Constriction, Conformity and Control: The Taming of the Daily Herald 1921-30
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Section Three
For the Herald's new owners there were three priorities - survival, development and policy. For all the enthusiasm at conference, its existence over the next 15 months was to be clouded by incessant threats of closure, and as during the takeover process these short-term worries continued to exert a significant effect on longer-term strategy.

From these failures was to emerge the second priority of development - and the realisation that it was not mere political wrong-headedness that led millions of trade unionists to opt for the Express or Chronicle in preference to the paper they collectively owned. A half-million sale became the Herald's Holy Grail from the time of takeover - a target requiring the addition of 350,000 to the rump bequeathed by Lansbury. Finding the means to get there became a significant long-term preoccupation.

Priority number three - the transformation of Lansbury's radical sheet, albeit more decorous than it had been a decade earlier - into a staid official journal - is dealt with in this chapter's section on content.

i. Crisis Renewed

Reducing the Herald's price to 1d had the same disastrous effect on its finances as it had earlier in the year. Losses in the 11 weeks to 25th November were £24,542 - an average of £2,231 a week with the paper covering only 55 per cent of expenditure. (1)

When the General Election was called in late October, Beatrice Webb recorded Lansbury's belief that the paper "could only go on to the election day". Sales, 170,000 when the election was called, reached 270,000 for the results issues but immediately dropped back to 200,000 - and the increased costs of larger election issues cancelled out the financial benefits of higher sales. (2)

The distress signal, hoisted in the issue of November 23rd, lacked the Lansbury touch. The words are not very different to those he would have used, but it lacks the personal touches with which he leavened exhortation, leaving a mix of union circulars and conference rhetoric: "The moment is critical. Only by a united and determined effort can the great and growing party of the Workers keep its one daily organ in existence to put its point of view and give news of its MPs doings; this preventing the rest of the Press misrepresenting and ignoring them. We cannot believe that our appeal will be disregarded, seeing how vital is our need". (3)
Chapter Seven: Fight for Survival: Sep 1922 to Nov 1923 Page Seventy Seven

The General Council agreed to plug the financial gap while a final emergency appeal was made to the rank and file. A circular to party branches promised "All the news that papers which are insurance policies first and newspapers afterwards do not print" together with an eventual half-million sale and a Northern Edition.(4)

Lansbury and Henderson, appealing for a further 150,000 readers, gave the strong impression that the movement owed the Herald a living - a recurrent, exasperated tone in the paper’s publicity: "Surely you will add your voice and energy to ours and together by word and deed declare the DAILY HERALD SHALL LIVE or Five Million Trade Unionists and Labour men and women will hand their heads in shame and declare before the world their unfitness to stand in the shoes of the heroes and prophets who made the Movement possible".(5)

They did not get the extra 150,000. But they did survive. Progress was sufficient to persuade the national committees that persistence would pay as circulation rose to 236,000 by 20th December and 260,000 at the new year.(6)

But losses stayed at #1,700 to #2,000 per week - impossibly high if the paper were to survive. A fresh sub-committee chaired by Pugh was deputed to examine the state of the paper and its future options. Reporting to a joint meeting on 24th January the committee concluded that higher circulation was the only way out of the Herald's impasse. Massive losses had already consumed most of the 1923 affiliation fees - only #6,800 remained - enough for four weeks at most. And any savings made by cutting costs would be marginal.

They estimated 350,000 as the Herald's break-even point. But getting there would be expensive. On the highly optimistic assumption that it could put on 1,000 fresh sales every day, it would still cost #60,000 to keep the Herald going to the end of August, exhausting the 1924 and most of the 1925 levies. Surviving to the end of 1924 would swallow the 1926 levy as well.

Even on these highly optimistic projections, the movement would have to "Face the proposition that to satisfactorily establish a national daily Labour paper must involve a subsidy for some few years at least". Unions should be asked to pledge their 1924-5 levy now, where possible backed by loans, and the movement's machiney should be deployed in pursuit of 150,000 extra sales in the next four months.(7)
The national committees mulled over these conclusions for several hours on 25th January : "determined that the thought of letting the paper close could not be entertained", in the Herald's words. And the consequence was yet another joint committee, but this time with two significant differences.

Previous Herald sub-committees had been concerned with short-term issues of survival. But this one met in a context formed by the Pugh report's indication that the status quo was not an option. It would attempt to address the short-term problem through a longer-term strategy aimed at breaking the cycle of struggle and crisis management. The second difference was in its membership. The normal leadership repertory company was assembled under Pugh's chairmanship - including Lansbury, Tillett, Williams, Henderson, Cameron, Smillie and Bowerman. But they were supplemented by two members of the movement with extensive newspaper experience. Norman Angell, best known for his antiwar polemic The Great Illusion was formerly manager of the Continental Daily Mail. Clifford Allen, treasurer and soon-to-be chairman of the Independent Labour Party, had been general manager of the Daily Citizen and, briefly in 1920, secretary of the Herald. Angell was to be a significant influence on the sub-committee, Allen on the Herald for the remainder of the 1920s.

And their expertise introduced new elements into analysis of the Herald's problems. The professional activists who ran the paper had found the phenomenon of trade unionists buying other papers inexplicable. Allen and Angell recognised this as a natural response to those papers superior news and features service plus insurance. If the Herald could match their competitors, the argument ran, then it would win the readers.

They argued for a twelve page paper comparable to their competitors possibly backed by a "simple and not very extravagant" insurance scheme. Insurance was turned down unanimously by the Board. But the increased size was accepted alongside Norman Angell's revolutionary Pledge Scheme, which aimed to mobilise the Labour movement's mass following.
Chapter Seven: Fight for Survival: Sep 1922 to Nov 1923

Under this readers would "Pledge to Take the Labour Daily First" - not a promise necessarily to take the Herald or to eschew capitalist papers, but simply promising that when they took a paper they would buy the Herald before any other. Angell and his colleagues on the circulation sub-group believed that by distributing pledge cards to every trade unionist they could, given the other improvements proposed, secure two million promises and a self-supporting daily sale of a quarter that. They argued: "It is of course a method and a field of advertising which is closed to competitors. This is the one point at which the "Herald" can not be met: which competitors can not follow".

A sub-committee on costs endorsed Lansbury's view that editorial savings could only be made at the expense of the paper's quality - a self-defeating option in view of the circulation plans. Allen and Smillie, working on capital development, devised a plan for unions to pay their affiliation fees five years in advance, providing a £150,000 capital fund and freeing the paper from its recurrent crises. The joint committee's plans involved the expenditure of just under £120,000 over the next year, and a target of taking circulation to around 450,000 - where advertising rates could be raised high enough to wipe out the operating deficit.

The Herald headlined the national committees' acceptance of these plans "Labour's Own Newspaper: Great Forward Step". Five-year promises had already been received from the NUR and the Railway Clerks. By the end of March the joint committee felt sufficiently confident that their aims had been accomplished to adjourn sine die.

But Angell, Allen and Lansbury found themselves in mid April having to argue against a school of thought who argued that circulation had reached 275,000 with the existing paper - making further expenditure possibly superfluous. Their argument was that the pledge scheme sold the paper to trade unionists as equal to competitors "As a mere organ of news and entertainment apart from its politics" - an eight page paper could not do this. A six month postponement would mean spending £30-40,000 of the money raised simply to maintain the old Herald and, they warned "Once expectations like these now raised have been let down, even by postponement, it is extremely difficult again to rise to the previous plans".
They won the argument, and on 18th April the Herald announced the increase to 12 pages from May Day. On the 19th readers were promised, in a reflection of the Allen-Angell strategy: "It will appeal to everybody, whether they are interested in the politics of the Labour Movement or not: and while it will deal very fully with politics its first cause will be to see that the Herald is a complete newspaper, giving each day fully the history of yesterday".(12)

The new expanded paper duly appeared on May 1st. The following day's issue headlined "Instant Success of Twelve Pages" over a story opening "The Herald offers its apologies this morning for those who yesterday found themselves unable to buy the 12 page paper".

Demand, it claimed, had been close to 400,000. The Herald boasted: "Yesterday will be looked back upon as a milestone in the history of Labour organisation - the May Day on which it became evident that the Trade Unions and Labour Party successfully run a fully-equipped modern newspaper".(13)

As has already been noted, the Herald had something of a history of hailing false dawns - and this was to be yet another in a growing list.

Any strategy for the Herald would depend to a large extent on the success or failure of Fyfe as editor in broadening its appeal compared to the Lansbury model and to examine this it is necessary to go back to his appointment on 11th September 1922.

ii. Content - Fyfe's Herald

How Fyfe was received by the staff depends on who you believe. His own account suggests an enthusiastic reception, with the News Editor saying: "We're sick and tired and having people over us who don't know their own minds. We want somebody who will say yes, and stick to it."(14)

Within three months Newspaper World was recording: "Mr Fyfe's editorship has brought the happiest results among the staff, and he is regarded by them with full confidence and loyalty".(15)
But the memories of Raymond Postgate, Lansbury’s son-in-law, Herald sub-editor and archetypal activist Labour journalist - at this time “a thorough-going Communist” - are very different. He recalled: “The changes in tone, in make-up and in policy introduced by Mr Fyfe were not to the liking of the staff that Lansbury had trained. Discontent was particularly bitter in the journalists’ chapel and though Lansbury, with strict loyalty, refused to be brought in, in his heart he endorsed the criticisms” (16).

Neither is exactly a detached witness. But it is likely that there would have been tension between Lansbury-schooled activists and the politicised professional journalist brought in to reform them. And even if his staff held Fyfe in high regard, we have his own word that this was not reciprocated: “Except for three or four it was a poor staff Lansbury handed me. He had employed men, I was assured, out of pity for them, because they could not get employment anywhere else! Yet that staff did wonders.” (17)

The wonder he was attempting to accomplish was the transformation of a daily newspaper - a formidable task. He could insist on and supervise alterations to copy where he felt it necessary. But daily newspapers are by their nature put together in a rush by people at full stretch. This has two implications for the Herald in this period. First that Lansbury-ingrained routine and habit were likely to reassert themselves under pressure and secondly that any wholesale orders to rewrite or recast would have meant late editions and missed trains to Wales, the Midlands, the North and Scotland. Change was inevitably gradual.

The most important area over which he could exert immediate control was the leader column. In a paper that was avowedly an organ of opinion, this was of particular importance as its authorised, official voice. Fyfe demonstrated rapidly that he would treat it in a different way to the Lansbury/Gould regime.

The column was moved from page four to the left-hand side of the front page and labelled “From the Worker’s Point of View” - in line with the class identity chosen by the new Herald, where the “Things That Matter” column was retitled “With the Workers” and publicity material said “You want the point of view of the worker? The Daily Herald voices it”. (18)
The incontestably middle class Fyfe was an unlikely conduit for any worker's point of view and the new title was to last only until the May 1st relaunch. But the change in subject matter was more lasting and reflected the belief that the paper's appeal must be broadened away from the purely political. (19)

Lansbury's subjects had almost invariably been political, and Fyfe continued a heavy political emphasis, but with a leavening of lighter subjects. A pattern of one serious political leader balanced by one on a lighter theme became a regular feature.

On 23rd November - when the choice of second lead might in the past have been comment on either the Irish Civil War, the Lausanne conference or the march of the unemployed reaching London - Fyfe opted instead to protest at a 10/- fine imposed on a boy for shouting "Beaver" in the street. (20)

Four days later he was noting that a barber had arranged for wireless concerts for his customers to listen to and was speculating that soon they would want to dictate letters and eat and drink while being shaved. (21)

Leaders were not only lighter, but shorter - a tendency noted censoriously by Newspaper World critic Scrutator who argued "There were much better leaders in the old days....altogether inadequate in length and outlook for a paper like the Herald, which should carry the utmost possible weight in this department". (22)

Style also changed. In place of Lansbury's excitably exhortatory rhetoric Fyfe's leaders were measured, detached and a trifle didactic in approach - arguably reflecting a personality that once led an exasperated Walter Citrine to remark, to Fyfe's apparent amusement: "You're not advanced, you're remote". (23)

A characteristic effort was a leader attacking France's hard-line policy on German war reperations - its mannered conclusion, speaking at rather than to the reader in sharp contrast to Lansbury's style. The joke at the expense of the pro-French Daily Mail might have occurred to Lansbury, but the old internationalist would hardly have used the epithet 'anti-British' or quoted undeniably capitalist authorities in support of his arguments.
"All efforts to prove that Germany has really plenty of money, and the French are right to go in and get it, collapse as soon as they are examined. All serious financial and economic authorities now know that Germany has not the power to pay. The Association of British Chambers of Commerce said so plainly last week. Lloyds Bank, in its current monthly circular, rubs it in. Yet many credulous people are still deluded by the anti-British propaganda of the London edition of the Paris Daily Mail.

"Ha! You begin to see the light?".(24)

Policy was much more deferential to the Labour leadership. The former policy of steering between extremism and reformism was wrenched sharply towards one of backing for reformism when a leader defended the party programme against Communist Robin Page Arnot - describing his criticisms as "hasty" and arguing that Labour need not be "Anxious about its moderation. There is little chance of that happening as long as the present spirit of our Parliament keeps up".(25)

Party leaders, in particular Ramsay MacDonald, were flattered and complimented - a January comment on the Ruhr crisis including the line "As our leader Ramsay MacDonald said so admirably at yesterday's ILP demonstration in Glasgow".(26)

Postgate noted acidly that another leader in praise of MacDonald was accompanied by a second comment on the craving of actors for applause "without apparent irony".(27)

iii. Content - Politics

Publicity for the Herald emphasised that the paper would offer both a political and a general appeal to its readers - and there was no question that the political element remained central. Too central in the eye of one distinguished critic - AG Gardiner, whose 17 years as editor of the Liberal Daily News gave him some authority when commenting on the problems of combining a political line with a pitch for the mass-market: "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".(28)
An emphasis on propaganda was inevitable during the 1922 General Election, which happened only two months after the takeover. But elements in coverage showed the Herald shifting from previous traditions. The paper showed itself as an enthusiastic follower of the party leadership, prepared to bestow its praise on a wider range of Labour figures than previously. Its blanket endorsement of the party leadership encompassed not only established favourites like Lansbury and the Bradford ILPer Jowett, but old adversaries like Clynes, Snowden, Thomas and MacDonald - emphasising the claim to be the paper of the whole of the movement and not just of the left.

They were described as "Known in every part of the country, men who have justified the right to lead. They have been through the difficulties and dangers with which the mass of workers have been faced in their homes and at their work. They understand what it means to be out of work, to be badly housed, to be uncertain about keeping a job and about bringing home enough money every week to feed and clothe children".(29)

Labour policies received similarly warm endorsement - with a particular focus on the "Capital Levy" on personal fortunes, whose purpose was to pay off the war debt. It devoted considerable space and ingenuity to explaining the concept - fulfilling both a propagandist role and that of provider of ammunition to the canvasser and party speaker. A leader on the subject clearly fitted in with the party strategy for the 1920s of proving that it was a fit, safe choice for government - distanced from wild-eyed Bolshevism and, by implication, from the Herald's old affiliations. The strategy of seeking to reassure the middle-classes is unlikely to have been used by the old Herald: "Only those will be affected who earn more than £5,000. Up to £20,000 the contribution will be small and the gain from lowered income tax will be considerable. It is those who boast a vast superfluity of wealth, a great deal of it land wealth, who will bear the burden of the Capital Levy".(30)

After the election it provided further evidence of the shift towards the right - in the leader columns at least - when the new parliamentary party gathered to elect its leader. The Herald leader called for a unanimous election to the leadership: "Any contest, any pressure of competing claims, would not only give the enemy cause to exult: it might lead to an unfortunate fissure in the party itself".(31)
This of course named no names - but could only be taken as an endorsement of the status quo, represented by JR Clynes. A front-page story on Labour's recognition as the official opposition, linked with Clynes' name, provided reinforcement. But the Herald must have known that Ramsay MacDonald, restored to Parliament after a four-year absence, was planning to run as, in effect, the candidate of the left.

MacDonald won by 64 votes to 57. This was no simple case of backing the wrong horse. MacDonald, David Marquand records, saw the leader as an attempt to block his leadership bid and never forgave the paper. Relations with the party's dominant figure for the rest of the 1920s were to be characterised by unease, tetchiness and distrust.

But the party leader could hardly complain about either the extent or the tone of the paper's parliamentary coverage. As has been noted the Herald quoted its reporting of Labour MPs as one of its most important activities - and this emphasis, much more a reflection of former Citizen priorities than those of the old Herald, was among most striking manifestations of the new regime. Postgate, ever the upholder of the old verities, commented that parliamentary coverage now ran at two to three times previous levels - a notable surge even allowing for the much greater size and effectiveness of the Parliamentary Party after the 1922 election. On occasions such as the opening of the new session in February 1923 Parliament led the front and took the whole of page two.

A heavy parliamentary emphasis also reflected the reporting priorities of the local Labour press. The extent to which the Herald continued to perceive its readership as primarily interested in politics was reflected in a clear belief that the weight of coverage was a winner.

Readers, it was clearly believed, wanted heavy parliamentary coverage. That this level of attention might be a drawback rather than an asset in circulation-pulling does not appear to have occurred to the Herald. This was illustrated as it reported the February opening session in massive detail, with particular attention to the main Labour speeches. In the following day's issue it drew attention to the less extensive coverage provided by other papers - arguing "The capitalist press itself provided an effective illustration of the importance of the "DAILY HERALD"."
Here are the numbers of words given by the London penny morning papers to Labour MPs who took part in the House of Commons debate on Tuesday:

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<th>DH</th>
<th>News</th>
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<td>JR MacDonald</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>177</td>
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<td>CR Buxton</td>
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<td>Tom Shaw</td>
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<td>CH Wilson</td>
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<td>G Lansbury</td>
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<td>J Wheatley</td>
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<td>Wm Adamson</td>
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<td>J Jones</td>
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Other papers made no reference at all to speeches by David Kirkwood, James Maxton, Buchanan, Neil Maclean, Campbell Stephen, Muir and Johnston. (36)

It is also worth noting that old loyalties among some reporters were still visible in the length accorded individual Labour figures - with Lansbury and another left-winger Wheatley given more space than anyone other than MacDonald and a handful of the radical Clydesiders not touched by any other paper also getting coverage.

But most of the Herald's parliamentary coverage was in tone as well as bulk the part of the paper, leaders excepted, most clearly affected by the official role. Parliamentary reporter SV Bracher in particular struck a note of loyal followership, ever-anxious to portray Labour and its leaders as masters of the House - one characteristic comment was that "No previous opposition so short in numbers has in so short a time attained so great an influence". (37)

His long-running series of profiles of MPs painted glowing pictures of the capabilities and dedication of the parliamentary party under headlines such as "A Teacher Who Has Suffered For His Principles" (Morgan Jones - Caerphilly), "A Great Trade Union Administrator" (John Hodge - Gorton) and "A Humourist Who Is Profoundly Serious At Heart" (Jack Jones - Silvertown) (38)
MacDonald's efforts were described in prose that was little short of idolatrous: "The House is his true sphere...was Mr MacDonald made for Parliament, I asked, or was Parliament for Mr MacDonald?". His first speech on returning to the House earned the description: "In that hour, the dull hard-faced House of the preceding four years was forgotten - the very air was laden with the high traditions of the past and buoyed with the higher hopes of the future.(39)

Philip Snowden, like MacDonald a target of the Herald's in its rampaging pre-war style, was now seen delivering "One of the most powerful speeches that even he has delivered to the house...his marshalling of facts and presentation of argument were the work of a master mind, and he revealed also his great gift of touching human hearts to pity for the dispossessed common people".(40)

The Herald reader was left in no doubt that Labour had the best of all possible leaderships. JR Clynes, with other notables, was asked by Strand magazine to name the seven wonders of Britain. Other respondents produced a predictable list of architectural and scenic marvels - Clynes opted for sights illustrating the condition of Britain such as the East End, the Mansion and grounds of an industrial magnate and the Woolwich Arsenal.

The Herald commented: "He is not by any means insensitive to the charm of landscapes, he has a keen appreciation of noble buildings. But he sees too clearly into the state of his country and fellow countrymen to be satisfied to say "The most wonderful things are castles or cathedrals"...."

"No doubt Mr Clynes will be accused, as we often are, of calling attention to matters that require mending instead of passing round the soothing syrup of self-satisfaction. But if it is important, as we believe it is, to make people think, then he has done a great service by forcing reflection upon the prosperous, comfortable and mostly self-centred folk who read the shilling magazines. That is the work of a real leader, boldly to keep the end he seeks always fully in the national view".(41)
Just as much innovations for the Herald as fulsome praise for moderate leaders who had supported the war were aspects of its industrial coverage. This continued to be extensive. Surveys later in the 1920s were to show clearly that the balance of Herald coverage was different to that of the other papers, and nowhere was this disparity greater than on industrial news which continued to fill page six and regularly spill over on to the general news pages. (42)

As with political reporting there are clear indications that reporters still had some opportunities to go their own way - Fyfe could not dictate any word in the paper. Thus coverage of unemployed marchers to London not only displayed an enthusiasm that went rather beyond the TUC’s wariness of the NUWM under the headline "Stirring Scene at Hyde Park Demonstration", but drew particular attention to the part played by their Communist leader “Cheer followed cheer as the marchers turned from Edgware Road into the Park and congratulations and good wishes were shouted to Mr Wal Hannington, who headed the contingent" (43)

But the influence of official status could be clearly seen in the weekly column on matters written by Vivian Brodzky - singled out by Postgate as “Examples of the results of being confined to innocuous platitudes” - and above all in coverage of the unofficial Dockers Strike in the summer of 1923.” (44)

There can be little doubt that the old Herald would have backed the strikers without reservation as low-paid workers - many from Lansbury’s own district where son Edgar as chair of the local Guardians would point proudly to his role in ensuring that strikers and their families were properly fed during the dispute - contesting a wage-cut. That the strike was unofficial and in breach of a union agreement would not have concerned them - the slogan “Agreements Made Under Coercion Are Morally Binding” continued to have resonance and the essential justice of the strikers cause would have overridden other considerations. Cowling noted that Lansbury argued from a moral position in which “The claims of flesh and blood came before those of money” (45)
But as the part-property of the TUC the new Herald's position was different. The cut was being made under an agreement concluded by the Transport and General Workers Union - and such agreements were, for pragmatic reasons, regarded as sacrosanct by the leaders of organised Labour who now controlled the Herald. There were also close connections with the Transport and General - Bevin was general secretary, director Harry Gosling president and Tillett was also among the leadership.(46)

The consequence was to be a clear struggle between the paper's heart and head. Emotionally it was drawn to the dockers' side - reporting throughout was to stress their courage and determination as in Vivian Brodzky's description of "The solemn ceremony of 1,500 dock strikers stand(ing) beneath the hot sun with bared heads, in respect for Tid Marsh, a picket who had been killed by a motor lorry.

"It was impressive too, as each man said "and the miners too", referring to the recent mine disasters at Maltby and in Scotland".(47)

This was seen not only in reporting, but in leaders. The outbreak of the strike was greeted by a leader juxtaposing the dockers' lives with pictures from Henley Regatta:"What a fuss about a shilling!" was depicted as the cry of the Thoroughly Comfortable - a significant abstract figure in the Herald's demonology of the time. The same leader was sceptical about the Board of Trade figures on which the cut had been based.(48)

As the breach grew between the T and G and the strikers, following Bevin's warning that they were playing the employers' game, the Herald resorted to BBC-style even-handedness. The scrupulously equal length of the front-page columns in which Gosling and the strikers stated their cases on 7th July initiated a formula followed wherever possible over the next eight weeks.(49)

But if the Herald's heart was with the rank and file, its head increasingly followed the officials. It could not yet fairly be said, as Holton said of the Citizen, that it automatically upheld the authority of union leaders against spontaneous action by the rank-and-file. It was still clearly torn in the other direction. But the move towards the Citizen position is still clear.(50)
A warning of this was seen in the same leader that made the Henley comparison and complained about the Board of Trade figures: "We do not claim that the dockers are acting wisely. They would do better to face the situation calmly and follow men whom they have chosen to negotiate for them". (51)

Two days later a leader titled "Don't Sell The Pass" followed through the argument started on 5th July to its logical conclusion. With its accusations of "selling the pass" and the statement that "to understand all is not to excuse all", it marks a decisive step in the remaking of the Herald - effectively burying the paper's reputation as the organ of the militants, and as such merits quotation at length.

It started "What would be said of members of a Trade Union who refused to down tools when their union proclaimed a strike?

"They would be called renegades, traitors to the workers cause, short-sighted and stiff-necked obstacles in the struggle for better conditions of life.

"What the union decides is held in such a case to be binding upon all its members...

"But now let us put the position the other way around. When a Union executive decides there shall be no strike, when it calls for work as usual, are not all the members equally bound to show a united front?

"It is all very well to shout, as a strike sheet does "To hell with all agreements!" But what does that really mean?

It really means:

To hell with Trade Unions!

To hell with the Labour Movement!

To hell with the workers chance of better wages, more leisure, decent homes, decent opportunities for children!

To hell with the Co-operative Commonwealth which is so nearly within our reach!

"At this moment to break up the united front would be to sell the pass and let the enemy overwhelm us to our utter confusion and defeat".
Chapter Seven: Fight for Survival: Sep 1922 to Nov 1923 Page Ninety One

The leader concluded: "We have said that we have the greatest sympathy with the dockers. We can understand their behaviour. But to understand all is not to pardon all when the interests of millions of other people are liable to be very grievously injured". (52)

As might have been expected the leader's impact on its readers was profound - and "a large number of letters" were received. Some supported the leader, but these were a small minority. Where serious controversy blew up over items in the Herald Fyfe's clear policy was to withdraw correspondence from the letters column and instead run collections letters on the news pages as news in their own right. In this particular exchange of opinions the overwhelming majority of opinions were hostile to the paper.

C Abbott of Walworth - described waspishly by the Herald as "A worker who promises to help reduce by one the circulation of the workers' only daily spokesman" argued: "The history of capitalism is a history of blood and murder and that your duty in the class struggle is the battle cry "The workers are right", no matter what agreement is made. I have been a reader of the Daily Herald since its inception but can now see that it stands for Capitalism and not for Socialism". (53)

GH Richards, from that unlikely centre of revolutionary fervour Bridgnorth, Shropshire, stated that he gloried in the dockers revolt, accusing union official of being reactionary and the Herald of being "more and more the mouthpiece of reactionary officiabdom"(54)

AJ Horton of Kings Heath echoed the Herald's prewar spirit when he argued that argued that all agreements were slavery under economic pressure, while G Shidle, Secretary of Stafford Trades Council and Labour Party denounced ineffective leaders and called for the attitude of mind adopted by Labour's opponents: "My class right or wrong". (55)

These reactions can hardly have come as a surprise. The Herald position was restated in a leader. But Fyfe was angered when a striker, A Gartley of Bow, wrote deriding the new circulation drive, and claiming that the Herald had failed to report the strikers' case: "I thought we would get every assistance from our own daily paper, but find I am most mistaken. We are only handed our "Dope" and have to appeal to the capitalist press to publish our cause. And then you appeal for a larger circulation! How can you expect to get this when you are not fair to my class, that supports the paper. In future I shall not take the Herald as I have lost faith in it".
There was justice in the paper's retort: "What Mr Gartley says about our reports is simply not true. The Daily Herald has made every endeavour to get the news and give it fairly; and it has given more real news about the dispute than has any other paper". (56)

The Herald was on strong ground. It chronicled every twist - the TGWU conference vote sympathising with the dockers but reaffirming agreements on 9th July, the election of a new unofficial London committee when the men rejected a recommended return to work on 11th July and the drift back elsewhere leaving London on its own by the start of August. (57)

In the last weeks of the dispute one of Brodzky's reports from the London docks showed the extent of many strikers anger with a paper on whose support they had clearly counted. An earlier reference to Lansbury's name being received with cheers reinforced the point: "I was quickly recognised as a Daily Herald representative and a strong attack on the policy of the paper in connection with the strike was made, and received with applause", he reported on one occasion" (58)

The decision to return on 21st August, accompanied by the creation of a new union outside the TGWU for the lightermen and stevedores, must have come as a considerable relief to all at the Herald. As a signal to the movement's rank and file of their new relationship with the paper, the dispute could hardly have been bettered. (59)

v. Content: Foreign

Foreign coverage also provided a considerable surprise in relatively favourable coverage of Mussolini's succesful coup in Italy. This took the form of a signed article by Fyfe. Rather than evidence of Fascist sympathies - this piece represented a brief aberration rather than long-term policy - it indicated that Fyfe saw himself as an independent operator with a right to his own views rather than as a passive servant of the movement. Coming within two months of his appointment, it was a warning to the leadership that he would not automatically be amenable to movement discipline.

The Herald had spent the immediate postwar years denouncing Mussolini's tactics as "White Terror". It had given extensive coverage to Italy and compared the Fascists with the Black and Tans in Ireland - a potent criticism given the paper's Irish policy. (60)
Fyfe acknowledged their roots in the terrorising of Socialists and Communists. Yet he could still say: "They have lately shown a disposition to combine with some sections of the Italian workers, and it is possible that they may show themselves in the future to be more open-minded and forward-looking than they have seemed to be hitherto.

Of Mussolini he said: "It is impossible not to feel a certain amount of admiration for this man who has organised what he calls a bloodless revolution, even though the aims of it appear to be entirely opposed to those which the workers of this country set before them". As a final shock he equated Fascism with Bolshevism: "Unfortunately they have so far relied upon exactly the same weapons as those whose doctrines they came into being to oppose. The Bolsheviks tried to create a new world by violence, and the Fascisti have relied just as much upon that broken reed which always pierces the hand of him who attempts to use it. Nothing lasting, nothing useful, is achieved by violence". (61)

The Herald readership either treated this as an elaborate hoax or were distracted by the General Election as there were no critical letters - or at least none were published. When Mussolini visited Britain in December his apparent dynamism was contrasted with Prime Minister Bonar Law's somnolence. The headline reported "Signor Mussolini Disturbs Mr Law's Tranquillity: Getting Down To Realities", while the report noted that Mussolini "Believes in and practices Direct Action. He brought the conference at once down to realities". (62)

But Fyfe's line clearly wasn't supported by Ewer who produced an end of year front-page feature talking of the spread of Mussolini-like tactics to Hungary under the headline "Europe in Danger of Armed White Terror". (63)

And some movement was clear in January when a leader laid into the Times for supporting Fascism at the same time as it condemned Bolshevism - the Herald continuing to equate the two as equally undesirable creeds. It appears to have taken the Italian occupation of Corfu in the late summer of 1923 to persuade Fyfe that no good was to be expected of Fascism. (64)

The main theme in the rest of international coverage was reflected in the punning observation made by Way of the World in August 1923 "Whatever other news there may be, the Ruhr we have with us always". (65)
The Franco-Belgian occupation dominated the front page in the first two months of 1923. The French were denounced consistently as aggressive militarists, and a significant theme that would run through the 1920s was introduced in a leader calling for League of Nations sanctions: "Now or Never". Support for the League of Nations was conditional - it would have to prove itself a force in its own right rather than the sum of its capitalist government parts: "Now is the time for the League of Nations to show whether it has any life of its own or is merely an instrument in the hands of men who are either: like M Poincare, driving Britain to ruin, or like Mr Bonar Law, tranquilly looking on....

"There are articles in the Covenant which contemplate the arising of just such circumstances as those with which we are faced now. Let the League act now upon these, or be forever regarded as a sham" (66)

Almost as great a break with Herald traditions as the Mussolini article - and much more far-reaching - was Fyfe's intended approach to news. The previous news style had been a mix of reporting and commentary, with stories interspersed with comment. The new owners were naturally keen to see the flow of leftist opinion which had characterised the Herald's news columns stemmed, and on his first day of office the new editor issued an order that comment should be excluded from news stories and headlines. (67)

An event such as the Dockers Strike showed the paper's ability to fulfil this requirement in news reporting. But Fyfe could not check every story in the paper, and as he was to concede in answer to directors' criticisms in 1925: "Habits are difficult to break and this was the habit of the Herald for a long time". (68)

The old ironic tone broke through on occasion. When Lloyd George incautiously said he was a "poor man" subsisting on #40 per week the front page story headlined "Ex-Premier's Pitiful Flight" referred to a "truly pitiful cry" and a "heartrending yet dignified protest". (69)
It is easier for an editor to have an impact on story selection than on style - a decision on which should be run, and how great their prominence should be is less time-consuming than checking or writing them. Fyfe's impact on story selection was less dramatic than might have been expected - the criterion for lead item on the front page continued to be political importance rather than any commercial human interest-led conception of newsworthiness, the main shift in emphasis from the industrial-political to the party-political rather than from the political to the general.

But there was a small shift away from the exclusively political emphasis of the Lansbury years. Where the spectacular murder trials of the old regime's last years failed to make the lead slot, Fyfe devoted a series of splashes to the trial of Edith Thompson and her lover Frederick Bywater, tried and executed for the murder in Ilford of Edith's husband - a heavy emphasis which clearly irritated Postgate. (70)

Fyfe was still however some way from imitating the news values of his commercial competitors. The story was not carried as pure human interest, but as one with a clear political implication - that capital punishment was a barbarous punishment and should be abolished. The trial merited several front-page leads, but it was the execution of Mrs Thompson on 9th January that drew the heaviest and most pointed coverage. A huge front-page banner headline both told the story and emphasised a strong editorial line:

"Shall Not This End Capital Punishment ?

Scenes of Horror and Shame

Woman Carried

To Scaffold

Pitiful Condition Of

Mrs Thompson

Report of Screams"
A leader strove home the political message: "The whole case for capital punishment rests upon bad psychology and false assumptions. A Bill will be introduced next session to abolish it. We hope the Labour Party will give it vigorous support" (71).

A letter from MacDonald criticising the executions had already been carried, and a "heavy postbag" over the next few days confirmed that the readers agreed with the Herald's standpoint. (72)

But resistance to more conventional news values remained strong even under Fyfe. In the early months of 1923 the salacious details of the Russell divorce were heavily covered most commercial dailies. The Herald did not simply diverge from their judgment. It made a virtue of divergence, showing that it still regarded itself as very different from the rest of the press.

When the presiding judge criticised the detail with which other papers had covered the case, it gave his comments front page prominence and added as a footnote "The Daily Herald has not printed, and will not print, the sordid details of such cases". (73)

If Fyfe did relatively little to encourage the conventional human interest story, he was more interested in scientific and technological progress. This also had a political dimension. To the Herald Labour was a force for modernisation against the "old parties". This self-image linked with traditional liberal rationalist views - an important element in British Socialism's inheritance from its liberal roots - in supporting scientific progress as a means of improving man and his lot, though with a sharp eye to the potential destructive and warlike uses of any advance.

Advances in flight were to be a particular focus for these interests throughout the 1920s - and the tempering of enthusiasm with wariness was seen in February 1923 when director of Civil Aviation Sir Sefton Brancker talked of the possibility of flights to New York in 12 hours at the same time as Air Minister Sir Samuel Hoare asserted the need to strengthen Britain's air defences; "Shall our Conquest of the Air Bring War and Doom or Peace and Friendship", asked the lower bank of headlines. (74)

More straightforward enthusiasm was on display exactly six months later when LL Carter's new British air speed record of 220 mph was the dominant story, complete with a large picture, at a time when the Docks Strike was still going strongly. (75)
By contrast changes in the book pages were more of presentation than content, with the introduction of several regular features making the page slightly more approachable. Like science and technology news Herald arts coverage drew on the high-minded liberal enlightenment tradition - high arts as much as science was emphasised in the belief that they represented progress towards the perfectibility of man. The sole glance in the direction of populism was a half-column feature called "The Pick of the Shelf", carrying five or six one or two paragraph reviews each week. (76)

The other new features were both aimed at the serious self-educated reader, with the Herald literary staff reflecting HG Wells' belief that: "No other public is in such urgent need of a good account of books published and of the current discussion of ideas. The readers of the Daily Herald are the intellectual cream of our population, a bookbuying public". (77)

The "For the Workers Bookshelf" series carried serious political works such as a reissue of Fabian Essays and Political Finance by Emile Burns. A second regular feature "Books We All Pretend To Have Read" had some reasonably predictable entries - David Copperfield and The Bible - where the description "A free translation by Jacobean clergymen of a Greek text of doubtful authenticity and of multiple authorship. The Bible is as divinely inspired as Shakespeare, or Milton or Anatole France" - raised fierce controversy and a heavy mailbag. But it has to be questioned how many Daily Herald readers were really given to claiming that they had read Plato's Republic. (78)

Wells complained that the page produced: "Review after review of the work of little poetlets of whom nobody wants to hear" - and both poetry and literary criticism were heavily represented. On consecutive weeks in February former deputy editor Gerald Gould reviewed: "English Critical Essays of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" and new volumes of literary criticism by Edward Shanks, "One of the best of the younger critics" and novelist Maurice Hewlett. (79)
While the traditions of high literacy established in the Lansbury period were maintained, another could not be - that of having a high-class cartoonist. While Lance Mattison provided a regular sporting cartoon and on occasion joined Gadfly to illustrate one of his satirical forays into the idiosyncracies of British life, the political cartoons used in the late Lansbury period were mostly taken from the continental left-wing press.

Exactly why this should have been is not clear - although one possibility is that the Herald could not afford a first-class cartoonist as they were becoming distinctly expensive. By 1928 Low of the Evening Standard would be on a reported £4,500 per year - four and a half times the pay of the Herald editor.(80)

This gap was to be filled to some extent from early 1923 by the arrival of the Henry Dubb strip-cartoon. The central character was not original to the Herald, but the creation of the Call, a New York Socialist paper, and in Angus MacIntyre's words the most forceful expression of "The realisation that rationality alone would not convert workers into Socialists".(81)

Henry was the visual doppelganger to the hapless painters of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, a realisation of the passive consumers of Harmsworth rubbish derided by Cameron in 1920. Eden and Cedar Paul termed him "the good working man" of capitalist imagination, one with no thought of his own rights, always willing to create surplus value for the exploiter, the unclassconscious proletarian". It would be fairer to see him as the frustrated activists' image of his apolitical workmate. It would be easy to see him as the Herald's view of his readership - in fact he is its view of the people who didn't read it, but should have done,(82)

He was an established stock figure in the 1920s - when Gadfly and Way of the World invoked him as an imagined listener to their comments they were reflecting the usage of figures such as Bernard Shaw and RH Tawney.(83)

His appearance was established even before he had a name in the Herald - a first anonymous appearance on 26th January 1923 showed him with cloth-cap, droopy moustache, check jacket, painful thinness and the unease of the perpetual supplicant.(84)
The original American version frequently showed "a neatly dressed socialist haranguing the slovenly Henry Dubb in terms of strictest orthodoxy" - the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists in visual form. The Herald's version's interlocutor was more often a stock capitalist figure or a politician and Henry appears as a hapless everyman, trusting, honest, decent and powerless in the face of mistreatment by rulers, employers and betters. Not inevitably submissive - in his first named appearance on 20th January he flattened an MP complaining about the "excessive" demands of hunger marchers - but more often than not outmanoevred through his own naive good nature.(85)

Thus he is bilked by "George and Law" of his savings to invest in the war in Mesopotamia, returning with his son - also clad in cloth cap and check jacket - to find that the only return on his money is a few coins marked "Dole" while his son says :"Come Along Daddy, I'm Hungry".(86)

On budget day he is seen wearing a barrel as Chancellor Stanley Baldwin runs away down "Budget Street" to give his ill-gotten gains to deserving cases like industrialists and landowners. Attempting to celebrate the Royal Wedding he finds the celebrations either ticket-only or too expensive and ends up sitting at home with a cup of tea and candle on the table.(87)

Happy to be taken into his employer's confidence as the magnate - typically fat and complacent - outlines plans for a better future he suddenly discovers that his part will be longer hours and lower wages.(88)

The argument that he is an activist's image of passivity rather than the Paul's creation of capitalist imagination is shown in the way that the Herald used him as a symbol for frustration at working class refusal to take the paper - as MacIntyre puts it he "Consoled the elect in their conviction that they were right and the audience manifestly dim-witted".(89)

This was expressed in a pledge campaign advertisement using an imagined, extremely stilted, conversation at a union branch meeting concluding with the words:"I notice our brother Henry Dubb is not present - We will pay him a special visit He is injuring us all by giving preference to the newspapers run by our opponents.(90)
In August Henry was shown enjoying his capitalist paper in times of prosperity, then in harder times having his wages cut and hours increased and finding out that his paper backed his employer. Remembering the Herald he writes to the editor asking what the paper proposes to do about it - arriving to deliver it in person he finds there is a notice on the front door saying "Closing Down Owing To The Indifference of Henry Dubb". (91)

The message was rubbed in five days later as Dubb reads in his "Tory dope" that "Henry Dubb's paper" is to close and concludes it must be some other Henry Dubb even when he meets a capitalist who says "So You Can't Make Your Paper Pay Mr Dubb Ha! Ha!". It concludes with Henry, rocked back on his heels and his cap flying off his head, confronting a poster with his own picture and reading "Read The Daily Herald: Owned By Henry Dubb". (92)

Opinions of Dubb varied widely. A reader told of a previously anti-Labour friend: "I have offered him the loan of several of my books on socialism, but he always declined. He appreciated the Dubb cartoons and said it was quite true. I saw him today and he said that he reads the Daily Herald every day, and said what a mug he has been. The Dubb cartoons may not reach the high artistic standard desired by our highbrow friends, yet they get home". (93)

The alternative point of view came from director Clifford Allen, who said the Herald should "Give up insulting the worker" with it. In reacting this way to a cartoon that apparently left the Herald's working-class readers and trade union directors cheerfully un insulted Allen, the archetypal middle-class intellectual activist, was anticipating the manner in which academics would become the main critics of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. (94)

Henry Dubb was to some extent the visible symbol of the Herald's implicit belief that the workers owed it a living - a viewpoint that became explicit whenever the paper's existence was imperilled, which was frequently in the early 1920s. The Herald's career during this period recalls that of a weekly-serial heroine, left tied to the rails or hanging by her fingertips at the end of each episode. None of these near-misses was more hair-raising than the last, that of September 1923, when the General Council went to the TUC with a recommendation to close down.
Unlike followers of serial heroines, readers of the Herald showed a marked disinclination to tune in for the next episode - rapidly chilling the euphoria after the May Day relaunch. The last eight-pager had a circulation of 278,300 and the much-hailed 12 page May Day issue 351,400. But within a week the daily print was back below 300,000 - providing minimal financial return on the extra expenditure.(95)

Losses had doubled to £2,800 per week - a rate which would exhaust the planned £120,000 development fund in ten months. In four months liabilities of £81,000 would be accumulated. Nor did either of the twin pillars of the relaunch - the pledge scheme and levy capitalisation, work anything like as well as hoped for. Nearly four million pledge cards were dispatched - only 83,316 had been returned by August.(96)

A "Candid Friend of the Movement", presumably Angell, commented in the Herald that "The pledge was the acid test of the interest of the millions in a Labour press. It represented the very minimum which might be asked of a worker on behalf of something absolutely indispensable to the achievement of his political power and social regeneration".(97)

While hardly as spectacular, the failure of capitalisation was equally decisive - confirming the pessimism of a union secretary who told Fyfe "The unions will promise anything, but they won't pay up". It was in truth a bad time to be asking - membership had fallen by a third in two years and huge demand for unemployment and dispute benefit meant the average union ran an eight per cent budget deficit each year from 1919 to 1926. In late May 26 unions had still to pay their 1923 levy, let alone any for future years.(98)

The appeal fell nearly £50,000 short, bringing in little over £70,000 by late August. The Herald recorded :"We have had this provided in small sums week by week, instead of finding ourselves with a large sum in the bank for development purposes, and there is no prospect of the full sum being raised".(99)
Henderson warned the Labour Party conference in late June that closure could be only weeks away, and with no improvement visible during the next month, late July saw the appointment of yet another joint sub-committee to examine the paper's finances. On 9th August the directors met the TUC Finance Committee and after "very prolonged discussion" of a report prepared by Pugh, Lansbury and Allen it was agreed that following the failure of the development scheme, closure should be recommended to the TUC, meeting at Plymouth in the first week in September. Lansbury and Pugh were asked to prepare a report for the next joint meeting on the 23rd. (100)

In January Pugh had argued from the basic premise that, however desperate its finances, it was politically inconceivable that the Herald be allowed to die. Now his and Lansbury's report showed a weary acceptance of the inevitable - whatever the political costs, the financial ones had become insupportable.

On current affiliation levels, it could look forward to £125,638 over the next five years - but in the context of a paper that would cost £20,000 to run to the end of 1923 at eight pages this was wholly inadequate. Fee capitalization had depleted money available in future years, and had also reached the limits of its potential as a support for the paper.

While Lansbury argued for giving an eight page paper a one year trial, even this would cost around £60,000, pledging the General Council's Publicity Fund to the end of September 1926. Alternative options were a daily with eight half-size pages and an editorial staff of 12, a midweek 16 pager or creation of weeklies in Manchester, Cardiff and Newcastle as an extension of the Labour Press Service.

They argued "We must be certain there is no alternative before we advise the cutting down of our daily paper, involving the sacrifice of all the money and labour which the enthusiasts of the Movement have bestowed upon us". And, in spite of the increase in sales over the year, there was no likelihood of finding the funds needed to make the paper self-supporting. (101)
Their logic was accepted by the national committees - which rejected the midweek and daily options. Lansbury told Herald readers: "The decision came to us in a quiet uneventful sort of fashion which told, as no words can ever tell, that parleying, reasoning was of no avail, because, in the judgment of the joint meeting...circumstances were such that no talking could change, and in the judgment of those responsible drastic action was the only course left open for them to follow". Votes by 20 to 2 and 27 to 1 apparently sealed the Herald’s fate. (102)

But the decision still had to be confirmed by the Plymouth Congress - and whatever the Herald’s defects as an all-round newspaper it still knew how to campaign. The closure announcement under the headline "Will The Workers Let the "D.H" Die?" opened a ferocious week-long barrage aimed at the movement’s decision-makers and delegates: "We shall write again tomorrow and continue to do so, and day by day fight against the sentence of death being carried out. We shall not stand idly by and see the sweat, toil and sacrifice of years thrown away". (103)

Every technique learnt over years of campaigning was deployed - Lansbury talking of "this most loved and cherished child our movement has produced", multiple messages of support from MPs and union leaders and constant exhortation to readers to recruit friends and workmates - all aimed to illustrate enthusiasm for the paper’s survival. (104)

News items such as reports on the British Fascists "All such movements the DAILY HERALD regards it as a duty to watch and expose. If it did not do this nobody would" and the endurance of the shipwrecked crew of the Trevessa: "The Trevessa crew teach a useful lesson at this moment to those of us of the HERALD" were used to support the paper’s right to live. (105)

Even Bobby Bear was mobilised - with the normal cartoon supplemented on the 30th by an item under the headline "If the Daily Herald Dies; Bobby Bear In An Orphanage : Brief Description by a Visitor". This shameless attempt at manipulation was clearly aimed at Plymouth delegates with young children.
"It was not a cruel place, that Orphanage, and those who were in charge of it were not unkind. I must not be mistaken upon that point."

"There was no room for pranks there, no scope for jolly naughtiness. And what do you think our Bobby would be without his pranks, without any scope for those exasperating lovable tricks and fun to which he is always up, and for which poor Aunt Kitsie has educated us all to look every day when we open our paper?"

"Bobby Bear's home was Bear Villa and his playground was the Children's Corner of the HERALD, but now Bear Villa is let to Henry Dubb and the Children's Corner is gone. Bobby, and with him of course Maisie and Ruby are in an Orphanage for friendless children."

"It would have broken your heart if you could have seen them standing in a corner of the yard so disconsolate. I hardly recognised Bobby at first, so changed was he."(106)

x. The Plymouth Congress

Bobby's chances of escaping the orphanage would depend on the decisions of the Plymouth TUC, whose 702 delegates assembled, in Brodzky's words, considering the Herald "the most important business they have to deal with". (107)

It had been agreed that a report on the recommendation would be presented on the opening day, but that any debate would be postponed until later in the week to allow proper discussion - a clear indication both that the most important action of the week would take place in the back rooms and that the General Council were keen to find a way out of the Herald's troubles if possible. (108)

Pugh opened for the General Council, outlining the Herald's situation and pointing out that the takeover was made on the assumption that it would command rank-and-file support. He reminded delegates of Thomas' statement at the 1922 TUC that the paper should either be self-supporting or close. After a brief question and answer session debate was adjourned until Thursday, and the real action began backstage. (109)
The major direct losers from the closure of the Herald would have been the 396 staff. They and their unions, represented by the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, provided the main conference impetus for a rescue. While a series of reports had shown the Herald's main problem was insufficient sales and advertising income rather than overspending, their view was, not unnaturally, that unpleasant economies were preferable to outright closure.

Both groups were retailing economy plans - the staff had an audience with the General Council in the week before Congress and a leaflet with their plans was circulating at Plymouth. The PKTF had offered to set up a specialist inquiry committee during the summer, and as the affiliated body at Congress led the fight there - proposing a $12,500 TUC subsidy to keep the paper going for three months while a Committee of Investigation looked into its finances.(110)

This plan became the focus of the Herald's hopes, which rose when the Finance Committee accepted the plan on Tuesday evening, but were dashed again after dinner when, at a meeting that lasted until 11.30, the General Council overruled the committee on the grounds that the "situation had not been essentially changed" by the PKTF plan.(111)

The only chance left, reported Thursday's Herald, was that "Delegates may take the matter into their own hands and show how many can be found to carry it on, either in its present or in some other form. That is the possibility. Let all those who have any influence use it today to pull off this last eleventh-hour chance".(112)

That was the route the PKTF now took. They put their plans into resolution form and had it accepted by the conference arrangements committee. Moving the resolution on Thursday FO Roberts of the Typographical Association said: "Here you have in front of you, the work of twelve months or a little more, one of the finest instruments that it is possible to forge. You are going to destroy it wilfully because you do not understand, or because the country is apathetic". Closure, he said, made no economic or political sense, and would waste a commercial asset - better to keep the Herald's goodwill even if by producing a four-sheet paper.

Thomas, in his role as the General Council's pragmatic scold, said that the motion by itself could do nothing: "We will welcome the carrying of this resolution, but on one condition, and that condition is that you give us the money to do it. You have no right to vote unless you give us the brass. Give us the brass and we will carry on....".(113)
His contribution set the agenda for the rest of the debate, in which the Herald reporter noted a spirit "strongly in favour of making an eleventh-hour effort to keep the Herald in existence. But in spite of immediate support from the print union NATSOPA and the Workers Union, most unions could not commit themselves. Stephen Walsh, speaking for the miners, pointed out that a delegation of 130 plus could hardly be consulted informally on the floor of the conference. (114)

Only one speaker proposed an alternative to close or pay up. WJ Brown of the Civil Service Clerical Association said: "I suggest that the paper is within a short distance of becoming a paying proposition, and that it may be possible to find a capitalist, or a group of capitalists, who are prepared to regard the "Herald" as a speculative proposition, and to make such arrangements as may, or would, enable the Trade Union movement to retain a truly Labour policy editorially". (115)

Nobody appears to have taken this seriously. But Brown was simply ahead of his time - his heresy a strikingly prescient prophesy of the arrangement to be reached with Odhams Press in 1929. But the movement had several stages of disillusionment with the role of press proprietor to go before it accepted partnership with a capitalist.

Successful appeals for an adjournment extended the Herald's agony for an extra day - but to the effect it desired. Meeting after the adjournment the Miners voted to switch their support from closure to keeping the paper open until Christmas at least. Prime mover appears to have been the mercurial general secretary AJ Cook - who had signalled his support very clearly in the debate, earning a public rebuke from Walsh for conflating his own viewpoint with union policy. In his memoirs Fyfe credits Cook with saving the Herald. (116)

The extent of the miners' shift was underlined the following morning when Walsh moved the resolution to provide the Herald with £12,500 to keep it in being to the end of the year, pending a committee of inquiry and a movement conference to settle policy in relation to the paper. It was passed by 3.06 million voted to 808,000. The Miracle of Fleet Street had won yet another stay of execution. (117)
The Herald’s erratic career made it appropriate that a later editor Francis Williams should call his autobiography “Nothing So Strange”. And there was nothing so strange in even the Herald’s history as the period after the 1923 TUC as attempts were made to implement the resolution that had saved it at Plymouth, and management found itself fiercely resisting staff cuts pressed upon them with equal vigour by members of staff and their trade unions. The role of a Conservative Prime Minister as effective saviour of the Herald appears almost natural in such a context. (118)

Because it had to wait for the £12,500 to be raised before it started operations, the committee of inquiry was not set up until almost the end of September - and by this time the Herald management were well ahead with their own economy drive. Although the paper was saved, quite a few jobs were not. By 19th September £600 per week had been saved. Of this £240 had come from editorial, a 40 per cent saving in costs sacrificing foreign correspondents and leaving 34 staff journalists. The travelling circulation staff were cut from 16 to 7 over the protestations of manager Le Good who argued that a small paper would need more selling than before. (119)

With advertising reviving after its fall to around £300 per week during the crisis, the economies made by the time the committee was set up had brought losses down to £960 per week - inside the £12,500 limit. (120)

Reductions had been made unwillingly, when given no alternative, by managers who had argued consistently that their staff were at minimum levels and had seen their arguments accepted by people sent in to inquire into their activities. Their extent ensured that any further economy advice was arguably academic, and would unquestionably be resented and resisted. The Herald staff and PKTF proposals were made in this context. The staff plan for an 8 page paper with 38 staff was hardly controversial - cuts have already gone deeper than this. But the plan to abolish the day staff predictably induced violent indignation from that group at having to defend their jobs from fellow trade-unionists, even before printing manager Barrow demolished the budgetary calculations on which they were based. (121)
The chapel plans served as a warmup for the battle over the PKTF plans - completed on 8th October and discussed at a series of inquiry meetings throughout the month. A systematic department by department assault on the Herald and the way in which it was run it began with an analysis of the reporting and editing process by HM Richardson, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists. It said "The Herald has been and is still very overstaffed... greater economies than those contemplated by the Management could be effected without injury to the paper". He proposed a cut to 24 staff, axing all the full-time correspondents, who would work on linage. There would be no Foreign Editor as the post was needed only on "very big papers such as the Times or Telegraph". It was also critical of the political emphasis of the paper, arguing that this was counterproductive in winning readers. (122)

Fyfe was impressed neither by the inquiry's methods of operation - it appeared to have relied solely on Richardson's brother, a Herald journalist clearly not in editorial favour - or by its recommendations. The reasoning about the Foreign Editor was "antiquated" - the Herald had always emphasised overseas coverage. To rely solely on Reuters would be unwise. Why provide a paper at all if we only give what the capitalist papers give?".

Proposals to cut sub-editors showed a "surprising ignorance of actual conditions". A similar story was seen throughout the other sections as department head after department head demolished the plans as unworkable and ill-conceived. Poyser for instance argued that far from being overstaffed advertising was run well and efficiently. Running costs were currently six per cent of revenue against 15 per cent in most papers. (123).

Most of the cuts had in any case been pre-empted by the management's actions in September. But it was still not certain that it would be enough.

The eventual target was a cut in losses to $500 per week - and the economy process reached its limit in late October with a sale of around 300,000 and losses of around $600. Fresh economies were sought from Fyfe and Lansbury, who replied that none were available. (124)

So the ball returned to the court of the inquiry committee, which decided on 7th November that there was no point in asking the movement for more than $550 per week. A new clash over costs loomed, with Lansbury and Fyfe convinced further reductions would seriously damage the paper but their paymasters unable to see any alternative. (125)
Chapter Seven: Fight for Survival: Sep 1922 to Nov 1923 Page 109

It was at this point that Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin took the action that made him more than Cook, Fyfe, Lansbury or anyone from the PKTF - the true saviour of the Herald in late 1923. With a comfortable parliamentary majority and four years of his term to go, he called a General Election to pursue his belief in Tariff Reform.

The Herald's survival into 1924 was at best have been a struggling, straitened existence - battling away on limited resources. But elections were always good for the Herald, boosting sales by making politics the priority of a large group of potential readers and providing a sharp reminder to the leadership of the reasons for maintaining the paper in the first place. The Herald inquiry adjourned for the duration of the election. By the time they might have returned to their duties the political landscape, and the immediate prospects of the Herald, had been transformed almost out of recognition. (126)

Conclusion.

The fourteen months from September 1922 were a period of disillusionment for organised Labour after the optimism of the Southport TUC - with problems in policy, development, sales and finance.

In policy terms the shift was towards the Citizen model rather than the outright commercial style of the Herald's competitors. In the nature of the complexity of newspapers this emerged gradually rather than as soon as takeover was accomplished. The broad officialism of the policy line was undercut both by the left-wing sympathies of the staff and Fyfe's independence of disposition. A reflection of the Citizen model was that politics remained the focus and purpose of the paper, with the main shift from industry to Parliament rather than towards more general news. But the views expressed by Clifford Allen were the beginning of a developing critique within the movement of this emphasis, and its propagandist style of expression.

This critique would be stimulated in time by the development failures of 1922-3. Every attempt to break out of the paper's difficulties by spending to make it more competitive - whether by reducing the price or increasing its size - instead produced limited circulation returns and massive financial losses, exhausting the movement's limited resources. The Pledge Scheme failure ended any illusions that simple loyalty to the movement was sufficient to switch readers from other papers.
The consequence of this was that the Herald's existence continued to be dominated and constrained by the imminent fear of going out of business. The purchase price of its survival at the end of 1923 was a series of economies that ended any ambitions of genuine competitiveness with commercial rivals.

ENDS.
THE DAILY HERALD 1921-30  Footnotes Thirteen

CHAPTER SEVEN(p76-110)

1. Herald Accountant to Joint Bodies 4.12.22 TUC 789.01


3. DH 23.11.22

4. Wake and Henderson to affiliated bodies 8.12.22 LPDH 154

5. Lansbury and Henderson appeal n.d. (Nov 1922) LPDH 159

6. DH 22.1.23

7. Pugh report on position of Daily Herald Newspaper 24.1.23 TUC 788


10. DH 2.3.23. Joint committee minutes 29.3.23 LPDH 213 TUC 788

11. Report to Finance Committee 16.4.23 loc cit

12. DH 18, 19.4.23

13. DH 2.5.23

14. Fyfe - Sixty Years op cit p 193

15. NW 16.12.22

16. Lansbury to Henderson 13.10.23, quoted in McKibbin - Evolution op cit p 229. Postgate - Lansbury op cit p 221

17. Fyfe - Seven Selves op cit p 252

18. DH 23.10.22. Wake and Henderson 8.12.22 loc cit

19. DH 1.5.23

20. DH 23.11.22

21. DH 27.11.22

22. NW 4.8.23

23. Lord Citrine - Two Careers - Hutchinson 1967 p 349

24. DH 26.1.23

25. DH 7.12.22

26. DH 22.1.23

27. DH 15.2.23 Postgate analysis op cit 1923 p 8

28. NW 22.9.23

29. DH 25.10.22

30. DH 9.11.22

31. DH 21.11.22

32. Ibid
Thanks are due to Dr John Rowett for his insights into the local Labour press.

36. DH 15.2.23
37. DH 10.3.23
38. DH 17,23,24.2.23
39. DH 10.3.23
40. DH 21.3.23
41. DH 29.8.23
42. Ed rep 19.1.28 TUC 788.24
43. DH 14.2.23
44. Postgate - Analysis op cit 1919-23 p 6
46. DH 2.1.22
47. DH 10.8.23
48. DH 5.7.23
49. DH 5.7.23
50. Holton loc cit p 362.
51. DH 5.5.23
52. DH 7.5.23
53. DH 10.7.23
54. DH 16.7.23
55. DH 10.7.23
56. DH 11,19.7.23.
57. DH 10,12,31.7.23
58. DH 10.8.23
59. DH 20.8.23
60. Postgate - Analysis op cit 1919-23 p 14
61. DH 31.10.22
62. DH 11.12.22
63. DH 13.12.22
64. DH 20.12.22
65. DH 16.8.23
66. DH 12.1.23
67. Postgate - Analysis op cit 1919-23 p 7
68. Fyfe reply to directors memos 19.11.25 LPDH 481 TUC 789.1
69. DH 19.12.23
70. DH 9.12.22 Postgate - Analysis op cit 1919-23 p 7
Footnotes Fifteen

71. DH 10.1.23
72. DH 9,12.1.23
73. DH 10.3.23
74. DH 7.2.23
75. DH 7.8.23
76. DH 7.14.2.23
77. DH 9.4.23
78. DH 7.14.2,29.8.23
79. DH 7,14.2,9.4.23
80. DH 22.1.28
81. Maclntyre op cit p 205
82. Pauls quoted in Ibid p 205. Cameron at DH conference 6.11.20 EBDH 15.
83. Maclntyre op cit p 206
84. DH 26.1.23
85. DH 20.2.23 Maclntyre op cit p 206
86. DH 5.3.23
87. DH 12,22.4.23
88. DH 9.4.23
89. DH 11.6.23
90. Maclntyre op cit p 206
91. DH 25.8.23
92. DH 30.8.23
93. Ibid 1.5.23
94. Allen memo 17.9.25 loc cit. Critics of Ragged Trousered Philanthropists see McKibbin - Ideologies op cit p 34-5
95. DHD Dir minutes 22.5.23 TUC 788
97. DH 16.8.23
98. Fyfe - Seven Selves op cit p 251. Financial sub committee report to TUC General Council 23.5.23 TUC 788
99. DH 27.8.23
100. Memo on relationship between DH / Victoria House and TUC / Labour Party n.d (1925?) TUC 789.01. Report to joint meeting 23.8.23 recording decision taken by joint meeting 9.8.23 LPDH 223
101. Report of joint meeting 23.8.23 loc cit
102. Joint meeting minutes 23.8.23 in TUCGC.
103. DH 24.8.23
104. DH 25,29,30,31.8.23
105. DH 24,30.8.23
DAILY HERALD 1921-30 Footnotes Sixteen

106. DH 30.8.23
107. Ibid 3.9.23
108. Joint committee 23.8.23 loc cit
110. TUCGC 30, 31.8, 4.9.23
111. Ibid 4.9.23
112. DH 6.9.23
113. RPTUC op cit 1923 p 351-8
114. Ibid p 359-63 DH 7.9.23
115. RPTUC op cit p 363
116. DH 7.9.23. RPTUC op cit p 358 Fyfe - Seven Selves op cit p 251
117. RPTUC op cit p 363-70 DH 8.9.23
118. Francis Williams - Nothing So Strange - Cassell 1970
119. DH 12, 17, 27.9.23. GM rep 12.9.23 TUC 788.1 Joint council minutes
   assistant GM to Holmes (PKTF sec) 19.9.23 LPDH 242
120. GM rep 25.9.23 LPDH 244. TUCGC 27.9.23
121. Staff proposals n.d (Sep 1923?) LPDH 228. Day Staff to Pugh n.d LPDH 241
   Barrow to Lansbury 1.10.23 LPDH 234
122. PKTF proposals 8.10.23 LPDH 248
123. Fyfe reply 15.10.23 LPDH 264. Poyser to Barrow 11.10.23 LPDH 260
124. Inquiry committee min 29.10.23 LPDH 275 TUC 789.5. Lansbury memo n.d
   (early Nov 1923) LPDH 298
125. Inquiry committee min 7.11.23 LPDH 287 TUC 789.5
126. Bramley to members of Inquiry committee 16.11.23 LPDH 292

Ends