Construction, conformity and control: the taming of the Daily Herald 1921-30

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Constriction, Conformity and Control: The Taming of the Daily Herald
1921-30

Submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

History Discipline, The Open University

14th July 1992

Author number: M7020775
Date of submission: 5 August 1992
Date of award: 9 February 1993
Constriction, Conformity and Control: The Taming of the Daily Herald 1921-30
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Ph.D 1993
The Open University

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ABSTRACT

The period from 1921 to 1930 saw the Daily Herald come under the direct control of the organised Labour movement - jointly owned by the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. It separates an earlier incarnation of independent left radicalism from a subsequent identity as a commercial daily tied to an official political line.

It is a period of commercial and competitive failure - the 500,000 circulation constantly evoked as a target was only attained in times of exceptional political or industrial excitement. Reliant on movement subsidies for capital finance it was unable to match the new features and inducements - notably insurance schemes - that competitors provided in a period of rapid expansion and intense circulation battles.

Editorially it was torn between the radicalism of its staff, the journalistic instinct to avoid predictability and the desire of Labour's moderate leaders for an automatically reliable supporter in the national press. As leadership pressures mounted it increasingly became the voice of the centre lecturing followers, with debate restricted - but independent instincts were never totally curbed.

Failure to attract the desired mass readership cannot be wholly attributed to poverty. Initially developed as the voice of a committed, informed radical political elite it continued to reflect their interests - and would always choose to educate rather than entertain. In the absence of a mass counterculture this left it seeking a popular readership with a serious approach. Realisation that a different approach was needed to win such a readership combined with recognition that this would need capital investment beyond the means of the movement to force the partnership formed with Odhams Press in 1929, ending exclusive movement control.
Preface and acknowledgements

Any project lasting twelve years from conception to completion accumulates the obligation of a considerable number of acknowledgements - starting in this case with no fewer than four supervisors and an academic adviser. My chief thanks go to Professor James Curran, my external academic supervisor as an Open University student since February 1982. James has brought to the task of supervision not only unparalleled knowledge and expertise of the subject area, but a generous willingness to share that knowledge and fine judgment, confronted by a student whose early years were made barrenly unproductive by the pressures of freelance journalism, of when to tolerate non-production and when to demand adherence to deadlines. Without his assistance this project would not have been completed. My internal OU supervisor Dr Tony Aldgate has been an invaluable guide through the tortuous maze of OU regulations and requirements - not least those relating to the submission of theses.

When this project began, at Nuffield College, Oxford, in the autumn of 1980 Dr David Butler's enthusiasm, commitment to research and unfailing support for an erratic and troublesome student were a vital contribution to its initial impetus while Dr Martin Ceadel provided sympathetic assistance in unravelling the initial mysteries of academic research.

That the project should finally have been completed owes a great deal to the term I spent as a member of the Oxford Journalism Fellowship Programme at Queen Elizabeth House. My chief academic thanks for this period go to Dr John Rowett, whose knowledge of the Labour movement in the 1920s was the perfect complement to Professor Curran's expertise on the press, and whose willingness to read and criticise in detail vast screeds of manuscript were above and beyond the call of his role as an academic adviser.

Thanks are also due to Neville Maxwell, inventor and director of the programme, to the Leverhulme Foundation for funding my place and to my colleagues on the programme - particularly Ken Guggenheim, John Nicol, Connie Sage and Aura Triana - for creating the pleasurable and productive working environment in which the project was largely completed.
Thanks are also due to my employers Times Supplements Ltd for granting me three months paid leave of absence to go to Oxford, to my editor Peter Scott for granting the leave and extracting the full pay from company management and my news editor David Jobbins for accepting uncomplainingly both the absence of his political writer during the 1992 General Election and the presence on other occasions of a reporter whose mind was focussed more on the 1920s than the 1990s.

Several archives, libraries and their staff also provided invaluable assistance. Rosie Stone and the staff of the filing department at the Trades Union Congress and Stephen Bird, archivist at the Labour Party, facilitated access to the main institutional archives. Dr Richard Storey and the staff of the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University, Harry Cox, formerly librarian of Mirror Group Newspapers and the staffs of the manuscript room at the London School of Economics, the South Wales Miners' Library, the Public Record Office and the John Rylands Library, Manchester also helped with important archives. The Daily Herald and other newspapers consulted were read at the National Newspaper Library, Colindale, the map room of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in the library of Nuffield College, Oxford and in the research department at the National Union of Journalists.

Others have played significant roles in this project. Dr Gary McCulloch first planted the idea with a chance remark over a drink, Dr Brian Harrison provided initial encouragement to apply for postgraduate work and Dr Deian Hopkin advised me that the Open University would be the best place to continue post-Nuffield as a part-time student. Lord Jay and Lord Leatherland both talked about their experiences as members of the Herald staff and at different times a number of academics - notably Professor David Howell, Professor Ben Pimlott, Dr Philip Williams, Dr John Sheppard, Dr Ged Martin and Dr John Ritchie have given advice and reassurance. The Society for the Study of Labour History and the Institute of Historical Research Media History both provided the opportunity to clarify and test ideas inherent in the delivery of conference and seminar papers. Over the past three years regular attendance at the Institute of Historical Research's Wednesday afternoon seminar on Twentieth Century British History has greatly improved the quality of my life as a researcher - not least in counter-acting the feeling of mental and physical isolation that goes with part-time research.
Any doctoral student will confirm that the difficulties of research and writing are likely to be matched by those of physical production. If the spirit of the Herald lives on anywhere in modern British journalism, it is in the pages and among the staff and contributors of Tribune - so it is appropriate that the final edit and printing of this thesis should have been carried out at the Tribune offices. Thanks here are due to the editor Paul Anderson for offering the facilities and to his staff - particularly Jeff Lovit, Caroline Rees and Sheila Noble, for their assistance with the practicalities of their system and tolerance of my monopolising a computer and printer. Jeff's generosity in spending two hours transferring files between machines was particularly vital to completing the project. Thanks for assistance with photocopying are also due to Catherine Hastings and the London Business School. At earlier stages of the project help with printing and editing was provided by the Institute of Contemporary British History - thanks here to Peter Catterall, Brian Brivati and Virginia Preston - Tim Greenhalgh, Bernadine Corrigan, Tim Greenhalgh, Martin Ince, Claire Sanders and Kate Green. A different form of practical assistance came from friends who provided accommodation close to archives - in London Peter Raikes and Bridget Osborne and Mark MacDonald and in Oxford Stephen Howe and Daphna Vardi. Jane Matthews lived with the project for several years.

Finally I should like to thank journalistic colleagues from student training at the Centre for Journalism Studies, University College, Cardiff through a range of other publications to the present day at the Times Higher Education Supplement for a decade of insights into the way journalists and newspapers work, or do not work. ENDS
Key to Footnotes

DH: Daily Herald
NW: Newspaper World
WPN: World's Press News
DLB: Dictionary of Labour Biography
EBDH: Ernest Bevin Papers, Daily Herald File. Number refers to no of item.
JRMPRO: Ramsay MacDonald Papers, Public Record Office. UP: University Press
n.d: no date given for document.
Ed rep: Editor's report
GM rep: General Manager's report
AM rep: Advertising Manager's report
CM rep: Circulation Manager's report
DH dir: Daily Herald directors
VHPCo dir: Victoria House Printing Company directors

Labour Party.
LPDH: Labour Party Daily Herald Files. Number refers to no of item
LPRAC: Report of the Annual Conference
LPEC: Minutes of Executive Committee

Trades Union Congress
TUC: Trades Union Congress Daily Herald Files. Number refers to file
TUCGC: Minutes of General Council.
TUCFC: Minutes of General Council Finance and General Purposes Committee
(Finance Committee 1923-4, 1925-6. Finance and Office Committee 1924-5).
"Labour, still a cumbersome movement that enveloped a party, backed into
custody of a daily journal, with results that remain to be investigated". This thesis attempts to fill the gap in the historiography of the press and the Labour movement identified eight years ago by Stephen Koss. (1)

It examines the career of the Daily Herald between the end of August 1921 - when editor-proprietor George Lansbury was imprisoned as de facto leader of the protesting Poplar councillors - to April 1930 when a remodelled and expanded paper declared its first one million net sales certificate.

The Herald's 52 year history incorporated three broad incarnations. In 1921 it was still an independent paper of the radical left, its purposes entirely political - in essence its role since its foundation on 15th April 1912, a birthdate it shared with the North Korean dictator Kim Il-Sung. By 1930 it had become a fully-fledged popular daily, its political purposes now firmly mixed with the commercial ones predominant elsewhere in the national press - fundamentally the model that was to survive until its closure in 1964.

So the years studied are a bridging period, linking two widely differing incarnations of the paper by a third as the journalistic property of the organised Labour movement. The fact of being a Labour paper was fundamental to its identity throughout its history, but it was only between the Trades Union Congresses of 1922 and 1929 that it came under the direct and exclusive control of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress.

MF
Previous accounts of the Herald have concentrated largely on the first and third incarnations. Lansbury's "The Miracle of Fleet Street" (1925), the one substantial work specifically on the Herald, has some material on the period of official control but deals predominantly with the political and commercial vicissitudes of the earlier period. His "My Life" (1928) and Raymond Postgate's "Life of George Lansbury" also contain lengthy sections on his involvement with the paper while other material on the first period is contained in the memoirs of staff members Rowland Kenney (1939), George Slocombe (1936) and Francis Meynell (1971). Its relationship with its official Labour competitor, the Daily Citizen, attracted serious academic attention in an article by Robert Holton in the International Review of Social History (1974). (2)

There is nothing as substantial as "The Miracle of Fleet Street" on the third stage. Wilfred Fienbergh's 25th anniversary history of the commercial Herald has little to say about the paper itself. Accounts have concentrated on the 1930s - where the memoirs of editor Francis Williams (1970) and of staff member Douglas Jay (1980) and a hagiographic biography of proprietor Lord Southwood by RJ Minney (1954) are of value - and on its decline and demise in the 1960s. Hugh Cudlipp's "At Your Service" and "Walking on the Water" provide a first-hand insider view of its final years while subsequent media analysts, notably James Curran, have analysed the underlying reasons for its failure and the extent to which a paper of the left was hamstrung by dependence on advertising income. (3)
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The paper also has a frequent bit-part as a source or minor player in histories of the Labour movement - most significantly in Ross McKibbin's "The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-24" (1974), which contains a brief and lucid account of the movement takeover in 1921-2.(4)

The historian of the Herald in the 1920s starts with very little in the way of previous accounts, and these are almost entirely confined to the first half of the decade. McKibbin and Lansbury's "Miracle" are supplemented only by the acidic memoirs of Henry Hamilton Fyfe, editor from 1922 to 1926, contained in "My Seven Selves" (1935) and "Sixty Years of Fleet Street" (1949).(5)

This relative neglect of the 1920s is surprising insofar as this is the only period for which for which a primary Herald archive exists. This is a significant factor in the choice of period of study - to have attempted to extend it before 1921 or after 1930 would have created a serious discontinuity in the sources used.

There are limitations to these archives, which are contained in the records of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. Consisting largely of the records of the board members nominated by the two national bodies and papers and correspondence circulated by and to them as they pursued their role, they contain little concerning the day to day running of the paper or the people who worked on it. Where historians with access to comprehensive institutional archives like David Kynaston, David Ayerst and successive contributors to the Times' series of tombstones have made staff records and anecdotes a cornerstone of their studies, it is possible to say very little about Herald journalists - a frustration for any chronicler, but particularly so for a working journalist.(6)
Some historians of the press – notably Koss in his "The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain" (vol 2:1984) and Keith Wilson in his recent work on the Morning Post have leaned heavily on archives to the extent of almost excluding the content of the papers themselves. Limited archives make such an approach impossible in this case, but even were it possible this would leave an inadequate history of the Herald or any other paper. This is not to deny the value of, in particular, Koss. But his book might better have been called "The Rise and Fall of Political Press Proprietorship". But to attempt to write the history of a newspaper without using the contents of the paper as a fundamental element is to miss the point of the exercise, generating a product akin to that most bizarre of philatelic errors – the 1965 Post Office Tower stamp minus tower. (7)

The defining element in any newspaper's existence is the daily or weekly deadline. As well as dictating an emphasis on the contents of the paper, it makes a chronological approach desirable. All life is by definition lived chronologically, but in few activities is this as important as journalism – dominated by the daily or weekly routine of producing a product whose built-in obsolescence is summed up by the phrase "next week's fish and chip wrapping". Not all good press history is written that way, Patricia Hollis showed the potential benefits of a thematic approach in her study of the unstamped press – the sheer mass of of papers involved would have made a chronological approach almost impossible to organise. But for the simpler task of examining a single paper and the way in which it changed over a decade in response to external commercial and political pressures, chronology provides the most effective means of matching content to those pressures. (8)
Analysis of content raises considerable difficulties. The historian of public policy may, subject to the weeding process, have copious files in the Public Record Office to explain the gestation, organisation and presentation of a single decision - a mass of input in relationship to output. The press historian, particularly when dealing with archives as limited as those of the Herald, faces a mass of output in the form of the papers compared to very limited input in explanation.

The sheer bulk of the material is daunting. As Joel Wiener says "Everything in a newspaper, however insignificant it may seem, is potentially of interest, which complicates the matter". A loose, conservative estimate of the word-count in the Herald in the eight and a half years under study suggests that it is around 300 times the number recommended in university regulations for a doctoral thesis. (9)

Therefore selection is vital. Quantitative analysis provides one means of assessing content, and Virginia Berridge's work on Reynolds's Newspaper and other popular Victorian papers shows the potential value of such analysis to a press historian. The difficulty with any quantitative approach is, as Herald editor William Mellor pointed out when confronted by the figures produced by a member of his own staff, is that categorisation of particular stories is an uncertain and imprecise process. It is also less effective in charting changing ideas than the more straightforwardly literary style of analysis used by Hollis. Such an approach is by definition more subjective and reliant on the judgment and interpretation of the individual historian - but given the emphasis in this study on the changing world view of the Herald it has been adopted as the more likely to generate interesting and revealing insights. MF
Personal judgment and interpretation also dictate what amid the mass of available material is emphasised. Any newspaper is a complex and sensitive mechanism subject to an immense range of influences and pressures. Editors are important, but they cannot write or edit every item that appears in the paper. Much depends on decisions taken by other members of staff—writers, sub-editors, picture editors and others—under the pressure of deadlines.

Because of these pressures and the dependence of newspapers on unpredictable external events for their material, much of what appears is fortuitous. It would be rash for any analyst to make much of a particular run of the mill news story appearing at the bottom of page five. It may reflect some crucial political subtext. Far more likely though is that it was selected at the last moment from a mass of agency news copy by a sub-editor desperate for something of the right length to slot into a hole on the page.

But some elements are not fortuitous. The lead news story will not have been chosen without forethought. Its selection in preference to other stories will represent the considered view of the editor and other senior staff that this is the most important item available to the paper and its readers on a particular day. Similarly the choice and content of leader articles—particularly in a paper of explicitly political purpose such as the Herald—and of the main features, most of which will have been commissioned or selected in advance, will reflect forethought rather than reflex. The emphasis in this study is therefore on these elements within the paper.

MF
But this does mean dismissing the fortuitous elements. Reflex the selection is likely to have been, but it will have been a conditioned reflex - conditioned by journalists' assumptions about the sort of story the Herald wanted. Conditioned reflex under the pressure of deadlines will, if the conditioning is strong enough, lead to consistency of decision-making. News coverage has been examined on the principle that once is coincidence, twice is suspicious and three times is enemy action.

Once is also occasionally worthy of note along 'exception proving the rule' lines. Incongruities such as the Herald's cricket correspondent disparaging the ability of professionals to lead the England team at a time when the paper was pressing the parallel political case for a government composed of players rather than gentlemen or the printing of a public school headmaster's smug witticisms about the General Strike are so striking in the context of the rest of the paper as to demand comment.(10)

The heavy emphasis on political content reflects the Herald's self-perception as a political paper. It can be argued that seeing itself purely in these rather than in cultural terms was a fundamental weakness, but that the people running the Herald saw it that way is indisputable. Just as sources dictated a concentration at board rather than news room level in analysing the institution, so they force an emphasis on how the Herald saw its readers rather than vice versa. How fruitful a search for evidence would have been is questionable. Alan Lee, writing on the Victorian and Edwardian press, said: "There are serious methodological, problems involved in getting to know how communicated ideas and information affect their recipients, particularly if the problem is given an historical dimension". This applies as strongly to the 1920s as to earlier periods.(11)
Those earlier periods also had their own radical working-class press. Herald rhetoric would consistently portray it as a lone force acting against the overwhelming power of the capitalist press combines. In the context of the national daily press this was true in the 1920s, but the Herald had both contemporaries in other sections of the press and forerunners in its national radical role.

James Curran has argued that the press was considerably more radical in 1860 than it was at the time of the Herald's foundation half a century later. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the explosion in the 1830s of the working-class unstamped press and Feargus O'Connor's attempt to run a national Chartist paper, the Northern Star. JA Epstein's account points to a diversity of viewpoint and tolerance of debate in its columns that anticipated by three quarters of a century George Lansbury's open forum approach in the Herald. (12)

The middle of the century saw the rise of rumbustious mass-circulation Sunday newspapers such as Reynolds's Newspaper, whose vigorous relish of scandal had a political edge. Virginia Berridge noted that "Sensationalism was part of the papers' political commentary and a continuation of it". But it also saw what Curran isolates as the decisive factor in the marginalization of the radical press - the replacement of stamps, licensing and other forms of government control with a far more effective form of market control imposed by advertisers' refusal to support the radical press and constantly growing market entry costs. It has been estimated that a London daily cost £25,000 to launch in 1818. By the 1870s this figure had risen to £100,000 and Edward Lloyd had to spend £180,000 to buy the Clerkenwell News and transform it into the Daily Chronicle. (13)
Curran argued that 'advertising licensing' drove Reynolds's upmarket in pursuit of wealthier readerships, progressively blunting its political edge—although Berridge rejected this analysis.(14)

What is not in dispute is that the main attempt at a trade union paper, the Beehive of 1861–1876 was to anticipate the Herald's career in several respects. Its initial roots were in a strike, of building workers, Growing from London roots—it was run at first by the London Trades Council—into a national role it was ultimately forced into conformity with the views of the dominant moderate leaders of the day and sold to a proprietor outside the union movement, a Liberal MP.(15)

But a distinct Labour press had developed by the early years of the twentieth century. Deian Hopkin estimated that to 1914 the Independent Labour Party could muster around 100 papers, the Social Democratic Federation 15, Labour and the unions 30 and syndicalist and anarchist groups 20. And not only in English, Paralleling the Herald in its roots in a 1911 printers strike Y Dinesydd Cymreig provided North Wales with a powerful Labour weekly exclusively in Welsh until 1926.(16)

The majority were small, local and short-lived. But there were significant exceptions—notably Robert Blatchford's weekly Clarion, selling 74,000 copies by 1906 with its mix of sharp editorial comment, humour and non-political features like short stories and cycling columns and Keir Hardie's more explicitly political Labour Leader, spiced with exposé articles. Hopkin argued: "The exposé was a means to an end, the target chosen because of its political significance; the arguments deployed were political more than moral, although it is difficult to disentangle the two".(17)MF
Providing a powerful extension of the public platform, the Labour press was an important element in the apprenticeship of the political generation who would take decisions about the Herald in the 1920s. Robert Williams was a major contributor to the Labour press in Swansea while Ben Turner said of "Yorkshire Factory Times" that "it made our union proper". Skills initially honed in Labour papers could also be deployed more profitably elsewhere. Alan Lee noted: "It is doubtful whether either the Irish Nationalists or the Labour Party could have provided any MPs had it not been for the opportunity which journalism provided for them to support themselves. (18)

Those decision makers were also aware that overseas Labour movements could point to more impressive press support. Ramsay MacDonald complained in 1900 that "The newspaper so characteristic of the democratic movements on the Continent and not unknown in this country, which depends altogether on its opinions for its circulation, is being crushed out of existence" - on Hopkin's evidence an unduly pessimistic assessment of the British scene, but one displaying sharp awareness of greater promise elsewhere. A regular feature of Herald debates at the TUC in the early 1920s was Ben Tillett's lecture on the glories of the continental Labour press - although on one occasion Ben Turner was to dismiss them en masse as "not a patch on the Daily Herald". (19)

In the United States the Appeal to Reason could claim a 200,000 national sale in 1902 and commanded a national audience for the first decade of the century while rivals such as The Challenge could also point to impressive sales figures. In France the Socialist Party had four daily papers in 1914 including L'Humanite with a readership estimated at 200,000. (20)
Postwar French experience was also to provide some parallels for followers of the Herald. When the Communists split off in 1920 L'Humanite, under the editorship of Marcel Cachin, went with it and the Socialists attempted to fill the gap with Le Populaire. Substitute "Lansbury" for "Blum" and Raymond Manevy's description of its tribulations might describe those of the Herald in the same period: "Sa pauvreté ne lui permit pas pendant plusieurs années de rivaliser sur le plan de l'information avec les grands quotidiens, ni même avec la plupart de ses confrères politiques. Les militants avaient pris l'habitude de le considérer comme un journal de complément. Ils l'achetaient pour l'article de Leon Blum, qui ouvrait la première page, et pour les vocations des groupes et sections qui bouclaient la dernière". Suspended in 1924, to the ill-concealed glee of the firmly anti-Labour Newspaper Press Directory, which concluded from its fate and the Herald's difficulties that "Labour and Socialist organs are not able to command the financial support of those they profess to represent", it was restarted in 1927 but continued as a consistent loss-maker, in Theodore Zeldin's words "Much more a doctrinal than a newspaper"(21).

Much more encouraging and more frequently cited, particularly by Tillett, was the example of the Social Democratic press in Germany. In 1914 there were 90 SPD papers, almost all dailies, with a total sale of 1.465 million. The most important - Vorwärts - had a daily sale of 175,000 and an annual income of two million marks while the weekly cultural and entertainment paper Neue Welt sold 550,000. But there were also features recognisable on the British scene - complaints that sales were well below the votes polled in elections, low-paid journalists and disaffection between the moderates who staffed Vorwärts and the radicals of the Leipziger Volkszeitung.(22)
By the 1920s the SPD daily press had been diminished by the schism with Communism. But what Tillett and other British enthusiasts saw was the extent of the SPD press operation compared to their own single struggling paper. A full comparative explanation might occupy an entire doctoral thesis in its own right. Two points are worth making. First is Alex Hall's observation that the SPD papers had realised as early as the 1890s that they would have to provide a full general news service as well as political information in order to win readers - a service facilitated by the creation of a central party press bureau in 1908. (22)

Second are the observations of Egon Wertheimer, Vorworts correspondent in Britain, whose background in the SPD provided the means for a penetratingly perceptive study of its British equivalent in "Portrait of the Labour Party" (1929). Wertheimer pointed out that SPD membership involved a major personal commitment, and also admitted the member to a whole countercultural network of leisure, cultural and sporting bodies linked to the party: "Continental party membership was the outcome of a personal decision. From the moment of registration the party organisation surrounded him with a whole series of duties and obligations, demanded certain services from him and, to a certain extent, determined his mode of life". (23)

By contrast most Labour members joined through union membership: "The party does not make any extra-political demands upon its members". In the absence outside the ILP of "inner party life" along the European pattern Labour was, compared to the SPD, "a mere voting machine". (24)
Wertheimer argued that "Separated by no class barriers from the mental and spiritual concepts of capitalism, which would otherwise have given birth to an exclusively proletarian way of life and morality, and deep-rooted in national religious tradition, the Labour Party had never been able to make a clean breakaway from capitalist culture". The disinclination during the 1920s of the mass of Labour members and supporters to make a clean breakaway from capitalist newspapers adds force to his insight. (25)

One possible explanation for this relative absence of counterculture was that British labour had no solidifying experience equivalent to Bismarck's campaign against socialists between 1878 and 1890. Though Koss's description of a "cumbrous movement" is not unfair, British Labour had good reason for optimism at the start of the 1920s. The TUC was undoubtedly the senior partner in the political-industrial partnership, established since 1868, and membership was at record levels following the First World War. The left, boosted by the fashion for direct action espoused by the Herald in the immediate postwar period, had a strong presence within the leadership but moderates such as general secretary Bowerman, Will Thorne and John Clynes retained a dominant position.

The Labour Party was evolving under the impetus of Arthur Henderson's reforms - permitting individual membership and creating local parties - from being a union representation group to a national party. Its leadership was firmly in the hands of the right - with the alliance of trade unionists Clynes, JH Thomas and Henderson with Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden in control throughout.

MF
The dominant intellectual fashions were ethical, ameliorative, reformist and pragmatic. An element in that pragmatism was the belief, common across the political spectrum, that a press presence was essential to political success. Quite how much notice people took of their newspapers was as questionable then as now, but as Koss noted "Mistaken or not, this conviction created its own reality". (26)

That conviction informed the movement's decision to take over the Herald when the only alternative on offer was its closure. Its period of proprietorship cannot be termed successful, except insofar as a paper which seemed unlikely to survive contrived to do so. One measure of failure is that the Trades Union Congress should at the end of the period have been forced to accept a commercial publisher as dominant partner in the running of the paper. Such an act of privatisation would hardly have been contemplated had the direct-owning status quo been seen as a success.

Seeking explanations for this failure is the main purpose of this thesis. There can be little doubt that it experienced a difficult and complicated existence and was subject to an immense range of political and commercial pressures.

Most important of the commercial pressures was the constricting effect of poverty. This was nothing new for the left-wing press - James Curran's analysis of the impact of advertisers' prejudices has already been noted. The rising entry cost trend of the second half of the nineteenth century had continued and accentuated in the first two decades of the twentieth. Tribune had failed in 1908, in spite of £300,000 expenditure over two years in the attempt to turn it into an effective Liberal daily. (27)
The Daily Herald 1921-30: Introduction

The Daily Citizen's fate in 1915 was a recent reminder of the mismatch between the resources the organised left could devote to a newspaper and those needed to make it competitive. Deian Hopkin has noted: "By socialist standards the Daily Citizen raised a fortune in investment - much more than £150,000 in all. By Fleet Street standards it was not enough". (28)

And the stakes were to raise further in the 1920s - a period of expansion and ferocious competition. The Herald's competitors poured ever-increasing resources not only into expanded news coverage but into special features, pictures and, most expensively, sales promotion. The extraordinary rise of newspaper insurance schemes and of the foot-soldier of the circulation wars, the door-to-door canvasser, and arguably the keynote of the national press between the two world wars.

Demands on the Herald were accentuated by its political purpose. As director Ethel Bentham put it in 1925: "The difficulty of the Herald is that a small paper with limited resources has to fulfil two different functions - that of the ordinary daily newspaper and that of the organ of the movement". It was not a new problem for the left-wing press - the pressures on SPD newspapers have already been noted, while the Beehive sixty years earlier had promised "All the features of a popular weekly newspaper with the more specialised features of a trade union and working class journal". (29)

This uncertainty over the extent and ambitions of coverage was linked inextricably to the pursuit of higher sales. This was dictated both by the commercial objective of converting a chronic loss-maker into a viable proposition and the political desire to spread the message as widely as possible.
Recurrent notes throughout the period are the belief that a 500,000 circulation and a Northern Edition will solve most of the Herald's problems - a classic chicken and egg proposition as the Northern Edition was felt to be essential to attaining the sales target, but increased sales were indispensable to raising the money necessary to start up in Manchester.

The Herald's poverty conditioned its responses to these problems. But so too did the moral and ethical make-up of the people who ran the Herald. The eternal conundrum confronting socialist parties in capitalist democracies is that however much they dislike the status quo, they have to operate and try to win within it. Their constant dilemma is deciding how far they should adopt the methods of their adversaries in order to defeat them.

Similar pressures operate on a socialist newspaper in a capitalist market. Insurance was discussed when the Herald was first taken over, but rejected. Cost was certainly a factor but Arthur Henderson, whose disposition to opt for morality over commercial imperatives in the newspaper business had been demonstrated by his resignation from the board of the Daily Citizen when it introduced racing tips in 1914, argued: "It was an extremely doubtful method of trying to get their rank and file to take the paper which ought first of all -should he not say first and last? - be taken because it was the finest weapon that the workers could hope for in giving publicity to its own principles and ideals". The dialectic between morality and pragmatism in this respect is an important running theme.
The debate had its journalistic counterpart. Philip Snowden, who was to be conspicuously uninvolved in the Herald, wrote in the 1919 edition of Sell's World Press: "A Labour Newspaper is at a disadvantage from the point of view of establishing a circulation by feeling under an obligation to maintain a higher moral standard than that observed by ordinary newspapers. The directors of a Labour newspaper regard it as inconsistent with their principles to give prominence to sensational news.

"The success of a daily newspaper depends upon the diversity of its topics and features. It must contain in every issue features which will appeal to a large number of different people... The directors of a Labour newspaper have a mission to carry out. They have a gospel to preach. To them the newspaper is primarily a medium for propagating their ideas. The ordinary newspaper is conducted on entirely different lines. It is primarily a commercial venture. It has no scruples which are allowed to interfere with the success of its appeal for popular support". (31)

The dominant commercial model of the time was provided by the Mail and Express – with a broader human-interest driven conception of news and serious political commentary present but subsumed to other elements: "Features rather than editorial commentary set the popular tone of the paper", JD Startt has argued. (32)

Popular journalism could be given a political twist as Reynolds's in the late nineteenth century, WJ Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette in the 1880s and Clarion contemporaneously had shown. Hopkin describes Clarion as the "first mass-circulation socialist paper". (33) MF
A formidable literary tradition had also emerged - Hopkin notes that Labour Leader and William Morris's Commonweal were arguably more distinguished in this area than in political commentary. This tradition would be continued by the Herald, particularly in Lansbury's last years and was undoubtedly important in appealing to the coalition of left-wing intellectuals and self-educated worker activists who would appear to have been the bulk of its readership. But whether it helped in getting a wider readership is more questionable. The extent to which the Herald's difficulties could be attributed to journalistic failings of the sort outlined by Turner and the basic error of pursuing a mass popular audience with a serious, heavily political paper as well as to its resource limitations is a debate that runs through the entire period. The most comprehensive critique along these lines was developed in 1925 and after by director Clifford Allen with Ben Turner, chairman of the paper over the same period, as his main opponent.(34)

The complications of the Herald's existence did not end here, but could also be seen in a long drawn-out and complex battle for its editorial soul. It was clear in 1922 what the official Herald would not be - the freewheeling radicalism of the Lansbury days was not an option once the paper was answerable to a board of directors composed of the movement's parliamentary and industrial leaders. But quite what would replace it was less clear - not least because the new editor and directors had to implement the new style with the politically-motivated, leftist staff assembled by Lansbury, MF.
The precise form an official line would take had also to be defined. As director RB Walker pointed out in a debate on editorial policy in 1925, the Herald could not "Be expected to speak with any more authority, or any more consistently, on any one issue than the movement itself does". (35)

Even where there was little doubt what the official line was, the Herald had to decide where to position itself in relation to leaders and led, and this was to make issues of conformity and control fundamental throughout this period. One view of an official paper would have it acting as a top-down conduit - handing down the official viewpoint, expounding it and rejecting all criticism. The appeal of this for party leaders and officialdom is self-evident.

An alternative view would expect it to give editorial support to the official line while permitting debate and dissent in features and letters. A third would give the Herald an active role within debate, free to express its own line on any policy even if it conflicted with official viewpoints. The greater appeal of either of these to journalists - constitutionally opposed to monotony and predictability - and to party activists, particularly those on the left in this period, is equally clear.

Much depended on the editor's conception of his own role and his willingness to subordinate personal and journalistic instincts to a role as servant of the movement - Henry Hamilton Fyfe and William Mellor were to display differing conceptions of their role.
The formidable difficulty and complexity of the role taken on by the TUC, the Labour Party and the Herald staff in 1922 is clear. But any estimate of their performance has to take into account the sharply realistic view of political life - one that might have been applied to journalism - expressed by one of the left's most vivid personalities in this period, Glasgow ILPer James Maxton who said "If you cannot ride two horses at once you have no right in the bloody circus". (35)
THE DAILY HERALD 1921-30

INTRODUCTION (p1-5g)

Footnotes One

1. Stephen Koss - The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain Vol 2: The Twentieth Century, Hamish Hamilton 1984 p 369


10. DH 9, 7, 24, 26, 7, 26.


24. Ibid p 11, 113 MF.


27. Curran - Capitalism loc cit p 219


29. Harrison op cit p 143. Dr Ethel Bentham - Memorandum 17-9-25 LPOH 464 TUC 788.1


32. Startt - Good Journalism loc cit p 279

33. Hopkin loc cit p 236-7

34. Ibid p 232, See for example Allen memo 11.5.27, Turner ditto 13.5.27 TUC 788.5

35. ed) Alan McKinlay and RJ Morris - The ILP on Clydeside 1893-1932: From foundation to disintegration Manchester UP 1991 p 1
Its coverage reveals several of the defining features of the Herald's style under Lansbury. Its news values were almost exclusively political - what was felt to be the most significant political event of the day would always receive exhaustive coverage. Poplar received consistent attention throughout 1921 - notably 23rd March (Poplar’s refusal to pay), 8th July (divisional court order to pay) and 5th August (order to go to jail) (4).

The arrests in the first week in September brought attention to a new crescendo, and by occupying a full week gave it ample scope for self-expression. Poplar occupied prime news space - the left-hand columns of the front page - for eight consecutive issues from Tuesday 30th August to Thursday 8th September. This was supplemented by a series of leaders and articles by Lansbury - the one regular by-lined contributor. These elements were combined to striking effect in the issue of September 1st 1921, leaving the reader in no doubt that the revolt was dignified, determined, united and firmly backed by the people of the borough.

A front page news story provided a vivid account of the scenes at Poplar Town Hall as the councillors held their final public meeting. Lansbury was to suggest that the whole saga could be seen as a "A screamingly funny farce...if only we could put it on at the movies", and the Herald was to seize on the moments of humour in the following week.

The late arrival of the men intending to arrest John Scurr was reported with a barely suppressed chuckle that he "Had been awaiting arrest all day, and having got rather tired had gone out to take the air", while Lansbury's arrest was accompanied by the family parrot's continuous interjections of "Chuck, chuck, pretty, pretty!" (6)

But this pre-arrest evening in Poplar was more Eisenstein than Keystone Cops. Hamilton Fyfe was acutely critical of the abilities of the staff he inherited a year later, saying most had been chosen for reasons other than journalistic ability. But this report is evidence that at least one member of that staff was capable of generating vivid and powerful reporting, done with sufficient skill that support for the cause was conveyed without the interjection of outright comment.
"The men and women of Poplar gathered in imposing force to prove to the Councillors, whose last night of liberty they generally believed it to be, that they recognised to the full the sacrifice which these 30 men and women were making on their behalf and that the community as a whole was solidly behind its representatives....The big building was crowded, until it was literally impossible for another person to gain admission... Impressive as was the crowd within the hall, it dwindled into insignificance when compared with the huge overflow concourse outside".

Estimating that the crowd was between 6,000 and 7,000 - and limited to that only by the hearing range of the human ear, the report recorded that "There was nothing pessimistic about the huge gathering, no note of misgiving in the fighting speeches of the councillors. Every speaker was greeted with loud applause, and at times, speakers could not continue until the tumult of enthusiasm subsided". (7)

The supporting leader reinforced in polemical style the news story's images of determined resolution, backing it with a critique of the system Poplar was attacking. This critique was rooted firmly in a concept of justice and the belief that the current system was unfair, had one rule for the poor and another for the rich, and was inhumane. That it was inefficient and wasteful was an important sub-element, particularly in the context of attacks made on these grounds, but came second to the shout for moral justice. While the Herald had its contingent of Marxists, its analysis was firmly within the ethical, humanitarian British Labour Socialism tradition - an underpinning betrayed by the reference to the "wickedness" of capitalism. (8)

It said of the councillors: "They are going, not with any display of martyrdom or in any mood except that of the simple resolve to see justice done. They are going because it is the only way left open to them of making an effective protest against injustice..... To keep children at an insufficient standard of life because their parents - through no fault of either parents or children - are out of work is, anyway, the act of a blackguardly system. But it is also the most monstrous form of squandermania because it foments disease, it lowers the morale and physique of the nation, it retards trade recovery, it increases every sort of economic burden, it adds to the rates and taxes which it is supposed to save. It is the philosophy not merely of criminals, but of lunatics".
It concluded with a vigorous ethical flourish: "The difference between the two classes of unemployed is this: that the rich unemployed do not want work, but insist on getting money out of the pockets of the workers for no refund at all, whereas the unemployed men and women of the working class do want work, ask nothing better than work at a reasonable wage, and are denied it by the folly and wickedness of capitalist society and a capitalist government". (9)

Such a viewpoint was to be expected of any paper edited by Lansbury- whose socialism was underpinned by christian convictions. Fye questioned how far Lansbury was really in control of the paper at this time. But whatever the day to day set-up, there is little doubt that his was the dominant voice in setting the tone of the paper. If leader column rhetoric was the Herald's official voice, then Lansbury's articles were the personal voice. He was a politician rather than a journalist, with his writings lacking the polish and finish of the professional journalist. But in their sermon-like quality, with a tone more of the spoken than the written word, they spoke directly to the reader as a fellow-participant in the struggle. (10)

His front-page article on September 1st, headlined "A Fight For the Poor", is typical: "Poplar is not asking for universal lawlessness. Poplar is only arguing that the boroughs of London afflicted with an overwhelming mass of human suffering and misery should refuse to add to this by landing upon the shoulders of the poor financial burdens they are unable to carry".

The conclusion accentuated the personal element with a typically direct button-holing appeal to the reader: "Today with my colleagues I await arrest. Putting us in prison may suit Sir Alfred Mond and the Government. They are drawing dragon's teeth. When the prison door closes its clang with resound throughout England, bringing a note of good cheer to the poor, the sick and the unemployed. For in prison by our very silence we shall be smashing down the theory that the beastly system which dooms the workless to poverty must continue. I repeat: our call, comrade, will be to you, and you must organise to ensure that victory shall see the end of our imprisonment". (11)
Lansbury's style of direct address contained the implied assumption that his reader was, like himself, a political activist. This assumption also pervaded the front-page article on 3rd September, which followed the decision to place the Poplar councillors in the Second division rather than the less unpleasant First at Brixton Prison. It illustrates several other Herald characteristics. It was on a news page, but was unashamedly a mix of reporting and propaganda. Its tone was angry - while Lansbury had placed an anathema on the "good old gospel of hate" as practised by editor Charles Lapworth and cartoonist Will Dyson before the First World War, there was no prohibition on anger. (12)

Nor was there any restriction on comment in headlines - this article was Headlined "Workers and Workless, Back Up Poplar!", with sub-heads including "Treated as Common Debtors". The conclusion was a ferociously angry polemic against the decision - which among other things denied Lansbury the right to edit the Herald from jail. It was directed to readers as individual activists but the style - unlike Lansbury's - was hardly conversational.

"It is therefore on the Home Secretary that pressure should be brought. Pass resolutions! Flood the Home Office! ORGANISE! Demonstrate!

"But don't stop at demanding first class treatment. DEMAND RELEASE!"

(Cross-Head) Agitate Now!

"What agitation has done, agitation can do. If Stead could edit the "Pall Mall Gazette" from prison, why should not George Lansbury edit the Daily Herald from prison?

"The imprisonment has been deliberately delayed until Parliament is not sitting. But there are other ways of approaching and influencing the Government.

"Already demonstrations and protest meetings are being organised. ROLL UP AND KEEP IT UP!"

When news stories have this tone and approach, the simultaneous printing of a leader on the issue appears somewhat superfluous. (13)
Poplar's cause may have been local, but among the Herald's objects - and, Gillespie has argued, the councillors' achievements - was recognition that the issues had national implications. It was seen in campaigning mode, under the slogan "Go to the Guardians", inciting groups of the unemployed to besiege meetings of their local Guardians of the poor with demands for work or adequate maintenance. It reported that "The Daily Herald slogan "Go to the Guardians" is acting as a fiery cross". A demonstration of 8,000 to 10,000 was reported from Shoreditch where local leaders included Wal Hannington, subsequently leader of the National Unemployed Workers Movement. Other demonstrations were reported in Woolwich, St Pancras, Hackney and, mildly improbably, Bromley. (14)

While gaining a cause the Herald was, temporarily at least, losing an editor. Lansbury's arrest on 5th September was marked by a characteristically loaded front page banner headline extended across six columns "Our Editor in Gaol for Justice". His signed article conveyed the same message as Saturday's front page polemic, but couched in the familiar conversational terms: "But now we are in. YOUR work becomes more and more intensified. We shall all be content to leave you to decide whether a no-rent strike is the best way to help, or whatever efforts you should adopt. We are only anxious that the agitation should be kept going". He linked his own plight to the tradition represented by John Wilkes - an unexplained reference to an eighteenth century radical indicating Herald assumptions about the depth of readers' historical and political knowledge. (15)

Lansbury was never allowed to be a prison editor. But on 7th September the Herald reported that he had been allowed a daily meeting with a representative from the paper. The next month saw both a steady stream of reports on the councillors' progress in Brixton and Holloway and Lansbury continuing his regular contributions. They stayed in prison for six weeks. Their release by court order on 12th October was greeted with another front page six-column headline, three front-page news columns and a prominently-displayed message of thanks to the paper from Mayor Sam March. (16)
The enthusiasm had considerable justification. The councillors had held out against prison conditions, government and their Labour critics. They had forced the Minister of Health, Coalition Liberal Sir Alfred Mond, whose wealth and role in the Poplar affair earned him a prominent place in Herald demonology, to implement an equalisation scheme. The Herald concluded triumphantly: “They have fought a great fight, not only for Poplar, but for all the poor and all the unemployed of the country. They have forced things to a crisis”. (17).

They had also provided the Herald with the last great campaign of a tradition extending back to 1912 as the next few months were to see the inexorable logic of the paper's anarchic finances and Labour’s desperate need for an assured voice in the press drive it into the unenthusiastic arms of the organised movement. But to see how it got to that point it is necessary to go back into the Herald's earlier history.

ENDS
CHAPFER ONE(p5-12)

7. DH 1.2,5.9.21
9. DH 1.2,9.21
10. For the most effective analysis of Labour Socialism vis a vis Marxism see Angus Macintyre - A Proletarian Science. Cambridge UP 1980 particularly p 46-55.
11. DH 1.9.21
12. Henry Hamilton Fyfe - Sixty Years of Fleet Street. WH Allen 1949 p 192
13. DH 1.9.21
14. George Lansbury - The Miracle of Fleet Street. Victoria House 1925 p 33
15. DH 3.9.21
16. Gillespie loc cit p 179. DH 1,2,3.9.21
17. DH 5.9.21
18. DH 7.9,13.10.21
19. Branson op cit 83-103. DH 13.10.21
The Daily Herald’s outstanding characteristics were established from the moment of its first issue on 15th April 1912 - it was financially, organisationally and politically anarchic. Debates on the creation of a national Labour daily to supplement the mass of local papers - 66 were published by the Independent Labour Party alone between 1893 and 1910 - dated back to the ILP’s foundation in 1893. In 1907 the Trades Union Congress had passed a resolution to start a daily paper and a special conference in February 1908 backed the creation of a paper called the Morning Herald.(1)

But the new paper was unlike the official organ visualized in debates over the previous two decades. The Herald’s earliest origins were, appropriately, in a strike - the lockout and walkout of London printers in January 1911. Setting up a paper to present their case and reply to the attacks of employers, the print unions called it the Daily Herald. Within days, encouraged by their initial success and a sale of 27,000, the printers broadened coverage to include general as well as strike news and began to talk seriously of keeping the paper permanently. Its closure on 28th April was accompanied by a commitment to relaunch as a permanent paper as soon as practicable - in other words when sufficient capital had been raised.(2)

Its backers, a committee dominated by London trade unionists such as Tommy Naylor of the Compositors and dockers leader Ben Tillett, appealed for #10,000 - then, disappointed at the response, for #5,000. Finally they settled for #300. All logic suggested that the Herald was doomed before it started. Even arch-optimist George Lansbury, recruited to the committee by Ben Tillett, admitted that the failure to raise capital "knocked all optimism and faith out of me and left me speechless".(3)

Its survival was to be a triumph of optimism and faith over financial logic. In spite of backing from wealthy sympathisers like HD Harben, former Liberal candidate and the suffragist and pacifist Baroness de la Warr, it teetered consistently on the brink of closure. Raymond Postgate, in his analysis of the Herald’s early years, points to crises in June, August and October 1912. On 23rd October 1912 it announced "We may come out again or we may not". They did because a man turned up in the office at the last moment with #150.
On another occasion the decision was taken to close the paper and Lansbury left to address meetings in Hanley and Crewe - where on the following morning he was able to buy a Herald at Crewe station. The printing staff had begged some part reels of paper and old outsize reels from Drew, the manager of the Victoria House Printing Company, and improvised a paper that was "all sorts of shapes and sizes". Three issues were produced with brokers men on the premises - on the third day Lansbury, Tillett and transport unionist Bob Williams delayed the brokers men by standing in the doorway while money was found to buy back the tables, desks and chairs. (4)

Early organisation matched the finances. Founder staff member Rowland Kenney recalled arriving for his first day at work: "That one room was the Editorial Department. It contained either two or three tables, two chairs and telephone on the floor in one corner and the day's newspapers. There was not a piece of copy paper or a pencil, blue or otherwise; nothing. So on my suggestion Seed slipped out and bought a parcel of scribbling pads and other material. Then we began to discuss our 'news service'!" (5)

Staff lived an uncertain existence. Kenney recalled: "When pay-day came the staff had an apprehensive time. Sometimes there were funds, sometimes there were not". One Friday they were offered the choice of being paid or the paper coming out on the following day. They chose to continue. (6)

There was no more certainty over editors. The Herald went through four - WH Seed, Sheridan Jones, Kenney and Charles Lapworth - between April 1912 and October 1913 when Lansbury began his nine years in the chair. At one point serious negotiations were conducted with Frank Harris, who would have been appointed if Lansbury and Tillett had had their way, but did not consider his brush with the Herald worth recording in his extensive memoirs. (7)

But in spite of these uncertainties the paper assembled and retained a gifted staff, several of whom would survive into the 1920s and beyond. Predominantly political activists rather than journalists, they gave the paper its distinctive sharp political flavour. Undoubted star was the Australian cartoonist Will Dyson - in Martin Walker's words "One of the angriest and most ferocious cartoonists ever to sketch a line", whose brutal caricatures were a radical break with the genteel pattern of the Victorian political cartoon.
Walker records that a special fund was created to keep him when the Hearst press attempted to lure him away with a massive salary - enabling the payment of $20 per week, a large salary by any standards, let alone those of the impoverished Herald.(8)

Dyson had gone by 1921, but a nucleus of pioneers remained. Among the founders was WP Ryan, poet and veteran Irish radical journalist - "calm as a rock in the midst of our storms" in Kenney's words. He lost narrowly to Kenney for editor in June 1912 but took charge in Lansbury's absences and was assistant editor into the 1920s and libel catcher into the 1930s.(9)

Kenney recruited Charles Langdon Everard and George Slocombe. Everard, brought in to provide a lighter touch, did so to great effect over the next two decades as house humourist "Gadfly" while Slocombe, employed at 18 as Kenney's secretary, was a noted Paris correspondent and chronicler of international conferences in the postwar decade. Immediately after the war Slocombe was news editor and Everard chief sub-editor.(10)

If the Herald had been launched as the organ of radical trade unionism, it rapidly attracted the interest of another key element in the nascent Labour coalition, left-wing intellectuals. University graduates were as yet something of an exception both in the Labour Party and in journalism, but Norman Ewer and William Mellor were to play important roles in both. Ewer joined the Herald management committee as a representative of Liberal MP Baron de Forest, his employer and a significant backer, and was to have an immensely long career as Foreign Editor. Mellor, in Slocombe's words, "a tall, black, grim young man" and in those of Margaret Cole "forceful personality, commanding if not always wise" was with GDH Cole the main intellectual proponent of Guild Socialism and would serve as Industrial Editor, Assistant Editor and from 1926 Editor.(11)

While less pertinent to the Herald's political progress, boxing writer Jimmy Butler was also a long-term survivor. His experiences included refereeing an office punch-up while his contributions as "Pollux" injected expertise and enthusiasm into otherwise perfunctory sports pages.(12)
Consistency was never a strong point in the editorial line of a paper run by such strong, politically committed personalities. In the early days this might be put down to the frequent changes of editor, but with Lansbury providing stability in the chair, little changed. Lansbury recalled: “Our apparent inconsistency was due to the fact that I, as editor and director, insisted on giving the very fullest freedom of expression to all our paid and unpaid contributors, and allowed all sides of our movement to state our case...I...still firmly hold the view that it is always better to allow people to say what they think than to pay them to say what you think”.(13)

But even if the precise policies advocated varied, the Herald achieved a distinct consistency of tone. Raymond Postgate comments: “It printed anything that the libel laws would permit (and at least five times what they would not). To get into its columns a writer had only to be a rebel; he had to be an enemy of the existing capitalist system, and what he was in favour of mattered less”. Ewer recalled: “It lambasted with cheerful impartiality Tory employers, the Liberal Government and the official leaders of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress”.(14)

Women’s suffrage - an issue of such concern to Lansbury that he was to sacrifice his seat in Parliament and go to jail for it, Irish Home Rule and a range of other causes were encouraged. But industrial and political coverage provided the most distinctive features. Lansbury, Postgate and Slocombe all agree that the Herald's ferocity peaked during the editorship of Charles Lapworth, subsequently the first British director of film concern Metro Goldwyn, when it was said that “The Daily Herald contains the noblest aspirations and the basest adjectives in the English language”.(15)

During this period the Herald's invective was trained not only on political enemies, but nominal allies. Postgate notes: “Lapworth and his colleagues were not content to attack the system, but denounced everyone who compromised with it”. These included moderate leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden who came under bitter personal attack - one assault drew a public rebuke from Lansbury and left a residue of distrust between him and Lapworth.(16)
CHAPTER TWO: Prehistory 1912 to 1921

Rejection of MacDonald's moderate parliamentarism was summed up in a headline referring to "The House of Pretence". The Herald's priorities were seen in an industrial headline "The war that really matters". Lapworth's editorship saw the famous "Hurrah for the Rebels" issue of 20th September 1913, lauding unofficial strikers, vigorous support for the bitterly-fought Dublin strikes led by James Larkin and advocacy of syndicalism - a theory rejecting Parliamentarism and calling for a "social general strike" to bring organised labour to power in place of capitalism. (17)

It carried this rejection of leadership moderation to the extent of forming its own activist organisation, the Herald League, set up as a fundraising, political education and propagandising group which ran unofficial Labour candidates at a number of by-elections where official Labour had declined to stand. (18)

But Lapworth's spell in charge ended when Lansbury, by now the dominant figure in the paper, concluded that his violence of opinion and expression made him too much of a risk as editor. He dismissed Lapworth and took over himself. Slocombe recalled: "The paper lost some of its fighting quality. It became less mordant, less cynical, less irreverent in the famous style of 'the Sydney Bulletin and more sentimental". (19)

But if the "good old gospel of hate" was diluted, the underlying policy remained the same. At any point before 1914 Lansbury's comments that "It could with truth be said of us that wherever a strike took place there we were in the midst" and "The policy of the paper was not merely unofficial, it was avowedly anti-official" held true. This viewpoint had its consequence in the headline "Agreements Made Under Coercion Are Never Morally Binding", run in the aftermath of London builders and busmen's strikes, and a predictable estrangement from many of the moderate trade union leaders who had backed the Herald at the start - when the Board had included CW Bowerman, the ultra-respectable Secretary of the TUC. (20)
The Herald's view was consistently counter-cultural - seeing Labour as an outsider, rebel force opposed to the dominant forces in British society. But this was not the only, or even the dominant, view within the movement. And the insider, conformist, integrationist view found its voice in the official Daily Citizen, started in October 1912. In theory it was the voice of the Independent Labour Party, the Labour Party and the moderate trade union leaders. In practice the ILP, the most radical element in the coalition, was marginalised once Keir Hardie had withdrawn his backing and it was, in the words of its historian "An official organ of the Parliamentary Labour Party financed by the Trade Unions". (21)

As such it offered a model of the Labour daily rather more palatable to moderate officialdom - and a warning of what might happen to the Herald should it ever fall into official hands. It did share some of the Herald's financial problems - while its initial capitalisation was not quite so ludicrously inadequate, the #85,000 it raised was still well short of its #150,000 target and it was always undercapitalised. (22)

But unlike the independent, anarchic Herald it was controlled, conformist and orthodox. As Arthur Marwick has said: "An official paper tends to stolid conformity, the unofficial becomes a freebooter exultantly firing off the fratricidal salvoes which are a special joy of the British Left". (23)

Where the Herald was run by activists, the Citizen recruited professional journalists - editor Frank Dilnot and news editor Stanley Bishop both came from the Daily Mail and first issue messages wishing it lucks came from press baron Lord Northcliffe and Daily Chronicle editor Robert Donald. Bob Holton points to a desire "to model the Citizen as far as possible upon existing mass-circulation dailies". (24)

While the Herald's voice was that of the militant activist, the Citizen spoke for the moderate centre. Holton says: "In practice the presentation of representative "voices" in the paper was severely restricted to orthodox opinion centred on Labour Party pragmatism...Editorial initiative was narrowly based and came from above. It was geared to the incorporation of Labour unrest into conciliatory forms of protest and pressure, harmonising relations between labour and capital, and re-directing energies towards the Parliamentary area". (25)
This emphasis was reflected in the decision to launch at the start of the parliamentary session, with company secretary Clifford Allen arguing "Interest in politics and everything serious lags during the summer months" - this in spite of unrest involving miners and transport workers in the months up to the launch. And while the Herald was cheering unofficial strikers, Holton records that in the Citizen: "At all times the authority of union leaders was upheld over unofficial or spontaneous outbreaks of rank-and-file discontent". (26)

The difference between the two was epitomised by their networks of supporters’ groups in the country. Where the Herald League was a counter-cultural expression of the paper’s view of its reader as an activist with a part to play in forming and changing policy - involved in campaigning, discussion and propaganda - the Citizen’s circulation committees expressed a passive follower role, run by local Labour organisations purely as a means of increasing sales and with no element of debate. (27)

The Herald cheerfully satirised its staid contemporary as the "Daily Gamp". But competition was short-lived, as the First World War hit both very hard. And the Citizen, founded upon orthodox political, journalistic and business assumptions, was the one that failed to survive, appearing for the last time on June 5th 1915. Labour Party secretary Arthur Henderson pronounced an epitaph horribly recognisable to subsequent Herald fundraisers: "If resolutions could have saved the Daily Citizen, it would have had a long life. So far as the National Committees of the movement are concerned, I think every practical step has been taken to ensure that continuance of the paper. The plain, blunt fact is that the Labour Movement does not want a daily newspaper and is not prepared to regard such a weapon as necessary in the Labour fight". (28)

The Herald, used to living on its wits and enthusiasm, was better adapted to the extraordinary circumstances of war. Recognising that it could not survive as a daily, it went weekly from September 1914 and prospered, first as the main anti-war paper and from 1917 as an enthusiastic proponent of the Russian Revolution. "Financially it was our easiest time. We were very successful as a weekly, and although we did not actually pay our way, the losses were manageable and fairly easy to meet", Lansbury recorded. (29)
A conventional commercial organ might have concluded that it was on to a good thing, and stayed as a weekly when the war ended. But financial considerations were purely a means to an end for the Herald and frequent promises that it would return to daily issue were redeemed on 31st March 1919. Optimism was an essential Herald quality, but it seemed particularly well-founded as it relaunched as a daily. Its sales campaign, identifying it with the intellectual as much as the political avant garde, was based on the "Soaring to Success" poster by the vorticist MacKnight Kauffer.(30)

Sales, reflecting a persistent tendency to rise in times of political or industrial excitement, had been 200,000 at the relaunch but rapidly passed 300,000 and topped 400,000 during the 1919 Rail Strike. Lansbury wrote to Ernest Bevin, currently leader of the Dockers Union and soon to be General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers, that "We were quite unable to cope with the huge demands made upon us and there seems no limit to the power and usefulness of the paper". But to achieve its purposes the Herald, still exclusively London-based, must be able to print in a northern centre. Thus one of the dominant themes of the 1920s was introduced. Bevin was clearly convinced, and wrote in the Herald that a one million circulation was possible within a year if it were given the right machinery - which would include a Northern Edition. (31)

But how was the Herald to raise the sums required - estimated at around £400,000?

Lansbury's pre-war backers had been good for a few thousand, but were unlikely to be able to manage sums on this scale. With sales rising it might have been argued that he had a commercial proposition on his hands and that sale to or partnership with a commercial publisher would solve the problem.

There were undoubtedly offers - Williams and Bevin told the TUC Parliamentary committee of several, but Lansbury recalled "Our one answer to everybody was that the Daily Herald would never pass voluntarily from our control except as it now passed to the Labour Movement. We would prefer the paper die a glorious death rather than see it become the property of the Liberal Party, masquerading as friends of Labour".(32)
The only remaining means by which such sums of the money could be raised was mobilising the organised movement. Lansbury said: "We knew that our fate as an independent paper was settled". One option would have been to go to the TUC and the Labour Party and ask them to become officially responsible for the paper. Lansbury subsequently conceded that it was a mistake not to do so, but argued that there was no guarantee that they would have been willing to take on the responsibility in 1920 - although the Labour conference of that year passed unopposed a resolution from Chorley divisional party calling for a movement takeover. (33)

Instead they accepted a partial loss of independence by mobilising a trade union committee - among whom Bevin, Williams, Henderson and textile workers leader Ben Turner would have important Herald roles throughout the 1920s and JH Thomas of the Railwaymen was choosing to forget a libel action in 1914 - to spearhead the appeal for a debenture issue. This was aimed only at institutions, with the debentures offered in minimum blocks of £500. They hoped for £400,000 - and got around £100,000 of which more than £42,000 was subscribed by the Miners Federation of Great Britain. This was not enough to fund any real development, but the principle of movement-wide involvement in the Herald had been established. (34)

Lansbury continued as editor, with man of letters and former academic Gerald Gould - a financial backer and contributor before the war - installed as Associate Editor. Decision-making structures remained as before. Lansbury recorded: "We decided to continue on the same lines as before: editing and management should be co-operative, always leaving me, as editor, the last word in case of disagreement. We were a very lively band indeed. Our discussions, which at times were prolonged and heated, were, I think, viewed with dismay by experienced newspaper friends like Norman Angell, who occasionally came along to see us". (35)

There are indications that whatever formal titles said, Gould was in charge from day to day. Literary staff member SK Ratcliffe's recall a decade later of having been recruited by "editor Gerald Gould" might be dismissed as a slip of the memory were it not for the fact that in reply to a complaint Miners Federation secretary (and Herald director) Frank Hodges about a leaked document in March 1921 Lansbury explained: "It just happens that I personally made the decision in the matter, as Gould has been away for the last week". The implication that Gould had the responsibilities if not the title of editor is a strong one. (36)
A fresh influx of recruits, several of whom remained through the 1920s, reinforced the veterans of the prewar days. Parliamentary correspondent SV Bracher, literary sub-editor Arnold Dawson and industrial correspondent Vivian Brodsky were to be mainstays of the Herald for the next decade. With European events demanding greater attention than before 1914 a strong team of foreign correspondents was assembled - Vernon Bartlett wrote from Paris, former Manchester Guardian correspondent Morgan Phillips Price from Berlin and the gifted Noel Brailsford from Central and Eastern Europe. (37)

Gould's literary connections reinforced the Herald's relationship with the intellectual and literary left. Siegfried Sassoon was literary editor for a while. Other writers and reviewers included Havelock Ellis, Israel Zangwill, Alec Waugh, Rebecca West, EM Forster, Robert Graves and Osbert Sitwell - who contributed a memorable leader in verse when War Minister Winston Churchill ordered the burning of copies of the Herald. (38)

The spirit of Lapworth and Dyson had to some extent departed from the Herald. It was still trenchant in criticisms of the existing order, but given its new sources of funding it was hardly in a position, even had it been so inclined, to continue as the scourge of moderate officialdom. Lansbury said: "Both the policy and expression of policy was much more moderate than in the daye preceding August 1914....The Movement during the war had been very largely divided as to support of the Government in the stormy years from 1914 to 1918 and it was felt that if both sides sat down and indulged in recriminations, only the possessing classes would triumph". (39)

Even so it was enough, in the rather fevered political atmosphere that followed the war and the Russian Revolution, to strike fear into many of Britain's rulers. Herald reporter Evelyn Sharp recalled that "These were the days when universal revolution seemed more imminent events than subsequent events proved it to be in this country". Christopher Andrew, historian of Britain's secret services, records the government view that "Men who would subsidize the Daily Herald were in their view men who would stop at nothing" and points to considerable surveillance of the paper. (40)
And, even if it lacked its pre-1914 savagery, the Herald was still unequivocally of the left. Where syndicalism had spearheaded the Herald’s intellectual challenge before the war, the doctrine of “direct action” - the use of union power for political ends, dominated after 1919. Miners leader Robert Smillie said the moderate Labour Party executive “feared more than anything else what had come to be seen as direct action”, while Maurice Cowling has said that it “Would have left little mark without the part played by the Daily Herald in systematising its insights and publicising its intentions. Under Lansbury, Ewer, Brailsford, Meynell, Williams and Mellor...it presented a fundamental challenge”. (41)

One consequence was Herald enthusiasm for the police strikes of 1918 and 1919, with Lansbury was the one major Labour politician to give support. But the historians of the strikes call the misleadingly bullish reporting of the 1919 dispute “The least admirable chapter in the long and often gallant story of the Daily Herald”. And in spite of a high-point when the dockers blocked the loading of arms intended for use against Russia in May 1920 - some historians suggest even this was more to do with war-weariness than class solidarity - direct action fizzled out in 1921 with the failure of the “Triple Alliance” of miners, railwaymen and transport workers. (42)

“Black Friday”, the day in April 1921 when the miners allies refused to support them, also marked a turning point for the Herald. Raymond Postgate argues that it marks the effective end of independent policy in the paper, defeat depriving it of the distinctive element in its political and industrial analysis. On Cowling’s reading its ultimate political achievement was essentially negative - that of frightening Britain’s rulers so much that they were galvanised into effective anti-Labour action. (43)

Gerald Gould’s leader on Black Friday supports Postgate’s analysis by reading like a valediction on the Herald’s days of rebellion: “Yesterday was the heaviest defeat that has befallen the Labour Movement within the memory of man. It is no use trying to minimise it. It is no use pretending that it is other than it is. We on this paper have said throughout that if the organised workers stood together they would win. They have not stood together and they have reaped the reward”. The leader went on to state “What we need is a new machinery and a new spirit. The old machinery has frankly, in the hour of emergency, failed”. (44)
Gould's tone may also have owed something to knowledge of the Herald's finances, where it was fast becoming a victim of its own circulation success. Sales were certified at 329,869 in October 1920. This was well above any level recorded before 1914, and respectable by national daily standards - in 1921 the Daily News was selling 300,000, the Express 579,000 and the Daily Chronicle 661,000. Lansbury recorded: "By the calculations of 1918 330,000 sales should have established it comfortably".(45)

But unlike the News, Chronicle or Express the Herald could not make the standard newspaper calculation that increased sales will lead to increased advertising income. Take away that assumption and the only commercial consequence of higher sales is increased production costs - a serious consideration in the immediate postwar years with the price of newsprint in 1920-1 six times what it had been in 1914 and distribution costs, on Lord Beaverbrook's reckoning, three to four times what they had been before the war.(46)

There is little doubt that the Herald's inability to attract advertising had political roots. Postgate records that in October 1920 Advertising World admitted that there was a political boycott of the paper and advertising manager Poyser had no doubt: "The only reason that the Daily Herald has not received its share of advertisement business is because advertisers have allowed political prejudice to influence their judgment". His view was supported by a letter to Newspaper World quoting "a well-known man of business" saying: "If you can prove to me that the Daily Herald would produce more orders than any other paper, and at a lower cost even, I would not give them an advertisement, because they support a policy intended to bring about the downfall of independent businessmen such as myself".(47)

Thus the higher the Herald's sales went, the closer financial disaster came. Extra sales may have meant increased political influence, but they posed a fresh threat to the paper's independence as losses reached unprecedented levels - running at #1,400 to #2,400 per week by November 1919 and amounting to #113,661 in 1920.(48)
With fresh financial assistance desperately needed Herald director Francis Meynell, acting on his own initiative, met Soviet representative Maxim Litvinov and secured a #75,000 subsidy which he carried to Britain in the form of uncut diamonds. There were, both Meynell and Postgate said, no strings attached. The Bolsheviks merely wished to support a rare friendly voice in the overseas press. But the offer came when the Herald was already under ferocious fire from other papers for alleged secret foreign funding - assaults which led Lansbury to publish a complete list of debenture and shareholders in August.(49)

Realising that news was leaking, the Herald led its issue of 10th September 1920 with the question "Shall we accept #75,000 of Russian money". Appended was the comment that there were no objections as internationalists to accepting the offer, but the propriety of taking money from so devastated a country was in doubt. Postgate reports that the readers were in favour of acceptance - but the directors, debenture holders and staff against. Meynell points in particular to the unanimous opposition of his fellow-directors. The offer was rejected, Meynell left the board, and the rest of the British press - happy to see their accusations given weighty supporting evidence, enjoyed themselves hugely at the expense of the Herald's apparent complicity in a red plot.(50)

There was now no escape from the financial necessity of increasing the Herald's price from 1d to 2d, a decision that was made in October 1920. It was this, Ewer recalled a quarter of a century later, that led Lord Northcliffe to call the Herald 'The Miracle of Fleet Street' for retaining its circulation after the price rise. Northcliffe did say: "I thought I knew everything there was to know about the newspaper business, but these fellows have something I do not understand", but the Herald's circulation did not remain intact - instead it dropped by more than a third in eleven months to 210,512 in early September 1921. Northcliffe's reasoning may have been, as Ewer concluded, that "If he had raised the price of the Mail to twopence, it would have died in a week", but with losses at around #1,000 per week and sales dropping rapidly the Herald's fate looked likely to differ only in speed.(51)
The trade paper Newspaper World commented: "At twopence per issue the Daily Herald, suffers naturally by comparison with some of its contemporaries - I might add almost all of them. The other dailies so priced give a larger sheet and more pages and it is a difficult proposition for the industrial classes who buy the Herald to pay to double the price asked by contemporaries. This, in effect, is what has happened since the time when, owing to financial crisis, the Herald raised the charge from a penny to twopence" (52)

The loss in sales - which continued to 185,889 in November 1921 - was not acceptable to a paper whose basic purpose was political proselytisation. A return to a penny was essential. But the financially-straitened Herald would have to find extra income to bridge the gap until sales rose to cut losses - it was reckoned that £100,000 would be needed to bring the paper to a self-sustaining circulation of 500,000 - an aspiration that was to echo unattainably throughout the 1920s (53).

There was only one place left to go - to its loyal supporters. On 6th September the Board voted to go back to a penny, with the move financed by a new debenture issue at £5 and £1 to attract individual supporters. The campaign was launched by RB Walker of the Agricultural Workers, chairman of the TUC, striking a note of exasperation with the reading preferences of trade unionists that was to recur as often as the cry for a half million sale. He said: "I am amazed when I reflect on the success of Labour papers abroad and watch the struggles of our own. Is it that Labour people in other countries have grit, enthusiasm and loyalty which we lack? If so, the sooner we get some 'vim' among the Daily Herald readers the better" (54).

This hardly seems fair to the Herald's readers - the problem was not with them, but with the several million trade unionists who opted for alternative newspapers. But the belief that the workers owed them a living was a standard theme in Herald propaganda - expressed again by Lansbury in November: "People often say to me 'You are always begging for the Daily Herald'. That is true, but the trouble is you never give what we asked for in the first place. We asked for £400,000 in order to develop the paper, and you gave us less than £200,000. Had we got what we asked for at the start we would not be begging today" (55).
He was to be disappointed again. For all his celebration of the Herald's relationship with its readership, saying - "Since we made our appeal you have sent in, mainly in sums of #1, a total of #8,000. What capitalist newspaper could raise that amount from its readers, not one!" - in the first issue of 1922 the brutal fact remained that #8,000 was not remotely enough to achieve the Herald's objectives.(56)

Lansbury wanted to keep the Herald independent, arguing that "Movements such as this need the stimulus which independent thought and expression alone can give. Officialdom always dries up initiative and expression". But independence was reliant on commercial viability, and its loss the price of commercial failure. Lansbury was to say: "It is the money question, and the money question alone which had placed the Daily Herald under the control of the Labour movement", and the scale of losses in the years immediately after the First World War meant that movement control was now the only conceivable hope of survival.(57)END


5. Rowland Kenney - Westering - Dent 1939 p 175.


13. Lansbury - My Life op cit p 176


18. Lansbury - Miracle op cit p 34

19. Ibid p 35. Slocombe op cit p 36


22. Ibid p 21-3.


25. Holton loc cit p 361.

26. Ibid p 362-3

27. Ichikawa op cit p 30. Harding loc cit p 91-2

28. Postgate - Analysis 1912 p 13. Henderson to Clifford Allen 11.6.15, quoted in : Martin Gilbert - Plough My Own Furrow, the story of Lord Allen of Hurtwood as told through his writings and correspondence - Longman 1965 p 33


31. Circular from DH Trade Union Committee to Executive Officers and members of the Trade Union Movement 29.11.19 LPDH 1 EBDH 5. Lansbury to Bevin 5.11.19 EBDH 5. Ernest Bevin - "The Written Word: Ways and Means" - manuscript of article for DH n.d. EBDH 1


33. Lansbury - Miracle op cit p 18. LPRAC 1920 p 175


36. WPN 1.8.29. Lansbury to Hodges 11.3.21 - Miners Federation of Great Britain, Annual Volume of Proceedings 1921. Executive minutes 17.3.21 item no 4, p 137

37. Postgate - Lansbury op cit p 188. WPN 5.9, 14.11.29 Labour Who's Who 1927 p 24
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38. Lansbury - Miracle op cit p 121-6. Postgate - Lansbury op cit p 187
39. Lansbury - Miracle op cit p 65-6
   Bill Schwarz - Constitutionalism and Extra-Parliamentary Action - Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham occasional paper no 75 1984 p 55
43. Postgate - Analysis op cit 1919-23 p 2. Cowling op cit p 30-44
44. DH 16.4.20 Lansbury - Miracle op cit p 67-9
45. Lansbury - My Life op cit p 211. Circular from DH TU Committee 29.11.19
46. NW 18.3.22
47. Postgate - Analysis op cit 1919-23 p 5. NW 23.9.22
48. Lansbury - My Life op cit p 211
   Postgate - Lansbury op cit p 212
51. Ewer - Miracle op cit. DH Board statement 6.9.21 LP DH 17
52. NW 22.10.21
53. DH Board 6.9.21 loc cit
54. Ibid. DH 17.10.21
55. DH 19.11.21
56. DH 2.1.22 Lansbury - Miracle op cit p 2-3
57. Ibid p 162
ENDS