

STENTOR  
OR THE PRESS OF  
TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

*DAVID OCKHAM*















STENTOR



## TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

*For the Contents of the Series see the end of  
the book*



# STENTOR

OR

THE PRESS OF TO-DAY  
AND TO-MORROW

BY

DAVID OCKHAM

“ The abstract and brief chronicle of the time.”

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"The new spirit in the Press, which aims, not at influencing statesmen by giving them an instructed and enlightened public opinion, but at making them subservient to a power which will exalt them or hound them out of office, according to whether they will or will not accept its dictates and its terms."

"The insolent pretensions of newspaper owners to reduce Downing Street to the position of an annexe of Fleet Street."

—*Certain People of Importance,*

by A. G. GARDINER.

The freedom of the Press is the freedom of public opinion, that's the beginning and the end of it. Can you pretend that public opinion is free, when more than half the leading journals are the voice of one man? There is a danger to the freedom of the Press, Janion; and that danger is you. You are simply a trust crushing out or buying up all opposition, till you control the market—till you can sit in your office and say, "What I think to-day, England will think to-morrow."

—*The Earth,* by J. B. FAGAN.







# STENTOR

## I

### THE BIRTH OF STENTOR

It is some eight thousand years ago that Man, having already set himself apart from the brute creation by walking on two legs and creating the art of speech, paved the way to the "best seller" by the invention of writing.

The nomad settled in the village. From the village there grew the city. Empires rose, fell, and crumbled into decay. Plato, Homer, Aristotle, Dante, da Vinci, Shakespeare



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enlarged the boundaries of intellect and of emotion. America was re-discovered. Moveable types were introduced to Europe. And the newspaper, via the printed book and the pamphlet, sprang from the loins of Gutenberg. Grub Street gave place to Fleet Street, and the Carmelites to Carmelite House. Compulsory schooling for the masses produced a new social phenomenon in the shape of whole nations among whom the illiterate was the exception, and Demos roared voraciously for newsprint. And the halfpenny "daily" created a demand for the forest products of Newfoundland.

So may our grandchildren condence their Outline of History.

Historically considered, the Newspaper is an upstart, although its



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germs existed in the Roman Empire, in the shape of *Acta Diurna* and *Acta Publica*, Government publications which contained registers of births and deaths, and particulars of the corn supply and of payments into the Treasury. The *Acta* even embodied so modern a feature as the Court Circular.

Journalism found no incitement during the Dark and Middle Ages, and the use of moveable types at first stimulated the production of books rather than that of periodicals. By the latter half of the fifteenth century, rudimentary journals were, however, making their more or less regular appearance in Germany, Austria, and Italy, and embedded in Continental archives is to be found at least one copy of a contemporary



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account of Columbus' voyages to America recorded while his journeyings still represented the latest news.

The sixteenth century saw the *Gazzetta*, an Italian production in manuscript, to be read on payment of a *gazzetta*, a small coin of the period, which eventually gave its name as a synonym for newspapers and other publications. None of these Continental attempts to assuage the thirst for news seems, however, to have embodied the seeds of permanence, and the idea of a Newspaper in the modern sense, that is, of a publication issued at regular intervals and characterised by continuity in administration and policy, is largely English. The first regular English newspaper was the *Weekly News from Italy, Germany, etc.*,



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founded in 1622, and nineteen years later an English paper secured a "scoop" by publishing a report of a Parliamentary debate for the first time on record. In 1709, London had its first daily under the title of the *Daily Courant*; the *Morning Post* dates back to 1772; and the *Times*, originally established as the *Daily Universal Register*, followed in 1785.

It is almost impossible to assign a definite historical date for the inception of the newspaper as a regular institution created to satisfy a public demand, since so many of the journalistic pioneers were both of a fugitive and ephemeral nature, whilst others were pamphlets rather than news bulletins. But if we strike a mean between the *Daily Courant*



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and the *Morning Post*, we may say that the newspaper has enjoyed some two centuries of vigorous life. It has thus witnessed the birth of the Industrial Age and of its offspring, Mechanical Transport, has seen the formation of the United States of America, the peopling of Canada and Australia, the fall of most European thrones, the development of great communities in South America, the birth of flying, and the shifting of the centre of gravity of political power from the semi-instructed few to the uninstructed many. If Stentor has lost his head a trifle at the contemplation of such an unparalleled record of human activity, and of a period pregnant with such almost unimaginable possibilities for good and evil, who shall wonder?



## II

### THE NATURE OF STENTOR

WHAT is a newspaper? Ask any editor or proprietor, and he will tell you that its primary function is the dissemination of news, and its secondary, but none the less immensely important, task is that of commenting on the happenings of to-day or forecasting those of to-morrow, with the object of educating the community and guiding public opinion. So we are frequently informed, in rotund periods, by noble lords who respond to the toast of The Press at public feastings.



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What, actually, is a newspaper? To begin with, it contains advertisements, mainly of women's dress, soaps, face creams and powders, chocolate, beer, whisky, tobacco, and motor cars. Democracy's needs.

Then there is a page of pictures, gathered at great expense from the ends of the earth, often transmitted by aeroplane, and providing a feast of new hats and evening wraps from Paris, railway accidents, shipwrecks, upturned tramcars and motor lorries that have fallen into ditches, the more or less recognisable portraits of men and women performing at the Divorce Courts or for some other reason temporarily in the public eye, photographs of film actresses, and pictures of the diversions of the Rich at the races,



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on the moors, on the Lido, and on the Riviera. Democracy's peep-show.

After these hors d'œuvres come the leading articles, letters to the editor, "nature notes" straight from Fleet Street, an instalment of a serial story depicting a life such as was never lived on land or sea, pictures which are believed to amuse the children, and "leader page articles" largely contributed (or at least signed) by doctors, divines, the wives of ex-Cabinet Ministers, Russian Princesses, actresses, and—occasionally—journalists.

There are also articles in which women are instructed how to dress, cook, arrange a luncheon table, plan schemes of interior decoration, pack their trunks for a holiday, economise



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in the household, and retain the affection of their husbands.

The residue is news.

But not all of it.

For much of this residue is news only in a specialised and restricted sense. City notes, produce market notes, the movements of shipping, and golf, bridge, gardening, or motor-ing notes do not appeal to every reader. Nor, for that matter, does literary criticism, or the critiques of plays, films, concerts, and picture exhibitions.

But the residue of the residue is news. And that includes "gossip" by ladies and gentlemen apparently on terms of the utmost intimacy with Royalty and the nobility and gentry, the deaths of centenarians, the bright sayings of witnesses at police courts,



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the witty sayings of judges, the wise sayings of magistrates, and the futile sayings of coroners.

Add a crossword puzzle, and you have a newspaper. Democracy's Mentor.

New inventions and institutions achieve popularity in accordance with the readiness with which they lend themselves to vulgarisation. So it has been with wireless and the kinema, and so it is with the Press. Cynics may say that every country has the newspapers it deserves, but that begs the question. The mass of the public undoubtedly likes its newspapers well enough (without having any very great respect for them) but it also likes novels and film plays entirely devoid of artistic value, just as it likes third-rate music



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and fourth-rate pictures. The real question is how far is popular taste natural, and how far has it been debauched by those who aim at giving the public what it wants, or what it is supposed to want. A brewer who succeeds in inducing his customers to acquire a taste for doctored or synthetic beer may be entitled to say that he is giving them what they like. But he is not entitled to say that they are incapable of appreciating unadulterated malt and hops, or that they would <sup>not</sup> really prefer the genuine article if they were allowed a free choice between the two.

When compulsory schooling led to an immense and sudden increase in the number of people able to read without difficulty, well-meaning enthusiasts rejoiced at the prospect



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of the artisan beguiling his leisure with Dante, Milton, Schopenhauer, Ruskin, Darwin, George Elliot, or the works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Actually, these newcomers to the world of letters turned mostly to the penny novelette and the "bitty" weekly. They might have patronised something better if the pioneers of reading matter for the million had made the experiment of seeing whether there was a market for something better. But the experiment was not made. And it was on the basis of a culture largely represented by the "snippety" weekly, that the creators of newspapers for the million began to build about a generation ago.

Let it be conceded that their intentions were largely laudable. The



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appeal of the newspaper had previously been restricted to a degree almost incredible to contemporary men and women under thirty. The daily paper was the preserve of the well-to-do and the "comfortable classes"; the masses bought evening papers for racing tips and other sporting information, and on Sundays they were regaled with a rag-ôut of the murders, the robberies, the assaults, the divorces, and the more unsavoury police court cases of the week. Journals of international repute, such as the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Neue Freie Presse*, the *Journal des Débats*, sold fewer copies in a week than the popular organs now dispose of in a day.

The Harmsworths, the Pearsons, the Hearsts, were to change all that.



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In order to make the daily paper a necessity, or a habit, of the masses, it was essential to depart from the pomposity of the older journals, with their long and platitudinous leading articles about nothing in particular, their unattractive "make-up," their bald presentation of news, the immense length of their police court reports, and their adherence to the theory that the fall of a Cabinet in Patagonia was of more interest to the reader than a murder on his doorstep. The motto of the new Press was Brightness, Brevity, Enterprise, and Cheapness. It introduced photographs. It presented its news more attractively. It catered for the interests of women. It printed the light, but informative, article on topics of the day, often written by a



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specialist. It quickened up the transmission both of the news and of the newspaper. It aimed, in short, at mirroring passing events for the multitude rather than providing reading matter to be digested at leisure by the banker, the lawyer, the country gentleman, and the politician. And it succeeded remarkably—up to a point.

But man cannot live by brightness alone. And brightness became a fetish. Insensibly, and on the whole probably unconsciously, at least at first, the newspaper made excessive sacrifices in the pursuit of its passion for the purely readable. It concentrated on the tabloid and the snippet. It plastered its pages with pictures, so that we have reached the stage at which if Dean Inge, Bernard Shaw,



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the ex-Kaiser, President Coolidge, Mr. Lloyd George, or Mr. Charles Chaplin be mentioned on six consecutive days of the week by the same paper, each mention will be accompanied by a photograph, usually the same photograph, the size of a postage stamp. Similarly, the obsession of the Press for "human interest stories" (a characteristic legitimate enough in itself) has been developed to the point at which the wives and mothers of condemned murderers are interviewed directly after the verdict with a request for their comments on the justice of the sentence, while respectable householders are despatched with cameras to photograph the tears of miners' widows after a colliery accident.

"Human interest" with a ven-



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geance. But the worst feature of this vulgarisation of the popular Press is the resulting vulgarisation of the public. News editors would not instruct their reporters to interview divorcées, husbands whose wives have just been killed in motor accidents, or bereaved mothers, unless journalistic insistence as the "personal touch" had so greatly succeeded in banning decent reticence. The law does not punish such outrages on public taste, although it punishes many offences of far smaller detriment to the community.

Side by side with vulgarisation is persistent falsification of values. The Press promotes mass hysteria, as is shown by the excesses accompanying the visits of American film stars to England or of European queens to



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the United States. It consistently denounces the very evils, or imaginary evils for whose creation it is itself so largely responsible, finding, for instance, good "copy" both in detailed descriptions of a play alleged to be lewd, and in criticisms of the same play by clergymen who have not seen it. And it is driving privacy from the world by its discovery of the new creed that if the pen be mightier than the sword, the camera is mightier than either.

Insistence on the personal note has also brought in its train a Mumbo-Jumbo belief in the virtue of names. It is assumed that the public will attach more importance to an article signed with a name with which it is familiar than by an unsigned contribution, and although this theory is



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based on a certain element of fact, it is in practice overworked to the point of nausea. The reader will no doubt attach special importance to an article under the signature of Arnold Bennett, or H. G. Wells, especially if it deal with a subject with which the writer is particularly identified. He will also be more impressed by an article on tennis by Suzanne Lenglen than by an equally good but anonymous contribution. But is he equally impressed by the fact that a column of platitudes on motherhood, the contemporary young woman, or the decay of church-going, is signed by a, no doubt, estimable lady, whose only claim to public distinction is that she is the wife of an ex-Lord Mayor or the bearer of an obscure Hungarian title? Editors and



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proprietors apparently think so, thus indicating their cynical estimate of the level of public intelligence.

Furthermore, this passion for names is responsible for the perpetration of the grossest frauds on the public. It is notorious in Fleet Street that articles alleged to be contributed by politicians, musical comedy actresses, film stars, and professional footballers are, in fact, often not written by the illustrious who are their reputed authors. Indeed, the illustrious are as like as not incapable of writing a page of grammatical English, as is also the case with the self-advertising commercial magnate, whose reputed views on economic questions or industrial co-operation, neatly typed and flanked by carefully touched-up photographs, descend on



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the desks of editors in the company of the pigeon-English letters of pushful publicity agents.

But this fraud on the public, and there is no other name for a species of false pretence which is growing so rapidly that it is developing into an open scandal, is, relatively, a minor affair. The real evil is that the controllers of the Press, themselves largely amateurs, are going out of their way to encourage the incursion of the amateur into what is a highly-skilled and highly-complex avocation. And that constitutes the real false pretence. It does not matter very much whether that popular film comedienne, Miss Ruby Vamp, is actually responsible or not for the article on "Should Curates Charleston?" extensively and expensively



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advertised by the "Daily Dope." But it does matter if the public be led to believe that an article on foreign relations written to order by a hack journalist for the purpose of provoking a sensation or promoting the policy of a newspaper proprietor should purport to be, and should be accepted, as from the pen of an impartial diplomatic expert, who has, in fact, only lent his name in return for money or for purposes of self-advertisement.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In December last, the Lawn Tennis Association passed resolutions prohibiting a competitor in tournaments and matches from writing articles thereon for the Press "under his own name, initials, or recognisable pseudonym," and also from allowing a player to permit his name to be "advertised as the author of any book or press article of which he is not the actual author." This resolution was boycotted by a portion of the Combine Press, while one newspaper distorted the attitude of the Association as representing "interference with amateurs," and "dictating to newspaper proprietors and editors." Imperence.



### III

#### THE DICTATORS

FEW people understand the economic, still less the social, significance of Trusts and Combines. The public is familiar enough with the amalgamation of a number of more or less competing concerns engaged in the same industry ; it is not so familiar with the conception of a Trust which owns or controls undertakings of widely-differing nature, such as the modern Combine which aims at controlling an article during the whole cycle of operations from the winning of the raw material to the marketing



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of the finished product. Still less is it familiar with the process whereby control, which is far more important than ownership, can be acquired by putting up quite a small proportion of the total capital invested in a commercial undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

It is as the result of control rather than actual ownership that the British Press has within the past few years largely come into the hands of some four or five men. The Independent Press has, in consequence, almost ceased to exist. There are

<sup>1</sup> A large proportion of the capital of modern joint-stock companies is provided by debenture-holders, who normally have no voting rights whatever, and by preference share-holders, who may vote at meetings only when their dividend has been in arrears for a prescribed period. Even ordinary shareholders may have no voting rights, and the entire control, including the appointment of directors, can be vested in the owners of a particular class of share representing less than a tenth of the company's total capital.



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still, of course, newspapers uncontrolled by Combines or Trusts, but these are in the main restricted alike as to circulation, influence, and the range of their geographical distribution. Moreover, independence of ownership does not necessarily mean independence of control by a political party in whose interests the paper is administered by its nominal owners.

The "Trustification" of the Press is an entirely logical development, and has been accepted by the public in much the same way as amalgamations in any other industry. But there is a vital difference between a Newspaper Trust and a Beef Trust. The Newspaper Trust controls and manipulates public opinion. Its workings are largely subterranean. It is guided on occasion by purely



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political considerations to an extent impossible in any other industry. It may exercise a decisive influence on the issue of war or peace. Obviously, the control of a nation's Press by a handful of men is not to be regarded in the same light as the control of its chemical industry. A "deal" in newspapers embodies, ultimately, a "deal" in the means of manipulating public opinion.

In every industry, the appetite for amalgamation grows by what it feeds on. The tendency is for the immensely powerful and wealthy Newspaper Trusts to absorb more and more publications. Very often, a competing organ is bought only that it may be "killed," as happened to London's oldest evening paper, *The Globe*. Amalgamation is often only a



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euphemistic term for the disappearance of an old-established paper. The independent journals cannot withstand the tentacles of the Octopus. Either they are forced out of existence by sheer inability to stand up against their much wealthier rivals, or the owners are induced to sell by offers too tempting to refuse. In the latter instance, the matter has usually been decided on down to the last detail by the directors on both sides before the offer is submitted to the shareholders who are the nominal and legal owners of the property.

The Dictators of Public Opinion thus enlarge their realm. It may be asked why, granted that the disappearance of existing Independent Newspapers is inevitable, new Independent organs do not make their



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appearance. The answer is that few undertakings involve the risk of such great loss, coupled with so much uncertainty and the necessity of putting up so much working capital to provide for possible losses during the first two or three years of existence, as the launching of a great newspaper. Excluding a journal subsidised by Labour organisations, only one serious attempt has been made in England during the last twenty years to found a new morning paper of national scope. It failed, after its millionaire proprietor had tired of losing money on the venture. The last attempt to establish a new London evening paper failed on the score of finance, distribution alone (*i.e.*, getting the paper into the hands of readers after it had been



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printed) costing a thousand pounds a week. London, which is the journalistic centre of the United Kingdom (the small size of the country making possible the "nation-wide" newspaper, with which there is nothing really comparable in the United States), has actually far fewer morning and evening papers than twenty years ago.

It has more Sunday papers. But that is one of the results of Trustification. By placing a Sunday paper under the same control as one or more morning and evening journals, overhead charges, which eat up money in the newspaper industry, are largely reduced. Administrative and mechanical costs are lowered. Each paper in the Combine can give free publicity to the rest. Distribution



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costs are shared. Against such conditions, the lone hand fights a losing battle, and economic factors operate as much against the creation of new Independent journals as they operate for the absorption of those still in existence.

Since the armistice, the process of Trustification has undergone a remarkable acceleration. It has also entered on a new and immensely significant phase, the unification of control of publications of the most widely differing nature, thus bringing illustrated weeklies, fashion papers, monthly magazines, technical and trade journals, children's weeklies and monthlies, and directories and other works of reference under the same ownership as morning, evening, and Sunday Newspapers. The



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modern Combine will even control the manufacture of its paper, and the supply of raw material for the purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Such comprehensive Trustification may either assume the shape of complete amalgamation of separate companies, or be effected by the process known as unification of interests, in which a common control is brought about by such means as the presence of the same men, or their nominees, on the boards of companies which retain their corporate entity but are animated by a common policy and administered to serve common interests. The result is in either instance the same.

The world has never known anything comparable. A handful of

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.



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men, sitting over a luncheon table, can decree what the community is to think, what it is to be told, what it is not to be told. So we have reached the "Fordisation" of the intellect, which works through mass suggestion reinforced by damnable iteration. And this is mainly the work, not of men with missions, not of enthusiasts, or patriots, or men of culture, not even of journalists, but of men who have "gone into" the newspaper industry as they might have "gone into" the establishment of bacon-curing factories.

Does it require a prophet to forecast the colossal influence of the Dictators on the opinions, the conduct, and the ideals of the next generation?

For the process of Trustification



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cannot be arrested. Law and public opinion are alike powerless to stem it. No Anti-Trust legislation, as has been proved by America, is ever or can ever be of the smallest effect, since there are too many means of evading the spirit of the law while adhering to the letter. Interlocking directorates, ownership of shares carrying control over the entire undertaking, secret arrangements for pooling profits, are among the common methods adopted in order to set up a *de facto* Trust when it may not be legal or politic to establish a Trust in name. Newspapers which succeed in maintaining a semblance of independent ownership and independent policy will thus be brought within the orbit of the Combines although they may nominally re-



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main outside. The Trusts will become Super-Trusts, and the Press of the whole country may be dominated by two, three, or even one combine, with a single individual as Arch-Dictator.

The process is inevitable, even if only for the reason that the splitting up of a Trust that has once been formed entails reduction in profits. Northcliffe, who was above and beyond everything else a journalist, aimed merely at the supreme control of the journals created by his genius. The contemporary Dictators, who are not journalists, aim at dominion over the whole field of the Press. They have already gone most of the way towards attaining their ambition.

A special factor which has re-



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ceived very little consideration will operate in the near future towards the tightening of the stranglehold of the Press Combines. Trustification of the Newspaper Industry has recommended itself to financiers on the ground, *inter alia*, that it enables expenditure to be cut down. The history of nearly every industrial combine, excepting those affecting the Press, has since the armistice been one of profits that have failed to come up to the promoters' estimates. In numerous instances, despite the considerable economies foreshadowed in the prospectus, earnings have been materially lower than those of the former separate undertakings now under one control. Indeed, the process of amalgamation or of acquiring controlling interests



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has during the past few years been in general disappointing to shareholders.

Until now, the Newspaper Trusts have been more fortunate, partly because certain classes of advertisers have been induced to spend much more money, partly because of the economies effected by the wholesale discharge of staffs consequent on the so-called amalgamation of papers which have been bought only that they might be "killed";<sup>1</sup> and in part because the results of acquiring shareholdings at fancy prices have yet to materialise.

<sup>1</sup> "The Yorkshire Evening Argus having been amalgamated with the Bradford Daily Telegraph, the Editor of the former paper (Mr. J. W. Masters) confidently recommends the members of his loyal and competent staff to all who need literary assistance, and would be glad to receive applications from editors and others having positions to offer."—Advertisement in the *Times*, December, 15, 1926.



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This prosperity cannot be expected to last indefinitely. The newspaper brokers, that new class of financial intermediary which is playing so significant a part in the making of "deals" in public opinion, have done uncommonly well out of their buyings and sellings. They may still do well in the immediate future, but they have no concern with the ultimate prosperity of the industry. The future position of shareholders in the Press Trusts does not seem so assured as they imagine to-day. As profits decline, or fail to increase in accordance with expectations, the dictators will decree reductions in expenditure, beginning with the human material which has created their profits and their goodwill. The desire for economy, which is on the



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whole more likely to be attained by means of centralised administration than with a number of separate and individual undertakings, will obviously outweigh any arguments that might be brought forward in favour of "unscrambling" the Press Trusts, or splitting up the Combines into smaller undertakings. Furthermore, when the Trusts feel the pinch, or regard their profits as insufficiently bloated, the ambition to drive out what remains of the Independent Press will be accentuated, and yet more journals outside the Combines will be forced to surrender.

With the process of Trustification has come a complete change in the character of the Controllers of the Press. Men such as Delane of the *Times* were great editors, that is, great



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journalists, who stamped their impress on an age which still held to the belief that the editor was responsible for the editorial policy of his paper, and was something more than the mere paid servant of his proprietors, to be engaged and discharged as one " hires and fires " a scullery maid. Men such as Northcliffe (with all his faults a great man and one with a touch of that indefinable quality which we term genius) were possessed of creative ideas ; they had vision and ideals ; they saw in the newspaper something more than a mere instrument for money-making. If they made money it was not because it was their primary ambition to do so, or even because they particularly cared about money, but because their creations



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could not help attaining a considerable degree of material success.

To-day, with negligible exceptions which are unlikely to be perpetuated, editors are merely hired servants. A. C. P. Scott is an exception.<sup>1</sup> Another Delane is an impossibility. Another Northcliffe is unthinkable, since the new Dictators have fashioned the rôle of the Press, and their own rôle, after a diametrically opposite conception.

In the stead of the Delanes and the Northcliffes, we have control by self-seeking millionaires with a megalomaniac itch for interference. A dozen years ago, the spectacle of a newspaper proprietor expressing on the front page of his principal organ his entire disagreement with the

<sup>1</sup> Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, and controller of its editorial policy.



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opinions of his dramatic critic on an entirely undistinguished play would have been incredible. Such an outrage on taste is symptomatic of the dictatorship by the new Overlords of the Press. Here we have yet another manifestation of the amateur's conception of journalism. Anyone, thinks the modern proprietor, can be a dramatic critic, a musical critic, a literary critic, a Parliamentary correspondent, an editor, especially if his name be known to the public in a capacity entirely unrelated to journalism. If he be a peer or possess a courtesy title, then he is the beau ideal of journalism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Anyone can write leading articles," the author was once solemnly assured by one of our best-known editors. He was neither endeavouring to be humorous nor to be cynical; he was merely expressing what the Conductors of the Press themselves think of the Press which they conduct.



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Amateurishness and the love of interference also combine to give us the ponderous signed contributions with which newspaper proprietors regularly favour their own journals. Whether these articles are in every instance, or in any instance, actually written by their signatories, is a matter with which I have no immediate concern. But they are significant of the driving forces behind the modern Press Trust ; they exemplify the rôle of the Press as an engine of propaganda, self-advancement, and self-advertisement, for its millionaire owners.

To quote Mr. St. John Ervine :

“ We know there are certain demented millionaires who own newspapers and will write for them ; and when one of these men



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writes an article, the staff hides its head and goes about the rest of the week explaining it away. We (the journalists) are the paper. We are the goodwill of the paper, and when they sell a paper they sell what we have made. When they sell what we have made and say 'We don't want you any more,' we should be regarded as the first charge on the price of that paper. We have known proprietors who have ruined papers. Such a man should be in gaol for ruining a good business. . . . Editors used to put the proprietors of newspapers in their place, and there is no reason why it should not be done again."

Mr. Ervine, it may be added, made these remarks at a meeting convened by the Institute of Journalists on December 11, 1926, under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Bruce, editor



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of the *Glasgow Herald*. His remarks were, of course, boycotted by the leading organs of the Press Trust.



## IV

### THE MANNERISMS OF STENTOR

A PROBLEM for the consideration of the Dictators of the Press is that of reconciling the up-to-date nature of the modern newspaper in most respects with its extraordinary conservatism in others, an inconsistency that affords genuine amusement to the student of contemporary life and manners. The Press is still old-fashioned enough to regard Woman (with a very large "W") as a remarkable creature that has only just been discovered. Her slightest and most inconsequential doings are re-



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garded as of the most compelling interest. "Women Present at Football Match" declaim the headlines, and the game is immediately vested with a special and romantic atmosphere.<sup>1</sup>

Again, we have progressed beyond the "Book of Snobs," but "public schoolboy," "old Etonian," "wife of Ex-M.P.," and "Colonel" are still imagined by sub-editors to be invested in the reader's mind with an aura denied to the mass of human beings. As for members of the nobility, let an amiable and undistinguished peer die of heart failure in his eightieth year, or collide in his motor car with a taxi-cab, and the

<sup>1</sup> I do not dilate on this theme, since it has so admirably been expounded by Rose Macaulay, who is human enough to rebel against her sex being treated by the Press as though it were almost human.



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news is conveyed to a bored public by means of special contents bills. For the public is bored, when it is not disgusted, by these endeavours to make the world safe for Snobocracy. Yet a journalist who attempted to point out that both social values and news values had altered since the days of the Great Exhibition, and, in particular, since the Great War, would be told that he did not know his business and that he was most certainly a Bolshevik.

Again, while proprietors and editors long ago realised the implication of Northcliffe's discovery that Woman was a creature of sufficient intelligence and curiosity to read a newspaper (even if only for the advertisements of drapers), they still regard her in the light of an intellectual



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crétin so far as concerns the provision of reading matter. If any critic consider this statement too severe, let him—or her—concentrate exclusively for the next two days on the fashion and “ Society ” columns and the “ Woman’s Pages ” of the Popular Press.

Moreover, the editorial conception of women is that they are without exception possessed of inexhaustible means, leisure, and ability to make holiday at expensive resorts all the year round and to attend all the costliest “ functions ” as a matter of course. No other explanation of the fatuous drivél offered up for the special delectation of female readers offers itself to the reasoning mind.

Do you think I have been unfair ?  
Then read this characteristic para-



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graph from an evening paper, headed  
" Earnest Young Women " :

" It must not be thought that the American girl merely dances her way through life. Not at all. She must have variety, therefore she dabbles lightly in art, literature, politics, or philanthropy. She has days for visiting hospitals or other institutions or she makes political speeches as Miss Barbara Sands, grand-daughter of Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, has been doing recently, and as Sarah Murray Butler does all the time, or she even takes up business in her odd moments, like Elinor Dorrance, who at eighteen has decided to know all about the famous Campbell soups company of which her father is head and which she will inherit."

This is not parody. It is the real thing, complete with snobbishness,



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clichés, naïveté, and the conviction that it doesn't in the least matter how you write or what you write about so long as you are writing for other women. And it is published in a paper whose owners lay stress on the fact that it caters especially for intelligent and cultured womanhood.

“ The famous Campbell soups company.” “ Famous ” is the sub-editor's favourite word,<sup>1</sup> applied by him with unwearying zeal to all men and women who have ever got themselves in the public eye—unless they are really famous—applied even to furniture polishes, blends of whisky, and popular cigarettes. The sub-editor, that romantic soul, also assumes that the normal behaviour of the notorious

<sup>1</sup> “ Amazing,” “ mystery,” “ thrilling,” and “ dramatic ” are also hot favourites in the Stock Phrase Stakes.



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or the merely well-known is flamboyant, so that when they manage their affairs without limelight they are "quietly married," or they "leave quietly" for their honeymoon. The one thing the Press will in no circumstances permit them to do is to die quietly.

Is it not time that the pages of the Press were one quarter so up-to-date as the machinery which prints them? and that "journalese" should cease to be a synonym for the vapid, the crude, the provincial, and the semi-illiterate?

Impartiality being even rarer than commonsense, no one would be foolish enough to demand from a newspaper either complete lack of bias, or the presentation with equal prominence of both sides of a con-



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troversial case. Such impartiality would be contrary to human nature. But natural prejudice does not necessarily involve the deliberate distortion of news.

News can be, and is, habitually manipulated both by distortion and suppression. The first procedure is, on the whole, less objectionable, since a little knowledge on the part of a reader will often enable him to realise that a case is being overstated. Moreover, he may allow for the known political complexion of a journal. Suppression assumes two shapes, partial and complete. The latter, which is the more unusual, comes into play when a newspaper does not find it convenient or politic to give publicity to events or ideas, but this reticence does not necessarily



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spring from sinister or interested motives. Indeed, it may simply be because the news editor, who lives in a curious world of his own, often remote from the contacts of the outer world, and who is avid only of stereotyped sensations, fails to recognise news when it is thrust under his nose. In such instances, a rival may possibly recognise "news value." Or again, he may not.

This partial suppression, of which the Socialist newspapers are quite as guilty as the so-called "Capitalist Press" denounced by them for the practice, is one of the deadliest weapons in the armoury of journalism. Let it be clearly understood that we are concerned here not so much with a matter of unfairness or injustice to an individual or a section



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of the community, as with injustice to the community as a whole, which is deliberately and systematically deprived of knowledge of all the facts necessary to form a judgment regarding the issues at stake in a question which may affect the national well-being.

For instance, it is impossible for the average newspaper reader to form a detached opinion of the rights and wrongs of a coal strike. The miners' wages are alternatively exaggerated and minimised ; exceptionally high earnings in the coal fields are paraded as typical of the average for the industry as a whole ; or the earnings of coal hewers are represented at much below the real level on the strength of figures including the wages of boys and sur-



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face workers. All these facts are readily available and accessible in any modern newspaper office. But only a selection of them is published by any one paper.

Again, to take an example of complete suppression, the curtain may never be lifted by the Press on a political or other scandal of which the exposure is emphatically in the public interest. Such a boycott may be just as much due to the belief that the subject has no news value as to any ulterior reasons. But the injury to the community is the same in either event. Newspaper readers are not concerned with the motives animating editors and proprietors ; they *are* concerned with the results of those motives.



## V

### THE NEWSPAPER OF TO-MORROW

THE professional will not, of course, be entirely eliminated from journalism. Despite their love of the amateur, newspaper proprietors realise that his place is not among the reporters, the news editors, the sub-editors, the financial editors, or the "art editors"—whose concern lies not with art, but with news photographs. As to editors, that is another matter. The rôle of editor tends more and more to become that of conduit pipe between staff and proprietary, whose views and policy he



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is called on to expound and further. So that the amateur will add the editorial chair to his Press conquests. Indeed, he has already made a beginning.

One figures the popular "dailies" of the next decade, with their signed articles by film stars, politicians, jockeys, footballers, tennis players, and racing motorists. One visualises their Women's Page, Beauty Hints, and Guide to the Fashions, ostensibly conducted by popular actresses whose time is already fully occupied in meeting the conflicting claims of the Stage and of "Society." One foresees the daily sermon by the proprietor's pet divine, and the daily health article by the medical man who regards the stylo as more lucrative than the scalpel. One foresees



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also an immense increase in the number of photographs and other pictures, aided by the development of telephotography, television, and air transport. The motorist, the golfer, the collector of antique furniture, the amateur gardener, the investor, will find more space devoted to their special interests. There may even be room for an increase in the amount of space (if not of the quality) devoted to book reviews, although this forecast is admittedly optimistic. (What the public is supposed to want is not literary criticism, but "gossip" about the personal habits, the clothes, the recreations, the holidays, and the monetary earnings of authors.)

The leading articles will remain, partly through conservatism, and in part because of their utility for pur-



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poses of propaganda and "uplift." The serial story will improve in quality, since that is one of the logical sequences of the passion for well-known names. More and larger prizes will be awarded for guessing contests and other competitions. The scope of newspaper insurance will be extended, although this function may ultimately be curtailed or even cease when the process of Trustification has gone so far that individual journals will no longer be under the necessity of trying to abstract each others' readers. The pictures and stories for the nursery (and what the nursery really thinks of some of these efforts for its entertainment would surprise their purveyors) will be raised to the dignity of a whole page, complete with editor,



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the latter probably the wife of an ex-Cabinet Minister. The Sabbath will be kept holy by an increase in the space devoted to autobiographies of contemporary criminals and the retelling of old crimes. In short, the Newspaper will have travelled a stage further on the road to supplant the book, to supplement the playhouse.

It is pertinent at this point to refer to one of the seeming paradoxes of the modern Press, the diminution of its influence as its circulation and wealth have increased. Strictly speaking, the process has rather been one of a shifting of the centre of influence. When circulations were small, readers belonged to the influential classes. A leading article in the *Times* could cause the Cabinet to reflect, could influence European



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chancelleries, could even exercise a definite effect on projected legislation. In much the same way as the importance of the individual voter has diminished with every broadening of the basis of the franchise, so has the nature of the old influence of the Press on public affairs declined with growth in circulations.

“ Government by newspaper ” has been denounced by politicians when the views expressed by a journal have not happened to coincide with theirs, but hitherto it is the endeavour rather than the realisation which has been criticised. A newspaper can and does influence the Cabinet in relatively unimportant matters, such as the propriety of commercial advertising by post-mark ; it no longer succeeds in swaying the Administra-



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tion in the matter of a first-class legislative measure, or in inducing it to sanction a reform or a change desired by the majority of electors ; despite almost unanimous newspaper criticism of the retention of certain war-time regulations, such as those governing the hours during which it is licit to sell chocolate or cigarettes, the Home Secretary is still able to say that he is so far unaware of any widespread public demand for a relaxation of these restrictions.<sup>1</sup>

But against the decline in the direct political influence of the Press there has to be set the growth of its influence over the community. The expansion both of circulations and of

<sup>1</sup>Since this has been written, a committee has been set up to inquire into the regulations in question.



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the field of interests catered for by the newspaper, already touched on in these pages, has helped immensely to develop the "newspaper habit." It is a matter of elementary psychology that the average man and woman cannot help being influenced by the day-to-day exposition of political and other questions in the columns of their newspapers. Let any journal adopt the consistent policy of blackening the leaders of Soviet Russia or belauding Mussolini, and the infamy of the Bolsheviks or the disinterestedness and greatness of the Italian dictator becomes a creed to hundreds of thousands. Let the whole Press unite in the same shout, and that is the tendency under its present controllers, and the result is mass suggestion of a nature and



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intensity which causes the Press to mould the public opinion of whole nations. So that although an individual newspaper or a combination of newspapers may be powerless directly to affect the policy of a Cabinet, it is daily operating to sway the minds of the people and thus, indirectly, to sway Governments through the ultimate effect of mass suggestion in action during the period of a general election or a political crisis.

And this is the work of a handful of men who—it is no reproach to them—are temperamentally unfitted for the enormous responsibilities which they have assumed so lightly, so casually—as casually as though they were “cornering” chewing gum.



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Newspaper proprietors assert that in fact, their editors have a free hand, and attempt to prove this contention by pointing to differences in policy or treatment manifested by newspapers under the same control. One is at some difficulty in deciding whether this argument is the fruit of ingenious or of merely ingenuous minds. The *Evening Standard*, for instance, may not see eye to eye with the *Daily Express* in such matters as the morality of modern dancing or the retention of old churches in the City of London, but a strike, a political crisis, a general election, the issue of war or peace, will witness a unanimity of editorial comment which goes beyond the limits of sheer coincidence. The *mot d'ordre* has been given.



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The Press of to-morrow will have to regard wireless and the kinema as potential rivals. Both occupy a position analogous to the newspaper, inasmuch as their popularity is largely due to the lack of mental resources in the average man and woman, and their active disinclination to read anything calling for concentration or sustained effort. The Popular Press, Broadcasting and the "Movies" are alike variants of the "Daily Dope." Furthermore, the Press has itself largely helped to popularise its potential competitors through the immense publicity which it accords them.

In England, broadcasting has hitherto not trenched on the province of the newspaper because of the archaic restrictions imposed on the



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transmission of news by wireless, which is virtually limited to a brief re-hash of the evening papers, together with weather forecasts. But it is impossible that these restrictions will be allowed to prevail indefinitely, even if only for the reason that "listeners-in" are able to compare the service with that provided by Continental broadcasting agencies, who are not fettered by the Mandarins of the Post Office. As a matter of fact, the new British Broadcasting Corporation, which is a Government Department, possesses powers to do almost anything that can be done by a newspaper. Some of those powers it will certainly use, and there is nothing to prevent the Corporation from adding to its functions that of purveyor of propaganda



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for the Government of the day. The transmission of official news, and the development of an Inter-Empire news service it will certainly undertake.

But these are relatively minor matters. The real competitive possibilities of wireless lie in the fact that it brings the outer world into the homes of the millions at precisely those hours between the publication of the latest evening paper and the appearance of the morning paper at the breakfast-table. As the bulk of the contents of a morning paper are printed well before midnight, wireless transmission of news from seven o'clock in the evening until eleven or twelve would skim the cream off the next day's papers. Whether the Press should retaliate by establishing a



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wireless service of its own (impossible in England save by means of co-operation with the British Broadcasting Corporation, which possesses a double-riveted, State-enforced monopoly) or by issuing later editions of the evening papers than is now customary, will become a matter for the consideration of its conductors.

For, insofar as concerns the dissemination of news, the wireless can clearly do as well as, if not better, than the newspaper. And it can do it at smaller cost to the subscriber. No one would, of course, seriously suggest that wireless transmission of news will drive the newspapers out of business, or even that it will seriously affect their circulation or revenue. But it is obvious that if



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broadcasting compete with the Press in the publication of news (and the Press will be powerless to stop it in England and unable to do so elsewhere unless wireless be brought within the scope of Newspaper Trusts) then the Press must strengthen its hold on the public in those fields where wireless cannot compete, or cannot compete so well. So it will enlarge its field of comment. It will become more and more of a miscellany. It will devote more and more attention to crusades and "uplift." It will become more and more of a pulpit, and a lecture theatre for the physician. Above all, it will more and more strive to mould public opinion.

The rivalry of the Kinema will be of a subtler and less direct nature.



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Both the Popular Press and the " Pictures " appeal largely to a class which is easier to reach through the eye than through an appeal to the intellect, which demands a little imagination. The popular newspapers have lately begun to break out in a pictorial eczema throughout their pages. But the kinema, with its extremely well-organised service for recording and exhibiting events of the hour, leaves the newspaper miles in the rear. An evening paper can print photographs of the Derby or the Boat Race within a few minutes of their being taken. But it cannot show the whole progress of the race within a couple of hours after it has been run. Television, already a scientific achievement, and tomorrow a possible " commercial pro-



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position," will also come to the aid both of the Kinema and the Wireless. How does the Press propose to meet the actualities of the picture theatre and the possibilities of new inventions for the photographic recording and reproduction of events?



## VI.

### POISON GAS OR FRESH AIR

THE Trustification of the Press has gone further in England than in America or on the Continent, partly because of such specially favourable conditions as the small size of the country, the excellence of its communications, and the presence of an exceptionally large proportion of the population within a radius of a score of miles from the centre of the capital. But there is nothing to suggest that other countries represent more favourable soil for the continued propagation of an Independent Press.



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As has been said, neither legislation nor public opinion is competent to arrest the progress of combination, or to operate against Combines already in existence. Incidentally, the awakening has come too late, and although there is in this instance no lack of wisdom after the event, the utmost that it can effect is to instruct the community as to the nature and control of its newspapers. It is powerless to vary the nature of either. There are, it is true, alternatives to the Trust in the shape of Government control or ownership on behalf of a political party or group<sup>1</sup>, but these merely oppose one

<sup>1</sup> Last year, the *Journal des Débats* was sold to a banker and an ironmaster (the former is Baron Edouard de Rothschild), both of whom hold strong views on the re-valorisation of the franc. The London *Daily Chronicle*, in which the controlling interest had previously been



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form of dictatorship to another. Such control is characterised by no real independence, which obviously, cannot exist in the case of a Government organ. Political or Governmental control is, it is true, less objectionable from many stand-points than control by a Trust, while it also possesses the negative advantage that identity of ownership is usually less easy to camouflage. But such journals are not and cannot be independent. In the long run, the same vices of partiality, suppression, and distortion are present in a newspaper whose aim is the

held by Mr. Lloyd George, passed at the end of 1926 into the control of another Liberal group, and into the ownership of a company of which Lord Reading is the chairman. Some months earlier, the Government of the German Reich acquired the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, which had been acquired by the Prussian Government the previous year.