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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Ph. D 1993
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Section Nine
PAGE NUMBERING AS ORIGINAL
In spite of the TUC vote, the Odhams deal had still to be sold to the wider movement - whose only warning before the Herald announcement had been in a leak to the Mail in early August. The apparent handing over of the Herald to capitalism must have come as a bombshell, yet there was little apparent opposition. Only a few letters in the Labour and TUC archives register protests although Derby Trades Council can hardly have been reassured when Citrine replied to their complaint about secrecy by saying he could not discuss private session deliberations. (1)

A more aggressive resolution from the Birmingham branch of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, protesting at the transfer of the Herald to "controlling management and interests alien to the principles of the Labour Movement" was suppressed by the City Trades Council executive while Labour deputy secretary Middleton attempted to choke off an animated correspondence with South Marylebone ILP by pointing out that the Labour Party had no say in the running of the Herald, so "It is hardly competent for any ILP branch to pass resolutions of the type you have forwarded". (2)

Both Citrine and Middleton told protesters that the new structures would safeguard policy. If asked to prove the necessity for the Odhams deal they could have quoted the Herald's continuing travails. Under the old set-up it would have been close to disaster in October. Forced to request #8,000 from the Publishing Fund they were greeted by Citrine's comment that of the #8,000 left in the fund #7,000 was earmarked for a paper guarantee. With the Odhams Seventh Cavalry just round the corner the TUC released the cash - without it the Herald would have been at the end of its auxiliary resources barely a month into the TUC year. (3)

The circulation crash had continued through the summer and autumn. More than 15,000 copies were lost over the seven-week holiday period with circulation dropping below 350,000 on August 21st. By 17th October it had fallen to 332,554, a further loss of nearly 8,000 in a month and Williams was airing a last insurance-related lament: "Yesterday, in Bargoed.... two men were killed in the colliery, T Jones and J Mason. The first had been a regular daily reader of our paper for nine years.... and the other for about five years.. Neither of them took an insurance paper. The result is - talk amongst people all over the place pointing out the pecuniary disadvantages now to the dependants" (4)
Planning for the new Herald began in the early autumn. A new company, the Daily Herald (1929) Limited, was registered on 11th November with the nine-man board - chaired by Elias and with Bevin as vice-chair leading a TUC quartet also including Tillett, Citrine and Pugh, met on the following day. The other Odhams directors were Dunbar, Cook, Advertising Director Philip Emanuel and head of insurance Norman Canter.

Mellor, in a foretaste of the eventual change of editorship, was released from day to day responsibilities to concentrate on planning - leaving Stevenson in temporary charge. Staff recruitment went on rapidly: "The new proprietors seem to have cast their net widely and drawn catches from a good many staffs", commented a writer to the NUJ's "Journalist" in January 1930, expressing fear that the old staff would lose out. Several major posts went to new recruits - LM MacBride from the Express became News Editor, Austin of the Sunday Dispatch Features Editor and Webb of the Sporting Life Night Editor.

But the new Chief Sub was an old Herald hand - Leslie Sheridan, described as "returning to his old love, but at a much bigger salary" after five years at the Chronicle. Apart from Mellor and Stevenson the conspicuous survivor was Ewer, who stayed on as foreign editor - his appointment as much as those from capitalist papers showing that Odhams sought journalistic talent before political conformity, although he was to resign from the Communist Party in 1930. His wife Monica Ewers survived as Drama Critic, and celebrated by publishing her third novel, Insecurity. Poyser was subordinated to Advertising Director Emanuel, but continued as Advertising Manager.

It was reported that all but two refuseniks had transferred, most to better-paid jobs, by November. Their identities are unclear. The professional press reported the departure of Brodzky and Parliamentary sub-editor and NUJ Father of Chapel Tom Pearson, but the picture is complicated by a reference in the board minutes to the sacking of Pearson. Williams' was found a role as liaison officer between the Herald and the unions after Bevin had interceded with Elias on his behalf.
The importance given to the circulation campaign was shown by the quality of those in charge. Odhams seconded William Surrey Dane, who would direct the Herald's 1930s sales surge as publicity director and became chairman of Odhams in the 1950s while the TUC provided Vincent Tewson, who would succeed Citrine as General Secretary in 1946.(9)

The aim was to mobilise the movement's activists. Inadequate as a circulation figure, they were a different matter as a canvassing force. The top-down recruitment process began on 7th December in Cardiff with the first of 14 regional meetings to which 10,000 union and party officers and officials were invited.(10)

There were General Council and Labour executive speakers at each meeting, but the centrepiece was a comprehensive statement from Bevin - or, in his absence Citrine, followed by questions. Organisation was not the only purpose, as Middleton admitted:“Frankly they have been heard very largely in order to give Bevin an opportunity to make a very full statement to representatives of the Movement regarding the new "Herald" scheme..until these conferences were initiated, the only statements that had been made were those made by Bevin in the private session of the Belfast Trades Union Congress and at our own Brighton conference.Experience has shown that it is wise to give ample opportunity for questions, in order to clear away, as far as possible, the many doubts and suspicions that have been created by the character of the new company”(11).

Citrine's notes for a speech probably delivered at Sheffield on 4th January indicate a basically political appeal to a political audience, but with reminders of the importance of wider horizons. Points emphasised in explaining the Odhams deal were control over policy through the A directors - they would rather have let the Herald die than pass its name, goodwill and policy over for cash - and the fact that Daily Herald 1929 Ltd were the owners, with Odhams merely the printers.
The movement were being offered a 20 page daily and free insurance equal to other popular nationals - Minney notes that a Newspaper Publishers Association agreement to limit insurance schemes stopped wilder claims. A Northern edition, rewarding readers who had taken the paper out of loyalty, would be ready in June or July. The conclusion pointed to the importance of national and international industrial news and of a daily paper to defend the Labour Government against the rest of the press. (12)

Suitably inspired, delegates were asked to pass a resolution: “That we, the delegates attending this Conference, pledge our support to the new "Daily Herald" and approve the scheme under which the Movement will undertake to secure new registered readers, we undertake enthusiastically to administer the scheme and to assist to the fullest extent in our power to secure for the new "Daily Herald" a sale which will make its position pre- eminent as a national newspaper.

"Further we agree immediately to commence the work of enrolling helpers, and to forward during the coming weeks the largest possible number of enrolment forms as part evidence of the enthusiasm with which we are sure the scheme will be received in the area covered by this conference" (13)

Working from the Herald offices at 68 Long Acre, the campaign was organised through local coordinating bodies - Trades Councils and Labour Parties in boroughs, divisional parties in the country - with the purpose of ensuring that: "The whole force of the political organisation on the one hand, and the Trade Union organisation on the other, is brought into operation". Union branches were to canvass their workplaces and local parties their districts. At the bottom of the pyramid came the infantry of the operation - the individual Helper operating "as directed by the responsible officer of his or her Trade Union branch or Labour Party". A target of 100,000 Helpers, set by Bevin, was proclaimed in the Herald on 19th December. (14)

This was not the first attempt to mobilise the massed rank and file for the Herald. The pledge scheme fiasco remained an unhappy memory, and requests for Herald canvasses had been made throughout the 1920s.
But all previous attempts had relied on activists prepared to work for the greater good.

Birt, circulation traveller for the West Midlands, had put the problem bluntly in June:

"Voluntary canvassing is no good - you must offer some payment", he said, advocating a payment of 1s per new sale. The Herald campaign offered 1/3 - 3d to the co-ordinating body, 3d to the Party or union branch and 9d to the Helper - in return for which the Helper had to return a plethora of coupons to the various bodies. (15)

Driven by the conferences and frequent plugs in the Herald, an enrolment campaign ran through December - too slowly for Middleton's liking, but doing nothing to dampen Herald confidence: "I am not at all discouraged by the comparatively few number of enrolments that we are getting at present", said Dane before Christmas, predicting a January rush. (16)

Inevitably attention was diverted from the day to day running of the Herald: "We are doing all possible to feed the old Herald whilst doing our share to help the new paper", reported Poyser in November. (17)

But, under Stevenson's editorial direction, there was still a government to be supported, and the fortunes of MacDonald's second administration was still inevitably the dominant theme. As in 1924 foreign achievements provided most occasion for unalloyed delight. Domestic policy involved grappling with complex and intractable social problems - with their solutions subject to wide and divisive debate within the movement. In foreign policy a broad Labour consensus centred on the strengthening of international institutions as a means of averting the threat of war.

The Herald saw its official role as not merely reporter but facilitator of Labour foreign policy. It had made much during the Hague conference of reporter Slocombe's role, at a sensitive time, in arranging a meeting between Snowden and Briand. Even now its news values remained heavily movement-oriented.
When the conference concluded it treated a letter from Snowden, Graham and Henderson thanking Slocombe for his work, which "gave us great assistance on the political and financial sides" as a front-page splash, printing a full facsimile of the letter along with Ewer's profile of the reporter. Slocombe's efforts were also singled out by Bevin at the TUC, conveniently forgetting that he had at least acquiesced in Allen's proposal to sack him a mere six months earlier (18)

Henderson's admiration was reciprocated. His recognition, after nine years of British resistance, of the jurisdiction of the international court at The Hague was welcomed as "Another big step forward towards the establishment of the rule of law in international affairs..... the thanks not only of this country, but of the civilised world (sic) are due to Mr Henderson". Two weeks later it hailed "A record of achievement in the sphere of foreign affairs which for a period of less than four months is amazing".

As the new parliamentary session began the Herald commented: "Abroad the government has completely justified the confidence of the nation: it now proceeds to repeat its foreign successes on the domestic front". (19)

This wasn't quite so easy, but the Herald, accepting JH Thomas' view that the government would be judged on its handling of unemployment and expressing confidence that it would not fail, did its loyal best. The ever-willing Bracher was in admiration overdrive as Thomas unveiled a £42m work-creation programme in November. (20)

He enthused: "I have heard many Ministerial statements on work to provide employment, but the speech delivered by Mr JH Thomas this evening far surpassed every one of them, not only in its content, but also in the force, clearness and confidence with which the Minister made every point.

He spoke like "a workman that needeth not be ashamed". His voice was at its best, its manner deliberate, and the crowded audience hung upon his words... Mr Thomas disclaimed all magic powers, but he had some astonishing numbers to disclose". (21)
But unpleasant reality and divisions within the movement meant that the Herald, while less inclined to facilitate critics than in 1924, was unable to maintain the same note of enthusiasm. Mounting unemployment received less publicity than under Baldwin, and reports included efforts to explain figures away - in December a leader "The First Six Months" argued that the other parties were in no position to criticise and noted that, while rising, unemployment was still 47,902 less than at the same time in 1928. (22)

Divisions also sprouted on the "Not Genuinely Seeking Work" provisions of unemployment law, under which thousands of claimants were being refused benefit. The Government's tentative attempts to mitigate the law tested the Herald's loyalty to its limits - with not only the Clydesiders but its co-proprietors, the TUC, calling for greater liberalisation. Committed to following both Labour political policy and TUC industrial policy, it found itself in a situation where the two were close to irreconcilable. The consequence was a muted renewal of the "candid friend" mode - without attacking a measure outright, and accepting the principle that under difficult circumstances half a loaf was better than none, the Herald would point to possible improvements, generally corresponding to the TUC's views.

Debate centred on the Morris committee, appointed by Minister of Labour Margaret Bondfield to look into the issue. The TUC took the view that the only proper test of "Genuinely Seeking Work" was the offer of suitable employment, a view that the Herald strongly endorsed. But the committee devised a second test, accepted by Bondfield in legislation launched in November, based on evidence that work was available and the claimant had failed to try to secure it. (23)

The Herald's reactions are in marked contrast to those it accorded Trevelyan's school leaving age plans or the extension in October of widow's pensions - greeted with headlines on "Millions of Pounds for Purpose of Extending Human Happiness" and a leader baldly titled "A Great Bill". (24)
Accepting the constraints under which government was acting and that the bill was "Essentially a stop-gap measure, designed to tide over a state of affairs which is temporary", it nevertheless argued that the wording was too loose - placing too much burden of proof on the claimant rather than the Labour Exchange - again noted the TUC line and suggested that an amendment along these lines would strengthen the bill.(25)

A similarly 'supportive with helpful suggested improvements' attitude was shown when the government brought forward its Mines Bill in December. The leader said those who wanted immediate fulfilment of Labour's full policy were "just crying for the moon", but went on "The Coal Mines Bill is not in its final form. It can still be improved in committee. On the wages side there will undoubtedly be a desire to tighten up the provisions and to give the National Industrial Board greater powers. On other points it is also susceptible of amendment. But it remains an honest and straightforward attempt to unravel the tangled skein of coal difficulties."(26)

Scepticism on detail gave way to Bracher's habitual cheerleading when Bondfield's Insurance Bill was introduced. Her speech :"Revealed a mind equal to every demand of exposition, of defence, of rational controversy, a mind not moulded by, but moulding, as Whitehall knows, a great Department of State, a mind which has earned for her the title of "Masterly Maggie".(27)

In the parliamentary ranks, vigorous criticism came from the left - with WJ Brown, Maxton and Wheatley the most vigorous. Brown had been seen in the role of candid friend in October - quoted as being in "a friendly, critical mood" and arguing that treatment of the unemployed was the one blot on a good record. While a minority government could not launch fundamental attacks on capitalism :"The very least that it can do, however, is to use its power to see that the victims of Capitalism are properly treated..the treatment of the unemployed calls for immediate and drastic amendment". He argued that Bondfield was making insufficient use of existing powers.(28)
The Herald had consistently drawn a distinction between the constructive critic - not only legitimate but necessary - and the destructive critic. Brown's classification in the first category was shown when Mellor gave him feature space to put the case for the "Left-Wing Critic". He couched his justification in terms little different to those used at times by the Herald: "The most serious danger in all popular movements is their tendency, as power is approached, to accommodate themselves to the standards of the existing order, which they began by wishing to destroy - the danger that they will cease to be revolutionary in any way at all...

"The justification of the Left-Wing critic is that he opposes a barrier to the drift towards acquiescence. He is, so far from being the enemy of democracy, its surest bulwark". (29)

Right of reply was exercised in pungent terms two days later by fellow MP John Clarke who argued that "Left wingers exhibit a woeful lack of balance and an exaggerated idea of their own virtue... The traditions of our Socialist Movement spring from the spirit of self-sacrifice and the subordination of the individual... Not one single member of the Party in the House likes the Unemployment Bill before us at present before the House. Conditions determined it as a purely interim Bill to give us a little more time to do bigger things".

Clarke added that both the party and the ILP had accepted this view by majority vote, yet a group of members had staged "a mutiny which is as indefensible as it is dangerous. The hopes of millions are centred upon this popular Government, and any indiscretion, any unwise action on the part of any section calculated to weaken it, is reprehensible to the highest degree". (30)

With the TUC arguing the same lines and its own views clearly declared, the Herald could hardly treat Maxton's amendment to the Bill as indefensible. Nor could it endorse such direct opposition. A news report said: "It is not a revolt. It is a pious expression of opinion that the Bill really ought not to have included provisions enacting the objects specified in the motion". And the leader columns remained silent while the amendment and the Brown and Clarke articles prompted vigorous exchanges in the letters columns - the unemployed Gwyn Richards of Burry Port arguing that "no-one outside a lunatic asylum" could expect a minority Labour government to carry out its full programme and that more team-work and less suspicion of leaders were needed. (31)
By contrast St Pancras councillor T Moore complimented Brown: “If the spirit of the Movement is to be kept alive and active, room must be found for those who hold similar views. Our opponents are making full use of the contrast between promise and fulfilment. It is left to men like WJ Brown to keep first things first". (32)

Less legitimate in the Herald’s view was Wheatley’s behaviour a week later. Angered by Bondfield’s refusal of a concession that would have cost £50,000 he attacked the Chairman of Ways and Means and denounced government policy. The row recalled Buchanan’s row with Bondfield in the early days of the government - pitting the demands of the poor against administrative and financial constraints. The Herald again came down against the protester - not immediately in its leader columns but later in the week when its comments on MacDonald’s speech to the 1917 Club demonstrate how far the paper had moved since the early 1920s, rebuking rebels in terms extraordinarily reminiscent of those used against Poplar: “Mr MacDonald did well to bring his listeners back to fundamentals... If it is true, and it surely is true, that the mere distribution of money is not Socialism, then it is entirely wrong to turn it into a test of Socialist faith. No greater disservice could be done than to create in the public mind a picture of Socialism as one huge national workhouse and the reckless pouring in of public or private charity. That is only a caricature of the real thing, with which the enemy can do untold harm to the Socialist cause”. (33)

In defending the government from its critics, the Herald consistently invoked the limitations imposed by minority status and financial circumstances. A firm rebuke of those dissatisfied with Trevelyan’s education grant plans was a typical exposition of half-a-loaf theory.

It asked: “Do some Labour members of Parliament take the view that circumstances must never be taken into account when Ministers are formulating their legislative proposals? What sense is there in passing an adverse verdict on every proposal that is not all that everybody could wish for? Under the exceptional circumstances which exist, few things can be ideal, and the sooner that is frankly faced the better... Labour MPs have a duty to support it, and equally a duty to put forward constructive criticism. A tiny minority seem to take nagging for criticism, and self-righteousness for virtue”. (34)
A key motivation here was fear that the government might be portrayed as split - it furiously lectured the Express for the "perversion of the truth" in reports that a PLP meeting had heard a resolution for the expulsion of the five leading Clydesiders. Stevenson was on strong ground, but in a much weaker position in February over "venomous press attacks" on Thomas claiming that Mosley, Lansbury and Johnson - the rest of the employment team - had resigned. "Political journalism in this country is certain to discredit itself if every time a controversial memorandum is before a Cabinet the occasion is represented as a crisis of the first magnitude" (35)

Here the Herald was acting as an official advocate rather than a newspaper. With their privileged access, Herald reporters must have known of the extent of the division within the government over the "Mosley Memorandum". It would precipitate an offer of resignation from Thomas and lead ultimately to the departure of Mosley, Labour's rising star, from Cabinet and party - by any measure "a crisis of the first magnitude" (36).

But the Herald was prepared to criticise the government over its relationship with the Liberals in the Commons when the Coal Bill majority fell to eight. This criticism was not direct - but the use of the indirect "many thought" and "others felt" in comments advocating a tougher line with the Liberals is a clear indication of belief that the government was failing to impose itself: "Ever since it became known that Cabinet Ministers had taken counsel with the Liberal leaders on the mining problem there has been an uneasy feeling in the Party. Many thought that the conversations should never have taken place. Others felt deep concern at too-generous conciliatory gestures by the Government".

The Herald's solution to irritating dependence on the Liberals was simple: "We speak for local Labour Parties when we ask the Government to stand no nonsense from Mr Lloyd George but to go to the country and ask for a majority at the earliest moment that that becomes imperative" (37)
A day later it could quote Clynes and Thomas as backing its "No More Nonsense" argument for an early election. The uneasy relationship with the Liberals was patched up in January - though the Herald greeted Lloyd George's olive branch rather sourly: "The real question is whether or not the Liberal minority intends to help in carrying out much-needed social reform. Its record to date is not encouraging". (38)

Herald enthusiasm for an election was doubtless aided by the havoc in Conservative ranks, with Baldwin besieged by Beaverbrook and Rothermere's Empire Free Traders. The Herald affected not to take them too seriously - dismissing a "Crazy Crusade" and Beaverbrook as "Amiable and well-intentioned but hopelessly wrongheaded" - a note of personal affection, reflecting correspondence with Mellor, never extended to Rothermere. (39)

But it took it seriously enough to devote three two column-features by "An Eminent Economist", a front-page splash and a leader to the campaign in October. With unemployment rising a campaign promising economic revival backed by two major press barons was a potential threat to the Labour vote, and even as it piled on derision the Herald took wary notice. (40)

On the industrial front it went on giving dutiful support to the continuing Mond-Turner process. Agreement in December to create consultation and co-operation machinery was welcomed as "An Historic Experiment" with all the normal caveats about neither expecting too much nor superseding existing machinery, and "an undoubted hope that it may serve to create an informed and constructive power which shall promote the well-being of all engaged in British industry and commerce". Similar state-corporatist enthusiasm greeted the creation of a economists' Council of Experts - it was never likely to be anything other than enthusiastic when it was explained as a long-cherished MacDonald project also backed by the TUC. It was again able to advertise its excellent sources of information by confidently nominating Hubert Henderson as a likely member. (41)
Faith in the inquiry as an instrument of good government was demonstrated in October 1929 following the Bank of England's decision to raise the bank rate - seen by the Herald as a "staggering blow to hopes of successfully accomplishing any of the tasks to which the Government and the nation have set their hands". The decision to up rates was, the Herald conceded, inevitable given Bank policy: "But the real issue is the policy of the Bank of England. Is it the right policy? Are the principles on which it is based sacrosanct. (42)

An inquiry was, the Herald argued, a logical consequence of the Mond-Turner declaration, and was granted by Snowden on 3rd October during "a brilliant review of the situation". It is characteristic of the Herald and the movement that it should be certain something is wrong, but lack any concrete ideas of how to right it and instead reach for the device of committees of wise men. (43)

Rather less publicity was given to the Wall Street crash in late October 1929 - although the Herald regarded it seriously enough to grant a single front-page lead story and a leader showing some grasp of the potential international implications: "It would all be as unimportant as the Monte Carlo gaming tables were it not that, on this gigantic scale, it affects credit the world over... So inter-connected is the world economy today that a miner in Durham or a cotton operative in Saxony may go hungry because of the follies of gamblers in New York". But the consequences of bankers' priorities and international financial collapse were not to be visited on the movement until 1931, so it is hardly fair to criticise the Herald for its relatively dim perception of the threat. (44)

A rather more recognisable danger appeared to be on the loose again when drivers at Barking Bus Garage came out on strike in early October. The Herald reported that "It affected nine routes and 106 buses, causing much inconvenience to the working-class districts of Dagenham, Becontree and Barking" - a mildly censorious note about the impact of public service strikes not normally associated with Herald industrial reporting - not that is, unless it could be "proved by literature that has been issued to be a Minority Movement stunt". (45)
The strike was rapidly settled, and soon afterwards an embarrassed Bevin admitted that he had been mistaken in issuing a statement that "Literature now issued proves that the stoppage is a Minority Movement Stunt". The striking similarity in wording between Bevin's statement and the Herald's suggests strongly that the paper was prepared to reprint comments from some union leaders, without attribution, as matters of uncontested fact. It does not appear to have felt the need to replicate Bevin's apology. (46)

Attitudes to Communism had in any case continued to harden. Criticism within the CPGB of Pollitt as a "right-winger" prompted a cheerful leader stating that it was "inevitable that the mania for destruction which possessed the Communists should turn inwards". Russian Communism continued to be regarded more generously than the British variant. But it too was less popular than previously - because of continued Russian dictation of the CPGB's line and possibly also due to the tricky negotiations over the resumption of diplomatic relations. For the first time since Fyfe's day the anniversary of the 1917 revolution passed without a leader. Current attitudes were expressed when a delegation of Kent miners returned from Russia with less than glowing impressions: "The natural reaction of men fed on silly Communist propaganda designed to prove that the Soviet has established a new heaven on earth. Russia's achievements, not least survival, were not in doubt, but: "The tragedy is that by their mischievous interference in the affairs of other countries the members of the Third International are doing so much to nullify the efforts of those who are willing and eager to help Russia". (47)

Indian coverage maintained the anti-boycott line, lecturing those who supported them: "surely the last word in futility". When Congress voted for a boycott in pursuit of complete independence it said: "Mr Gandhi and his colleagues have made, not indeed so far a Himalayan blunder, but a singularly foolish one. Their policy to which they have succeeded in definitely committing Congress is...a futile one of mere negation". The self-designated official paper of the Labour government unsurprisingly felt they might have done better to cooperate "with a Government the sincerity of which he has frankly acknowledged". (48)
The greater volume of serious political news inevitably reduced the prominence given to
general and human interest stories. Recognition than an unleavened diet was far from ideal was
signalled by Stevenson in a feature on "Letters to the Editor", when he said: "Do not complain
that your letter on Marx and the Great Contradiction was overlooked in favour of one describing
a queerly-shaped potato dug out of an Ilford allotment. Too many of us Socialists try to make man
in our own image. We forget that the average worker, good Labour man and trade unionist though
he be, demands diversity in his daily news diet. Man does not live by politics alone."(49)

The Herald reader's diet in autumn and winter 1929-30 took in a mix of trials and
disasters. Trials included those of discredited financier Clarence Hatry, the inquest at Reading in
which actor Yale Drew found himself in effect on trial for murder, and of the R101 Airship.
Disasters took place on land (Enfield bus and tram), sea (off Pembrokeshire), air (Imperial
Airways in the Gulf of Genoa) and in a Paisley cinema in the last nine weeks of 1929. (50)

And in the absence of society gossip, the Herald continued to take lighter items from the lives
of Labour leadership families - a half-column news page report plus picture devoted to the
Oxford v Cambridge University women's hockey match owed everything to the presence of Sheila
MacDonald, daughter of Ramsay, at inside-right for Oxford. (51)

Eleven years after the end of the Great War, memories were still raw and charged. The
Herald, which had run extracts from All Quiet on the Western Front during the election
campaign, would always support writers who demythologised war, and gave firm backing to
Robert Graves' Goodbye To All That - greeted as "A fearless and graphic book about the war - a
book which will give rise to sharp and bitter controversy". (52)

When the controversy started, a leader noted that the fiercest critics of All Quiet... had been
non-combatants and that Graves memories tallied with those of actual fighters. While "Ex-lance
corporal" from Hampstead described it as "A travesty of the facts", German journalist Egon
Wertheimer's view "Never Has The War Myth Been More Fearlessly Exploded", if a
disconcerting choice of verb, expressed the majority of an extremely heavy postbag. (53)
A critic in World’s Press News commented that “All highbrowism should be carefully excised. The present paper is not altogether free from this defect”. The Herald role as junction box between the tastes of the left intelligentsia and the self-improving worker was seen again when an exhibition of Italian masterpieces was staged at the Royal Academy in the first months of 1930. It gave the exhibition heavy coverage and offered a series of reproductions of the paintings - described as a mix of two favourite themes, “Modern science and the art of the world’s greatest painters”, for which it received 70,000 orders.

Delighted to see that readers were responsive to its own high-culture values, the Herald reported: “By far the largest number of orders came from industrial areas, clearly revealing the fact that the workers of today are determined that they should not live by bread alone, and they are as keenly interested in art as are the workers of any other country in the world.”

With the exhibition due to close on March 8th, the Herald campaigned for an extension: “For too long the great masterpieces of the past, and even of the present, have been enjoyed only by a very few people. Now at last the masses are being awakened to a new beauty by the joy and colour of the artist. Ugly as life may be, the painters, the poets and the musicians can bring light and happiness to many minds that have only lived in dark places. That this is being so widely understood is a great achievement and one for which the Italian exhibition is largely responsible.”

And when its demands were partially met, the Herald for once confessed itself “Not satisfied with the half-loaf”, but made sure of taking credit for what had been achieved.

A final major story was the Herald itself and its relaunch, announced in full to readers on 12th November in a signed front-page story by Mellor, outlining the Odhams deal and promising “The Labour outlook and policy of the “Daily Herald” cannot be changed, for its policy and outlook must be that of the Labour and Trade Union Movement”. Reader response was reported as overwhelmingly favourable: “A thrill of joyous expectation”. The critical minority were told that they had lost sight of the policy guarantees outlined by Mellor.
There is little extant information on the week to week progress of the Herald registration campaign, but there are hints of a slow start. While the organisers had called for 100,000 helpers, the number enrolled fell well short - 32,803. The campaign started on 9th January, intended to run until 3rd March, a fortnight before the launch of the new paper. (58)

Expenditure had already been considerable. Each new reader was offered a choice of a camera or fountain pen plus membership of "#10,000 Free Family Insurance" - advertised in a leaflet tastefully illustrated with train smash es, injured footballers, crashing motorbikes and other mishaps. Vast numbers of leaflets were issued - 450,000 with messages from MacDonald and Snowden and a further 200,000 with details of the incentives offered to Helpers and readers and messages from the chair and secretary of the Labour Party and the TUC. Added to the deluge of paper were the seven sections of the order form, to be filled in by the Helper - who kept No 1 and sent off 2 and 3 to the local secretary and the co-ordinating body, 4, 5 and 6 to the Herald to give them the reader and newsagents name plus registration for insurance and the free gift and 7 to the reader as a receipt. (59)

Their efforts were encouraged and directed by The Helper, an eight-page weekly intended both to inform and to inspire canvassers with a feeling of crusading excitement as part of a great army fighting for the future of the paper and the movement. Appeals from the leadership were the staple item - with Labour leaders more prominent than those of the TUC co-proprietors, Bevin apart. MacDonald, inevitably was first with a message reading "Go Full Steam Ahead". (60)

MacDonald and Bevin were pictured in every issue while Snowden, Henderson and Clynes followed their leader on the cover. Lansbury, incongruously clutching a cricket bat, appeared in issue three while other appeals included one from the Movement's 13 leading women and what was termed "An inspiring message to Daily Herald Helpers" from Walter Citrine. (61)
Rhetoric was supplemented by practical instruction. Pictures of the free gifts on offer appeared in every issue. Early issues featured hints on canvassing, succeeded by suggestions and anecdotes from Helpers which as well as serving a practical purpose - some hints would have been genuinely useful - aimed to accentuating the sense of belonging. The same mix of practical assistance and collective involvement was seen in competitions to find the most difficult order secured and the best argument used. (62)

Its language was conversational - recognising the canvassers as a group of movement insiders. A message in the fourth issue caught the flavour, while betraying unconscious belief that all Helpers were male: "You are now an experienced Helper. A valuable man in the service of the cause". Later issues aimed to set targets for emulation, quoting for instance a Norwich man named Goldsmith who said he had recruited 400 new readers and was aiming for 1,000, and numerous letters recounting successes. (63)

Both the Herald and The Helper were consistently bullish about the campaign's progress. But there were to be two extensions of the campaign, first to the 17th March launch date, and then to 21st March - with the second extension accompanied by a 3d per reader increase for Helpers, taking their reward to 1/- and the total cost of each new reader to 1/6. (64)

This may have been, as The Helper claimed on the second occasion, to allow for demand to be satisfied. But it is also possible that things were not going well enough. The Helper termed itself the "Great last two weeks rally issue" and the term "rally", implying recovery from adversity, may be significant. On March 3rd, the intended end of the campaign, the total number of pledges received was 400,566 - clearly nowhere near enough. (65)

Whether inspired by the extra 3d or more selfless motives the Helpers redoubled their efforts in the next fortnight. An extra 219,188 readers were enrolled - taking their contribution to 619,854. It is a reasonable assumption that this period saw the week with a daily average of 36,202 new orders and the day with 51,836 quoted in May by Bevin. Add in the 210,000 enrolled by a press campaign and adverts in other papers plus just under 100,000 old readers who registered and by the night of March 17th the Herald had a registered readership of 929,000. (66)
All these efforts were aimed at the new Herald, but the sheer volume of publicity evidently eased the last days of the old paper. Sales increased from the moment Odhams took over production from Victoria House on February 17th. The last Victoria House issue on February 15th had a circulation of 323,900. The first Odhams issue ran to 327,915 and by the time the last old-style Herald hit the streets on the morning of Saturday March 15th the figure was 348,030, recovering the losses made since August.

The old Herald bowed out on 15th March with the headline "Success assured on Monday" reporting a valedictory visit to the paper by Lansbury - while the new proprietors were effectively repudiating many of his traditions they also recognised the immense importance of his endorsement, linking the new paper to the Herald's distinctive heritage.

A leader, headed "Invincible", similarly linked the old and the new. Implicit in it was the promise that in future the Herald would depend on the financial and professional resources of a commercial publisher rather than the movement's goodwill.

"The paper began in a fighting spirit; in a fighting spirit it has lived. And from Monday it will carry on the fight with a power never before possible..."

"Behind it was the Socialist spirit, the Socialist ideal and these are invincible...No paper has ever had such splendid supporters. They gave themselves unstintingly to the "Daily Herald". Never will it be fully known what sacrifices they made in time and money.

"That is why the paper lived. That is why, despite its meagre equipment, it grew in power and influence". (68)
iv. The New Herald

It is as well that the first issue of the new paper covered a relatively uneventful weekend, as there was only ever going to be one lead story - itself and premier MacDonald's visit to the premises to start the presses. The Herald reported: "The Prime Minister's visit was the outcome of a keen willingness to identify himself with the new enterprise". This has to be doubted. During the First World War Odhams and Elias, as publishers of John Bull, had been responsible for printing his birth certificate, displaying his illegitimacy beyond doubt to the public.

Bullock records that MacDonald blocked Elias' elevation to the peerage - he had to wait until 1936 with Baldwin again premier. Years later Elias would still quote bitterly MacDonald's greeting on arrival at Long Acre: "You're a very courageous man. You're taking a great risk you know - running a daily paper." (69)

But MacDonald and the Herald knew that each needed the other's public endorsement. After a dutiful hour-long visit, during which, it was proudly reported: "Never before had a British Premier mingled so freely with the staff of a great journal", the premier sat at Mellor's desk to be photographed penning a ten-paragraph message: "I hope that all supporters of Labour, and all those, whatever their views, who wish to have the Labour case put fairly before them, will buy it and read it. There never was a time when it was more necessary for the Labour Party to have a national newspaper devoted to its support; or for the public to have the Labour point of view continuously put before it". The front also carried a picture of Elias, although a passport-size portrait near the bottom of the second column was hardly a Maxwellian gesture. (70)
The new paper was visually dramatically different to low-cost, low-key conservative predecessor, using pictures on every page. After years of aspiring to political innovation, the Herald found itself a design innovator. Design expert Allen Hutt said: “Fleet Street’s backwardness in make-up, text and machinery was put to shame by a “popular paper”...with a consistently planned typography in the bold variants of one type family only (Cheltenham), with a strong-contoured text in American Ionic...and with rotary presswork of a quality comparable only with that of the Times”. Le Mahieu sees it as a revolutionary step in the British popular press, using layout to create a unique visual identity for a paper, and notes that during the 1930s: “Virtually every major newspaper in Britain significantly reformed its layout and typography”. (71)

Content was also very different. Mellor, writing in the Labour Magazine had pointed to the essential difference between the old and the new: “This does not mean that political news must be submerged, but it must take its proper place as news and not sprawl over the paper colouring every page and obtruding its way into every nook and cranny. We shall try to avoid that mistake”. Political and industrial news continued to occupy a page each in the new paper, but were two pages out of 20, rather out of 10 or 12. (72)

Promised the full range of popular features, new readers got them - including a leader page article on peace by HG Wells and a specially-written serial story by Edgar Wallace, the biggest selling thriller writer of the day. A front-page plug for insurance was supplemented by a three-column inside description of the scheme. Full pages covered music and arts, radio and business and finance - the last signalling the new Herald's changed view of its readership with the headline “Your Investments” - and a general diary column edited by “Chanticleer”. Tomfool and Gadfly survived, but Way of the World was relegated in truncated form to the arts page. A special feature “The Truth Behind the Dope Peril” referred to the drugs trade, not, as might have been assumed in past, to capitalist competitors.
Advertisements were complemented by a page seven comment assuming an ignorance of the purposing of advertising surprising even in readers of the anti-capitalist press: "These advertisements are invitations specifically directed to you. They ask you to buy the goods of the firm who insert them in our pages" and betrayed over-anxiety to please advertisers: "You can have as much faith in the advertisements carried in this paper as you have in the integrity of the paper and the principles for which it stands. Remember: Good advertisements in the "Daily Herald" mean good goods.

This embrace of commercial values was epitomised by two advertisements. Wincarnis, the one company to have complained consistently about birth-control adverts, took front-page space while the once-controversial H and J Seale Berkeley Chair was also advertised heavily, either fortuitously or pointedly, on the industrial news page.(73)

Further change was to be evident in subsequent issues in the crisply clipped style of leaders and the straight factual parliamentary reporting of Ernest Hunter, previously editor of the New Leader, replacing Bracher's lyrical partisanship in the Commons gallery. If any readers still doubted that the Herald's priorities had changed, proof came in the issue of 1st April. On the previous day the government had been defeated in the House of Commons. The Herald's view that the defeat in itself made little difference to the government echoed its reaction to a similar setback three weeks earlier. But where defeat in the second week of March had been given six-column banner treatment by the old Herald, its successor denied the later reverse any front page coverage - treating Kaye Don's bid for the world land speed record as the day's main story. Mellor's brief was being well fulfilled(74)

The Herald was not slow to proclaim its own success at the relaunch. The second relaunch issue enthused "At one bound yesterday the 'Daily Herald' leaped into the front rank of national daily newspapers. Never before has nay daily made such a great stride in one day". Within three days it was advertising the first insurance pay-outs on the front page, and within five proudly brandishing congratulations from Charles Higham, doyen of the advertising industry.(75)
But formal confirmation of its success had to wait for three weeks until the issue of the first post-relaunch net sales certificate. When it came the Herald again gave itself top front-page billing. Banner headlines hailed a net sales certificate showing a figure of 1,058,588 “Net Sales Over A Million A Day: Daily Herald Breaks the Record: Amazing Feat in 14 Days: Third Biggest Daily Before North Office Opens”.

The accompanying article hailing the “Most spectacular feat in the history of journalism” again showed the Herald determined to flatter both readers and advertisers with an analysis on the place of advertising in modern capitalism that even the most enthusiastic proponent of the publicity industry might have found overplayed: “The Daily Herald public is essentially a thinking public and one which spends with discrimination .... Advertisers have been quick to realise that the new and enlarged ‘Daily Herald’ has enabled them to display their products before an army of readers who have been largely neglected in the past. Readers in their turn have not been slow to appreciate that the firms which advertise most freely are those whose products are the best”. (76)

Even more significant for the paper’s immediate future was the comment: “Labour’s newspaper should have pride of place among the daily journals and should not be contented with having leaped into third place”. As early as 9th April Williams was writing to Middleton saying it was essential to keep the sales pressure on - fearing that many readers who had signed on for 10 weeks in order to get the free gifts offered might drop out unless the sales drive was maintained. (77)

The Northern sales campaign, centred on the issue of a Northern Edition from July 7th and featuring a rally in late June that in spite of Ramsay MacDonald’s refusal to attend, pleading prior business, attracted such crowds that Manchester Tramways takings record was broken, ran on the slogan “Now for the Second Million”. A second series of The Helper appeared, along the lines of the first, carrying the incantation “2,000,000 : Think It: Dream It: Talk It : and Get It!”. (78)
The Herald had in effect exchanged the old treadmill of battling for survival for the new one of desperately pushing for extra sales. In the past it had relied on the political commitment of the movement, now it was to run on fundamentally commercial lines and to be judged a success or failure on that basis.

v. Conclusion

The final months of the old Herald saw its loyal follower role qualified by disagreement between the Labour Government and its TUC co-proprietors. Forced to choose it inevitably backed the TUC, but using the language of its candid friend mode - always accentuating the positive rather than being directly critical. This had the effect of legitimating other dissent, providing that it was expressed in moderate language - but the Herald was still far from the independent-minded facilitator of debate that it had been in 1924. To the end of its life its competitiveness was constricted by lack of money, but also by the balance of its coverage - a point admitted by Mellor in his Labour Magazine article.

The new Odhams Herald was a practical exposition of the critique expressed by Clifford Allen - in Margaret Hamilton's view, the "major architect of the reconstituted Daily Herald", carrying the features the old paper lacked and with a professional journalist's rather than activists' value structure. Its initial success did much to confirm many of his arguments.(79)

The registration campaign of early 1930 is like much of the Herald's history a unique event in the life of the British press. It might be argued that it is ironic that the one occasion on which the human resources of the Labour movement were effectively deployed on behalf of the Herald was after it had passed irrevocably out of exclusive movement control. But the crucial factor in this deployment was Odhams financial muscle, enabling payments to canvassers. Just as Leventhal argues that reliance on voluntary effort was the achilles heel of Henderson's attempts to build a strong Labour organisation, so had volunteers and their freely-given time been inadequate in winning readers for the Herald. The reason why the Labour and Trade union machine could be mobilised so succesfully in 1930 after so many failed previous efforts was precisely that commercial muscle was also applied for the first time. Each was essential to the other.(80)
Chapter Fourteen (p 276-299)

1. DH 4.9.29. TUC General Council circular no 7 (1929-30) 26.9.29. Derby and District Trades Council to Citrine 22.9.29, Citrine reply 25.9.29. TUC 788.51

2. Rudland (Birmingham TC) to Citrine 26.9.29. E Parker (Putney DLP) to Citrine 4.10.29, Elisabeth Williamson (S Marylebone ILP) to Citrine 8.10.29. TUC 788.51 Williamson to Middleton 7.10.29. Middleton replies 8, 25.10.29 LPDH 570-3.

3. Middleton replies loc cit, Citrine to Rudland 27.9.29. TUC 788.51. AM reps 19.9, 17.10, 20.11.29. TUC 788.23. VHPCo Board min 22.10.29 TUC 788.11

4. GM rep 19.9, 17.10.29. TUC 788.22

5. DH 12.11.29. Herald headed notepaper used for letter 20.12.29. LPDH 661 WPN 14.11.29

6. The Journalist Jan 1930. VHPCo Board min 24.9.26 TUC 789.2


8. WPN 28.11.29, 4.4.32. NW 23.11.29. VHPCo Board min 7.8, 26.11.29, 21.1.30 TUC 789.2


11. Middleton to Joseph Jones (Yorkshire Miners) 8.1.30 LPDH 705


13. Draft resolution in TUC 788.89


15. GM rep 1.7.29 TUC 788.22. "How the Scheme Works" loc cit

16. Daily Herald official (signature illegible - probably Dane) to Middleton 20.12.29 LPDH 661

17. AM rep 20.11.29 TUC 788.23

18. DH 21.8, 14.9.29. 1929 TUC Private Session transcript loc cit

19. DH 20.9.3.29. 10.29

20. DH 2.10.29

21. DH 5.11.29

22. DH 12.12.29
23. DH 19,25.10.29
24. DH 17.10.29
25. DH 16.11.29
26. DH 13.12.29
27. DH 22.11.29
28. DH 25.10.29
29. DH 20.11.29
30. DH 22.11.29
31. DH 21,26.11.29
32. DH 22.11.29
33. DH 26.11,3,6.12.29
34. DH 20.12.29
35. DH 30.11.29,10.2.30
37. DH 21.12.29
38. DH 22.12, 21.1.30.
40. DH 18,19,20.10.29
41. DH 20.12.29, 23,30.1.30
42. DH 28.9,3.10.29
43. DH 4.10.29
44. DH 25,26.10.29
45. DH 7.10.29
46. DH 8,11.10.29
47. Ibid 21,24.9.29
48. DH 2.1.30
49. DH 30.11.29
50. DH 21,23,24.9.29,25.1.30 (Hatry), 9,10,11.10.29 (Reading inquest), 11.10.29 (air crash), 27.11.29 (ship), 12.12.29 (bus and tram), 1.1.30 (cinema)
51. DH 4.3.30
52. DH 18.11.29
53. DH 19,21.11.29
54. DH 6.1.30. WPN 28.11.29
55. DH 22.2.30
56. DH 25.2.30
57. DH 12,14,15.11.29
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58. Herald official (signature illegible - probably Dane) to Middleton 20.12
29 LPDH 661. Helper kit LPDH 643-4. TUC files ref 790.

59. Helper kit loc cit

60. The Helper no 1 23.1.30

61. Ibid nos 1,2,3,4.

62. Ibid no 7

63. Ibid nos 4,5

64. Ibid no 6. Middleton to Labour Party Secretaries 20.2.30 LPDH 748,
   Middleton and Shepherd (National Agent) to local parties 26.2.30 LPDH
   770.

65. Ibid. Daily Herald "A" directors report 12.5.30 TUC 790.01

66. Middleton to local parties 11.3.30 LPDH 774

67. DH "A" dir 12.5.30 loc cit

68. DH 15.3.30


70. DH 17.3.30

71. Le Mahieu - A Culture for Democracy op cit p 252-9

72. Labour Magazine April 1930 p 550

73. DH 17.3.30. Reports to VHPCo dir 24.5.28 LPDH 544

74. DH 12.3,1.4.30

75. Ibid 18,20,22.3.30

76. Ibid 8.4.30

77. Williams to Middleton 9.4.30 LPDH 793

78. TUCGC 23.4.30 min no 231. Middleton draft circular 26.5.30 LPDH 806, to
   MacDonald 14.5.30 LPDH 816. Gower to Middleton 28.5.30 LPDH 830.
   Middleton and Shepherd to branch and DLP secretaries, agents in Durham
   and Northumberland 9.5.30 LPDH 804. Helper 2nd series nos 2 and 3.
   Kneeshaw to Middleton n.d (July 1930) LPDH 902

79. Marwick - Clifford Allen op cit p 193

80. Leventhal - Arthur Henderson op cit p 110

ENDS
In concluding this study it is worth glancing briefly at the Herald's career after the Odhams takeover, in particular at the 1930s. The tone for this decade was set by Williams, otherwise a marginal figure in the new commercial set-up, in the forebodings expressed within days of March 17th. As he predicted, unrelenting pursuit of ever-higher sales became the overwhelming priority. Its base established by the registration campaign, the Herald set out to catch and overhaul its rivals.

The consequence was a fresh Herald irony. The daily paper theoretically dedicated to replacing capitalism with socialism was the catalyst for the most ferocious capitalist circulation battle yet seen. The Daily Chronicle, expensively relaunched only weeks before the Herald was an early victim— in the argot of Fleet Street "torpedoed flat" by Herald competition and forced into amalgamation with the Daily News to form the News Chronicle. Odhams tactics were simple— to outbid their rivals in the inducements offered to potential readers. One characteristic move was their circumvention of a moratorium on free gifts by using their printing capacity to produce a low-cost edition of Dickens for Herald readers. It was extremely expensive— Odhams are estimated to have spent £1,325 million, about one pound for each new reader, by 1932, and £3 million in the decade to 1939. But in purely circulation terms it worked.(1)

In July 1933 the Herald just beat the Express to the first two million audited net sale — a distinction narrowly denied to the Mail in late 1923. That was the zenith of the Herald's fortunes— it stuck at around two million while the Express continued an inexorable rise, but was still firmly established in second place when the war broke out.(2)
The political line continued to be one of loyal moderation. George Orwell in 1940 testified to the victory of journalistic over political values in the Herald's priorities: "The one Socialist paper in England which could last a week on its merits as a paper is the Daily Herald, and how much Socialism is there in the Daily Herald?". One critic joked that the only way to get a political statement into the paper was to print it on the back of a bathing beauty.(3)

The American political scientist Dean McHenry noted its character in greater detail: "The Herald is little, if any, superior to its competition; it is popularly written, with a considerable tendency to the spectacular. Neither the foreign news nor the domestic news is reported as well as in the Times or Guardian, or the better American papers. Its parliamentary reporting is fair, although there are some justified complaints that the debates are not given in sufficient detail. The Daily Herald's pages contain a great deal of advertising of patent medicines and cheap merchandise. Excellent features and editorial pages compensate for the weaker sections. The Herald outdoes its competitors offering gifts and prizes of enormous size, its free insurance policy pays benefits up to £10,000 for certain accidents".(4)

This overstated the extent to which the Herald had come to resemble its rivals. Until its demise in 1964 content studies would show that it devoted considerably more attention to serious political and industrial news than any other popular paper. But it describes the formula on which the successes of the 1930s were built - and began to fail in the 1940s when the transformed Daily Mirror initiated a fresh revolution in popular newspaper technique.(5) MF
The Daily Herald 1921-30 : Conclusion

The failures of the period after 1945 replicated those of the years before 1930. The political-commercial model that had been so succesful in the 1930s looked as dated and unattractive to a postwar audience as the earlier political model had been to their parents in the 1920s.

The postwar Herald proved incapable of winning its target audience of Labour-voting working-class readers against the competition of the racy demotic, irreverent Mirror. Shielded from the worst consequences of its weakness by newsprint rationing in the decade after the war, it slid inexorably after the mid 1950s. Its doom was arguably sealed in 1961 when, as a by-product of a deal centred on the Mirror's desire to control Odhams' lucrative magazine empire, it became part of the Mirror group.

Unsurprisingly unable to accomplish a revival that could only be at the expense of their main paper, the Mirror closed the Herald in 1964, transforming it on the basis of exhaustive market research into the Sun.(6)

In seeking evidence for the proposition that the Herald failed in the 1920s and the 1960s one need look no further than its fate in those decades. Successful newspapers are not sold to new proprietors as the Herald was in 1929, or closed and transformed into a new product as it was in 1964. This definition is purely commercial - the one area in which conclusions about success or failure can be more than tentative.
While the Herald’s purposes were political, it is extremely difficult to reach any conclusions as to its success or failure in these purposes. The Herald’s political masters undoubtedly believed that it had influence on occasion – when Ramsay MacDonald formed the National Government in 1931 Henderson and Bevin devoted considerable, successful effort to ensuring that the paper did not endorse his desertion of Labour. Observers like Hugh Dalton argued that the debacle of 1931 would have been still worse without the Herald as an influence on party and public opinion. (7)

But Alan Lee’s warnings about the great difficulty of assessing the influence of newspapers in historical terms have to be heeded. So too must Lord Beaverbrook’s statement to the 1947-9 Royal Commission on the Press that politically effective newspapers must first of all be commercially successful. The Herald’s political fortunes were inextricably linked to its commercial record. That record, contained in its sales, advertising and profit and loss figures, was one of failure – and the measure of its failure is the sale to Odhams. It is inconceivable that the leaders of the Trade Union movement would have consented to the privatisation of a movement asset had they seen any alternative. (8)

The predominant theme of its commercial career between 1922 and 1930 is the progressive elimination of all such alternatives. Yet there is little in the institutional history to hint at decline – in this respect it was a model of stability and continuity. It was throughout the period a penny daily paper subsidised by payments from the organised Labour movement. Changes came only in the form of reductions in the TUC payment in 1926 and 1929 and the Labour Party’s inability to pay after 1926, followed by formal withdrawal in 1929.
Personalities remained relatively stable. The paper had only two editors and two general managers during this period. Department heads like Poyser, Barrow and Le Good survived throughout, as did significant journalists such as Ewer, "Gadfly", Slocombe and Brodzky. At Board level key figures of the late 1920s like Bevin, Allen, Williams and Turner had connections with the paper extending back to the Lansbury period.

But the stable facade concealed a succession of commercial setbacks. At any time in the 1920s, except periods of exceptional political or industrial excitement, it was a safe assumption that the Herald's circulation was on a downward trend. This continuous attrition and the accompanying losses progressively eliminated the options open to its management until only sale to an external financier remained.

This progression had six stages. Immediately after the movement takeover its new owners relied on movement loyalty to bring in new sales. By the middle of 1923 it was realised that this was insufficient and that a paper equal editorially to its competitors and buttressed by the pledge scheme was seen as the answer - insurance still being rejected as a dubious gimmick. The failure of this stage, with the increased costs of the larger paper and the failure of the pledge scheme pushing the paper close to death at the 1923 TUC, led on to the belt-tightening of stage three.

The cuts necessary to keep the paper open combined with the stimulus provided by the 1923 and 1924 General Elections and the intervening period of government kept the paper's finances relatively stable through the mid 1920s, but at the price of ending any prospect of competing on equal terms - it was in Lansbury's words "An exotic probably requiring a subsidy". (9)
But by the 1926-7 period it was realised that, with competitors redoubling their promotional efforts, this was a recipe for inexorable decline. Key figures such as Williams concluded that without an improved paper and an insurance scheme the Herald was doomed and initiated stage four in which the paper put up a series of development plans to its owners in an attempt to secure the finance needed.

The General Council's refusal to find extra money initiated stage five — the attempt to find external finance for development while retaining movement control of the paper. When the Prudential loan collapsed, so did the chances of keeping the paper within the movement. Stage six — the sale to Odhams — was the only possible outcome.

The driving force in this progression was poverty. The Herald Board consistently believed that their salvation was to be found in a 500,000 daily sale and a Northern Edition. But each was an essential prerequisite of the other, and they had money for neither. It may have been a third of a century before Robert Heller wrote Catch 22, but the Herald Board would have recognised the concept on sight.

Poverty was felt most deeply in the area of sales promotion. While competitors spent millions on their insurance schemes, the Herald was unable to follow suit — the £20,000 spent by the Mail on a single family following the Sevenoaks rail disaster in April 1928 was equivalent to the Herald's total movement subsidy for the year. The consequences of this for competitiveness were epitomised by the Welsh railwayman's comment: "We vote Labour all right, but we are railwaymen. I am married with children. The Daily Express covers me with insurance, so you cannot blame me for taking it". (10)
But it had consequences for production - in 1926 some of the machines being used were more than 20 years old, and for the product, selling at the same price as its competitors the Herald was in 1927 half the size of the News and little more than a third the size of the Mail and Express.

Both Fyfe and Mellor complained that their staff was smaller, worse paid and harder worked than that of their competitors and, wanting extra resources, found themselves instead under pressure to make further economies. The career of sub-editor Leslie Sheridan is instructive. He left for the Daily Chronicle in 1925, but returned to his "first love" in the words of the trade press, journalists of course change jobs for many reasons. But the strong implication of the report, aided circumstantially by the fact that his return came as soon as the Odhams takeover ensured that it was possible to both work for the Daily Herald and enjoy competitive pay and conditions, is that with such conditions all along he would never have left. (11)

Sheridan's career underlines the wider point about the impact of the Herald's poverty. When it was given money to match its rivals in the 1930s, it was extremely competitive. Whether or not problems can be solved by the expenditure of throwing money at them - and the Herald's performance in the 1930s suggests that some can - the evidence of the 1920s is a reminder of the undoubted truth that having none to throw can guarantee failure.

Fyfe's analogy with the ragged man criticised for failing to buy himself a new suit of clothing was thus an apt one, but left out the second question generally asked of ragged men: how far is he responsible for his own predicament?
And it is hard to escape the verdict that, however handicapped by poverty, the Herald also contributed something to its own downfall. The most successful British national dailies this century have been run by proprietors and managements whose first priority is maximising the success of their paper. For the Herald's owners, the paper was merely a means to a political end and its fortunes subordinate to political and industrial objectives.

This contributed to impoverishment through decisions such as the successive reductions in the TUC subsidy, and had a more direct impact when Robert Williams was appointed General Manager. From the evidence we have, Williams appears to have done the job adequately - but it is hard to resist the conclusion that his appointment had far more to do with political convenience than the belief that he was an ideal General Manager.

The manner in which political needs compounded the effect of poverty is summed up by Ethel Bentham's comment in 1925: "A small paper with limited resources has to fulfil two different functions - that of the ordinary daily newspaper and that of the organ of the movement". (12)

Will Stevenson may have informed readers in 1929 that "Man cannot live by politics alone", but the Herald came very close to attempting to do exactly that during this period. It is hard to disagree with AG Gardiner, whose 17 year tenure of the Daily News had demonstrated the ability to combine political purpose and popular appeal, who said: "The carpenter, the cotton operative and the shipwright buy a daily newspaper to be interested and entertained and not primarily for the purposes of propaganda... this elementary consideration has, I think, been ignored". (13)
The Herald's owners, and those journalists we know about, were politically motivated and made this area of activity the overwhelming priority of their lives. They believed that these priorities were shared by rival proprietors — a belief exposed by the exclusively political construction placed upon Lord Rothermere's decision to expand his regional newspaper chain in 1928. In extenuation it should be pointed out that the antics of Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook in the 1920s lent themselves to such an assumption. But this led to a misreading of the competition — completely ignoring their commercial agenda.

But the assumption that others were as they were did not only apply to other press proprietors. They assumed the same about their own potential readers. Their own tastes were those of the Labour elite's autodidact high culture — the culture that produced MacDonald's endorsement of Reith and Ellen Wilkinson's aspiration to turn Britain into a Third Programme country. These were reflected in the Herald. Given the choice between educating and entertaining, the Herald would always choose to educate. The question it asked of a news story was not "Will this story help to sell the paper?", but "Is this politically significant?". (14)

These attitudes led to a dismissal of the human interest stories used as a staple element by other popular dailies as "dope". But it is hard to resist the conclusion that Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook, or at least the editors and journalists employed by them, showed a stronger grasp of mass reading tastes than the duly constituted readership of the organised working class. Ever since the 1930s readership surveys have shown that the human interest story has an appeal, exceeding other categories of story, that cuts across divisions of age, class, gender and region.
There is no reason to assume that the 1920s were any different. And after 1922 there was a gradual acceptance of the fact that the Herald needed to broaden its appeal away from the purely political agenda offered by the Lansbury paper. Thus Ethel Thompson's trial and execution and the ordeal of Vacquier were given full front-page lead coverage where True and Armstrong had been overshadowed by political news. The radical human interest story, such as the Wembley exposes, was developed in a manner that recalled Keir Hardie's exploits for the Labour Leader. In the second half of the decade stories such as the King's illness were heavily covered and leader-column comments on channel swimmers and the Prayer Book controversies showed that a conception of stories being newsworthy even if intrinsically unimportant was emerging.

But it would be misleading to see this as a fundamental shift in the paper's priorities. The Herald remained different, and for all of Clifford Allen's critiques, proud of it. The self-righteous disdain with which it reported its refusal to cover the Cathcart and Russell cases was seen in its subsequent ignoring of Pola Negri's romance and downplaying of "Colonel Barker". In 1927 Howard found that the Herald devoted nearly one fifth of its space to parliament, politics and industry against two per cent in the News, one per cent in the Express and three per cent in the Chronicle. Routine interviews with leaders commanded the lead front page slot, third readings of Sugar Bills could occupy four columns of an eight page paper and a relatively parochial matter like the Herald van hi-jacking might monopolise the front page for days. It was typical that where the Westminster Gazette's mystery man handed money out to readers, the Herald's 'Traveller' interrogated them about their political beliefs. (15)
The Herald was itself interrogated about its beliefs as the movement's leadership attempted to control it throughout this period. The battle for the paper's soul was protracted and hard-fought - in any struggle for control of the movement the Herald, exerting influence over the terms and limits of internal debate, was a significant prize.

The introduction to this thesis defined three broad models for a party paper - the 'independent actor' going its own way, the 'candid friend' giving consistent support to the leadership but retaining the right to dissent and debate and the 'top down' model acting purely as the voice of the controlling group. The broad tendency of the Herald in this period was a movement from an 'independent actor' role under Lansbury before 1922 through a long 'candid friend' stage in the mid 1920s to something very close to the 'top down' model by the time of the takeover.

Several qualifying points should be made. The three categories are not mutually exclusive, nor are their boundaries hermetic. The Herald was always a mix of the three - the change is one of balance. The process was uneven and was not a straightforward left-right progression. Again the broad tendency was to move it from left to right, but this incorporates a sharp lurch to the left in 1925. That this lurch should have taken place shows the extent to which the Herald's line was influenced by guidance from the top, coinciding as it did with the corresponding sharp turn in the General Council in particular following the General Election defeat in 1924.
Among historians of the movement MacKibbin and Shaw have shown how the centre developed and controlled national organisation during the 1920s, while Price and Schwarz have pointed to the intellectual consequences, with challenges to the moderate, ethical reformism espoused by the leadership marginalised. Those at the centre were not interested in tolerating dissent. Ernest Bevin may at the 1928 TUC have proclaimed the importance of the Herald dissenting at the 1928 TUC, but the private views of leaders show a dislike of criticism – with Bramley’s comments to Brodzky on the role of journalists, MacDonald’s letters to Fyfe and Turner and Allen, in his role as a directorial surrogate for MacDonald, consistently demanding conformity to orthodox centre viewpoints. (16)

Lansbury recognised that the movement takeover doomed his freewheeling style and his successor editors adopted different approaches to their political masters. It is one of the numerous ironies attending the Herald in this period that Mellor, whose politics were far more left-wing and dissenting than Fyfe’s, should nevertheless have been much more amenable to leadership pressures to conform. There are two likely reasons for this – the first the simple fact that conformity was to some extent a cumulative process and Mellor followed Fyfe. But second and more fundamental was a difference in outlook. Left-winger he may have been, but Mellor was first and foremost a product of the Labour movement and accepted the disciplines imposed by its leadership. Where he saw himself as a servant of the movement, Fyfe, a late and somewhat paternalistic convert to socialism, saw himself as an independent actor and acted accordingly.
There was considerable movement away from the Lansbury approach under Fyfe's editorship - a notable landmark in the taming of the paper was its leader-column criticism of the 1923 Docks Strike, firmly foreswearing its previous rank and file allegiances to come down reluctantly but firmly on the side of trade union officialdom. The paper tacitly accepted the Labour Party's exclusion of Communists and, under the first MacDonald administration, the threat to use special powers during a transport strike.

But the 'candid friend' approach remained uppermost - an approach epitomised by Fyfe's response to MacDonald's complaints about the paper's refusal to offer uncritical support: "It is very important that no section shall feel resentment at not being allowed to express its views in its own newspaper" and a 1925 leader on the importance of "A continuous interchange of views between (leaders) and the rank and file". (17)

Mellor also espoused the right of dissent, but in practice moved towards the top-down model - in his first few months accepting the self-denying ordinance ruling out debate about the fate of the General Strike when more conventional journalistic demands might have called for the debate to occur while memories were still fresh. These tendencies were seen ever more firmly expressed in 1928 when the Mond-Turner process was supported and the Cook-Maxton manifesto was ferociously attacked. The explicit request in 1929 that the paper should be seen as the official organ of the Labour Government shows, in contrast to its attitude in 1924, how far the process had gone - and the headlining of government praise for Slocombe shows the paper as loyal follower rather than independent actor or candid friend. Significantly it was only seen in candid friend mode when dissent was licensed by TUC disagreement with the government line. MF
The Daily Herald 1921-30 : Conclusion

The Herald's shift from left to right - one paralleling not only power within the movement, but the general trend of politics through the 1920s, can be tracked through its attitude to Communism and its place within the Labour movement. This was a live issue where attitudes taken defined the position of those taking them on the movement's left-right spectrum.

Support under Lansbury for Communists as comrades with similar anti-capitalist views but a different strategic approach gave way after the official takeover to acquiescence in expulsion but sympathetic reporting for Communist affiliates like the Minority Movement.

Fyfe's parting broadside at the Minority Movement in 1926 may have been deplored as divisive at the time, but anticipated the move to outright hostility in the late 1920s - moving through savage assaults on the Movement in 1928 to outright equation with fascism in 1929.

So the Herald can be seen through this period moving from diversity to uniformity, from dissent to conformism, and from rank and file left to official right. Its shift was paralleled on the political stage by a former member of staff, John Scurr who moved from Poplar rebel in 1921 through left MP so disillusioned by the first Labour government that he questioned the value of the exercise to a position where he has described as "among the loyallest of the loyal" among the backbenchers in the 1929-31 parliament.

It can be questioned whether this did the Herald's journalism any good. A later editor, Francis Williams spoke feelingly of the "priceless journalist gift of surprise". This was something that the paper increasingly lacked as the 1920s progressed.
Predictability can also be leavened with passion. When former Times editor Wickham Steed declared "What does the public want... as a rule it wants emotions" he was thinking of human interest stories, but his views also have implications for political coverage. The Herald's Poplar coverage abounds in excitement, engagement, and commitment - in short in emotions - that can reach and exhilarate the reader of microfilm copies 70 years later. That spirit is rarely recaptured after the movement takeover. If the Herald responded to leadership strictures, it did so by becoming a duller paper. (19)

The temptation in commenting on the Herald's fortunes in this period is to adopt the apocryphal traffic direction "I wouldn't start from here if I was you". It might be argued that it was ill-advised that the Labour movement to devote part of its resources to trying to run a mass-circulation daily and that the Lansbury Herald only found itself in that market at all through unplanned circulation growth in the wake of the Russian Revolution.

But however ill-equipped the Herald was, that is the aspiration against which it and its journalism must be judged. To succeed the Herald needed to attract at least half a million readers. It is not axiomatic that the style defined by the commercial press was the only way to a mass sale in the 1920s. But if there was an alternative, nobody found it.

The Herald's heavy political approach could only have captured a mass sale if a large enough section of the British population had been prepared not only to define themselves as socialist anti-capitalists, but prepared to make that definition the decisive factor in their choice of newspaper. Or in other words, a mass anti-capitalist counterculture.
That there was a fair-sized counterculture is shown by the Herald's sales in the immediate postwar period. But Wertheimer, an important witness because of his knowledge of the countercultural German movement, argues convincingly that the bulk of the Labour movement was linked to capitalist culture. Working-class acceptance of capitalist newspapers followed from this - and the Herald, unprotected by cultural barriers, had to match competitors' offerings to win readers.

But it remained deeply serious. This made for some good, well-informed journalism, but not for commercial success in the mass market. It was pitching for popular sales with a serious agenda - the hope Lansbury once expressed of making it "The Manchester Guardian of the working classes". This was a fine aspiration - but the Manchester Guardian's circulation in 1921 was around 50,000. In practice the Herald catered to a political elite much as clubland papers like the Pall Mall and Westminster Gazettes had done. But the difference was that their elite had also been a socio-economic elite attractive to advertisers and, confined to a small area, not demanding the trouble and expense of national distribution. (20)

Growing awareness of the flaws in its strategy served only to increase the Herald's discomfort as the 1920s went on - a discomfort defined by Ethel Bentham's perceptive comments. The Herald was confined by poverty and a movement culture that made adoption of its competitors' style and priorities unlikely. But there was a choice that it might have made before one was forced upon them in 1929.
It could have tailored its serious-minded, improving outlook to serve the movement's activist elite - accepting in the process that a mass circulation was unobtainable. Or it could have accepted that, in the absence of a mass counter-culture, it would have to make the compromise with dominant commercial values and the commitment from its own resources necessary to secure a large popular circulation. It refused to make the choice and persisted in pursuing popular targets with elite values. In its confusion of journalistic purpose the Herald contrived the worst possible outcome - that of being neither one thing nor the other.

ENDS
THE DAILY HERALD 1921-30

Footnotes


2. F. Williams - Dangerous Estate op cit p 176-7. NW 12, 1, 29.


8. Taylor - Beaverbrook op cit p 748.


10. RPTUC 1928 p 495. GM rep 29, 8, 29 TUC 788, 21. CM rep 21, 6, 28 TUC 788, 22.

11. WPN 12, 12, 29.

12. Dr Ethel Bentham - Memorandum 17, 9, 25. LPOH 462 TUC 789, 1.


15. CM rep 15, 12, 27 loc cit.


17. Fyfe - Seven Selves op cit p 258-60. DH 21, 1, 25.

18. F Williams - Dangerous Estate op cit p 182.

19. Le Mahieu op cit p 111.

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