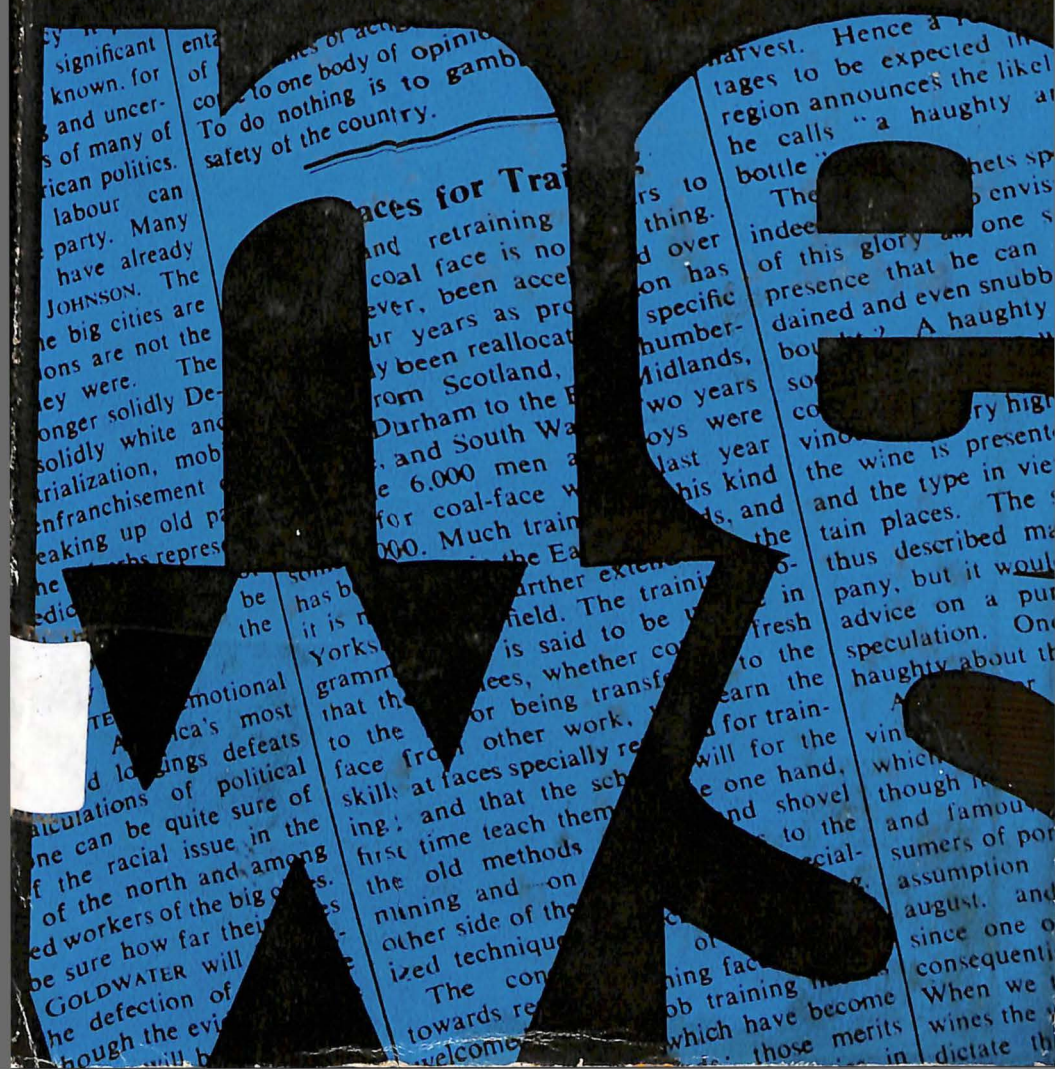


The Press in modern society

Robert Hornby

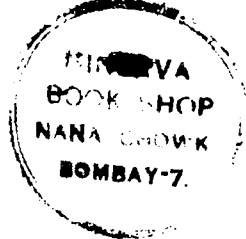


The British Press has been brought into sharp focus in recent years, but although much has been aired and two Royal Commissions have reported on the profession since the war, the layman still knows comparatively little about this responsible branch of society.

What is the Press ? How big is it ? Do journalists spend all their time in pubs ? Does it matter what the Press says ? Is the journalist a craftsman or a paid hack who writes to his employers' direction ? There are many actions by newspapers that offend ; are these really necessary and what can be done to prevent them ?

Colonel Hornby answers these and many other questions and explains the pressures of a newspaperman's life. He also fully explains the work of many journalists whose existence is often unknown to the general public, such as the sub editors and those who work for news agencies at home and overseas.

For those who find themselves having to deal with the Press in the course of business, or who merely feel that the newspaper world is something they should know more about, this book will be of invaluable assistance.



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Modern Society*

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by

ROBERT HORNBY

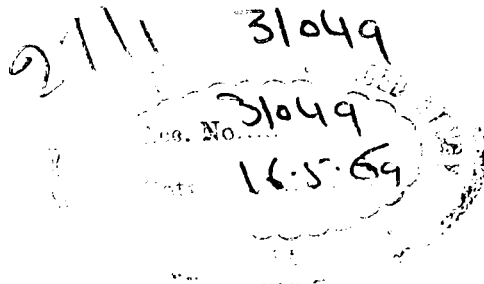
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Preface

AS AN ARMY officer I found that sudden postings were often connected with a current crisis being reported at the time. One was very conscious of the press, therefore, but in a rather hostile way. It was a topic for conversation in the mess, but seldom did anyone put in a good word for the journalist, despite the distinguished records of many correspondents which were freely acknowledged by those who had served alongside them during the war. My reaction to the press was much the same until one day, through a succession of events, I found myself in 1948 sitting at the feet of the late John McCulloch, an ex-News-Editor of the Exchange Telegraph Company Ltd., then Chief Press Officer at the War Office. I had entered a new world and found it intensely interesting. There was then an enormous gap between journalists and the world in which I had moved previously; few of my brother officers had a notion about how the press worked and little or no inclination to find out. The press was a nuisance, to be tolerated if it kept to itself and produced the morning paper, but not to be encouraged to poke into service affairs. This attitude was not uncommon amongst many civil servants then working in the War Office and to a lesser degree perhaps amongst members of Embassy staffs and the average English

"community" overseas, as I was later to find out. It was noticeable, for example, that many senior officials who appeared to have some responsibility for informing the public of their policies, and therefore to make themselves available to the press for questioning, were unsympathetic to say the least.

Since those early post-war days there has been an improvement in the press relations of the Services and of many Government departments, but it has always appeared to be a rather uneasy relationship depending largely upon the confidence which has been placed in the public relations officers concerned, both by the official side and the press. The inherent fear of the press and its methods of disclosure, however, has resulted in the proliferation of public relations officers since the war. Many of these have been ordinary career officers who have been put into public relations appointments without training and without much inclination, briefed to act as a buffer between the press and those in authority. In this way the worst of both worlds has been achieved. If the public relations officer was discarded altogether, then direct contact between the press and the official would come about more often, possibly to the advantage of both. If the public relations officer system is maintained, but without using people with professional training, then the journalist finds himself blocked and unable to get the answers he wants. Contact is reduced to the minimum. Friction and mutual dislike become the order of the day.

There has been grave concern about the press, sufficient disquiet to have caused two Royal Commissions to report since the war, the first in 1949 and the latest, after

a two-year period of investigation, in 1962. The two Commissions performed a herculean task, amassing details about every aspect of newspaper production, and it should perhaps be noted by those who are critical of the way the press seek information that when it came to disclosing information about itself the press was very open and forthcoming. The evidence given by proprietors, journalists, trade unions, and managements generally is frank and full. Some newspapers allowed themselves to be subjected to detailed investigations by outside business efficiency experts. Facts and figures abound in both reports and the details of ownership are recorded for every newspaper published in the country. It is all there for anyone to read, and I have drawn freely from both reports.

The 1962 Report was concerned basically with the problem of monopoly and amalgamations, but also covered many of the questions asked by members of the public: how big is the press, how influential, and is it becoming dangerous; if so, how and why? And above all, why do newspapers behave as they do sometimes, why all this sensationalism and so much concentration on what appears to be unhelpful and sordid? Why indeed does the press cause so much trouble when so many things which are publicised could well be left alone? All of us from time to time have heard complaints like this about the press, sometimes in anger, sometimes more in sorrow than anger, but always with only a veiled hostility towards the journalist himself who seems to be the nigger in the woodpile. This book, therefore, is concerned more with the journalist than with newspapers because, knowing many journalists

over the years their public image often seems so divergent from what one really knows of them as people, fulfilling as they do a difficult and vital role in our democratic way of life. The general public sees only the end product of their labours, the daily or weekly newspaper. In the succeeding chapters an attempt has been made to show something of what goes on behind the scenes and why some of the activities of journalists cause the pain and hurt they appear to do, resulting in enquiries such as the Radcliffe Tribunal following the Vassall affair and the imprisonment of two journalists, which has been taken as the starting-point for a discussion of the work of the press and the part played by the journalist himself.

This book is certainly not a critique of the press as a whole, because I am hardly qualified to make one, pretending to no direct experience of journalism myself and writing solely as an interested observer who has had the opportunity of knowing a great many journalists under a variety of circumstances. This has also made it possible to write without any feelings of obligation to past or present employers; where I have been critical of some journalistic practices I hope that for those for whom the cap fits, there will also be a regard for the fact that I have been equally critical of many members of the establishment. It may be, however, that those who succeed in reading this book will feel I have been altogether too sympathetic to the press and have painted far too rosy a picture. This may be so, but my experience, such as it is, leads me to conclude that the press is grossly maligned by certain sections of society and the journalist is often treated as an outcast; much needs to

be done to redress the balance. The press itself will say, no doubt, that it needs no advocate. Many distinguished journalists are themselves prominent critics of their own profession. I hope that those who have more knowledge of the inner workings of the press than I have, and feel they are in some way sinister and need exposing, will put another point of view. Nothing but good can result from a freer exchange of information and the removal of some of the mystique of Fleet Street.

In deciding how much to try and cover in a book like this (which is meant to act as some sort of practical guide for the layman) I was guided by the principle of writing only about those press matters in which I have had personal experience as a result of the various appointments I have held over the past sixteen years, all of which have entailed constant contact with the press. I know little or nothing about the management of newspapers, the difficulties of production from the mechanical point of view, or trade union disputes which form a large part of the context of both the Reports. Those whose interest lies in the field of industrial relations will find plenty to read in the latest Report and in the Summaries of Evidence.¹ There is criticism of the efficiency of production implied in the 1962 Report which does not seem to have been denied, and of course this must have a bearing on the work of the journalist himself. Where this has been obvious and I have had to make references to both management and to the trade unions, my researches are based largely on the findings of the

¹ Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations, paras. 24-27: Report of The Royal Commission on the Press, 1962 (Cmnd. 1811).

reports and not on personal experience. In this respect I have deviated from the principle of writing from experience. It is more than likely that many of my deductions are wrong, and I shall be glad to be corrected. At the moment the journalistic side of the industry is submerged in the general image conjured up by that derogatory phrase "the gentlemen of the press". If at the end of this book the reader begins to think of the journalist as he might of the scientist, or the doctor, or indeed of any of the professions where it is the integrity of the individual that gives the image of the profession as a whole, then it is hoped that it may have served a useful, if modest, purpose.

In order to distinguish between the mass circulation press and those newspapers appealing to a minority readership, the expressions the *quality* press and the *popular* press have been used following the nomenclature used in the reports of the Royal Commissions. The implication however that the quality press has a monopoly of those journalists who might be expected to produce material of a high quality, and conversely that the popular press employs journalists of a lower calibre, is utterly refuted, as it is of course quite untrue. No one supposes, for example, that those manufacturing a popular car employ engineers or designers of less merit than those making quality cars—the difference is in the design of the cars to meet the different consumer demands; the skills required are much the same, though some might say that those operating in a more highly competitive market have to exercise more imagination and dash than those in a secured one. Both the Royal Commissions use these distinguishing terms and explain

in a footnote¹ that: "the significant difference between the quality and the popular newspaper is that while the quality publisher aims at serving those who want full information on a wide range of public matters, and who are prepared to devote time to reading it, the popular publisher aims his product at those who want their news presented in a more summary way and with more illustration". In Fleet Street the jargon for what the Royal Commission terms quality newspapers is the "heavies", not a bad definition and one that avoids the connotation attached to the word *quality* for those journalists who find themselves working in the so-called popular press.

I am indebted to many friends in Fleet Street for their help and their criticisms of parts of this book, and for the help given to me in preparing two previous pamphlets on the press, which in turn have provided me with the background for some of the chapters in this book. In the chapter on foreign correspondents I have based my remarks on the experience of working with representatives of most of the world's press, in Paris, Singapore, Hong Kong and the Far East generally; in East Africa, mainly Nairobi, where from time to time there was an influx of foreign correspondents; and during the period I was the official Military Spokesman at the British Embassy in Cairo from 1951 to 1953, covering the period of the abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, the burning down of Cairo on "black Saturday", and the *coup d'état* by Colonel Nasser. During this period, in conjunction with a Foreign

¹ Report of The Royal Commission on the Press, 1962, p. 12, note 6.

Office spokesman, I presided at 175 press conferences held on successive days, and was thus able to observe at first hand how the journalist went about his business, often at considerable risk, to get stories to be read later in the calm seclusion of British homes, far from the rioting and tensions of the Middle East. Many of the friendships I made then have continued to this day; some of the foreign correspondents who were there have since died or have been killed; others have left journalism altogether; one, Alan Whicker, is known to many as one of the "Tonight" team; another, James Holburn, now editor of the *Glasgow Herald*, was then a foreign correspondent of *The Times*. Colin Reid of the *Daily Telegraph*, the doyen of the Cairo foreign correspondents, has retired. Sefton Delmer no longer roams the world. The casualty rate is high in Fleet Street and perhaps that is the reason why the friendship of a journalist is something which is not to be treated lightly and once given is rarely broken. I have reason to be grateful for many kindnesses shown to me by journalists of every sort; I hope this book will in some way acknowledge my debt to them and help toward a greater understanding.

Stephen Ward and All That

THERE IS little doubt that the handling by the press of the Vassall and Profumo affairs shocked a large number of hitherto placid readers of daily sensationalism. The findings of the Radcliffe Tribunal over the Vassall case revealed Fleet Street practices in reporting news and interviewing people which came as a shock to many lay readers, as did its conclusions that a good deal of what the press had been saying was inaccurate or misleading, and that some stories were virtually without foundation.¹ The sensational treatment of the Ward case and the detailed reporting of every sordid incident in some newspapers did nothing to improve the image of the press revealed by the Radcliffe Tribunal. The public were later presented with the spectacle of Mr. Alastair Hetherington, the editor of the *Guardian*, and Mr. Cecil King, the proprietor of the largest group of newspapers and magazines in the country, which includes the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*, abusing each other for the particular treatment of the Ward trial in their respective papers. At the meeting of the Institute of Journalists held in September of that year, 1963, the President, Mr. H. H. Hayman, said:²

¹ See article by Lord Shawcross in *The Press and the People*, 10th Annual Report of the Press Council, November 1963.

² As reported in the *Guardian*, September 4th, 1963.

"Relations between the public and the press had probably never been as bad as they had in recent months. The freedom of the press was in danger because the deterioration in relations could lead to an easy passage for controls."

The blame for this state of affairs must be shared by both the general public and the press. The British public are "amongst the most avid newspaper readers in the world" (Lord Francis Williams' calculation is that "per head of population the British read twice as many of their newspapers as the Americans"¹), yet the average person cares little how this industry puts a newspaper on the breakfast tables of the nation every morning, without fail, nor much about the people who work in it. In this the British reading public is unlike its American counterpart; for example, there the journalist is rated high and his work considered important, something everybody should know about. The contrast between the status of the journalist in these two countries is marked. Naturally a distinction must be drawn between the attitude of the better educated public to the "quality" newspapers and their staffs, and to the "popular" press, with its mass circulations that create a sensational treatment of even the dullest of news. Nevertheless the findings of the Royal Commissions give some justification to the remarks made by the President of the Institute of Journalists.

A reason for the state of affairs that existed then may be that although the press as a whole could hardly have

¹ *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), page 1.

been more co-operative in giving detailed information about itself to the Royal Commissions, in particular in the Report of the Royal Commission of 1962, little of this ever reached the general public, who relied on the press to give them the information contained in the Royal Commission Reports. Therein lies the paradox. The press felt under no obligation to foist a mass of detailed evidence on to the public unless it was convinced their readers would find it interesting. The Report of the Royal Commission on the Press, however, was no Denning Report.

It is true that in 1961 there was a spirited debate on the press in the House of Lords in which the then Primate of All England, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher (now Lord Fisher of Lambeth), played a prominent part. A number of criticisms were made, suitably sandwiched between layers of protective flattery, by any of those peers present who felt that they might one day be the subject of press interest. The debate as reported, however, produced just sufficient confusion by way of criticism and praise to leave the general reader as ignorant about the press as he had been before the debate. One constructive step was taken—the elimination of spite from the gossip columns. The credit for this must go to Lord Fisher of Lambeth and to William Hardcastle, then editor of the *Daily Mail*. In a speech that contained some of the old resentments against the way the press handled ecclesiastical matters, with a more sympathetic approach to the problems of reporters, if not their proprietors and editors, the Primate finished by appealing to editors to come out from behind their desks and face the public: "Who are the faceless ones?" he asked. The answer was

given the next day by a newspaper which produced photographs and names of the editors of the day, unkindly referred to by some as the rogues' gallery. Granada T.V. went further and arranged the first ever gathering of some editors before T.V. cameras to answer the various charges which had been made during the Lords' debate. It is to the credit of the *Daily Mail* that its editor did not try to defend himself, although he defended his staff, against the charges made against him over the gossip column and, what is more, said something would be done. Something was done and gradually the worst excesses at least in the gossip column type of reporting were eliminated. Other papers followed suit, but not much else happened.

In the same year, 1961, Parliament, alarmed by the demise of the daily newspaper the *News Chronicle*, and the evening paper from the same stable, the *Star*, and disturbed by the take-over of Odhams Press (which included the *People* and the *Daily Herald*) by the *Daily Mirror/Sunday Pictorial* Group,¹ set up a new Royal Commission to go into the whole question of monopolies and amalgamations by examining "the economic and financial factors affecting the production and sale of newspapers, magazines and other periodicals in the United Kingdom"; and "to consider whether these factors tend to diminish diversity of ownership and control or the number or variety of such publications, having regard to the importance, in the public interest, of the accurate presentation of news and the free expression of opinion". This was subsequently debated in the House of Lords in May 1963. A significant point was made

¹ Now the International Publishing Corporation.

during this debate by Lord Francis Williams in reference to the 1949 Royal Commission. Quoting from the two reports in order of publication, he showed plainly how little was really known about the *economic* affairs of the press by the distinguished members of the 1949 Commission. The relevant paragraph quoted by Lord Francis Williams from the 1949 Report said that :

“There had been between 1921 and 1948 a marked tendency away from the previous concentration of ownership in the National Press and it saw no reason to expect a reversal of this tendency and a fresh bout of concentration.”

The 1962 Royal Commission, however, had this to say :

“Taking all the dailies together, it is clear that the extent of concentration has been substantially increased since the Report of the 1949 Commission. The three leading undertakings controlled 67 per cent. of the total circulation in 1961 against 45 per cent. in 1948.”

Here was not the sort of misjudgment that one expected from a Royal Commission.

Similarly those persons in the country whose actions in one way or another make news are bewildered by the way in which their statements and speeches are treated by the press. The weariness felt by many people because so much that is worth while is never reported, whereas so much that is sordid or sensational appears to be meat and drink to the press, is very real indeed. The Radcliffe Tribunal did nothing to allay the feelings of this section of the public that all was not well within

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the press and, despite a natural wave of sympathy for the two reporters—Mulholland and Foster—against whom proceedings were taken in the High Court, resulting in imprisonment for refusing to disclose the source of their information in the Vassall case, the feeling of general hostility towards the “reporter” hardened. Journalists felt this and were momentarily disheartened, but since then have been able to throw back into the teeth of their critics a good many of the criticisms made at the time.

Many newspapers have pointed out how much the public owes to them as the “watch dogs” of the nation; underlining that even if some of the stories published about the scandals of 1963 were not entirely accurate, they were sufficient to open up the whole question of morality in public life in this country and to provide a platform for the debate that has been going on intermittently ever since.

The *Sunday Telegraph* in a leader at the height of the leadership debate before Mr. Macmillan’s resignation said:

“Irresponsibility is the charge most frequently made against the press and, in recent weeks, it has been directed against those Right Wing newspapers which have found it consistent with their professional consciences to point out the deficiencies of the leadership of Mr. Macmillan. In our view”, it goes on, “the charge implies confusion between the duties of a party politician and those of a newspaper. Rightly, one of the main considerations of a politician in deciding what to do is the effect which his actions are likely to

produce in the fortunes of his party: a newspaper, on the other hand, is primarily concerned to make all the relevant information available to the public—who decides.”

A high ideal which, by and large, is attempted in many newspapers, but the attempt “to make all the relevant information available” is often unsuccessful due to the sheer necessity for speed and the limitation of space. The dilemma which faces every conscientious journalist and editor in this respect is admirably summed up in the earlier Royal Commission on the Press (Cmd 7700, para 572, page 154):

“It is a peculiarity of a newspaper that it is produced by a profession grafted on to a highly competitive industry: whatever the ideals of the profession, they can be realised only within the conditions set by the industry.”

In most of the debates which take place about the press, whether in private or public, this competitive aspect is often overlooked and rarely understood to its full extent. But it is this factor which lies behind the actions of most daily newspapers in their treatment of the news stories of the day. The circulation figures are the economic key by which their advertising value is judged, and therefore advertising revenues and working capital. An increase in circulation means more resources to employ more and better personnel, to advertise the paper and launch new ideas to attract new readers. A fall in circulation means not only a loss of revenue from the sale of the paper itself, but also in revenue from ad-

vertising. This in turn means that there are less resources available to keep up with competitors and the downward spiral can be steep; disaster in fact stalks a newspaper with a falling circulation, as can be seen from the relative proportion of revenue from sales and advertising revealed in the 1962 Report and reproduced below:

Percentage of total revenue attributable to Sales and Advertising

<i>Class of Publication</i>	<i>1960</i>	
	<i>Sales†</i>	<i>Advertising</i>
	%	%
National Mornings—Quality ...	25	73
Popular ...	54	45
National Sundays— Quality ...	21	79
Popular ...	51	46
London Evenings ...	38	61
Provincial Mornings ...	41	58
Provincial Evenings ...	37	62
Provincial Weeklies ...	21	79
General Periodicals	50	46
Trade and Technical Periodicals	21	78

† Sales revenue represents gross receipts from sales less returns and discounts. The difference between the total of sales and advertising revenue and 100 per cent. represents small items of miscellaneous income.

It is interesting to note that the quality press in this respect leans more heavily on advertising revenue than the popular press with its immense circulation.

If the popular idea of the press is that of all-powerful editors or proprietors taking major decisions in the calm seclusion of their offices, it is very far from reality. The heart of the modern newspaper is on the news side, the time factor is all-important and because the circulation figures are so vital fierce competition rules everything. The sheer size and complexity of it all must be taken into consideration too when one glibly refers to the press. In addition to the 1,235 weekly newspapers all employing journalists and often providing the basic training for new entrants, there are 45 morning, 78 evening and 15 Sunday newspapers currently on sale and more than 4,600 periodicals of every description, a figure that is tending to increase rather than decrease as is the case with some of the provincial weekly newspapers.¹

¹ The figures in this paragraph are condensed from the *Newspaper Press Directory* as at January 1964 and include figures for Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Channel Islands and the Republic of Ireland. I am grateful to the Newspaper Society for making these figures available to me.

News and Views

THERE IS a wealth of information available for any reader who wants to examine in detail the function of every journalistic post in a newspaper, and the aspiring journalist has no difficulty in finding out what he might one day have to do. But for those who have no interest in the journalist but considerable interest in the end result of his labours—the daily newspaper on the breakfast table—there appears to be a curious reaction to any suggestion that to know what goes on in a newspaper office is either important or relevant to the needs of our times.

Of all the distinctions to be made, the most important is that between “news” and “views”, and every trained journalist knows the ideal relationship between the two, which was best expressed in the centenary number of the *Manchester Guardian* in May 1921: “Comment is free, but facts are sacred.” It is true, of course, that this ideal has often been honoured in the breach more than in the observance, apart from the many border-line cases where a news story is intentionally presented through the medium of a particular writer’s mind or by a series of quotes which are used without balance. Nevertheless few newspapers fail to pay it lip service when writing about their craft and the organisation of a newspaper

tends to further it by the separation of "news" and "views". The latter includes all that part of the paper which appears to supplement the main news stories, the leaders and the feature articles, the letter columns and the reviews of books, films and plays; in all these opinion is not only legitimate but essential and the attraction of reading this part of the newspaper lies in agreeing or disagreeing with the various views which have been expressed. The more violent the views, the more violent the reaction of the average reader, and so, by using a team of skilful commentators, the editor can build up a personal relationship with the reader who will quote these opinions in pub and home until they are replaced by more in the next day's issue.

The cartoonist too plays an important part in providing a link between the news and views of the paper over any particular story. His cartoon must be topical—often more than one is drawn and discarded during the day due to late news coming in, and a cartoonist is not only an artist, often of distinction, but a news reporter and leader writer rolled into one. For the subject usually reflects some significant news item though the comment is highly personal. Feature articles, too, follow a news story. "News" is hard objective fact to be presented without bias, though naturally with an eye to the interests of a newspaper's particular readers. What may appear as news in a provincial newspaper holding a dominant position in a city, and therefore unaware of competition, will bear as little relationship in *presentation* to the same news item splashed across a national daily as a seaside revue does to a West End musical. Another criterion of news is simply that it must be

“new”, and yet so often an editor is asked to publish items that may well have appeared in other newspapers the day before or even a week before. In presenting up-to-the-minute news which is fresh and arresting a newspaper is adopting the sound basic principles to be followed in marketing any new product, and a newspaper is a new product every twenty-four hours. Newspaper editors, however, are criticised for the way in which some news is presented and for the content of many stories they claim to have news value. What then are the basic elements of a news story? They may be roughly grouped as following:

Importance: This usually means the importance of some person connected with the story, a Cabinet Minister or any well-known politician, a public figure, people who are famous or infamous, and if they have been “in the news” before, so that their names or faces are easily identifiable at a quick glance, so much the better.

Human interest: This really means an item that is interesting to many people rather than a few; the pathetic, something that causes indignation or deals with money; news of prices and gambling and robberies have always been of tremendous news value.

Topicality: A news story must be new, as has been said, but new facts about a subject of intense current interest always make news. Excitement, danger, rapid movement (such as a description of a chase by police cars), all make their appeal. It is important too that the background is easily recognised; well-known faces must also be photographed in well-known places: this will produce the maximum impact and make for easy recognition. A great deal that is trivial derives its news value

from this quality, especially in the popular press. Then there are a number of subjects which are of wide interest but on which it is difficult to obtain "hard" news all the time; for instance, that mainly concerning women—fashions (except at the Paris shows, when reporting for "hard" news about new fashions is one of the tougher assignments of Fleet Street), food, family problems, schools and so on. The pattern of most newspapers in their presentation of news stories changes little and the type of story that sells a particular newspaper becomes almost sacrosanct. The News Editor and the sub-editors follow, in fact, patterns set for them by their predecessors. An exception to this has been the increase in the amount of space given to religious matters. This has come about through the initiative of one or two editors and news editors a few years ago who took a chance by running specifically religious articles. The response was surprising. The *Daily Telegraph* over one article on the subject of the Prayer Book received so many letters from readers that they were published over several issues of the paper. Such a response is easy to gauge and encourages an editor to do more. Naturally certain quality newspapers have always numbered a large group of religious people amongst their regular readers and cater for them, but the extent to which the popular press and the provincial press has realised the intense interest of their readers in serious subjects, and has provided for them, is one of the more encouraging aspects of newspapers at the present time. In this respect the British press is ahead of the press in the U.S.A. and other countries where a subject that begins to reach this sort of depth is placed in a special "box", that is a column

occupying a regular position somewhere in the paper, usually an obscure part of it, and heavily signposted so that no reader can complain he has had to read it unwittingly. When a newspaper changes its make-up, even for a day, it gambles heavily either on getting new readers or losing some of its regulars. This sort of gambling was once done a great deal and it made for exciting times in Fleet Street. Like everything else, newspapers are now so complex that less and less scope exists for the really hard and challenging changes in presentation and content. In this respect the change of attitude to a serious and, for many newspapers, a dangerous subject like religion, and the challenge it makes, is something for which Fleet Street should rightly be given great credit. Having said that, one must immediately complete any discussion on the ingredients of a news story by reference to the stories that could be called *amusing* or *entertaining*.

In the popular press, but certainly not in every newspaper thus grouped, there has been a hangover from the Edwardian delight in the exposure of the thigh. The excited shock with which the Can-can was greeted seems to have made an indelible impression on a generation of journalists and photographers, to the extent that no woman could, at one time, ever appear in a certain type of newspaper unless she was sitting down and exposing a length of thigh: cheesecake, as it is known in most journalistic circles. This has developed so that now some of our popular dailies show a scantily dressed girl a day between them. The photographs, on the whole, are of the Beauty Queen type rather than suggestive pictures, and if those who must have a pretty under-dressed girl

to look at once a day find her in their daily newspaper, rather than having to go and snoop round Soho, then the press is probably doing little harm in this respect. Whether or not, however, it increases circulation is debatable. The *Express* newspapers, for example, both daily and Sunday, do not publish salacious material of any kind, either photographically or by the written word. The circulation of these two newspapers has certainly not suffered, in fact they both attract tremendous advertising. The circulation of the serious Sunday press has also risen by comparison with its popular competitors over recent years. Some journalists in Fleet Street, however, cannot be persuaded that virtue might have its own reward; but then who is closer to human nature—often seen at its very worst—than the journalist? So the salacious type of story and picture is likely to go on until public opinion takes a hand. When one considers the near-pornographic literature and illustrated publications which are now sold in their countless thousands by bookshops all over the country it is perhaps to the credit of the press that this particular human weakness is not exploited more. The sexual story, however, is one of the ingredients of a news story simply because it will always evoke a response from the great majority of readers, who can react to it from their own experience. It is this involuntary reaction to seeing something reported which is familiar and yet not familiar because it affects someone else, that builds up the appeal of newspapers.

The feature side of the newspaper is much easier for most people to understand. Whether the article appears in a popular or a quality newspaper, the techniques are

much the same and although the presentation of an article, the sub-headings and illustration, if any, can be highly individual, the readers of feature articles are looking for something different from the easily digested news story on the front page. The mood of reading is quieter and more reflective and it is here that the journalist is able to exercise his craft to a fuller extent, although still subject to the twin terrors of speed and "subs", of whom more later. (The big names of Fleet Street are more often associated with the feature side than the news although there are many brilliant exceptions.) Considerable resources for research and contact are placed at a feature writer's disposal by all classes of newspapers and it is through them that the serious reader is able to obtain an interpretation of the main news stories. What many readers of the quality press fail to appreciate is the high standard of *feature* writing in the popular press and also the time and research devoted to such articles that may be written well in advance of an anticipated news story, and many such articles may be kept for a suitable occasion. The sources of information open to a writer, backed by the power of his newspaper's ability to sway public opinion, are much more authoritative than many might suppose—not least in that proprietors and directors are often powerful figures in the world of affairs themselves, who garner information at all levels to pass on to their feature writers. To anyone who has attended the quasi-Government type of reception or City gathering there is wry humour to be found in watching influential men and women paying court to proprietors of newspapers whose products they would not choose to have in their houses and certainly

never read. The information they pass on, however, does not fall upon deaf ears and some of it may influence the news and feature stories of the popular press. It is the greatest miscalculation to assume, because a particular newspaper has a popular appeal and is "dressed" for its market, that, *ipso facto*, all who work for it are morons. The great leaders of our times have all avoided this mistake and daily read all the newspapers they can, Sir Winston Churchill being an outstanding example. Those who criticise most are often those to whom the popular press is almost unknown.

The *News of the World*, for example, has been criticised often for the content of its news columns. It could not be so criticised for the content of its feature articles, many written with insight and skill. This could be said for several Sundays whose general reputation is based only upon their selection of news stories. The discerning reader, therefore, will pick his way amongst the whole range of daily and Sunday newspapers, if what he seeks is the story behind the news, and is perceptive enough to realise that the best goods are not always put in the shop window.

The News Story in Print

ASSUMING THAT it is the news story, the ingredients of which have been discussed in the previous chapter, which sets the pace and from which flow the feature articles, leaders and supporting stories (although here again there can be significant exceptions to this general rule), what is the routine on the news side? It is the duty of the News Editor to keep a diary covering all forthcoming events which, in his opinion, would yield news stories and which might be used by a competitor. Also, and perhaps most important, "follow-up" stories, side roads which have formed as a result of a main news story, for reporters to pursue in connection with current news. These may cause reporters to drift into many peculiar backwaters to obtain fresh material, and if possible an angle on a story that has not been previously covered or is not known to reporters of other papers. He inspires his specialist reporters to cover any subject that might produce a news story and about which he has received information in advance, so that the paper is prepared when the story "breaks". A considerable amount of material is sent to Fleet Street with an embargo on it, i.e. that it is not to be published before a certain date and time. This can often be an important speech or document or a short news story. A clearly

marked embargo from a reputable source which is known and respected by the press will rarely be broken, except in error. The way in which so much material is held for publication with so few mistakes is a tribute to the ability of Fleet Street to keep its mouth shut when it wants to, and the efficiency of its arrangements in that it seldom loses an important story amongst the thousands of handouts and documents of all kinds which flow into every newspaper office.

Taking into account all this sort of material, and his own judgment of the way things are likely to go over a whole range of subjects, the News Editor each day puts all this news in a schedule with a provisional allotment of space for each story. How necessary this is can be judged by the fact that something like 80 per cent. of all the news and information reaching a daily newspaper, whether quality or popular, has to be discarded through sheer lack of space. In most offices there is a morning conference at which this schedule is discussed and amended in the light of information available to the editors and other heads of departments, and in the afternoon a further conference when more specific direction may be given for this or that story to be pursued. The leaders and feature articles are related to the news side and suggestions made how this or that subject might be treated. A considerable amount of initiative, however, is always left in the hands of specialist writers and leader writers, and strong personal opinions and judgments are given fairly free play. The journalist here comes into his own as an important member of our society, able to judge on the importance of an issue from an experience of many years of personal interviewing and the sifting

of thousands of words for that which is relevant and of basic public interest. Many of the articles that appear are thus highly personalised and not slavishly written to an editor's or proprietor's direction; but both with news and all other stories the final results of a journalist's labours are often in the hands of the sub-editors, who are responsible for shortening and re-writing copy until it fits into its allotted space. This system, that can be heart-breaking for a young journalist trying to get a story into his own newspaper, possibly with his name on it, operates roughly as follows.

In the sub-editors' room the actual news as it pours in from reporters and the news agencies is provisionally evaluated in terms of space and importance by a "copy taster" or a deputy chief sub-editor, and then handed to one of the team of sub-editors who re-writes or shortens it to the approximate length which has been decided upon, finally writing the headings as well—those headlines for which the reporter, who wrote the story and interviewed the person featured in it, is so often blamed when they are sensational or inaccurate. To paraphrase a hundred words or more of "copy" in two or three words is almost impossible and the shorter the story the less room for the headlines to it. Further, the sub-editor responsible knows little of what lies behind the story or any of the background, so that inadvertently in the headlines he may highlight just that aspect of the case that the reporter has probably played down for a variety of reasons, none of which can be transmitted to the sub-editor. The story, however, even re-written and shortened, has not yet seen the light of day. Everything depends on its news value set against that of other stories

from other reporters, and the news agencies which carry news to the press throughout the day and influence the sub-editor's decisions from moment to moment. An early story of moderate news value may stand a better chance of publication than a later one of the same value; but a big news story which has not been foreseen or comes in late will kill all the lesser ones, as more space is required to give it prominent treatment. From the sub-editors the revised and shortened stories go to the chief sub-editor who passes them for printing. Newspapers, in fact, are produced by the sub-editors. It is on their desks that a story, which may have taken hours of painstaking investigation and interviewing to write, or is a careful paraphrase of a long parliamentary debate, is operated on by a ruthless surgeon, so that within a few minutes it may bear little relationship to the original, though still containing the relevant facts. The degree and speed of subbing varies a great deal from newspaper to newspaper, and reporters and feature writers alike try to write to the length they think the story warrants against the news of the day as they know it. But apart from a specially commissioned signed article practically no story survives without subbing.

It will be seen, therefore, that the journalist who fills this role in a newspaper is someone who should have a good background knowledge of a wide variety of subjects and, apart from the technical skill required in getting over the principal facts of any story in the least number of words, judgment on those facts and the knowledge of where they can be checked quickly. Names, appointments, legal aspects which have been overlooked by the reporter must be noted. It follows

that here educational standards are important and some training a little more specialised than that meted out to the young journalist on the provincial paper which is the basic training ground for the aspiring journalist. The standard of most newspapers rests largely in their hands, but they are rarely brought into contact with the customer; very many people are unaware of their existence, yet to the question put so often by newspaper readers, "Why was that story published and not another perhaps more worth while?", the answer lies with the subs. In short, the sub-editors' room can make or break a newspaper, and much depends on the judgment and indeed *flair* and skill in devising telling headlines that are not an insult to the copy that follows, the development of a sixth sense for the detection of the bogus and inaccurate, a knowledge of the law of libel (although there is a further check at proof stage), and the ability to master the art of compressed simple writing and quick condensation.

If we follow a particular "story" from the reporter's notebook through the subs' room, by late afternoon it will have been passed for printing, the proofs will have been checked for libel and further cut, probably, to be fitted into the pages by the night editor. Finally, the page proof incorporating our reporter's story will be scanned for such things as accidental incongruities, or anything which seems "wrong". Here again the night editor is relying on a sixth sense based on years of experience and training. All these operations are carried out at high speed, and by 9.30 p.m. or slightly later the first editions of most papers are ready for printing. To get the paper into that form, carrying all the news

stories, feature articles, leaders, special articles and photographs, advertising, city news and the whole variety of matter that makes up a modern daily newspaper, a matter of ten or eleven hours has been allowed, although much of it may have been prepared well in advance. During the next five to six hours, say until 4.0 a.m., the news pages may be remade several times. News does not stop with the first editions; late home news and in particular foreign news continues to pour into Fleet Street through the news agencies. As this news is going to the other newspapers no one can afford to ignore it.

This late news is considered in relation to what is already appearing; if it is important lesser stories are cut or removed to make way for it, and a great deal of cutting, elimination and re-writing in summary form by the late sub-editors shape the second edition, which is being prepared as soon as the first is printing. Further editions are handled in the same way throughout the night. During the whole of this time the evaluation of news is taking place, one story balanced against another, the public interest in this or that assessed, decisions made and sometimes drastic alterations of a front page put into effect. The lead story may change, the headlines be altered and then, as the first editions of competing papers arrive in the offices, a decision made whether to follow another newspaper's story on some subject or let it go. Any newspaper that has a scoop will hold this back, if possible, until the later editions, so making it more difficult for competitors to catch up. It is, however, as a result of the edition battles that take place in the small hours of the morning in Fleet Street that errors

occur and stories are lost. Members of the establishment, having travelled home at the respectable hours of 6.0 p.m. or thereabouts the previous evening, read the paper carefully over breakfast or in the train, and take delight in proving that some report is inaccurate, caring little for those who every night of their lives go home at dawn, in order to provide them with a daily paper carrying the latest news up to 3 or 4 a.m. that morning.

The News Agencies

THE REPORTER at the door, or on the end of a telephone, or even at a press conference, is rather like the fighting soldier: he requires a number of people at base to put him there and to support his operations. Members of the public rarely see a reporter unless they are the subject of press interest, the official world only sees them at press conferences or interviews, and a large percentage are rarely seen at all. In the main these are the reporters and sub-editorial staffs of the news agencies. Certainly the extent to which the press, and through it the general public, relies upon them for the solid job of minute by minute reporting of events is little understood. All the public sees is the result, which is the news presented in a variety of ways. Journalists themselves know how much technical skill is required to produce the flow of news from the agencies, upon which they all depend at one time or another, and so have a much better understanding of their fellow journalists' capabilities. This may delude them into thinking that the general public have the same regard for journalists doing a difficult job, on the whole well and efficiently. In fact, of course, few members of the public have any knowledge about the role played in the national press by either the provincial journalists or the news agencies'

staffs, and can only judge the industry and those who work in it by superficial appearances.

To deal with the Press Association, the principal news agency in this country, or the Exchange Telegraph Co. Ltd., both of which have their offices in or near Fleet Street, is to find oneself in business with a group of highly trained men whose integrity and judgment is of the highest order. In their hands the Royal Family, the Government of the day, great industrial enterprises, the Churches and many others often place the first information of some important event, with an agreement for the time and date of release to the press. To the second of that agreed time, this information will start to appear on the teleprinters in the newspaper offices served by them. The report, or statement, will have been carefully paraphrased so that newspapers can use what they are receiving almost without changing a word if they wish, thus avoiding errors, particularly if the original material was issued in full and too long for the newspaper space available, which is nearly always the case. Entirely independent of Government direction, they are as vital to the Government of the day as any Whitehall department, for without them neither parliamentary debate nor Government action, through the publication of its reports and the statements of its ministers, would get reported with anything like the impact which results from a statement being published simultaneously by every newspaper throughout the country. Yet the final decision on what is news, what should be sent and how much space should be given to it, is the agencies' own decision. The editor's decision is final and neither monarch, nor Minister of the Crown,

industrialist nor Church leader, can cause anything to be circulated which is not viable as news. The question, "Can you trust the press?" is heard more than often. When it comes to keeping secrets those working in the news agencies can be as silent as Trappist monks. The reasons are simple. In the first place all their early training has taught them that competition is vital, and as between one journalist and another working for competitive papers, it is clearly understood that information of a confidential nature is not bandied about. Furthermore the three codes of Fleet Street are also taught early in a journalist's career and few journalists succeed if they break them and are known to do so. "On the record"—"off the record"—"background": three simple phrases under the cover of which some of the momentous news items of the post-war years have been told to editors and correspondents and, of course, the editors of the agencies. Advance information is vital if an announcement is to be put into its proper perspective and released simultaneously so that no one newspaper will get a scoop, with the resultant confusion. Naturally balance has to be maintained between the press retaining its freedom to comment and to disclose news as and where it finds it, and the acceptance of confidential information under these codes, which by implication are a restriction. The fact is, however, that where those on the official side know their business and the press trust their confidant, a great number of announcements are made in this way. More often than not, the information is restricted to the chief news editors of the agencies, and this requires of them long hours of work reading the thousands of words often contained in turgid

Government reports which have to be stripped down to get at the essential facts. Moreover, if the document is highly confidential, this work may have to be done after office hours. The responsibility for the safe keeping of such documents and all the tension which inevitably goes with handling material of this kind, where a slip might cause a panic or a sensational scoop, is borne cheerfully by these men, who are rarely recognised by any form of honour or award. Perhaps this is just as well, for the last thing in the world any journalist would accept is that in some way he is a member of the establishment. His non-membership, aggressively so, is what we mean by a free press. All the same, when the press receive so much criticism it should be remembered how journalists such as these serve the public, and if no honour comes their way, then respect might be a welcome alternative.

The Press Association is concerned primarily with the distribution of *factual news* and features, and has been serving the press since it was formed as long ago as 1868. Its terms of ownership and methods of operation are admirably set out in para. 168 *et seq.* of the Royal Commission Report 1947-49, which is worth quoting in part.

“Although in form a limited liability company, the Press Association is in effect a co-operative organisation. It has been owned since its foundation in 1868 by the provincial newspapers of the British Isles. Any company or individual owning a newspaper published in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or Eire may be a member of the company, and every member must take up a minimum number

of shares varying according to the number of papers it publishes. Proprietors of London newspapers can be shareholders only if they print their newspapers outside London. These arrangements ensure that so long as newspaper ownership itself is widely distributed, no one shareholder can obtain anything approaching a controlling interest in the company. Each year the director who has been longest in office retires and, though he is eligible for re-election, another is almost invariably appointed, so that all the shareholders have an opportunity of being elected from time to time to take part in the direction of the Association's affairs. For five years after his retirement an ex-director is a member of the Consultative Committee, a body consisting of the board of directors and five ex-directors which exists to give the directors an opportunity of discussing problems with the Association's 'elder statesmen'."

Extel, the Exchange Telegraph Company Ltd., to give it its full name, is the only national news agency independent of newspaper control. An independent company, it was formed in 1872 and its origins and present activities are clearly set out in an excellent brochure published during 1962.¹ Its first activities, and those in which it still dominates the agency business, stemmed from an agreement made with the Stock Exchange in 1872 to "circulate to its subscribers the fluctuations in the prices of its stocks and shares".

It differs from the Press Association in its twofold

¹ *Extel and its Group of Companies*, produced by Central News Ltd.

activities of catering both for newspapers, like the Press Association, and for non-newspaper interests such as the world of finance with the London Stock Exchange Service to brokers, greyhound and racing information to bookmakers; and in providing a running news service for many clubs, hotels and Government offices. We are not concerned here, however, with its non-newspaper activities. In the newspaper field it competes with the Press Association in the provision of up-to-the-minute news, for the national press and overseas agencies and the news rooms of the BBC and ITN. But the wider provincial press is the special province of the Press Association, which was formed by the press itself for this purpose.

Something has been said about the gathering of official information for release by these two agencies, but what of the run-of-the-mill news stories which they are also expected to provide? How do they get them in the first place? As in the case of the national daily and Sunday press, they too have representatives on the staff of many of the larger provincial and smaller local papers, they too deploy, throughout the provinces, their own staff reporters who work only for the agency concerned. This network is so comprehensive that if something of interest happens anywhere it will be known almost immediately.

The Press Association moreover is closely linked with Reuters, which is housed in the same building, and steadily feeds such items to it, whence they are retransmitted to the papers of the countries concerned.

A simple analogy may illustrate this side of the work. To supply the water for a large town, water is caused to

flow from many sources into a central reservoir where it is filtered in a variety of ways and then put into the main pipes. Anyone in the town can draw off this water and use it for many purposes. The same thing happens with the news provided by the news agencies. It goes to nearly every newspaper office in the country, and editors, as it were by turning on the tap, have a flow of news they can use in any way they want.

All the news transmissions, however, are carried out at speed. With the present techniques, an important story can be circulated to papers throughout the country in a matter of minutes. Between agencies such as Reuters in this country and their main offices overseas there is simultaneous communication, and through them an important news story can be transmitted by local teleprinter systems to every newspaper served by them throughout the world. It is therefore almost always too late to try and correct a story once it has been "sent". At best one can obtain a correction in a later edition of a paper, but the original impression of the reader will be formed by the first news story. Whether or not one likes this situation is beside the point; the fact is it exists, and it is up to those who "make news" to try and understand some of the techniques it is necessary to use, both to help themselves and the press in their job of reporting events as accurately and concisely as possible.¹

It is not for a non-professional such as the writer to make any comparison between these agencies. Suffice it to say that anyone who has established a *modus vivendi* with the Chief News Editors of these two agen-

¹ See *The Parish and The Local Press* (C.I.O. 1962) by the same author.

cies has at hand friends whose judgment and experience in the news field is unrivalled in Fleet Street, and through them the means of almost instant communication with all the newspapers in the country.

The Exchange Telegraph Company in its brochure refers to its full-time staff of some fifteen hundred, which includes journalists, telegraphists, electrical engineers, instrument makers, draughtsmen, businessmen, chartered accountants, chartered secretaries, printers, telephonists, drivers, and so on. Their circuits work twenty-four hours a day and carry nearly ten million words a year. No less would be the activities of the Press Association, in fact in the news field their overall organisation is considerably larger. The 1949 Report of the Royal Commission refers to a full-time staff of one hundred and sixty-five journalists in Fleet Street with some sixteen hundred correspondents scattered over the country, most of them employed on provincial weekly and daily newspapers. The figures are certainly no less today and these two agencies, employing large numbers of journalists, highly trained and many of them specialists, such as Political Correspondents, are also "the press", but very different from the popular image of it. Certainly Parliament is heavily in debt to the reporters of these two agencies. When the House is sitting, day after day their reporters work in competitive teams so that there is always one man from each agency taking down verbatim whatever is being said during a debate. When major debates are being held simultaneously in the House of Lords and the House of Commons a heavy demand is made on their resources, if one considers the length of the debates and the fact that each member's

speech has to be transcribed, condensed and phoned over to the "copy takers". From them it is immediately transmitted to the newspapers. Thus in a long and important speech such as the Budget Speech the first part of it may well be in print before the member sits down. No one reads the parliamentary reports more avidly than those who speak in Parliament, and woe betide the newspaper which misquotes them; the standard of accuracy in this reporting is high, but it is not achieved without toil and expertise. Anyone who has gone up to the press gallery following a major speech and has watched the reporters responsible checking and cross-checking their shorthand transcriptions, verifying facts or figures which have been quoted, and then paraphrasing and condensing to bring out all the essential facts, but mercifully omitting the rambling asides, and finally dictating it all in an uncomfortable telephone box, would wonder how we have managed to achieve this sort of an independent operation of Parliament that costs no one anything but without which, in order to know what was being done in the name of Parliament, we would have to read in Hansard everything said by Members in both Houses. For the release from that chore, and for the joy of being able to read at a glance the important speeches, the legislation and the business of the day in our daily newspapers, everyone should be grateful to these journalists. Let it be said at once, most of the daily press, in particular the quality press, have their own parliamentary correspondents and report speeches direct themselves, but whereas these may be seeking to write more of a critique of Parliament, the agencies are providing the texts on which comment is made.

Reuters

REUTERS LTD., a name familiar to the reader of practically any newspaper, is the main news agency whereby the British press is served with factual news of what is happening *outside* Great Britain, in the same way as it is served with news about what is happening *inside* Great Britain by the Press Association and Extel. Reuters, however, does a great deal more than that, as internationally it circulates news from this country to more than 3,000 daily newspapers all over the world, as well as providing many other forms of news service in individual countries. It is one of the principal means of news communication between one country and another, as well as between all these thousands of newspapers and our own press, both national and provincial. Reuters, too, was founded in the prolific nineteenth-century era of journalistic expansion by Julius Reuter in 1851 seeking to provide "commercial intelligence, who seven years later undertook to supply general news as well".¹ The situation today is that Reuters is jointly owned by the newspapers of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, with its headquarters in Fleet Street. Ownership is secured by a Trust Agreement

¹ The Report of The Royal Commission on the Press, 1949 (Cmnd. 7700), paras. 170 *et seq.*

entered into by the Press Association and the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, which has been extended to include the Australian Associated Press and the New Zealand Press Association. The latter are news agencies themselves in their own countries. "The purpose of the agreement is to maintain the independence and integrity of the News Service for all time."¹ Reuters distributes no profit and ploughs back year by year money to go on improving its world-wide services.

In the field of foreign news Reuters plays a dominant part. Through its main offices, scattered throughout the principal cities of the world, there is continuous communication by teleprinter. The head of each bureau has a full-time staff, often extensive, as well as locally recruited men who have contacts at every level and who keep a twenty-four-hour watch on the news in their area. This is done by watching the local press and keeping in touch with a whole range of contacts. Many of these men may well be bilingual, English of course being the common denominator. The news will be evaluated by a staff member of Reuters, re-checked for its authoritative-ness and then put on the wires. In, say, Singapore, news of some political development in Malaysia will be sent direct to the Reuter building in Fleet Street; there it will again be evaluated and checked against any other known information; then it will be put out on the teleprinter system covering the United Kingdom press and on the international circuit in those areas where the news is likely to be most interesting, so all the foreign editors of both the British and the foreign press of the world who are served by Reuters will have the informa-

¹ 1947/49 Report, para. 181.

tion which was depatched by the Singapore office, within possibly a few minutes if it is a reasonably important story. If it were sensational, say an assassination, then it takes only seconds for such a message to be flashed to nearly every newspaper in the world. Some Reuter offices also run their own distributive systems. The news from the United Kingdom which is flowing back to the Singapore office, say, on its way to Japan, Australia and New Zealand, is intercepted and retransmitted on a local Reuter circuit in Malaysia, sometimes by the use of teleprinters, sometimes by printing news sheets, often a combination of both.

The outstanding characteristic of Reuters is the devotion of its staff, and in particular of its successive General Managers, to the constant improvement of its services, so increasing the speed of its communications. All Reuters' staff work long hours, longer hours probably than most other journalists overseas, and all their offices function on a twenty-four hour basis. Throughout these hours, the Royal Commission reporting in 1949 estimated that something like half a million words a day flowed into the London office. The figure today is nearer 1,000,000. Its reputation throughout the world is such that, although entirely independent of the Government, information sent by it to any country in the world would be accepted immediately as authoritative. In moments of crisis anywhere in the world, invariably the first reports will be from the Reuters' representative. Without this basic information the Government of the day, indeed even the Services, would be severely handicapped, for when it comes to speed in communication, techniques and equipment equal that of any of the fighting

Services, and the information supplied is a good deal broader in scope than that given in Service messages.

I had the unique experience during the Suez *débâcle* of supplying the then Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, General Gruenther, with a daily "newsheet" made up of News Agency reports, as this was by far the quickest source of news of what was going on, especially as by that time the very useful prefix "U.K. eyes only" to Service messages emanating from the Suez area of operations was being used. This meant a good deal of the purely British aspect of the operation was not being seen officially by the U.S. personnel at Supreme Headquarters in Paris, hence the daily "newsheet". One was later able to check the agency reports against the "official" information. It was remarkable to see both the general accuracy of the reports, although not always in detail, and the speed of transmission in comparison with Service methods. There is a very sound explanation for this which has already been given, namely the lack of coding techniques which introduce delays, and the "man to man" relationship as between a bureau chief, say, in Washington and the duty news editor in London who can "talk" to each other on the teleprinter with no one between them. The latest equipment which has been installed by the Australian Associated Press in the Reuter building enables the London editor to have a continuous two-way conversation with Australia if he so wishes. Questions fed into the communication system will probably be answered from Australia before the transmission has been completed. It is virtually simultaneous communication; whereas Albany, the *Sunday Telegraph* columnist,

writing about the Cyprus crisis of Christmas 1963, said: "I hear urgent telegrams from the troubled island took several hours to reach the Foreign Office from the Commonwealth Relations Office. The entrances to the two buildings are less than 50 yards apart on opposite sides of the same courtyard."¹ It was not denied.

The safeguard to the British nation as a whole provided by Reuters is that little can happen, and certainly virtually nothing that affects British interests, without the British people through their own free press being informed and informed *independently* of the Government. It prevents biased interpretation for political motives which any foreign government might wish to put upon some event, although at the same time giving a foreign government the opportunity to give its views. If the number of foreign correspondents decreases, the importance of Reuters is bound to increase, as it will become in many cities and countries the *sole* source of news transmitted by a Commonwealth organisation. Thus the integrity of its staff and its General and Deputy Managers is a vital safeguard against biased reporting and Reuters being used for propaganda purposes by foreign powers. There have been three General Managers since the war, and with each Reuters have been very fortunate in having men of this calibre. Sir Christopher Chancellor, General Manager from 1944 to 1959, gave to Reuters much of the prestige and standing it now enjoys in every major country. Walton A. Cole, a human dynamo, literally died for Reuters, for it filled his whole life, and in working for it incessantly and travelling to every part of the world, leaving nothing to

¹ *Sunday Telegraph*, January 5th, 1964.

chance in ensuring that Reuters provided the finest news service in the world, he collapsed and died in his office on January 25th, 1963, after four years as General Manager. During his reign Reuters had been constantly improved from the news gathering point of view and in its technical ability to transmit at the highest possible speeds consistent with accuracy. Those who had the privilege of knowing "Tony" Cole well were given an insight into the ethos that lies behind the life of a really dedicated newspaper man. It is something which goes much deeper than the appeal of most professions, perhaps, and this applies particularly in Reuters; it is a feeling of being constantly at the centre of world events and knowing that much of what will be reported of any major event will be the result of one's own actions or non-actions. There is a feeling of immense power. This, luckily, produces also in the best of men a humility and sense of dedication, and this Tony Cole had to a marked degree. Anyone who had a really tough press problem could go to him and receive wise advice, and I suppose most of the nation's state secrets were revealed at one time or another to Cole, when a whisper in the press would have been disastrous. But such is the confidence placed in the hands of the General Manager of Reuters, who, whilst maintaining complete independence, exercises a responsible judgment of when matters should be brought to the attention of the public. There are occasions when Reuters will say "No, we do not accept the 'official' view that this or that matter should be concealed." When the Governor of Hong Kong in consultation with the military authorities in 1949 ordered the siting of anti-aircraft guns as a precaution

against low-flying Chinese Nationalist aircraft based on Formosa, who were using it as a base to harry the Chinese of Chou en-Lai that surround Hong Kong, the Reuter correspondent quite naturally checked on the story, for anyone could see the guns being constructed. Considerable pressure was brought upon Reuters to suppress this information, pressure in Hong Kong on the local correspondent, and pressure in London on the General Manager, at that time Sir Christopher Chancellor, without avail. Here was something happening in full sight of the residents of Hong Kong and presumably well known by the Chinese military intelligence—why should the only people kept in ignorance be the British themselves? And so the story was published and responsible opinion could be formed in this country of a Government action on the other side of the world.

In another context altogether, it was Tony Cole I consulted first when Archbishop Lord Fisher told me that he was proposing to visit Pope John XXIII in Rome during the course of a tour which would take him through the Holy Land, and a visit to Patriarch Athenagoras, spiritual leader of 180 million Christians of the Orthodox Church. This visit by Lord Fisher, then Archbishop of Canterbury, was of course to be the first overt action demonstrating the new desire amongst the Churches for a greater sense of unity and purpose. It was to be the first meeting between a Pope and an Archbishop of Canterbury for four hundred years. Tony Cole sized up all the relevant data within a few minutes, understood perfectly what this might mean to English Roman Catholics (who were then unaware of the proposed visit) and the importance that any reporting on it

should reveal the spiritual significance that lay behind such a move. He detached one of his senior journalists, Sydney Taylor, a practising Christian himself, who could see what was required in handling a story of this nature, and attached him to Archbishop Lord Fisher for the entire tour. Although the world's press were also covering the "story", the Reuter reports hour by hour and day by day provided the framework of factual information against a knowledgeable background, from which every newspaper could extract the *facts* of the situation as it developed and of course were free to comment.

It is this sort of service that Reuters in many other fields provides for the British public, at no cost and in no way "official". It means that as a democratic people we can have access to the facts of a situation, free to make up our minds about it and through Parliament to probe into the policies of the Government of the day, and if necessary to bring pressure through parliamentary procedure to change policies we do not like. Without the news agencies, and in particular without Reuters in the foreign field, we would have precious little information on which to base any opinions.

There is little doubt that in the hands of the new General Manager, Gerald Long, and his Deputy General Managers, all men of long experience, Reuters will continue to play a leading part in world affairs. Yet one day these men will have to be replaced. Where are the future General Managers of Reuters now? Probably amongst the three or four hundred journalists just starting their professional life on one of the provincial papers, men with their feet on the first rung of the ladder. Much

of the future of organisations such as Reuters and the other news agencies depends upon the training and experience available to these young men, and one can only be doubtful whether it is really sufficient to meet the demands likely to be made upon future senior men in the agencies and in journalism generally. Certainly much needs to be done in the training field, and one hopes that the senior executives in Reuters and elsewhere will look upon this as a major part of their responsibilities, or at least as a heritage which can be passed on to future generations of newsmen.

To sum up the work of the news agencies, therefore, one can say they provide a continual flow of news between all the major cities of our own country, and between this nation and other nations and within each nation. Little or nothing happens without a report of an event going through the hands of one of the journalists of one of the agencies. It is upon his skill, his evaluation of the news, his training and judgment, that we depend for the basic news day by day in the press and in the news bulletins on radio and television. In the age in which we live, is there any task more important than his? For until the facts are known about any situation no action can be taken by anybody, and the first information of any developing situation usually comes from the press just because of the training and skill of its journalists and the speed and efficiency of its operations. Is not the picture of the journalist in this field a very different one from the mackintosh-covered, battered felt hat figure of the imagination and perhaps *some* films?

The Editor

THE EDITOR is responsible ultimately for what appears in print in his publication. If he is the editor of a newspaper with a circulation running into millions, the possibility of an error of any kind, or an unintentional libel, passing unnoticed is highly unlikely. The editor of a quality newspaper is even less likely to escape criticism from his readers for an error of judgment or a misstatement of fact. Clearly, however, no editor of a national or provincial daily or evening newspaper has the opportunity to examine in detail every story before publication. Nevertheless editors are conscious of their responsibilities and try to meet them so far as is possible within the time limits set by the production schedule. Inevitably this has meant that in recent years, with the increase in the speed of communications of every kind, an editor has had less and less time at his disposal for any activity other than that of producing the newspaper for which he is responsible. Little wonder, therefore, that few editors are well-known public figures; nor can they spare the time to attend very many of the functions to which they are so assiduously invited by would-be publicists. The fact is editors are required more and more to be on hand to take decisions almost without ceasing during the "life" of each particular issue. Naturally

there is a good deal of variety in what different proprietors expect of their editors, but the average editor is in his office from at least eleven o'clock in the morning until late each evening. Just how late depends on many factors, but usually until the first edition is ready. That some of their luncheons may be long is true, but it is the main opportunity they have now to meet people and, not an unimportant point, possibly the last opportunity to eat until they leave the office well after the time their colleagues in other walks of life have already reached home. In the office the editor is like the captain of a ship who has to remain on the bridge for just as long as it is necessary for the safety of the ship. On rare occasions this may mean until the early hours of the morning, with another newspaper to produce the same day.

There are many stories circulated outside the press about the heavy drinking habits of journalists. Nothing could be further from the truth in the case of an editor of any significant newspaper, whether national or provincial. The short answer is that any departure from personal discipline in this respect soon brings down the best of men. A strong constitution is only one of the many requirements of a modern editor. Versatility and professional respect from fellow journalists are essential too if the editorial team is going to produce a newspaper which is lively and interesting. Many editors, particularly those of the Sunday press, for example, contribute articles for publication in their own newspapers.

The conception, therefore, of an editor as a sort of chairman or managing director of an industrial concern is to misunderstand the spirit of Fleet Street and the close relationship which exists between an editor and his

staff. The editor of an evening newspaper is even more directly involved. Both the London evening newspapers have up to eight editions during the day, enabling the editor to change the lead story that number of times if he so wishes, certainly giving him the opportunity to re-create the news columns at will. There is hardly any other industry which has this degree of flexibility in production, enabling the principal executive, in this case the editor, to put his own personal stamp on each product.

On a daily newspaper much of the news is always likely to come in late in the evening, and although every possible contingency will have been taken into account at the daily editorial conference, there comes a moment when decisions pass out of the editor's hands, and it is the night editors and sub-editors who take control and ensure that their newspaper is not going to be behind a competitor in getting and reporting the news. When the chips are down in Fleet Street and a news story starts breaking late at night there is not much time for self-examination or the cautious covering up of one's actions by seeking to shift responsibility higher up—a habit that is prevalent in many other organisations. A man has to think quickly, decide at once what to put in and what to leave out, and to get the next edition away at all costs. Inevitably it is at this point that mistakes occur. These can be brought about by all sorts of minor emergencies, but are due often to the speed at which stories have to be "subbed" to make way for late news. An editor is often unjustly accused of deliberately distorting some statement, or leaving out a vital paragraph through some personal prejudice, as though at midnight

he prowled the corridors of his offices, deleting a word here or a sentence there, when by that time this highly complex machine is in high gear, minutes are as precious as gold and the editor is probably in bed. A late news story will throw out the entire layout of several pages. Stories have to be moved or cut down to make room, changed from one page to another, and the paper remade as another edition is printed. In fact the miracle is that so little of importance is lost, and that a story still retains the vital facts even after "subbing" not once but several times. Every daily newspaper has successive editions so that the latest available news is given to its readers throughout the country. The latest editions go to press at about 4 a.m. but even between the regular editions some news flash may upset the layout of the paper causing quick alterations to be made. In all this therefore the editor himself cannot play a personal part—on hand for important decisions, yes, but personally supervising every word and every statement, no. Nor by this time of the day are the reporters or the specialist writers much involved. The paper is in the hands of a few highly skilled specialists. An editor cannot spend much time having hindsight; no sooner is Monday's newspaper published than Tuesday's news is flowing across his desk. Introspection would be fatal and there is not much time for post-mortems either.

Fortunately few editors will ignore a reasoned letter pointing out errors which have been made and invariably these are published, although no editor cares to make editorial corrections (for reasons of space as much as anything else) as this might grow into a column by itself. *The Times*, however, does carry a small paragraph

sometimes under the heading of "corrections". Too often the letters editors receive are merely abusive and quite ignorant of the problem facing reporters in getting accurate information at short notice and late at night. When a reporter does contact someone in authority (and often it is just the sort of person who writes complaining letters) there is frequently evasion, over-caution, or worse still incoherent rambling out of which a few salient facts somehow have to be extracted. Often the deductions or guesses are wrong, but does the blame always rest with the reporter?

One thing readers can be sure about is that no journalist who has not himself served in the ranks of either a national or provincial newspaper is likely to succeed to an editorial chair. It is a position held by men who have already achieved some distinction in their own field of journalism, who have proved themselves to have a shrewd judgment of men and affairs. They are not likely to be taken in by "planted" stories or the type of P.R.O. who professes to be able to manufacture an "image" of anyone or anything to order. The public interest is less likely to be served, however, by those editors upon whom commercial pressures are put to produce newspapers which are merely vehicles for carrying advertising and where every consideration is dominated by circulation figures. Here editors have to make the most difficult decisions, particularly in the popular Sunday press where the publication of the sensational story or scandalous memoir is likely to increase circulation. In the Ward affair and the subsequent Denning Report reference was made to the Keeler memoirs. It is rumoured that these were rejected by two editors of

Sunday newspapers, both in the same group, as being unfit for publication in their own journals. Inevitably, however, they were bought at a high figure and published in another newspaper, which it is reputed put on some 300,000 in circulation as a result. Inevitably newspapers appealing to this level of readership will always seek material of this nature, and in this respect Fleet Street bears a heavy responsibility for the harm which may be done to every new generation of young readers.

Finally perhaps, in discussing the role of the editor, one must ask the question, "How much can an editor today put his own personality into a paper and make his own mark?" Is it in fact in the public interest that an editor or an active proprietor should have the power to influence public opinion to the extent that is possible in a high circulation newspaper? A short answer might be that to rob a newspaper of a strong controlling hand, whether it be that of the proprietor or the editor, results in a bloodless animal that is soon overcome by its competitors. Lord Beaverbrook, who gave evidence to the Royal Commission, is quoted as saying of the *News-Chronicle*, in reply to the question "Why do you think the *News Chronicle* failed?":

"It had no management. It passed from weak management to another weak management with divided counsels. It had no will to survive."

And in response to a further question asking what he meant by a young man being able to build it up, said:

"As regards the whole organisation, the advertising side, and the circulation side, making economies,

taking advantage of situations that develop, making the paper feel the effect of vigour, drive and energy all the time. That is what makes a newspaper and the spirit of it, like many other businesses. It wanted leadership and they had no leadership." (Royal Commission on the Press, Minutes of Oral Evidence—Cmnd. 1812-2, para. 13774.)

If there were some other way of running an organisation that has to perform the tasks that are the essential lot of the press, there is little doubt that this would have been found by now. Few other industrial processes lend themselves to direct control in the same way as newspapers, nor can any other industry provide the degree of flexibility that enables this control to be exercised so easily. To lay on one side these advantages, which are open to a competitor, is to go into the ring with a hand tied behind one's back.

Furthermore the decline in the number of national or provincial newspapers cannot be in the common interest, for with the death of each one a channel of communication for some section of the community dies too. If a strong editor or proprietor, whatever his views, is the key to the production of a successful newspaper, and is able to prevent its demise, then let us have strong editors and proprietors. The problem today is clearly that through controls of one kind or another an editor or proprietor may be prevented from producing a newspaper which is financially viable and thus ceases publication, for the most successful newspapers appear to be those in which the editor is free to exercise his skills in journalism and display his powers of leadership. The

importance of the editor in our modern society is misunderstood both in the provinces and in London, and far too many people judge editors and rank and file journalists alike only on what their newspapers produce in the way of news and comment. Thus the editor of a popular tabloid catering for mass readership is himself put on the same intellectual level as his readers, and by some is seen as the sort of person one would hardly want to meet in polite society. This is unfortunate because such an editor has it within his power to influence standards and needs to be rubbing shoulders with men of similar influence in other fields. It is far more important that this type of editor should be influenced to raise the standard of his publication than the editor of *The Times*, but in the way of things it is the latter who is more often brought up against those in the country who have a concern for what appears in the press, either through correspondence in the letter columns or by personal contact. The editor of the mass circulation tabloid is left alone—except by those who have some axe to grind—to face the tremendous responsibility of influencing millions of readers and of making moral judgments almost every hour, each of which might keep a Bishop locked up in his study for a week. If the standard of our popular press is to be raised, it is the editors and the journalists we must look to for help. Before we can do that we shall have to make them understand that we do appreciate the problems they face, so that criticism may be informed and constructive. No longer will it then be just brushed aside as ill-informed and prejudiced as it is at the moment.

There is really a twofold need: first to create more

opportunities for editors and senior journalists to debate some of the criticisms made against the press; secondly to encourage dialogue between those who are trained to examine the issues raised in the publication of, say, salacious material, although not personally involved, and those for whom this is a constant anxiety. It should perhaps be more widely recognised that many journalists are so close to these problems that there is little opportunity for reflection, although a considerable desire to be true to the ideals of journalism, no matter how far from those ideals much of the results of their daily work may appear to be.

There is however no professional headquarters where such discussions might take place, and no professional journals, other than *World's Press News* and the union journals. Many editors in Fleet Street are strangers to one another. Due to the intense competition between newspapers, the tendency is for senior staffs to keep to their own groups, and personal relationships have to be watched carefully to safeguard against accusations of disloyalty. The whole ethos of Fleet Street is against this suggested form of co-operation or mutual discussion, and yet to ignore the increasing isolation of the editor, and to some extent the journalist generally, is mere wishful thinking that standards will be raised somehow without the need for concerted action.

The Foreign Correspondent

ANYONE WHO has lived for any length of time in one of the major foreign capitals, whether as a diplomat, in the services, or as a resident businessman, may well have met one of the team of foreign correspondents employed by the British press. The meeting, however, will more than likely have taken place at some social occasion. The integration of the resident foreign correspondent with the social life of the community in which he finds himself living is an accepted fact. This may seem trivial enough an observation and most journalists would shudder at the thought that to be socially acceptable was some sort of accolade, indeed many would say it was a hindrance rather than a help in their pursuit of a story. But deep down most people like to be socially acceptable, particularly wives and families, and in the much smaller English society that exists in foreign capitals one must either integrate or virtually disappear. So, unlike his colleagues in England, the foreign correspondent who is allowed to reside in a city, even for a few months in the year, and has a semi-permanent home there, will find himself accepted as very much part of the community with a wide variety of friends drawn from all walks of life and nationalities and backgrounds. It is essential that this is so, for it is upon these contacts the foreign

correspondent depends for interpretation of the news affecting the country to which he is assigned. He will be expected to master the political situation very quickly indeed, to be on terms of friendship with the Ambassadors and diplomatic staffs not only of his own country but of those countries playing a distinctive role in foreign policies, as well as having contacts at all levels; thus little will happen which will not come to his notice.

The foreign correspondent also relies on local press reports, sometimes with dire results if he has not cross-checked, and on the news agencies of England, France and America, and probably Germany and Italy too, who are all normally represented in the major capitals. Moving between all these groups, disappearing mysteriously for weeks on end and then reappearing, having been half way round the world and back again, those capitals still possessing a foreign correspondent have sometimes a romantic figure in their midst. It is a pity, therefore, that this type of resident foreign correspondent is slowly becoming extinct. The reasons are several, but money and the speed of travel are two factors.

The foreign correspondent was usually paid enough, with a generous expense allowance, to be on an equal footing with almost any of his likely acquaintances. He was, therefore, able to entertain extensively and so join in the local activities, whether sporting or social. One of the best polo players in Singapore is Stead, the resident correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Accountants, in or out of the Treasury, however, have never been persuaded of the intangible benefits of good food and drink and social entertaining in the realm of business, and within the last few years the accountants

of many newspapers have turned deaf ears upon the arguments put up to retain a foreign correspondent here or there, and claims for expenses have been looked at with increasingly raised eyebrows. Today, within twenty-four hours, it is possible for a correspondent to be in almost any major city in the world: the air fare costs less than a month's expenses, so why not keep your foreign correspondent in London with a bag packed to fly to where the news story is breaking? In any case the news agencies will keep the foreign editors fully supplied with news until "our man" gets there. So the argument has run and so a policy has been shaped of having a comparatively few key men in the important cities, relying on agency coverage for the rest and the ability to get someone to a trouble spot very quickly. Most of the Far East is now "covered" from Hong Kong, where a large press corps lives, but very much unto itself. In Singapore and Malaya (five times the size of Great Britain) there are probably not more than two or three resident foreign correspondents, and not more than one or two from the British press. Yet Hong Kong is 1,500 miles from Singapore. If a crisis occurs, of course, correspondents will fly in, but within a few days many will go back to Hong Kong—and who can blame them? *The Times* foreign correspondent, one of the most experienced in the Far East, who was in Singapore, is now in Beirut, another base like Hong Kong for the foreign correspondents of the world; New Delhi is another; and from Hong Kong, New Delhi and Beirut, practically the whole of the middle and far eastern areas are "covered".

The number of cities where foreign correspondents

are welcome, particularly British correspondents, is also declining. There is less time to stay in his own capital, and although contacts must be kept up at all costs, the leisure and the social background that enabled some of these contacts to ripen into friendships have largely gone. Gone with them too, an opportunity for many newspaper men to make lasting friendships with people from many walks of life, particularly diplomatic and service, who in the course of their careers might be of inestimable help to a newspaper in evaluating foreign news stories.

Moscow, which has almost become a "must", is the most expensive city of them all. The reaction of most editors is to say that the Moscow assignment is enough outgoing expense to have to bear; particularly as the amount of "copy" their correspondents will provide is a pretty bad bargain from a financial point of view, compared with the rest of the staff, home or overseas. The element of competition, always to be taken into account, mainly decides where, and how many, correspondents will be assigned round the world, and although the big circulation newspapers have made few, if any, reductions so far, in the long term there is less chance now for the younger journalist to find himself and his family living in one of the capitals of the world. It will be a loss both to himself and to Fleet Street and as time goes on for us all. As a nation it is imperative that we should have access to the sort of background information about other countries which the trained correspondent can provide. At the moment, many of the foreign correspondents who have been brought home and "cover" foreign news stories, as the news breaks, by flying straight from London previously have lived abroad

themselves, and therefore possess background knowledge of the countries they cover and, all-important, contacts which have been made over the years. It will not be so easy to replace these correspondents if the younger men of this sort of calibre drift to television and other media. Alan Whicker of "Tonight" fame was an experienced foreign correspondent for the Exchange Telegraph until they decided to close down their foreign coverage. James Mossman, formerly of "Panorama", was a young foreign correspondent for the Australian *Sydney Morning Herald* in Singapore in 1958 and one of the great foreign correspondents, James Cameron, now works for television as well as the *Sun*. Ralph Izzard, remembered for covering the Everest expedition for the *Daily Mail*, is another who also left the foreign correspondents field for television: the present U.K.-based foreign correspondents who have the necessary experience and contacts are not growing any younger. John Redfern, the distinguished correspondent who reports on African affairs for the *Daily Express*, is wont to describe himself as an ageing field officer of Beaverbrook's Light Horse. One might well ask, where are today's subalterns?

So much in the production of a newspaper is taken for granted by the public who read of chilling events in other countries that little thought is given to how these stories get from some remote corner of, say, North Borneo, or a stricken city, to be published in a matter of a few hours in the daily press. Correspondents, in fact, use the normal cable wireless service whenever this is in operation, but in emergencies any and every means will be tried to get a story through. Pilots of commercial

lines may be asked to carry "copy" (although strictly forbidden to do so), or the correspondent may have to get right out of a country in order to send his story to avoid censorship. Many correspondents have taken the risk of political imprisonment, and to be deported at short notice from a country which they are embarrassing by telling the truth about it is a common hazard. During the crisis in Egypt following the abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1951, many correspondents avoided censorship by using alternative means of communications, mainly by telephoning their stories from Cairo to the British Military Authorities in the Canal Zone, from where they were re-transmitted to the War Office in London and then in turn to Fleet Street. The newspapers in which the stories appeared were read by the pre-Nasser Egyptian government of the day and correspondents who did this were in constant danger of being imprisoned for violating censorship. On the day of the *coup d'état* by Nasser, the cable and wireless office was blocked by tanks and soldiers, and no correspondent could get a story through which would either have arrived in time for the next day's editions, or have borne much resemblance to the original. To a man they used all the other means of communication open to them, civil pilots, the services in the Canal Zone, or flew out themselves to send the story from Cyprus or Beirut. Every day stories sent in by foreign correspondents show how vital it is that news should not be suppressed by nations for their own political ends, particularly if censorship distorts news affecting our nation or its nationals living overseas.

It would be ridiculous, however, to represent the

foreign correspondent as a knight in shining armour, fighting for democracy in "foreign parts". As a journalist he is subjected to the same pressure of competition as his colleagues at home, much of his information has to be gathered at high speed because of this competition, and a proportion of his stories are bound to be misleading or inaccurate for this reason. Often, far too great a reliance is placed on local newspapers to provide stories for him, gossip and innuendo unsupported by authoritative confirmation or denial can form too much of a foreign correspondent's despatches; all this is a target for criticism by those who from time to time are in an official position to know the true facts about a foreign crisis. The fewer correspondents present, in a crisis, however, the greater the risk of only one interpretation being given. If there are no foreign correspondents present and an effective censorship is in operation, it is possible that newspapers all over the world may merely repeat that country's propaganda.

A further reduction in numbers would be a pity if for no other reason than that the possibility of being a foreign correspondent must make an appeal to young journalists and should attract the type of person so badly needed in the newspaper industry: people with courage, moral and physical, and the ability to form their own opinions unswayed by class or political considerations. And if our newspapers are to give us strong opinions and news, whether it embarrasses some section of the community or not, or upsets diplomatic relations—the kind of information we need, in fact, to retain our position in the world and gauge what must be done for the future—then this is what can be provided by the corre-

spondent of the foreign assignment calibre. The hope is that new entrants will be trained to provide this nucleus of journalists on whom we are going to rely heavily in the next decade. It is significant that already the British press is outnumbered in many world capitals by the resident American correspondents, many of them working for what we would rate as the provincial press in terms of circulation. The amount of newspaper space available to him also enables the American foreign correspondent to write longer and more informative articles than his British colleagues, who are restricted more to the news field, although, of course, there are many exceptions to this. The Commonwealth press, particularly the Australian, keep a number of foreign correspondents in the field who often display an initiative and determination to get a story that beats the rest of the press. Dennis Warner, who writes for a number of Australian papers, is likely to pop up in the middle of a riot or a minor war in the Far East before his colleagues have had the first news. Ronald Monson of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, determined to despatch his story in the middle of a Cairo riot in 1952, fought his way through the rioting to the cable and wireless office at the cost of being strangled with his own necktie. Richard Hughes of the *Sunday Times*, the well-known Far East correspondent, is another Australian, and we remember men like the late Noel Monks of the *Daily Mail*. So many have been Australian that some of the characteristics of a successful foreign correspondent seem crystallised in what we have come to accept as part of their character—tough, resilient, independent, warm-hearted.

Another contribution made by the foreign correspondent is that in a gentle way he teaches many young diplomats and the people with whom he mixes how to conduct interviews, and the conventions used by newspapers all over the world in handling information of a confidential nature. The tendency with the home reporter (an exception is the lobby correspondent) is to want everything "on the record", meaning that whatever is said may be used in direct quotes. The foreign correspondent, however, is more likely to want the background type of interview during which he can get the facts of a situation from, say, an ambassador, the head of a delegation or a leading political figure. Nothing of what passes will be attributed to the person granting the interview. Many people holding high office are prepared to give interviews on this basis and it is often in their interests to do so. Further, as confidence grows between a person in authority and a foreign correspondent, this may grow into a friendship which is lasting and rewarding, and in the long run in the interests of the country.

The Provincial Press

THE SITUATION of the provincial daily and evening newspapers and local weekly press, if not desperate, is alarming. For many years the overall number of these newspapers was large enough to absorb the occasional casualty. In the present climate of opinion with regard to the press, however, further failures are often considered unimportant to the man who buys the local newspaper out of loyalty, but reads the national paper of his choice. The figures speak for themselves. The 1962 Report of the Royal Commission on the Press focused attention on the overall decline. It reported that the total number of weekly or twice weekly London, suburban and provincial titles had dropped from 1,307 in 1949 to 1,219 on December 31st, 1961—a fall of 88 newspapers.¹ However, it was still able to say in its report on local monopoly: “In *only* seven towns outside London is there more than one evening paper and in four of these towns the evening papers are under common ownership.”² The report was published in September 1962. By November 1963 the number of cities claiming more than one evening paper had dropped dramatically to two, London and Glasgow.

¹ *The Present State of the Press*, chapter 1, p. 14.

² *The Diversity of Ownership-Control*, chapter 2, p. 17.

The role of the provincial newspaper, whether morning, evening, weekly or bi-weekly, is to provide throughout the country a link at the local level between the ordinary man in the street and the world of affairs and politics, whether the latter may be local or national. Television reporting provides this sometimes, but only sporadically. A massive treatment by T.V. or the national press of one local story now and again, the housing situation in Glasgow, or the unemployment problem of the north-east, is no substitute for the detailed examination of a problem week by week by journalists on the spot, who have an intimate knowledge of local affairs. This is what the provincial press provides, a channel of communication which is geared specifically to the local conditions, by virtue of employing local men, often born and bred in the district. In doing this the local press is also taking out an insurance policy against those who wish to conceal the facts of a local situation and can often do so when dealing with the London journalists. It is not so easy with a man who has lived alongside the principals of a news story and knows their background, their friends, and their families. The Sheffield Police Case in the latter part of 1963 is a clear case where the local press brought to light a situation that had to be dealt with quickly. It is doubtful whether any of the subsequent facts would have come to light had it not been for the tenacity of the editor of the *Sheffield Telegraph*, and the intimate knowledge of local conditions shown by his reporting staff.

The loss to the country by the demise of these provincial and local newspapers, however unimportant it may seem to the commuting businessmen, is the loss

of providing people living in the provinces with the means of being able to make themselves heard. The national press is concerned with publishing that which can be rated as news in the national sense; there is little or no space for news from any specific local area unless that news is of national interest. At the moment, the gap in the reporting of matters which are important but still only of *local* importance is filled by the provincial newspaper. But where a newspaper has a *solus* position in a provincial city, there may be a danger that the lack of competition dulls the cutting edge of its reporting as it finds that it cannot lose readers to another paper and does not wish to offend its captive audience. It is not enough, therefore, to say that everything is all right because such and such a city still has an excellent daily and evening paper. The danger point has arrived when it only has one of each. Nor does the loss of local representation stop there. It is the local journalist working for a local paper who provides many of the basic news stories for the national press and the news agencies; unless an area is well covered by local journalists able to distinguish between local and national news who also have some working arrangements with the national press, much can happen locally which will go by unnoticed.

When we examine the provincial press against the background of the criticism of the sensational treatment of news by some of the national press, we find a remarkable standard of integrity and judgment displayed by the editors of the provincial press as a whole. It has been calculated that these papers go into 12 million homes out of the 14½ million homes throughout Great Britain.

They do not appear to have caused offence and little or no criticism has been heard of the behaviour of their reporters. The Press Council in its report published in October 1963 reports only eight complaints upheld against the whole provincial press and one against the London and suburban. This is a record of which the provincial press can be justly proud.

Nevertheless, the further raising of the status of the provincial and local press must be a first step towards raising the whole standard of journalism in the country, because the provincial newspapers are the recognised training ground for the young journalist. National newspapers rarely take on a new member of their staff who has not served an apprenticeship with a local newspaper. The only common policy, however, with regard to educational standards of entry (there are no enforced conditions of entry into journalism) is that laid down by the National Council for the Training of Journalists, set up in 1952, under the patronage of the proprietors' associations, the Guild of British Newspaper Editors, the National Union of Journalists and the Institute of Journalists. The 1962 Royal Commission reported that: "The Council arranges with colleges for further education, courses for vocational and academic study. The Newspaper Society has further laid down that attendance and the possession of a certificate obtained by examination is a necessary qualification for a fully trained junior in its member offices, and these are roughly the provincial press offices as we know them." As a result of its work, qualifications of new entrants to journalism are rising. In 1963 a third had at least one "A" level and about two-thirds five or more

"O" levels. Five "O" levels are now the minimum qualification for entry into those newspapers which are members of the Newspaper Society. Individual newspapers, however, may still demand more or a great deal less. The final say is with the editor.

One of the criticisms made against the press as a whole is that of misquoting. The reasons for this may be several, and whatever a reporter records as verbatim in his original story may well be changed for a number of reasons which have been explained, but if the reporter is unable to put down in shorthand even a few simple sentences at dictation speed, he is unlikely ever to get a correct report published. Some reporters are now using tape recorders to fill in the gap. In the hands of an experienced journalist the tape recorder can be a valuable *aide memoire* and enable him to concentrate on the person he is interviewing, but if the use of a tape recorder is to reduce the requirements for shorthand as a qualification for the young journalist, then a great deal is going to be missed. During a formal interview with someone who is experienced at being interviewed, plenty of time will be given to a young reporter to take down the answers, but such interviews rarely come the way of young reporters and, in the meantime, his job is to record events as they happen. To arrive at the scene of an accident and to be able to record the reactions of people who saw it, and at the same time to observe and to note other details, requires a familiarity with shorthand that James Pitman in a letter to *The Times*¹ described as "the reflex skill in penmanship which enables some to write shorthand as effortlessly and with as little

¹ December 19th, 1963.

obstruction to the process of listening, understanding and memorising, as all of us are able to breathe while yet carrying on very different activities." This may be a standard which few journalists, apart from parliamentary correspondents and court reporters, would try to reach, but if it is dropped it will be at the expense of further deterioration in the general standard of reporting. The National Council are now making great efforts to re-emphasise the importance of shorthand, and under their training schemes a junior must achieve at least one hundred words a minute before he can sit for the professional examination. There are hopeful signs that this campaign is succeeding. It is thus the provincial press which has to do the actual training and give their men time off to attend courses. Although the national press is interested in the scheme and finances it to some extent, it still expects to be able to milk the provincial press of its best men by offering them higher salaries and more opportunities in Fleet Street, as do the B.B.C. and I.T.V. with less justification, without feeling any obligation to provide further training, or encourage membership of professional bodies to help the provincial journalist once it has got him. This means that some Fleet Street journalists, though men of ability (otherwise they would not have been taken from their provincial papers), retain a provincial outlook and little is done to help them overcome it. If a man has had a sound general education, professional expertise can be acquired and there is nothing to stop him reaching the heights of his profession. The man without this background now gets little help from his employers once he has finished his training, such as it is. There has always

been a plentiful supply of journalists for Fleet Street in the past. Perhaps an encouraging aspect of the growth of Television and Public Relations is that it is providing alternative means of employment for journalists, thus making newspaper employers more aware of their responsibilities towards their existing staffs.

The actions of a few (and it is the minority) of the mass circulation dailies and Sundays, whose treatment of news is described by the layman as sensational and who appear to give undue emphasis to the sexual aspect of any case reported in their columns, have caused from time to time a revulsion against the press as a whole. This mass condemnation of the press because of the activities of a few reporters of a few papers on a few occasions is, of course, unjust. However, it is a pity that the press as a whole does not display more courage in reporting the criticisms made about it, and it is equally a pity that those papers whose staffs are doing a difficult job well and whose standards of integrity are high do not also say this; and it applies very much to the provincial press as a whole, who are often lumped in with the one or two of the national newspapers of mass circulation who cause criticism to be levelled against the whole press. The average news editor would say that the correct approach for the Public Relations Officer is to make known the facts of any situation, whether or not they redound to the credit of the organisation for which he works. "Facts are sacred—comment is free!" A more positive attitude in the reporting of press matters *in* the press might help the public and the press, if they saw that the reports were without bias and of news interest, the press's own criterion of what is or is not published.

News about journalists who get into trouble could be easily suppressed by common consent. This must always be resisted. News about personalities in the press world itself is rare and where it does appear it is usually favourable. If the press, both provincial and national, are to have public recognition (they would never say they want it), then the press must be asked to take an objective view about itself, and this means objective reporting as a first principle.

The provincial newspaper in particular is still too often thought of as the "local rag". The reasons for the supreme importance of its being there at local government level as an alternative means of expression between the people of a locality and the country as a whole have been given. With the country in the middle of what is said to be a second social revolution, comparable to the industrial revolution—involving once again the denuding of some areas of all but the aged and retired, and at the same time creating new towns with little community feeling, mere dormitories for tired workers—the role the provincial newspaper has to play in helping and representing these people caught up in the dilemma of their own restlessness has never been more vital. The provincial newspaper, more than any other institution, can give that first feeling of "belonging" to a new community so necessary to any sort of balanced behaviour. Through its editorial columns, its articles, even its advertisements, a community sense can be developed more quickly and more easily than by any other medium. In this context the editor could be one of the most important figures in the community. Is he? And what is being done by the provincial press as a whole to adapt

itself to changing social patterns and to telling the new people who arrive in an area what their local newspaper does, what it stands for and how it works? There is hardly any more urgent requirement than to give those living in many of the new towns which are springing up, this sense of being a community, of "belonging". The situation for many provincial newspapers, far from being desperate because of national competition and the difficulty of obtaining advertising revenue, could be that they are on the brink of an entirely new era, campaigning for and leading the new populations in their new towns and thus attracting national attention to what they say and do. Where they do this, there is clear evidence, as in the Sheffield case, that the whole attitude to the provincial press, what it stands for and what it does, is clearly revealed to the nation through radio, T.V. and the national newspapers.

We are made well aware, for example, of the difficulties of the car manufacturers and their labour problems, of the railways, the nationalised airlines, of big business deals and industrial development, the doctor's pay, the work of hospitals, life in the services; every one eventually attracts the attention of the press, except the press. Then, when another newspaper dies, and the displaced journalists have to seek new employment, possibly outside their chosen way of life, is it to be wondered why no one cares? No one cares because virtually no one knows and what is said, is often hearsay, of little credit to the press, whether provincial or national.

Despite its losses, however, the provincial press still contains the majority of journalists in the country. The first need surely is for this group of newspapers to

demonstrate clearly where it stands with regard to certain press practices, and to inform the people through its own columns of the standards it considers viable in modern journalism and what it thinks of those who fall short. It should press demands for better treatment at the hands of organisers and officials up and down the country when it covers the various ceremonial occasions that are a regular feature of our life. There is too ready an acceptance on the part of both reporters and photographers from the provincial press to take second best unless the Newspaper Society representative is there, and the impression is left in the public mind, at least on the official part of it, that somehow the provincial newspaper is a second-class national paper, that it is staffed by journalists who are not good enough for Fleet Street. If the national press do not turn up at an important but *local* event, nor is there T.V. in any shape or form, it is automatically deemed a failure. But, as has been shown, the national press can well be covered by the provincial press representation if need be, and the photographs taken by the provincial press photographer are invariably "offered" to the national press. What we find on most national occasions is that the best or the only suitable photographic positions have already been allotted to the B.B.C. T.V. cameras or the independent T.V. companies and what is left is doled out amongst the national and provincial press, with the provincial press having to make do with very few positions compared with the local interests they cover, over and against the national press, let alone the T.V. coverage. The acceptance of this situation helps once again to relegate the provincial newspaper, in the minds of those with whom

they come into contact, to third or last place with T.V. and nationals in front. However, this is just not the situation, as we have seen. The provincial press has a separate and distinctive role to play in the life of the nation; it is not a second-class national press; its work cannot be done for it by radio or T.V. It is vital to the well-being of the nation that we should continue to have a strong and largely independent provincial press of high integrity, but this will not happen unless the press itself takes some action to make its own views known and respected. Very many people, particularly perhaps those in the Services, have made the mistake of feeling that because they were doing a good job under difficult circumstances, they had nothing to fear for their future. This clearly has not been the case. The running down of the Services and sacking of countless thousands of officers and non-commissioned officers, the reduction of the Colonial Service and the number of careers stopped in mid-flight, the fate of the Kenya settlers, and many others, all go to show that no group of people today can afford to let its case go by default. Few Governments have time for sentiment and the British Government, in particular, has rarely shown it; people are far too concerned with the tensions of daily living to worry about the fate of others, particularly newspapers or their staffs, so it is up to an organisation, any organisation, to fight for itself. When, one might ask, are we going to see the press and especially the provincial press doing just that?

Little has been said about the whole question of amalgamations and the concentration of more and more newspapers into fewer hands. The reasons for this are

that the terms of reference of both the Royal Commissions included this and indeed the greater part of their reports cover this aspect of the press. Whatever hidden influences exist in the board-rooms of those amalgamations controlling a number of newspapers, it is doubtful whether anyone but the directors can say. To find out how much a proprietor uses his newspapers to propagate his own ideas, we have the evidence of one or two, but this by no means gives us any pattern of influence. There appears to be evidence to support the contention of nearly all newspaper proprietors and their editors that advertising does not influence editorial comment or content to any marked degree, and that in those cases where advertisers have tried to suppress information that may have an adverse influence on the sale of their products (criticisms of films is an example given in the 1949 Report) they have not been successful. The real safeguard of editorial freedom in the long run is in the character and standing of the editors of the larger group of newspapers. If journalism is a vocation, and many would say it is, and we expect to see journalists and not businessmen as editors, then I doubt whether over the *news content* of most papers the average proprietor has very much influence. The system of news gathering and production militates against deliberate distortion or suppression, provided the situation of the solus newspaper is avoided, when it is more difficult for the reader to compare the contents of one newspaper with another.

In the provincial press, therefore, as in the national press, competition, while producing many of the excesses to which there is general objection, also safeguards us from an excessive use of power by any one proprietor.

to influence or to use his newspaper for personal or political ends. A description of the intricate arrangements by which the provincial press is grouped and amalgamated through the country is outside the scope of this book and the author's experience. So far as proprietorial influence is concerned one can only report from limited experience, but for the factual presentation of news, sound comment and honesty in reporting local affairs, in so far as it is within an editor's powers to ensure that his journalists have reported facts correctly, I doubt whether any other country is served as well and with so little bias by its provincial press. Moreover, many of the leading provincial newspapers are far from lagging behind the national press in presentation and layout, nor in using new techniques including colour printing on occasions.

The Influence of the Press

THE QUESTION which bothers people when it comes to discussing the press is the extent of its influence and whether, in our desire to retain a free press, inadvertently we may be playing into the hands of the proprietor who is using the influence of his paper for personal or political ends. The press barons, as they are popularly called, are cast in this role and for many years Lord Beaverbrook was thought of as the villain of the piece, although he was the one proprietor prepared to go on record that he used his papers for propaganda purposes. Lord Beaverbrook admitted this, not only in giving evidence to the Royal Commission but also when writing in his own newspapers. This propaganda, however, was directed mainly to one end—supporting the ideals of the Commonwealth—not for personal gain or political power.

A new figure whose personality has burst upon us in recent years is Mr. Roy Thomson, now a baron, owner of a hundred newspapers round the world, television stations, radio stations, the *Sunday Times*, and *The Scotsman*. In terms of national daily or Sunday circulations in this country, however, he does not show much desire at the moment to enter the lists. The dominant proprietors, who, with Sir Max Aitken, control 67 per

cent of the circulation of all the daily newspapers and 84 per cent of the Sunday newspaper circulation are Mr. Cecil King, chairman of the International Publishing Corporation (which includes the *Daily Mirror* Group and the *Sunday Mirror*), and Viscount Rothermere, chairman of Associated Newspapers Ltd. (which controls the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Sketch* and the *London Evening News*).

Nor are these the only newspapers they control. Mr. Cecil King, nephew of Lord Northcliffe, is potentially the man with the greatest power to mould opinion, particularly female opinion, in the world today. Apart from the *Daily Mirror* with its circulation of more than 5,000,000, and the *Sunday Mirror* with 5,300,000, one hundred and nine trade papers and thirty-two other newspapers, which are owned by the various companies under the control of Mr. King, he has a monopoly of nearly every large circulation woman's magazine—the combined readership has been estimated at some forty-three million—although this must include duplication, as Lord Francis Williams observed in quoting this figure.¹ The titles themselves give perhaps more indication of this influence than the circulation figures.

†Home	†Woman and Beauty
Honey	Woman and Home
Marilyn	Woman's Journal
My Home	Woman
†Roxy	Woman's Mirror
Valentine	Woman's Weekly

¹ *The New Statesman*, October 27th, 1961.

† Since merged.

Everywoman	Modern Woman
Flair	Mother
Homes and Gardens	Woman's Own
Housewife	Woman's Realm ¹
Ideal Home	

Associated Newspapers, controlled by the Daily Mail and General Trust Ltd., the principal shareholders of which are Viscount Rothermere and his family, in turn control a number of undertakings as well as still more than thirty established provincial evening and weekly papers throughout the country. It is acknowledged financially as almost the strongest newspaper group.

The significant trend noted by the Royal Commission on the Press 1961-62, was the amount of concentration which had been achieved by these three proprietors since 1948, an increase in concentration of readership of twenty-two per cent in thirteen years. The present order of batting is as follows :

International Publg. Corpn.	24%
Associated Newspapers	23%
Beaverbrook Newspapers	20%

In the field of national Sunday reading alone, the largest circulation newspaper is the *News of the World*. In 1947 it stood at 7,809,000 and in 1961 at 6,643,000, a drop of over a million for which many reasons have been put forward. It still, however, leads the Sunday field with an estimated readership of 17,625,000 each week. The fact that much of its news content depends

¹ As given in Report of the Royal Commission, 1962.

upon the reporting of cases with sexual overtones does not reflect very highly on the reading habits of the nation, but its accuracy has never been challenged.

Even the *News of the World* figure, however, is swamped by the overall daily and Sunday readership of the King empire. Its three daily papers, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Herald* (now the *Sun*) and the *Daily Record* in Glasgow, yield 21,291,000 daily readers, and the *Sunday Mirror* and the *People* reap 30,399,000 every weekend; all this quite apart from the women's magazine readership figures and the journals of Fleetway Publications.¹

Sir Max Aitken is second in the field with 12,734,000 readers for his *Daily Express*, 1,941,000 for the *Evening Standard* and 11,140,000 for the *Sunday Express*. All this leaves Viscount Rothermere fairly well behind on Sunday newspapers, having sold the *Sunday Dispatch* to Lord Beaverbrook, who incorporated it into his *Sunday Express*, which put on another million or so circulation when it happened. However, with the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Sketch* and the *Evening News*, the largest selling evening paper in the country, Viscount Rothermere claims 15,065,000 daily readers. Lord Thomson has yet to enter the high national circulation field in this country with the exception of the *Sunday Times*, but internationally and in the developing countries such as Africa he is a dominating figure in the newspaper industry. (His policy of editorial decentralisation is interesting, because if he is able to resist the temptation

¹ All the circulation and readership figures given in this chapter are taken from the I.P.A. National Readership Surveys, July 1962-June 1963.

of doing battle with either Mr. King or Sir Max Aitken and to keep the *Sunday Times* in its position as the leading quality Sunday newspaper, then his influence should be helpful both for the journalist and for those countries in which he is operating.)

In the reduction of the number of provincial papers, and in the loss of the *News Chronicle* with a circulation of over a million at the time, is seen the stark reality of what befalls a newspaper with weak management. It has been argued already that, so far as the provincial press is concerned, anything would be better than its reduction to the stage at which each city had only one newspaper or perhaps two, a morning and an evening, under the same management. Equally it would be disastrous if our daily or Sunday press was controlled by one proprietor. The deduction appears to be that no high circulation newspaper will survive without a dominant personality behind its management. He must combine all the qualities of dynamic industrial know-how with a feeling and flair for journalism. In this way he can emphasise both the financial and economic aspects of his business and the journalistic, but always remain in full control and able to weigh carefully the demands of both sides of his business. In this Lord Beaverbrook epitomised the rare genius which is necessary. His evidence before the Royal Commission fully brings this out and makes exhilarating reading.

In Mr. King we find much the same mixture. Brought up in the atmosphere of Fleet Street journalism against a background of wealth and position, a Wykehamist and an Oxford graduate, he could have been successful equally as a banker or an industrial tycoon. Already he

has outstripped Lord Northcliffe in achieving power and influence over the minds of men and women outside the political field.

There seems little doubt that newspaper managements which fail to appreciate the need for strong personalities, for tremendous vigour and drive on the part of their executives, find it difficult to keep their newspapers financially solvent, yet newspapers which adopt an aggressive approach must inevitably influence their readers, and this is, of course, the case with our national press, which makes no bones about where it stands politically on any issue and what it thinks should be done by this politician or that. So in order to keep as many newspapers in the field as possible we must look for newspapers with strong policies and expect them to try and influence and dominate; this is the manifestation of enlightened management, backing able editors, and the drive and energy of their staffs. All the cant, therefore, about newspapers being wicked because they have strong views, the tut-tutting when our sacred institutions are attacked, even members of the Royal Family, will in the end, if it results in some form of legislative restriction, reduce newspapers to impotence and those who work on them. This situation, as we have seen, will be followed by failure and closure, and having achieved our intention of "cleaning up the press", we shall be left with no press worth having, or precious little information on which to do our business. Surely then we must take a more positive approach, fully appreciate the influence of the press, the power of certain press "barons", and be aware of the harm that can be done by certain newspapers where a particular policy of editorial content

is carried to excess. At the same time we must look at this in an adult manner and also appreciate that newspapers either survive in this manner or die. Do we as a nation want to find ourselves being herded along by a few papers strongly influenced by the Government of the day?

The Royal Commission, in examining this problem, also seems to discount some of the fears of past years. The whole paragraph is worth quoting:

Royal Commission, 1961/62, paras. 29, 30.

"29. In our opinion the influence of the Press is not as great as some suggest or, indeed, as it has been in the past. The advance of education has led to a readership which is more discriminating, at least in so far as concerns the acceptance of opinions expressed by newspaper proprietors. Large numbers of people rely increasingly for news on broadcasting and television and probably tend to be more influenced by opinions and arguments on social and political problems put out on radio and television than they are by those set forth in the newspapers. We do not think that it is possible for a newspaper or group of newspapers to swing public opinion overnight in any particular direction, whether by tendentious presentation of the news or by direct expression of opinions. The influence of the Press is more gradual and takes the form of a subtle conditioning of opinion to the acceptance or rejection of particular approaches to social and political problems. Campaigns conducted over a long period may have their effect; thus the campaign conducted—quite frankly (and legitimately) for the

purpose of propaganda—by Beaverbrook Newspapers Ltd. in support of the ideals of the British Empire and more recently their opposition to the Common Market may not have achieved all that Lord Beaverbrook would have wished, but it would be impossible to suppose that they had no result.

30. Among periodicals the journals of opinion clearly have the power to exercise a strong influence on political matters. Even the illustrated weekly magazines which do not set out to deal with public affairs at all may help to create social habits and senses of values. In some instances they may serve no socially meritorious purpose and even tend towards a vulgarisation of manners. These social implications are, however, outside the scope of this inquiry."

The contention that people tend to be more influenced by opinions and arguments on radio and television than they are by those set forth in the newspapers may be right in respect of the one outstanding controversial programme in a week or perhaps a month, but in the long term there is no doubt, as the Commission says, that the influence of the press has a subtlety which is more pervasive and more universal than that which can be accomplished by either radio or television. The readership figures are certainly comparable with the television audience viewing figures—few programmes regularly exceed the ten million viewing audience as a matter of course, yet we find that the *Daily Express* has a daily readership of 12,734,000. No one of course reads all of any one newspaper, each reader has his own interest and seeks information on that first. However he may

“pick up” a good deal of information on other matters while seeking his favourite feature or whatever it may be; in fact this must surely be so, and in this way newspapers effectively influence regular readers over a wide range of subjects in a way a television programme cannot do, restricted as it is in context and time.

The influence of television, of course, can be far greater than that of the press over a very short period, but it cannot challenge the place of the newspaper as the medium that daily records, in some detail, life in all its aspects. What is more, unlike radio and television, which within the scope of one programme offers a listener or viewer a very narrow range of interest, usually only one or two subjects discussed or seen consecutively, the newspaper at a glance offers a wide range of news items, feature articles, comment, criticism, sport, financial news, women’s pages, gossip, competitions and advertisements which in themselves are informative and of course influential and opinion forming.

The hostility and suspicion directed against certain sections of the press recently has been turned on to television as producers, feeling the spur of competition, have produced more and more programmes that attract, shock and get talked about. The more successful the programme, the greater the financial resources placed at the disposal of the producer; and the less successful (in terms of viewing audience), the less money available to pull it up. This is the familiar pattern of newspaper production in a competitive field, and it is interesting to note, in passing, that television producers have had to resort to much the same tactics as newspaper editors in holding viewing audiences.

The safeguard is in the variety of newspapers available and the variety of each newspaper, the choice being that of the consumer. The Royal Commissions (paras. 580 and 333 respectively of their two Reports) have called attention to the fact that "the freedom of the Press involves not only a freedom to publish, but also a freedom to read; the imposition of a statutory limit on circulation would infringe both aspects of this freedom". This freedom of choice is certainly more limited when it comes to television, in fact to only three programmes within certain fixed hours, and the third choice as yet in the early days of its operation. Therefore, although at any one moment ten or fifteen million people may be watching a peak programme, thus enabling a speaker to make an emotional impact far greater than that which could be achieved by using the daily press, the impact is momentary. There is no written record except that of the press itself which will report the speech, but as usual in a variety of ways backed by interpretation and bias.

However, is this not more in keeping with the whole ethos of our democratic approach to life than the emotional one night stand appeal of a political leader, swaying millions of people by the power of his personality and the fervour of his words? The British, politically mature, have never reacted favourably to that sort of appeal, yet that is the appeal of television, and it could be dangerous were it not balanced by the press reporting of the same event. The safeguard against undue influence would appear to be, as always, in the balance of the presentation of news and events, whether on television or in the press, but so long as there is

variety, within both these powerful media, the one can balance and complement the other and provide an alternative manner of presentation, the choice being up to the viewer or reader. On this count, if newspapers can only survive today, let alone new ones be created, by having strong and forceful editors and proprietors, carrying with it all the dangers of influence and the moulding of public opinion, this would appear to be far less dangerous in the long run than any form of restriction in either circulation or advertising revenue which may bring about the closure of more newspapers, thus creating a monopoly of influence by television.

If we accept the opinion of the Royal Commission 1961-62, therefore, "that the influence of the press is not as great as some suggest" and that, in so far as moulding public opinion is concerned, we need not fear strong proprietorial influence, provided there is plenty of diversity, this in turn will help to keep men with strong personalities in the newspaper industry and call off those critics who seek in one way or another to denigrate the press and if possible to by-pass it as a means of disseminating essential information to the public.

The power of the press to force the Government of the day to reveal facts in the public interest, though it may not always seem so at the time, has been clearly demonstrated in recent years. That this position of power should be retained by the press is clearly in our interest if one glances, even briefly, at the growth of the power of the two great parties which has itself altered the power of Parliament as such and especially of the House of Commons. Our largely unwritten constitution is in fact continually changing. The power of the Civil Service

has been immeasurably augmented by the increased range and complexity of State activity, and within recent Cabinets power is said to have tended to accumulate in the hands of the Prime Minister. Where is the balance to all this to be found, if not in the power of what Edmund Burke and Macaulay called "the Fourth Estate of the Realm"? So long as the public through its support of the press gives it this power of disclosure, then in politics each party must watch the press warily, as well as television and radio, and guide policy accordingly.

The remarkable aspect of the relationship which has been built up over many years between the lobby correspondent and the politician is the mutual trust of the one in the other so that, while information of a confidential nature may be passed between them on certain conditions of non-publication, nothing prohibits the press in the publication of essential facts which should be known in the public interest. Furthermore, if the Government of the day wants to suppress information on grounds of national security, it cannot do so without the knowledge of the press. The Press and Broadcasting Committee, which issues the "D" notices requesting that this or that item should not be referred to in the interests of security, is a committee on which the press is equally represented with those Government departments concerned, with an independent secretary respected by both sides. The press therefore *knows* the item of security involved and agrees not to publish in the public interest, but it has the right constantly to challenge that assertion and to point out, if necessary, that the Government precautions over security are insufficient to warrant non-publication, as the information is already

public property. The "off the record" briefing is invalid if it is an attempt merely to shut the stable door after the horse has gone, and the press are not slow to make that point when the need arises.

The whole relationship, therefore, between the press and those in power in Government and between itself and its readers is more delicate than is generally supposed. The working arrangements with regard to, say, security have evolved over a long period of negotiation where every sort of situation has arisen and been tested against the principles of a free press—free to publish what it will, but that freedom carrying with it national responsibility which has been discharged with considerable honour over the years. With its readers the press must keep faith, or else it will be discredited and lose the allegiance of regular daily or weekly readers on which it depends so much. This means sticking to a policy with which its readers can identify themselves, not necessarily always politically, but that a paper should express the feelings and hopes, often unexpressed, of its millions of readers is essential if the bond between reader and newspaper is to be a strong one. So will newspapers expose injustice where it is to be found, sponsor schemes for improving standards of living, freedom from hunger campaigns and so on, and by and large report a considerable amount about the way and life of the Churches and give religious leaders the freedom of their columns. In short, all the ideas that stir men's deepest feelings find expression in the newspapers; and the aspirations and hopes of the man in the street, weighed down as he is by the cares of daily life, are often illuminated for him by the journalist.

If all this is to be met within the columns of a newspaper—and if it is not met circulation falls—then the opportunity for any one single proprietor or editor to wield undue influence in the presentation of news in his paper is curtailed to a large extent by the sheer necessity of having to meet the many editorial requirements forced upon him by both readers and competing newspapers. We have seen that newspapers with strong editors and even dominating proprietorial control are more likely to survive than other newspapers with equal opportunities but without some dominating figure to push them along, and provided that there are enough newspapers of the former calibre in the field, we as a nation need not have so much to fear from the undue influence of the press as a whole, offset as it is by the divergence of its views and the editorial requirements of its readers. What is essential for the democratic health of the nation is that there should be as many newspapers as possible, of as many views as possible, and that these newspapers should be strong and virile with all the overtones of prejudice and sensationalism, rather than weak and “controlled”.

Complaints against the Press and the Role of the Press Council

IF WE EXAMINE critically and unemotionally the role of the journalist in modern society, and we set our conclusions alongside the criticisms of the press which have been particularly rife over the last few years, we may be at a loss to explain why the journalist is sometimes reviled. More often than not, a story which has started out by being described as sensational, indeed untrue, has all too often proved to have been almost dull compared with the final results of an investigation. The picture given by the two Royal Commissions, save in one important matter, the recruitment and educational standards of journalists, is on the whole reassuring. It is clear that there is a sense of service amongst British journalists, and a remarkable freedom from corruption among both employers and employees, remarkable because the temptations must be very great. A similar freedom from illegitimate advertising influences and from subsidies was all clearly demonstrated in the Reports. Yet the President of the Institute of Journalists could say in the same year in which the last Report was published that "the freedom of the press was in danger because the deterioration in relations (between the public and

the press) could lead to an easy passage for controls". This must mean that those in whose hands lies the moulding of opinion outside Fleet Street and the press world have not had pleasant experiences when dealing with the press, and I would say from my own experience in talking to people from all walks of life and in all sorts of situations that this is largely true. I am sure in part the reason is that the non-journalist simply fails to understand the persistence of journalists when they are in pursuit of a story, and the apparent indifference to appeals to suppress a story which may be embarrassing or indeed hurtful. For members of the establishment it is humiliating to find that the "old boy" network breaks down completely when a thrusting young journalist from a mass circulation paper is on the track of a story that can do no good to the organisation concerned. Even the Royal Family seems open to attack and innuendo, and many people are shocked and dismayed—"the gutter press" becomes an habitual term of reference for practically every newspaper except the "heavies", although many of the popular newspapers are rarely read by critics who base their remarks more on hearsay than on evidence. The fact is, a person in a position of power and influence may fear no one except the press. When such a person finds that suddenly none of the usual methods of persuasion works, it is as though he has been transported into a world with new rules or no rules. Hence there is deep resentment against the journalists who have caused this disquiet. The fact that the same person may have been enjoying other people's discomfort in other newspapers (and the press is no respecter of persons) does nothing to ease the shock and be-

wildermont if one becomes the centre of press interest in connection with a story that is unfavourable.

Some journalists in Fleet Street, however, lay themselves open to attack unnecessarily by failing to stick to a few comparatively simple rules which, in many cases, would enable them to obtain their stories just as well and much more legitimately.

The criticisms most often made are inaccuracy, misquoting and intrusion of privacy, particularly when this takes place soon after some personal family trouble or bereavement. Photographers equally are criticised for intrusion and for disrupting solemn ceremonies.

It has been said that anyone reading a story about himself or a subject in which he is well versed will find mistakes of fact and, of course, this is often so. Journalists, on the other hand, will say that facts are about the last thing to be revealed when they seek information. Too often however this situation is accepted. The reporter fails to make that extra telephone call to someone in authority, who could probably put the whole matter into perspective. If he fails to do this because he suspects that a good "story" will be deflated by so doing, he is of course simply being irresponsible. The authoritative spokesman should be given a chance. If a spokesman is unavailable, or tries deliberately to mislead a journalist who is seeking facts, then the latter has a right to publish as much as he knows at that moment, whether or not this is the whole story. It should be realised that the responsibility for the accurate reporting of a story is shared to some extent by those involved in it. There should always be evidence, however, that an attempt has been made to check the more unlikely or sensational type of stories.

All too often those in authority have evidence that no such attempt has been made, and they suspect the reason is because such a check would stop the story. In the long run, the advantage gained by a newspaper in publishing a sensational story without adequate check must be set against the future risk of loss of confidence on the day when a much more important story needs to be confirmed. If confidence between the official spokesman and the press deteriorates, the inaccuracies will only increase, and very positive steps have to be taken by both sides to put right such a situation.

There is a fault very often on the part of the journalist because he fails to pursue an enquiry to the bitter end, but too many people think that just because an office has closed down for the day and the facts cannot be unearthed, a newspaper has no right to publish anything without official comment and should delay publication. This is plain nonsense. The failure on the part of those in authority to have someone working out of office hours ignores the whole aspect of newspaper production. It is important that the public, through the press, should have an opportunity to know the facts at any hour of the day or night. Personal stories, however, should surely always be checked at the source, and if the principal is unavailable, really unavailable, then "when in doubt leave out" is an adage the press could stick to a little more.

When it comes to misquoting, there is really no excuse. Yet of all the prevalent criticisms this is the one most heard and most damaging for the journalist. Quite rightly, for a journalist who is incapable of extracting an accurate quote, or of paraphrasing correctly the results of a conversation, is falling down in one of the

basic requirements of his craft. It can only be ineptitude, laziness or, regrettably, deliberate distortion, to make the "quote" support a story which has already been written. Of course many people, suddenly telephoned by a journalist, go to pieces. They are seized with panic and stutter incoherent nonsense to try and cover up the main issue which is being investigated. Or they lose their temper, or imagine their name in large print, so they keep the journalist on the telephone giving him a lot of irrelevant personal details. It is certainly not always easy. However, the journalist should be a professional and by the time he reaches Fleet Street he should be capable of extracting the facts and condensing them, without distortion, into a reasonable "quote". Nor should advantage be taken of a person unused to dealing with press matters, who answers a query in general terms, not appreciating that everything he is saying is "on the record" and may be used in the story. With no such warning, the report in the next day's newspaper can be a really bad shock.

The journalist could protect himself by being honest with the person he is interviewing and making it clear that he is going to quote him and that anything he says may appear in print. The average person knows nothing about press procedure, but he expects fair play. Many of these cases are comparatively trivial, too trivial to take up even with the editor, but accumulatively they tend to create an atmosphere of suspicion and dislike between the journalist and the average citizen who likes to think of himself as a decent fair-minded man. Naturally those who have a great deal to do with the press are more careful. Only a fool takes a telephone call from a strange reporter and tells him confidential information or fails

to check what is going to be quoted. The sensible course is to note the question, promise to call back, reflect on the subject, prepare a statement and then to call the reporter concerned and *dictate* a reply. But this procedure is unlikely to be adopted by the inexperienced.

The official "spokesmen", therefore, are usually the last people to have many real criticisms against the press for the simple reason that in *their* transactions there is little to be critical about. Enquiries are usually put to them with courtesy and very rarely does one find a statement misquoted. Unfortunately the evidence of the Vassall Tribunal and many of the complaints before the Press Council indicate that standards of honest dealing between the journalist and the public leave a lot to be desired *on both sides*. If P.R.O.s, or those employing them, mislead the press deliberately over some controversial issue, then one cannot blame the journalist who is caught in this way for avoiding them in future. There must be honesty and a mutual respect for the truth.

Intrusion of privacy, in particular at the time of bereavement or some personal tragedy, is quite another matter. In the present atmosphere of intense competition between the various groups of newspapers—not just the popular press as many suppose—it is difficult to know how enquiries or intrusion can be controlled. Whoever studies the problem must be aware of the pressures put upon reporters to get a story and the financial penalties they could suffer through unemployment if, in the case of failure, they are dismissed for incompetence. No such cases came to light in either of the Reports, but surely the threat must be there, otherwise why should journalists, on occasion, go to such lengths to get a story for

their particular newspaper and to take actions that must be against their own conscience? Veiled threats of publicity which will be detrimental to an individual or an organisation unless someone makes a statement is another malpractice that should cease. Threats such as these do infinite damage to the reputation of journalists. The cases are few and far between taken in the context of the many thousands of stories published every day. Yet just as the press, by publishing some event which is detrimental to an organisation, can give the impression that the whole organisation is like that, so a journalist who behaves unethically can give the impression that all journalists behave in this way. It is perhaps difficult for individualists who are essentially individualists to have any sense of corporate loyalty, and little is done by editors or proprietors to create such feelings, although there is considerable loyalty between colleagues working on the same newspaper.

These problems will no doubt be considered by the reconstituted Press Council with its new lay membership. One is aware of the reasons for the lay element—the public interest which is involved (if we believe all we are told about the influence of the press), and of course the danger of monopoly and amalgamations, all of which the Press Council is going to watch over for us. These matters are rightly the concern of some widely representative body.

On matters of unethical conduct, however, which is a matter for the press itself, why should lay members sit in judgment? Will this not in some way only increase the feelings of irritation and hostility on both sides? The way to make an individual or a corporate body of

people responsible is to treat them as though they were responsible. The Press Council by the very Articles of its Constitution is saying plainly that the press is incapable of managing its own affairs. While it was composed of representatives of the various press organisations, and indeed was a voluntary organisation of the press itself, Articles (ii) and (iii) were the special concern of the representatives of the National Union of Journalists and the Institute of Journalists, both of which bodies lay down certain ethical codes. The Articles in question are: "(ii) To maintain the character of the British Press in accordance with highest professional and commercial standards. (iii) To consider complaints against the conduct of the Press or the conduct of persons and organisations towards the press; to deal with these complaints in whatever manner might seem practical and appropriate and record resultant action".

Writing in the foreword to the 10th Annual Report of the Press Council, the then Chairman, Mr. George Murray, said: "But when a fresh impetus was given to 'monopolistic tendencies' in 1960 and 1961 and another Commission reverted to the recommendations of its predecessor, the appointment of a lay element became inevitable." Now, however, by the constitution of the new Press Council the lay element has a right to criticise and presumably pass judgment upon the conduct of individual journalists, and such conduct, however reprehensible, clearly can have little to do with monopolistic tendencies. It is an abrogation of the rights of the journalists' own professional bodies to deal with their own members. Not that this is ever likely to become an issue under the new chairman, but it is indicative of the

attitude towards the press, and while this exists it is useless wishing that journalists would adopt professional attitudes towards recruiting and organise themselves as a professional body within the industry. If the journalists were already a professional group they would certainly not accept lay members to sit in judgment. No other profession does, and the imposition of lay members, one would have thought, is little encouragement to certain elements of the press to do anything but go on being as individualistic as ever, taking little notice of the Press Council. They could claim it is no longer *their* council.

The new Press Council, while providing facts about the ownership of the press, amalgamations and so on, which is in the public interest, also tends to restrict contact between individuals and the press itself, and inevitably gives the impression that the press is so irresponsible that it needs a distinguished judge to keep an eye on it.

It might be said in passing that the means of redress by members of the public, who feel themselves libelled or injured in some way by the press, are already very powerful under Common Law. Juries are not sympathetic towards the press, and some of the sums for damages agreed in court have been as sensational as anything the press might have thought up themselves. This use of the weapon of libel against the press has been used mercilessly when the opportunity has been given, and the situation today is that a good deal of information vital to the nation is withheld because of the fear of punishing libel actions. The *Manchester Guardian* put the matter concisely as part of its reply to the Royal

Commission Questionnaire to Publishers, incorporated in the 1947-49 Report:

"The great obstacles to the adequate presentation of news and opinion are probably not those mentioned in the questionnaire, but the capriciousness of the laws of libel and contempt. The area in which the Press can operate in seeking redress of public grievances, in exposing abuses and in crusading for reform is seriously limited or hedged around with risks that only the very wealthiest organisations dare face. The contrast with the United States is striking, for although the American libel laws may not be widely different from ours, their practical effect is very different. There is also a habit of freer personal criticism which, though often indulged in to excess, is on the whole healthier than the repressions to which in the last fifty or sixty years the British Press has become subject."

Perhaps the most useful aspect of the Council's work might be to set rough-and-ready standards over the years for the press, with regard to reporting intrusion and photography, so that an editor may feel confident that if he calls his reporters and photographers off a particular story, other newspapers are likely to do the same. In the chairman, a highly respected lawyer, there is also someone to consult over general principles in the same way as the secretary of the Press and Broadcasting Committee can be consulted informally over security matters.

If in this way a code of general conduct is built up and acknowledged, then the Council will indeed have served a useful purpose. The imposition of further controls, however, would be intolerable and must surely be resisted inside as well as outside the Council.

Towards a Better Press

THERE ARE probably about 20,000 journalists in Great Britain and in their hands lies the eventual answer to the question, how can the standards of the press be raised without any further loss of freedom? As we have seen, taking the industry as a whole the number of newspapers and individual journalists who offend is small. Is this too high a price to pay or should we endanger the whole principle of a free press by introducing more controls?

The press lives by disclosure. This has been said often enough, but it cannot be ignored as an underlying motive behind the actions of many journalists and newspapers, and to ignore the vocational aspect of a journalist's work is to misunderstand much of the spirit of Fleet Street and the provincial press. There are already sufficient restrictions on the amount of information passed to the press by Government and many other employers.

It has been estimated that well over half the activities of Britain are controlled either by public authorities or eight large corporations, and something like three million men and women (1 in 7 of the employed population)

would be committing professional misconduct if they made a disclosure to the press.¹

This restriction is further enforced by the large number of Public Relations Officers employed by commerce and industry to control contact between their employees and the journalists.

In handling press enquiries, the P.R.O. may well be fulfilling a vocation as much as the journalist who is trying to obtain the information, but the odds are heavily against the latter at the moment. Any more controls, therefore, in addition to those which already exist under Common Law and by the establishment of the Press Council, with its new lay membership, are likely to restrict the disclosure of information even further, to the eventual detriment of the country as a whole.

As the situation now exists, any citizen who has a grievance can tell his story to a journalist, safe in the knowledge that his confidence will be respected. Any group can obtain a hearing for their views. Unfortunately, many of us have little consideration for the person to whom we tell our story under these circumstances. All we want to do is use the press to stir up public opinion. In condemning a newspaper for the sensational treatment of someone else's story, we forget that this is just what we demanded for ourselves under different circumstances. It is this situation, in which the public needs the journalist's services but sometimes rejects the journalist and the newspaper he works for, that creates

¹ "The Journalist and Professional Secrecy", by E. J. B. Rose, published in *Crucible*, January 1964 (a publication of the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility).

much of the hostility which flares up when the press are subjected to enquiries, such as that following the Vassall case. It also tends to make journalists move in a self-contained society, and in this lies a danger for us all. It is very easy for journalists to become inured to the sensational, the trivial and, indeed, to the frankly sordid and sadistic type of reporting that tends to shock many readers. The more contact there is between journalists and ordinary members of the public, particularly when both are "off duty", the more it will help journalists to see the results of their reporting in some kind of perspective. If criticism is both friendly and informed, there seems little reason why it should not be heeded. What is intolerable is a situation in which there is nothing but dislike on both sides.

It must be recognised that as only a comparatively few newspapers have been the target of much criticism, so the critics themselves are only a small group compared with the millions of satisfied readers. The problem is how to put those who are critical in contact with those journalists who are faced day by day with making difficult ethical decisions about their motives in pursuing certain types of stories. It is not just a question of increasing contact between senior men in the press and those in other walks of life who are at the centre of affairs, for there is already a great deal of contact, and some newspaper managements spare no pains to arrange luncheons and meetings for V.I.P.s to meet them and their staffs. Moreover, it is by no means certain that those who have dealings with the press at this level are in the main the most critical in public or private about the press. The significant gap would appear to be between

the middle grade executives and the provincial and junior national journalists. Many of the press's most vociferous critics have rarely met a journalist and know little about the competitive pressures which are put upon him and account for much that is offensive to them.

One of the difficulties in making contact is due, in part, to the lack of facilities provided by newspapers for their staffs to have anywhere to which guests or friends can be invited. The larger provincial cities which have press clubs may arrange meetings and functions to which people from outside the press world are invited. But there is usually little money for this purpose and most of the clubs and their activities are unlikely to attract people from the middle and upper class bracket, usually the most hostile towards the press. Yet it is from among the junior provincial journalists that the future senior reporters, news editors and editors of both the provincial and national press will be found. It is surely during these formative years that standards are set, when it is vitally important that there should be contact at all levels, and opportunity given for journalists to debate some of the ethics of their profession with reasonable and responsible members of the public whom they serve.

Before this can happen, however, the educational barrier will have to be breached if not broken, and steps taken to raise the standards for entry into journalism, as the graduate population increases. At the moment the educational barrier can also be said to be a class barrier because a public school and university education has for long been synonymous with a certain social background. In a way this has presented newspapers with an excuse for not demanding a professional standard of

entry, as this would have meant drawing their staffs from a group with roughly the same background. As a newspaper must reflect its readers' wishes in respect of news and views, obviously it must staff itself with people, or at least a proportion of people, who come from the same social background as its readers.

Over the next decade, however, Britain will be going through a complete reorganisation of society which will involve a change of social attitudes at every level, and class distinctions as we have known them will largely disappear. Some distinctions, however, will remain and one of them is likely to be educational without any "class" connotation.

The press, therefore, might one day find itself out of step educationally at all levels and it would be intolerable if, in the face of the pledges made by both political parties to support the Robbins recommendations for higher education, the press sets its face against an increased graduate entry into journalism.

In London, of course, the whole question of contact is easier, and by the time the provincial journalist has reached Fleet Street he is a more mature person, capable of fitting into the background of the society in which he finds himself. The Press Club, too, has played its part in helping to bring people into closer contact with the press. Situated in the heart of Fleet Street, reached by an alleyway off Salisbury Square and backing on to St. Bride's Church, which is itself almost part of the Reuter building, journalists can eat and drink, talk shop and entertain friends, often from outside the press. Under the expert guiding hand of Mr. Morley Richards, one time news editor of the *Daily Express*, Archbishops,

Prime Ministers, politicians, Service chiefs and countless V.I.P.s have been dined, and no one can deny that all these activities have gone a long way to eliminating some of the prejudices of people holding high office. But the Press Club is not a professional headquarters in the same way as the Law Society, a few hundred yards away.

All this means that, although the situation is better than in the provinces, in that a reporter working for an influential national newspaper may find himself brought into contact with people at all levels of society, there is still no "professional" centre as such for journalists, and little opportunity for the debate and exchange of views essential to any organisation that must be as flexible to the needs of the times as the press.

It is important to retain in journalism those who have reached senior positions and for more opportunities of employment to be opened up to absorb some of the casualties of closures and amalgamations. One year after the closing down of the *News Chronicle*, twelve of its senior staff sat round a table in a London club to meet again and discuss how they had got on. Only one of the twelve was still working for a newspaper, and there are today many journalists of very high calibre who are working outside the newspaper industry—script writing, publications, television reporting and commercial work. In the public interest men like this should be either on the staffs of leading newspapers or in some way handing on their experience. No profession, no organisation can withstand a situation for long where there is a poor standard of entry coupled with a rapid dispersion at the top of people with experience.

In the long term the future of every newspaper and the raising of standards lies in the hands of those now just starting on some local newspaper. The question that might well be asked of the press as a whole is, what is it going to do to help these young men in their careers over the next quarter century?

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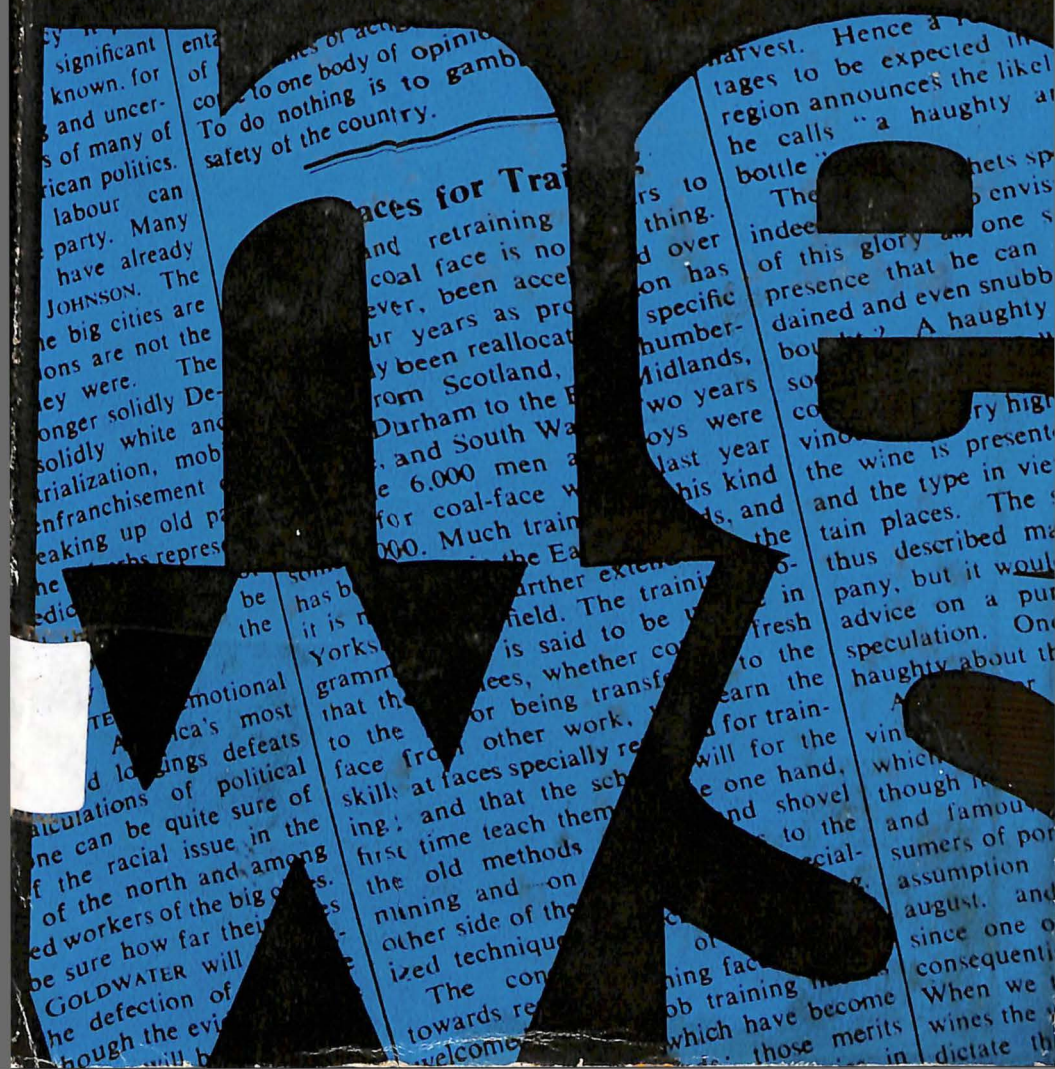
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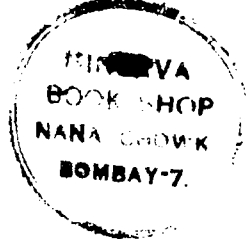


The British Press has been brought into sharp focus in recent years, but although much has been aired and two Royal Commissions have reported on the profession since the war, the layman still knows comparatively little about this responsible branch of society.

What is the Press ? How big is it ? Do journalists spend all their time in pubs ? Does it matter what the Press says ? Is the journalist a craftsman or a paid hack who writes to his employers' direction ? There are many actions by newspapers that offend ; are these really necessary and what can be done to prevent them ?

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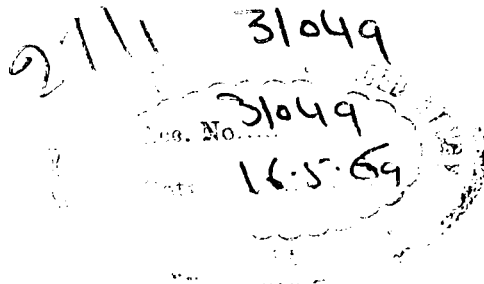
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Preface

AS AN ARMY officer I found that sudden postings were often connected with a current crisis being reported at the time. One was very conscious of the press, therefore, but in a rather hostile way. It was a topic for conversation in the mess, but seldom did anyone put in a good word for the journalist, despite the distinguished records of many correspondents which were freely acknowledged by those who had served alongside them during the war. My reaction to the press was much the same until one day, through a succession of events, I found myself in 1948 sitting at the feet of the late John McCulloch, an ex-News-Editor of the Exchange Telegraph Company Ltd., then Chief Press Officer at the War Office. I had entered a new world and found it intensely interesting. There was then an enormous gap between journalists and the world in which I had moved previously; few of my brother officers had a notion about how the press worked and little or no inclination to find out. The press was a nuisance, to be tolerated if it kept to itself and produced the morning paper, but not to be encouraged to poke into service affairs. This attitude was not uncommon amongst many civil servants then working in the War Office and to a lesser degree perhaps amongst members of Embassy staffs and the average English

"community" overseas, as I was later to find out. It was noticeable, for example, that many senior officials who appeared to have some responsibility for informing the public of their policies, and therefore to make themselves available to the press for questioning, were unsympathetic to say the least.

Since those early post-war days there has been an improvement in the press relations of the Services and of many Government departments, but it has always appeared to be a rather uneasy relationship depending largely upon the confidence which has been placed in the public relations officers concerned, both by the official side and the press. The inherent fear of the press and its methods of disclosure, however, has resulted in the proliferation of public relations officers since the war. Many of these have been ordinary career officers who have been put into public relations appointments without training and without much inclination, briefed to act as a buffer between the press and those in authority. In this way the worst of both worlds has been achieved. If the public relations officer was discarded altogether, then direct contact between the press and the official would come about more often, possibly to the advantage of both. If the public relations officer system is maintained, but without using people with professional training, then the journalist finds himself blocked and unable to get the answers he wants. Contact is reduced to the minimum. Friction and mutual dislike become the order of the day.

There has been grave concern about the press, sufficient disquiet to have caused two Royal Commissions to report since the war, the first in 1949 and the latest, after

a two-year period of investigation, in 1962. The two Commissions performed a herculean task, amassing details about every aspect of newspaper production, and it should perhaps be noted by those who are critical of the way the press seek information that when it came to disclosing information about itself the press was very open and forthcoming. The evidence given by proprietors, journalists, trade unions, and managements generally is frank and full. Some newspapers allowed themselves to be subjected to detailed investigations by outside business efficiency experts. Facts and figures abound in both reports and the details of ownership are recorded for every newspaper published in the country. It is all there for anyone to read, and I have drawn freely from both reports.

The 1962 Report was concerned basically with the problem of monopoly and amalgamations, but also covered many of the questions asked by members of the public: how big is the press, how influential, and is it becoming dangerous; if so, how and why? And above all, why do newspapers behave as they do sometimes, why all this sensationalism and so much concentration on what appears to be unhelpful and sordid? Why indeed does the press cause so much trouble when so many things which are publicised could well be left alone? All of us from time to time have heard complaints like this about the press, sometimes in anger, sometimes more in sorrow than anger, but always with only a veiled hostility towards the journalist himself who seems to be the nigger in the woodpile. This book, therefore, is concerned more with the journalist than with newspapers because, knowing many journalists

over the years their public image often seems so divergent from what one really knows of them as people, fulfilling as they do a difficult and vital role in our democratic way of life. The general public sees only the end product of their labours, the daily or weekly newspaper. In the succeeding chapters an attempt has been made to show something of what goes on behind the scenes and why some of the activities of journalists cause the pain and hurt they appear to do, resulting in enquiries such as the Radcliffe Tribunal following the Vassall affair and the imprisonment of two journalists, which has been taken as the starting-point for a discussion of the work of the press and the part played by the journalist himself.

This book is certainly not a critique of the press as a whole, because I am hardly qualified to make one, pretending to no direct experience of journalism myself and writing solely as an interested observer who has had the opportunity of knowing a great many journalists under a variety of circumstances. This has also made it possible to write without any feelings of obligation to past or present employers; where I have been critical of some journalistic practices I hope that for those for whom the cap fits, there will also be a regard for the fact that I have been equally critical of many members of the establishment. It may be, however, that those who succeed in reading this book will feel I have been altogether too sympathetic to the press and have painted far too rosy a picture. This may be so, but my experience, such as it is, leads me to conclude that the press is grossly maligned by certain sections of society and the journalist is often treated as an outcast; much needs to

be done to redress the balance. The press itself will say, no doubt, that it needs no advocate. Many distinguished journalists are themselves prominent critics of their own profession. I hope that those who have more knowledge of the inner workings of the press than I have, and feel they are in some way sinister and need exposing, will put another point of view. Nothing but good can result from a freer exchange of information and the removal of some of the mystique of Fleet Street.

In deciding how much to try and cover in a book like this (which is meant to act as some sort of practical guide for the layman) I was guided by the principle of writing only about those press matters in which I have had personal experience as a result of the various appointments I have held over the past sixteen years, all of which have entailed constant contact with the press. I know little or nothing about the management of newspapers, the difficulties of production from the mechanical point of view, or trade union disputes which form a large part of the context of both the Reports. Those whose interest lies in the field of industrial relations will find plenty to read in the latest Report and in the Summaries of Evidence.¹ There is criticism of the efficiency of production implied in the 1962 Report which does not seem to have been denied, and of course this must have a bearing on the work of the journalist himself. Where this has been obvious and I have had to make references to both management and to the trade unions, my researches are based largely on the findings of the

¹ Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations, paras. 24-27: Report of The Royal Commission on the Press, 1962 (Cmnd. 1811).

reports and not on personal experience. In this respect I have deviated from the principle of writing from experience. It is more than likely that many of my deductions are wrong, and I shall be glad to be corrected. At the moment the journalistic side of the industry is submerged in the general image conjured up by that derogatory phrase "the gentlemen of the press". If at the end of this book the reader begins to think of the journalist as he might of the scientist, or the doctor, or indeed of any of the professions where it is the integrity of the individual that gives the image of the profession as a whole, then it is hoped that it may have served a useful, if modest, purpose.

In order to distinguish between the mass circulation press and those newspapers appealing to a minority readership, the expressions the *quality* press and the *popular* press have been used following the nomenclature used in the reports of the Royal Commissions. The implication however that the quality press has a monopoly of those journalists who might be expected to produce material of a high quality, and conversely that the popular press employs journalists of a lower calibre, is utterly refuted, as it is of course quite untrue. No one supposes, for example, that those manufacturing a popular car employ engineers or designers of less merit than those making quality cars—the difference is in the design of the cars to meet the different consumer demands; the skills required are much the same, though some might say that those operating in a more highly competitive market have to exercise more imagination and dash than those in a secured one. Both the Royal Commissions use these distinguishing terms and explain

in a footnote¹ that: "the significant difference between the quality and the popular newspaper is that while the quality publisher aims at serving those who want full information on a wide range of public matters, and who are prepared to devote time to reading it, the popular publisher aims his product at those who want their news presented in a more summary way and with more illustration". In Fleet Street the jargon for what the Royal Commission terms quality newspapers is the "heavies", not a bad definition and one that avoids the connotation attached to the word *quality* for those journalists who find themselves working in the so-called popular press.

I am indebted to many friends in Fleet Street for their help and their criticisms of parts of this book, and for the help given to me in preparing two previous pamphlets on the press, which in turn have provided me with the background for some of the chapters in this book. In the chapter on foreign correspondents I have based my remarks on the experience of working with representatives of most of the world's press, in Paris, Singapore, Hong Kong and the Far East generally; in East Africa, mainly Nairobi, where from time to time there was an influx of foreign correspondents; and during the period I was the official Military Spokesman at the British Embassy in Cairo from 1951 to 1953, covering the period of the abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, the burning down of Cairo on "black Saturday", and the *coup d'état* by Colonel Nasser. During this period, in conjunction with a Foreign

¹ Report of The Royal Commission on the Press, 1962, p. 12, note 6.

Office spokesman, I presided at 175 press conferences held on successive days, and was thus able to observe at first hand how the journalist went about his business, often at considerable risk, to get stories to be read later in the calm seclusion of British homes, far from the rioting and tensions of the Middle East. Many of the friendships I made then have continued to this day; some of the foreign correspondents who were there have since died or have been killed; others have left journalism altogether; one, Alan Whicker, is known to many as one of the "Tonight" team; another, James Holburn, now editor of the *Glasgow Herald*, was then a foreign correspondent of *The Times*. Colin Reid of the *Daily Telegraph*, the doyen of the Cairo foreign correspondents, has retired. Sefton Delmer no longer roams the world. The casualty rate is high in Fleet Street and perhaps that is the reason why the friendship of a journalist is something which is not to be treated lightly and once given is rarely broken. I have reason to be grateful for many kindnesses shown to me by journalists of every sort; I hope this book will in some way acknowledge my debt to them and help toward a greater understanding.

Stephen Ward and All That

THERE IS little doubt that the handling by the press of the Vassall and Profumo affairs shocked a large number of hitherto placid readers of daily sensationalism. The findings of the Radcliffe Tribunal over the Vassall case revealed Fleet Street practices in reporting news and interviewing people which came as a shock to many lay readers, as did its conclusions that a good deal of what the press had been saying was inaccurate or misleading, and that some stories were virtually without foundation.¹ The sensational treatment of the Ward case and the detailed reporting of every sordid incident in some newspapers did nothing to improve the image of the press revealed by the Radcliffe Tribunal. The public were later presented with the spectacle of Mr. Alastair Hetherington, the editor of the *Guardian*, and Mr. Cecil King, the proprietor of the largest group of newspapers and magazines in the country, which includes the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*, abusing each other for the particular treatment of the Ward trial in their respective papers. At the meeting of the Institute of Journalists held in September of that year, 1963, the President, Mr. H. H. Hayman, said:²

¹ See article by Lord Shawcross in *The Press and the People*, 10th Annual Report of the Press Council, November 1963.

² As reported in the *Guardian*, September 4th, 1963.

"Relations between the public and the press had probably never been as bad as they had in recent months. The freedom of the press was in danger because the deterioration in relations could lead to an easy passage for controls."

The blame for this state of affairs must be shared by both the general public and the press. The British public are "amongst the most avid newspaper readers in the world" (Lord Francis Williams' calculation is that "per head of population the British read twice as many of their newspapers as the Americans"¹), yet the average person cares little how this industry puts a newspaper on the breakfast tables of the nation every morning, without fail, nor much about the people who work in it. In this the British reading public is unlike its American counterpart; for example, there the journalist is rated high and his work considered important, something everybody should know about. The contrast between the status of the journalist in these two countries is marked. Naturally a distinction must be drawn between the attitude of the better educated public to the "quality" newspapers and their staffs, and to the "popular" press, with its mass circulations that create a sensational treatment of even the dullest of news. Nevertheless the findings of the Royal Commissions give some justification to the remarks made by the President of the Institute of Journalists.

A reason for the state of affairs that existed then may be that although the press as a whole could hardly have

¹ *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), page 1.

been more co-operative in giving detailed information about itself to the Royal Commissions, in particular in the Report of the Royal Commission of 1962, little of this ever reached the general public, who relied on the press to give them the information contained in the Royal Commission Reports. Therein lies the paradox. The press felt under no obligation to foist a mass of detailed evidence on to the public unless it was convinced their readers would find it interesting. The Report of the Royal Commission on the Press, however, was no Denning Report.

It is true that in 1961 there was a spirited debate on the press in the House of Lords in which the then Primate of All England, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher (now Lord Fisher of Lambeth), played a prominent part. A number of criticisms were made, suitably sandwiched between layers of protective flattery, by any of those peers present who felt that they might one day be the subject of press interest. The debate as reported, however, produced just sufficient confusion by way of criticism and praise to leave the general reader as ignorant about the press as he had been before the debate. One constructive step was taken—the elimination of spite from the gossip columns. The credit for this must go to Lord Fisher of Lambeth and to William Hardcastle, then editor of the *Daily Mail*. In a speech that contained some of the old resentments against the way the press handled ecclesiastical matters, with a more sympathetic approach to the problems of reporters, if not their proprietors and editors, the Primate finished by appealing to editors to come out from behind their desks and face the public: "Who are the faceless ones?" he asked. The answer was

given the next day by a newspaper which produced photographs and names of the editors of the day, unkindly referred to by some as the rogues' gallery. Granada T.V. went further and arranged the first ever gathering of some editors before T.V. cameras to answer the various charges which had been made during the Lords' debate. It is to the credit of the *Daily Mail* that its editor did not try to defend himself, although he defended his staff, against the charges made against him over the gossip column and, what is more, said something would be done. Something was done and gradually the worst excesses at least in the gossip column type of reporting were eliminated. Other papers followed suit, but not much else happened.

In the same year, 1961, Parliament, alarmed by the demise of the daily newspaper the *News Chronicle*, and the evening paper from the same stable, the *Star*, and disturbed by the take-over of Odhams Press (which included the *People* and the *Daily Herald*) by the *Daily Mirror/Sunday Pictorial* Group,¹ set up a new Royal Commission to go into the whole question of monopolies and amalgamations by examining "the economic and financial factors affecting the production and sale of newspapers, magazines and other periodicals in the United Kingdom"; and "to consider whether these factors tend to diminish diversity of ownership and control or the number or variety of such publications, having regard to the importance, in the public interest, of the accurate presentation of news and the free expression of opinion". This was subsequently debated in the House of Lords in May 1963. A significant point was made

¹ Now the International Publishing Corporation.

during this debate by Lord Francis Williams in reference to the 1949 Royal Commission. Quoting from the two reports in order of publication, he showed plainly how little was really known about the *economic* affairs of the press by the distinguished members of the 1949 Commission. The relevant paragraph quoted by Lord Francis Williams from the 1949 Report said that :

“There had been between 1921 and 1948 a marked tendency away from the previous concentration of ownership in the National Press and it saw no reason to expect a reversal of this tendency and a fresh bout of concentration.”

The 1962 Royal Commission, however, had this to say :

“Taking all the dailies together, it is clear that the extent of concentration has been substantially increased since the Report of the 1949 Commission. The three leading undertakings controlled 67 per cent. of the total circulation in 1961 against 45 per cent. in 1948.”

Here was not the sort of misjudgment that one expected from a Royal Commission.

Similarly those persons in the country whose actions in one way or another make news are bewildered by the way in which their statements and speeches are treated by the press. The weariness felt by many people because so much that is worth while is never reported, whereas so much that is sordid or sensational appears to be meat and drink to the press, is very real indeed. The Radcliffe Tribunal did nothing to allay the feelings of this section of the public that all was not well within

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the press and, despite a natural wave of sympathy for the two reporters—Mulholland and Foster—against whom proceedings were taken in the High Court, resulting in imprisonment for refusing to disclose the source of their information in the Vassall case, the feeling of general hostility towards the “reporter” hardened. Journalists felt this and were momentarily disheartened, but since then have been able to throw back into the teeth of their critics a good many of the criticisms made at the time.

Many newspapers have pointed out how much the public owes to them as the “watch dogs” of the nation; underlining that even if some of the stories published about the scandals of 1963 were not entirely accurate, they were sufficient to open up the whole question of morality in public life in this country and to provide a platform for the debate that has been going on intermittently ever since.

The *Sunday Telegraph* in a leader at the height of the leadership debate before Mr. Macmillan’s resignation said:

“Irresponsibility is the charge most frequently made against the press and, in recent weeks, it has been directed against those Right Wing newspapers which have found it consistent with their professional consciences to point out the deficiencies of the leadership of Mr. Macmillan. In our view”, it goes on, “the charge implies confusion between the duties of a party politician and those of a newspaper. Rightly, one of the main considerations of a politician in deciding what to do is the effect which his actions are likely to

produce in the fortunes of his party: a newspaper, on the other hand, is primarily concerned to make all the relevant information available to the public—who decides.”

A high ideal which, by and large, is attempted in many newspapers, but the attempt “to make all the relevant information available” is often unsuccessful due to the sheer necessity for speed and the limitation of space. The dilemma which faces every conscientious journalist and editor in this respect is admirably summed up in the earlier Royal Commission on the Press (Cmd 7700, para 572, page 154):

“It is a peculiarity of a newspaper that it is produced by a profession grafted on to a highly competitive industry: whatever the ideals of the profession, they can be realised only within the conditions set by the industry.”

In most of the debates which take place about the press, whether in private or public, this competitive aspect is often overlooked and rarely understood to its full extent. But it is this factor which lies behind the actions of most daily newspapers in their treatment of the news stories of the day. The circulation figures are the economic key by which their advertising value is judged, and therefore advertising revenues and working capital. An increase in circulation means more resources to employ more and better personnel, to advertise the paper and launch new ideas to attract new readers. A fall in circulation means not only a loss of revenue from the sale of the paper itself, but also in revenue from ad-

vertising. This in turn means that there are less resources available to keep up with competitors and the downward spiral can be steep; disaster in fact stalks a newspaper with a falling circulation, as can be seen from the relative proportion of revenue from sales and advertising revealed in the 1962 Report and reproduced below:

Percentage of total revenue attributable to Sales and Advertising

<i>Class of Publication</i>	<i>1960</i>	
	<i>Sales†</i>	<i>Advertising</i>
	%	%
National Mornings—Quality ...	25	73
Popular ...	54	45
National Sundays— Quality ...	21	79
Popular ...	51	46
London Evenings ...	38	61
Provincial Mornings ...	41	58
Provincial Evenings ...	37	62
Provincial Weeklies ...	21	79
General Periodicals	50	46
Trade and Technical Periodicals	21	78

† Sales revenue represents gross receipts from sales less returns and discounts. The difference between the total of sales and advertising revenue and 100 per cent. represents small items of miscellaneous income.

It is interesting to note that the quality press in this respect leans more heavily on advertising revenue than the popular press with its immense circulation.

If the popular idea of the press is that of all-powerful editors or proprietors taking major decisions in the calm seclusion of their offices, it is very far from reality. The heart of the modern newspaper is on the news side, the time factor is all-important and because the circulation figures are so vital fierce competition rules everything. The sheer size and complexity of it all must be taken into consideration too when one glibly refers to the press. In addition to the 1,235 weekly newspapers all employing journalists and often providing the basic training for new entrants, there are 45 morning, 78 evening and 15 Sunday newspapers currently on sale and more than 4,600 periodicals of every description, a figure that is tending to increase rather than decrease as is the case with some of the provincial weekly newspapers.¹

¹ The figures in this paragraph are condensed from the *Newspaper Press Directory* as at January 1964 and include figures for Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Channel Islands and the Republic of Ireland. I am grateful to the Newspaper Society for making these figures available to me.

News and Views

THERE IS a wealth of information available for any reader who wants to examine in detail the function of every journalistic post in a newspaper, and the aspiring journalist has no difficulty in finding out what he might one day have to do. But for those who have no interest in the journalist but considerable interest in the end result of his labours—the daily newspaper on the breakfast table—there appears to be a curious reaction to any suggestion that to know what goes on in a newspaper office is either important or relevant to the needs of our times.

Of all the distinctions to be made, the most important is that between “news” and “views”, and every trained journalist knows the ideal relationship between the two, which was best expressed in the centenary number of the *Manchester Guardian* in May 1921: “Comment is free, but facts are sacred.” It is true, of course, that this ideal has often been honoured in the breach more than in the observance, apart from the many border-line cases where a news story is intentionally presented through the medium of a particular writer’s mind or by a series of quotes which are used without balance. Nevertheless few newspapers fail to pay it lip service when writing about their craft and the organisation of a newspaper

tends to further it by the separation of "news" and "views". The latter includes all that part of the paper which appears to supplement the main news stories, the leaders and the feature articles, the letter columns and the reviews of books, films and plays; in all these opinion is not only legitimate but essential and the attraction of reading this part of the newspaper lies in agreeing or disagreeing with the various views which have been expressed. The more violent the views, the more violent the reaction of the average reader, and so, by using a team of skilful commentators, the editor can build up a personal relationship with the reader who will quote these opinions in pub and home until they are replaced by more in the next day's issue.

The cartoonist too plays an important part in providing a link between the news and views of the paper over any particular story. His cartoon must be topical—often more than one is drawn and discarded during the day due to late news coming in, and a cartoonist is not only an artist, often of distinction, but a news reporter and leader writer rolled into one. For the subject usually reflects some significant news item though the comment is highly personal. Feature articles, too, follow a news story. "News" is hard objective fact to be presented without bias, though naturally with an eye to the interests of a newspaper's particular readers. What may appear as news in a provincial newspaper holding a dominant position in a city, and therefore unaware of competition, will bear as little relationship in *presentation* to the same news item splashed across a national daily as a seaside revue does to a West End musical. Another criterion of news is simply that it must be

“new”, and yet so often an editor is asked to publish items that may well have appeared in other newspapers the day before or even a week before. In presenting up-to-the-minute news which is fresh and arresting a newspaper is adopting the sound basic principles to be followed in marketing any new product, and a newspaper is a new product every twenty-four hours. Newspaper editors, however, are criticised for the way in which some news is presented and for the content of many stories they claim to have news value. What then are the basic elements of a news story? They may be roughly grouped as following:

Importance: This usually means the importance of some person connected with the story, a Cabinet Minister or any well-known politician, a public figure, people who are famous or infamous, and if they have been “in the news” before, so that their names or faces are easily identifiable at a quick glance, so much the better.

Human interest: This really means an item that is interesting to many people rather than a few; the pathetic, something that causes indignation or deals with money; news of prices and gambling and robberies have always been of tremendous news value.

Topicality: A news story must be new, as has been said, but new facts about a subject of intense current interest always make news. Excitement, danger, rapid movement (such as a description of a chase by police cars), all make their appeal. It is important too that the background is easily recognised; well-known faces must also be photographed in well-known places: this will produce the maximum impact and make for easy recognition. A great deal that is trivial derives its news value

from this quality, especially in the popular press. Then there are a number of subjects which are of wide interest but on which it is difficult to obtain "hard" news all the time; for instance, that mainly concerning women—fashions (except at the Paris shows, when reporting for "hard" news about new fashions is one of the tougher assignments of Fleet Street), food, family problems, schools and so on. The pattern of most newspapers in their presentation of news stories changes little and the type of story that sells a particular newspaper becomes almost sacrosanct. The News Editor and the sub-editors follow, in fact, patterns set for them by their predecessors. An exception to this has been the increase in the amount of space given to religious matters. This has come about through the initiative of one or two editors and news editors a few years ago who took a chance by running specifically religious articles. The response was surprising. The *Daily Telegraph* over one article on the subject of the Prayer Book received so many letters from readers that they were published over several issues of the paper. Such a response is easy to gauge and encourages an editor to do more. Naturally certain quality newspapers have always numbered a large group of religious people amongst their regular readers and cater for them, but the extent to which the popular press and the provincial press has realised the intense interest of their readers in serious subjects, and has provided for them, is one of the more encouraging aspects of newspapers at the present time. In this respect the British press is ahead of the press in the U.S.A. and other countries where a subject that begins to reach this sort of depth is placed in a special "box", that is a column

occupying a regular position somewhere in the paper, usually an obscure part of it, and heavily signposted so that no reader can complain he has had to read it unwittingly. When a newspaper changes its make-up, even for a day, it gambles heavily either on getting new readers or losing some of its regulars. This sort of gambling was once done a great deal and it made for exciting times in Fleet Street. Like everything else, newspapers are now so complex that less and less scope exists for the really hard and challenging changes in presentation and content. In this respect the change of attitude to a serious and, for many newspapers, a dangerous subject like religion, and the challenge it makes, is something for which Fleet Street should rightly be given great credit. Having said that, one must immediately complete any discussion on the ingredients of a news story by reference to the stories that could be called *amusing* or *entertaining*.

In the popular press, but certainly not in every newspaper thus grouped, there has been a hangover from the Edwardian delight in the exposure of the thigh. The excited shock with which the Can-can was greeted seems to have made an indelible impression on a generation of journalists and photographers, to the extent that no woman could, at one time, ever appear in a certain type of newspaper unless she was sitting down and exposing a length of thigh: cheesecake, as it is known in most journalistic circles. This has developed so that now some of our popular dailies show a scantily dressed girl a day between them. The photographs, on the whole, are of the Beauty Queen type rather than suggestive pictures, and if those who must have a pretty under-dressed girl

to look at once a day find her in their daily newspaper, rather than having to go and snoop round Soho, then the press is probably doing little harm in this respect. Whether or not, however, it increases circulation is debatable. The *Express* newspapers, for example, both daily and Sunday, do not publish salacious material of any kind, either photographically or by the written word. The circulation of these two newspapers has certainly not suffered, in fact they both attract tremendous advertising. The circulation of the serious Sunday press has also risen by comparison with its popular competitors over recent years. Some journalists in Fleet Street, however, cannot be persuaded that virtue might have its own reward; but then who is closer to human nature—often seen at its very worst—than the journalist? So the salacious type of story and picture is likely to go on until public opinion takes a hand. When one considers the near-pornographic literature and illustrated publications which are now sold in their countless thousands by bookshops all over the country it is perhaps to the credit of the press that this particular human weakness is not exploited more. The sexual story, however, is one of the ingredients of a news story simply because it will always evoke a response from the great majority of readers, who can react to it from their own experience. It is this involuntary reaction to seeing something reported which is familiar and yet not familiar because it affects someone else, that builds up the appeal of newspapers.

The feature side of the newspaper is much easier for most people to understand. Whether the article appears in a popular or a quality newspaper, the techniques are

much the same and although the presentation of an article, the sub-headings and illustration, if any, can be highly individual, the readers of feature articles are looking for something different from the easily digested news story on the front page. The mood of reading is quieter and more reflective and it is here that the journalist is able to exercise his craft to a fuller extent, although still subject to the twin terrors of speed and "subs", of whom more later. (The big names of Fleet Street are more often associated with the feature side than the news although there are many brilliant exceptions.) Considerable resources for research and contact are placed at a feature writer's disposal by all classes of newspapers and it is through them that the serious reader is able to obtain an interpretation of the main news stories. What many readers of the quality press fail to appreciate is the high standard of *feature* writing in the popular press and also the time and research devoted to such articles that may be written well in advance of an anticipated news story, and many such articles may be kept for a suitable occasion. The sources of information open to a writer, backed by the power of his newspaper's ability to sway public opinion, are much more authoritative than many might suppose—not least in that proprietors and directors are often powerful figures in the world of affairs themselves, who garner information at all levels to pass on to their feature writers. To anyone who has attended the quasi-Government type of reception or City gathering there is wry humour to be found in watching influential men and women paying court to proprietors of newspapers whose products they would not choose to have in their houses and certainly

never read. The information they pass on, however, does not fall upon deaf ears and some of it may influence the news and feature stories of the popular press. It is the greatest miscalculation to assume, because a particular newspaper has a popular appeal and is "dressed" for its market, that, *ipso facto*, all who work for it are morons. The great leaders of our times have all avoided this mistake and daily read all the newspapers they can, Sir Winston Churchill being an outstanding example. Those who criticise most are often those to whom the popular press is almost unknown.

The *News of the World*, for example, has been criticised often for the content of its news columns. It could not be so criticised for the content of its feature articles, many written with insight and skill. This could be said for several Sundays whose general reputation is based only upon their selection of news stories. The discerning reader, therefore, will pick his way amongst the whole range of daily and Sunday newspapers, if what he seeks is the story behind the news, and is perceptive enough to realise that the best goods are not always put in the shop window.

The News Story in Print

ASSUMING THAT it is the news story, the ingredients of which have been discussed in the previous chapter, which sets the pace and from which flow the feature articles, leaders and supporting stories (although here again there can be significant exceptions to this general rule), what is the routine on the news side? It is the duty of the News Editor to keep a diary covering all forthcoming events which, in his opinion, would yield news stories and which might be used by a competitor. Also, and perhaps most important, "follow-up" stories, side roads which have formed as a result of a main news story, for reporters to pursue in connection with current news. These may cause reporters to drift into many peculiar backwaters to obtain fresh material, and if possible an angle on a story that has not been previously covered or is not known to reporters of other papers. He inspires his specialist reporters to cover any subject that might produce a news story and about which he has received information in advance, so that the paper is prepared when the story "breaks". A considerable amount of material is sent to Fleet Street with an embargo on it, i.e. that it is not to be published before a certain date and time. This can often be an important speech or document or a short news story. A clearly

marked embargo from a reputable source which is known and respected by the press will rarely be broken, except in error. The way in which so much material is held for publication with so few mistakes is a tribute to the ability of Fleet Street to keep its mouth shut when it wants to, and the efficiency of its arrangements in that it seldom loses an important story amongst the thousands of handouts and documents of all kinds which flow into every newspaper office.

Taking into account all this sort of material, and his own judgment of the way things are likely to go over a whole range of subjects, the News Editor each day puts all this news in a schedule with a provisional allotment of space for each story. How necessary this is can be judged by the fact that something like 80 per cent. of all the news and information reaching a daily newspaper, whether quality or popular, has to be discarded through sheer lack of space. In most offices there is a morning conference at which this schedule is discussed and amended in the light of information available to the editors and other heads of departments, and in the afternoon a further conference when more specific direction may be given for this or that story to be pursued. The leaders and feature articles are related to the news side and suggestions made how this or that subject might be treated. A considerable amount of initiative, however, is always left in the hands of specialist writers and leader writers, and strong personal opinions and judgments are given fairly free play. The journalist here comes into his own as an important member of our society, able to judge on the importance of an issue from an experience of many years of personal interviewing and the sifting

of thousands of words for that which is relevant and of basic public interest. Many of the articles that appear are thus highly personalised and not slavishly written to an editor's or proprietor's direction; but both with news and all other stories the final results of a journalist's labours are often in the hands of the sub-editors, who are responsible for shortening and re-writing copy until it fits into its allotted space. This system, that can be heart-breaking for a young journalist trying to get a story into his own newspaper, possibly with his name on it, operates roughly as follows.

In the sub-editors' room the actual news as it pours in from reporters and the news agencies is provisionally evaluated in terms of space and importance by a "copy taster" or a deputy chief sub-editor, and then handed to one of the team of sub-editors who re-writes or shortens it to the approximate length which has been decided upon, finally writing the headings as well—those headlines for which the reporter, who wrote the story and interviewed the person featured in it, is so often blamed when they are sensational or inaccurate. To paraphrase a hundred words or more of "copy" in two or three words is almost impossible and the shorter the story the less room for the headlines to it. Further, the sub-editor responsible knows little of what lies behind the story or any of the background, so that inadvertently in the headlines he may highlight just that aspect of the case that the reporter has probably played down for a variety of reasons, none of which can be transmitted to the sub-editor. The story, however, even re-written and shortened, has not yet seen the light of day. Everything depends on its news value set against that of other stories

from other reporters, and the news agencies which carry news to the press throughout the day and influence the sub-editor's decisions from moment to moment. An early story of moderate news value may stand a better chance of publication than a later one of the same value; but a big news story which has not been foreseen or comes in late will kill all the lesser ones, as more space is required to give it prominent treatment. From the sub-editors the revised and shortened stories go to the chief sub-editor who passes them for printing. Newspapers, in fact, are produced by the sub-editors. It is on their desks that a story, which may have taken hours of painstaking investigation and interviewing to write, or is a careful paraphrase of a long parliamentary debate, is operated on by a ruthless surgeon, so that within a few minutes it may bear little relationship to the original, though still containing the relevant facts. The degree and speed of subbing varies a great deal from newspaper to newspaper, and reporters and feature writers alike try to write to the length they think the story warrants against the news of the day as they know it. But apart from a specially commissioned signed article practically no story survives without subbing.

It will be seen, therefore, that the journalist who fills this role in a newspaper is someone who should have a good background knowledge of a wide variety of subjects and, apart from the technical skill required in getting over the principal facts of any story in the least number of words, judgment on those facts and the knowledge of where they can be checked quickly. Names, appointments, legal aspects which have been overlooked by the reporter must be noted. It follows

that here educational standards are important and some training a little more specialised than that meted out to the young journalist on the provincial paper which is the basic training ground for the aspiring journalist. The standard of most newspapers rests largely in their hands, but they are rarely brought into contact with the customer; very many people are unaware of their existence, yet to the question put so often by newspaper readers, "Why was that story published and not another perhaps more worth while?", the answer lies with the subs. In short, the sub-editors' room can make or break a newspaper, and much depends on the judgment and indeed *flair* and skill in devising telling headlines that are not an insult to the copy that follows, the development of a sixth sense for the detection of the bogus and inaccurate, a knowledge of the law of libel (although there is a further check at proof stage), and the ability to master the art of compressed simple writing and quick condensation.

If we follow a particular "story" from the reporter's notebook through the subs' room, by late afternoon it will have been passed for printing, the proofs will have been checked for libel and further cut, probably, to be fitted into the pages by the night editor. Finally, the page proof incorporating our reporter's story will be scanned for such things as accidental incongruities, or anything which seems "wrong". Here again the night editor is relying on a sixth sense based on years of experience and training. All these operations are carried out at high speed, and by 9.30 p.m. or slightly later the first editions of most papers are ready for printing. To get the paper into that form, carrying all the news

stories, feature articles, leaders, special articles and photographs, advertising, city news and the whole variety of matter that makes up a modern daily newspaper, a matter of ten or eleven hours has been allowed, although much of it may have been prepared well in advance. During the next five to six hours, say until 4.0 a.m., the news pages may be remade several times. News does not stop with the first editions; late home news and in particular foreign news continues to pour into Fleet Street through the news agencies. As this news is going to the other newspapers no one can afford to ignore it.

This late news is considered in relation to what is already appearing; if it is important lesser stories are cut or removed to make way for it, and a great deal of cutting, elimination and re-writing in summary form by the late sub-editors shape the second edition, which is being prepared as soon as the first is printing. Further editions are handled in the same way throughout the night. During the whole of this time the evaluation of news is taking place, one story balanced against another, the public interest in this or that assessed, decisions made and sometimes drastic alterations of a front page put into effect. The lead story may change, the headlines be altered and then, as the first editions of competing papers arrive in the offices, a decision made whether to follow another newspaper's story on some subject or let it go. Any newspaper that has a scoop will hold this back, if possible, until the later editions, so making it more difficult for competitors to catch up. It is, however, as a result of the edition battles that take place in the small hours of the morning in Fleet Street that errors

occur and stories are lost. Members of the establishment, having travelled home at the respectable hours of 6.0 p.m. or thereabouts the previous evening, read the paper carefully over breakfast or in the train, and take delight in proving that some report is inaccurate, caring little for those who every night of their lives go home at dawn, in order to provide them with a daily paper carrying the latest news up to 3 or 4 a.m. that morning.

The News Agencies

THE REPORTER at the door, or on the end of a telephone, or even at a press conference, is rather like the fighting soldier: he requires a number of people at base to put him there and to support his operations. Members of the public rarely see a reporter unless they are the subject of press interest, the official world only sees them at press conferences or interviews, and a large percentage are rarely seen at all. In the main these are the reporters and sub-editorial staffs of the news agencies. Certainly the extent to which the press, and through it the general public, relies upon them for the solid job of minute by minute reporting of events is little understood. All the public sees is the result, which is the news presented in a variety of ways. Journalists themselves know how much technical skill is required to produce the flow of news from the agencies, upon which they all depend at one time or another, and so have a much better understanding of their fellow journalists' capabilities. This may delude them into thinking that the general public have the same regard for journalists doing a difficult job, on the whole well and efficiently. In fact, of course, few members of the public have any knowledge about the role played in the national press by either the provincial journalists or the news agencies'

staffs, and can only judge the industry and those who work in it by superficial appearances.

To deal with the Press Association, the principal news agency in this country, or the Exchange Telegraph Co. Ltd., both of which have their offices in or near Fleet Street, is to find oneself in business with a group of highly trained men whose integrity and judgment is of the highest order. In their hands the Royal Family, the Government of the day, great industrial enterprises, the Churches and many others often place the first information of some important event, with an agreement for the time and date of release to the press. To the second of that agreed time, this information will start to appear on the teleprinters in the newspaper offices served by them. The report, or statement, will have been carefully paraphrased so that newspapers can use what they are receiving almost without changing a word if they wish, thus avoiding errors, particularly if the original material was issued in full and too long for the newspaper space available, which is nearly always the case. Entirely independent of Government direction, they are as vital to the Government of the day as any Whitehall department, for without them neither parliamentary debate nor Government action, through the publication of its reports and the statements of its ministers, would get reported with anything like the impact which results from a statement being published simultaneously by every newspaper throughout the country. Yet the final decision on what is news, what should be sent and how much space should be given to it, is the agencies' own decision. The editor's decision is final and neither monarch, nor Minister of the Crown,

industrialist nor Church leader, can cause anything to be circulated which is not viable as news. The question, "Can you trust the press?" is heard more than often. When it comes to keeping secrets those working in the news agencies can be as silent as Trappist monks. The reasons are simple. In the first place all their early training has taught them that competition is vital, and as between one journalist and another working for competitive papers, it is clearly understood that information of a confidential nature is not bandied about. Furthermore the three codes of Fleet Street are also taught early in a journalist's career and few journalists succeed if they break them and are known to do so. "On the record"—"off the record"—"background": three simple phrases under the cover of which some of the momentous news items of the post-war years have been told to editors and correspondents and, of course, the editors of the agencies. Advance information is vital if an announcement is to be put into its proper perspective and released simultaneously so that no one newspaper will get a scoop, with the resultant confusion. Naturally balance has to be maintained between the press retaining its freedom to comment and to disclose news as and where it finds it, and the acceptance of confidential information under these codes, which by implication are a restriction. The fact is, however, that where those on the official side know their business and the press trust their confidant, a great number of announcements are made in this way. More often than not, the information is restricted to the chief news editors of the agencies, and this requires of them long hours of work reading the thousands of words often contained in turgid

Government reports which have to be stripped down to get at the essential facts. Moreover, if the document is highly confidential, this work may have to be done after office hours. The responsibility for the safe keeping of such documents and all the tension which inevitably goes with handling material of this kind, where a slip might cause a panic or a sensational scoop, is borne cheerfully by these men, who are rarely recognised by any form of honour or award. Perhaps this is just as well, for the last thing in the world any journalist would accept is that in some way he is a member of the establishment. His non-membership, aggressively so, is what we mean by a free press. All the same, when the press receive so much criticism it should be remembered how journalists such as these serve the public, and if no honour comes their way, then respect might be a welcome alternative.

The Press Association is concerned primarily with the distribution of *factual news* and features, and has been serving the press since it was formed as long ago as 1868. Its terms of ownership and methods of operation are admirably set out in para. 168 *et seq.* of the Royal Commission Report 1947-49, which is worth quoting in part.

“Although in form a limited liability company, the Press Association is in effect a co-operative organisation. It has been owned since its foundation in 1868 by the provincial newspapers of the British Isles. Any company or individual owning a newspaper published in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or Eire may be a member of the company, and every member must take up a minimum number

of shares varying according to the number of papers it publishes. Proprietors of London newspapers can be shareholders only if they print their newspapers outside London. These arrangements ensure that so long as newspaper ownership itself is widely distributed, no one shareholder can obtain anything approaching a controlling interest in the company. Each year the director who has been longest in office retires and, though he is eligible for re-election, another is almost invariably appointed, so that all the shareholders have an opportunity of being elected from time to time to take part in the direction of the Association's affairs. For five years after his retirement an ex-director is a member of the Consultative Committee, a body consisting of the board of directors and five ex-directors which exists to give the directors an opportunity of discussing problems with the Association's 'elder statesmen'."

Extel, the Exchange Telegraph Company Ltd., to give it its full name, is the only national news agency independent of newspaper control. An independent company, it was formed in 1872 and its origins and present activities are clearly set out in an excellent brochure published during 1962.¹ Its first activities, and those in which it still dominates the agency business, stemmed from an agreement made with the Stock Exchange in 1872 to "circulate to its subscribers the fluctuations in the prices of its stocks and shares".

It differs from the Press Association in its twofold

¹ *Extel and its Group of Companies*, produced by Central News Ltd.

activities of catering both for newspapers, like the Press Association, and for non-newspaper interests such as the world of finance with the London Stock Exchange Service to brokers, greyhound and racing information to bookmakers; and in providing a running news service for many clubs, hotels and Government offices. We are not concerned here, however, with its non-newspaper activities. In the newspaper field it competes with the Press Association in the provision of up-to-the-minute news, for the national press and overseas agencies and the news rooms of the BBC and ITN. But the wider provincial press is the special province of the Press Association, which was formed by the press itself for this purpose.

Something has been said about the gathering of official information for release by these two agencies, but what of the run-of-the-mill news stories which they are also expected to provide? How do they get them in the first place? As in the case of the national daily and Sunday press, they too have representatives on the staff of many of the larger provincial and smaller local papers, they too deploy, throughout the provinces, their own staff reporters who work only for the agency concerned. This network is so comprehensive that if something of interest happens anywhere it will be known almost immediately.

The Press Association moreover is closely linked with Reuters, which is housed in the same building, and steadily feeds such items to it, whence they are retransmitted to the papers of the countries concerned.

A simple analogy may illustrate this side of the work. To supply the water for a large town, water is caused to

flow from many sources into a central reservoir where it is filtered in a variety of ways and then put into the main pipes. Anyone in the town can draw off this water and use it for many purposes. The same thing happens with the news provided by the news agencies. It goes to nearly every newspaper office in the country, and editors, as it were by turning on the tap, have a flow of news they can use in any way they want.

All the news transmissions, however, are carried out at speed. With the present techniques, an important story can be circulated to papers throughout the country in a matter of minutes. Between agencies such as Reuters in this country and their main offices overseas there is simultaneous communication, and through them an important news story can be transmitted by local teleprinter systems to every newspaper served by them throughout the world. It is therefore almost always too late to try and correct a story once it has been "sent". At best one can obtain a correction in a later edition of a paper, but the original impression of the reader will be formed by the first news story. Whether or not one likes this situation is beside the point; the fact is it exists, and it is up to those who "make news" to try and understand some of the techniques it is necessary to use, both to help themselves and the press in their job of reporting events as accurately and concisely as possible.¹

It is not for a non-professional such as the writer to make any comparison between these agencies. Suffice it to say that anyone who has established a *modus vivendi* with the Chief News Editors of these two agen-

¹ See *The Parish and The Local Press* (C.I.O. 1962) by the same author.

cies has at hand friends whose judgment and experience in the news field is unrivalled in Fleet Street, and through them the means of almost instant communication with all the newspapers in the country.

The Exchange Telegraph Company in its brochure refers to its full-time staff of some fifteen hundred, which includes journalists, telegraphists, electrical engineers, instrument makers, draughtsmen, businessmen, chartered accountants, chartered secretaries, printers, telephonists, drivers, and so on. Their circuits work twenty-four hours a day and carry nearly ten million words a year. No less would be the activities of the Press Association, in fact in the news field their overall organisation is considerably larger. The 1949 Report of the Royal Commission refers to a full-time staff of one hundred and sixty-five journalists in Fleet Street with some sixteen hundred correspondents scattered over the country, most of them employed on provincial weekly and daily newspapers. The figures are certainly no less today and these two agencies, employing large numbers of journalists, highly trained and many of them specialists, such as Political Correspondents, are also "the press", but very different from the popular image of it. Certainly Parliament is heavily in debt to the reporters of these two agencies. When the House is sitting, day after day their reporters work in competitive teams so that there is always one man from each agency taking down verbatim whatever is being said during a debate. When major debates are being held simultaneously in the House of Lords and the House of Commons a heavy demand is made on their resources, if one considers the length of the debates and the fact that each member's

speech has to be transcribed, condensed and phoned over to the "copy takers". From them it is immediately transmitted to the newspapers. Thus in a long and important speech such as the Budget Speech the first part of it may well be in print before the member sits down. No one reads the parliamentary reports more avidly than those who speak in Parliament, and woe betide the newspaper which misquotes them; the standard of accuracy in this reporting is high, but it is not achieved without toil and expertise. Anyone who has gone up to the press gallery following a major speech and has watched the reporters responsible checking and cross-checking their shorthand transcriptions, verifying facts or figures which have been quoted, and then paraphrasing and condensing to bring out all the essential facts, but mercifully omitting the rambling asides, and finally dictating it all in an uncomfortable telephone box, would wonder how we have managed to achieve this sort of an independent operation of Parliament that costs no one anything but without which, in order to know what was being done in the name of Parliament, we would have to read in Hansard everything said by Members in both Houses. For the release from that chore, and for the joy of being able to read at a glance the important speeches, the legislation and the business of the day in our daily newspapers, everyone should be grateful to these journalists. Let it be said at once, most of the daily press, in particular the quality press, have their own parliamentary correspondents and report speeches direct themselves, but whereas these may be seeking to write more of a critique of Parliament, the agencies are providing the texts on which comment is made.

Reuters

REUTERS LTD., a name familiar to the reader of practically any newspaper, is the main news agency whereby the British press is served with factual news of what is happening *outside* Great Britain, in the same way as it is served with news about what is happening *inside* Great Britain by the Press Association and Extel. Reuters, however, does a great deal more than that, as internationally it circulates news from this country to more than 3,000 daily newspapers all over the world, as well as providing many other forms of news service in individual countries. It is one of the principal means of news communication between one country and another, as well as between all these thousands of newspapers and our own press, both national and provincial. Reuters, too, was founded in the prolific nineteenth-century era of journalistic expansion by Julius Reuter in 1851 seeking to provide "commercial intelligence, who seven years later undertook to supply general news as well".¹ The situation today is that Reuters is jointly owned by the newspapers of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, with its headquarters in Fleet Street. Ownership is secured by a Trust Agreement

¹ The Report of The Royal Commission on the Press, 1949 (Cmnd. 7700), paras. 170 *et seq.*

entered into by the Press Association and the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, which has been extended to include the Australian Associated Press and the New Zealand Press Association. The latter are news agencies themselves in their own countries. "The purpose of the agreement is to maintain the independence and integrity of the News Service for all time."¹ Reuters distributes no profit and ploughs back year by year money to go on improving its world-wide services.

In the field of foreign news Reuters plays a dominant part. Through its main offices, scattered throughout the principal cities of the world, there is continuous communication by teleprinter. The head of each bureau has a full-time staff, often extensive, as well as locally recruited men who have contacts at every level and who keep a twenty-four-hour watch on the news in their area. This is done by watching the local press and keeping in touch with a whole range of contacts. Many of these men may well be bilingual, English of course being the common denominator. The news will be evaluated by a staff member of Reuters, re-checked for its authoritative-ness and then put on the wires. In, say, Singapore, news of some political development in Malaysia will be sent direct to the Reuter building in Fleet Street; there it will again be evaluated and checked against any other known information; then it will be put out on the teleprinter system covering the United Kingdom press and on the international circuit in those areas where the news is likely to be most interesting, so all the foreign editors of both the British and the foreign press of the world who are served by Reuters will have the informa-

¹ 1947/49 Report, para. 181.

tion which was depatched by the Singapore office, within possibly a few minutes if it is a reasonably important story. If it were sensational, say an assassination, then it takes only seconds for such a message to be flashed to nearly every newspaper in the world. Some Reuter offices also run their own distributive systems. The news from the United Kingdom which is flowing back to the Singapore office, say, on its way to Japan, Australia and New Zealand, is intercepted and retransmitted on a local Reuter circuit in Malaysia, sometimes by the use of teleprinters, sometimes by printing news sheets, often a combination of both.

The outstanding characteristic of Reuters is the devotion of its staff, and in particular of its successive General Managers, to the constant improvement of its services, so increasing the speed of its communications. All Reuters' staff work long hours, longer hours probably than most other journalists overseas, and all their offices function on a twenty-four hour basis. Throughout these hours, the Royal Commission reporting in 1949 estimated that something like half a million words a day flowed into the London office. The figure today is nearer 1,000,000. Its reputation throughout the world is such that, although entirely independent of the Government, information sent by it to any country in the world would be accepted immediately as authoritative. In moments of crisis anywhere in the world, invariably the first reports will be from the Reuters' representative. Without this basic information the Government of the day, indeed even the Services, would be severely handicapped, for when it comes to speed in communication, techniques and equipment equal that of any of the fighting

Services, and the information supplied is a good deal broader in scope than that given in Service messages.

I had the unique experience during the Suez *débâcle* of supplying the then Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, General Gruenther, with a daily "newsheet" made up of News Agency reports, as this was by far the quickest source of news of what was going on, especially as by that time the very useful prefix "U.K. eyes only" to Service messages emanating from the Suez area of operations was being used. This meant a good deal of the purely British aspect of the operation was not being seen officially by the U.S. personnel at Supreme Headquarters in Paris, hence the daily "newsheet". One was later able to check the agency reports against the "official" information. It was remarkable to see both the general accuracy of the reports, although not always in detail, and the speed of transmission in comparison with Service methods. There is a very sound explanation for this which has already been given, namely the lack of coding techniques which introduce delays, and the "man to man" relationship as between a bureau chief, say, in Washington and the duty news editor in London who can "talk" to each other on the teleprinter with no one between them. The latest equipment which has been installed by the Australian Associated Press in the Reuter building enables the London editor to have a continuous two-way conversation with Australia if he so wishes. Questions fed into the communication system will probably be answered from Australia before the transmission has been completed. It is virtually simultaneous communication; whereas Albany, the *Sunday Telegraph* columnist,

writing about the Cyprus crisis of Christmas 1963, said: "I hear urgent telegrams from the troubled island took several hours to reach the Foreign Office from the Commonwealth Relations Office. The entrances to the two buildings are less than 50 yards apart on opposite sides of the same courtyard."¹ It was not denied.

The safeguard to the British nation as a whole provided by Reuters is that little can happen, and certainly virtually nothing that affects British interests, without the British people through their own free press being informed and informed *independently* of the Government. It prevents biased interpretation for political motives which any foreign government might wish to put upon some event, although at the same time giving a foreign government the opportunity to give its views. If the number of foreign correspondents decreases, the importance of Reuters is bound to increase, as it will become in many cities and countries the *sole* source of news transmitted by a Commonwealth organisation. Thus the integrity of its staff and its General and Deputy Managers is a vital safeguard against biased reporting and Reuters being used for propaganda purposes by foreign powers. There have been three General Managers since the war, and with each Reuters have been very fortunate in having men of this calibre. Sir Christopher Chancellor, General Manager from 1944 to 1959, gave to Reuters much of the prestige and standing it now enjoys in every major country. Walton A. Cole, a human dynamo, literally died for Reuters, for it filled his whole life, and in working for it incessantly and travelling to every part of the world, leaving nothing to

¹ *Sunday Telegraph*, January 5th, 1964.

chance in ensuring that Reuters provided the finest news service in the world, he collapsed and died in his office on January 25th, 1963, after four years as General Manager. During his reign Reuters had been constantly improved from the news gathering point of view and in its technical ability to transmit at the highest possible speeds consistent with accuracy. Those who had the privilege of knowing "Tony" Cole well were given an insight into the ethos that lies behind the life of a really dedicated newspaper man. It is something which goes much deeper than the appeal of most professions, perhaps, and this applies particularly in Reuters; it is a feeling of being constantly at the centre of world events and knowing that much of what will be reported of any major event will be the result of one's own actions or non-actions. There is a feeling of immense power. This, luckily, produces also in the best of men a humility and sense of dedication, and this Tony Cole had to a marked degree. Anyone who had a really tough press problem could go to him and receive wise advice, and I suppose most of the nation's state secrets were revealed at one time or another to Cole, when a whisper in the press would have been disastrous. But such is the confidence placed in the hands of the General Manager of Reuters, who, whilst maintaining complete independence, exercises a responsible judgment of when matters should be brought to the attention of the public. There are occasions when Reuters will say "No, we do not accept the 'official' view that this or that matter should be concealed." When the Governor of Hong Kong in consultation with the military authorities in 1949 ordered the siting of anti-aircraft guns as a precaution

against low-flying Chinese Nationalist aircraft based on Formosa, who were using it as a base to harry the Chinese of Chou en-Lai that surround Hong Kong, the Reuter correspondent quite naturally checked on the story, for anyone could see the guns being constructed. Considerable pressure was brought upon Reuters to suppress this information, pressure in Hong Kong on the local correspondent, and pressure in London on the General Manager, at that time Sir Christopher Chancellor, without avail. Here was something happening in full sight of the residents of Hong Kong and presumably well known by the Chinese military intelligence—why should the only people kept in ignorance be the British themselves? And so the story was published and responsible opinion could be formed in this country of a Government action on the other side of the world.

In another context altogether, it was Tony Cole I consulted first when Archbishop Lord Fisher told me that he was proposing to visit Pope John XXIII in Rome during the course of a tour which would take him through the Holy Land, and a visit to Patriarch Athenagoras, spiritual leader of 180 million Christians of the Orthodox Church. This visit by Lord Fisher, then Archbishop of Canterbury, was of course to be the first overt action demonstrating the new desire amongst the Churches for a greater sense of unity and purpose. It was to be the first meeting between a Pope and an Archbishop of Canterbury for four hundred years. Tony Cole sized up all the relevant data within a few minutes, understood perfectly what this might mean to English Roman Catholics (who were then unaware of the proposed visit) and the importance that any reporting on it

should reveal the spiritual significance that lay behind such a move. He detached one of his senior journalists, Sydney Taylor, a practising Christian himself, who could see what was required in handling a story of this nature, and attached him to Archbishop Lord Fisher for the entire tour. Although the world's press were also covering the "story", the Reuter reports hour by hour and day by day provided the framework of factual information against a knowledgeable background, from which every newspaper could extract the *facts* of the situation as it developed and of course were free to comment.

It is this sort of service that Reuters in many other fields provides for the British public, at no cost and in no way "official". It means that as a democratic people we can have access to the facts of a situation, free to make up our minds about it and through Parliament to probe into the policies of the Government of the day, and if necessary to bring pressure through parliamentary procedure to change policies we do not like. Without the news agencies, and in particular without Reuters in the foreign field, we would have precious little information on which to base any opinions.

There is little doubt that in the hands of the new General Manager, Gerald Long, and his Deputy General Managers, all men of long experience, Reuters will continue to play a leading part in world affairs. Yet one day these men will have to be replaced. Where are the future General Managers of Reuters now? Probably amongst the three or four hundred journalists just starting their professional life on one of the provincial papers, men with their feet on the first rung of the ladder. Much

of the future of organisations such as Reuters and the other news agencies depends upon the training and experience available to these young men, and one can only be doubtful whether it is really sufficient to meet the demands likely to be made upon future senior men in the agencies and in journalism generally. Certainly much needs to be done in the training field, and one hopes that the senior executives in Reuters and elsewhere will look upon this as a major part of their responsibilities, or at least as a heritage which can be passed on to future generations of newsmen.

To sum up the work of the news agencies, therefore, one can say they provide a continual flow of news between all the major cities of our own country, and between this nation and other nations and within each nation. Little or nothing happens without a report of an event going through the hands of one of the journalists of one of the agencies. It is upon his skill, his evaluation of the news, his training and judgment, that we depend for the basic news day by day in the press and in the news bulletins on radio and television. In the age in which we live, is there any task more important than his? For until the facts are known about any situation no action can be taken by anybody, and the first information of any developing situation usually comes from the press just because of the training and skill of its journalists and the speed and efficiency of its operations. Is not the picture of the journalist in this field a very different one from the mackintosh-covered, battered felt hat figure of the imagination and perhaps *some* films?

The Editor

THE EDITOR is responsible ultimately for what appears in print in his publication. If he is the editor of a newspaper with a circulation running into millions, the possibility of an error of any kind, or an unintentional libel, passing unnoticed is highly unlikely. The editor of a quality newspaper is even less likely to escape criticism from his readers for an error of judgment or a misstatement of fact. Clearly, however, no editor of a national or provincial daily or evening newspaper has the opportunity to examine in detail every story before publication. Nevertheless editors are conscious of their responsibilities and try to meet them so far as is possible within the time limits set by the production schedule. Inevitably this has meant that in recent years, with the increase in the speed of communications of every kind, an editor has had less and less time at his disposal for any activity other than that of producing the newspaper for which he is responsible. Little wonder, therefore, that few editors are well-known public figures; nor can they spare the time to attend very many of the functions to which they are so assiduously invited by would-be publicists. The fact is editors are required more and more to be on hand to take decisions almost without ceasing during the "life" of each particular issue. Naturally

there is a good deal of variety in what different proprietors expect of their editors, but the average editor is in his office from at least eleven o'clock in the morning until late each evening. Just how late depends on many factors, but usually until the first edition is ready. That some of their luncheons may be long is true, but it is the main opportunity they have now to meet people and, not an unimportant point, possibly the last opportunity to eat until they leave the office well after the time their colleagues in other walks of life have already reached home. In the office the editor is like the captain of a ship who has to remain on the bridge for just as long as it is necessary for the safety of the ship. On rare occasions this may mean until the early hours of the morning, with another newspaper to produce the same day.

There are many stories circulated outside the press about the heavy drinking habits of journalists. Nothing could be further from the truth in the case of an editor of any significant newspaper, whether national or provincial. The short answer is that any departure from personal discipline in this respect soon brings down the best of men. A strong constitution is only one of the many requirements of a modern editor. Versatility and professional respect from fellow journalists are essential too if the editorial team is going to produce a newspaper which is lively and interesting. Many editors, particularly those of the Sunday press, for example, contribute articles for publication in their own newspapers.

The conception, therefore, of an editor as a sort of chairman or managing director of an industrial concern is to misunderstand the spirit of Fleet Street and the close relationship which exists between an editor and his

staff. The editor of an evening newspaper is even more directly involved. Both the London evening newspapers have up to eight editions during the day, enabling the editor to change the lead story that number of times if he so wishes, certainly giving him the opportunity to re-create the news columns at will. There is hardly any other industry which has this degree of flexibility in production, enabling the principal executive, in this case the editor, to put his own personal stamp on each product.

On a daily newspaper much of the news is always likely to come in late in the evening, and although every possible contingency will have been taken into account at the daily editorial conference, there comes a moment when decisions pass out of the editor's hands, and it is the night editors and sub-editors who take control and ensure that their newspaper is not going to be behind a competitor in getting and reporting the news. When the chips are down in Fleet Street and a news story starts breaking late at night there is not much time for self-examination or the cautious covering up of one's actions by seeking to shift responsibility higher up—a habit that is prevalent in many other organisations. A man has to think quickly, decide at once what to put in and what to leave out, and to get the next edition away at all costs. Inevitably it is at this point that mistakes occur. These can be brought about by all sorts of minor emergencies, but are due often to the speed at which stories have to be "subbed" to make way for late news. An editor is often unjustly accused of deliberately distorting some statement, or leaving out a vital paragraph through some personal prejudice, as though at midnight

he prowled the corridors of his offices, deleting a word here or a sentence there, when by that time this highly complex machine is in high gear, minutes are as precious as gold and the editor is probably in bed. A late news story will throw out the entire layout of several pages. Stories have to be moved or cut down to make room, changed from one page to another, and the paper remade as another edition is printed. In fact the miracle is that so little of importance is lost, and that a story still retains the vital facts even after "subbing" not once but several times. Every daily newspaper has successive editions so that the latest available news is given to its readers throughout the country. The latest editions go to press at about 4 a.m. but even between the regular editions some news flash may upset the layout of the paper causing quick alterations to be made. In all this therefore the editor himself cannot play a personal part—on hand for important decisions, yes, but personally supervising every word and every statement, no. Nor by this time of the day are the reporters or the specialist writers much involved. The paper is in the hands of a few highly skilled specialists. An editor cannot spend much time having hindsight; no sooner is Monday's newspaper published than Tuesday's news is flowing across his desk. Introspection would be fatal and there is not much time for post-mortems either.

Fortunately few editors will ignore a reasoned letter pointing out errors which have been made and invariably these are published, although no editor cares to make editorial corrections (for reasons of space as much as anything else) as this might grow into a column by itself. *The Times*, however, does carry a small paragraph

sometimes under the heading of "corrections". Too often the letters editors receive are merely abusive and quite ignorant of the problem facing reporters in getting accurate information at short notice and late at night. When a reporter does contact someone in authority (and often it is just the sort of person who writes complaining letters) there is frequently evasion, over-caution, or worse still incoherent rambling out of which a few salient facts somehow have to be extracted. Often the deductions or guesses are wrong, but does the blame always rest with the reporter?

One thing readers can be sure about is that no journalist who has not himself served in the ranks of either a national or provincial newspaper is likely to succeed to an editorial chair. It is a position held by men who have already achieved some distinction in their own field of journalism, who have proved themselves to have a shrewd judgment of men and affairs. They are not likely to be taken in by "planted" stories or the type of P.R.O. who professes to be able to manufacture an "image" of anyone or anything to order. The public interest is less likely to be served, however, by those editors upon whom commercial pressures are put to produce newspapers which are merely vehicles for carrying advertising and where every consideration is dominated by circulation figures. Here editors have to make the most difficult decisions, particularly in the popular Sunday press where the publication of the sensational story or scandalous memoir is likely to increase circulation. In the Ward affair and the subsequent Denning Report reference was made to the Keeler memoirs. It is rumoured that these were rejected by two editors of

Sunday newspapers, both in the same group, as being unfit for publication in their own journals. Inevitably, however, they were bought at a high figure and published in another newspaper, which it is reputed put on some 300,000 in circulation as a result. Inevitably newspapers appealing to this level of readership will always seek material of this nature, and in this respect Fleet Street bears a heavy responsibility for the harm which may be done to every new generation of young readers.

Finally perhaps, in discussing the role of the editor, one must ask the question, "How much can an editor today put his own personality into a paper and make his own mark?" Is it in fact in the public interest that an editor or an active proprietor should have the power to influence public opinion to the extent that is possible in a high circulation newspaper? A short answer might be that to rob a newspaper of a strong controlling hand, whether it be that of the proprietor or the editor, results in a bloodless animal that is soon overcome by its competitors. Lord Beaverbrook, who gave evidence to the Royal Commission, is quoted as saying of the *News-Chronicle*, in reply to the question "Why do you think the *News Chronicle* failed?":

"It had no management. It passed from weak management to another weak management with divided counsels. It had no will to survive."

And in response to a further question asking what he meant by a young man being able to build it up, said:

"As regards the whole organisation, the advertising side, and the circulation side, making economies,

taking advantage of situations that develop, making the paper feel the effect of vigour, drive and energy all the time. That is what makes a newspaper and the spirit of it, like many other businesses. It wanted leadership and they had no leadership." (Royal Commission on the Press, Minutes of Oral Evidence—Cmnd. 1812-2, para. 13774.)

If there were some other way of running an organisation that has to perform the tasks that are the essential lot of the press, there is little doubt that this would have been found by now. Few other industrial processes lend themselves to direct control in the same way as newspapers, nor can any other industry provide the degree of flexibility that enables this control to be exercised so easily. To lay on one side these advantages, which are open to a competitor, is to go into the ring with a hand tied behind one's back.

Furthermore the decline in the number of national or provincial newspapers cannot be in the common interest, for with the death of each one a channel of communication for some section of the community dies too. If a strong editor or proprietor, whatever his views, is the key to the production of a successful newspaper, and is able to prevent its demise, then let us have strong editors and proprietors. The problem today is clearly that through controls of one kind or another an editor or proprietor may be prevented from producing a newspaper which is financially viable and thus ceases publication, for the most successful newspapers appear to be those in which the editor is free to exercise his skills in journalism and display his powers of leadership. The

importance of the editor in our modern society is misunderstood both in the provinces and in London, and far too many people judge editors and rank and file journalists alike only on what their newspapers produce in the way of news and comment. Thus the editor of a popular tabloid catering for mass readership is himself put on the same intellectual level as his readers, and by some is seen as the sort of person one would hardly want to meet in polite society. This is unfortunate because such an editor has it within his power to influence standards and needs to be rubbing shoulders with men of similar influence in other fields. It is far more important that this type of editor should be influenced to raise the standard of his publication than the editor of *The Times*, but in the way of things it is the latter who is more often brought up against those in the country who have a concern for what appears in the press, either through correspondence in the letter columns or by personal contact. The editor of the mass circulation tabloid is left alone—except by those who have some axe to grind—to face the tremendous responsibility of influencing millions of readers and of making moral judgments almost every hour, each of which might keep a Bishop locked up in his study for a week. If the standard of our popular press is to be raised, it is the editors and the journalists we must look to for help. Before we can do that we shall have to make them understand that we do appreciate the problems they face, so that criticism may be informed and constructive. No longer will it then be just brushed aside as ill-informed and prejudiced as it is at the moment.

There is really a twofold need: first to create more

opportunities for editors and senior journalists to debate some of the criticisms made against the press; secondly to encourage dialogue between those who are trained to examine the issues raised in the publication of, say, salacious material, although not personally involved, and those for whom this is a constant anxiety. It should perhaps be more widely recognised that many journalists are so close to these problems that there is little opportunity for reflection, although a considerable desire to be true to the ideals of journalism, no matter how far from those ideals much of the results of their daily work may appear to be.

There is however no professional headquarters where such discussions might take place, and no professional journals, other than *World's Press News* and the union journals. Many editors in Fleet Street are strangers to one another. Due to the intense competition between newspapers, the tendency is for senior staffs to keep to their own groups, and personal relationships have to be watched carefully to safeguard against accusations of disloyalty. The whole ethos of Fleet Street is against this suggested form of co-operation or mutual discussion, and yet to ignore the increasing isolation of the editor, and to some extent the journalist generally, is mere wishful thinking that standards will be raised somehow without the need for concerted action.

The Foreign Correspondent

ANYONE WHO has lived for any length of time in one of the major foreign capitals, whether as a diplomat, in the services, or as a resident businessman, may well have met one of the team of foreign correspondents employed by the British press. The meeting, however, will more than likely have taken place at some social occasion. The integration of the resident foreign correspondent with the social life of the community in which he finds himself living is an accepted fact. This may seem trivial enough an observation and most journalists would shudder at the thought that to be socially acceptable was some sort of accolade, indeed many would say it was a hindrance rather than a help in their pursuit of a story. But deep down most people like to be socially acceptable, particularly wives and families, and in the much smaller English society that exists in foreign capitals one must either integrate or virtually disappear. So, unlike his colleagues in England, the foreign correspondent who is allowed to reside in a city, even for a few months in the year, and has a semi-permanent home there, will find himself accepted as very much part of the community with a wide variety of friends drawn from all walks of life and nationalities and backgrounds. It is essential that this is so, for it is upon these contacts the foreign

correspondent depends for interpretation of the news affecting the country to which he is assigned. He will be expected to master the political situation very quickly indeed, to be on terms of friendship with the Ambassadors and diplomatic staffs not only of his own country but of those countries playing a distinctive role in foreign policies, as well as having contacts at all levels; thus little will happen which will not come to his notice.

The foreign correspondent also relies on local press reports, sometimes with dire results if he has not cross-checked, and on the news agencies of England, France and America, and probably Germany and Italy too, who are all normally represented in the major capitals. Moving between all these groups, disappearing mysteriously for weeks on end and then reappearing, having been half way round the world and back again, those capitals still possessing a foreign correspondent have sometimes a romantic figure in their midst. It is a pity, therefore, that this type of resident foreign correspondent is slowly becoming extinct. The reasons are several, but money and the speed of travel are two factors.

The foreign correspondent was usually paid enough, with a generous expense allowance, to be on an equal footing with almost any of his likely acquaintances. He was, therefore, able to entertain extensively and so join in the local activities, whether sporting or social. One of the best polo players in Singapore is Stead, the resident correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Accountants, in or out of the Treasury, however, have never been persuaded of the intangible benefits of good food and drink and social entertaining in the realm of business, and within the last few years the accountants

of many newspapers have turned deaf ears upon the arguments put up to retain a foreign correspondent here or there, and claims for expenses have been looked at with increasingly raised eyebrows. Today, within twenty-four hours, it is possible for a correspondent to be in almost any major city in the world: the air fare costs less than a month's expenses, so why not keep your foreign correspondent in London with a bag packed to fly to where the news story is breaking? In any case the news agencies will keep the foreign editors fully supplied with news until "our man" gets there. So the argument has run and so a policy has been shaped of having a comparatively few key men in the important cities, relying on agency coverage for the rest and the ability to get someone to a trouble spot very quickly. Most of the Far East is now "covered" from Hong Kong, where a large press corps lives, but very much unto itself. In Singapore and Malaya (five times the size of Great Britain) there are probably not more than two or three resident foreign correspondents, and not more than one or two from the British press. Yet Hong Kong is 1,500 miles from Singapore. If a crisis occurs, of course, correspondents will fly in, but within a few days many will go back to Hong Kong—and who can blame them? *The Times* foreign correspondent, one of the most experienced in the Far East, who was in Singapore, is now in Beirut, another base like Hong Kong for the foreign correspondents of the world; New Delhi is another; and from Hong Kong, New Delhi and Beirut, practically the whole of the middle and far eastern areas are "covered".

The number of cities where foreign correspondents

are welcome, particularly British correspondents, is also declining. There is less time to stay in his own capital, and although contacts must be kept up at all costs, the leisure and the social background that enabled some of these contacts to ripen into friendships have largely gone. Gone with them too, an opportunity for many newspaper men to make lasting friendships with people from many walks of life, particularly diplomatic and service, who in the course of their careers might be of inestimable help to a newspaper in evaluating foreign news stories.

Moscow, which has almost become a "must", is the most expensive city of them all. The reaction of most editors is to say that the Moscow assignment is enough outgoing expense to have to bear; particularly as the amount of "copy" their correspondents will provide is a pretty bad bargain from a financial point of view, compared with the rest of the staff, home or overseas. The element of competition, always to be taken into account, mainly decides where, and how many, correspondents will be assigned round the world, and although the big circulation newspapers have made few, if any, reductions so far, in the long term there is less chance now for the younger journalist to find himself and his family living in one of the capitals of the world. It will be a loss both to himself and to Fleet Street and as time goes on for us all. As a nation it is imperative that we should have access to the sort of background information about other countries which the trained correspondent can provide. At the moment, many of the foreign correspondents who have been brought home and "cover" foreign news stories, as the news breaks, by flying straight from London previously have lived abroad

themselves, and therefore possess background knowledge of the countries they cover and, all-important, contacts which have been made over the years. It will not be so easy to replace these correspondents if the younger men of this sort of calibre drift to television and other media. Alan Whicker of "Tonight" fame was an experienced foreign correspondent for the Exchange Telegraph until they decided to close down their foreign coverage. James Mossman, formerly of "Panorama", was a young foreign correspondent for the Australian *Sydney Morning Herald* in Singapore in 1958 and one of the great foreign correspondents, James Cameron, now works for television as well as the *Sun*. Ralph Izzard, remembered for covering the Everest expedition for the *Daily Mail*, is another who also left the foreign correspondents field for television: the present U.K.-based foreign correspondents who have the necessary experience and contacts are not growing any younger. John Redfern, the distinguished correspondent who reports on African affairs for the *Daily Express*, is wont to describe himself as an ageing field officer of Beaverbrook's Light Horse. One might well ask, where are today's subalterns?

So much in the production of a newspaper is taken for granted by the public who read of chilling events in other countries that little thought is given to how these stories get from some remote corner of, say, North Borneo, or a stricken city, to be published in a matter of a few hours in the daily press. Correspondents, in fact, use the normal cable wireless service whenever this is in operation, but in emergencies any and every means will be tried to get a story through. Pilots of commercial

lines may be asked to carry "copy" (although strictly forbidden to do so), or the correspondent may have to get right out of a country in order to send his story to avoid censorship. Many correspondents have taken the risk of political imprisonment, and to be deported at short notice from a country which they are embarrassing by telling the truth about it is a common hazard. During the crisis in Egypt following the abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1951, many correspondents avoided censorship by using alternative means of communications, mainly by telephoning their stories from Cairo to the British Military Authorities in the Canal Zone, from where they were re-transmitted to the War Office in London and then in turn to Fleet Street. The newspapers in which the stories appeared were read by the pre-Nasser Egyptian government of the day and correspondents who did this were in constant danger of being imprisoned for violating censorship. On the day of the *coup d'état* by Nasser, the cable and wireless office was blocked by tanks and soldiers, and no correspondent could get a story through which would either have arrived in time for the next day's editions, or have borne much resemblance to the original. To a man they used all the other means of communication open to them, civil pilots, the services in the Canal Zone, or flew out themselves to send the story from Cyprus or Beirut. Every day stories sent in by foreign correspondents show how vital it is that news should not be suppressed by nations for their own political ends, particularly if censorship distorts news affecting our nation or its nationals living overseas.

It would be ridiculous, however, to represent the

foreign correspondent as a knight in shining armour, fighting for democracy in "foreign parts". As a journalist he is subjected to the same pressure of competition as his colleagues at home, much of his information has to be gathered at high speed because of this competition, and a proportion of his stories are bound to be misleading or inaccurate for this reason. Often, far too great a reliance is placed on local newspapers to provide stories for him, gossip and innuendo unsupported by authoritative confirmation or denial can form too much of a foreign correspondent's despatches; all this is a target for criticism by those who from time to time are in an official position to know the true facts about a foreign crisis. The fewer correspondents present, in a crisis, however, the greater the risk of only one interpretation being given. If there are no foreign correspondents present and an effective censorship is in operation, it is possible that newspapers all over the world may merely repeat that country's propaganda.

A further reduction in numbers would be a pity if for no other reason than that the possibility of being a foreign correspondent must make an appeal to young journalists and should attract the type of person so badly needed in the newspaper industry: people with courage, moral and physical, and the ability to form their own opinions unswayed by class or political considerations. And if our newspapers are to give us strong opinions and news, whether it embarrasses some section of the community or not, or upsets diplomatic relations—the kind of information we need, in fact, to retain our position in the world and gauge what must be done for the future—then this is what can be provided by the corre-

spondent of the foreign assignment calibre. The hope is that new entrants will be trained to provide this nucleus of journalists on whom we are going to rely heavily in the next decade. It is significant that already the British press is outnumbered in many world capitals by the resident American correspondents, many of them working for what we would rate as the provincial press in terms of circulation. The amount of newspaper space available to him also enables the American foreign correspondent to write longer and more informative articles than his British colleagues, who are restricted more to the news field, although, of course, there are many exceptions to this. The Commonwealth press, particularly the Australian, keep a number of foreign correspondents in the field who often display an initiative and determination to get a story that beats the rest of the press. Dennis Warner, who writes for a number of Australian papers, is likely to pop up in the middle of a riot or a minor war in the Far East before his colleagues have had the first news. Ronald Monson of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, determined to despatch his story in the middle of a Cairo riot in 1952, fought his way through the rioting to the cable and wireless office at the cost of being strangled with his own necktie. Richard Hughes of the *Sunday Times*, the well-known Far East correspondent, is another Australian, and we remember men like the late Noel Monks of the *Daily Mail*. So many have been Australian that some of the characteristics of a successful foreign correspondent seem crystallised in what we have come to accept as part of their character—tough, resilient, independent, warm-hearted.

Another contribution made by the foreign correspondent is that in a gentle way he teaches many young diplomats and the people with whom he mixes how to conduct interviews, and the conventions used by newspapers all over the world in handling information of a confidential nature. The tendency with the home reporter (an exception is the lobby correspondent) is to want everything "on the record", meaning that whatever is said may be used in direct quotes. The foreign correspondent, however, is more likely to want the background type of interview during which he can get the facts of a situation from, say, an ambassador, the head of a delegation or a leading political figure. Nothing of what passes will be attributed to the person granting the interview. Many people holding high office are prepared to give interviews on this basis and it is often in their interests to do so. Further, as confidence grows between a person in authority and a foreign correspondent, this may grow into a friendship which is lasting and rewarding, and in the long run in the interests of the country.

The Provincial Press

THE SITUATION of the provincial daily and evening newspapers and local weekly press, if not desperate, is alarming. For many years the overall number of these newspapers was large enough to absorb the occasional casualty. In the present climate of opinion with regard to the press, however, further failures are often considered unimportant to the man who buys the local newspaper out of loyalty, but reads the national paper of his choice. The figures speak for themselves. The 1962 Report of the Royal Commission on the Press focused attention on the overall decline. It reported that the total number of weekly or twice weekly London, suburban and provincial titles had dropped from 1,307 in 1949 to 1,219 on December 31st, 1961—a fall of 88 newspapers.¹ However, it was still able to say in its report on local monopoly: “In *only* seven towns outside London is there more than one evening paper and in four of these towns the evening papers are under common ownership.”² The report was published in September 1962. By November 1963 the number of cities claiming more than one evening paper had dropped dramatically to two, London and Glasgow.

¹ *The Present State of the Press*, chapter 1, p. 14.

² *The Diversity of Ownership-Control*, chapter 2, p. 17.

The role of the provincial newspaper, whether morning, evening, weekly or bi-weekly, is to provide throughout the country a link at the local level between the ordinary man in the street and the world of affairs and politics, whether the latter may be local or national. Television reporting provides this sometimes, but only sporadically. A massive treatment by T.V. or the national press of one local story now and again, the housing situation in Glasgow, or the unemployment problem of the north-east, is no substitute for the detailed examination of a problem week by week by journalists on the spot, who have an intimate knowledge of local affairs. This is what the provincial press provides, a channel of communication which is geared specifically to the local conditions, by virtue of employing local men, often born and bred in the district. In doing this the local press is also taking out an insurance policy against those who wish to conceal the facts of a local situation and can often do so when dealing with the London journalists. It is not so easy with a man who has lived alongside the principals of a news story and knows their background, their friends, and their families. The Sheffield Police Case in the latter part of 1963 is a clear case where the local press brought to light a situation that had to be dealt with quickly. It is doubtful whether any of the subsequent facts would have come to light had it not been for the tenacity of the editor of the *Sheffield Telegraph*, and the intimate knowledge of local conditions shown by his reporting staff.

The loss to the country by the demise of these provincial and local newspapers, however unimportant it may seem to the commuting businessmen, is the loss

of providing people living in the provinces with the means of being able to make themselves heard. The national press is concerned with publishing that which can be rated as news in the national sense; there is little or no space for news from any specific local area unless that news is of national interest. At the moment, the gap in the reporting of matters which are important but still only of *local* importance is filled by the provincial newspaper. But where a newspaper has a *solus* position in a provincial city, there may be a danger that the lack of competition dulls the cutting edge of its reporting as it finds that it cannot lose readers to another paper and does not wish to offend its captive audience. It is not enough, therefore, to say that everything is all right because such and such a city still has an excellent daily and evening paper. The danger point has arrived when it only has one of each. Nor does the loss of local representation stop there. It is the local journalist working for a local paper who provides many of the basic news stories for the national press and the news agencies; unless an area is well covered by local journalists able to distinguish between local and national news who also have some working arrangements with the national press, much can happen locally which will go by unnoticed.

When we examine the provincial press against the background of the criticism of the sensational treatment of news by some of the national press, we find a remarkable standard of integrity and judgment displayed by the editors of the provincial press as a whole. It has been calculated that these papers go into 12 million homes out of the 14½ million homes throughout Great Britain.

They do not appear to have caused offence and little or no criticism has been heard of the behaviour of their reporters. The Press Council in its report published in October 1963 reports only eight complaints upheld against the whole provincial press and one against the London and suburban. This is a record of which the provincial press can be justly proud.

Nevertheless, the further raising of the status of the provincial and local press must be a first step towards raising the whole standard of journalism in the country, because the provincial newspapers are the recognised training ground for the young journalist. National newspapers rarely take on a new member of their staff who has not served an apprenticeship with a local newspaper. The only common policy, however, with regard to educational standards of entry (there are no enforced conditions of entry into journalism) is that laid down by the National Council for the Training of Journalists, set up in 1952, under the patronage of the proprietors' associations, the Guild of British Newspaper Editors, the National Union of Journalists and the Institute of Journalists. The 1962 Royal Commission reported that: "The Council arranges with colleges for further education, courses for vocational and academic study. The Newspaper Society has further laid down that attendance and the possession of a certificate obtained by examination is a necessary qualification for a fully trained junior in its member offices, and these are roughly the provincial press offices as we know them." As a result of its work, qualifications of new entrants to journalism are rising. In 1963 a third had at least one "A" level and about two-thirds five or more

"O" levels. Five "O" levels are now the minimum qualification for entry into those newspapers which are members of the Newspaper Society. Individual newspapers, however, may still demand more or a great deal less. The final say is with the editor.

One of the criticisms made against the press as a whole is that of misquoting. The reasons for this may be several, and whatever a reporter records as verbatim in his original story may well be changed for a number of reasons which have been explained, but if the reporter is unable to put down in shorthand even a few simple sentences at dictation speed, he is unlikely ever to get a correct report published. Some reporters are now using tape recorders to fill in the gap. In the hands of an experienced journalist the tape recorder can be a valuable *aide memoire* and enable him to concentrate on the person he is interviewing, but if the use of a tape recorder is to reduce the requirements for shorthand as a qualification for the young journalist, then a great deal is going to be missed. During a formal interview with someone who is experienced at being interviewed, plenty of time will be given to a young reporter to take down the answers, but such interviews rarely come the way of young reporters and, in the meantime, his job is to record events as they happen. To arrive at the scene of an accident and to be able to record the reactions of people who saw it, and at the same time to observe and to note other details, requires a familiarity with shorthand that James Pitman in a letter to *The Times*¹ described as "the reflex skill in penmanship which enables some to write shorthand as effortlessly and with as little

¹ December 19th, 1963.

obstruction to the process of listening, understanding and memorising, as all of us are able to breathe while yet carrying on very different activities." This may be a standard which few journalists, apart from parliamentary correspondents and court reporters, would try to reach, but if it is dropped it will be at the expense of further deterioration in the general standard of reporting. The National Council are now making great efforts to re-emphasise the importance of shorthand, and under their training schemes a junior must achieve at least one hundred words a minute before he can sit for the professional examination. There are hopeful signs that this campaign is succeeding. It is thus the provincial press which has to do the actual training and give their men time off to attend courses. Although the national press is interested in the scheme and finances it to some extent, it still expects to be able to milk the provincial press of its best men by offering them higher salaries and more opportunities in Fleet Street, as do the B.B.C. and I.T.V. with less justification, without feeling any obligation to provide further training, or encourage membership of professional bodies to help the provincial journalist once it has got him. This means that some Fleet Street journalists, though men of ability (otherwise they would not have been taken from their provincial papers), retain a provincial outlook and little is done to help them overcome it. If a man has had a sound general education, professional expertise can be acquired and there is nothing to stop him reaching the heights of his profession. The man without this background now gets little help from his employers once he has finished his training, such as it is. There has always

been a plentiful supply of journalists for Fleet Street in the past. Perhaps an encouraging aspect of the growth of Television and Public Relations is that it is providing alternative means of employment for journalists, thus making newspaper employers more aware of their responsibilities towards their existing staffs.

The actions of a few (and it is the minority) of the mass circulation dailies and Sundays, whose treatment of news is described by the layman as sensational and who appear to give undue emphasis to the sexual aspect of any case reported in their columns, have caused from time to time a revulsion against the press as a whole. This mass condemnation of the press because of the activities of a few reporters of a few papers on a few occasions is, of course, unjust. However, it is a pity that the press as a whole does not display more courage in reporting the criticisms made about it, and it is equally a pity that those papers whose staffs are doing a difficult job well and whose standards of integrity are high do not also say this; and it applies very much to the provincial press as a whole, who are often lumped in with the one or two of the national newspapers of mass circulation who cause criticism to be levelled against the whole press. The average news editor would say that the correct approach for the Public Relations Officer is to make known the facts of any situation, whether or not they redound to the credit of the organisation for which he works. "Facts are sacred—comment is free!" A more positive attitude in the reporting of press matters *in* the press might help the public and the press, if they saw that the reports were without bias and of news interest, the press's own criterion of what is or is not published.

News about journalists who get into trouble could be easily suppressed by common consent. This must always be resisted. News about personalities in the press world itself is rare and where it does appear it is usually favourable. If the press, both provincial and national, are to have public recognition (they would never say they want it), then the press must be asked to take an objective view about itself, and this means objective reporting as a first principle.

The provincial newspaper in particular is still too often thought of as the "local rag". The reasons for the supreme importance of its being there at local government level as an alternative means of expression between the people of a locality and the country as a whole have been given. With the country in the middle of what is said to be a second social revolution, comparable to the industrial revolution—involving once again the denuding of some areas of all but the aged and retired, and at the same time creating new towns with little community feeling, mere dormitories for tired workers—the role the provincial newspaper has to play in helping and representing these people caught up in the dilemma of their own restlessness has never been more vital. The provincial newspaper, more than any other institution, can give that first feeling of "belonging" to a new community so necessary to any sort of balanced behaviour. Through its editorial columns, its articles, even its advertisements, a community sense can be developed more quickly and more easily than by any other medium. In this context the editor could be one of the most important figures in the community. Is he? And what is being done by the provincial press as a whole to adapt

itself to changing social patterns and to telling the new people who arrive in an area what their local newspaper does, what it stands for and how it works? There is hardly any more urgent requirement than to give those living in many of the new towns which are springing up, this sense of being a community, of "belonging". The situation for many provincial newspapers, far from being desperate because of national competition and the difficulty of obtaining advertising revenue, could be that they are on the brink of an entirely new era, campaigning for and leading the new populations in their new towns and thus attracting national attention to what they say and do. Where they do this, there is clear evidence, as in the Sheffield case, that the whole attitude to the provincial press, what it stands for and what it does, is clearly revealed to the nation through radio, T.V. and the national newspapers.

We are made well aware, for example, of the difficulties of the car manufacturers and their labour problems, of the railways, the nationalised airlines, of big business deals and industrial development, the doctor's pay, the work of hospitals, life in the services; every one eventually attracts the attention of the press, except the press. Then, when another newspaper dies, and the displaced journalists have to seek new employment, possibly outside their chosen way of life, is it to be wondered why no one cares? No one cares because virtually no one knows and what is said, is often hearsay, of little credit to the press, whether provincial or national.

Despite its losses, however, the provincial press still contains the majority of journalists in the country. The first need surely is for this group of newspapers to

demonstrate clearly where it stands with regard to certain press practices, and to inform the people through its own columns of the standards it considers viable in modern journalism and what it thinks of those who fall short. It should press demands for better treatment at the hands of organisers and officials up and down the country when it covers the various ceremonial occasions that are a regular feature of our life. There is too ready an acceptance on the part of both reporters and photographers from the provincial press to take second best unless the Newspaper Society representative is there, and the impression is left in the public mind, at least on the official part of it, that somehow the provincial newspaper is a second-class national paper, that it is staffed by journalists who are not good enough for Fleet Street. If the national press do not turn up at an important but *local* event, nor is there T.V. in any shape or form, it is automatically deemed a failure. But, as has been shown, the national press can well be covered by the provincial press representation if need be, and the photographs taken by the provincial press photographer are invariably "offered" to the national press. What we find on most national occasions is that the best or the only suitable photographic positions have already been allotted to the B.B.C. T.V. cameras or the independent T.V. companies and what is left is doled out amongst the national and provincial press, with the provincial press having to make do with very few positions compared with the local interests they cover, over and against the national press, let alone the T.V. coverage. The acceptance of this situation helps once again to relegate the provincial newspaper, in the minds of those with whom

they come into contact, to third or last place with T.V. and nationals in front. However, this is just not the situation, as we have seen. The provincial press has a separate and distinctive role to play in the life of the nation; it is not a second-class national press; its work cannot be done for it by radio or T.V. It is vital to the well-being of the nation that we should continue to have a strong and largely independent provincial press of high integrity, but this will not happen unless the press itself takes some action to make its own views known and respected. Very many people, particularly perhaps those in the Services, have made the mistake of feeling that because they were doing a good job under difficult circumstances, they had nothing to fear for their future. This clearly has not been the case. The running down of the Services and sacking of countless thousands of officers and non-commissioned officers, the reduction of the Colonial Service and the number of careers stopped in mid-flight, the fate of the Kenya settlers, and many others, all go to show that no group of people today can afford to let its case go by default. Few Governments have time for sentiment and the British Government, in particular, has rarely shown it; people are far too concerned with the tensions of daily living to worry about the fate of others, particularly newspapers or their staffs, so it is up to an organisation, any organisation, to fight for itself. When, one might ask, are we going to see the press and especially the provincial press doing just that?

Little has been said about the whole question of amalgamations and the concentration of more and more newspapers into fewer hands. The reasons for this are

that the terms of reference of both the Royal Commissions included this and indeed the greater part of their reports cover this aspect of the press. Whatever hidden influences exist in the board-rooms of those amalgamations controlling a number of newspapers, it is doubtful whether anyone but the directors can say. To find out how much a proprietor uses his newspapers to propagate his own ideas, we have the evidence of one or two, but this by no means gives us any pattern of influence. There appears to be evidence to support the contention of nearly all newspaper proprietors and their editors that advertising does not influence editorial comment or content to any marked degree, and that in those cases where advertisers have tried to suppress information that may have an adverse influence on the sale of their products (criticisms of films is an example given in the 1949 Report) they have not been successful. The real safeguard of editorial freedom in the long run is in the character and standing of the editors of the larger group of newspapers. If journalism is a vocation, and many would say it is, and we expect to see journalists and not businessmen as editors, then I doubt whether over the *news content* of most papers the average proprietor has very much influence. The system of news gathering and production militates against deliberate distortion or suppression, provided the situation of the solus newspaper is avoided, when it is more difficult for the reader to compare the contents of one newspaper with another.

In the provincial press, therefore, as in the national press, competition, while producing many of the excesses to which there is general objection, also safeguards us from an excessive use of power by any one proprietor.

to influence or to use his newspaper for personal or political ends. A description of the intricate arrangements by which the provincial press is grouped and amalgamated through the country is outside the scope of this book and the author's experience. So far as proprietorial influence is concerned one can only report from limited experience, but for the factual presentation of news, sound comment and honesty in reporting local affairs, in so far as it is within an editor's powers to ensure that his journalists have reported facts correctly, I doubt whether any other country is served as well and with so little bias by its provincial press. Moreover, many of the leading provincial newspapers are far from lagging behind the national press in presentation and layout, nor in using new techniques including colour printing on occasions.

The Influence of the Press

THE QUESTION which bothers people when it comes to discussing the press is the extent of its influence and whether, in our desire to retain a free press, inadvertently we may be playing into the hands of the proprietor who is using the influence of his paper for personal or political ends. The press barons, as they are popularly called, are cast in this role and for many years Lord Beaverbrook was thought of as the villain of the piece, although he was the one proprietor prepared to go on record that he used his papers for propaganda purposes. Lord Beaverbrook admitted this, not only in giving evidence to the Royal Commission but also when writing in his own newspapers. This propaganda, however, was directed mainly to one end—supporting the ideals of the Commonwealth—not for personal gain or political power.

A new figure whose personality has burst upon us in recent years is Mr. Roy Thomson, now a baron, owner of a hundred newspapers round the world, television stations, radio stations, the *Sunday Times*, and *The Scotsman*. In terms of national daily or Sunday circulations in this country, however, he does not show much desire at the moment to enter the lists. The dominant proprietors, who, with Sir Max Aitken, control 67 per

cent of the circulation of all the daily newspapers and 84 per cent of the Sunday newspaper circulation are Mr. Cecil King, chairman of the International Publishing Corporation (which includes the *Daily Mirror* Group and the *Sunday Mirror*), and Viscount Rothermere, chairman of Associated Newspapers Ltd. (which controls the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Sketch* and the *London Evening News*).

Nor are these the only newspapers they control. Mr. Cecil King, nephew of Lord Northcliffe, is potentially the man with the greatest power to mould opinion, particularly female opinion, in the world today. Apart from the *Daily Mirror* with its circulation of more than 5,000,000, and the *Sunday Mirror* with 5,300,000, one hundred and nine trade papers and thirty-two other newspapers, which are owned by the various companies under the control of Mr. King, he has a monopoly of nearly every large circulation woman's magazine—the combined readership has been estimated at some forty-three million—although this must include duplication, as Lord Francis Williams observed in quoting this figure.¹ The titles themselves give perhaps more indication of this influence than the circulation figures.

†Home	†Woman and Beauty
Honey	Woman and Home
Marilyn	Woman's Journal
My Home	Woman
†Roxy	Woman's Mirror
Valentine	Woman's Weekly

¹ *The New Statesman*, October 27th, 1961.

† Since merged.

Everywoman	Modern Woman
Flair	Mother
Homes and Gardens	Woman's Own
Housewife	Woman's Realm ¹
Ideal Home	

Associated Newspapers, controlled by the Daily Mail and General Trust Ltd., the principal shareholders of which are Viscount Rothermere and his family, in turn control a number of undertakings as well as still more than thirty established provincial evening and weekly papers throughout the country. It is acknowledged financially as almost the strongest newspaper group.

The significant trend noted by the Royal Commission on the Press 1961-62, was the amount of concentration which had been achieved by these three proprietors since 1948, an increase in concentration of readership of twenty-two per cent in thirteen years. The present order of batting is as follows :

International Publg. Corpn.	24%
Associated Newspapers	23%
Beaverbrook Newspapers	20%

In the field of national Sunday reading alone, the largest circulation newspaper is the *News of the World*. In 1947 it stood at 7,809,000 and in 1961 at 6,643,000, a drop of over a million for which many reasons have been put forward. It still, however, leads the Sunday field with an estimated readership of 17,625,000 each week. The fact that much of its news content depends

¹ As given in Report of the Royal Commission, 1962.

upon the reporting of cases with sexual overtones does not reflect very highly on the reading habits of the nation, but its accuracy has never been challenged.

Even the *News of the World* figure, however, is swamped by the overall daily and Sunday readership of the King empire. Its three daily papers, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Herald* (now the *Sun*) and the *Daily Record* in Glasgow, yield 21,291,000 daily readers, and the *Sunday Mirror* and the *People* reap 30,399,000 every weekend; all this quite apart from the women's magazine readership figures and the journals of Fleetway Publications.¹

Sir Max Aitken is second in the field with 12,734,000 readers for his *Daily Express*, 1,941,000 for the *Evening Standard* and 11,140,000 for the *Sunday Express*. All this leaves Viscount Rothermere fairly well behind on Sunday newspapers, having sold the *Sunday Dispatch* to Lord Beaverbrook, who incorporated it into his *Sunday Express*, which put on another million or so circulation when it happened. However, with the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Sketch* and the *Evening News*, the largest selling evening paper in the country, Viscount Rothermere claims 15,065,000 daily readers. Lord Thomson has yet to enter the high national circulation field in this country with the exception of the *Sunday Times*, but internationally and in the developing countries such as Africa he is a dominating figure in the newspaper industry. (His policy of editorial decentralisation is interesting, because if he is able to resist the temptation

¹ All the circulation and readership figures given in this chapter are taken from the I.P.A. National Readership Surveys, July 1962-June 1963.

of doing battle with either Mr. King or Sir Max Aitken and to keep the *Sunday Times* in its position as the leading quality Sunday newspaper, then his influence should be helpful both for the journalist and for those countries in which he is operating.)

In the reduction of the number of provincial papers, and in the loss of the *News Chronicle* with a circulation of over a million at the time, is seen the stark reality of what befalls a newspaper with weak management. It has been argued already that, so far as the provincial press is concerned, anything would be better than its reduction to the stage at which each city had only one newspaper or perhaps two, a morning and an evening, under the same management. Equally it would be disastrous if our daily or Sunday press was controlled by one proprietor. The deduction appears to be that no high circulation newspaper will survive without a dominant personality behind its management. He must combine all the qualities of dynamic industrial know-how with a feeling and flair for journalism. In this way he can emphasise both the financial and economic aspects of his business and the journalistic, but always remain in full control and able to weigh carefully the demands of both sides of his business. In this Lord Beaverbrook epitomised the rare genius which is necessary. His evidence before the Royal Commission fully brings this out and makes exhilarating reading.

In Mr. King we find much the same mixture. Brought up in the atmosphere of Fleet Street journalism against a background of wealth and position, a Wykehamist and an Oxford graduate, he could have been successful equally as a banker or an industrial tycoon. Already he

has outstripped Lord Northcliffe in achieving power and influence over the minds of men and women outside the political field.

There seems little doubt that newspaper managements which fail to appreciate the need for strong personalities, for tremendous vigour and drive on the part of their executives, find it difficult to keep their newspapers financially solvent, yet newspapers which adopt an aggressive approach must inevitably influence their readers, and this is, of course, the case with our national press, which makes no bones about where it stands politically on any issue and what it thinks should be done by this politician or that. So in order to keep as many newspapers in the field as possible we must look for newspapers with strong policies and expect them to try and influence and dominate; this is the manifestation of enlightened management, backing able editors, and the drive and energy of their staffs. All the cant, therefore, about newspapers being wicked because they have strong views, the tut-tutting when our sacred institutions are attacked, even members of the Royal Family, will in the end, if it results in some form of legislative restriction, reduce newspapers to impotence and those who work on them. This situation, as we have seen, will be followed by failure and closure, and having achieved our intention of "cleaning up the press", we shall be left with no press worth having, or precious little information on which to do our business. Surely then we must take a more positive approach, fully appreciate the influence of the press, the power of certain press "barons", and be aware of the harm that can be done by certain newspapers where a particular policy of editorial content

is carried to excess. At the same time we must look at this in an adult manner and also appreciate that newspapers either survive in this manner or die. Do we as a nation want to find ourselves being herded along by a few papers strongly influenced by the Government of the day?

The Royal Commission, in examining this problem, also seems to discount some of the fears of past years. The whole paragraph is worth quoting:

Royal Commission, 1961/62, paras. 29, 30.

"29. In our opinion the influence of the Press is not as great as some suggest or, indeed, as it has been in the past. The advance of education has led to a readership which is more discriminating, at least in so far as concerns the acceptance of opinions expressed by newspaper proprietors. Large numbers of people rely increasingly for news on broadcasting and television and probably tend to be more influenced by opinions and arguments on social and political problems put out on radio and television than they are by those set forth in the newspapers. We do not think that it is possible for a newspaper or group of newspapers to swing public opinion overnight in any particular direction, whether by tendentious presentation of the news or by direct expression of opinions. The influence of the Press is more gradual and takes the form of a subtle conditioning of opinion to the acceptance or rejection of particular approaches to social and political problems. Campaigns conducted over a long period may have their effect; thus the campaign conducted—quite frankly (and legitimately) for the

purpose of propaganda—by Beaverbrook Newspapers Ltd. in support of the ideals of the British Empire and more recently their opposition to the Common Market may not have achieved all that Lord Beaverbrook would have wished, but it would be impossible to suppose that they had no result.

30. Among periodicals the journals of opinion clearly have the power to exercise a strong influence on political matters. Even the illustrated weekly magazines which do not set out to deal with public affairs at all may help to create social habits and senses of values. In some instances they may serve no socially meritorious purpose and even tend towards a vulgarisation of manners. These social implications are, however, outside the scope of this inquiry."

The contention that people tend to be more influenced by opinions and arguments on radio and television than they are by those set forth in the newspapers may be right in respect of the one outstanding controversial programme in a week or perhaps a month, but in the long term there is no doubt, as the Commission says, that the influence of the press has a subtlety which is more pervasive and more universal than that which can be accomplished by either radio or television. The readership figures are certainly comparable with the television audience viewing figures—few programmes regularly exceed the ten million viewing audience as a matter of course, yet we find that the *Daily Express* has a daily readership of 12,734,000. No one of course reads all of any one newspaper, each reader has his own interest and seeks information on that first. However he may

“pick up” a good deal of information on other matters while seeking his favourite feature or whatever it may be; in fact this must surely be so, and in this way newspapers effectively influence regular readers over a wide range of subjects in a way a television programme cannot do, restricted as it is in context and time.

The influence of television, of course, can be far greater than that of the press over a very short period, but it cannot challenge the place of the newspaper as the medium that daily records, in some detail, life in all its aspects. What is more, unlike radio and television, which within the scope of one programme offers a listener or viewer a very narrow range of interest, usually only one or two subjects discussed or seen consecutively, the newspaper at a glance offers a wide range of news items, feature articles, comment, criticism, sport, financial news, women’s pages, gossip, competitions and advertisements which in themselves are informative and of course influential and opinion forming.

The hostility and suspicion directed against certain sections of the press recently has been turned on to television as producers, feeling the spur of competition, have produced more and more programmes that attract, shock and get talked about. The more successful the programme, the greater the financial resources placed at the disposal of the producer; and the less successful (in terms of viewing audience), the less money available to pull it up. This is the familiar pattern of newspaper production in a competitive field, and it is interesting to note, in passing, that television producers have had to resort to much the same tactics as newspaper editors in holding viewing audiences.

The safeguard is in the variety of newspapers available and the variety of each newspaper, the choice being that of the consumer. The Royal Commissions (paras. 580 and 333 respectively of their two Reports) have called attention to the fact that "the freedom of the Press involves not only a freedom to publish, but also a freedom to read; the imposition of a statutory limit on circulation would infringe both aspects of this freedom". This freedom of choice is certainly more limited when it comes to television, in fact to only three programmes within certain fixed hours, and the third choice as yet in the early days of its operation. Therefore, although at any one moment ten or fifteen million people may be watching a peak programme, thus enabling a speaker to make an emotional impact far greater than that which could be achieved by using the daily press, the impact is momentary. There is no written record except that of the press itself which will report the speech, but as usual in a variety of ways backed by interpretation and bias.

However, is this not more in keeping with the whole ethos of our democratic approach to life than the emotional one night stand appeal of a political leader, swaying millions of people by the power of his personality and the fervour of his words? The British, politically mature, have never reacted favourably to that sort of appeal, yet that is the appeal of television, and it could be dangerous were it not balanced by the press reporting of the same event. The safeguard against undue influence would appear to be, as always, in the balance of the presentation of news and events, whether on television or in the press, but so long as there is

variety, within both these powerful media, the one can balance and complement the other and provide an alternative manner of presentation, the choice being up to the viewer or reader. On this count, if newspapers can only survive today, let alone new ones be created, by having strong and forceful editors and proprietors, carrying with it all the dangers of influence and the moulding of public opinion, this would appear to be far less dangerous in the long run than any form of restriction in either circulation or advertising revenue which may bring about the closure of more newspapers, thus creating a monopoly of influence by television.

If we accept the opinion of the Royal Commission 1961-62, therefore, "that the influence of the press is not as great as some suggest" and that, in so far as moulding public opinion is concerned, we need not fear strong proprietorial influence, provided there is plenty of diversity, this in turn will help to keep men with strong personalities in the newspaper industry and call off those critics who seek in one way or another to denigrate the press and if possible to by-pass it as a means of disseminating essential information to the public.

The power of the press to force the Government of the day to reveal facts in the public interest, though it may not always seem so at the time, has been clearly demonstrated in recent years. That this position of power should be retained by the press is clearly in our interest if one glances, even briefly, at the growth of the power of the two great parties which has itself altered the power of Parliament as such and especially of the House of Commons. Our largely unwritten constitution is in fact continually changing. The power of the Civil Service

has been immeasurably augmented by the increased range and complexity of State activity, and within recent Cabinets power is said to have tended to accumulate in the hands of the Prime Minister. Where is the balance to all this to be found, if not in the power of what Edmund Burke and Macaulay called "the Fourth Estate of the Realm"? So long as the public through its support of the press gives it this power of disclosure, then in politics each party must watch the press warily, as well as television and radio, and guide policy accordingly.

The remarkable aspect of the relationship which has been built up over many years between the lobby correspondent and the politician is the mutual trust of the one in the other so that, while information of a confidential nature may be passed between them on certain conditions of non-publication, nothing prohibits the press in the publication of essential facts which should be known in the public interest. Furthermore, if the Government of the day wants to suppress information on grounds of national security, it cannot do so without the knowledge of the press. The Press and Broadcasting Committee, which issues the "D" notices requesting that this or that item should not be referred to in the interests of security, is a committee on which the press is equally represented with those Government departments concerned, with an independent secretary respected by both sides. The press therefore *knows* the item of security involved and agrees not to publish in the public interest, but it has the right constantly to challenge that assertion and to point out, if necessary, that the Government precautions over security are insufficient to warrant non-publication, as the information is already

public property. The "off the record" briefing is invalid if it is an attempt merely to shut the stable door after the horse has gone, and the press are not slow to make that point when the need arises.

The whole relationship, therefore, between the press and those in power in Government and between itself and its readers is more delicate than is generally supposed. The working arrangements with regard to, say, security have evolved over a long period of negotiation where every sort of situation has arisen and been tested against the principles of a free press—free to publish what it will, but that freedom carrying with it national responsibility which has been discharged with considerable honour over the years. With its readers the press must keep faith, or else it will be discredited and lose the allegiance of regular daily or weekly readers on which it depends so much. This means sticking to a policy with which its readers can identify themselves, not necessarily always politically, but that a paper should express the feelings and hopes, often unexpressed, of its millions of readers is essential if the bond between reader and newspaper is to be a strong one. So will newspapers expose injustice where it is to be found, sponsor schemes for improving standards of living, freedom from hunger campaigns and so on, and by and large report a considerable amount about the way and life of the Churches and give religious leaders the freedom of their columns. In short, all the ideas that stir men's deepest feelings find expression in the newspapers; and the aspirations and hopes of the man in the street, weighed down as he is by the cares of daily life, are often illuminated for him by the journalist.

If all this is to be met within the columns of a newspaper—and if it is not met circulation falls—then the opportunity for any one single proprietor or editor to wield undue influence in the presentation of news in his paper is curtailed to a large extent by the sheer necessity of having to meet the many editorial requirements forced upon him by both readers and competing newspapers. We have seen that newspapers with strong editors and even dominating proprietorial control are more likely to survive than other newspapers with equal opportunities but without some dominating figure to push them along, and provided that there are enough newspapers of the former calibre in the field, we as a nation need not have so much to fear from the undue influence of the press as a whole, offset as it is by the divergence of its views and the editorial requirements of its readers. What is essential for the democratic health of the nation is that there should be as many newspapers as possible, of as many views as possible, and that these newspapers should be strong and virile with all the overtones of prejudice and sensationalism, rather than weak and “controlled”.

Complaints against the Press and the Role of the Press Council

IF WE EXAMINE critically and unemotionally the role of the journalist in modern society, and we set our conclusions alongside the criticisms of the press which have been particularly rife over the last few years, we may be at a loss to explain why the journalist is sometimes reviled. More often than not, a story which has started out by being described as sensational, indeed untrue, has all too often proved to have been almost dull compared with the final results of an investigation. The picture given by the two Royal Commissions, save in one important matter, the recruitment and educational standards of journalists, is on the whole reassuring. It is clear that there is a sense of service amongst British journalists, and a remarkable freedom from corruption among both employers and employees, remarkable because the temptations must be very great. A similar freedom from illegitimate advertising influences and from subsidies was all clearly demonstrated in the Reports. Yet the President of the Institute of Journalists could say in the same year in which the last Report was published that "the freedom of the press was in danger because the deterioration in relations (between the public and

the press) could lead to an easy passage for controls". This must mean that those in whose hands lies the moulding of opinion outside Fleet Street and the press world have not had pleasant experiences when dealing with the press, and I would say from my own experience in talking to people from all walks of life and in all sorts of situations that this is largely true. I am sure in part the reason is that the non-journalist simply fails to understand the persistence of journalists when they are in pursuit of a story, and the apparent indifference to appeals to suppress a story which may be embarrassing or indeed hurtful. For members of the establishment it is humiliating to find that the "old boy" network breaks down completely when a thrusting young journalist from a mass circulation paper is on the track of a story that can do no good to the organisation concerned. Even the Royal Family seems open to attack and innuendo, and many people are shocked and dismayed—"the gutter press" becomes an habitual term of reference for practically every newspaper except the "heavies", although many of the popular newspapers are rarely read by critics who base their remarks more on hearsay than on evidence. The fact is, a person in a position of power and influence may fear no one except the press. When such a person finds that suddenly none of the usual methods of persuasion works, it is as though he has been transported into a world with new rules or no rules. Hence there is deep resentment against the journalists who have caused this disquiet. The fact that the same person may have been enjoying other people's discomfort in other newspapers (and the press is no respecter of persons) does nothing to ease the shock and be-

wildermont if one becomes the centre of press interest in connection with a story that is unfavourable.

Some journalists in Fleet Street, however, lay themselves open to attack unnecessarily by failing to stick to a few comparatively simple rules which, in many cases, would enable them to obtain their stories just as well and much more legitimately.

The criticisms most often made are inaccuracy, misquoting and intrusion of privacy, particularly when this takes place soon after some personal family trouble or bereavement. Photographers equally are criticised for intrusion and for disrupting solemn ceremonies.

It has been said that anyone reading a story about himself or a subject in which he is well versed will find mistakes of fact and, of course, this is often so. Journalists, on the other hand, will say that facts are about the last thing to be revealed when they seek information. Too often however this situation is accepted. The reporter fails to make that extra telephone call to someone in authority, who could probably put the whole matter into perspective. If he fails to do this because he suspects that a good "story" will be deflated by so doing, he is of course simply being irresponsible. The authoritative spokesman should be given a chance. If a spokesman is unavailable, or tries deliberately to mislead a journalist who is seeking facts, then the latter has a right to publish as much as he knows at that moment, whether or not this is the whole story. It should be realised that the responsibility for the accurate reporting of a story is shared to some extent by those involved in it. There should always be evidence, however, that an attempt has been made to check the more unlikely or sensational type of stories.

All too often those in authority have evidence that no such attempt has been made, and they suspect the reason is because such a check would stop the story. In the long run, the advantage gained by a newspaper in publishing a sensational story without adequate check must be set against the future risk of loss of confidence on the day when a much more important story needs to be confirmed. If confidence between the official spokesman and the press deteriorates, the inaccuracies will only increase, and very positive steps have to be taken by both sides to put right such a situation.

There is a fault very often on the part of the journalist because he fails to pursue an enquiry to the bitter end, but too many people think that just because an office has closed down for the day and the facts cannot be unearthed, a newspaper has no right to publish anything without official comment and should delay publication. This is plain nonsense. The failure on the part of those in authority to have someone working out of office hours ignores the whole aspect of newspaper production. It is important that the public, through the press, should have an opportunity to know the facts at any hour of the day or night. Personal stories, however, should surely always be checked at the source, and if the principal is unavailable, really unavailable, then "when in doubt leave out" is an adage the press could stick to a little more.

When it comes to misquoting, there is really no excuse. Yet of all the prevalent criticisms this is the one most heard and most damaging for the journalist. Quite rightly, for a journalist who is incapable of extracting an accurate quote, or of paraphrasing correctly the results of a conversation, is falling down in one of the

basic requirements of his craft. It can only be ineptitude, laziness or, regrettably, deliberate distortion, to make the "quote" support a story which has already been written. Of course many people, suddenly telephoned by a journalist, go to pieces. They are seized with panic and stutter incoherent nonsense to try and cover up the main issue which is being investigated. Or they lose their temper, or imagine their name in large print, so they keep the journalist on the telephone giving him a lot of irrelevant personal details. It is certainly not always easy. However, the journalist should be a professional and by the time he reaches Fleet Street he should be capable of extracting the facts and condensing them, without distortion, into a reasonable "quote". Nor should advantage be taken of a person unused to dealing with press matters, who answers a query in general terms, not appreciating that everything he is saying is "on the record" and may be used in the story. With no such warning, the report in the next day's newspaper can be a really bad shock.

The journalist could protect himself by being honest with the person he is interviewing and making it clear that he is going to quote him and that anything he says may appear in print. The average person knows nothing about press procedure, but he expects fair play. Many of these cases are comparatively trivial, too trivial to take up even with the editor, but accumulatively they tend to create an atmosphere of suspicion and dislike between the journalist and the average citizen who likes to think of himself as a decent fair-minded man. Naturally those who have a great deal to do with the press are more careful. Only a fool takes a telephone call from a strange reporter and tells him confidential information or fails

to check what is going to be quoted. The sensible course is to note the question, promise to call back, reflect on the subject, prepare a statement and then to call the reporter concerned and *dictate* a reply. But this procedure is unlikely to be adopted by the inexperienced.

The official "spokesmen", therefore, are usually the last people to have many real criticisms against the press for the simple reason that in *their* transactions there is little to be critical about. Enquiries are usually put to them with courtesy and very rarely does one find a statement misquoted. Unfortunately the evidence of the Vassall Tribunal and many of the complaints before the Press Council indicate that standards of honest dealing between the journalist and the public leave a lot to be desired *on both sides*. If P.R.O.s, or those employing them, mislead the press deliberately over some controversial issue, then one cannot blame the journalist who is caught in this way for avoiding them in future. There must be honesty and a mutual respect for the truth.

Intrusion of privacy, in particular at the time of bereavement or some personal tragedy, is quite another matter. In the present atmosphere of intense competition between the various groups of newspapers—not just the popular press as many suppose—it is difficult to know how enquiries or intrusion can be controlled. Whoever studies the problem must be aware of the pressures put upon reporters to get a story and the financial penalties they could suffer through unemployment if, in the case of failure, they are dismissed for incompetence. No such cases came to light in either of the Reports, but surely the threat must be there, otherwise why should journalists, on occasion, go to such lengths to get a story for

their particular newspaper and to take actions that must be against their own conscience? Veiled threats of publicity which will be detrimental to an individual or an organisation unless someone makes a statement is another malpractice that should cease. Threats such as these do infinite damage to the reputation of journalists. The cases are few and far between taken in the context of the many thousands of stories published every day. Yet just as the press, by publishing some event which is detrimental to an organisation, can give the impression that the whole organisation is like that, so a journalist who behaves unethically can give the impression that all journalists behave in this way. It is perhaps difficult for individualists who are essentially individualists to have any sense of corporate loyalty, and little is done by editors or proprietors to create such feelings, although there is considerable loyalty between colleagues working on the same newspaper.

These problems will no doubt be considered by the reconstituted Press Council with its new lay membership. One is aware of the reasons for the lay element—the public interest which is involved (if we believe all we are told about the influence of the press), and of course the danger of monopoly and amalgamations, all of which the Press Council is going to watch over for us. These matters are rightly the concern of some widely representative body.

On matters of unethical conduct, however, which is a matter for the press itself, why should lay members sit in judgment? Will this not in some way only increase the feelings of irritation and hostility on both sides? The way to make an individual or a corporate body of

people responsible is to treat them as though they were responsible. The Press Council by the very Articles of its Constitution is saying plainly that the press is incapable of managing its own affairs. While it was composed of representatives of the various press organisations, and indeed was a voluntary organisation of the press itself, Articles (ii) and (iii) were the special concern of the representatives of the National Union of Journalists and the Institute of Journalists, both of which bodies lay down certain ethical codes. The Articles in question are: "(ii) To maintain the character of the British Press in accordance with highest professional and commercial standards. (iii) To consider complaints against the conduct of the Press or the conduct of persons and organisations towards the press; to deal with these complaints in whatever manner might seem practical and appropriate and record resultant action".

Writing in the foreword to the 10th Annual Report of the Press Council, the then Chairman, Mr. George Murray, said: "But when a fresh impetus was given to 'monopolistic tendencies' in 1960 and 1961 and another Commission reverted to the recommendations of its predecessor, the appointment of a lay element became inevitable." Now, however, by the constitution of the new Press Council the lay element has a right to criticise and presumably pass judgment upon the conduct of individual journalists, and such conduct, however reprehensible, clearly can have little to do with monopolistic tendencies. It is an abrogation of the rights of the journalists' own professional bodies to deal with their own members. Not that this is ever likely to become an issue under the new chairman, but it is indicative of the

attitude towards the press, and while this exists it is useless wishing that journalists would adopt professional attitudes towards recruiting and organise themselves as a professional body within the industry. If the journalists were already a professional group they would certainly not accept lay members to sit in judgment. No other profession does, and the imposition of lay members, one would have thought, is little encouragement to certain elements of the press to do anything but go on being as individualistic as ever, taking little notice of the Press Council. They could claim it is no longer *their* council.

The new Press Council, while providing facts about the ownership of the press, amalgamations and so on, which is in the public interest, also tends to restrict contact between individuals and the press itself, and inevitably gives the impression that the press is so irresponsible that it needs a distinguished judge to keep an eye on it.

It might be said in passing that the means of redress by members of the public, who feel themselves libelled or injured in some way by the press, are already very powerful under Common Law. Juries are not sympathetic towards the press, and some of the sums for damages agreed in court have been as sensational as anything the press might have thought up themselves. This use of the weapon of libel against the press has been used mercilessly when the opportunity has been given, and the situation today is that a good deal of information vital to the nation is withheld because of the fear of punishing libel actions. The *Manchester Guardian* put the matter concisely as part of its reply to the Royal

Commission Questionnaire to Publishers, incorporated in the 1947-49 Report:

"The great obstacles to the adequate presentation of news and opinion are probably not those mentioned in the questionnaire, but the capriciousness of the laws of libel and contempt. The area in which the Press can operate in seeking redress of public grievances, in exposing abuses and in crusading for reform is seriously limited or hedged around with risks that only the very wealthiest organisations dare face. The contrast with the United States is striking, for although the American libel laws may not be widely different from ours, their practical effect is very different. There is also a habit of freer personal criticism which, though often indulged in to excess, is on the whole healthier than the repressions to which in the last fifty or sixty years the British Press has become subject."

Perhaps the most useful aspect of the Council's work might be to set rough-and-ready standards over the years for the press, with regard to reporting intrusion and photography, so that an editor may feel confident that if he calls his reporters and photographers off a particular story, other newspapers are likely to do the same. In the chairman, a highly respected lawyer, there is also someone to consult over general principles in the same way as the secretary of the Press and Broadcasting Committee can be consulted informally over security matters.

If in this way a code of general conduct is built up and acknowledged, then the Council will indeed have served a useful purpose. The imposition of further controls, however, would be intolerable and must surely be resisted inside as well as outside the Council.

Towards a Better Press

THERE ARE probably about 20,000 journalists in Great Britain and in their hands lies the eventual answer to the question, how can the standards of the press be raised without any further loss of freedom? As we have seen, taking the industry as a whole the number of newspapers and individual journalists who offend is small. Is this too high a price to pay or should we endanger the whole principle of a free press by introducing more controls?

The press lives by disclosure. This has been said often enough, but it cannot be ignored as an underlying motive behind the actions of many journalists and newspapers, and to ignore the vocational aspect of a journalist's work is to misunderstand much of the spirit of Fleet Street and the provincial press. There are already sufficient restrictions on the amount of information passed to the press by Government and many other employers.

It has been estimated that well over half the activities of Britain are controlled either by public authorities or eight large corporations, and something like three million men and women (1 in 7 of the employed population)

would be committing professional misconduct if they made a disclosure to the press.¹

This restriction is further enforced by the large number of Public Relations Officers employed by commerce and industry to control contact between their employees and the journalists.

In handling press enquiries, the P.R.O. may well be fulfilling a vocation as much as the journalist who is trying to obtain the information, but the odds are heavily against the latter at the moment. Any more controls, therefore, in addition to those which already exist under Common Law and by the establishment of the Press Council, with its new lay membership, are likely to restrict the disclosure of information even further, to the eventual detriment of the country as a whole.

As the situation now exists, any citizen who has a grievance can tell his story to a journalist, safe in the knowledge that his confidence will be respected. Any group can obtain a hearing for their views. Unfortunately, many of us have little consideration for the person to whom we tell our story under these circumstances. All we want to do is use the press to stir up public opinion. In condemning a newspaper for the sensational treatment of someone else's story, we forget that this is just what we demanded for ourselves under different circumstances. It is this situation, in which the public needs the journalist's services but sometimes rejects the journalist and the newspaper he works for, that creates

¹ "The Journalist and Professional Secrecy", by E. J. B. Rose, published in *Crucible*, January 1964 (a publication of the Church of England Board for Social Responsibility).

much of the hostility which flares up when the press are subjected to enquiries, such as that following the Vassall case. It also tends to make journalists move in a self-contained society, and in this lies a danger for us all. It is very easy for journalists to become inured to the sensational, the trivial and, indeed, to the frankly sordid and sadistic type of reporting that tends to shock many readers. The more contact there is between journalists and ordinary members of the public, particularly when both are "off duty", the more it will help journalists to see the results of their reporting in some kind of perspective. If criticism is both friendly and informed, there seems little reason why it should not be heeded. What is intolerable is a situation in which there is nothing but dislike on both sides.

It must be recognised that as only a comparatively few newspapers have been the target of much criticism, so the critics themselves are only a small group compared with the millions of satisfied readers. The problem is how to put those who are critical in contact with those journalists who are faced day by day with making difficult ethical decisions about their motives in pursuing certain types of stories. It is not just a question of increasing contact between senior men in the press and those in other walks of life who are at the centre of affairs, for there is already a great deal of contact, and some newspaper managements spare no pains to arrange luncheons and meetings for V.I.P.s to meet them and their staffs. Moreover, it is by no means certain that those who have dealings with the press at this level are in the main the most critical in public or private about the press. The significant gap would appear to be between

the middle grade executives and the provincial and junior national journalists. Many of the press's most vociferous critics have rarely met a journalist and know little about the competitive pressures which are put upon him and account for much that is offensive to them.

One of the difficulties in making contact is due, in part, to the lack of facilities provided by newspapers for their staffs to have anywhere to which guests or friends can be invited. The larger provincial cities which have press clubs may arrange meetings and functions to which people from outside the press world are invited. But there is usually little money for this purpose and most of the clubs and their activities are unlikely to attract people from the middle and upper class bracket, usually the most hostile towards the press. Yet it is from among the junior provincial journalists that the future senior reporters, news editors and editors of both the provincial and national press will be found. It is surely during these formative years that standards are set, when it is vitally important that there should be contact at all levels, and opportunity given for journalists to debate some of the ethics of their profession with reasonable and responsible members of the public whom they serve.

Before this can happen, however, the educational barrier will have to be breached if not broken, and steps taken to raise the standards for entry into journalism, as the graduate population increases. At the moment the educational barrier can also be said to be a class barrier because a public school and university education has for long been synonymous with a certain social background. In a way this has presented newspapers with an excuse for not demanding a professional standard of

entry, as this would have meant drawing their staffs from a group with roughly the same background. As a newspaper must reflect its readers' wishes in respect of news and views, obviously it must staff itself with people, or at least a proportion of people, who come from the same social background as its readers.

Over the next decade, however, Britain will be going through a complete reorganisation of society which will involve a change of social attitudes at every level, and class distinctions as we have known them will largely disappear. Some distinctions, however, will remain and one of them is likely to be educational without any "class" connotation.

The press, therefore, might one day find itself out of step educationally at all levels and it would be intolerable if, in the face of the pledges made by both political parties to support the Robbins recommendations for higher education, the press sets its face against an increased graduate entry into journalism.

In London, of course, the whole question of contact is easier, and by the time the provincial journalist has reached Fleet Street he is a more mature person, capable of fitting into the background of the society in which he finds himself. The Press Club, too, has played its part in helping to bring people into closer contact with the press. Situated in the heart of Fleet Street, reached by an alleyway off Salisbury Square and backing on to St. Bride's Church, which is itself almost part of the Reuter building, journalists can eat and drink, talk shop and entertain friends, often from outside the press. Under the expert guiding hand of Mr. Morley Richards, one time news editor of the *Daily Express*, Archbishops,

Prime Ministers, politicians, Service chiefs and countless V.I.P.s have been dined, and no one can deny that all these activities have gone a long way to eliminating some of the prejudices of people holding high office. But the Press Club is not a professional headquarters in the same way as the Law Society, a few hundred yards away.

All this means that, although the situation is better than in the provinces, in that a reporter working for an influential national newspaper may find himself brought into contact with people at all levels of society, there is still no "professional" centre as such for journalists, and little opportunity for the debate and exchange of views essential to any organisation that must be as flexible to the needs of the times as the press.

It is important to retain in journalism those who have reached senior positions and for more opportunities of employment to be opened up to absorb some of the casualties of closures and amalgamations. One year after the closing down of the *News Chronicle*, twelve of its senior staff sat round a table in a London club to meet again and discuss how they had got on. Only one of the twelve was still working for a newspaper, and there are today many journalists of very high calibre who are working outside the newspaper industry—script writing, publications, television reporting and commercial work. In the public interest men like this should be either on the staffs of leading newspapers or in some way handing on their experience. No profession, no organisation can withstand a situation for long where there is a poor standard of entry coupled with a rapid dispersion at the top of people with experience.

In the long term the future of every newspaper and the raising of standards lies in the hands of those now just starting on some local newspaper. The question that might well be asked of the press as a whole is, what is it going to do to help these young men in their careers over the next quarter century?

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