

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRESS AND PUBLIC OPINION.

"In how far the Press represents public opinion, moulds it, or has any relation to it, is a matter for speculation"<sup>213.</sup> It is now proposed to attempt this speculation. There is no doubt that public opinion cannot be stamped by any mechanical means, as the result of the St. George's, Westminster, by-election (discussed in the following chapter) clearly shows. On the other hand it cannot be said that newspapers have no important effect whatsoever in guiding the thoughts of its readers. Where, between these two extremes, can the line be drawn?. Early newspapers, being in the strictest sense newspapers and by no means "viewpapers", provided much food for thought but, except for the manner in which the news was presented gave no indication of its own attitude towards the speech, occurrence or whatever the matter reported may have been. The development of the newsletters into purveyors of both news<sup>214</sup> and views has served to complicate the issue which hitherto had been plain and straightforward.

If a newspaper does influence the line of thought of its readers, is this influence restricted in each case to the individual reader, quite unrelated to the world at large, or is there, through these readers, a general influence/

213. Dr.G.J.Renier in "The English: Are they Human?".

214. The introduction into most newspapers of cartoons dealing with current topics has served to complicate matters still further. Cartoons, invariably partial to some cause, exercise a subtle and almost unconscious influence on the mind of the newspaper reader.

influence exerted upon the whole community? William McDougall <sup>215</sup>  
says: "Consider the influence of the American Sunday news-  
papers. These papers are read on a large scale all over the  
continent; and the bulk of those published at different places  
is identical, being prepared and printed in New York, and  
then sent to be blended with a little local matter in each  
centre of publication; thus each Sunday morning vast numbers  
are reading the same stuff". Although McDougall does not  
actually say so, he implies that, through reading the same  
matter, Americans are unconsciously thinking along similar  
lines.

It cannot be doubted that in very many in-  
stances the public, themselves undecided as to what stand-  
point to adopt, look to the Press for guidance, and, once  
given the lead, are prepared to follow. It is not so much  
a game of "Follow my Leader", as "Follow the Leader-writer".  
Many members of the public are either unable or are too lazy  
to think for themselves but once an opinion has been formed  
on a matter they are prepared either to agree or disagree with  
these views and to accept them as their own or to reject them.

<sup>216</sup>  
The Mayor of Johannesburg, Mr. D. F. Corlett, said: "It is a  
fact that the general public would appear to be dependent  
upon the daily newspapers for their own opinions on matters of  
vital public interest. That being so, the responsibility of  
the Press is very great indeed. Our safety seems to lie in  
the fact that you do not hesitate to express, very often em-  
phatically, divergent opinions. I must acknowledge the  
indebtedness we all owe to the responsible Press and the

tremendous /

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215. "The Group Mind", page 125.

216. Minutes of the Opening of the annual Congress of  
the South African Society of Journalists, Johannesburg,  
January, 1932.

tremendous part it plays in the public life of this City and in the Union of South Africa".

There are some, however, who are not prepared to accept as final the opinions formed by newspapers but prefer to reason for themselves. Even these persons are in some cases dependent for their facts upon the daily Press, for where no information is available, no judgment can be formed, and the presentation in the Press of news, which is not otherwise easily obtainable very often forms the basis upon which conclusions are formed. <sup>217</sup> Dr. Morris Ginsberg shows how the public rests, not so much on personal contact, but on means of communication by means of the Press. "One may", he states, "be a reader of several newspapers. Suggestions coming from different parts will tend to neutralise one another or to lead to a suspense of judgment and to further discussion".

The incentive which the Press provides for the "further discussion" is a most valuable one. Thought in the modern world, characterised as it is by a daily whirl of hustle and bustle is at a premium. <sup>218</sup> Most people prefer to be busily engaged in some activity or other, whether it be work or recreation, rather than to apply themselves to meditation and to serious thinking. In fact it has been suggested <sup>219</sup> that the popularity of the modern light novel is due to the fact that it obviates the burden of having to think. It is an undisputed fact that "stories", either short, or of novel /

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217. "The Psychology of Society", page 137.
218. Stephen Leacock: "The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice". Page 26: "Few men think for themselves. The thoughts of most of us are little more than imitations and adaptations of the ideas of stronger minds".
219. Mr. Hamilton Fife, addressing the Alpha Club in Belfast, made the following observation: "Most people buy books and newspapers to stop themselves from thinking. That is why books which contain information never sell well, and it is also the reason for the modern newspaper, as opposed to that of

novel length, are in much greater demand than books of an informative and instructive nature. The reason for this is that the latter require something more on the part of the reader than merely being read. The information contained in them has also to be "marked, learnt, and inwardly digested". The majority of members of public libraries and book clubs are apparently averse to mental indigestion and therefore choose the light reading matter which requires a minimum of effort on their part.

Mr. Justice McCardie, that eminent English Judge, whose words of wisdom from the Bench always command attention, recently stated that "Parliament might mould opinion to a certain extent, but the supreme moulding of opinion is achieved by the Press"<sup>220</sup>. This being so it is the duty of the Press to see that the moulding of opinion is upon right lines. What direction these lines take is, of course, an open matter, for while one newspaper considers that the standpoint which it has taken up is the correct one, another paper holding views diametrically opposite may consider itself to be in the right. It is for the reader of both papers calmly and dispassionately to consider the facts given on both sides and then to form his own opinion.

It is a commonplace that the readers of a newspaper are not necessarily its supporters. A person may subscribe to a newspaper for years in order to obtain an adequate news supply, without in any way considering himself bound by the views of the newspaper to which he subscribes. Opinions must be based upon facts and if the facts are not

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true /

219. (continued from previous page:) 40 years ago . Nowadays a morning or an evening newspaper is a drug to prevent thought during the journey to and from work.

220. "Bloemfontein Friend", 1931.

true then the opinions formed on those facts must be faulty. It is the duty of newspapers to give the facts correctly and impartially in order to allow of reliable opinions being formed.

"Instead of a record of the day's happenings told in their proper proportion, there is a constant tendency to trim, to edit, to omit, or to embellish facts if they should happen to come into conflict directly or indirectly with the moneyed interests which lie behind the paper or the group of papers". (221).

Mr. H.J.Laski, one of England's foremost leaders of political  
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thought, says: "Students of public opinion like Mr. Walter  
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Lippmann are right in their emphasis upon the vital connection between truthful news and liberty; Truthful news is dangerous to a Society the actual contours of which its presentation might seriously change. It would have been a different war in 1914 without propaganda.... It only pays to print the truth when the interest responsible is not prejudiced thereby.

The policy of censorship during the war meant that everyone anxious for its prosecution to the end had ample opportunity to express his view; the pacifist found it extraordinarily difficult to speak. We are impressed when we hear that a Government is solid in its determination not to give way to the miners; we assume a careful weighing of the facts and a decision taken in the light of their total significance. But when we hear that the miners are solidly behind their leaders, we feel that this is a clear case of ignorant and misguided men being led to their destruction

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221. Article by "Critic", "Natal Witness", May 27th, 1931.  
222. In "Freedom in the Modern State, page 316 .  
223. Author of "Public Opinion".



by agitators enjoying the exercise of power. The whole machinery of news-making is directed to the confirmation of that impression;. The opinion represented by the miners is not objectively valued. It is the victim of a process of valuation the purpose of which is to prevent, so far as possible, an alteration in the status quo.

On the point of the distortion of values Mr. Laski writes: "Compare Macaulay's glorification of the Victorian progress with the picture in Carlyle's "Chartism", or Dicken's "Hard Times". Set the resounding complacency of Mr. Gladstone's perorations against the indignant insight of William Morris and Ruskin. Think of the America of President Coolidge's speeches, and the America as bitterly described by Mr. Sinclair Lewis. Remember that Treitsche's eulogy of blood and iron is a picture of the same Germany as that which Bebel and Liebknecht sought to overthrow".

The question of values, on which Mr. Laski insists, is a real one which presents many-sided difficulties. On the same set of facts more than one opinion can be formed, and each holder of these conflicting opinions can firmly believe himself to be in the right and all the others in the wrong without betraying his intellectual honesty. This is especially the case in international affairs. The truth of this statement is upheld by the following passages from a Series of Articles <sup>224</sup> by Mr. Kingsley Martin. <sup>225</sup> Dealing with "The Press and Foreign Affairs", Mr. Martin states:

"Everything /

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224. On "The New Journalism", in "The Listener", January, 1932  
225. Editor of "The New Statesman and the Nation" and for many years a member of the staff of the "Manchester Guardian".

"Everything to do with British interests is stressed in the news from China. The Japanese are reported to have dropped bombs on Shanghai, a large part of which has been burnt down and a great number of Chinese have been killed or injured. But the death of these Chinese is not emphasised in the reports. The top line of headings, and the most sensation-ally described events were the dropping of one or two bombs in the International Settlement. Two British soldiers were hurt and great emphasis is laid upon the position of European women working in this dangerous area. It is perfectly natural that we should be particularly interested in any threat to the security of British people, but many instances in the past of the results of the kind of excitement that follows a Press campaign about the danger of European nationals abroad, should have put us on our guard.

By stressing our own small part in the matter, and becoming tremendously excited by the sensational part of the news, we may be stampeded into doing things which we should never do if we really understood the situation, and which we should bitterly regret afterwards. But commercial newspapers, composed in a furious hurry, mainly with an eye to circulation, have little time for such considerations. The news is presented in the most inflammatory way, just at a time when the one thing that is necessary is an impartial and international point of view, and a cold presentation of the facts on which a sober and rational public opinion could be built".

The writer has in his possession newspapers issued in Great Britain during the General Strike in Great Britain. These documents-- which are in fact mere caricatures of newspapers as the term is generally understood-- admirably illustrate the point of the "process of valuation" of which Professor Laski speaks. By a comparison of the "News" of the strike presented from three different sides, it will be shown how attempts are made to direct public opinion along different channels. The three sides are those of the strikers themselves, of the British Government, and of those newspapers which were still able to continue publication in spite of all the obstacles placed in their

way by the strike.

The strikers' version of the progress of the strike was given in a four-page pamphlet known as "The British Worker" published by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress as the "Official Strike News Bulletin". The Government told its story through the medium of "The British Gazette", published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, and called into being temporarily as a counterblast to the news disseminated by the strikers. Of the third side of the triangle-- the newspapers -- the "Daily Mirror", and "The Northampton Echo" will serve as being typical. This side, which was undoubtedly the most impartial of the three concerned, presented news which was probably the nearest approach to an unbiased critical analysis of the situation.

Events moved at a lightning pace during the strike, and it will therefore be necessary to consider the "news" presented by the three organs at a certain stage in the developments. For this reason, the issues of May 10th and 11th will be considered. In order to facilitate the comparison, extracts from "The British Worker" and "The British Gazette" will be placed in parallel columns. Further comments will thereafter be made together with the treatment of the news presentation of the daily newspapers.

"The British Worker"  
 (Monday Evening, May 10th 1936,  
 Price One Penny

"The British Gazette"  
 (Tuesday, May 11th, 1936)  
 Price One Penny.

"We are entering upon the second week of the general stoppage in support of the mine workers against the attack upon their standard of life by the coalowners.

Official Communique,  
 Whitehall.

"The situation in all parts of the country is well maintained. The arrangements for the distribution of milk, food,



"The British Worker",  
(continued)

"The British Gazette",  
continued)

Nothing could be more wonder-  
ful than the magnificent re-  
sponse of millions of workers  
to the call of their leaders.  
From every town and city in  
the country reports are pour-  
ing into the General Council  
Headquarters stating that all  
ranks are solid, that the  
working men and women are re-  
solute in their determination  
to resist the unjust attack  
upon the mining community.

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"Behind King's Cross railway  
station I found a crowd  
watching the "movement" of  
trains, for it had been an-  
nounced that several would  
leave this station. I saw  
eight locomotives. They ap-  
peared to have steam up. Now  
and then one of the engines  
would move up the track, preceded  
by two or three civilians wav-  
ing their arms. Then it would  
move back again. In a two-  
hours wait, no engine stirred  
with carriages behind it, and  
no train went out.  
In the dock area not a man was  
visible. Cranes, derricks and  
gantries stood pointing heaven-  
ward, still and silent. No  
rattle of winch or hauling-geat  
broke the silence.

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and petrol supplies have been  
' more successful than on any  
' other day of the strike, and  
' there is every sign that they  
' will improve continuously.

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"In many quarters the unload-  
ing and transportation of  
' commodities is approaching  
' normality, and the emergency  
' arrangements made by the Gov-  
' ernment are working thoroughly.  
' The situation at the London  
' Docks and at other ports is  
' well in hand.  
' The position as regards the  
' supply of light and power con-  
' tinues to be remarkably satis-  
' factory, while railway services  
' show a progressive improvement.  
' One-fifth of the regular staffs  
' of the railway companies are  
' at work, and there is an abun-  
' dant supply of volunteers to  
' take the places of those on  
' strike. Nearly 4,000 trains  
' will be run to-day.  
' The situation, both in London  
' and in the provinces, is gener-  
' ally quiet. Disturbances are  
' few, but where they have oc-  
' curred they show signs of be-  
' coming sharper. Nevertheless  
' there is no cause for anxiety  
' in this respect and the police  
' are in complete control. Yes-  
' terday was a record day for  
' the recruitment of special  
' constables in London.  
' More than one million copies  
' of 'The British Gazette' were  
' printed last night and distri-  
' buted in all parts of the  
' country, and it is expected  
' that this number will be  
' largely increased to-night.  
' While there are many indivi-  
' dual cases of strikers in  
' various trades and services

"The British Worker"  
(continued)

"The British Gazette",  
(continued)

returning to work, the General Strike continues unabated throughout the whole country. The success of the authorities in maintaining the feeding and vital services of the people must not obscure this grave fact, or its increasingly wasteful consequences to all classes.

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"The 'Gazette' wrote Macaulay in his 'History of England' about the official newspaper published by William III's Ministers in 1695, 'Contained nothing but what the Secretary of State wished the nation to know'. 'That description might well be applied to 'The British Gazette' which is being published by Mr. Baldwin's Cabinet. 'But in 1695 Ministers had not such a contempt for the public as Mr. Churchill and his colleagues have to-day. They did not put out utterly absurd statements and expect them to be believed, and they did not at the same time prove the statements to be absurd! 'Yesterday, on the front page of the 'Gazette' there was a prominent headline 'Chief Trades Almost Normal'. Yet this is what we find in the reports which follow that heading : 'Boot and hosiery trades working half-time; lace firms mainly closed; Hull industries completely closed down; Mansfield works on half-time; large works closed at Derby; paralysis at Sheffield. 'And remember these reports apply mainly to trades not called out by the General Council. 'The 'British Gazette' is unwittingly proving that the response in the trades that have been called out has been so splendid that the effect on other trades has been even greater than was expected".

"Reports from Liverpool and Southampton indicate that the trade of these ports is practically normal. Ships are arriving and departing according to schedule and volunteer labour is discharging large quantities of cargo, principally foodstuffs..An ample supply of volunteer labour is available for all purposes...A much more frequent service of trains is now in operation from the various railway stations.... Everything is proceeding in a quiet and orderly manner... Work generally is proceeding normally.

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"The British Worker",  
(continued)

"Despite statements to the contrary, not a municipal bus or tram is running in Nottingham.

"The British Gazette"  
(continued)

"The reports from the country during the week-end are quite cheerful. They show that recruiting everywhere is more than enough to meet immediate requirements, and that railway services are not only being maintained, but extended every day.

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"A train from King's Cross to Edinburgh took 37½ hours for the journey on Friday. Peaceful picketing is being interfered with by the police at Edinburgh. In several cases agents-provocateur are at work representing themselves as speakers sent by the Central Strike Committee.

"The position in Scotland is that we have an almost complete standstill" is the analysis of the situation by the Scottish Trades Union Congress General Council.

Several cotton mills have shut down at Bolton owing to transport difficulties.

At Coventry, the position has been further consolidated by the engineers ceasing work.

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"Two hundred women have returned to work with the Shell Mex Company.

At the Army and Navy Stores all motor drivers have resumed work.

"We have hardly known that there is a strike here" said the Mayor of Portsmouth, Councillor Frank J. Privett.

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"Many men continue to join the strikers in North Wales. No trams, motor-buses, or taxi-cabs are running at Wrexham. Workmen are out at Ruabon Brickworks owing to the stoppage, and more than a thousand are idle at Brymbo Steel Works.

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"The Mayor of Portsmouth telegraphs that the statement that 50 per cent of the tramway employees and forty cars were working on Friday is an under-statement, as actually 90 per cent of the workers were running seventy-six cars, making a full service, and fifty additional men had passed the doctor and been engaged.

The Mayor of Wigan telegraphs that the rumour that there was disorder in Wigan is entirely untrue.

All station attendants on strike at Stoke Newington electricity works have returned.

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"The British Worker",  
(continued)

"Despite the fact that the Government's appeal for Extra Special constables was fairly explicit, there seems to be some doubt in what passes for the minds of certain stout fellows who are willing to perform a job of work in defence of the Baldwinstitution as to what they are letting themselves in for. The answer seems to be a pretty soft number compared with that of, say, the perspiring citizens who have enrolled in the O.M.S.

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"When the enrolment forms of Wallington and Carshalton O.M.S. volunteers were examined, it was found that most of them wanted to do some sort of "supervisory work"!

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"The British Gazette",  
(continued)

"The false statement has been spread about that those who are helping so loyally in the mechanical production of The British Gazette have been persuaded to give their assistance by the payment of huge sums on the part of the Government. There is no truth in this statement. These men are working purely from a sense of patriotism and the realisation of their duty towards their country. They are receiving no more than the normal rate of pay, and ask for no more remuneration, nor do they demand any further protection than that guaranteed them by the Government proclamation.

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"On Wednesday night I broadcast an appeal for Special Constables. On Friday night I added to that appeal by asking for 50,000 Londoners during the week-end.

"I am delighted to say that they are coming in splendidly, but I am a few thousands short of my number. I want you to realise that protection is the one thing that will kill the strike and restore England to its normal life.  
(Signed) W. Johnson-Hicks./

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"Many false rumours are current. Believe nothing until you see it in an authoritative journal like The British Gazette."

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"British Gazette"  
Circulation.

May 5.. .. .	232,000
May 6 .. . . .	507,000
May 7 .. . . .	855,000
May 8 .. . . .	836,000".

In addition to the "news" items quoted above, both papers published appeals to the emotions of those into whose hands the news-sheets fell. "Levy Yourselves at Work" cried the "Worker". "Every man who does his duty by his country and remains at work, or returns to work during the development of the crisis will be protected by the Government" announced Mr. Stanley Baldwin in the "Gazette". The latter reproduced one of Rudyard Kipling's verses as follows:

"From panic, pride, and terror,  
 Revenge that knows no rein,  
 Light haste and lawless error,  
 Protect us yet again".

In the same way as the news items appearing in these two news-sheets were worlds apart, so the headlines, which in newspaper practice should advertise the news and summarise it impartially, betray a partiality for the cause fostered and exert a psychological influence upon the reader. A few examples are given :

"The British Worker",  "Churchill's Stunt" "Talk of 'Revolution' His Bright Idea". "Trick that failed"  .....	"The British Gazette",  "Perils of General Strike". "Mr. Clynes' Repeated Warnings".  .....
"Nation behind the T.U.C." "What a London Park Meet- ing Revealed". "£55 Collection".  .....	"Lame and Impotent Method".  .....
"Brief-- and Bracing!" "Scotland at a Standstill;  .....	"Position Still Brighter" "Week-end of Loyal Achievement" "Sproadic Return to Work". "Disturbances Promptly Countered".  .....

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226. "Newspaper Make-up and Headlines", by Norman J. Radder, Associate Professor of Journalism, Indiana University, page 49.



"The British Worker",  
(continued)

"Worse than 230 Years Ago".  
"Government's Contempt for  
the Public".  
"Absurd Statements".

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"Those Extra Specials".  
(Above an article dealing with  
the Special Constabulary).

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"Great Enthusiasm for Leaders".  
"Memorable Scenes in all parts  
of the Metropolis".

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" ALL'S WELL! "  
"Council's Message to Members".

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"NO Continental Coal".  
"Transport International's  
Decision".

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"City Temple View".  
"No attack on the Con-  
stitution".

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"The British Gazette",  
(continued)

"Supplies Everywhere  
Improving".  
"Most successful day since  
the strike began".  
"Still more trains".

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"No Paralysis of the  
Nation".

.....

"Record Recruiting of  
Specials".  
"Everything going wonder-  
fully well".  
"Train Services".

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"Marked Expansion in all  
Directions".  
"Long distance connections"  
"Many Strikers Returning  
to Work".

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"The Fiasco at Ostend".  
"Story of Miner's Failure".  
"Severe snub for Mr.Hodges".  
"Partial Embargo".

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"The Truth of the Nego-  
tiations".  
"Where the Responsibility  
Rests".  
"Constitutional Government  
Challenged".

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Both news-sheets were particularly anxious that their contents should be read by as wide a public as possible. The "Worker", at the bottom of its front page, urged its readers to "Pass it on or Post it up", while the "Gazette", in a more dignified manner, but at the top of the front page, exhorted readers to "Please pass on this copy or display it". It also published a paragraph to the effect /

effect that "Any article appearing in the 'Gazette' may be reprinted in pamphlet form and published on the understanding that due acknowledgment is made to 'The British Gazette' ".

Members of the public anxious to obtain information regarding the strike position and relying upon the "Workers" for their information would get a totally different impression from those members of the public equally anxious to obtain the latest news and looking for it in the "Gazette", while the readers of both papers would simply be bewildered. In order to obtain a more dispassionate view of the developments it was necessary to turn to the daily papers, although even in this field it must be pointed out that the sympathies of the papers were either on the one side or the other. None were so much in love with either cause, however, as to overlook the fact that the newspaper, in a time of crisis, should more than at any other time, be in the nature of, a national service. A critical analysis of the situation, without any undue bias, was more likely to be found in the daily press than in either of the one-sided organs already discussed.

The newspapers were not unaffected by the troubled waters of the strike. Indeed many of them had temporarily to cease publication. Some idea of the position in regard to the Press may be obtained from the following extract from the "British Gazette" of May 2nd :

"Additions to the number of newspapers publishing emergency or ordinary issues were recorded during the week-end.

"The 'Observer' came out with a two-paged type-written sheet. The 'Sunday' Pictorial published a small sheet with three photographs on the title page, and news on the back page. The 'Camberwell Borough Advertiser' had a news bulletin of a single sheet with news on the back and front pages.

"Probably /

"Probably the briefest strike in the newspaper world occurred on the Devon and Somerset Weekly News, Tiverton, the Somerset County Gazette, Taunton, and the Mercury, Bridgwater series. The men were on strike in the morning and part of the afternoon, but then returned to work, and the normal issues appeared.

"With one or two exceptions, the Isle of Right newspapers issued emergency editions".

"The Daily Mirror" of May 11, which during the strike times, claimed to be "the daily picture newspaper with the largest net sale" comprised four pages eleven inches by eight inches in size, one of which was taken up by two photographs explaining "Why the Railway Service is Improving" and showing "Student Volunteers Keeping the Signals in Trim", and "Varsity students getting ready the 'Flying Scotsman' at King's Cross, with pilot looking on".<sup>227</sup> The second edition of the "Northampton Daily Echo" of May 8th comprised a single folded sheet, foolscap size. It was sold for one penny! On May 11th it was able to publish a single printed page of four columns width. Whereas bold statements were the order of the day in both the "Worker" and the "Gazette", "caution" was the watchword of the "Echo". In addition to publishing straightforward news of meetings, confining itself largely to resolutions passed, the "Echo" gave the "Local Strike News" of which the following paragraphs may be regarded as typical :

"Although no official statement has been made, the Press Association says there is reason to believe that peace moves are taking place beneath the surface.

"A miners' leader stated that nothing tangible or concrete had yet been placed before the Executive.

"A Government spokesman said it was generally believed the tide had turned.

"The situation all over the country is quiet" summarises the news to-day. There

is /

is no increase in disorder, trains and other transport services are improving daily, and there is no danger of a serious shortage of food. "Outwardly, there are no developments, but the outlook is brighter than it was on Saturday. The view is growing that, while the Government must remain firm and insist upon the general strike being called off, there must be no subsequent attempts to break Trade Unionism like a potter's vessel.

"Northampton tramwaymen met this morning to consider the inquiry of the committee as to whether they are prepared to work forthwith. At the close the secretary said he was instructed to make no statement to the Press. We understand that the men decided to remain out.

"It is believed that strong pressure is being brought upon the T.U.C. by the printing Trade Unions to lift the embargo on newspapers".

The caution exercised by the "Echo" is reflected in its headlines, two of which are in the form of questions, "Peace Moves?" and "Movement towards Peace?", while the other headlines are non-committal labels.

In the issue of May 8th, the "Echo" published a message from Lord Asquith urging that the strike weapon should be sheathed for negotiations. The paper stated further that "there was a great improvement in traffic conditions in London yesterday. A good many more trains and buses were running; nearly everybody found some bus or tube to takethem home. In some of the suburbs people were able to get on almost as in normal times". An interesting paragraph was to the effect that "Strike Committee in Alferton district ordered newsagents not to sell papers during the strike, orders were ignored and sales are increasing daily".

The "Daily Mirror" of May 11 made the following observations in regard to the position of the Press in relation to the strike :

"The strikers' organ devoted a large proportion of its space "replying", as it said, to Sir John Simon's clear statement that the General



Strike is undoubtedly illegal.

"We warn everybody that the strikers' declaration as to there being "no constitutional crisis" is a travesty of the facts and deliberately false.

"It is their intention to subvert all that the people have fought for centuries to obtain. If they win we can bid a farewell to liberty.

"The first attack, as is well known, was on the British newspaper press - to silence it preparatory to the mass attack on the rights and privileges of the whole community.

"That attack was splendidly repulsed. The newspaper press has not surrendered. It will not surrender. Whatever its faults the British Press stands for liberty and fair play. The Daily Mirror has not ceased publication. It has no intention of ceasing publication. On the first day of the strike there was circulated over 80,000 copies of an attenuated Daily Mirror. It followed with additional sheets and published the first strike pictures. And on Friday night it was able to circulate as far west as Bristol and as far north as Oxford over 150,000 copies of the Daily Mirror".

The dire necessity that the newspaper Press should not have surrendered has been laid bare by the comparison of the pseudo-Press of the British Government and of the strikers. Both organs were "one way" organs. Each could see its own point of view and no other. There was no question of laying all the facts before the public and allowing public opinion to be formed in accordance with its own valuation of the facts. Each organ had one aim in view and all its influence was concentrated on the attainment of its goal. Neither organ was able to view the situation objectively and impartially. In each case a sense of proportion was conspicuously absent and a process of valuation-- so essential in journalism-- was ignored. In the light of these observations, the comments of Mr. J.A. Spender are apposite: "I can think of nothing more impressive, or in a way, more alarming than the sudden hush that fell upon Britain during the general strike, when the newspapers failed to appear", Mr. Spender said. "The Government was absolutely compelled /

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228. A well-known Liberal Journalist, in opening an exhibition, arranged by the London Press Club, of the English newspaper through three centuries, - reported in the "Star", June 24th, 1932.



compelled to fill the gap (with the "British Gazette") and, while I do not wish to speak disparagingly of its effort, I feel grateful for the independent newspaper in private hands".

A member of the staff of the "Natal Witness" did not flinch at speaking disparagingly of The British Govern-  
ment's effort and, in an article on "The Press and the Public"<sup>229</sup> he referred to the "British Gazette" as being "frankly and perniciously partisan".

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General Smuts has some pertinent remarks to make regarding the Press and public opinion. "Owing to the spread of education and the reading habit and to the persuasive influence of the Press, the massed force of public opinion is every day becoming greater and more incalculable and to the politician more terrifying". Further (on page 176) "There is a far greater mobilisation of public opinion through the Press, the cinema and the 1,000 and one other forms of publicity which to-day make the work of the statesman much more difficult than ever. Publicity is becoming an almost greater evil than secret diplomacy was formerly. It gives a power to the Press and to all forms of scaremongering which rivals that of Governments and becomes a grave menace to Government. The General is insistent on this point and emphasises his viewpoint (on page 169) with the following utterance: "The power of the press and of other forms of publicity is leading to such an inflammation of public opinion and popular and party passions that statesmen have little scope nowadays".

The writer feels that General Smuts is unduly pessimistic and not a little unkind in his attitude towards

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229. June 2nd, 1932.

230. "Africa and Some World Problems", page 159.

the Press. While it is not claimed that the Press is a model of perfection, it can at least be stated with every justification that at no time has the Press gone out of its way to attack a Statesman for the fun of the thing. If a newspaper has poured vials of scorn upon a statesman and criticised his policy as being the essence of futility, this has been done in all sincerity, prompted by the firm conviction that the policy criticised is not in the best interests of the country as a whole. It is natural that a statesman should find such criticism a hindrance but it is made in the hope that he may yet mend his ways and amend his policy. The writer is grateful to General Smuts for the saving words "an almost greater evil". Press publicity is less of an evil than the secret diplomacy of former days. Therefore it represents an advance. However great the annoyance caused by the Press may be, the present position is infinitely more tolerable than a form of Government which is unaided or unrestrained by the Press.

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Mr. J.A. Spender stated that a newspaper is, at the present time, one of the prime necessities of modern life and government, while the check which the Press indirectly exerts upon the Government is explained by Dr. G.J.

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Reiner who says: "The third check upon the activities of the Government is that exercised by public opinion, made known by petitions, by gatherings, and by the Press. It is significant that General Smuts, in spite of his forceful remarks regarding the Press, does not so much as hint at the desirability of muzzling it or of limiting its powers.

Indeed, as has already been shown, South

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231. See page 222

232 "The English--Are they Human?"

Africa has had a negligible amount of legislation dealing with the Press since the time of Union, in spite of the fact that General Smuts was at the head of the Party that held the majority in Parliament for a number of years, and could have muzzled the snarling watch-dog he dislikes so much. Clearly what General Smuts would like to see-- as would most South Africans-- would be a change of spirit on the part of newspapers which are so much enamoured of politics that they are unable to see good in anything or anybody that falls on the other side of the party line. Not less power, but more discretion is probably General Smuts' hope for the Press and if this surmise is correct, then the writer must humbly endorse this view.

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