

PRESS
AND
PARTY
IN
CANADA



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F. H. UNDERHILL

PRESS AND PARTY IN CANADA: ISSUES OF FREEDOM

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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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CANADIAN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN 1955

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FOREWORD

THE PURPOSE of the Chancellor Dunning Trust, established at Queen's University in 1948, is "to promote understanding and appreciation of the supreme importance of the dignity, freedom and responsibility of the individual person in human society."

Since its inception the purposes of the Trust have been carried out by annual lecture series given at the University during the academic session by distinguished visiting lecturers.

In past series, the philosophic bases of freedom have been examined and the theme has been followed through the fields of history, political philosophy and literature.

In the present series consideration is given to the status and problems of freedom in contemporary society. During the session 1954-1955 the lectures here published on freedom of the press and Canadian liberal democracy were given and each lecturer spent a week at the University among staff and students.

Mr. George V. Ferguson, Editor of *The Montreal Daily Star*, is an eminent journalist concerned with the place of the press in society. Having been a westerner, a Rhodes Scholar, protege and colleague of John W. Dafoe, Executive Editor of *The Winnipeg Free Press*, a member of the United Nations Commission on Freedom of the Press, he spoke from a background of experience and thought.

Professor Frank H. Underhill, Professor of History at the University of Toronto, is equally well known as a writer and commentator. As a scholar he is known for his profound knowledge of the origins and growth of Canadian political parties.

Though the lectures differ in subject and the lecturers in experience and temperament, both are relevant and important to the purpose of the Chancellor Dunning Trust.

W. A. MACKINTOSH
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

*Queen's University at Kingston,
April 30, 1955*

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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

G. V. FERGUSON

FREEDOM of the press is a single aspect of a larger freedom—freedom of speech, freedom of information, and I presume that I have been asked to talk to you about it, to explain how it actually works in practice, because for thirty years I have earned my living inside its framework, benefiting materially certainly—and spiritually, I hope—from its provisions. I hope this fact does not prevent me taking an objective glance at it, its advantages, its defects and its limitations.

The theory behind it can be quickly stated. It is that every man and woman will be better off if the transmission and reception of fact and opinion are left free from the intervention of government. The detail of the theory expresses itself in every sphere of life, but the aspect of it which concerns me here is principally the discussion of public affairs. It is conceived that the general will of a political society cannot be fully expressed without this freedom. Freedom of information thus becomes an essential part of any system of democracy.

Freedom of the press has become, in the last thirty years, an inadequate description of my subject. The printing press has now been joined by radio, television and film, and the sociologists have invented an omnibus term for all of them. They are now known as the media of mass communication. I do not object to this precision of definition until the sociologists go on to refer to me as a manipulator of written symbols in the field of mass communication. What pretentious verbiage to apply to a reporter!

The theory of freedom in this field does not debar a government from providing information for its citizens. It merely declares that government shall not prevent others from doing so. The historical struggle for the freedom of the press was not so much to get the government out of the business. Governments did not try very hard to get into it. It was merely to put a stop to government interference with those who sought to use the printed word. Originally governments insisted on licensing all printed matter. They would not license what they thought disagreeable or dangerous, and they applied the most barbarous penalties against those who published unlicensed material. In the reign of Charles II a printer's right hand was slowly burned off, he was then disembowelled and hung. Finally his head was cut off—all sanctions aptly designed to discourage the rapid growth of free editorial opinion.

Licensing was finally abandoned, and the printers were left to their own devices. There was no tax money available to pay their printing costs. They could print only if someone paid them to do it, and they could continue to print only if they made a profit out of it. This cardinal fact should not be forgotten. It underlies and is essential to the whole development of the media of mass communication in all lands where government monopolies do not exist.

A newspaper exists because its costs are covered partly by the revenue it gets from advertising and partly from the buyers of its finished product. The proportion it derives from each of these two sources differs widely in relation to its position in the market which it occupies. Roughly speaking it may be assumed that about sixty per cent comes from its advertising, and forty per cent from the sale of its product to the consumer. In the fields of radio and television, advertising of course carries the whole cost of all private operations. In certain countries these latter media are in part or in whole publicly owned. I will have more to say

on this subject of my topic a little later on, its strengths and its weaknesses. Meanwhile I would appreciate it if you kept it in mind.

This was the major factor in the evolution of the press, as we know it; and this accounts for some of the developments of the press once prior censorship had been done away with. Some newspapers, their freedom assured, took subsidies and hand-outs from political groups which were looking for mouthpieces for their views. There was a time, less than 150 years ago, when the august *Times* of London got an annual payment from the Foreign Office to support the policies that department of government was advocating. In the United States, in the early days of the Republic, a score of newspapers could not have continued publication without payments from political groups. In Canada, just a little more than twenty years ago, the deficits of a western daily newspaper were faithfully met by the country's Prime Minister, Mr. R. B. Bennett. Thomas Jefferson, the greatest single figure in the development of American democracy, once remarked that, if he had to choose between the existence of government or of newspapers, he would choose the organs of opinion. In his later years, having witnessed for himself what subsidy could do, he was much more doubtful. But there were other means beside direct subsidy which could gain newspaper support: flattery and honours could achieve what banknotes could not get unaided, and this gave rise to Humbert Wolfe's famous quatrain:

They say you cannot bribe nor twist,
Thank God, the British journalist;
But, seeing what the man will do
Unbribed, there's no occasion to.

These commercial origins of the press are important to remember today when one of the often-heard criticisms of the modern newspaper is that it puts its profits ahead of the

services it renders to its readers. The fact is that the newspaper of free, western society began as a function of the free enterprise system, it has never been anything else, and remains a stronghold of that system to this day. Its business practices and its attention to both solvency and profit are indistinguishable from the practices of any other segment of a private enterprise world. If you happen to object to private enterprise, the newspaper certainly should be included in your objection. If you examine its practices closely you will find the reasons for many of them embedded in the same congeries of economic circumstances which lead, for instance, toward retail price maintenance, the fixed price, and toward monopoly. The newspaper is exempt neither from the economic storms nor the profitable sunshine of normal economic society.

In the circumstances of the present, left wing and socialist parties—and indeed other parties as well—have devised a policy which they believe cures the ills to which free enterprise is prone. The remedy is socialization. The state assumes the ownership of those industries, or those segments of the economic structure whose direction under private ownership is believed to be deleterious to society as a whole. The state also intervenes when private enterprise fails to maintain essential services. There are many illustrations of this. Here in Canada, a Conservative Government became the founder of the Canadian National Railways; and the C.C.F. would go a long way to socialize other sections of the economy. The British Labour party took over the iron and steel industry. The railways of Germany are state-owned. You are all familiar with the Ontario Hydro.

No responsible person, as far as I know, has urged socialization of the newspapers of this country. On the other hand, in both radio and television, the state plays an important role. Let me digress from my main theme to discuss that fact, which represents a striking departure from

orthodox democratic doctrine particularly in its North American form. Both radio and television in the United States have been developed, and are owned, by private persons or corporations. Canada would undoubtedly have followed the same course of development had it not been for the effective presentation some twenty years ago of a theory which cut clean across the liberal tradition. It was pointed out that radio stations, unlike printing presses, could not be multiplied indefinitely. Only a limited number of wave lengths existed. To make effective use of them, there had to be national and international allocation of them. Some degree of state intervention, in the form of a controlling and licensing authority, was therefore inevitable. There was, from the beginning, an element of monopoly in radio which was lacking in the printed word, and this justified state intervention. Thus the argument ran. There was added to this, another consideration. In the economic circumstances of the time in Canada, it was believed not only possible, but highly probable, that, without state intervention, Canadian radio would become the branch plant of an aggressive and expanding American industry. Most of the big centres of population lie within one hundred miles of the United States where the national radio chains were developing fast. It was known that one of the prime objectives of private licensees of radio wave lengths was to get affiliation with a United States chain, thereby securing permanent access to the highly paid, popular entertainment programmes with mass audience appeal. It was considered undesirable that this should happen—that this new and important medium of communication should fall so completely under American direction. It was believed that such a development would retard the growth of native Canadian nationalism and thinking, and that it was essential for the national well-being and development that this

new instrument should be protected from such consequences. These ideas, presented by a Royal Commission headed by a distinguished Canadian banker (who could hardly be accused of harbouring socialist tendencies) seized the mind of a Prime Minister whose United Empire Loyalist heritage made him watchful and suspicious of American influences on Canadian life. The result was the creation of a mixed radio system in which privately-owned stations are permitted to develop local audiences while network facilities become the responsibility of a Crown corporation.

The system has worked well, but it would be idle to deny that it represents a striking departure from the orthodox liberal tradition.

That tradition, however, still holds absolute sway in the newspaper field. There, no public ownership exists, and none, so far as I know, is sought. One reason for this is the factor already mentioned. Radio contains natural elements of monopoly which the printing press does not. Another, perhaps, is that there is, in Canada, no national newspaper. The country is too big, the interests of its different regions and cities are too diverse. Every newspaper therefore serves at most a provincial function, and usually its service is confined to a single community and the immediate marketing area which surrounds it. This is what advertisers want. They do not want to buy space in a newspaper circulated in areas where they do not sell their goods. This is also what readers want. They are, for the most part, interested in local news. The social news, the deaths and funerals, the activities of a city council in some centre hundreds of miles away interest them very little. If there existed a real national newspaper of mass circulation, and if it fell into the hands of an American chain, some of the arguments which were used to support the creation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and its predecessor, might apply. The question has not arisen, and is unlikely to.

This does not, of course, mean that criticism of privately-owned newspapers does not exist in Canada. Criticism indeed abounds. The socialists, for instance, protest that they are run in the interests of capitalism. But the criticism stops short when logic suggests socialization as the cure. There are probably various reasons for this. A large part of the public is not politically minded. They like the comic strips, the entertainment, the flavour of gossip in the local news of its local newspaper. They feel themselves well enough served. The politically-minded minority has other reasons as well. It fears that even the level of public discussion we now have might be damaged by a change. Its tradition supports a free, privately-owned press. Like Hamlet, it would rather bear those ills it has than fly to others that it knows not of.

The press, therefore, has a double role in society. In one aspect it is a merchant of news, selling that commodity at a profit to its readers and its advertisers. In its other aspect, it is, in the old-fashioned phrase, the Palladium of our liberties. The *Denver Post* years ago had a slogan for its staff—"A dog fight in Champa Street is more important than a war in Europe," but, in huge letters of gold there ran around the cornice of its building the following stirring exhortation: "O Liberty, when driven from all other habitations, make this thy dwelling place." There has been, and there is today, often a wide gap between a newspaper's declarations of principle and its actual practices, but this holds true of many other institutions in the world, including universities. That fact is not, of course, an excuse for a newspaper to behave badly; and most modern newspapers at least are ready to accept the fact that they are affected by a public interest, and should adopt and maintain certain broad practices which would demonstrate that obligation.

I want to discuss in some detail what those broad practices

are, but before I do so I want to discuss briefly what is often referred to as growth of monopoly in the mass communication media. It is very important in a democracy that as much information as possible, and as many opinions as possible should be at the disposal of its citizens. Only thus, so the theory goes, can democracy come to wise judgments and conclusions. For this reason there is a fair amount of head-wagging over the obvious fact that there are in every western democracy, far fewer newspapers than there were forty years ago. From this the conclusion is drawn that many minority views are no longer being expressed, that monopoly has swallowed them up, and that monopoly in turn is leading us all to a dead level of conformity which will in turn destroy the essence of democracy itself.

It is very true that, a hundred years ago or more, it was not much of a trick to start a newspaper. Almost any printer could do so; and a very great many of them did. In the early days of the American republic there was hardly any aspiring politician who did not see to it that he had some organ available to express his views. True, these organs were often venal and corrupt. True, they had neither the means nor the inclination to present any fair picture of news and events. But there were hundreds of them just the same, and out of this enormous babel of conflicting voices, public opinion and policy were formed. Even in big cities like New York, an enterprising printer could start a metropolitan daily with very little money indeed. The *New York Sun* was launched 120 years ago with a total capital expenditure of \$3,500. A few decades later, the *New York Times* began publication with a total expenditure of only \$50,000. Today it would take many millions to start such an enterprise in New York. Even in relatively small communities, it takes substantial capital for a man to attempt such a venture.

Steadily rising costs, and a technology which demands

more and more expensive machines, have resulted over this one hundred years or so in the more enterprising and efficient newspapers destroying, or buying out their competition. In New York, there is a single newspaper known as the *World-Telegram and Sun*: an amalgamation of three once healthy and prosperous newspapers. In Halifax there is the *Chronicle-Herald*, in Saint John, the *Telegraph-Journal*, both amalgamations of two. Perhaps, some of you are familiar with a newspaper known as the *Whig-Standard*—the same process has been at work here. Toronto, forty years ago, had six daily newspapers. Now it has three. The same trend is noted in the United States where hardly a year passes without more deaths than births in the newspaper world.

This trend toward concentration and monopoly is something to be taken seriously. You remember that the theory behind the maintenance of a free press is that a multiplicity of voices aids the creation of a sound public opinion. If Babel changes into the boom of a single voice, can a free press perform the function which it is desired that it should perform? In the United States the number of daily newspapers fell from a peak of 2,600 in 1909 to 1,750 in 1947. The number of weekly papers, in about the same period of time, fell from 16,000 to 10,000. At the same time, still another trend has been evident. This is the creation of newspaper chains. While the number of newspapers has diminished, the number of owners has decreased still more.

This does not mean, however, that there exists any communications monopoly. While newspapers have shown the trend to concentration I have just noted there developed radio, and later television. If competition is generally lessening as between newspapers, newspapers as a whole must compete, and compete violently, with the new media. The latter, to be sure, are displaying the same trend toward concentration—the big radio chains in the United States,

for instance, the state radio and television monopoly in Great Britain, the CBC network monopoly in our own country. But, certainly on this continent, the economic security of the newspaper press has been challenged by radio and television interests; and I would say that, in the communications field as a whole, competition remains violent and sustained. Nor has the total number of voices engaged in the expression of opinion in any way diminished. More news of all kinds is available, and on the whole, more comment. To that extent it seems to me that the principle of freedom has been strengthened over the whole field of communications, though it is certainly a fact that local news monopolies have emerged. The one-newspaper and one-radio-station town may not have quite the same diversity of news and opinion it used to have. But these local monopolies do not, it seems to me, present a very great, absolute danger.

There is, of course, at least in theory a further factor which may modify the conclusion thus reached. Where does the news come from? And it is true that the bulk of national and foreign news presented to the democratic publics of the free world, increasingly comes from the same sources. The cost of its collection and transmission has risen steadily. Few newspaper or other media can afford to maintain its own staff of national or foreign correspondents. The result is that most of them are serviced from the same sources—the handful of huge, world-wide news agencies—the Associated Press, the United Press, Reuters, and so on. There are not so very many of them, and one of the results is that the reader in St. John's, Nfld., and the reader in Victoria, B.C., picking up their daily paper are likely to find they are reading identical items of news. Here again is this bugaboo of uniformity, the lack of diversity; but the balance sheet items are not all red. There are credit items also in

the ledger. There is, after all, something to be said for important facts to be widely and commonly known. If those facts are fairly reported, there is a national, even an international, gain in having some corpus of common knowledge.

Ah, but, you may say, the real danger lies elsewhere. You have admitted that the solvency of the modern press depends upon its advertising revenue. Who pays the piper obviously must call the tune. In addition you have pointed out that large sums of money are now needed to initiate and to maintain an efficient unit in the world of communications. That means that capitalists run newspapers and that capitalists dictate the policies they will follow. Surely that means that only the capitalists' point of view is presented to the public.

Let me examine these criticisms in turn. It is a common belief that the news published by newspapers and the comment they make on events is either dictated, or heavily influenced, by their advertisers. I would be the last to say that the connection between a newspaper and its advertisers is not a close one. The advertiser knows very well that the solvency of a newspaper depends upon the amount of advertising it carries. So does the publisher. Neither is a fool. But each of them is fully conscious of one thing. The advertiser knows that he wastes his money if the newspaper in which he places his advertising has not got circulation. The publisher knows that circulation depends on his newspaper carrying news complete enough to satisfy those who buy it day by day. If the publisher does not publish news unpalatable to his advertisers, his circulation will, in the long run, suffer. In the end result both advertiser and publisher suffer. The consequence of this is, in practice, that the advertiser's influence on the news columns of a newspaper is far less than it is often popularly supposed to be.

You may think that, in a one-newspaper town, this influence would not exist, and that the publisher and his advertiser could play suitable games together. But it is not as simple as that. For one thing, a monopoly is seldom if ever absolute. News is not carried only by a newspaper. It is also on radio and television. If all three in a community have common ownership, there are other papers which enter the community, perhaps not in any great number, but they enter just the same. There is also the community grapevine which is both powerful and pervasive. All these exercise their moderating effect. A favourite story of the late J. W. Dafoe was of an Eastern Townships' editor whose friend came to tell him he proposed to run for Parliament. He was, however, worried that a neighbour was also proposing to run. "That's all right," said the editor. "I won't publish that he's running, and nobody will know it but himself." If such a monopoly ever existed in Canada, I don't know where it was. It certainly doesn't exist now.

There is another factor. An advertiser is, broadly speaking, more dependent on the newspaper than the newspaper is on the advertiser. There is only one of the former, or at most a few, and the advertiser is dependent on their space to sell his goods. The average newspaper, on the other hand, has hundreds and sometimes thousands of advertisers. All are not equally important to the newspaper, to be sure, but few, if any of them, are so important that the newspaper can't get along without them. I know of two serious fights between newspapers and their biggest advertisers. In one case the newspaper won. In the other the advertiser won. But in neither case was the integrity of the news columns an issue. They were straight fights about advertising rates. Interestingly enough in the case in which the advertiser won, the cause of his victory was that his advertisements had news value. They were so highly

valued by the readers that, when they were omitted from the paper circulation fell off quickly and alarmingly.

One further point, when the argument is made that advertisers influence newspapers, it is reasonable to ask "Which advertiser?" Their trading interests differ widely. If one wanted the suppression of certain news, another might demand it. In any event, in the two most recent impartial investigations of the press, one in England, and the other in the United States, the press was in both instances, given a clean bill of health. In England specific charges were made against the publishers by the National Union of Journalists. They were carefully examined and the press was found not guilty.

All this does not mean that the advertiser has no influence at all. In any business where two interests come together to serve certain commercial purposes, it is usual for a friendly relationship to spring up. The exchange of little favours is common. The advertiser, for instance, may find it easier to get his daughter's picture into the society page than the non-advertiser does. The fiftieth anniversary of the founding of a business is likely to be given more space than a fiftieth anniversary where no commercial nexus is present. But these are peccadilloes of little concern either to the theory or practice of liberty, and if these sins of commission are unimportant, the corresponding sins of omission are of a similar nature. Be it noted, on the other hand, that when department stores—the biggest buyers of newspaper space in the country—came under fire during the proceedings of the Royal Commission on Price Spreads twenty years ago, the charges made against them were fully reported day by day.

Now let me turn to the other criticism I suggested—that the nature of the modern newspaper is likely to place it in the hands of capitalists who will naturally use it to pursue

their own ends. William Allen White, the famous old editor and publisher of *Emporia*, Kansas, put this idea into his own words in these terms:

If he is a smart go-getting-up-and-coming publisher in a town of 100,000 to 1,000,000 people, the publisher associates on terms of equality with the bankers, the merchant princes, the manufacturers and the investing brokers. His friends unconsciously colour his opinions. If he lives with them on any kind of social terms in the city club, the country club, or the yacht club, or the racquet club, he must more or less merge his views into the common views of the other capitalists. The publisher is not bought like a chattel. Indeed he is often able to buy those who are suspected of buying him. But he takes the colour of his social environment.

It would be idle to deny the substantial element of truth in this analysis. Ownership of the press does rest in the hands of the rich and the well-to-do, and the opinions expressed in it, as distinct from the facts it contains are, broadly-speaking, right wing in character. Sometimes, indeed, the facts are, too. But I have had professional occasion to study the publishing class, and the closer one comes to it, the less easy it becomes to make accurate generalizations about the men and women who compose it. For all that there exists a broad strain of what William Allen White has called "the country club mentality," the diversities of views among them are perhaps as striking as their uniformities. Many of them, for instance, are dedicated politicians, and your real, genuine, dyed-in-the-wool right winger cannot subscribe *in toto* to the whole programme of any political party I ever heard of. He becomes inevitably a maverick, in the sense, for instance, that Colonel McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune* was a maverick. That military-minded genius had trouble for years adjusting himself to the strength of the left wing of the Republican party. Old E. W. Scripps, a millionaire

many times over, who lived his last years on his private yacht, whence he directed the destinies of his big newspaper chain while drinking a couple of quarts of whisky a day, was strongly pro-labour in his views and brought down upon his head the objurgations of the country club class. I have known Canadian publishers whose general views were reactionary, strongly support the Liberal party. They have even gone the length of putting in a strong plea for family allowances, and old age pensions, on the ground that, if any other party but the Liberals introduced them, they would either be higher, or less well administered. I have heard of one, who, though he hated Stalin and Communism like death itself, hated the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church even more. The result was that papal criticism of communism led on occasion to a sympathetic consideration of Stalin's views.

In Britain, though most of the big newspapers are right wing, two national organs, the *Herald* and the *Mirror*, are strongly socialist, and both are directed by honest and sincere left-wingers. A third Fleet Street paper, the *News-Chronicle*, is certainly not right wing, nor is the *Manchester Guardian*. Even so majestic a newspaper as *The Times* has, from time to time, gravely afflicted Conservatives by its views. On this continent the press stands further to the right, but there are many newspapers which do not uniformly follow a right wing line. The gradations of attitudes are many, and will become even more varied once the present panic over communists and the cold war comes to an end, as it shows current signs of doing. In other free countries, the variety of newspaper expression is even greater.

In the other big media of communication, radio and television, the broad picture is not dissimilar. Expression of opinion by the extreme left is hardly to be found, but generally speaking most other views find their voices. In

moments of violent controversy, extreme partisans will tell you that they were silenced or that the public was given no chance to hear all points of view expressed with equal vigour. Critics of the BBC are fond today of pointing out that Churchill, before the war, was given no opportunity to have his say, and this is true. But these critics conveniently forget that the pre-war Churchill was held in equal disfavour both by the Conservative and the Labour parties. At the peak of the appeasement era he represented few people besides himself. Nobody has suggested that the BBC did not play fair with the Labour opposition of those days. If that opposition did not express Churchill's views, it is because it did not believe in them. Even if Churchill's voice was lacking, there remained the expression of a wide variety of radio opinion.

I do not want to suggest that I think the BBC monopoly in England is good. I do think it is reasonably well managed and that it is directed with intelligence and moderation and liberalism. I prefer myself the mixed system we have in this country, though, in this country, too, the critics of the CBC have points in their favour which should not be ignored, even though the critics of the CBC far too often hopelessly overstate their case. The CBC, I believe, makes a valiant effort to avoid the abuses to which its network monopoly opens the door. By any human standards, it achieves a marked measure of success. I would be tempted to say that it does its over-all job in the objective presentation of conflicting points of view better than American radio does. But my intimate experience of newspaper conditions bids me avoid generalizations in a field where my personal knowledge is far less complete. American radio is just too big a term to be easily used. There are several thousand radio stations in the United States. To judge by a casual listening in to the broadcasts, there are gaps in the broadcasting of opinion. These are keenly resented by those

groups who feel their views are being ignored and they are naturally vociferous in their criticism. But the importance of the gaps cannot be accurately measured by that alone. Noisy minorities sometimes succeed in getting far too much space in newspapers and far too much radio time—far too much, that is, in relation to their real importance.

That last phrase, of course, has a question-begging quality about it. What is important, and what are the criteria of judgment to be applied? These are the vital questions, for radio and the press alike always have far too much material available for their time and space. The process of selection is, by long odds, the most difficult and the most skilled of all the editing processes in the field of communication.

Is that process of selection on the whole worthily carried on? I believe that the answer, within strict limitations, is Yes. The limitations are, however, serious. The organs of information are, almost without exception, mass media, and the key-word in that description is "mass." The prime necessity of their existence is that they should reach large audiences, and that they should do so with the greatest possible degree of speed. If they do not, they fall by the wayside. The press, and the other media as well, have found that mass appeal is not met solely by the publication of significant news which has a bearing upon the nature and tendencies of society, political, economic, social or religious. A significant amount of entertainment is required, a significant amount of illustration, of features, of gossip and of sporting events. This limits the amount of serious material which a newspaper feels able to publish. It limits also the extent to which a newspaper's style and intellectual level can diverge from those of its public. "A paper," said the British Royal Commission on the Press, "can be a little ahead of its readers but not far; if the distance becomes too great, circulation will fall." It quoted a saying of the late Lord Northcliffe that, while it is damaging for a paper not to give

a reader what he wants, it is far worse to give him what he does not want.

An even more fundamental limitation, perhaps, is the unending cry for speed. Let us suppose that a newspaper has a public which wants serious news and lots of it. The techniques of news gathering and its transmission are such that it is virtually impossible, within the limits imposed, to present facts and their interpretation in measured, orderly and adequate fashion.

Let me illustrate this in general terms. An important speech is made late in the day in the British House of Commons. The Foreign Secretary proclaims an important shift in his country's policy. Before he has finished speaking, the important sentences of his address have been cabled piecemeal across the Atlantic and they have been published in the late editions in North America. Depending on whether other, and perhaps more important, news does not break in Europe, a more extended version of the Foreign Secretary's speech is cabled during the night. But, before the first afternoon editions here are on the press, the United States Secretary of State has replied to the British Foreign Secretary in a statement which in turn produces new developments. Comment has also arrived from Paris, Berlin and Moscow, and the result is that the average reader gets little more in his paper than the first disjointed extracts of the original speech in London. No newspaper in North America, with the single exception of the *New York Times*, can be called a newspaper of record. In that newspaper, the British Foreign Secretary, if he is lucky, may get his text published. In the press as a whole, on radio and on television, the world has rushed on to the next stage, and never learns anything of the carefully phrased conditions of the British policy, the background or the context, the caveats, the explanatory modifying clauses.

There is just too much news, and it comes at us too fast.

We are swamped by it. Before we have caught our footing after one wave has struck, another is upon us. To keep perfect balance is beyond human capacity to achieve. We live in an age of recurring instabilities, and I do not see how, having regard to the practical necessities of the press, we can do very much better than we do now. Communications is an industry which, by the law of its own nature, cannot stop to catch its breath.

It is therefore only within the limits of these two major restrictions that I believe the performance of the press and of communications generally is reasonably good. I am nevertheless well pleased that they should not be wholly responsible for the opinion-making process in a free society. Other instruments are required, and they are, fortunately, at hand, but to study them would be to go far beyond the borders within which this paper must be compressed.

I think I should confine myself to noting only certain other defects which have been observed in the performance of the press and the other mass media, together with some of the proposals which have been made for their improvement. There is, for instance, the protest against multiple ownership, that is to say, the existence of newspaper and radio chains, and the widespread tendency for newspapers and radio stations to enjoy a common ownership. It is proposed that the state should intervene to break up chains and to separate common ownerships. In Canada, for instance, the CBC as a policy is opposed to granting radio station licenses to newspapers. The theory is that society is better served if as many separate and distinct voices as possible play a part in the provision of information and the creation of public opinion.

I doubt if a theory which is already breached by the action of the state itself has too much validity. More than one state which interferes not at all with the operations of the newspaper press has created its own monopoly in the field of

radio. In Canada, the government has set up a partial monopoly. I am inclined to believe that, in actual practice, the evils which flow from multiple ownership in private hands have been—to put it mildly—no greater than those which have flowed from monopolies or quasi-monopolies operated by the state.

I also have a very great, indeed an awesome, respect for the strength of the tendency toward concentration in industry. The powerful economic forces which drive in that direction are hard, if not impossible, to stop by legislative action. Ways are found around the most ingenious legislation. If the monopoly or the combine is broken or checked by one means of approach, it appears to be not insuperable to find another way of achieving the economies and the power which monopolies can confer. It is moreover a fact that the worst abuses of good newspaper practice are apt to be found among the weaker units in the industry. A financially strong newspaper can resist more vigorously whatever improper advances may be made to it. The weak newspaper, again and again, has been driven by financial need to yield to bribes, subsidies and outside pressures.

Another safeguard that has been proposed and, in certain cases, actually set up, has been the creation of trusteeships which, in a way, supervise ownership. Some of these trusteeships are designed to prevent the passage of a newspaper from worthy into unworthy hands. Others are designed to safeguard editorial policy or the independence of the editor. These have their strength, but they have also their weaknesses. Who is to judge which hands are worthy and which unworthy? The owners of *The Times* in London have set up a board whose approval will be necessary before any sale of the property can be made. The trustees include the Lord Chancellor, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Warden of All Souls College, and the board was set up by

men who remembered with horror the passage of *The Times* from the hands of the Walter family into those of Lord Northcliffe, and its near passage, after Northcliffe's death into the hands of his brother, Lord Rothermere. They seek to avoid such risks in the future.

Yet, in fairness it should be said that, had it not been for Lord Northcliffe, *The Times* would have gone bankrupt and disappeared. It was rescued, drastically reformed, and, in due course of time, again became a very great and worthy newspaper. This was the work of Northcliffe who, with all his faults, was a newspaper genius. I sometimes wonder whether, if the board of trustees had been in charge at that time, the sale to Northcliffe would ever have been made. Archbishops and Lord Chancellors may not be the best of judges of a newspaper's needs.

As to the independence of editors, I should, I suppose, as an editor, be in favour of it. But I am not. Editors are subject, believe it or not, to the normal, and sometimes abnormal, quota of human frailties. Some newspapers have been made great by an independent editor. Some, however, have been destroyed by such a man. It seems to me best that the ultimate direction of a newspaper's course should rest in the hands of its responsible ownership. If ownership proves irresponsible, the processes of the market-place will look after it in due course. If the market-place fails to assert itself, the old man with the scythe lies in wait for the irresponsible owner just as he lies in wait for the rest of us.

I do not despair over this conservative approach to the problem of the performance of the press and its great competitors in the field of communications. If you do not like what you now have in the way of press, radio and television, it may be worth recalling that there has never been anything like a golden age in newspaper history; there is nothing better in the past to look back to with longing. The

standard of criticism rests therefore not upon a historical foundation but upon a human aspiration for something better, something which has never yet been.

To turn that aspiration into hard reality is something which rests quite as much upon you as upon the industry itself. The British Royal Commission to which I have previously referred draws a distinction between what it calls the "popular" press and the "quality" press. Great affairs of national or international importance do not, in the popular press, get the attention they deserve. The quality press on the other hand, the Commission believed, does "convey to its readers a clear picture of the conflict of issues in the world today." It concludes: "A mass of material upon which considered judgment on crucial problems, national and international, can be built up will be found in their pages, and if such papers are few in number, *it is open to the public to increase their circulation.*"

For our part, inside the trade, we have our own contribution to make. The press has passed through a prolonged earlier period in which little effort was made to present news either completely or objectively. Proprietorial and editorial bias was in those days not only respectable, it was expected and enjoyed. With the growth in the size of the industry's units, a different attitude and temper began to prevail. This was partly imposed by a change in the newspaper's function, partly by a change in the public's demand, and partly by the gradual growth of a sense of responsibility inside the press itself. I shrink from the use of a phrase like "a professional point of view," for I do not regard my trade as a profession. It is, however, tinged by what might be called professional attitudes. If bias and partisanship and prejudice still exist, they are modified, as time goes on, by reference to standards of performance which approach the pride a professional man brings to his tasks. It is for that reason that, of all the proposals I have heard for the

improvement of the media of mass communication, I favour most that of the Commission on the Freedom of the Press, presided over some eight years ago by President Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago. Its major recommendation was as follows:

“We recommend the establishment of a new and independent agency to appraise and report annually upon the performance of the press.”

The proposed agency would be designed to compare the accomplishments of the press with the aspirations which the people have for it. It would in turn educate the people as to the aspirations which they ought to have for the press. The agency should be independent of government, it should be created by gifts, and it should be given a ten-year trial.

Such an agency would study the actual performance of the press, bestow praise and blame impartially, study areas where inadequacies of service were apparent and make recommendations for their improvement, receive and inquire into complaints of bias and lying and misrepresentation, and encourage the establishment of research centres at universities.

Such an agency, manned by a personnel which would command the respect of the industry itself, would have, of course, no sanctions at its command. Sanctions are a function of the state or of the industry itself. I do not favour state intervention for obvious reasons, and I do not believe that the industry is capable of self-discipline. But the individualists who control the press have already shown that they are subject, and to some extent amenable, to broad social pressures. A continuing agency of examination would in due course have its beneficial effect.