

## Power and the Press

A SHAKE-UP of practices and production techniques in the newspaper industry; higher prices for newspapers; encouragement for more regional dailies — including local ones for London. And a stand against attacks on press freedom.

These are recommendations which Aims of Industry makes in its evidence to the Royal Commission on the Press as being desirable in the industry\*.

Aims concentrates on two aspects: first, the threat to freedom of expression through censorship over editorial and advertising content; second, the danger to the survival of the Press resulting from restrictive practices and overmanning and inability to adopt technical changes which would save it.

A number of cases of newspaper employees bringing pressure against cartoons, comment and advertising are described in the evidence.

"We believe that these instances . . . represent a frightening attack on the Press's freedom and should concern everyone.

"Once the principle had been accepted that not only staff writers but outside contributors had to be members of the NUJ, it would create what would be in effect a closed shop situation virtually without limits. A further consequence would be that union discipline could require that public relations people in business and industry must cease their output when journalists on newspapers were on strike."

One of the gravest implications of a journalists' union closed shop is that the union can lay down who shall work and who shall not. "This is seen in operation in Czechoslovakia, where a person cannot write unless he belongs to the union, and cannot belong to the union unless he signs approval of the Russian invasion.

The Press should be open to

anyone who has something worthwhile to say in his own field of specialisation, says Aims. "If radio and television have leading figures in politics, economics, academics, sports, etc., appearing while the Press is not allowed to use their services, even more public support would be lost to the other medium."

The evidence looks at the effect on editors if they were forced as union members to submit to pressures from employees working under them. "The reason why newspaper editors and proprietors are vulnerable to pressures from workers is, of course, an obvious one. Of all commodities, there is no other as perishable as a newspaper. A newspaper that is not published loses not only circulation but advertising revenue. It cannot afterwards make up losses."

Aims suggests that union pressures were behind the delay of more than a week in publication of Hansard containing the report of a House of Lords debate on April 10 of this year in which details were given of over-manning and print union pressures in Fleet Street.

Although it was officially denied

that the report was held up by an industrial dispute, "It was too much of a coincidence that Hansard did not appear immediately, as its custom, on the one day when the text included some hard criticism of the print unions' action."

The Aims submission warns against government intervention in the industry, especially subsidies or such ideas as an advertising revenue board that would redistribute wealth from one paper to another.

"Why should anyone subsidise a grossly inefficient industry? Subsidies would, in fact, only help perpetuate the present crazy situation. They would treat the symptoms and not the cause. They would do nothing at all to attack the industry's basic problems."

Another consideration is the danger to a free press once it is beholden in any way to a Government, "whatever that Government's policies. We would agree with the Member of Parliament who argued 'Once there are subsidies there are strings, and once there are strings there is an end to the real legitimate freedom of the Press'."

## Miscellany

### Subsidies—The Hidden Beneficiaries

ARGUING against the principle of subsidies in general, Russell Lewis (*Daily Telegraph*, December 11) denounced as the most entrenched, the subsidies for housing and agriculture. There would be little need for the former but for rent control which has caused the housing shortage, he says, and as for agriculture "... both the European price supports and the British deficiency payments are unsatisfactory because both deposit the bulk of the benefit into the laps of rich farmers."

Subsidies, says Mr. Lewis, arise from politicians thinking they can improve on the free market. "Worse still, they sometimes set out deliberately to bribe sections of the electorate with the taxpayer's money. Our problem is that, once established, every sub-

sidy becomes someone's sacred cow."

He might have added that subsidies in the economy ultimately find their way through the economic sieve into land values.

### Shhhhss... Touch Wood

A LETTER to *The Times*, December 10 rebukes the National Institute of Economic and Social Research for announcing that it expects the rate of inflation in Great Britain to rise to 25 per cent. The announcement itself, suggests the writer, will give it a good chance of doing so and he calls for a moratorium on all future forecasts from all quarters. This, he claims, "would make a far bigger contribution to bringing down the rate of inflation than any policy recommended by such bodies and individuals."

Maybe we could, in the event of

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