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

Thesis

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Constriction, Conformity and Control: The Taming of the Daily Herald 1921-30
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Section Two
The Herald may have been a new paper with spectacular modernist posters, but in its competitive context it was rather old-fashioned. Examining the national press during the interwar years Colin Seymour-Ure points to a change from the late Victorian set-up "highly political and linked financially to the party system" to the twentieth century popular press "broader in its range and based on the market economy". The Economist could say in 1928 "With a few notable exceptions the British press no longer consists of "organs of opinion". (1)

Priorities had changed. Where the old style of paper pursued influence among the political elite, the new aimed for financial success through sales and advertising. The difference was epitomised in an exchange between JA Spender - editor of the Westminster Gazette, the archetypal small-scale political paper - and a mass-circulation proprietor. When Spender asked the press baron to justify his policy he replied by pointing to increased sales since it had been introduced. Spender recalled "I found it impossible to persuade him that there was any gap in his reasoning". (2)

The catalyst for the new style was the Daily Mail, founded in 1896 by Lord Northcliffe. Its content reflected its pursuit of a wider audience. Historian Collingwood noted with distaste that it Mail was "the first English newspaper for which the word 'news' lost its old meaning of facts which a reader ought to know if he was to vote intelligently". Success won it imitators, and in Le Mahieu's words: "Journalism divorced itself from prevailing notions of historical significance. News no longer concentrated exclusively on the public lives of powerful elites. The everyday life of the common man acquired more importance". (3)

The old style retained its adherents - Garvin of the Observer commented that "I mean to give the public what they don't want", and found a new centre of power in the BBC under director-general John Reith who believed that "The best way to give the public what it wants is to reject the explicit policy of giving the public what it wants" and employed senior officials who said: "Every man wants in his heart to be a highbrow". These assumptions were shared by Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald who told Reith: "Keep up the standard of your service. Do not play down. Remember that the great mass of our people really want good things". (4)
CHAPTER THREE: COMPETITION - THE PRESS IN THE 1920s Page Twenty Eight

The Herald may have been a new paper with spectacular modernist posters, but in its competitive context it was rather old-fashioned. Examining the national press during the interwar years Colin Seymour-Ure points to a change from the late Victorian set-up "highly political and linked financially to the party system" to the twentieth century popular press "broader in its range and based on the market economy". The Economist could say in 1928 "With a few notable exceptions the British press no longer consists of "organs of opinion".(1)

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The Herald found itself uneasily suspended between the two types. Its content was much more of Reith or Spender's world than Northcliffe's. But in pursuing a mass circulation its competition came from the practitioners of the new formula - the Mail, Express, Chronicle and News. None was apolitical - the Chronicle was controlled by Lloyd George from 1918 to 1928 - but their priorities were commercial rather than political.

With rare exceptions like Snowden and Clifford Allen Labour observers failed to understand these priorities and continued to see the Herald's rivals in a purely political context. References to the "Dope Press" dot the Herald throughout the 1920s and a briefing compiled for Ernest Bevin in 1920 spoke of "largely a subsidised press, prefers to lose money on its newspapers in order to fight the Labour Movement".

This incomprehension was signalled by the contemptuous anger with which movement leaders regarded working people who chose such papers. Carpenters and Joiners leader Alex Cameron, chairman of the Labour Executive spoke for this tendency in 1920 in a debate on the Herald.

He said: "If the Daily Herald was being offered to the Harmsworth Brothers tomorrow they would jump at it and they would run the Daily Herald and they would make money out of it, and I am afraid it matters not what kind of stuff they issue, the working class of the country would buy it so long as it was issued by the Harmsworth Brothers".

They were right to be worried - Michael Kinnear comments that the papers controlled by Rothermere (Mail, Mirror) and Beaverbrook (Express) were "especially influential as they blended political information with slickness to a remarkable degree". But in their concentration on politics, Labour analysts missed the essential appeal of the new style of paper. Le Mahieu notes that the Mail and Express were "rarely speaking from on high", but communicated at their readers' levels. "What does the public want? As a rule it wants emotions", mused former Times editor Wickham Steed. Le Mahieu says: "The hyperbolic, the emotive and the 'sensational' - all were elements of private conversation which the popular press adopted as a means to engage a wider public in familiar, personal terms".
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The crucial weapon in their armoury was the human interest story, which says Le Mahieu "engaged their readers because they drew upon the emotions of private life". The success of this was demonstrated by research in the 1930s showing that where political stories appealed to only a section of the national audience, heavily skewed to men and the higher social classes, human interest stories had uniformly high appeal across the entire population. Subsequent studies have produced similar results, and there is no reason to suppose that findings in the 1920s, had such research been conducted then, would have been any different.(9)

Accompanying the shift away from concentration on high politics was a diversification in coverage. Looking at developments over a decade, the Newspaper Press Directory for 1929 declared: "A large part of the paper is devoted to every form of sport, space is given to the affairs of the Empire, to news from other countries, finance, literature and art, to travel and discovery, science, medicine, hygiene and religion. The gradual introduction of the serial, the short story, the Puzzle Page, the Gossip Page and the Women's Page has greatly extended the range of the newspaper public; and now practically every page has its daily or weekly "Children's Corner", devoted to the interests of the smallest readers of all".(10)

But Labour views continued to be suffused with improving Reithian assumptions, regarding a human interest-driven agenda at best as trivial and at worst a deliberate diversion from more important issues. Hamilton Fyfe commented acidly that the 1930s Express "never bored its readers by assuming that they had minds" while Bevin in 1919 provided a magnificent exposition of Reithianism: "We may be certain that there is such a growing working-class consciousness that a large clientele is awaiting serious literature. Labour's press must be a real educational factor, provoking thought and stimulating ideas. In addition it must not be full of the caprices of princes, the lubricities of courts and the sensationalism produced by display of the sordid. All these things are but passing phases and are the products of an evil system which is rotten at the base".(11)
And this disdain was reflected in the balance of Herald coverage, where it attempted to capture a mass readership content more characteristic of a serious newspaper. In 1927 73 per cent of its news space was devoted to home news - compared to 55 per cent in the Express, 45 per cent in the Mail and 49 per cent in the News. The total of 31 per cent devoted to political, social and economic news was higher not only than the Express, News (both 20 per cent) or Mail (12 per cent) but the heavies - the Times (25 per cent) and Telegraph (23 per cent).(12)

Technique as well as content changed. RD Blumenfeld, editor of the Express from 1904 to 1932 called for “Simplicity, accuracy, conciseness and purity of style”, expressed in sentences that were “short, sharp and clear-cut”, using “short words in preference to long ones” and “emphatic words like must and will”. Headlines were equally important. Blumenfeld introduced the streamer - running across more than one column, but less than a full page - and encouraged headlines that ran for five or six banks, telling much of the story in a series of crisp, telegraphic messages.(13)

Le Mahieu says: “Headlines functioned in the popular press as both a summary and an invitation to what lay below... The headlines of the Daily Express sought to draw the reader into the drama of these events whereas the Times self-consciously distanced itself from any emotive reactions. Moreover, by conveying the story in the suggestive shorthand of a telegram, the Daily Express allowed the reader to grasp the story in a few seconds”.(14)

The pursuit of sales took on a snowball quality in the 1920s - one estimate puts the increase in the sale of London morning papers between 1920 and 1925 at around 40 per cent - from 5.3 million to 7.4 million. Raymond Williams argued that this was the period in which national dailies first penetrated the mass of the working class (15).
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This growth was accompanied by increasing sophisticated and expensive sales promotion. Ernest Bevin told the 1928 TUC: "No one, I think... could have foreseen the tremendous development of the publicity side of the press that has taken place in the last eight years".

Central to this development was the reader insurance scheme, backed by intensive canvassing. Accident insurance had a ready appeal for working-class readers before comprehensive national insurance, and was initially introduced as a means of stabilising sales by tying readers to a single paper. Seymour-Ure credits the idea to the Daily Chronicle, in 1915 offering readers insurance against spectacular and frightening, but largely innocuous German Zeppelin raids.(16)

But by the early 1920s insurance was being aggressively as a means of increasing sales. PG Wodehouse was indulging only mildly in humourist's license in 1924 when he wrote of: "Every daily paper in London competing madly against its rivals in the matter of insurance and offering princely bribes to the citizens to make a fortune by breaking their necks" (17).

It was not invariably popular. Journalists like to believe that sales can be attributed to their own efforts and prefer that extra expenditure should be on editorial budgets - a speaker at the 1923 Annual Delegate Meeting of the National Union of Journalists satirised gory coverage of accidents leading to insurance payouts by suggesting the creation of a paper called the Death's Head Gazette to cover such news.(18)

The columns of Newspaper World were full of expressions of scepticism - one report saying: "The almost frenzied pace at which insurance claims are being paid by London newspapers gives rise to the query as to how long this form of attraction for readers will last", while another looked forward to their abolition under the heading "Insurance - who will be the first to cry "Halt"?". But the amateur seers were wrong. The $100,000 paid out by the end of August 1922 by the Mail inaugurated a decade of ever-mounting insurance competition - by 1928 it had paid out around $1 million.(19)
The success of insurance was confirmed by sales figures. The Daily News rose from 336,609 in October 1921 to 635,934 in November 1922. The Mail, selling 1,295,807 in February 1921, reached 1,532,709 by the end of the following January and was brandishing a sales certificate for 1,817,947 by mid-July. The Express, entering on a decade of steady progress that would make it the first serious challenger to the Mail's generation-old sales primacy, was up 200,000 to 825,000 in the four months to June 1922 and topped a million in August, shortly after the Chronicle. (20)

The financially-limited Herald's disadvantage in promotions paled into insignificance compared to its advertising problems. Difficulties of overt political bias were compounded by implicit political and social bias in the conventional wisdom of the advertising industry. It was not listed in Newspaper World's monthly "space barometer" and subjective analysis still held sway in the industry. A standard text asserted "You cannot afford to place your advertisement in a paper which is solely read by the down at heels who buy it to scan the 'Situations Vacant' column. Just in case it wasn't clear who was meant, it added: "The Socialist press has a following of people who cannot persuade the world to share its wealth with them" (21)

Industry leader Thomas Russell commented that the sobriety of the Times induced readers to order goods through tradesman, while the Daily Mail's vivacity was good for direct mail order: "When he reads the Daily Mail he is in a "Daily Mail" frame of mind - rather eager, rather excitable, rather energetic, not so dignified and formal". The Mail's promotional material stressed "fearless advocacy of every measure and movement likely to be of benefit to British common enterprise". (22)

Russell's psychological nostrums were typical of a world where where conventional advertising analysis was dominated by such subjective elements as 'atmosphere', 'force of impression', 'pulling power', 'Confidence factor'. A paper that encouraged readers to besiege local Boards of Guardians could hardly be regarded as a promising medium. (23)
Chapter Three: Competition - The Press in the 1920s Page Thirty Four

More objective criteria arrived on the scene in the mid 1920s with more sophisticated research and the replacement of 'wealth' by 'disposable income' as the key concept and a 1928 survey was to show that the Herald had a previously unsuspected lower middle-class readership. Until then, for all Poyser's efforts and protestations that the remarkable loyalty of Herald readers "Has been extended to advertisers using its columns, as many unsolicited testimonials received from them in the past have shown", conventional wisdom would continue to reinforce rather than question prejudice.(24)

How to deal with these problems was an issue that would now fall to the lot of the organised Labour movement.

ENDS
CHAPTER THREE (p 28-34)

1. The Economist 3.11.28. Seymour-Ure - Press and Party loc cit p 232
2. Seymour-Ure - Press and Party loc cit p 232
3. Le Mahieu op cit p 23,111
4. Ibid p 18,145-50
5. Seymour-Ure - Press and Party loc cit p 240-1
6. Briefing for Bevin for 1920 TUC loc cit
7. Northern Edition Conference, Downing Street Cooperative Hall, Manchester
   6.11.20. Transcript of proceedings EBDH15
8. Le Mahieu op cit p 32-33,111
   Economy of the Human Interest Story in (ed) Anthony Smith - Newspapers and
13. Le Mahieu op cit p 27,69
15. N Kaldor and R Silverman - A Statistical Analysis of Advertising
   Expenditure and of the Revenue of the Press - Cambridge 1948 quoted in
   Seymour-Ure - Press and Party loc cit p 236. Raymond Williams - The Long
   Revolution - Pelican 1965 p 27.
17. PG Wodehouse - Ukridge - Herbert Jenkins 1924, Penguin p/back 1964 p 31
18. NW 23.4.22
19. NW 25.3,13.5,22.7,2.9.22. Economist 17.11.28
20. NW 13.8,12.11.21.4.3,24.6,29.7,5.8,16.9,23.12.22
21. James Curran - Advertising As a Patronage System in (ed) H Christian -
   Sociology of Journalism and the Press - Sociological Review Monograph no
   29, University of Keele 1980 p 76
22. Ibid p 75
23. Ibid p 75.
24. Ibid p 76-81. NW 23.9.22
One of the questions the organised Labour Movement had to consider as it contemplated the possibility of taking over the Herald was why it should want a vastly unprofitable newspaper staffed by combative left-wingers. The answer is contained very largely in Ross McKibbin’s comment: "The Herald had one indispensable quality - it was the only paper Labour had got". (1)

This was underlined by Stephen Walsh MP, leader of the Lancashire Miners, at the Miners Federation of Great Britain annual conference in 1922. Walsh was not a natural Herald supporter - he had held office in the wartime coalition while the paper was campaigning against the war, and would be Ramsay MacDonald’s Minister for War in 1924. But as a union leader he recognised its importance: "During the last twelve or eighteen months, a period flooded with probably greater industrial strife than any other period, the Daily Herald has been the only paper that has given anything like a faithful account of the situation. Well, in the near future, we shall want the help of the daily paper in a greater degree than ever before. The political situation, as we all know, is very closely related to the industrial situation and we have no paper at all, except the Daily Herald, that purports to take the side of the workers". (2)

Every time the Herald teetered on the verge of destruction it was to revive this appeal - with a representative, if not definitive plea, appearing on 18th March 1922 when the paper appeared in danger of closing a few months short of achieving the apparent safe haven of official ownership.

* The death of the DAILY HERALD would not mean merely the silencing of Labour’s one voice in the press. It would mean the immediate reverting of the whole of the capitalist Press to an attitude even more hostile to Labour than that which it takes up to-day. God knows, in every dispute the poison gas of lies and false suggestion sent out by the capitalist Press is bad enough: but at any rate the existence of the DAILY HERALD has made this difference to the other newspapers - that now they cannot ignore the facts as they used to.... (3).
Such Labour beliefs were the subject of periodic complaint in the trade journal Newspaper World, while the Newspaper Press Directory for 1921 asserted: "The charge that the great newspapers invariably support the capitalist cause is quite unjust; on the contrary more than one recent strike would have failed ignominiously had it not been for the support of the much-reviled journals". Whether or not Labour complaints were justified is secondary to the fact that conviction that other papers were irretrievably and automatically hostile was decisive in the movement's disposition to support the Herald.

Though the Herald had no rival as the voice of Labour the battle to determine which of many possible Labour voices it should adopt would be the contested fiercely through the 1920s. At the time of its takeover it was the voice of the left-wing activist. But the takeover placed it in the hands of the official leadership of the Labour Party and TUC, dominated by the right. Both bodies developed more sophisticated central organisation and control during the 1920s, and the right used its organisational dominance to marginalise left-wing critics. Control of the Herald, the movement's official voice, would be an important weapon in this battle.

Two partnerships dominated the period. On the political side, David Howell has written, the 1920s were "The decade of the dedicated centralist and rationaliser Arthur Henderson, loyally backed by the National Agent, Egerton Wake". Henderson's organisational talents complemented the charismatic parliamentary leadership of Ramsay MacDonald - his importance summarised in 1929 by Wertheimer: "In the imagination and consciousness of hundreds of thousands his position is beyond party politics...the personification of all thousands of downtrodden men and women hope and dream and desire...he is the focus of the mute hopes of a whole class".

On the industrial side their partnership was replicated after 1925 by the alliance between the brilliant bureaucrat Walter Citrine, TUC General Secretary from 1925, and Ernest Bevin, the immensely forceful creator and general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union.
While disagreements over the war had damaged the Labour Party, war conditions had been good for the unions. Membership rose from 4.145 million (2.682m TUC affiliated) in 1914 to 6.533 million (5.283m TUC) in 1918 and a peak, not to be surpassed until 1946, of 8.438 million (6.418m in TUC unions) in 1920. Disputes also peaked in 1918-20 as unions used their favourable position to push for higher wages, shorter hours and national rather than local agreements. But postwar prosperity ended abruptly in mid 1920, with unemployment rising from 2.7% to 17.9% in the year to June 1921. Disputes were increasingly defensive rather than aimed at higher wages and the collapse of the "Triple Alliance" on "Black Friday" was a shattering blow to confidence.

From then on the unions were on the defensive, their negotiating power limited by mass unemployment, falling wages and deteriorating conditions of work. Membership dropped sharply - back to 6.633m (5.128m TUC affiliated) in 1921, and the decline was not to be arrested until 1933. The General Workers lost 54% of its membership between 1920 and 1923 and was forced into merger with the even harder hit National Amalgamated Union of Labour and the Municipal Employees as the General and Municipal Workers Union.

But as individual unions declined, stronger and more sophisticated central organisation grew. The General Council of the TUC was created as a central body in place of the old Parliamentary Committee in 1920 - whether or not it should be turned into a "General Staff" with wider co-ordinating powers was one of the running debates of the 1920s. Patrick Renshaw has written that the General Council moved into a vacuum left by the Triple Alliance - its purpose "to control militancy rather than lead it".

"Black Friday" shattered faith in the power of direct action as a practical policy. Although "Red Friday" and the government's tactical withdrawal in the face of the miners in 1925 would encourage the illusion, not least in the Herald, that ground lost had been regained, the shattering defeat of the General Strike firmly entrenched a moderate, consensual approach espoused by Citrine and Bevin.
During the same period the Labour Party was in transition from political wing of the unions to a more equal partner with a national constituency. The new party constitution, drafted by the Fabian Sydney Webb, adopted in 1918, gave it a nominally socialist ideology and was accompanied by the introduction of individual parties and divisional parties, both fostered sedulously by Henderson and Wake. (9)

But in the 1918-22 period this development was overshadowed by the weakness of a Parliamentary party shorn of much of its talent - including MacDonald, Snowden and Lansbury - by the massacre of anti-war figures at the 1918 General Election. It was a virtual union monopoly - 50 of 60 MPs were union nominees, 25 from the miners. The leadership consisted of moderate union leaders - Adamson of the Scottish miners led for four years until 1921 and the succession of Clynes of the General Workers, who like many MPs combined parliament with office in his union. Historians such as Michael Kinnear argue that, while numerically stronger than Asquith's Liberals in the opposition to Lloyd George's coalition, Labour were too ineffective to be seen as an alternative government. Kinnear sees Clynes as a "mouthpiece for the unions rather than leader of an independent party". (11)

But by 1929 the acute German analyst Egon Wertheimer could argue that the PLP had an autonomous standing and influence of its own, independent from that of the supporting movement and its electoral machinery. This transformation can be dated from the 1922 election. A much larger non-union group was returned - 54 out of 142 including 19 sponsored by the new local parties. The new party included MacDonald and Snowden, the vocally left-wing Clydesiders and the first significant group of middle-class MPs including Clement Attlee, Sydney Webb and the former Liberal Charles Trevelyan. (12)

MacDonald's defeat of Clynes for the leadership may have depended on Clydesider support, but it consolidated rather than weakening right-wing control of the PLP. Snowden and MacDonald had differed from Thomas, Clynes and Henderson over the war, but in peacetime they had far more in common with each other than they had with the Clydesiders or even less abrasive left-wingers such as Lansbury and Jowett. (13)
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The taming of the Herald and other centres for alternative strategies such as the Labour Research Department were a consequence of the consolidation of their control. Richard Price wrote : "By 1923 the debate over alternative policies and strategies was effectively closed off...the hegemony of political labourism within the party had effectively marginalized those elements which represented a broader political line than that countenanced by the political and trade union leadership" and echoes McKibbin in noting the taming of centres for alternative strategies such as the Labour Research Department and the Herald.(14)

This dominant philosophy was pragmatic, moderate and constitutionalist. Wertheimer, brought up on the Marxist intellectual disciplines of the German Social Democrats, noted that "its main warp and woof are purely ethical. The place which economic determinism holds in the Continental parties is filled by the demand for "justice for all mankind" in the British Labour Party". Labour, he wrote, was free from the Talmudic theoretical debates which bedevilled the continental parties : "Crises in English Socialism arise always from tactics and never from theory".(15)

It was not automatically conservative. Lansbury, described by Harold Laski as "not a very clear head, but with a heart that reaches beyond the stars", was a classical exponent of the radical ethical tradition. But its dominant exponent in this period was MacDonald who drew from his early experience as a research scientist a biologically-based determinism that led him to believe that socialism was the inevitable outcome of economic progress. He was no class warrior. His roots lay in the ILP rather than the unions, and as early as 1905 was arguing that socialism was an ideal above and beyond class.(16)

His desire to broaden Labour's appeal beyond the trade unions was shown in a speech in the Commons in 1912:"We are too fond of imagining that there are two sides only to a dispute...there is the side of capital, there is the side of labour, and there is the side of the general community: and the general community has no business to allow capital and labour, fighting their battles themselves, to elbow them out of contention".(17)
MacDonald's aim was to displace the Liberals as the main alternative to the Conservatives. Strategy was gradualist, ameliorative and ostentatiously non-revolutionary - the acceptance of court dress when he took office in 1924 symbolic of determination to show that Labour was safe - integrated within existing British society rather than a disruptive external threat.

As a style it was, in McKibbin's words, the logical outcome of "a politically independent working-class following the rules of a game learned from their social superiors". Schwarz too points to a strategy of "creating Labour in the image of the Liberals before them and a focussing of energy on "demands for state reforms which limited struggle to a particular and narrow conception of legality".(18)

His strict parliamentarism, eschewing other forms of struggle, followed the integrationist Labour tradition. McKibbin has stated: "Only the most sectarian working man denied that parliament was the repository of the liberties of the people". McGurk of the Miners, speaking as party chairman at the height of direct action's vogue in 1919, had said: "We are either constitutionalist or we are not constitutionalist... it is both unwise and undemocratic because we fail to get a majority at the polls to turn round and demand that we should substitute industrial action".(19)

But integration was not complete. MacIntyre notes that belief in a capitalist conspiracy against Labour spread across the whole movement. Cowling points to Lansbury's postwar Herald's role in building up a view of Liberal and Conservative politicians, the capitalist press and industrialists "agents of Big Business whose business it was to ensure that Cabinet, Parliament and press consecrated capitalism's robbery of the market", but this viewpoint was not confined to the left. Equally strong was the TUC General Council's belief that the Federation of British Industry was conspiring to cut wages and increase the working week.(20)
Nor was the entire movement prepared to accept the world view that dictated the leadership's tactics. The most fundamental challenge came from the Communists. How serious a challenge this really was is a matter of debate - Schwarz and Durham have argued that in the division between Labourism and Communism that emerged between 1918 and 1924 there was no guarantee from the start that Labourism would emerge dominant, while McKibbin's view is that "The Labour Party was not free to choose between Marxism and reformism, but only between varieties of reformism".(21)

But again what is not in doubt is that the Communist challenge was taken seriously. Eric Shaw has demonstrated that it was the driving force behind the development of central managerial and disciplinary powers by the Labour Party during the 1920s. And attitudes to relations with Communists were to be a crucial defining factor in left-right debates during the 1920s - with the Herald's shifting attitudes on the issue a key indicator of the extent of leadership control and its movement along the left-right axis.(22)

Many Communists maintained Labour membership after the foundation of the CPGB in 1920, but were progressively excluded by a series of leadership-sponsored annual conference resolutions. But this was a contentious process. Wertheimer noted that Communist speakers continued to be warmly received at party conferences at the same time as they were voted down heavily. Much of the Labour left, including Lansbury at the 1926 Party Conference, continued to argue that as fellow-supporters of class struggle against capitalism - differentiated from Labour by methods rather than fundamental philosophy - Communists should be tolerated.(23)

The place of Communism within the movement was always equivocal. But nobody could doubt the legitimacy of the Independent Labour Party, focus for the main in-party challenge to the ruling orthodoxy. The introduction of individual Labour Party membership in 1918 left the ILP in an equivocal position, challenging its role as the section for individual socialists within the Labour federation.(24)

As Wertheimer noted, the influence of the ILP during the 1920s, when it could claim sizeable sections of both the parliamentary party and Labour cabinets, was more apparent than real: "In practice it proved that ILP membership was always subservient to Labour Party allegiance whenever the two came into conflict".(25)
The main impetus behind the ILP's critique came from the Scottish members led by James Maxton and John Wheatley, who drew from an underconsumptionist economic analysis based on the ideas of JA Hobson and, in an echo of Poplarism, took from their own experience as interventionists in local government the lesson that socialism could be achieved much more rapidly than the leadership believed.(26)

But they lost rather than gained ground as criticism of the leadership line developed in the years following the fall of MacDonald's 1924 administration. As criticism grew more uncompromising following Maxton's election as ILP chair in 1925, the detachment of the party from Labour's mainstream left and centre grew. The proof of this was not so much in decisions by MacDonald and Snowden, both lifelong members, resign as in the career of former Herald journalist and Poplar councillor John Scurr, MP for Mile End from 1923 to 1932. In 1925 his comment on the first Labour administration was "I do not care a brass farthing if we have a Labour Government or not, if the game is to be played under the present rules". But by 1928 he had joined the exodus from the ILP, and under the 1929-31 administration was to be described as "one of the most loyal of the 'loyalist' MPs".(27)

It could be argued that Scurr's political progress from Poplar rebel to faithful MacDonald backer was a reasonably faithful reflection of that undergone by his former newspaper over the same period.

ENDS
CHAPTER FOUR (p35-42)


3. DH 18.3.22


6. Henry Pelling - *A History of British Trade Unionism* - Pelican 1963 p 262

7. Clegg op cit p 266,274,301,312

8. Clegg op cit p 347-51,460-1. Pelling - op cit p 262


10. McKibbin - Evolution op cit p 91-105,137-150

11. Kinnear - Fall of Lloyd George op cit p 199


15. Wertheimer op cit p 110,134.


17. Schwarz op cit p 26


21. McKibbin - Ideologies op cit p 41. Schwarz and Durham - Safe and Sane loc cit p 141
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24. Wertheimer op cit p 13

25. Wertheimer op cit p 15. William Knox - 'Ours is not an ordinary Parliamentary movement I' in McKinlay and Morris - ILP op cit p 162

26. RJ Morris - The ILP 1893-1932 in McKinlay and Morris op cit p 14


END
The physical conditions in which Scurr and his fellow journalists worked for the Herald in the early 1920s were as cramped as their financial circumstances. Francis Williams, subsequently editor from 1937 to 1940, but then an aspirant freelance, remembered: "Its offices were up a flight of stairs in Carmelite Street, not many yards away from the great mass of the Daily Mail building and its reporters room a tiny den hardly enough for half a dozen people". Francis Meynell recorded that female staff worked separately in a room known as "The Convent" (1).

Precise details of the staff are not available for the 1921-2 period - but in late 1923, when some small expansion may have taken place, there was an editorial pay-roll of 35 including a news editor, five reporters and a dozen sub-editors (2).

The paper they produced, like all publications, was subject to a gap between aspiration and practice. The production of newspapers is a complex process carried out under consistent pressure from deadlines - their composition the consequence of dozens of marginal decisions made in haste.

In consequence any collective image has ragged edges. Modern tabloid techniques may allow production by a handful of staff, allowing in theory for the imposition of a common outlook and style. But this was impossible in the 1920s, even for a paper whose outlook was as definite as the Herald's, crammed as it was with news items and comment from a range of sources including the news agencies who served the entire British press.

Any image is further clouded by Lansbury's desire to encourage debate and the expression of opinion - one which a staff with strong political motivation and in many cases powerful intellect would inevitably use to express personal opinions.

Even so a strong and reasonably consistent voice is discernible in its last year of independence. If one of the preconditions for a successful newspaper is a strong editorial identity the Herald certainly fulfilled the requirement. It can be debated whether it was the right strong editorial identity - but that there was one is unquestionable.
i. Presentation and Structure

The Herald was a small, crowded paper that regarded content as more important than presentation and aimed to cram as much news as possible into its limited space. It was an eight page broadsheet, with six columns per page - a single-column news story with a typical four-decker headline could run to 170 lines of print. (3)

Layout was conservative with the vast majority of items set in single column, drawing the readers eye up and down rather than across the page. Wider columns were used only in exceptional circumstances, such as the directors appeal to the readers to keep the Herald alive on 18th March 1922. (4)

Headlines were normally set the width of the story, reinforcing the "up and down" feel of pages. But they did reflect other modern trends in style - their detailed descriptiveness, telling the reader the gist of the story in seconds before they had read it, echoed Blumenfeld's Daily Express methods. A typical front page headline read:

EXPLOSION
SEQUEL
-----
TIPTON OWNER AND
MANAGER CHARGED
-----
DEATH ROLL 18
-----
MANSLAUGHTER CHARGE:
HEAVY BAIL (5)

Several techniques were used to make the pages more approachable - standfirsts, often italicised, were used to explain the context of stories, important points were emphasised in bold type and major long stories were broken up into two or three sections, each with its introductory headline.
Photographs were used sparingly. Some news reports were accompanied by half-column library mugshots while other carried larger pictures - such as Lansbury addressing a Poplar demonstration on the day of his arrest. But their main, limited, use was to accompany "colour" stories such as a feature on Barnet Horse Fair carried in September 1922 or in sports coverage. (6)

When every other popular daily except the Express carried advertisements on the front page, the Herald, which would in any case have struggled to muster a page of advertisements on many days, ran news with the main story normally appearing in the lefthand two or three columns.

The main inside general news pages were pages two, three and five. These would often contain 25 or more stories to a page - the bulk of it clearly newsagency copy reworked by the Herald's sub-editors. The pattern of distribution of stories varied - the mix incorporated political items, human interest, crime and court reports.

The regular foreign coverage had no settled place in the pattern, but movement news - as crowded as the other news pages with 20 or more stories on disputes, conferences and speeches by leader - was always on page six together with the Herald's gesture in the direction of its role as the movement's noticeboard - "Things That Count" - a column of announcements, notices of meetings and brief factual notes related to Labour and union affairs. By-lines of news pages were rare, except for Lansbury's contributions - more commentary than news - and Paris correspondent George Slocombe's stories from Europe. Main correspondents were by-lined by title - Diplomatic (Ewer), Industrial (Brodzky) and Parliamentary (Bracher).

Named writers were more frequently found on the leader page - dominated on Saturday by Lansbury's weekly sermon and during the week by political and diplomatic sketches and commentaries, notably from Noel Brailsford and Slocombe. These were supplemented by a literary, highbrow mix of philosophical and descriptive pieces or short stories - with Evelyn Sharp, Brodzky and Ivor Brown among the regulars - whimsically humorous verse by "Tomfool" (Eleanor Farjeon) and the "Way of the World" diary column which together with the daily page five column by "Gadfly" (Everard) made up the paper's quota of light relief. Leaders normally occupied most of two columns.
Page seven broke up the visual monotony with "Home Rulings", a women's section including dress tips, normally illustrated by a picture, cookery and advice plus the cartoon strip Bobby Bear - anticipating the Express's better-known Rupert by anthropomorphic adventures retailed in verse.

This page was subject to incursions from page six on heavy movement news days, Herald League notes covering the activities of the paper's residual propaganda organisation and, once a week, by-lined book reviews. Sport often spilled over from the back page, either in the form of racecards or of football reports in the Monday edition.

ii. Content: Priorities

Any newspaper is shaped by its conception of the identity and interests of its readers. Arthur Christiansen of the Daily Express was to build his winning formula of the 1930s round the perceptions of the family from the backstreets of Derby. The Herald's identikit reader was clearly a serious-minded, well-informed trade unionist and political activist, probably London-based and with more interest in the latest news from the Genoa conference or a major strike than in the goriest murder or most titillating court case. (7)

Rarely if ever were political items displaced from their position at the core of the paper. The standard human interest or crime story beloved of commercial papers might get on to the front page. The 1921-2 period saw the trial, conviction and execution of Hay on Wye solicitor Herbert Armstrong, memorable enough to be cited by George Orwell in "The Decline of the English Murder" and the trial of Ronald True. But both played second-fiddle to political stories. (8)

There were non-party political issues that became the lead story. But these normally had a political implication - heavy coverage of the trial and conviction of fraudster Horatio Bottomley reflected his genuine political significance during the First World war and immediately after, while serious accidents like the Tipton disaster could be used to illustrate the brutality, carelessness and incompetence of capitalism. (9)

Assumptions about reader activism were seen in the headline "Your Summer Holiday" on a news story about the TUC summer school - although with a maximum of 45 places a substantial take-up of the suggestion by Herald readers might have caused some difficulties. (10)
Assumptions about readers' knowledge led the Herald to neglect the signposting seen in most journalism. This was demonstrated in October 1921 when a journalist was dispatched to look at the state of Cornish tin-mining communities ten months into a shutdown of the mines. He explained that on his way back: “I interviewed Dan Hillman to see if he could suggest a remedy from the Labour point of view.

“Yes”, said Dan. “The remedy is the one I have been advocating for months. The nation must take over the mines”. (11)

Dan Hillman was in fact the local district secretary of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers Union. But the Herald felt no need to explain who he was - he appears in the guise of an old friend of the family who needs no introduction. (12)

This is not an isolated incident. In the same issue a story about the London conference on Economic Recovery and World Peace quotes Krassin - at the time the Soviet representative in London - and Nansen, the former explorer, without feeling any need to explain who they are. (13)

Similarly a whole column is devoted to a speech on the Labour Party by "Arthur Henderson MP" without any explanation of who he is. Similarly with JH Thomas in an account of the budget debates. Lansbury on occasion is known simply as "G.L". The effect is of a small world where everybody knows everyone else, so no introductions are needed. (14).

If the Herald were to be seen as a family there is little doubt that Lansbury was its head and Poplar its headquarters. His Saturday column's gently conversational style, confiding in the reader and speaking, as on 7th January 1922 of "all that matters to you and me", reinforced this effect. (15)

The most striking example, a "family" occasion in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense, was the heavy coverage of the death of Minnie Lansbury less than three months after coming out of Holloway. The early death of a Labour councillor imprisoned for opposing government policy would be covered in any Labour newspaper, but devoting almost the whole of a front page news column plus announcements about funeral arrangements on the following two days showed the importance of the Lansbury-Poplar axis. (16)
Heavy Poplar coverage - half a column on a dinner for 10,000 children in Bow and Bromley and a warm obituary notice for borough clerk Charles Skeggs - reflected a general London-centricity in news. This may in part reflect the fact that the papers preserved in the National Newspaper Library, Colindale are final editions. Even so a front page story headlined "Smallpox in London" - reporting that the disease had moved from Nottingham - implied clearly that disease striking in London gave the outbreak a whole new level of newsworthiness. A series of local issues such as government attempts to restrain London street markets and the London County Council’s debates on Sunday opening for parks received attention worthy of national issues.

The Herald’s faith in its relationship with its readers is indicated by the extensive use of irony in the news, diary and humorous columns. Irony is a journalistic boomerang - if it misfires through the reader’s failure to understand, its effect can be precisely the opposite of what is intended. For this reason trainers of journalists often counsel students against it as a technique, particularly in news writing.

Faith that the Herald’s readers shared its underlying assumptions and would recognise the tone of voice underpinned the dry observation of a comment in the report on the 1922 New Year’s Honours List that: “A whole host of Mr Lloyd George’s political friends will in future be able to point with pride to their names in Debrett”.

A fundamental element in the paper’s worldview was that there was one rule for the poor and another for the rich. As such claims of impoverishment from the wealthy were always a tempting target. The conjunction of two news items in March 1922 - the fifth massive will in recent years from the Wills tobacco family and Lord Tredegar’s announcement that he had been forced by financial pressures to give up foxhunting - prompted a story that, taken strictly at face value without knowledge of the ironic intent, might have come from the diehard Morning Post: "The world is full of oddities, as everybody knows. While some have made millions out of puffs of smoke, the exercise of that truly Christian virtue - the self-sacrifice of a pack of fox-hounds - is harshly imposed on a wealthy Welsh peer who owns land by the thousand acres".
This approach extended to the Way of the World column, which was to be condemned in 1925 by director Clifford Allen - formerly general manager of the Daily Citizen as "Much too highbrow and clever", but was nevertheless to survive fundamentally unchanged until 1930. It mixed an appropriate quote of the day with observations of quirks and oddities, but irony was its stock in trade, as in the New Year issue of 1922.(21)

"An appalling picture of the morale and conditions of the rising generation in Russia", I read in a Sunday paper, "is drawn by Professor Alexander Amfiteatroff, a well-known Russian writer living in Prague. Under the Bolshevist principles of equality all classes mingle in the schools and boys and girls study together". I got no farther. It was too dreadful. I don't think the newspapers ought to tell us these horrors, do you? Not at this time of year".(22)

Much of its most lethal weaponry was plucked from the pages of other newspapers - the Morning Post being a particular butt. It seized with joy on an item in a gossip column about the advantages of "coming out" :"To begin with the debutante comes in for all the hunt balls, and by the time the real season begins in May, knows practically everyone there is to know".

As Way of the World observed :"You and I, Henry, simply don't exist. And yet if we all went to sleep with the gas on I believe even the debutantes would notice the difference quite soon".(23)

Dry contemplation of the follies of political opponents was also the hallmark of humorist "Gadfly" - C Langdon Everard - who delighted in examining the wilder fringes of the right and undermining them with the ironic pretence that he really rather sympathised with them.

"Gadfly" was similarly unloved by Allen, who argued in 1929 that his contributions should be reduced and be made from outside the office. But both his pay - with Ewer second only to that of the editor throughout the 1920s, and the normally acidulous Hamilton Fyfe's comment that "He knew - no one knew better - how much better the paper ought to be in every way - except perhaps "Gadfly". He did not think they could improve on "Gadfly" - underlined his status as the Herald's star.
A characteristic sketch examined the Conservative candidate at the Motherwell by-election, Bailie Hugh Ferguson: "Some Tory candidates are content to take their inspiration from Conservative Central office, with particularly ghastly results. Not so Bailie Ferguson of Motherwell. The bible is good enough for him. 'It is', he says conservatively, the Old Book that has taught one the menace of the Irish Romanists and Socialists.....It is a pity considering how dull Westminster is nowadays that 15,000 of his neighbours turned him down with a thud in 1918". (25)

iii. Content - Politics and Industry

In defining the Herald's political line among the contesting factions of the Labour movement, Lansbury had protested in early 1921 that "This paper belongs not to the right or the left, but to the whole of the Labour Movement". (26)

It was, as he was to explain in launching the Back To A Penny campaign in the autumn of 1921, a difficult position guaranteed to maximise external criticism: "We welcome any reform within the present system if we think it will contribute towards the end of the system; we work for a peaceful but complete revolution by which the system shall be overthrown and a better one instituted. So we steer a middle course between what some call "reformism" and some call "extremism".

"It is a difficult job. Often we please nobody. The rank and file, if we don't print the divisive letter he has written, tells us we have sold ourselves to the officials. The officials, whom some branch curses by a resolution which it insists on our printing, tells us that we have sold ourselves to the extremists. And all because we try to do what is fair by both !" (27)

Lansbury had already explained the paper's credo: "With only one daily paper devoted to the interests of Labour, it is obvious that such a paper must be, and ought to be, as catholic as possible in its views, and should constitute an open platform for the expression of opinion by all sections of the movement. At the same time the one and only Labour daily newspaper should at all times be a pioneer that should lead the movement rather than lag behind". (28)
But as an open platform it had the odd characteristic that it made little use of readers’ letters, in the early part of 1921-2 at least. Without many by-lines or a record of contributors it is impossible to establish how far the ‘open platform’ function was fulfilled by direct contributions rather than letters to the paper. Many issues carried only a single letter - often from an organisation rather than an individual - which was more of a news story than a contribution to debate. Typical of those printed were a protest from the secretary of the St Pancras Unemployed Committee against the unfair conviction of a demonstrator for allegedly hitting a policeman and a letter with a string of leadership names including Margaret Bondfield of the General Workers, Clynes, Henderson and Labour National Women’s Officer Marion Phillips arguing for improved rights for working women. More letters appeared as 1922 went on, but this remained an underdeveloped area of the paper. (29)

And for all the protestations, the Herald remained decisively lodged on the left - Lansbury’s reference to leading the movement rather than lagging behind it a giveaway in this respect. Abuse of gradualist leaders no longer appeared, but the agenda was on the left.

This could be seen in the language of a leader on Lloyd George’s plans for a reformed House of Lords, which would in the Herald’s view have entrenched an anti-Labour bulwark. It had already displayed a clear conviction that bad laws were meant to be broken - as against the determined constitutionalism of Labour moderates - in the dispute of Poplar. Now, in calling for Labour to refuse recognition to a reformed Lords, it again showed contempt for approaches that stressed constitutionalism at all costs: “Such action would be technically "unconstitutional". What of it? In such an issue there could be no place for pedantries. The future of the country is more than the niceties of the “constitution”. Labour would turn from the quibblings of lawyers to the bold commonsense of the men who created the constitution itself by breaking through the meshes of legalism. The precedents of 1640 and 1688 would become valid”. (30)

A further indication of the tendency to the left was an emphasis on industrial rather than parliamentary matters - an expression of old Herald traditions reinforced by the uninspiring Labour performance in Parliament. Parliamentary sessions were less interesting than union conferences, by-elections less newsworthy than strikes or hunger marches.
Official trade union attitudes to the National Unemployed Workers Movement, formed in April 1921, were warmer at this stage than they were to be in the later 1920s when the NUWM was regarded as a Communist front. Even so the Herald's enthusiasm went well beyond the leadership's, with NUWM leader Wal Hannington recalling that its coverage was crucial in the early stages: "The paper gave sympathetic and favourable publicity to the unemployed struggles", he wrote. (31)

Labour candidates at by-elections could count on noisily partisan support. But the Herald's continuing preference for a good industrial story was shown at the end of March 1921 when Labour overturned a Conservative majority of more than 11,000 at Leicester, winning the by-election by more than 5,000. An impressive result at any time, it had nevertheless to play second front-page fiddle to a dispute in the chemical industry, headlined "Industrial Warfare Spreading". (32)

Coverage of the Leicester victory demonstrated a continuing characteristic - the larding of news stories with comment to the extent that some resembled leaders. The result was greeted as: "A clear indication that the workers, sick of the Capitalist Coalition and the Capitalist Liberals alike, realise that the Labour Party is the one hope of the nation. It is too, a vote of no-confidence in Lloyd George's Genoa juggle and will strengthen the Labour MPs in their frontal attack on the Government in the House of Commons on Monday". (33)

Headlines were similarly loaded - making up in bite what they lacked in size. There was little doubt of their view of London transport employers in the story headlined "Men Who Sleep In The Bus: Hardships of London's Busmen: Heartless Combine" - even less of that of the Asquithian Liberals in the headline: "Wee Frees in Labour: Ridiculous Mouse Produced". (34)

A partisan spin might be put on apparently innocuous stories. A brief and unexceptionably orthodox report of the cricket match between the Lords and Commons Cricket Club and Westminster School acquired a new dimension of ironic contempt from the headline: "NOVEL SPECTACLE: Coalition Members Try to Play Cricket: Low Scores. The report shows that the parliamentarians scored nearly 200 and appear to have had the better of a drawn game. (35)
Anger and hyperbole were frequently in evidence. The leader welcoming 1922 makes extraordinary reading in the context of having been written little more than three years after the end of the First World War: "In your first issue last year we wrote that the year then past was probably the blackest in human history. The year that was then beginning has been far blacker". (36)

The Herald's critique of politics and industry continued to be underpinned by a conspiratorial analysis. Its language was always derived from the ethical tradition - protesting angrily at inequity and injustice. But it is possible to detect the influence of the Herald's small group of Marxists - Mellor and Postgate were still Communist Party members at this time - in a view of the state as an instrument of the capitalist class and the assumption that capitalism would always try to drive living standards down to a minimum. (37)

A clearcut version was presented in a major leader at the start of 1922: "A year ago we prophesied a co-ordinated development of the attack on wages. We do not claim to have foreseen - no one could have foreseen - how rapid that development would be, or how successful.

"The government has worked in with the employers. Unemployment has been their weapon.

"The Government's part was definite. It was to break its promises, reverse its own Acts, repudiate its responsibilities, and throw industry - suddenly, violently, at a carefully chosen time of trade depression - back into the cockpit of competition. The employers were to cut wages to a point at which it was reckoned that the spirit of the men would be broken by sheer starvation. If the men refused such wages, the Government was to declare that this was "War on the community" and place all its strike-breaking resources at the service of the employers.

"At the same time, the unemployed were to be refused adequate maintenance, and were to be thus coerced by starvation into becoming blacklegs and being willing to do any work at any stage".

It went on to state: "Few people no doubt (though many profess to doubt) that the plot was a plot". (38)
Chapter Five: Content and Style 1921-2

The centre of this attack was not in parliament or cabinet, but Big Business (the Herald habitually emphasised the description by capitalising the offending words) and specifically the Federation of British Industry, which had been founded in 1916 as a representative body for business.(39)

As has already been noted members of the TUC General Council believed that the FBI was co-ordinating an attack on wages and conditions. This viewpoint was given considerable space when George Hicks, secretary of the Amalgamated Building Workers and a leading General Council left-winger, told his annual conference that the FBI was "The most ruthless combination of capitalist interests the war of classes has yet produced" - adding that it controlled 360 MPs.

A small space at the bottom of the column was found for a reply by the FBI, who retorted that only 59 MPs were connected with Federation members and that it had no control over the selection or actions of Parliamentary candidates.

The Herald's response to this exchange endorsed Hicks' attack and claimed it as its own - pointing to "The power and influence of massed capital, as shown by their open activities, open and secret, of the FBI..."

"Many months ago we warned Labour that this organisation was scheming and planning for a wholesale reduction of wages in many trades and callings" (40).

Proof positive, in the Herald's view, of the FBI's ability to dictate government policy was the Geddes report, which called in February for #75m of cuts in public spending. While allotting the government its share of the blame for giving the committee too negative a brief, it blamed business influence for the attack on the public services, including #18m proposed cuts in education headlined as "Starving the Minds of the Young".
Noting the preponderance of businessmen on the committee, it argued: "All this part of the report which deals with the life of the people should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations, which we published yesterday, made by the Federation of British Industries - an organisation representing the same class as do the members of the Geddes Committee. The Federation of British Industries is quite definite in its demand for a still further decrease in wages. We think even the most sceptical will require no further illustration of the truth of what we have for long past alleged: that there is a definite and concerted move to beat down the whole standard of living of the working-class in this country to far below the pre-war level".

Belief that government policy was determined by manipulation from big business - on Price’s reading evidence of a rather more developed analysis of the relationship between economic and political power than that possessed by MacDonald and other moderate leaders, whose viewpoint assumed that winning power in parliament was a sufficient aim - accounts in part for their choice of Health Minister Sir Alfred Mond, rather than Premier David Lloyd George, as the Herald’s Public Enemy Number One.

This is not to say that Lloyd George got off without criticism. Lansbury’s ferocious assault in February 1922 showed a bitter dislike of his deviousness: “The chicanery and humbug of Lloyd George are being revealed more clearly every day... has climbed steadily to place and power by the use of every artifice known to the demagogue....fooled women fighting for freedom...."Jack on both sides" deceiving each in order to secure kudos for himself...He is the greatest failure of all time, and this because of his constitutional ability to either see or speak straight”.

But the conspiratorial reading inevitably rated the Premier as much monkey as organ-grinder. Mond was different. A considerable factor in the Herald’s broadside was undoubtedly personal - as Minister of Health he was responsible for poor relief and Poplar’s direct political adversary: “That grotesque and sinister creature in whose hands has been placed the care of the national health”, in the furious view of one leader column.

He was also a leading capitalist who could be portrayed as the personification of the conspiracy, and whose role as a wealthy man in setting maximum rates of poor relief for the destitute could be attacked as a symbol of inequity in British society.
A ferocious assault by Lansbury, whose powers of invective were clearly in excellent order in February as it came in the same Saturday feature as his broadside on Lloyd George, incorporated the whole range of attacks on Mond, and by implication the conspiracy, and as such merits quotation at some length.

"Sir Alfred Mond, well fed, and with a bank balance supplied from the sweat and toil of thousands of workers, asks, with a sneer: "Is anyone starving?"

"What a question, coming from the Minister of Health, whose idea of sufficiency is found in the miserable standard of life he has set up for the unemployed of 25s, plus 3s for coal per week, for a man and wife, while he himself accepts a salary of #96 a week from the pockets of the poor, in addition to his enormous private income, also derived from the labour of the workers....

"This rich, contented, happy Sir Alfred Mond... has commenced to practice economy, not of course in connection with his own salary or income, but vicariously by robbing little children of the milk they need, and nursing and expectant mothers of food and nourishment. He has also taken in hand the task of cutting down the provision of clinics for the treatment of consumption and bad teeth....

"Sir Alfred Mond, representing the school of employers known as the Federation of British Industries, is endeavouring to drive the workers down to the wretched level which existed from the inception of the "New Poor Law" in 1834. I beg every reader of the Daily Herald to watch Mond and all his works. He is in one of the key positions for beating down the workers' standard of life" (45).

This view of the state as the prop and perpetuator of inequity was a consistent element in analysis. News of the current Lord Nelson's continuing receipt of a #5,000 annual state pension prompted the reflection that "It is degrading to accept doles, unless you are an Earl. The nation cannot afford houses, health or education. But it manages to find space on its back for a five-thousand pound earl" (46).
It was seen also in treatment of a story on entertainment tax. The headline "Taxing Amusement: Poor Have To Pay Most Heavily - As Usual", took in a characteristic aside, reinforced by the comment-laden story:

"As usual it falls heaviest on the poor. Rich people who can afford higher-priced seats pay a tax of about 10 per cent. The man who can only afford the cheapest seat in the house is taxed 25 per cent" (47)

The Herald's estimate of industry's influence had its impact on at least two significant areas of policy. The first was consistent support for wider powers for the TUC General Council as a counter to the co-ordinating power apparently wielded on the other side of industry by the FBI. A leader in the first issue of 1922 summed up the argument: "It is clear that, at a time when the whole energies of the rich and the powerful enemies of Labour are concentrated on breaking down the main rights and safeguards which generations of Trade Unionists have so painfully and heroically won, Trade Unionists cannot hope to stand up to the attack save by equal co-ordination within itself. It needs a central authoritative fighting body" (48).

The second was a refusal to differentiate between the capitalist parties - the Liberals were portrayed as as much as enemies as the Conservatives, in some respects more dangerous because they might be mistaken for friends. Cowling has noted this as an element in Herald rhetoric during the "direct action" period, and it was maintained in March 1922 in a leader asserting that there was no difference between the two older parties. The only battle that mattered was "Between the old Gang, who oppose the people in the interests of their own class, and Labour, whose cause is the people's" (49).
iv. Content: Foreign

Nor was the capitalist conspiracy seen as an exclusively British concern. It was similarly pervasive in its influence on the Herald's analysis of foreign affairs, which saw much of the diplomatic manoeuvring of the period as a conspiracy against the Soviet Union.

Andrew Williams, in the most comprehensive examination of the subject, has pointed to "a very complex love-hate relationship between the British Labour movement and the Soviet Union". Sympathy for the Soviet Union was not confined to the left. Williams notes widespread support for "fair play" - a powerful concept in the ethical tradition - for Russia and the way in which moderate pragmatists like MacDonald and Snowden argued consistently against isolating the Soviet Union. (50)

But in any plotting of the Labour movement along a love-hate axis, the Herald unquestionably tended towards the affectionate end. Lansbury was to write of his meeting with Lenin in the awe-struck manner of a middle-class patriot recalling a meeting with royalty: "I shall always esteem it the greatest event in my life that I was privileged to see this fine, simple, wise man and speak with him". (51)

Diplomatic editor Ewer's Communist sympathies were the subject of anxious scrutiny from the Labour leadership throughout the 1920s - although Fyfe was to defend him vigorously against any charge that he showed his views in his writing. (52)

Having run "Hands off Russia!" as one of its most persistent slogans during the period of postwar allied intervention, the Herald continued to attack international conspiracies against the new state. This viewpoint was epitomised by the leader greeting a #20m consortium aimed at opening up European trade. It concluded: "Infinitely greater sums than that will be involved before the thing can get very far, and they will be employed for that purpose, not merely of getting the ordinary return on capital, but of getting the claws of Capitalism firmly fixed into the quivering carcass of Europe. The one country of any size where these claws have been un-fixed is of course, the one specially marked down for destruction. This is a new move against the Socialist Republic of Russia, and its main motive is to prevent the spread of Socialism. " (53)
Far from seeing Russia as the fount of revolution, the Herald argued:

"They demand for themselves the toleration and peace they extend for others". (54)

Russia's place in the international Socialist brotherhood was underlined in the May Day issue when messages from Henderson, Adler of the Socialist International and American socialist Eugene Debs were accompanied by one from Zinoviev - Lenin's contribution having arrived too late for publication - and Communist International Secretary Arthur MacManus. (55)

The first traces of doubt about Russian internal policy surfaced in June 1922 when the leaders of the Social Revolutionary party went on trial. The reporting of both sides was straight and even-handed, always a sure sign of discomfort in a paper given to comment. (56)

But coverage of international conferences left little doubt that the Herald's sympathies were with Russia rather than Britain and other western powers. A comment, reflecting the influence of the Union for Democratic Control's attacks on secret diplomacy across the Labour movement on the "tradition of privacy, trickery and greed which have constituted the foreign policy of all capitalist nations in the past", followed by a week the headline on deadlock at the Genoa conference of the major powers: "Soviet Delegation Refuses To Betray Workers". (57)

Attitudes to the succession of international conferences were slightly confused. It gave them intensive coverage, but this was suffused with world-weary cynicism. French Premier Aristide Briand's visit to London in late 1921 drew the comment: "Time was when people watched these conferences of premiers intently, expecting big decisions and a settlement of world questions....Today nobody expects anything in particular". (58)

But the abrasive Raymond Poincaré's succession as French Premier in January 1922 added bite to Herald reporting as an fear that his aggression might trigger a new war became a dominant factor. His new administration was welcomed with the headline "Poincaré's plans for war". By April he was being labelled simply "Kaiser Poincaré". And when he threatened to occupy the Ruhr industrial region in May 1922, the leader warned "Once again the choice is between peace and M Poincaré". (59)
His villainy was finally sealed when he insisted at the Genoa conference that restoration of the rights of property be built into Allied demands on the Russians. The Herald greeted Lloyd George's concession of the issue to him by saying: "The British Premier has kept his peace with France, but has made peace with Russia impossible". (60)

If justice for Russia was one old Herald cry, then Home Rule for Ireland was an even longerstanding cause - one whose consistent coverage led one not unfriendly critic to say the paper was "Too much of an Irish political pamphlet for my taste". (61)

So it seized on the opportunity offered by violence in Belfast in late summer 1921 to contrast the independence-seeking Nationalist communities favourably with the Unionists of Ulster. It reported: "Unionist mobs disregarded the curfew....in self-defence the Nationalists retaliated". Headlines a day later told the tale of "Orange Savagery in Belfast : Men and Women Shot at, Beaten and Kicked: Dead 14 : Wounded 100". (62)

A leader in mid-September reinforced the picture, contrasting Ulster with "Sinn Fein Ireland...at the moment peaceful and progressive, and asks only to remain so". (63)

Irish Nationalist leaders were sure of favourable treatment with Michael Collins drawn in terms that readers could hardly fail to contrast with images of the devious British rulers and the murderous Orangemen "The most friendly and obliging of men....he has all an Irishman's quick-wittedness, ...a charm which is quite impossible to get into print". (64)

The outbreak of civil war between Nationalist factions in 1922 was a serious blow to the Herald's view of peacable Sinn Fein Ireland - leading it to resort to that clear sign of distress, straight, factual reporting.

v. Content: Books and Sport

Two other areas of coverage are worth noting - books and sport. McKibbin has pointed out that self-educated Labour activists, the Herald's core audience, assumed "a body of culture that people ought to know...The culture was very largely grounded on the classic texts of British literature, and it is suprising the extent to which they were known". (65)
The Herald's books pages reflected this outlook in a positively Reithian highbrow seriousness - mixing politics with demanding literature. Thus the five columns of reviews on 8th March 1922 included the latest books on China - under the caption "China - Captive or Free", Ivor Brown's full column account of the life of Tom Paine in the page's "Great Names" series and a full column by Middleton Murray on new poets.

The "classic text" tendency was seen a month later in an article on John Milton, while the lead feature was Wyndham Lewis' review of "Since Cezanne" by Clive Bell and Ewer lacerated a volume on "Europe in Convalescence" with the statement "Mr Zimmer's is a pathetic book".

That mix, and the weighty quality of reviewer, was no exception. Three weeks on from that GDH Cole was reviewing Harold Laski's weighty tome on the Foundations of Sovereignty while RH Tawney discussed Marion Phillips study of the education needs of industrial workers and a Labour Party publication on secondary education policy.

If literary coverage made few concessions to populism, sport had been forced into compromise when the Herald returned as a daily in 1919. Lansbury, who had dropped racing tips when he became editor in 1913, was forced by his colleagues to recognise their importance as a circulation builder among working-class readers and reluctantly restored them.

Postgate has left a picture of Lansbury in conversation with Taylor, the racing journalist who would still be on the Herald staff in 1930, and whose Templegate by-line was to outlive the paper itself, saying "Well, G.L., we had five winners yesterday" and being answered "That's fine brother: I'm very glad" in a tone of great dejection; and these two excellent men looking at each other in distress, each respecting the other, anxious to avoid hurting the other's feelings, desiring nothing so much as the success of the paper, and yet aware of the high fence of misunderstanding between them that nothing could overlap.

But this was in line with the extreme conventionality of sports coverage, giving readers the normal fare of match reports and previews, heavily factual rather than imaginatively written. There were few hints of the character of the rest of the paper - the occasional NUR Football League result apart - until the start of the 1922-3 football season and the launch of a campaign to cut the price of admission to league matches.
Admission charges had risen sharply from the prewar norm of 6d - the Herald reported that the lowest price was now 1/-.

On 5th September a frontpage headline reported "Make Football Cheaper: Workers With Cut Wages Can't Pay: Growing Protest: Sixpenny Soccer of Boycott".

The accompanying report explained "Without question resentment against the present high figures is quickening everywhere". Trades Councils were passing resolutions of protest - although it was reported that the clubs, characteristically, were unworried.(71)

But in the same week as sports coverage was taking an unusual turn, the Herald was undergoing compromise with external values far more fundamental than printing racing tips - the acceptance of official movement control.
CHAPTER FIVE (P43-62)

   Meynell op cit p 112

2. Lansbury to Bramley 3.10.23 LPDH 245

3. DH 16.6.22.

4. DH 18.3.22

5. DH 18.3.22, Le Mahieu op cit p 29

6. DH 5.9.21, 5.9.22

   Robert Allen - *Voice of Britain: The Inside Story of the Daily Express*
   Patrick Stephens, Cambridge 1983 p 39


9. DH 18.3.22 (Tipton) 27.5.22 (Bottomley)

10. DH 16.6.22

11. DH 13.10.21

12. Labour Who’s Who 1927 p 101

13. DH 13.10.21

14. DH 3.9.21, 3.5, 16.6, 7.9.22

15. DH 7.1.22

16. DH 2, 3, 4.1.22

17. DH 31.8.21 (smallpox) 19, 21, 11.21 (street markets) 2.1.22 (children), 12.4.22 (Skeggs) 10.7.22 (parks)

18. Writer’s personal recollection of training at Centre for Journalism Studies, University College, Cardiff 1981-2

19. DH 2.1.22

20. DH 8.3.22

21. Allen memo on editorial policy 11.5.27 TUC 788.5

22. DH 2.1.22

23. DH 5.9.22

24. Allen memo on Daily Herald Staff Reorganisation 11.3.29 TUC 789.8
   Lansbury to Bramley 3.10.23 loc cit. LPRAC 1924 p 178

25. DH 8.3.22

26. DH 19.2.21

27. DH 11.9.21

28. DH 22.10.21

29. DH 28.9, 13.10.21

30. DH 19.12.21
31. Wal Hannington - *Unemployed Struggles 1919-36* - Lawrence and Wishart

32. DH 31.3.22
33. DH 19.12.21
34. DH 1.9.21,31.3.22
35. DH 16.6.22
36. DH 2.1.22
37. McIntyre *op cit* p 28
38. DH 2.1.22
39. Clegg *op cit* p 252
40. DH 17.8.22
41. DH 11.2.22
42. Price *op cit* p 155
43. DH 11.2.22
44. DH 16.6.22
45. DH 11.2.22
46. DH 31.3.22
47. DH 19.1.22
48. DH 2.1.22
49. DH 8.3.22. Cowling *op cit* p 91
50. A. Williams *op cit* p 8-24.
51. Lansbury - *My Life* *op cit* p 235-6.

52. Criticisms of Ewer: Clifford Allen - Memorandum on the *Daily Herald*
17.9.25 LPDH 466 TUC 789.1 Citrine to Mellor 31.10.28 TUC 788.61.
MacDonald fears and Fyfe defence in Fyfe - *Seven Selvies* *op cit* p 254

53. DH 3.1.22
54. DH 12.4,25.4.22
55. DH 1.5.22
56. DH 16.6.22
57. DH 25.4,3.5.22
58. DH 19.12.21
59. DH 4.22
60. DH 3.5.22

61. The Journalist October 1922
62. DH 31.8,1.9.21
63. DH 1.7.9.21
64. DH 13.10.21
65. McKibbin - *Ideologies* *op cit* p 34
66. DH 8.3.22
67. DH 12.4.22
The Daily Herald 1921-30

Footnotes Ten

68. DH 3.5.22


70. Postgate - Lansbury op cit p 143

71. DH 5.9.22

Ends
While Poplar, Russia and the Capitalist Plot had all given the Herald ample opportunities to express its distinctive world view during 1921-21, there is little doubt that its best running story in this year, and up to the end of 1923, was itself. As a story it contained all those qualities of political commitment and battling against the odds that the Herald looked for in its front-page features.

The last year of independence was to live up to the traditions of uncertainty, chronic insolvency and commitment overcoming financial logic that the Herald had established from the first.

As has been noted the failure of the Second Debenture Issue ended the last hope of the independent Herald beyond question. Lansbury was to be quoted as late as the end of January saying that he hoped to maintain the paper as an independent concern. He was either misquoted or whistling to keep his spirits up. Its fate had been settled by the end of 1921. (1)

The Herald and its putative new owners, the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress, had four major issues of which three were essentially strategic to settle as they defined a new relationship.

Issue number one was that of principle - did the two national bodies wish to take over the Herald? If they decided that they did, the next issue was financial - how did they propose to fund it? And finally came the editorial decision - what sort of paper did they want and how did they propose as proprietors to control its policy? Making and implementing these decisions was to take the best part of a year. This might seem to imply a leisurely, relaxed process with decisions taken on the basis of thought-out strategic considerations.

But this was not to be the case. Ross McKibbin has noted that the official movement's involvement in the Herald was essentially reluctant, but that "Each step taken to assist the Herald made it more difficult for the movement to extricate itself" (2)

The reasons for that are rooted in issue number four - the short-term imperative of keeping the Herald alive when massive losses were threatening its existence. This imperative defined the atmosphere in which all other decisions were taken, giving the process an urgency and momentum that it would otherwise have lacked.
Chapter Six: Takeover 1921-2

The first steps in the takeover process took place in November when the Herald Board appealed to the debenture holders. A meeting of the holders, together with Labour Party and TUC representatives, was called for 7th December 1921 at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Road. At this delegates were informed that "the directors were unable to keep the paper in existence in the present state of finance". The debenture holders declared themselves equally unable to raise the necessary finance, leaving the meeting's call for the Labour Party and the TUC to take over joint responsibility as the only practical alternative to recommending closure.(4)

The two national bodies reacted in the time-honoured manner of Labour institutions confronted by a proposal that they are disposed to accept, but which has wideranging implications. At the suggestion of the General Council, they set up a joint sub-committee to explore the issue.(5) The membership of the group showed both bodies were taking it seriously. Henderson, elected chair, represented the party with MacDonald and textile workers leader Tom Shaw while TUC Chairman and Agricultural Workers leader RB Walker, who became secretary, was joined by Arthur Pugh of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation and Findlay of the Engineering and Shipbuilding Trades Federation.(6)

Newspaper World reported on Christmas Eve that the Herald directors had offered the organised movement control: "It is highly probable that the offer will be accepted, and this will, of course, involve at least partial direction of policy by the officials at Eccleston Square."(7) But the immediate concern was finance rather than policy. If anything might have deterred the organised movement from taking on the Herald it was an examination of its finances - which even Frank Hodgdes, deputy chair of the Board, admitted confused him.(8)

A report from chartered accountants WA Scott and Co revealed the Herald's chronic insolvency - liabilities exceeding assets by £159,741, and the need for a further £50,000 to carry it through the next year should the price be restored to 1d. At current sales of 185,889 the price cut would produce weekly losses of £2,200. The one bright patch was the solvency of the Victoria House Printing Company, whose amalgamation with the Herald had been set as a condition of any takeover and agreed by Lansbury, who owned more than 95 per cent of the shares.(9)
Not all the movement's leadership were keen to acquire the Herald. There was, Cameron was to note later in the year, a marked lack of enthusiasm among many General Council members. Yet all opposition was outweighed by the logic of the position expounded during this period by Henderson: "It would be nothing short of a disaster were the Movement without a daily paper to express a definitely working-class point of view on questions affecting the workers as customers, citizens and producers. As you are aware, in consequence of the extensive employment, many of the Unions are not in a position to do what they would gladly have done had their funds been more favourably situated, but we feel we must make the effort". (10)

So the sub-committee backed a takeover, and were in turn endorsed by a joint meeting of the two national committees, which declared: "The time has now arrived when the Labour Movement should take over the Daily Herald and the Victoria House Printing Company, so as to provide the Movement with a daily Labour paper". The decision was endorsed in turn by the debenture holders - and the question from now on was not whether the Herald would pass out of the hands of Lansbury and the paper's current directors into those of the Movement, but when and how. (11)

Thus committed the sub-committee began to examine the mechanics of a takeover and interim arrangements for policy supervision - deputing Henderson and Walker to be consulted by the directors when issues arose.

But there were also, as ever, short-term worries. Sales were still falling and the Herald had been banging the drum for a return to 1d throughout the final months of 1921. But cutting the price would, in the short-term at least, increase already formidable losses.

Financial assistance was needed - and in a further step towards full commitment the sub-committee recommended a return to 1d from January 23rd supported by #5,000 from each of the national committees, which with #5,000 already held by the Herald was estimated enough to see them through three months at the lower price. The national committees, balloted by post, accepted the plan (12)
At the same time a circular to affiliated organisations appealing for support showed the official movement's easy optimism about the efficacy of appeals from the leadership - a constant factor in Herald publicity. A circulation of a million, recipients were told, could be achieved "Easily if each one of your members will go at once to the newsagent in his district and place an order for the paper".

This belief that the rank and file would readily recognise the Herald as their paper now it was officially backed was however tempered by recognition of the efficacy of modern circulation methods. Readers were promised, in place of "free insurance schemes of doubtful validity,..."A real insurance scheme, one that aims at the prevention of evil and disease, because Labour stands four square for a social order within which the care of each will be the duty of all, and within which preventible sickness, accidents and poverty will find no place". (13)

The reduction was trailed every day until the 23rd by a front-page feature, while the first penny issue gave pride of place to messages of good wishes from an assortment of movement leaders. The following day's headlines were triumphant:" Unanimous Cry of "Sold Out" : Big Demand for Penny DH : Now for the Million". (14)

But triumph was wildly premature. A sale of 290,000 was up 127,000 on the previous week, but represented a peak rather than the first stage of an advance. By February 15th the Herald was back to 213,345 - a welcome 50,000 advance but hardly what had been hoped for - and hard evidence that leadership exhortation would not work by itself. Losses on the first fortnight at a penny were #4217 19s 6d. At this rate the movement subsidy would be used up in much less than three months. Advertising had risen, but only marginally.

The directors estimated that #50,000 would have to be spent on improvements for the paper to reach the break even sale of 375,000 or a self-supporting 500,000. They added that day to day money worries were a major problem - and proposed a way out in the form of a movement levy to provide financial breathing space and the funds for development. (15)
Their reasoning impressed the sub-committee, who asked the General Council to appeal to affiliates for a levy of a halfpenny per member per quarter, saying: "The matter has now become pressing if the continuation of the "Daily Herald" is desired. If the levy cannot be made, we can see no alternative to the immediate stoppage of the paper". The General Council agreed, and unions were asked to reply by March 31st (16).

At the same time as wrestling with the finances, the sub-committee had devised a means of transferring the Herald and Victoria House to the national committees. Lansbury, desperate to get the Herald's problems off his hands and had been appealing since January for the appointment of movement trustees - drawing rebuffs summarised by Ethel Snowden's opinion that "Questions of policy should be decided before the Labour Movement takes any step towards adopting the Daily Herald." (17)

Now in early March Lansbury opted for more direct action. On March 2nd the Victoria House resigned en bloc, electing in their place a new board of Lansbury, Henderson, Bowerman and staff representatives. (18)

It was an imaginative but doomed gambit. The national committees were well on the road to takeover, but would do it by the book at a time of their own choosing. Henderson, clearly feeling railroaded, told Lansbury that the election was premature. His executive agreed. Ethel Snowden, pointed as ever, said: "Lansbury is trying to prejudice the decision of the trade unions and to get the General Council committed to accepting the responsibility for the Victoria House Printing Co. and the Daily Herald so that they will be saddled with the liabilities for these, even if the two movements do not agree. (19)

Sub-committee member Tom Shaw said uncontested movement control of the paper, its policy and directorate was a precondition of takeover and warned against "Any method of a hybrid character which will entail the danger of the Labour Movement finding the money and a few individuals directing the policy of the paper, possibly in a spirit contrary to that of the decisions of the Party itself". (20)

The General Council also rejected the proposal, noting that they had yet to appoint directors, accept formal responsibility, prepare a takeover scheme or offer affiliates the chance to comment. (21)
Lansbury's anxiety, and the national committees reluctance, were understandable. On March 18th the Herald launched its latest distress signal in a massive front page story covering three columns width with only two columns of type, headlined "KEEP THE WORKERS' ONLY DAILY ALIVE! Fight for the Paper That Fights and Will Always Fight for You and Yours! IT'S UP TO YOU!". (22)

The appeal, promised like many to be the paper's last - was for £25,000. On April 12th it stood at £4,786. Lansbury recorded that a crisis early in 1922 was averted by a loan from the London Compositors Society - and it seems likely that this was the means by which the Herald survived into May. (23)

Certainly the levy disappointed any hopes that it would be either a short or long-term saviour. It had proved a flawed, cumbersome weapon - relying, when the Herald needed instant action, on individual decisions from unions whose rulebooks often required complex procedures. By 12th May - six weeks after the date by which unions had been requested to reply - only 107 out of 194 had answered. Of these only 27, including the Miners, ASLEF, the Railway Clerks and the Transport and General, had agreed to pay - raising £4,970 7s 6d from a membership of 2.385 million. This was a lot to the unions but the Herald's losses would total £80,485 for the whole of 1922.

Fifty-three unions with 1.034 million members refused to contribute. Even more telling were were the 27, membership 2.007 million, who had not completed consultation. These included the National Union of Railwayman, whose leader JH Thomas had been on the committee that recommended the levy. (24)

Appealing to individual unions had failed. Now only decisive, united central action would save the Herald - a fact recognised on May 3rd in the headline "Shall "DH" Go on ?: To-day Our Day of Fate". Lansbury explained "The General Council will decide its future action regarding the proposal to take over responsibility and control of the paper". Closure, he said, was days away unless "the Council decides to take its courage in both hands and go boldly to the movement for cash and circulation". (25)
In fact the day of reckoning was to be postponed as the General Council agreed to pay £1,000 to keep the paper going for another week and allow a special meeting of the national committees.(26)

Thirty nine members - 16 for the Labour executive and 23 of the General Council, met six days later with RB Walker in the chair. They received a deputation of four Herald staff members who appealed for the paper to continue as a daily and offered to pay £8,000 over the next six months - around £1 per week for each of the 170 employees - provided the national committees funded the balance.

Hodges, for the Herald directors, outlined the alternatives. These were to continue as a 1d daily, to revert to 2d or to become a Sunday paper. A penny daily would lose £2000 per week - £1700 with the staff contribution. Reversion to 2d would cut losses to £800, £500 with the staff money, but benefits would take a month to arrive. Publishing on Sunday only would forfeit staff support. The subsequent three hour debate recognised the levy's failure and at Henderson's suggestion reached a decision with long-term implications for reasons dictated by short-term survival needs.

The only way out, he said, was for the national bodies to accept full responsibility for the paper's losses and make a subsidy part of their annual expenditure from affiliation fees. The Herald should be regarded as part of the movement's propaganda operation. This view was not held unanimously - the decisive resolution proposed by Pugh and seconded by Clynes was passed by 18 votes to 9, hardly overwhelming in a meeting attended by 39. This called for reversion to 2d, backed by a joint guarantee of up to £500 a week for the next six months to cover losses. The issue would be put before Labour's Annual Conference and that year's TUC.(27)

This was the decisive step in the takeover. There is no more fundamental assumption of responsibility than agreement to sign the cheques. Whatever the official date of takeover, May 9th 1922 was for practical purposes the day on which the movement took charge. The next four months up to the 1922 TUC were essentially a mopping-up process.
The Herald was predictably exultant - devoting half of its front page to a report headed "DAILY HERALD'S FUTURE NOW ASSURED: Decision of the General Council of the T.U.C and Executive Committee of the N.L.P: IMMEDIATE GUARANTEE FOR SIX MONTHS: Full Scheme for Ownership by the Labour Movement to be Submitted to Constituants of Both Bodies". The return to 2d was explained as essential to save the movement as much money as possible over the next few months - the readers share in supporting the paper, which would now become "the mouthpiece of organised Labour" - part of "A great publicity department owned, financed and controlled by the joint movement". (28)

Newspaper World reckoned that the return to 2d on 15th May "could scarcely fail to be prejudicial" in the highly competitive London daily market. The increase reversed the gains from the reduction to 1d in January - sales, stabilised between 215,000 and 230,000 in early May, fell to 180,000 by the end of the month and 160,000 a month later. (29)

Outstanding management and finance issues were settled before the end of May, with a joint meeting on the 21st organising the new Board and a movement levy. An eleven-man board would consist of five TUC representatives - initially Thomas, Turner, Bowerman, Walker and Harry Gosling of the Transport and General Workers - plus three from Labour: Henderson, Hodges and Shaw and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Party (Clynes) ex-officio. Lansbury would continue as a director, and the 1919 debenture holders would have a seat once the "Daily Herald Ltd" was wound up in June and its shares sold to Victoria House. The party leader's ex-officio post would soon lapse, and Lansbury become the debenture-holders representative, but the broad pattern established when the new Board took over at the start of August with Henderson in the chair and Bowerman vice-chair was to survive through the 1920s. (30)

The levy system foreshadowed by Henderson on 9th May was also agreed on the 21st. Under this each TUC union's annual affiliation fee would be increased from 1d to 3d while the Labour Party made an annual block grant of £10,000. If backed by Congress the levy, unlike the scheme proposed in March, would be binding on all unions who could only avoid payment by disaffiliation. (31)
This was expensive for unions - Hodges noted that it would take half of the annual income of the ever-supportive Miners Federation. Some inevitably disliked the plan - the National Union of Journalists would disaffiliate, arguing that members on other papers should not be required to fund the Herald. But for most dislike of funding a newspaper was insufficient reason to withdraw from their national organisation. (32)

Attempts continued to find other funding. Throughout the 1920s the Herald saw the Co-operative movement much as an angler sees a giant fish. Frequent plays were made for its support, but to no avail. In June Henderson, Lansbury and Hodges tried again, but the Co-operators voted by a majority of two to one at their annual conference to develop their own independent daily paper instead. (33)

Labour's annual conference, in Edinburgh at the end of the month, proved more tractable. Following addresses by Lansbury and Henderson the conference endorsed their leaders' role in the de-facto takeover and pledged itself: "To use its best efforts, individual and corporate, to bring the circulation promptly up to half a million". On the last day of the conference the Herald's daily sale was below 160,000. (34)

Next issue in line was policy. A Policy Committee consisting of the chairman and the secretary of the General Council, the chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the secretary of the Labour Party and the secretary of the joint Publicity Committee as secretary was mooted, but sank without trace. The logical explanation is that the individuals concerned, Walker, Bowerman, Henderson and Clynes, were already directors and it was easier to leave policy issues to the board as a whole. (35)

The choice of editor was a vital element in policy. Lansbury wanted to go - his determined radicalism hardly fitted the editor of an official paper, as he himself recognised: "I always said that it would be impossible for me to edit a paper acting under the orders from a committee or congress. I told Lenin that the Bolshevik doctrine of discipline was abhorrent to me, and that I could never put my mind into someone else's keeping. Therefore, now the paper was to be owned and controlled as a party organ it was time for me to hand over to someone else" (36)
This was just as well for the new proprietors. To have had to sack Lansbury would have been the worst possible start for the official paper, alienating the existing readership. His deputy Gerald Gould was also out of the running, having resigned due to ill-health.(37)

Lansbury was urging the national committees to appoint a new editor from mid July, and announced his own departure in the Herald on July 29th in terms calculated to help the new owners: "my resignation is a perfectly voluntary one and has not been suggested either directly or indirectly by anybody. I have resigned because I desire the new owners to be perfectly free to appoint who they please to take editorial charge of the paper.....and this I also want to emphasize - I do not think anybody has the least right to complain because the policy of the paper, from being unofficial, is now to become official. If the I.L.P, the Communist Party or the Fabian Society owned the paper any of these bodies would insist on control of policy"(38)

Chosen instrument of that control was Henry Hamilton Fyfe, a 53 year old Scotsman. Fyfe was a party member, but his appointment clearly shifted the Herald in the direction of the Citizen professional journalist model. Previous Herald editors had been political in their motivation, with their journalism a consequence of political purpose. Fyfe was a professional journalist of considerable fame whose politics were a consequence rather than a cause of his journalism.

Formerly editor of the Morning Advertiser and the Daily Mirror, he had spent years as special correspondent for the Daily Mail. His conversion to socialism from previously conventional views, heavily influenced by his experience as a War Correspondent, had been documented in his book "The Making Of An Optimist".(39)

The initial approach was made by Henderson, with both Lansbury and MacDonald given a say in the appointment. It was clearly settled, if not formally completed, at the end of July when Fyfe wrote to Lansbury saying that he saw the job as a call and challenge he could not ignore, although he could earn more for less effort as a freelance. He was confident the paper would succeed provided the TUC fulfilled its promises of money - but there was a warning of future problems in his comment: "I was a little amused by the attitude of several of the Directors, and a little puzzled, but not discouraged". Journalists and trade union officials are unlikely bedfellows and this relationship was to be particularly fraught.(40)
Given Fyfe's renown and Fleet Street's appetite for gossip, the secret was remarkably well kept. Not until the end of August did Newspaper World get wind of the appointment, and even then it could say nothing more definite than "Rumour is busy in Fleet Street" (41)

The final hurdle was the Trades Union Congress, meeting in Southport. As it opened on Monday 4th September, the Herald announced its return to 1d, a move pushed by Lansbury since mid July. Four months of 'temporary increase' to 2d had cost 80,000 daily sales. In September 1921, 210,000 had been low enough to convince Lansbury that a return to a penny was essential. A year later he was bequeathing Fyfe a paper that had dropped in just over two years from 330,000 to a little more than 140,000. (42)

The Herald debate, disguised as a General Council resolution to amend Standing Orders and increase the levy, took place on Tuesday with Turner as proposer. Noting the advantages of acquiring a going concern he concluded "There is one big thing to remember, that it is your property now, that it was taken over by the General Council and the Labour Party some months ago after the Conference declared it should be done. It is your property now, and it is up to you to keep the only Labour paper going".

In an uneventful debate support from Turner and Hodges on the left and Sexton and Clynes from the right demonstrated the leadership consensus. But Brownlie, a left-wing Engineer, argued that the levy was unenforceable while Weston of the Shipwrights complained that an important issue was being concealed behind the standing orders device.

But the most effective display of scepticism came from the seconder of the resolution, JH Thomas. Clynes was to argue that the cost of the Herald should be weighed against its propaganda effectiveness. But Thomas, in an exposition of the "Yes, but" position demonstrated the continuing doubts about the Herald among the movement's most influential leaders: "If on the other hand we find we cannot make the "Herald" a paying proposition on its own basis, then I would not hesitate to come along and say, so far as my union is concerned "You had better stop providing the workers with something they do not want". It would be far more honest to face the fact, to say "No they do not want this, and the evidence is that we cannot even get 10 per cent of them to buy their own paper". If, as I say, you could not get a circulation after twelve months, and the paper put on a self-supporting basis, I would not be a party to continuing to subsidise it".
But even with so sceptical a seconder the resolution was certain to get through. Voting just before ten to one the Congress backed the levy by 4.057 million to 916,000, following the decision by a vote of appreciation proposed by Ernest Bevin report) for Lansbury’s work for the Herald. This was carried by acclamation. (43)

Meeting after the vote the Victoria House Board formally appointed Fyfe editor in succession to Lansbury, to take over from the issue of Monday 11th September. (44)

The appointment and the debate were, unsurprisingly, front page news for the following day’s Herald, which hailed the decision with a bank of two column headlines: “Labour Plumps for the Daily Herald: Big Plans for Paper Now Owned and Controlled by the Workers: New Editor Appointed: Price Down To One Penny Next Monday: Plan for 500,000 Readers.”

The accompanying report declared “Our immediate aim is the securing of 500,000 readers of Labour’s Own and Only Daily - We Look To You!”, while an inside page feature on the paper’s history struck a similarly robust note of optimism: “Now that the paper is placed, for the first time in its tempestuous career, on a firm financial basis as the property of the organised Labour Movement”. (45)

The main business had been done but the 1922 TUC had not done with the Herald. On the following day Fyfe was asked to address the congress, and reaffirmed the “We look to you” note struck by the paper: “We have to produce, and I think we can produce a good newspaper which will stand along with all the rest and be better than the rest, but it is no use producing the best newspaper in the world if people will not buy it. It is your pennies we want. We do not want a subsidised newspaper, but one which will pay; one which will not deplete the funds of the movement, but add to them. This is quite a possibility if everyone realises that possibility and drives it home so far as lies in their power, and if necessary make themselves a positive nuisance by talking about it. If this is done we shall go ahead. I have been the fortunate recipient of very many good wishes this morning, which have touched me deeply, but do not think I say it ungraciously when I say that good wishes are not enough”. (46)
Delegates felt that Fyfe by himself was not enough and Lansbury was summoned by acclamation to drive home the same message, concluding with an exuberant assessment of the Herald's sales potential: "There is, however, only one thing that will make this thing successful and that is if you are going to be co-operators, if you are going to stand with him, if you are going to join yourselves to us on the paper in seeing that it is bought, and that people get it day by day in their homes, to begin the day with and to talk about. In this way you may have the biggest readership in the world! Six or seven million Trade Unionists! You ought to have a circulation of 5,000,000 not 500,000." (47)

Lansbury's exuberance and his paper's enthusiasm were understandable - he had finally been relieved of the main burdens after a decade and the Herald appeared to have a guaranteed future. But, as ever, life was not to prove that simple. Past experience should have told its new owners that appeals to movement solidarity were an unreliable means of boosting circulation - and that official status was unlikely to change this. Nor would it automatically end the Herald's awesome capacity for losing money. If anyone seriously thought the paper's troubles were over, the next year was to prove them spectacularly wrong.

ENDS.
CHAPTER SIX (p63-75)

1. NW 28.1.22


LPEC 7.12.21, TUCGC 7.12.21. Miners Federation Proceedings 1921 op cit

Executive 8-9.12.21 Item 9 p 529


6. Joint meeting 14.12.21 loc cit

7. NW 24.12.21


9. Report of joint sub-committee LPDH 24 loc cit

10. Henderson to Whitehead 17.1.22 LPDH 35. Cameron to Henderson 6.3.22 LPDH 68


12. DH sub-committee to NEC and GC members 10.1.22 + marginal handwritten note re ballot LPDH 26

13. Circular to affiliated bodies 14.1.22 LPDH 32

14. DH 23,24.1.22

15. DH directors report 17.2.22 LPDH 53

16. Report of joint sub-committee n.d LPDH 97. TUCGC 1.3.22

17. Joint sub-committee LPDH 97 op cit. Lansbury to Henderson 11.1.22 LPDH 28

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24. Summary of levy results to 12.5.22 LPDH 98

25. DH 3.5.22

26. TUCGC 3.5.22

27. Minutes of joint meeting 9.5.22 LPDH 90. NW 13.5.22

28. DH 10.5.22
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30. TUCGC 31.5.22. Millwood and Henderson memo re winding up of DH Ltd

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32. Miners Federation Proceedings 1922 Annual Conference 18.7.22

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