

Newspaper Protection

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Mr. Alexander was the first person employed by the late Lord Beaverbrook when he came to England in 1910. He became his private secretary and subsequently financial editor of all his newspapers, his service covering a period of thirty-five years. Apart from his activities on the editorial side of newspapers, he was also concerned in management. For a period of eighteen years after leaving the Beaverbrook service because of disagreement about the advocacy of protectionist economic policies, he owned and edited the City Press newspaper. It can thus be assumed that he has some experience of the motives activating newspaper proprietors and their editors.

THE DISMISSAL of Mr. Cecil King from the chairmanship of the International Publishing Corporation, and recent statements by Lord Thomson, raise issues of national significance.

Lord Thomson said that he believes a newspaper proprietor has no right to intrude his views on the public, and that he thinks that editors are more familiar with conditions and have no leanings towards megalomania such as might be the case with a proprietor who thinks he has a lot of power. Lord Thomson also said that Mr. King had always made a virtue of the fact that he was not interested in profits, whereas he, Lord Thomson, believes that the chairman of a company represents the shareholders. He said: "I am darn sure that they are interested in profits. I think Mr. Cudlipp, who succeeds Mr. King, will be more interested, and will operate on that basis."

In the conditions of a commercialised Press, and not being an owner or a very large shareholder himself, Mr. King's position in respect of the expression of his own opinion in the newspapers under his control was at all times vulnerable. Nevertheless, in recent times he has been endeavouring, through the columns of the *Daily Mirror*, to arouse the British people to a recognition of the serious nature of the situation confronting them. His motives were good and honourable, but from a purely commercial point of view he was in the wrong place.

Only recently, in a television interview, Mr. King expressed the opinion that the influence of the *Daily Mirror* on its sixteen million readers could be only marginal because if it said things that seemed outrageous to a number of readers it would lose circulation. Only small

publications with a circulation of possibly five thousand copies, he said, could be bold in telling the truth. Because Mr. King tried to tell the truth to sixteen million readers he was dismissed by his colleagues, who apparently insist on high profitability at all costs.

Thus the remaining directors of International Publishing Corporation accept Lord Thomson's view of their responsibilities. And while Mr. King may appear to make a virtue out of not putting too much emphasis on profits, Lord Thomson makes a virtue of delegating full responsibility and giving "complete freedom" to his editors, provided that their newspapers achieve maximum profitability. This raises an important question.

Would Lord Thomson allow any of his editors to advocate a policy of free imports of food and raw materials without discrimination and without import duties? The answer would appear to be that unless the editor concerned is a patriot and is prepared to take the chances of the loss of advertising revenue that might result from the advocacy of such a policy, he will not do so.

By such restriction, important channels of communication of a vital alternative policy and opinion is lost to the public. The reason is that because of the abandonment of the free trade policy—which abandonment began with the imposition of the McKenna Duties in 1915—almost all the advertising in newspapers comes directly from industries protected by tariffs and other devices from overseas competition.

The protectionist policy, which has kept out overseas competitive goods, has been a most powerful influence behind the greatest movement towards amalgamation ever seen in this country, and behind the nationalisation movement. It has driven vast numbers of small independent men of business out of existence, and has concentrated industrial, economic and political power into fewer and fewer hands—a very dangerous trend. It has put up costs internally, and in a protected market these costs could until recently be passed on to the consumer, and are still being passed on by newspapers to the newspaper reading public. But while those costs have so far been met by the home consumer, they have also had to be met by our exporting industries. These industries could not pass increased costs on to the foreign buyer, with the consequence that there has now had to be a mass wage reduction by means of reducing the quality of money by inflation, a grossly unfair and improper procedure.

The International Publishing Corporation and the Thomson group are themselves products of the protection-

ist policy and the inflation that accompanies it, which has until recently brought great prosperity to the newspaper industry and has undermined our world trading position.

Mr. King has said that only small publications can tell the truth. In that he may well be mistaken. Integrity and patriotism are qualities that the British people will always recognise, and a small publication telling what its proprietor believes to be the truth and at the same time selling at a price that will allow it to survive with a minimum of advertising revenue, might well grow into a large publication.



Despite the statements by Lord Thomson about the freedom of his editors, and despite Mr. King's attempt at freedom of expression for himself, there are in our country today serious obstacles to freedom of speech. These obstacles arise directly as a result of the protectionist policy, and they are not confined only to the newspapers. They are found in all industries that are protected or are concerned with protected industries.

Where is the bank manager operating in an agricultural area in East Anglia, for instance, who will dare even to express privately his belief in the soundness for the nation of a free trade policy? We in the free trade movement know that there are such men. But can they appear on public platforms with us as they used to do before the advent of the protectionist policy? They can not. They know that if they did so they would immediately lose the accounts of protected farmers to their competitors in the same town. Where is the man employed in the chemical industry, whose directors are constantly demanding that government should impose anti-dumping duties against foreign imports, who will come out in public and insist that the consumer should have the advantage of abundance, quality, variety and cheapness wherever it may be available?

Nearly forty years of experience has proved that the evils that the free traders of the past predicted would result from the abandonment of free trade by our island nation have happened, and the final consequences of protection now confront us. There is no easy way out. The requirements are that there should be an immediate limitation on the volume of paper money that the government puts into circulation; the budget above and below the line should be balanced; exchange control should be abandoned and the people enabled to make the best use of their money by buying from the cheapest market.

In our present circumstances the first requirement is that the channels of communication to the people should

be opened so that the alternative policy to that which has brought our country to its present humiliating condition can be explained and fully debated. So long as protectionist advertising is allowed to block the channels of communication to the people there will be confusion in the public mind and a failure to deal honestly and justly with the problems that beset us. Mr. King is doubtless recognising that size in the newspaper business is not all that important from the national point of view. Lord Thomson will have to learn that profits are not everything.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES—1

NOBODY had a lot of sympathy for George Bernard Shaw, a lifelong apostle of socialism, when he wrote an article complaining bitterly that tax left him only 6d. in the £ of his earnings. Soaking the rich, it seems, is all right so long as you do not get wet yourself.

In Parliament, recently, Mr. Eric Heffer, a Labour left winger, said that while he was a great believer in the government intervening in this, that and the other, he got a bit worried when interventionist policies became too general. What was worrying him then in particular was Mrs. Barbara Castle's statement, as Minister of Employment and Productivity, that the Government was going to intervene in wage bargaining.

Most trade unionists have been wondering for a long time, since the Government started trying to hold wages down, whether they had not bred a monster. But that is the trouble about such things. Once you depart from the basic rule that the government is just a housewife whose job is to keep the home running, leaving the people who live in it to get on with their own jobs and interests, there is no controlling it.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES—2

IN 1966 there was a genuinely significant increase in the number of days lost in work as a result of sickness, and a correspondingly hefty rise—to £250 million—in the cost of sickness benefits . . . It does seem a curious coincidence that this large increase in absenteeism—voluntary or involuntary—occurred in the year in which the Government first introduced wage-related sickness and unemployment benefits. These can amount to as much as 85 per cent of a man's normal take-home pay.

But it is time that politicians began to ask themselves exactly where all this well-meant benevolence is leading us. We have only one labour force in Britain. It is being depleted at one end by a trend towards early retirement, and at the other by extended schooling. If the middle tier is to be discouraged from work either by un-economic disincentives or over-generous sick pay, which of us will be left to produce the wealth that provides all these splendid bounties?

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