't see how you can isolate the influences of the press from other influences which are at work on the reader. Here we are in the realm of impression and anyone's personal opinions are as good as anyone else's. We have a very good idea in the industry about what interests people, but we don't know what a newspaper does to change opinion. The crude evidence is rather negative, rather unflattering to us. We can never forget that the first Labour government won office in 1924 when it had only one newspaper supporting it and the rest of the press against it. That newspaper was the "Daily Herald", and it did not have a circulation of more than 300,000. In fact, the Labour vote in this country was built up in the face of a tremendously anti-Labour press. In those days the newspapers were much more political and much sharper towards their opponents than they are today. They had smaller readerships and so there was homogeneity and a closer link between the editor and his readers. They could still presume in the early twenties, I think, that the readers were rather like-minded people. I myself suspect the Labour voter in those days did not see a daily newspaper regularly and so was immune from a great deal of anti-Labour propaganda.

Another hint of the gap between public opinion and the newspaper comes from America, where it is notorious that in the days of repeated Roosevelt victories, the Democrats always had a minority of the press on their side. We have some very curious experiences in recent years of the indifference of the reading public to the politics of the newspaper they take. A few years before it disappeared, the Liberal, nonconformist "News Chronicle" swallowed the "Daily Dispatch", which was a typical traditional Tory paper, published by Kemsley's in Manchester, and for historic reasons had a rather large Roman Catholic readership. Now I cannot think of two popular newspapers as far apart spiritually as the "Dispatch" and the "News Chronicle" were. Yet the "News Chronicle" kept a pretty good proportion of those Dispatch readers until it merged with the "Daily Mail". The "News Chronicle—Daily Dispatch" merger aroused little cynicism because it took place in the far north, behind our backs as it were. But people were morally shocked by the merger of the "News Chronicle" with the "Daily Mail": the old radical sheet with the organ of the old Tory imperialists. But only a minority of "News Chronicle" readers were shocked.

Mergers

The technique when you have a merger is simply to deliver to the regular customer the paper which has swallowed up the other. As a rule it sticks. The majority of the people who had a "Daily Mail" delivered to them one morning instead of the "News Chronicle" did not rush out to change it. Probably half of them are still taking the "Mail". Now, what explains this behaviour? I think that by 1960 the traditional images of those newspapers did not conform to the reality, that in 1960 the "News Chronicle" was not all that radical and the "Daily Mail" no longer an old Tory paper, but the apostle of the new Conservatism which seeks to be all things to all men. And what other choice was there? Some of the stouter radicals came over to the "Daily Herald" but the "News Chronicle" folded up the day after we began re-organising the "Daily Herald", when it was still suffering from a recent aberration in which it had been experimenting unsuccessfully with vigorous tabloid techniques not to the taste of the "News Chronicle" reader. The "Herald" revolution began with the death of the "News Chronicle". If the merger had happened six months later, I think a far larger number of "News Chronicle" readers would have come over to the "Daily Herald". Quite a lot of them did, perhaps 70,000-80,000. These were very keen radicals. Each week a few come over, and it is seldom that anybody leaves, though they are tried rather hard when there is a by-election and the "Daily Herald" makes it clear that it has a preference for the Labour candidate over the Liberal candidate. This was the tragedy of the death of the "News Chronicle": a considerable political party was deprived of its popular organ. Of course, some "News Chronicle" readers have gone to "The Guardian" but these had to be people who could appreciate a paper on a different level from that on which the "News Chronicle" and the popular papers operate.

Before this lecture I asked the Social Surveys, better known as the Gallup Poll, what they know about newspaper influences and they said that they have not gone deeply into the question, though they have covered it fairly extensively. What they say is that, to a considerable extent, people throw in their lot with a party and with a newspaper which speaks in the interests of that party. Let us look at one of their investigations. If Gallup asks a question: do you approve or disapprove of Britain's applying to join the Common Market?, they get very different answers from the ones they get if they ask: do you approve or disapprove of the Government's decision to apply for membership of the Common Market? In fact, they did ask a question which brought in the government and "Daily Herald" readers. Though the "Herald" had campaigned in favour of the Common Market, only 38 per cent of its readers were in favour and 25 per cent were against. Moreover 37 per cent of these well instructed, well informed readers pretended that they did not know. Now the "Daily Mirror" by curious coincidence ran a pro-Common Market campaign too and of their readers 46 per cent approved, 15 per cent disapproved and 39 per cent did not know. If there's a newspaper which has campaigned against the Common Market with much greater vigour than the "Herald" and the "Mirror" campaigned

for it, it is the "Daily Express". But on this Gallup Poll, 45 per cent of "Daily Express" readers were for it, only 29 per cent were against it, and 36 per cent did not know. It is an extraordinary thing how much social class enters into the views on a sophisticated subject of this kind. Of the well-to-do and the middle class 61 per cent are for it, 19 per cent are against it. Of the lower middle class only 43 per cent are for and 21 per cent against. And of the very poor 26 per cent for and 18 per cent against. It is, of course, a complex question. I think I prefer Claude Cockburn's own private poll on this, in which he found that 20 per cent of the members of all parties were for the Common Market, 20 per cent were against it and 100 per cent were agreed that the evidence was not sufficient for anybody to make up their mind.

Communicating

One of the interesting things that Gallup point out is that there is a serious problem of communication. Newspapers cannot influence opinion unless they can communicate facts. But Gallup find that only one person in three is correctly informed about Britain's current position in relation to EFTA and the Common Market. Not surprising, but there it is. This is by no means uncommon. Last year, only one voter in three was correctly informed about the respective attitudes of Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Cousins at the Labour Party Conference. Now that was not a very complex subject. Not only have the newspapers failed to communicate. So have TV and radio and agents of political propaganda, orthodox Party agents, Trade Union agents—they have also failed at it too. Why? Why have we failed? Why haven't we got it across? Are our techniques wrong? Is the mass of the public invincibly ignorant, or is it indifferent? I don't think that our techniques are wrong in television, radio, or in popular newspapers. Popular newspapers are sharp and lucid and they are simple. If anything, they are to be accused of over-simplifying issues, not of making them difficult or obscure. But there is one fact which Dr. Trenaman discovered in his researches into radio listening, that there is about 40 per cent of the public who resist anything which is overtly informational or educational. They flee from it. Newspaper researchers would say their findings correspond with this. I have a friend who was the news editor of a popular Sunday newspaper which doesn't go in very much for politics, and sometimes they feel obliged to give a political story. He said that no matter what they do with it, dress it up, make it look dramatic, make it look exciting, put a picture of a pretty girl in the midst of it—no matter what they do with it, their readers will sniff it out and read all the way round it. So what Gallup says doesn't surprise me at all.

Content and Choice

One thing that we do know something about scientifically in Fleet Street is what people read in a newspaper, or in the popular newspapers. The content of newspapers can be divided into news and features—non news—and sport. News has the highest readership. On average about 43 per cent to 48 per cent of people who read the paper will read completely and right

to the end, the main or second news story on any given page. The features are read on average by 36 per cent and sport by men—men alone—on average about 58 per cent. This roughly applies to the readership of the "Mail", "Herald", "News Chronicle" (when it was alive), "Express" and "Mirror". Their readers all behave in more or less the same way. The type of story which often comes highest is court news, crime and accident news. So as a result of all this splendid scientific research journalists have been made aware that a short, sexy crime prominently displayed on the right hand side of page one will attract a higher readership than a learned article on the Common Market on page nine! It has confirmed us, I am afraid, in our judgments about humanity.

Now, the lowest readership is for foreign affairs and Party politics. I think this needs to be explained rather carefully. When, say, Tshombe invades or Tshombe is invaded, that's an active news story with which people are concerned. But when foreign affairs means speculation as to whether Dr. Adenauer is going to get 26 per cent of the vote, or 28 per cent; or those diplomatic stories full of 'ifs and buts', 'it's assumed in certain quarters'—that's the kind of thing they can't stand. And to say they are not keen on politics does not mean that people will not read, say, about the Immigration Bill or about social security changes, or anything like that. Politics means rows between Frank Cousins and Gaitskell, or about who is the coming man in the Tory party, Macleod or Butler. This kind of issue, especially when it is presented as a clash of political philosophies, has a very low readership indeed. The main news story, the splash, on which so much thought and attention is lavished every night, is not always the highest read. It's the second front page news story, the one which in the "Mail" and "Express" you will find on the right hand side of the page very frequently, that gets the highest readership. It's got no national importance as a rule, but it has got universal interest and it's brief and lively. In the "Mirror", letters to the Editor get up to 59 per cent. The leader columns of popular newspapers are remarkably well read, even though they are sometimes political. That's because people like controversy, and leaders are usually controversial; anything from 31 per cent to 43 per cent read them. This applies to the "Express", the "Mail", the "Herald" and the "Mirror". Gossip columns—Hickey, Tanfield, Fielding and so forth—35 per cent to 45 per cent; women's features, 50 per cent of women and a few curious men.

Now what about the cultural features? I think this is extremely interesting. The "Express" and the "Mirror" have readerships of over 14 million and the "Herald" 5 million. Films get normally 25 per cent to 35 per cent of the readership. Films are terribly well written about today. I don't think there is a newspaper which doesn't have very good quality film criticism. Theatre criticism gets 27 per cent. Book reviews get 27 per cent. The book-a-day feature in the "Herald" gets well over a million readers; gardening 25 per cent; City columns about 21 per cent. Those figures are extremely interesting. I don't know that they have been given in public before. What do they show? That there is a sizeable minority of readers

of popular papers and thus a sizeable minority of the adult population which thoroughly reads the serious items. But the majority of readers do not read these items thoroughly or do not read them at all.

British newspapers, by keeping their selling prices low and giving a limited amount of news about public affairs, have collected vast readerships among people who would not have been readers if newspapers had charged more for their product and had carried a larger amount of more serious news.

Yet there is a feeling in Fleet Street that more readers are interested in the serious side of popular newspapers than ever before. And these newspapers do in fact deal more expertly with the serious news than they did in the years just before the war.

Their critics may suppose they are a good way behind their readers. My view is that they are a little ahead on most days and in periods when there is a copious flow of serious news, they are far ahead.

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