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ARTICLE

The Ghosts of Fleet Street: What Did Not Working Mean in the British Printing Industry, C.1950–80?

Kim Christian Priemel

Department of Archeology, Conservation, and History, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
Email: k.c.priemel@iakh.uio.no

In the second half of the twentieth century, the British printing industry seemed to epitomise the United Kingdom's status as the sick man of Europe, worn down by changing patterns of consumption, lagging technological modernisation and all-powerful trade unions. Especially the latter were more often than not seen as the problem, not the solution to the industry's problems. An extravagant set of so-called restrictive practices, critics alleged, was used to hide that print workers were not putting in the work they were paid for while giving them undeserved bonuses that were choking corporate profitability. Print workers and their representatives offered a very different reading, in which the incriminated practices reflected a thoroughly earned privilege to define and distribute waged work. By looking at shop floor practices and conflicts, the article argues that print workers' defence of non-working intervals articulated a broader vision of their own place in capitalist production.

Introduction

'Then are there ghosts at all?'[1] Hartley Shawcross was clearly bewildered. A former star barrister and attorney general in Labour's post-war government, he was not one to be easily shocked. But the job he had accepted in 1961 – now a crossbencher in the House of Lords – confounded him. As chairman of the Royal Commission on the Press (RCP), second of its name and tasked with sorting out the British newspaper industry's problems, Shawcross and his four colleagues dived head forward into a world with its own rules and routines, traditions and patois. Ghosts were a common sight in that world, and the interviewees on the other side of the table – publishers, managers, journalists, trade unionists – had no problem appreciating what was meant: workers who were supposed to be on a shift according to pre-agreed manning ratios yet did not turn up. What made them ghosts rather than absentees was the fact that they were still paid and that these earnings were then distributed among those on the shop floor. Paying ghost money was standard practice at many newspapers, although specific to individual unions and places.[2]

Ghost money was a typical 'restrictive practice', contemporary industrial relations lingo for arrangements 'under which labour is not used efficiently and which [are] not justifiable on social grounds'. However, as criteria of efficiency and justifiability were inevitably controversial, a variety of traditions, routines and transactions, which ran the gamut from apprenticeship rules to take-home

[1]Evidence of Daily Mirror Newspapers, 26 June 1961, *Royal Commission on the Press 1961–1962. Minutes of Oral Evidence, vol. 1. Witnesses*, Cmnd. 1812 (London: HMSO, 1962), 215.

[2]*Royal Commission on the Press 1961–1962. Report. Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, September 1962*, Cmnd. 1811 (London: HMSO, 1962), 38 f.

wages, fell into the same category.[3] The Donovan Report – delivered by the eponymous Commission and the basis for the 1969 government white paper *In Place of Strife*, the aborted effort to reform British industrial relations – traced a great number of such rules and traditions across industries. However, it reserved a special place for printing for hosting some of the more colourful practices in name and deed.[4] Yet another Royal Commission (1974–7) would look into the state of the press and printing, as would several other organisations, including the Prices and Incomes Board (1965) and a Court of Inquiry led by Lord Cameron (1967).[5]

From these reports, and amplified by trade gossip, a picture emerged that portrayed the printing industry as 'mismanaged, riddled with restrictive practices and bled white by highly paid, incompetent workers', as one offended trade union official put it.[6] In such depictions Fleet Street, London's famous media hub, came out worst – a picture book version of 'workplace misbehaviour'.[7] Bearing greater likeness to a madhouse than to a business centre, it was said to be run by unaccountable trade unions and their constituent bodies, the chapels, which held weak managers to ransom to fill their members' pockets. Consensus on the absurdity of restrictive practices in printing bridged the gap from Cooperative Movement stalwart Lord Peddie to Jonathan Aitken, a member of the Beaverbrook publishing dynasty and Tory MP, and from *Evening Standard* editor Charles Wintour to 1980s printing trade union leader Brenda Dean.[8] Stories about workers signing in on chapel-managed work rosters as Mickey Mouse, Lord Beaverbrook or Stalin to earn double wages proliferated and found their pinnacle in Tom Bower's widely read biography of *Daily Mirror* proprietor Robert Maxwell:

> The machine room in the Mirror building had by 1970 become an unendearing model of anarchy and villainy. During the nights, especially Saturdays, large numbers of highly paid but unneeded printers sat in the basement of the ugly red-topped building watching blue movies or playing high-stake poker. Depending upon their seniority and muscle, many had even clocked in under two names and were receiving double wages for no work. Others had registered but were working or sleeping elsewhere. It was not unknown at the end of a shift for wage packets to remain unclaimed because the printers were too drunk to recall which phony names they had registered under on arrival. By any standards, their wages were phenomenally high, ample to provide luxurious homes, several foreign holidays every year and even funds to set up private businesses.[9]

[3] *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. Research Papers 4. 1. Productivity Bargaining; 2. Restrictive Labour Practices* (London: HMSO, 1967), 42.

[4] *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations 1965–1968. Report Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty*, Cmnd. 3623 (London: HMSO, 1968); see also the working paper written for the Donovan Commission: *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. Research Papers 4. 1. Productivity Bargaining; 2. Restrictive Labour Practices* (London: HMSO, 1967), 42–60. For the wider implications of the Report and the white paper see Robert Taylor, *The TUC: From the General Strike to New Unionism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 150–4; John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, 'The High Tide of Trade Unionism: Mapping Industrial Politics, 1964–79', in *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964–79*, ed. Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman, and John McIlroy (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007), 94 f.

[5] Investigation of Wage Costs and Price in the Printing Industry, July–Sept. 1965, NAUK, EW 8/326; a redacted version was published as *Wages, Costs and Prices in the Printing Industry*, Cmnd. 2750 (London: HMSO, 1965); Economist Intelligence Unit, *The National Newspaper Industry: A Survey* (London: EIU, 1966); *Court of Inquiry into the Problems Caused by the Introduction of Web-offset Machines in the Printing Industry*, Cmnd. 3184 (London: HMSO, 1967); *Royal Commission on the Press. Final Report. The National Newspaper Industry. Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, July 1977*, Cmnd. 6810 (London: HMSO, 1977).

[6] John Bonfield, 'Smear by Inference', *Graphical Journal* 4, no. 1 (1967): 25.

[7] Workplace misbehaviour is defined as employees doing things they are not supposed to at the workplace; see Roland Paulsen, 'Non-Work at Work: Resistance or What?', *Organization* 22, no. 3 (2015): 352.

[8] Hansard, HL, Deb 25 Jan. 1967, vol. 279, 'The Press', col. 603; Hansard, HC Deb 30 Nov. 1978, vol. 959, 'The Times Newspaper', col. 740; Charles Wintour, *The Rise and Fall of Fleet Street* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 240–3; Brenda Dean, *Hot Mettle: SOGAT, Murdoch and Me* (London: Politico, 2007), 70.

[9] Tom Bower, *Maxwell: The Outsider* (London: Mandarin, 1991 [1987]), 359.

The mobster imaginary Bower evoked bore an uncanny resemblance to Jimmy Hoffa's Teamsters overseas, but it was gladly seized by the likes of Wintour, despite the evident lack of sources (which Wintour frankly acknowledged). Indeed, the rumours and stories circulating were often apocryphal, and the Chinese whispers between industry insiders had Beaverbrook turn into Marmaduke Hussey, Mickey Mouse into Donald Duck and Stalin into Charlie Chaplin.[10] Likewise, the oft-repeated formula of 'underworked and overpaid'[11] workers who extorted ghost money conflated different issues and, importantly, different trade unions. In the fragmented British industrial relations system, printing's top earners were organised in craft unions whereas ghost workers were a tool mostly employed by unions with a predominantly semi-skilled membership who brought home much lower weekly earnings. Nor were wage bills necessarily a good measure for newspapers' economic performance; the *Financial Times* was reputed to pay amongst the highest wages of any publication in the industry (and was to experience major industrial relations problems from the 1970s), yet it was consistently profitable.[12]

Despite all the attention, though, neither contemporary commentators nor historians – who frequently took such descriptions at face value, finding a ready explanation for Britain's economic woes in the second half of the twentieth century[13] – took notice of the curious fact that trade union representatives readily admitted to these restrictive practices. While objecting to the pejorative term and disagreeing on details, most of the officials Shawcross and his colleagues met were straightforward in owning such practices – but with a very different take on why they existed. The common thread that ran through discussions about manning and extras, demarcation and apprenticeship rules was the question of who got to define what 'work' was in the printing industry and who got to decide over its operation: where, when, how and who. While the conflict appeared to be all about claiming the industry's spoils for one's own organisation (which it certainly also was), this paper argues, a more fundamental argument about industrial production and workers' roles was lurking below the surface. If, as contemporary Industrial Relations scholars posited, 'rules on times to work and not to work, on pace and quality of work, on method and amount of pay, on movement into and out of work and from one position to another', were the means by which the workforce was structured,[14] the authority to set these very rules was crucial. Disagreement over what was work and what was not was disagreement over who had the right, and the competence, to manage.

Jungle Book: The British Printing Industry around 1960

To call the printing industry's industrial relations messy was at best an understatement, at worst a misunderstanding of an industry that was tiny in terms of numbers – in the 1960s it accounted for

[10]See fn. 5, and Dennis Griffiths, *A History of the NPA* (London: NPA, 2006), 206.

[11]Hansard, HC Deb 30 Nov. 1978, vol. 959, 'The Times Newspaper', col. 740; Griffiths, *History*, 219; Alex Mitchell, *Come the Revolution: A Memoir* (Sidney: NewSouth, 2011), 16; cf. James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 99.

[12]The National Newspaper Industry, [21.5.1974], NAUK, CAB 184/203; EIU, *Survey*, IIa.43, IV.33; cf. Dennis Griffiths, *Fleet Street: Five Hundred Years of the Press* (London: British Library, 2006), 377 f.

[13]Keith Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society: The Experience of the British System since 1911* (London: André Deutsch, 1979), 439–452; N.F.R. Crafts, 'The Golden Age of Economic Growth in Western Europe, 1950–73', *Economic History Review* 48 (1995): 444 f.; Derek H. Aldcroft and Michael J. Oliver, *Trade Unions and the Economy: 1870–2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 43, 45, 86 f.; Mark W. Bufton, *Britain's Productivity Problem, 1948–1990* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 32 f.; George L. Bernstein, *The Myth Of Decline: The Rise of Britain since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2004), 546 f. For critiques of both the underlying data and its interpretation see Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson, 'Restrictive Practices on the Shopfloor in Britain, 1945–60: Myth and Reality', *Business History* 36 (1994): 65–82, and Alan Booth and Joseph Melling, 'Workplace Cultures and Business Performance: British Labour Relations and Industrial Output in Comparative Perspective', in *Managing the Modern Workplace. Productivity, Politics and Workplace Culture in Postwar Britain*, ed. Joseph Melling and Alan Booth (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 4–6.

[14]Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, 'The Structuring of the Labor Force in Industrial Society: New Dimensions and New Questions', *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 8 (1955): 163.

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less than 2 per cent of employment in Great Britain – but of outsized importance in terms of public scrutiny. Notoriously difficult to survey and even more so to organise, it gave its own protagonists as well as outside observers perpetual headache. At its smallest common denominator, printing was about putting ink on a surface to convey information. And there the common ground ended. While most of printing involved paper or carton, tin and textiles printing were significant exceptions. The bulk of printers in Britain, as on the continent, were in general printing (or 'jobbing', as it was often called), which included everything from labels and greeting cards to books and periodicals. In small provincial towns, general trade and weekly newspaper printing sat side by side, whereas in the cities daily newspapers ran large, specialised factories, with London, Manchester and Glasgow hosting the biggest plants. Technologies differed significantly; while flatbed letterpress printing dominated in the general trade, large rotary machines had characterised the dailies since the mass circulation paper revolution in the 1890s.[15] Magazines and trade journals often used photogravure while other illustration-heavy publications relied on lithography. Printing establishments bore little resemblance to each other. Among the members of the British Federation of Master Printers (BFMP), the largest cohort were those with five or fewer employees (again, a common trait in other countries' printing industries), which contrasted sharply with the four-digit figures employed at a few large print houses and the national newspapers. Of the 401,200 people employed in printing in 1966, 143,700 were in newspapers and periodicals, 257,500 in the general trade.[16]

Size mattered in terms of capitalisation, market shares and political leverage. It was also an indicator of crucial differences in working routines and labour relations. Smaller establishments often used older machinery, relied on traditional craft skills and had print workers take responsibility for a wider range of steps in the production process, from composing to distributing. In contrast, the industry's heavyweights were characterised by a minute division of labour: compositors set copy on Linotype or Monotype machines but did not correct, as that was the job of 'readers'; case-work compositors added graphical elements that machines could not handle, and make-up men assembled the pages. Stereotypers produced the plates that were to be mounted on rotary cylinders, which was done by a machine room staff composed of half a dozen types of workers. Fetching the printed copies from the machines and sending them to the warehouse where they would be stacked and prepared for distribution was primarily a paper worker job. To complicate things further, jobs were subdivided into craft and non-craft parts. Craft readers checked and corrected the proofs while non-craft assistants read the original copy for comparison and checked second proofs against the reader's first. In machine rooms, machine minders were in charge of the rotaries (and other machines) while subordinate tasks were given to semi-skilled staff.[17]

By the turn of the twentieth century, professional specialisation had translated into organisational division. Compositors, lithographers, readers, stereotypers and electrotypers, letterpress machine minders, lithographic printers, bookbinders and paper workers were divided along professional and geographical lines; while England, Wales and Northern Ireland were catered for by 'British' trade unions, compositors and machine minders in Scotland and London carried cards from their own organisations.[18] In addition, large printing houses employed substantial staff that was organised by non-print unions, including journalists, electricians and engineers. By the late 1950s, the industry counted no fewer than sixteen trade unions with demarcations that were as strict as they were

[15]Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press 1830s–1914: Speed in the Age of Transatlantic Journalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 183–210; Jeremy Black, *The English Press: A History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 91–119.

[16]*Court of Inquiry*, 6; *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. Research Papers 7. Employers' Associations* (London: HMSO, 1967), 21.

[17]John Child, *Industrial Relations in the British Printing Industry: The Quest for Security* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), 162–4.

[18]A.E. Musson, *The Typographical Association: Origins and History Up to 1949* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); Ellic Howe and Harold E. Waite, *The London Society of Compositors. A Centenary History* (London: Cassell, 1948).

idiosyncratic. Warehouses in London were organised by the National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paperworkers (NUPB&PW) but by the National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants (Natsopa) if they were in the provinces. Letterpress machine minders had to be members of the London Typographical Society (LTS) in the capital, yet not at the *News of the World*, where Natsopa had retained their original claim from the nineteenth century when craftsmen (in a bid to oppose what they regarded as demeaning or, in Marxist terms, alienated work) had refused to do 'industrial' work on the then new rotaries. Meanwhile in most smallish jobbing houses, few demarcations mattered.[19]

The employers' associations were hardly less fragmented. Among the dozen organisations in the British Isles, the BFMP catered to England (including London), Wales and Northern Ireland, but not Scotland, which had an equivalent association. The master printers represented the general trade and weekly newspapers; daily newspapers were members of the Newspaper Society (NS, which shared a 'Labour Committee' with the BFMP), but not in Scotland and not if they were national in outlook. The dozen or so papers that qualified met in the Newspaper Proprietors Association (NPA), very much a London affair but also speaking for plants in Manchester and Glasgow. A significant number of companies did not belong to any association, either because they were too small to benefit much from collective representation or because they were hostile to trade unions.[20]

Two more things bedevilled industrial relations in the industry: while workflow and production cycles were usually steady in general print, and in many provincial newspapers, they were volatile in national newspapers. Issues varied widely in their paging; breaking news required delayed deadlines and additional staff. These questions usually fell outside national agreements on hours, holidays and basic rates. Instead, the unions' constituent bodies, the chapels (which historically predated trade unions) negotiated details such as shift times, breaks or overtime in house agreements. Moreover, due to closed-shop agreements, local branches and chapels served as gatekeepers for entry into the industry and assumed co-management functions. FOCs ('fathers' and, rarely, 'mothers of the chapel'), often together with trade union offices, demanded a say in manning levels, shift times and production organisation. In effect, much of what would usually be considered the employers' prerogative was outsourced to labour representatives.[21]

Given the sheer number of chapels – in 1961, the Mirror Group alone counted forty-six on its publications, and across Fleet Street there were more than 400 – comparisons were difficult to make and generalisation regarding wages and conditions nearly impossible. Wage packages consisted of basic minimum rates to which shift extras, overtime payments, incentive bonuses, cost-of-living bonuses, merit money and house extras were added. As a result, incomes varied from relatively low pay that consisted of the minimum plus cost-of-living bonus to take-home earnings of nearly three times the basic rate.[22] Variation was endless: the basic rate for a hand compositor employed on evening newspapers was above that for his peer in jobbing, weekly and bi-weekly newspapers, but less than that for the hand compositor employed on morning and tri-weekly newspapers. In London, linotype operators and piece case compositors were partly paid on piece rates governed by the London scale of prices; their peers in Manchester and Glasgow received (lower) time rates.[23] Roy Thomson, one of

[19] John Gennard, *A History of the National Graphical Association* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 60. Clerical staff were largely covered by Natsopa/SOGAT: John Gennard and Peter Bain, *A History of the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades* (London: Routledge, 1995), 154 f., 254 f.

[20] *Court of Inquiry*, 7; Minutes of Meeting of Joint Labour Committee of the BFMP and Newspaper Society on 17 June 1958, St Bride Library (StBL), London, BFMP Labour Committee, vol. 8, 3280–8; NGA, National Council Report to the Second Biennial Delegate Meeting, 13–18 June 1976, London Metropolitan University (LMU), TUC Library, HD6661P7.49, 11–23.

[21] A.J.M. Sykes, 'Trade-Union Workshop Organization in the Printing Industry – The Chapel', *Human Relations* 13, no. 1 (1960): 49–65.

[22] Investigation of Wage Costs and Price in the Printing Industry, July–Sept. 1965, NAUK, EW 8/326, 6, 8.

[23] *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence I*, 271.

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the major players in British media at the time, could be forgiven for despairing over the 'jungle' he found in newspaper production.[24]

For a long time, these traditions and practises were rarely controversial or regarded as 'restrictive', as they were overshadowed by other trends: the advent of mass newspapers and the circulation wars of the 1920s and 1930s; the drastic shrinking of newspaper volumes as a result of military service and paper rationing in the 1940s; and the renewed boom of the 1950s when the volume of printed matter and newspaper circulation both increased rapidly. However, careful observers noted that the latest expansion showed peculiar features. There were few new papers, but they were bigger, carried more advertisements and branched out through supplements. There was also a renewed trend towards concentration among provincial and national papers (as well as TV, as in the case of Thomson and the Mirror Group), with one-paper towns worrying those interested in the plurality of the press and, by implication, its freedom. That had been the rationale behind the appointment of the first Royal Commission of the Press in 1948–9, and it was also a key part of the mandate Shawcross's committee had been given after several newspapers had ceased publication in 1961.[25]

These processes were gradual and long-term, but their pace quickened at the turn of the 1960s, as several major trends aligned that put the industry on a much more insecure footing. The tectonics of ownership in the national press started to shift and would not stop for decades. In 1959, the *Guardian* lost its *Manchester* epithet and began printing in London two years later, bringing another national daily to Fleet Street. Also in 1959, Thomson, a Canadian entrepreneur who had invested in Scottish media, took over the Kemsley provincial newspaper group, including the *Sunday Times*; seven years later, he added *The Times* to his portfolio. The Mirror Group embarked on a course of rapid expansion under the leadership of editor Hugh Cudlipp and finance director Cecil King, a nephew of Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere, and would morph first into the International Publishing Corporation (1963) and then Reed International (1968). Meanwhile, Robert Maxwell was expanding his book and periodicals publishing and made his first bid for a national newspaper – but lost against one Rupert Murdoch, who acquired both the *News of the World* and the *Sun* in 1968–9.[26] Around the same time, though far from the limelight of Fleet Street, the owners of the *Falkirk Herald* began a long process of acquisition that would make them the United Kingdom's third-largest regional newspaper chain.[27]

Besides reconfiguring the press's ownership, the entry of new capital and management had implications for the ability as well as the willingness to introduce new technology – of which there was now an abundance affecting nearly every production step. Web-offset printing had come of age, offering an alternative to letterpress as its propensity to high-quality colour printing appealed to advertisers. Teletypesetting, improved since its start in the 1930s, transmitted remotely composed text at high speed so that lines set in London or New York emerged as metal slugs in Manchester.[28] And while electronic facsimile transmission made it possible to send entire pages, phototypesetting, a French innovation that had been in the making since after the war, offered to replace lead with film by the late 1950s.[29] Electronics entered gravure printing via West Germany in 1962, and in the same year, the first fully automatic book finishing system put out thirty-six copies a minute. In newspapers, string-tying

[24] *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence I*, 642.

[25] The National Press, 17 Feb. 1969, NAUK, BT 258/2577; *Royal Commission on the Press 1947–1949. Report. Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty June 1949* (London: HMSO, 1949), Cmd. 7700.

[26] Bower, *Maxwell*, 170–82, 244.

[27] Rachel Matthews, *The History of the Provincial Press in England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 115–22.

[28] 'The Guardian Takes Part in Transatlantic TTS Test', *Guardian*, 7 Mar. 1962, 1.

[29] H. O. Smith, Phototypesetting. Paper presented at the PATRA Newspaper and Rotary Letterpress Conference, Oct. 1957, London College of Printing Archive, Robert Fenton Papers, Folder RF/21/4/4; LTS Compositors Quarterly Delegate Meeting, 1 Feb. 1961, Modern Records Centre (MRC), Warwick, MSS.28/CO/1/8/68/1; Lawrence F. Wallis, *Electronic Typesetting: A Quarter Century of Technological Upheaval* (Gateshead: Paradigm, 1984), 23–5.

machines entered British publishing rooms with the promise of reducing manpower requirements significantly.[30]

Technological transformation mattered in four important ways: (a) it offered huge long-term economies but was capital-intensive (costs easily ran into millions of pounds in today's prices), slowing down its introduction and making efficient use imperative; (b) several of the key developments reinforced each other, for instance phototypesetting and web-offset printing, while electronics began to pervade the entire production process; (c) technological change not only sped up drastically around 1960, it also became increasingly unspecific, as photocopying machines and computers entered offices, boosting a trend towards in-house printing that hit jobbing establishments; finally, (d) new technology had little regard for traditional skillsets and lines of demarcation, raising the question of whether litho or letterpress printers would man web-offset newspaper presses, whether compositors or press telegraphists were in charge of teletypesetting devices and what foundry workers would be doing in 'cold' rather than hot-metal printing plants.[31]

The Practice of Restrictive Practices

If British printing stood at the threshold of sweeping change, that transformation was heralded by the industry's first major collective bargaining conflict since the 1926 General Strike. For a full six weeks in 1959, the general trade and many provincial newspapers were largely shut down because the employers sought to put a stop to the upward trend in wages and the downward trend in hours that the post-war decade had brought. Worried about profitability and their competitive edge, NS and BFMP took a hard line: no to a 10 per cent wage rise; no to a reduction from 42.5 to 40 hours; no to a third week of annual holiday. Any change in basic rates and hours would be contingent on allowing employers a greater say in recruitment, notably of non-craft labour, and softening apprenticeship restrictions in the craft professions. Other demands included relaxed demarcations; more overtime and shift work; and the removal of restrictions on management, for example by agreeing to work-measurement bonus schemes or when it came to introducing new machinery.[32] It took a protracted mediation process to bring the two sides to a compromise (a 4.5 per cent increase in basic rates and phased introduction of the 40-hour week but no extra holidays here, shorter apprenticeships, easier introduction of new processes and greater use of semi-skilled labour there).[33]

If the dispute's outcome appeared all too predictable, its intensity reflected the serious ambition among employers to turn the tide of growing trade union power that had been rolling over their industry since the war. 'Restrictive practices' was to become a cipher for the question of who was to manage the workplace and who was to determine which work was done by whom, how and when. From within the BFMP ranks, the Conservative government had already been approached as to where it stood on restrictive practices in the mid-1950s, notably with an eye to inflation and incomes policy but also to potential legislation. Preferring free collective bargaining and non-intervention in private dealings, Conservative politicians like Iain Macleod, Minister of Labour 1955–9, had stayed clear of committing to any legislative action. Yet, pressure from the Tory base and employer-friendly organisations such as the Inns of Court Conservative and Unionist Society (which published a controversial pamphlet on how to curb trade unions' 'giant's strength' in 1958), and specifically the 1959 strike,

[30] *RCP 1961–2, Report*, 36.

[31] Gennard, *NGA*, 27–34, 72 f.

[32] Memorandum on forthcoming negotiations, 19 Nov. 1958, StBL, BFMP Labour Committee, vol. 8, 3320–42; Employers' Requirements. Appendix B, no date [Sept. 1958], ibid., 3317.

[33] Basic Requirements (excl. labour supply). Proposed clauses [July 1959], and Summary of negotiations under Lord Birkett's chairmanship [Sept. 1959], StBL, BFMP, Labour Committee, vol. 9, 3669–70 and 3679–81. Cf. H. Montgomery Hyde, *Norman Birkett: The Life of Lord Birkett of Ulverston* (London: Reprint Society, 1965), 590–4.

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pushed Macleod towards supporting an official inquiry into Britain's industrial relations.[34] The Royal Commission on the Press of 1961–2 and the 1965–8 Donovan Commission grew out of these debates, helped by the bipartisan support they found in the Labour party led by Harold Wilson: his 'white heat' of technological change had 'no place for restrictive practices or for outdated methods'.[35] Wilson did not care much to specify which practices he had in mind but, in the context of print, four complexes stood out as the most pressing issues: entry into the industry; professional and union demarcations; manning levels; and working-hours regulation.

Entry

From the employers' point of view, restrictions began with recruitment. 'If we can get our craft labour supply and demand into reasonable balance then the whole balance of power alters', an NS representative noted in 1965.[36] Entry into the industry was controlled by the unions through two interconnected devices, the closed shop and the apprenticeship. In a closed shop only union members were able to take print jobs in unionised houses (the vast majority), and eligibility for membership was an internal affair. By stipulating that only boys could be apprenticed, craft unions prevented women from entering the industry, rendering well-paid professions such as composition, foundry work and control of printing presses exclusively male prerogatives. Wartime exceptions remained just that, and the term of 'dilutees' applied to female print workers did not even try to hide the underlying misogyny.[37] Most of the women had to leave the industry after the war (except for Scotland but there, too, they were 'a dying race', as one employer put it[38]). While employers appreciated relatively cheaper female labour, they were hardly concerned with furthering women's equal access to jobs and, in the course of the 1959 negotiations, their all-male delegation successfully pressed down women's rates, to which the equally all-male union delegation readily agreed.[39]

Women were not the only casualties of apprenticeship. With some minor exceptions in smaller general trade houses, it was virtually impossible for semi-skilled print workers to enter craft ranks (although this was not unusual abroad). Employers in need of a rotary machine minder had to accept and retrain a flatbed printer rather than use an assistant printer with many years of experience on rotaries.[40] Such rules were very much about status[41] – machine minders instructed assistant printers, readers ran their teams – but also about pay, as craft and non-craft rates were strictly relational: if semi-skilled jobs received 87.5 per cent of the skilled basic rate, any improvement on either side would inevitably prompt demands to re-establish the old gap. So deeply ingrained were differentials in workers' thinking that as late as 1981, when the national newspapers were in full crisis mode, Natsopa's *Daily Mirror* machine chapel would warn managers that 'in the event of a settlement with the N.G.A., should they receive more, in money or extra holidays, we would be back for the equivalent amount'.[42] By that time, employers were no longer urging trade unions for a greater intake of labour,

[34]Robert Shepherd, *Iain Macleod* (London: Hutchinson, 1994), 148 f. On *A Giant's Strength* see Chris Wrigley, *British Trade Unions since 1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 69 f.; and Peter Dorey, *British Conservatism and Trade Unionism, 1945–1964* (London: Routledge, 2016), 88–90.

[35]Labour's Plan for Science. Reprint of Speech by the Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, MP, Leader of the Labour Party, at the Annual Conference, 1 Oct. 1963, London School of Economics Archives, Shore/4/83. For the party's debate about press reform see Sean Tunney, *Labour and the Press. From New Left to New Labour* (Eastbourne: Sussex University Press, 2007), 37–44.

[36]Note of a discussion at Joint Labour Committee, 15 June 1965, StBL, BFMP Labour Committee, vol. 13, 409–11.

[37]See the pathbreaking study by Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change* (London: Pluto Press, 1983). For a similar trend in French printing see Claude Maignien, 'La longue exclusion des femmes typographes et compositrices par la Fédération Française des Travailleurs du Livre', *Marie Pas Claire*, n°7 (1996): 8.

[38]BFMP hearing, 19 June 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 130–53, at 147.

[39]Application for Wages Increases for Non-Craft Males and Women Workers, Jan. 1959, StBL, BFMP Labour Committee, vol. 9, 3408–13; Employers' Statement, 21 July 1959, ibid., 3671–5.

[40]NS hearing, 12 June 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 114.

[41]Cockburn, *Brothers*, 126–32.

[42]Special Chapel Meeting, 12 Mar. 1981, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), CLC/013/MS23750/003.

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and the latter's doubts as to the long-term wisdom of increasing the workforce were vindicated by rapidly rising unemployment.[43]

Demarcations

The apprenticeship system as well as the logic of trade union boundaries meant that demarcations were one of the most vexing issues in printing. Again, larger firms were much more affected as industrial production here was highly segmented; any trespassing by one union onto the territory held by another would threaten production halts. In 1960, it took a special agreement at the *Daily Mirror* to determine who carried machine waste how far, the solution being that a table was put inside the circular moving band where Natsopa members placed the waste, LTS machine minders inspected it, before NUPB&PW members then tied it up.[44] Such arrangements were vulnerable to new machinery. When a new rotary was introduced to the *Daily Mirror* three years later, Natsopa's machine room chapel found that the LTS claimed the packing of plates until they were prepared and ready to be placed on the impression cylinder. When the foreman refused to respect Natsopa's title, the chapel FOC pulled out his members in order to press home 'that the Machine Managers had no right to arbitrarily assume that they could ride rough-shod over Natsopa'.[45] Generally, though, chapels were careful not to tread on each other's toes for fear of retaliation. At a Mirror Group subsidiary, machine minders refused to start work if their assistants were late or sick, requiring production management to have 'floating natsopas' available to fill the contingencies who, on other days, might not be needed.[46]

Things were even more difficult where technology ignored lines of demarcation altogether. When *The Times* introduced teletypesetting in 1950–1, it took months for the compositors to agree with the press telegraphists about who did the keyboarding and feeding of perforated tape, who sent the data and who oversaw the mechanical side. When an agreement was reached, both unions were adamant that this should not prejudice their claims on teletypesetting in other places.[47] Ten years later, when asked about a recent case in which it had taken three years to settle the matter, the press telegraphists explained to the RCP that 'if we have redundancy due to teletypesetting we have no employment we can move our members to'. Demarcation was a matter of both individual livelihood and organisational survival.[48]

Manning

Demarcation disputes went hand in hand with manning standards. With teletypesetting, one man could effectively work three units: setting type in London, telegraphing copy to Manchester and setting type in Manchester; indeed, in most other European countries and in the United States, it would not have been a man at all, as female typists operated the QWERTY keyboard. While Scandinavian unions yielded ground here,[49] a similar concession was ruled out by their British peers. The TA, which was responsible for the provincial end of transmissions, agreed to management numbers only after a series of tests. This was a matter of principle – the employer in question had 'never run a mono-caster in his life, and we cannot accept what he says just like that: we never do' – but such resistance also

[43]For the surviving print unions' unemployed members see Gennard, *NGA*, 129 f.; Gennard and Bain, *SOGAT*, 159 f.

[44]Natsopa. The Branch Committee's Report August to November 1960, 24 Jan. 1961, LMA, CLC/013/MS23751.

[45]Natsopa/LTS Dispute in 'J' Line Proofing, 16 July 1963, LMA, CLC/013/MS23754/003.

[46]Factors Contributing to High London Printing Costs, 7 Feb. 1963, MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 34/File 8.

[47]Mathew to NUPT, 6 Feb. 1951, MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 5/File 8.

[48]National Union of Press Telegraphists, 17 Oct. 1961, *RCP, Oral Evidence*, I, 35 f., 39.

[49]Lars Ekdahl, 'Två traditioner eller en inom svensk fackforeningsrörelse? Ett perspektiv på den sekellånga kampen om makten över arbetet inom grafisk industri', *Arbetarhistorie* 18, no. 70 (1994), 18 f.; Tor Are Johansen, 'Teknologi og faglig strategi – kampen om betjeningsretten', in *Fra bly til bytes. Oslo grafiske fagforening 1872–1997*, ed. Tor Are Johansen and Øystein Simensen (Oslo: Oslo grafiske fagforening, 1997), 167–9. Like the British, the French printing union refused to: Pierre Naville and Jacques Palierne, 'Automation et travail humain. Le cas de la «télétypesetter»', *Sociologie du travail* 2, no. 3 (1960): 203.

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reflected very real expertise. It soon transpired that composition knowhow was also needed on the receiving end as faulty spacing could result in chunks of molten lead obstructing machines.[50]

Even without the addition of different technology, new machinery could lead to prolonged problems. When Hazell, Watson & Viney, an Aylesbury-based periodicals printer that had the British run of *Reader's Digest*, acquired a new letterpress machine, the TA successfully pushed for a manning ratio of four craftsmen and three assistants. Although well above what was common in the United States, for management it was more important to keep the massive order than to press for lower staffing. Their Watford competitor Sun Printers hardly fared better. The master printers told the RCP that on a cutting machine a crew of eleven – as opposed to three in the United States – was employed: 'The thing is almost a joke at Watford. The men can hardly get near the machine.'[51]

Although evidence for this anecdote failed to materialise, periodicals printers, which were among the largest houses in the general trade and frequently located near London, did meet with more pressure from trade unions than most other firms. They were surpassed only by Fleet Street's national newspapers. As collective bargaining between unions and NPA did not cover manning standards, these were subject to house agreements, making for vast differences from one paper to the other and often between plants in the same group. Concentration of newspaper ownership tended to bring such variation to the foreground as managers discovered how little uniformity there was among departments. When the Mirror Group went on a shopping spree in 1959/60, rationalisation became a major objective. Publications that competed in the same market were axed. A comprehensive study charting manning levels and wage costs across the group found that staffing for comparable publications varied by as much as 40 per cent.[52]

Efforts to bring down overstaffing met with stiff resistance by the national unions' leaders, who personally engaged with the Mirror Group management. Over months and years, the two sides conducted difficult talks in which the media concern dangled the departure of publications from London as both an incentive and a threat: if the unions complied, the group would continue printing in the metropole; if they did not, the spiralling trend would be exacerbated by the group's periodicals moving along. The unions conversely insisted that printers of defunct publications were absorbed in other parts of the group and threatened to strike the vulnerable national newspapers *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* to gain leverage. Eventually, the closure of Mirror Group establishments and disagreements between employers, but also between unions, on the manning of web-offset presses that were supposed to make London printing viable would lead to a major conflict over the Southwark Press in 1965–6, prompting the Cameron Court of Inquiry with its devastating findings.[53]

Working Time

Manning was inextricably linked to the hours print workers did, which, in turn, determined take-home earnings. While there was little deviation from basic rates and common bonuses such as cost of living in the general trade, newspapers – and particularly national dailies – operated a wide variety of payments beyond the basic rate, most of which resulted from complex, arcane arrangements. How long things such as washing up or make-ready took was not determined by management but negotiated with the respective chapels and led to vastly different practices that begged the question

[50]NS hearing, 12 June 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 107–30, 123; TA hearing, 16 Oct. 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, II, 218–20; Interview with Eric Timmins by L. Plommer, 5 Dec. 2002, Guardian Media Archives, OHP/92/1.

[51]BFMP hearing, 19 June 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 139 (quote)–141; TA evidence, 16 Oct. 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, II, 217.

[52]Factors Contributing to High London Printing Costs, 7 Feb. 1963, and F. Rogers to G.G. Eastwood, 28 Dec. 1962, both MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 34/File 8.

[53]See the meeting memoranda in MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 34/File 8; for Southwark see the Ministry of Labour's observations in NAUK, LAB 10/2836, and the *Court of Inquiry*, 23–8.

of justifiability.[54] 'Fossilised' payments for no longer needed concessions[55] included 'cropper money' (cleaning during the print run rather than afterwards) in one place or 'tea and football times' (clearing out of the factory quickly, e.g., without washing, to make room for the next shift) in another.[56] Piecework compositors would regularly charge for work that had been done outside the composition room by advertisement agencies rather than at the newspapers.[57] And 'blow' times allowed workers, mostly in machine rooms and warehouses such as the *Observer*'s, to take hours off to remedy the effects of dust, noise and stress during peak production. While managers conceded that this might have been sensible in the past, they claimed that production facilities had much improved – at least a controversial contention in Fleet Street's cramped spaces.[58] Other issues that unnerved publishers and production managers were extras paid for colour printing, or the insistence that workers were entitled to additional payments if they worked on other periodicals or newspapers than those specified in their contract.[59]

The print workers' ability to hold on to, and even expand, such extras reflected that print labour was a seller's market. Indeed, employers brought pressure on competitors by forcing them to increase their payroll, too.[60] Yet management was rather clear that, while irritating, few of these extras mattered greatly in financial terms. A different case was two interconnected issues: overtime and ghost money, which reflected the highly peculiar mode of production in mass circulation newspapers with their millions of copies turned out each night and the flexibility editors and journalists cherished. Deadlines mattered everywhere but were imperative in national newspapers where trains and ferries had to be reached if the papers were to be sent to wholesalers. As these times could not be moved, additional staff had to be available at short notice for breaking news to make the morning editions. And if the *Daily Mirror* editor decided to honour the late Queen Mary by changing the masthead's usual red to mauve in the middle of the night, staff had to clean out one colour and replace it with another, something that was not factored into the usual routines. Seasonal shifts also affected paging: there was permanent staff for a twenty-page edition, and hence any additional pages (which at *The Times* could go up to forty-eight) meant that a lot of extra labour had to be brought in.[61]

The unsteady demand for labour led to a system in which national newspapers hired three classes of trade-union supplied workers: regulars (who worked five days a week after 1947, automatically increasing the demand for overtime from the previous six-day week), regular casuals (who did at least four days at the same paper) and casual casuals. The latter were supplied by union branches at short notice and usually had permanent employment on Sunday papers, that is, only for one night a week, numbering between 3,000 and 4,000 in the national newspapers in the mid-1960s.[62] Conditions differed significantly, notably in terms of benefits; while regular casuals were often, though by no means

[54] Daily Mirror Newspapers hearing, 26 June 1961, *RCP, Oral Evidence*, I, 208. The Mirror Group's report (see fn. 48) was largely confirmed by information the LTS gathered for their own purposes; see the letters to General Secretary Robert Willis in 1963: MRC, MSS. 39 F/Box 34/File 8.

[55] Allen Flanders, *The Fawley Productivity Agreement* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), 236.

[56] Associated Newspapers hearing, 17 July 1961, *RCP, Oral Evidence*, I, 395 f.

[57] LTS hearing, 17 Oct. 1961, RCP, *Oral Evidence*, II, 265; Factors Contributing to High London Printing Costs, 7 Feb. 1963, MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 34/File 8.

[58] The Observer. A survey of manning, pay and labour relations in the national newspaper industry, no date [Feb. 1975], NAUK, BS 2/574, 11. There is little evidence of the equivalent for piece rate workers using high productivity at one point to 'make time' at another; cf. Paulsen, 'Non-Work', 353 f.

[59] Printing. Untitled Report, no date [1965], NAUK, EW 8/326.

[60] While NPA members denied the allegation, representatives of the provincial press were more outspoken, not least because they felt their staff was pilfered by Fleet Street and that London's wage standards were filtering into the provinces via the Manchester and Glasgow plants; Scottish Newspaper Proprietors' Association, 1961, *RCP, Oral Evidence I*, 58; NPA hearing, 1961, *RCP, Oral Evidence I*, 95; BMFP hearing, ibid., 143 f.

[61] The Times hearing, *RCP, Oral I*, 484; 'Death of Queen Mary', *Daily Mirror*, 25 Mar. 1953, 1. Cf. Michael Burgess, 'Back Hill's Hidden History', http://byronik.com/reveille.html [22.5.2023].

[62] EIU, *National Newspaper Industry*, part IV, 62. Again, in practice rules differed. At the *Daily Mirror*, regular casuals worked less than four days, casual casuals up to three; see Jobbing Requirements [Oct. 1961], CLC/013/MS23754/004.

always, eligible for pension funds, casual casuals were not.[63] The latter did not account for all of the overtime, though, as it was a priced service print workers had to offer, if one that raised eyebrows on both sides of the bargaining divide. Publishers wanted to minimise permanent staff that was not consistently needed, yet overtime was expensive and hard to get rid of when technological advances allowed economies. Union officials did not like overtime either as it stood in the way of shorter working weeks, and the craft unions prided themselves on keeping casual work to a minimum (although some with better reason than others). Union officials mostly accepted that members were rather fond of the extra shillings and pounds they could earn. That Natsopa's higher echelons repeatedly reminded members that it was ill-advised to do much overtime with an eye to unemployment illustrated that base and leadership had different priorities and, indeed, visions of good working practices.[64]

At chapel level, overtime was the principal means that secured higher earnings. Minimum overtime amounts meant that management could not tailor labour supply to its demands but had to offer three hours or more even when just one or two were needed. Often, overtime had to be offered to all members rather than the number required for the particular job. In the flatbed machine room of the Mirror Group's Cornwall Press, LTS machine minders insisted that they were entitled to overtime if their Natsopa assistants received any for extra cleaning, even though there was nothing for them to do. When *The Times* introduced teletypesetting, the compositors' chapel demanded two hours overtime per week in compensation.[65] The forfeiture of extra hours was a disciplinary tool used by Natsopa's *Mirror* chapels,[66] yet opting out of contractual overtime was not an option either: when a *Daily Mail* driver refused to work overtime, the NUPB&PW chapel first admonished, then fined and ultimately expelled the man.[67]

Overtime was also the premise for ghost money. When there was extra work beyond the contractual standard without enough casual labour available, the regular staff did the work instead and distributed the money among them – even if they finished within their ordinary working hours. While this could be construed as an incentive scheme not unheard of elsewhere – the *Liverpool Daily Post and Echo* traditionally paid four overtime hours for Saturday afternoons no matter how long it actually took so that the production staff would work at top speed and go home early[68] – Fleet Street had institutionalised the system in peculiar ways. Rather than being an improvised means to meet deadlines, ghost work was a fixed routine and settled in official agreements. 'Ghost machines' were budgeted into production calculations with varying explanations: at the *Daily Express*, the physical limitations of Beaverbrook House restricted an expansion of the machine room that both sides agreed would have been preferable, implying more work on fewer machines than optimal and therefore resulting in work on fictional machines being paid for.[69] At the Thomson Group, acquisition of a plant in Manchester allowed printing the 250,000 northern copies previously sent from London. As that did not exploit Manchester's capacity, a ghost machine agreement for machines no longer staffed was found, and when the London Natsopa chapel learned about it, similar demands were raised here.[70] While craft unions, as the *Express*'s machine minders showed, had no compunctions raising ghost money, it was largely a tool used by the non-craft unions, Natsopa and NUPB&PW;

[63] Regular employees could hold double cards, allowing them to do casual shifts to increase their earnings; that was not the rule but exact numbers even for Fleet Street are missing.

[64] DM & SM Natsopa Machine and Reel Chapel Meeting, [Feb. 1964]; Natsopa. The Branch Committee's Report Aug. to Nov. 1963, 28 Jan. 1964, both in MRC, CLC/013/MS23751.

[65] Factors Contributing to High London Printing Costs, 7 Feb. 1963, MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 34/File 8; Suggested arrangements regarding pay and conditions for piece hands working Teletypesetter plant, 2 May 1951, MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 5/File 8.

[66] Committee Meeting, 15 Dec. 1960, LMA, CLC/013/MS23754/004.

[67] Silvester v. National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers. Note by Secretary, 10 Nov. 1966, NAUK, RC/P/121. The member took the case to the High Court and prevailed.

[68] Liverpool Daily Post and Echo hearing, 27 June 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence I*, 249.

[69] Minutes of the Quarterly Chapel Meeting, 12 Jan. 1965, MRC, MSS.28/DE/1/1/2.

[70] Special Committee Meeting, 22 Oct. 1960, MRC, MSS.39/NAT/6/NM/4, 56–7.

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to their members, ghost money was an extra that partly compensated for their lower wages in the differential system.[71]

Practical Vision: Co-managing and Caring

Trade unionists invariably pointed out that restrictive practices were based on formal arrangements, whether on national or house level, and therefore hardly deserved the epithet: they were an integral part of the price of the labour their members sold. If employers deemed that price too high, they were free to give notice and achieve a better result in a new bargaining round.[72] Of course, the same officials were well aware that employers would not simply cancel agreements given the costs of attaining new ones, but also because they were getting something out of the disparaged practices. Repeatedly, RCP members were nonplussed to find that employers were unwilling to denounce restrictive practices across the board or criticise the closed shop.[73]

This was more than holding back to avoid trouble (after all, everything they said would appear in print); it also reflected an awareness that trade union power had its perks. A good part of standard management functions was outsourced to – and paid for by – trade unions, notably recruitment, qualification, disciplinary matters and benefits. With some surprise, the Cameron Court of Inquiry found that the printing industry did not have enough managers who could have run labour affairs, had the unions not done the job for them.[74] On the shop floor, the chapels went through every detail of organising production and staffing machines. The *Daily Mirror*/*Sunday Pictorial* Natsopa day staff chapel would survey every step of production at the newspaper's plants and calculate the respective staffing needs accordingly. Staff was provided with the 'guarantee that under normal conditions and circumstances a good workmanlike job would be done daily, and no claims for additional payments would be made'. They would also make suggestions for improved efficiency, request pertinent equipment and formulate rules for practical matters such as reel storage.[75]

Clauses that promised to honour contractual obligations were no empty talk. Printing chapels regularly enforced discipline and quality of work among their members, covering a vast range of transgressions such as leaving work early, refusing to do assignments, executing jobs improperly or violating chapel rules.[76] Chapel meeting reports abound with sanctions of such violations (which, of course, showed both the FOCs' resolve and the members' readiness to ignore them). When rotary minders at the Natsopa *News of the World* machine chapel took unofficial blow times to have a pint in one of Fleet Street's many pubs, they were detected by chapel 'scrutineers' and subsequently penalised. Their opposite numbers at the *Daily Mirror* even saw the FOC resign in protest against such 'flagrant abuse'.[77] That did not solve the issue, though, and chapel officials would have to continue policing their members over the next decades.[78]

[71]Daily Mirror Newspapers hearing, 26 June 1961, and Beaverbrook Newspapers hearing, 3 July 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 215, 268.

[72]Notes on Meeting of Union Representatives held in London, 1 Apr. 1963, MRC, MSS.39 F/Box 34/File 8.

[73]Moira Hart, 'Why Bosses Love the Closed Shop', *New Society*, 15 June 1979, 352–4.

[74]*Court of Inquiry*, 75 f.; Richard Hyman, 'Afterword: What Went Wrong', in *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964–79*, ed. Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman, and John McIlroy (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007), 353 f.

[75]Nixson to Brice, 8 Dec. 1960, and Daily Mirror Sunday Pictorial Natsopa Day Staff Chapel to F. Scott, [1958/59], LMA, CLC/013/MS23761; Committee Meeting, 2 Feb. 1960, LMA, CLC/013/MS23754/003. Committee Meeting, 11 Oct. 1960, LMA CLC/013/MS23754/004.

[76]Executive committee minutes 11 Jan. 1956, 16 Mar. 1956, 9 Oct. 1956, 28 Nov. 1956, LMA, CLC/013/MS23754/002.

[77]Committee Meeting, 2 Nov. 1961, MRC, MSS.39/NAT/6/NM/4, 117–8, quote: Chapel Meeting, 18 Jan. 1958, LMA, CLC/013/MS23750/002.

[78]Quarterly Chapel Meeting, 16 Oct. 1969, LMA, CLC/013/MS23750/002; Chapel Meeting, 5 Jan. 1977, LMA, CLC/013/MS23750/003; Quarterly Chapel Meeting, 30 Mar. 1987, ibid.; Executive committee minutes, 16 Jan. 1969, 24 Feb. 1970, 1 Feb. and 1 Mar. 1972, LMA, CLC/013/MS23754/007.

The flip side of paternalism was charity and solidarity. Wayward members were not simply punished but received help if the underlying problems were serious. A member of Natsopa's *Daily Mirror* chapel who suffered from alcoholism and repeatedly landed himself in trouble was supported in arranging hospitalisation; when that failed and the man was sacked, the chapel followed up as he went from one institution to the next, helping out financially in the hope 'that J. would pull himself together and that the sun will once again shine on his path'.[79] In a similar case at the *News of the World*, after the member had passed away, the chapel kept track of his widow and, when she also died, supported the children with several hundreds of pounds, a hefty sum at the time.[80] Beyond such individual charity, chapels and trade unions operated various benefit schemes covering sickness, accidents, death, retirement and unemployment, which supplemented the rudimentary and non-transferable pension rights schemes of employers but also public social expenditure, which was modest by OECD standards. As these schemes were established in times of economic prosperity, unions would soon find that an ageing membership and redundancies quickly depleted their funds, eroding the social safety net they had created.[81]

Such worries were anticipated by union officials when they refused to reduce staffing or to allow for easier entry to the industry: any rise in unemployment would instantly put pressure on their resources. Although times seemed good in the early 1960s, the experiences from the Great Depression and the wartime contraction were built into the trade union movement's long memories. Cecil King found that the 'spirit of 1931' pervaded the printing unions thirty years on, and another fifteen years later the *Observer* management would tell the next Royal Commission that 'the habits learned during the 1930s and 1950s [. . .] have remained deeply ingrained'.[82] One of the key lessons learned was mutual support. It was not only through Natsopa's and NUPB&PW's ghost arrangements that earnings were pooled; the compositors, too, redistributed the monies from piece rates among all members of a shift. What to managers amounted to subverting the efficiency incentive built into the piecework scale was practical solidarity to chapels, as well as a remnant of the pre-industrial, task-oriented mode of production famously identified by E.P. Thompson.[83]

Accordingly, the very idea that productivity gains were a sufficient justification for reducing staff – which was the central premise on which the majority of RCP members insisted, and which came to inform virtually all subsequent investigations – was unacceptable to print unionists. Confronted by Shawcross on the NUPB&PW's resistance to new technology, its General Secretary Tom Smith replied: 'if new machinery is introduced [. . .] why should working people be thrown into the gutter?'[84] Indeed, to most labour representatives in the early 1960s, the question was not how costs could be reduced but how additional profits resulting from productivity gains could be shared. That was the rationale for demanding more money if a colour supplement was introduced, extra pages were printed or the same machines were used by more than one newspaper. 'Why', asked Smith's opposite

[79] Committee Meetings, 18 Apr. 1977, 31 Aug. 1978, 2 Mar. and 25 Apr. 1979 (quote), 15 May 1979, LMA, CLC/013/MS23754/008.

[80] Committee Meetings, 4 Jan. 1962, 5 Feb. 1962, 9 Apr. 1963, 2 May 1963, MRC, MSS.39/NAT/6/NM/4, 128–30, 182, 195–7.

[81] Welfare Fund/Chapel Sick Fund, no date [1968], LMA, CLC/013/MS23750/002. See Gennard, *NGA*, 240 f., and Gennard and Bain, *SOGAT*, 327–34. Benefits in national newspapers were lower than the average in industrial employment: *EIU Survey*, III.3, IV.57. Cf. Paul Johnson, 'The Welfare State, Income, and Living Standards', in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, vol. 3. Structural Change and Growth, 1939–2000*, ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 223 f., 227; and Martin Chick, *Changing Times: Economics, Policies, and Resource Allocation in Britain since 1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 134–9.

[82] *NBPI report* 1965, 21; Daily Mirror Newspapers, 26 June 1961, *RCP, Oral Evidence I*, 228; The Observer. A Survey, NAUK, BS 2/574, 8.

[83] LTS hearing, 17 Oct. 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, II, 63; The Observer. A Survey, NAUK, BS 2/574, 3. See E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present* 38 (1967): 61, 90.

[84] *RCP* 1961–2, *Oral Evidence*, II, 122.

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number at Natsopa, Richard Briginshaw, 'should our people not ask for something? Why should they not?'[85]

Such claims were made not as a plea or a faint hope but out of a sense of being in the right that had three roots. First, there was an awareness, often lost on employers just as much as on journalists or outside observers like Shawcross, that printing was still hard work and nowhere more so than in newspapers. Constant night work with artificial light, frequent weekend shifts and work routines and materials that were demanding were the rule: the letterpress's synonym 'hot metal' was after all literal, especially in foundries and the machine rooms. Pushing reels or stacking large bundles of paper was physical, gritty work, especially when compared to that done on the upper floors; health hazards were widespread.[86] Casual casuals did lack basic job security – although their being listed in 'casual books' from which to draw additional men was a means by which unions sought to alleviate the insecurity[87] – and had little access to corporate benefit schemes. Hence the evident disdain with which trade union representatives reacted to insinuations of undue slack time enjoyed by their members. Even though they were very much aware that managements' assertions that 'no one sticks to times in Fleet Street' were accurate, they were unwilling to cede to anyone the right to qualify blow times as bunking off. It was a fought for, well and truly deserved achievement – and if conditions in the industry had improved, it was only thanks to the efforts of those working the machines.[88]

Second, print workers rarely suffered from a lack of professional self-esteem. Although partly industrialised, printing retained a hard core of craft identity that justified speaking with authority on how work processes were organised, indeed with greater authority than many editors and publishers. The gatekeeping function of the apprenticeship as well as the rejection of manning ratios and hours calculations proposed by management grew out of this enormous, centuries-old confidence. This was also true for industrial unions that organised semi-skilled labour. Insisting on the skillsets acquired in the process of working in the industry, their union representatives, though unaware of the term, pointed to tacit knowledge to support their calls for higher status and better pay.[89] Workers' self-understanding also accounted for some of the differences between metropolitan and provincial printing. During the RCP hearings in 1961, employers and unions from across the United Kingdom were clear that their industrial relations were much superior to those in London. The *Bristol United Press* did not encounter any problems in staffing new machines with Natsopa approval; having never made anyone redundant throughout its existence, management could bank on trust. And while the Mirror Group's plants in London went through two decades of turmoil and crisis, an entirely new plant was opened in Glasgow in 1971 and became an instant success.[90] Best were relations in the many small jobbing houses that dominated the industry. In evident contrast to the national newspapers with their Press Lords and prominent editors, relations in these long-established, often family-owned firms were closer, and unions refrained from insisting on impossible demarcations or hindering technological change that implied more flexible uses of manpower.[91]

Third, print workers and their representatives took offence at the idea that they were overpaid, especially if articulated by those who brought home much higher salaries, like Wintour, or did not need any, like King. When Thomson's managing director E.W. Cheadle inquired why unions

[85]Natsopa, 24 Oct. 1961, ibid., 160 f. Similar points were raised by the Association of the Correctors of the Press (ACP, 17 Oct. 1961), ibid., 32, and the TA (31 Oct. 1961), ibid., 212–4.

[86]David A. Leon, 'Mortality in the British Printing Industry: A Historical Cohort Study of Trade Union Members in Manchester', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 51 (1994): 79–86.

[87]Cf. Michael Denning, 'Wageless Life', *New Left Review* 66, Nov./Dec. (2010): 95.

[88]Scottish Typographical Association hearing, 16 Oct. 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, II, 13; ACP hearing, 17 Oct. 1961, ibid., 32; TA hearing, ibid., 213. Quote: Special Committee Meeting, 17 Nov. 1962, LMA, CLC/013/MS23754/003.

[89]NUPB&BW hearing, 24 Oct. 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, II, 124 f.; Natsopa hearing, 24 Oct. 1961, ibid., 153, 167. Employers agreed: Liverpool Daily Post and Echo hearing, 27 June 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 257.

[90]Bristol United Press hearing, 25 Sept. 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 537–9; Anderston Quay – three years on, no date [1974], NAUK, BS 2/578.

[91]Printing. Untitled Report, no date [1965], NAUK, EW 8/326, 23 f.

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demanded an extra three quid when the *News of the World*'s northern print run replaced that of the *Empire News* at Manchester, he was asked in return how he would like to live on £25 a week. Cheadle found the retort patently absurd; the printers did not.[92] Likewise, the often-raised point that print workers were at the top of the manual workers' incomes did not cut ice with unions, chapels and the shop floor. Such generalisations were unhelpful as they camouflaged the vast differences within the industry – between London and the provinces, between craft and non-craft, between male and female workers – and they implied a sense of inappropriateness that affronted print workers who felt they were worth their money.

On a more fundamental level, however, there was a very tangible feeling of hypocrisy amongst union base and leadership, as free-market proponents were casting doubt on the legitimacy of what the labour market had allowed workers to take. At the *Daily Mirror*, the Secretary of the Federated House Chapel insisted that his members did 'seek to do no more or less than any other citizen of the community, to make a bargain about the sale of their time and labour. What is wrong with that in a democratic society?'[93] In that light, there was nothing wrong with compositors coming out on top of the working class's wages ladder, epitomising Eric Hobsbawm's 'labour aristocracy'.[94] It was the place where they thought they belonged, and to which their machine-minding, stereotyping and packing colleagues – along with manual workers in other industries – aspired.[95]

The End

Despite such forceful rhetoric, there was an apparent tension in trade unions' arguments: between their social responsibility on the one hand and their robust defence of members' pecuniary interests on the other. When the TA general secretary berated Shawcross that the 'essence of the matter [. . .] is that we do not regard industrial activity as purely an economic activity but a social one as well, with obligations', he invoked a strong track record of solidarity, welfare and protection. It was in this strand of labour movement discourse that printing unions stood out as a vanguard that had managed to gain significant control over the means of production, how these were put to use, and by whom. Reducing working hours and the stress of peak production while retaining and even expanding earnings was not remunerated absenteeism; it was an achievement in which they took pride. To unions, restrictive practices merely formalised empty time and minimised job insecurity, transforming what were tolerated habits of (re)appropriating time – 'soldiering', in Taylorist terms – in other workplaces into enforceable rights in printing.[96] The physical and psychological stress caused in particular by Fleet Street's frantic schedule were human costs that trade unions and chapels put a price on. For that reason, the very Fordist assumptions that informed the modernisers in the industry, and very clearly also the Shawcross commission and its successors, ran counter to the ambitions print workers and their representatives harboured. They would not let others decide what was work and what was not.

It was due to the same strength that printing unions were able to bargain for above-average wages and a host of bonuses that defied any attempt at standardisation – a development that rendered unions' strategies and tactics suspect to observers both in- and outside the industry. The flurry of investigations that began in 1961 attested to the growing irritation with the state of printing, mostly of the (national) press, among British politicians and civil servants. Not least of all, journalists found

[92]Thomson Newspapers hearing, 26 July 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence*, I, 637.

[93]Circular by E.A. Brice, 2 Nov. 1962, LMA, CLC/013/MS23763.

[94]Eric Hobsbawm, 'Trends in the British Labour Movement since 1850', in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, ed. Hobsbawm (London: Weidenfeld, 1971), 316–43. For a small sample see Isidore Cyril Cannon, *The Compositor in London: The Rise and Fall of a Labour Aristocracy* (London: St Bride, 2007), 143 f.

[95]Cockburn, *Brothers*, 140 f.; Mike Savage, 'Sociology, Class and Male Manual Work Cultures', in *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964–79*, ed. Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman, and John McIlroy (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007), 35.

[96]Paulsen, 'Non-Work', 354 f., with a further differentiation.

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Fleet Street's trade unions professionally irresponsible, losing them stories through industrial action, and personally reprehensible: 'worker capitalists' who filled their own pockets.[97] But LTS General Secretary Robert Willis denied that his union's efforts to maximise their members' incomes were irreconcilable with its professed socialist aims: 'for the time being we are living under a capitalist system and we ought to make the best out of it because they will make the best out of us'.[98]

Behind the belligerent rhetoric lay a clear sense of the tensions that resulted from trade unions' role – in printing and elsewhere – as 'both helpmates and antagonists of capitalism'.[99] These were amplified by the corporatist arrangements of anti-inflationary policies and the social contract with the (Labour) government that required unions to act as reliable, responsible partners, a course championed by the Trades Union Congress (TUC).[100] But whereas the TUC was by necessity a broad church, print union leaders had to reconcile such national obligations with their members' increasingly militant inclinations. Willis's dialectics were not always easy to stomach for officials and members further down the line. One FOC professed his bewilderment in view of divided loyalties, for they are divided. It is obvious that Trades Unions are as much a product of Capitalist Society as the Conservative Party itself, catering for a vested interest – that of its membership. [. . .] living as we do in a half world of capitalist practice and socialist theory we are slowly coming to realise that we cannot tear ourselves in half.[101]

Such misgivings as to the bigger vision of an equitable industrial society were to grow exponentially over the following two decades. Not only was the house that print workers and their unions had helped build coming apart under the threefold stress of the United Kingdom's pervasive economic problems and the political polarisation during the 1970s,[102] the crisis of the newspaper industry and parts of general publishing and a technological transformation that reconfigured power relations beyond all recognition but also, a decade later, the same FOC found his union 'caught between the nutcracker' of anti-inflation policy and the employers' renewed effort to introduce labour-saving technology. From a reconnaissance mission to a West German plant, he returned sobered, telling members that '[s]taffing arrangements are revolutionary compared to our own'.[103]

Looking beyond the doorstep revealed both similar challenges and markedly different responses that reflected national path dependencies in industrial relations. Whether French, West German or Scandinavian printing,[104] workers did not differ significantly from their British peers when it came to occupational pride and organisational strength. They also faced the same changes in media markets and technologies.[105] Yet, the internecine conflicts between the various printing unions, the paucity of (legal) institutions to settle conflicts over work and non-work and an industrial relations framework that increasingly favoured workplace regulation over industry-level bargaining set the United Kingdom apart.[106] Comprehensive, industrial unions like those in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) found it easier to deal with technological change that

[97] David Goodhart and Patrick Wintour, *Eddie Shah and the Newspaper Revolution* (Sevenoaks: Coronet, 1986), 43.

[98] 5th Annual Conference Report, 11–12 June 1960, LMU, TUC Library, HD6661P7.49, 37.

[99] McIlroy and Campbell, 'High Tide', 94.

[100] Taylor, *TUC*, 142–8, 212–21; Alastair J. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain's Trade Unions* (London: Penguin, 2005), 334, 386–8.

[101] Quarterly Chapel Meeting, 29 Oct. 1966, LMA, CLC/013/MS23751.

[102] David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-Century History* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 442–5.

[103] Quarterly Chapel Meeting, 25 Apr. 1967, ibid.; quote: Special Chapel Meeting, 6 Aug. 1974, ibid.

[104] West Germany and the Scandinavian countries were usually the positive examples in terms of both industrial relations and media policies, whereas the United States was a frequent point of reference for worst-case scenarios of de-unionisation; cf. Tunney, *Labour*, 21, 37; Rex Winsbury, *New Technology and the Press: A Study of Experience in the United States*, Royal Commission on the Press Working Paper 1 (London: HMSO, 1975).

[105] Baptiste Giron, 'Les ouvriers du livre au XXe siècle. Un groupe social entre quête de centralité et marginalité relative', *Siècles* 54 (2023), https://doi.org/10.4000/siecles.11207, 7f.

[106] For the latter see Chris Howell, *Trade Unions and the State: The Construction of Industrial Relations Institutions in Britain, 1890–2000* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 88 f., 123 f.

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transgressed traditional craft boundaries; their Scandinavian colleagues successfully amalgamated with the advent of photocomposition and web-offset. Far-reaching claims to manage the workplace rarely played out in unions' favour. Codetermination mechanisms gave West German printers a voice, and at times a say, in corporate decision-making, but neither they nor their peers in Norway and Sweden were in any position to police access to the industry. Consequently, they made concessions on labour-reducing technology, whereas the closed shop and the *atelier fermé* induced British and French print unions to go for broke. The year-long strike at *The Times* in 1978–9 and the even longer industrial action at *Le Parisien Libéré* from 1975 to 1977[107] stood in marked contrast to the (hard fought for) 1978 rationalisation agreement signed in the FRG or the resort to courts of law to determine controversial points such as manning, as happened in Norway.[108]

Of course, Norway's economic boom also provided for an economic climate rather different from that in the inflation-ridden United Kingdom, where the benevolent conditions under which the publishing industry had been working for years were now eroding. So did its peculiar governance structure. On the one hand, management – from 1979 with government support and armed with new legal means[109] – asserted its right to manage and reclaimed the authority to define what the work was they were paying for and, importantly, what did not deserve payment. On the other hand, trade union officials concluded that with a decreasing say in organising production, they could no longer accept responsibility for shop floor discipline.[110] Driving home the message that their bargaining power was undercut by foreign competition, changing media consumption patterns and technologies that rendered traditional skillsets redundant proved difficult among members used to prevailing in industrial conflict. Calls by trade union leaders on national, branch and chapel levels to trade job security for more people against purchasing power were far from popular, raising doubts as to the sincerity of the unions' core values. Regularly, members' self-interests were more pronounced than their ritual commitment to solidarity. Precious overtime and wage rises to offset the effects of inflation trumped the sharing of work. When pushed to choose between fewer but better paid working hours and more time for relaxation and leisure, print workers frequently opted for the former. Already in 1961, King acerbically commented that the Mirror Group's efforts to decasualise their labour force had gone nowhere: 'The idea of these ghost men turning into real men was not popular.'[111]

Egoism was not uniformly the rule; the Natsopa machine chapel at King's *Mirror* repeatedly voted for accepting rationalisation on terms that allowed softening social hardships. Outside London, problems were usually much less dramatic.[112] In the metropole, however, the permanent crisis mode of the 1970s led to a situation in which trade union base and leadership drifted apart on immediate, pressing issues and had little energy left for general questions of how to weigh work and non-work. In the second half of the decade, the national newspapers descended into costly mayhem that would

[107]Madeleine Rebérioux, 'Les ouvriers du livre devant l'innovation technologique. Esquisse d'une réflexion', *Histoire, Économie et Société* 5, no. 2 (1986): 228f; Isabelle Repiton and Pierre Cassen, *Touche pas au plomb! Mémoire des derniers typographes de la presse Parisienne* (Paris: Temps des Cerises, 2008), 23–6, 46–9.

[108]Ekdahl, 'Två tradisjoner', 19–21; Johansen, 'Teknologi', 212–16; Rune Andersen, *Nye Tider. Glimt fra Norsk Grafisk Forbunds historie. Bind II: 1967–2000* (Oslo: NGF, 2001), 36–44; Karsten Uhl, 'Challenges of Computerization and Globalization: The Example of the Printing Unions, 1950s to 1980s', in *Since the Boom: Continuity and Change in the Western Industrialized World after 1970*, ed. Sebastian Voigt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 134–42; Kim Christian Priemel, 'Multiple Innovation. Computer und die industriellen Arbeitsbeziehungen in den Druckindustrien Großbritanniens, der USA und Westdeutschlands, 1962–1995', in *Wege in die digitale Gesellschaft. Computernutzung in der Bundesrepublik 1955–1990*, ed. Frank Bösch (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018), 219–22.

[109]Wrigley, *British Trade Unions*, 73 f.

[110]Natsopa. London Machine Branch Committee Report for the months Dec. 1972 to Feb. 1973, 24 Apr. 1973, LMA, CLC/013/MS23751.

[111]Daily Mirror Newspapers, 26 June 1961, *RCP 1961–2, Oral Evidence 1961–2*, I, 215.

[112]Goodhart and Wintour, *Eddie Shah*, 173–80.

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ultimately bring about the demise of Fleet Street. With Murdoch's newspapers moving to Wapping, shedding some 6,000 print workers overnight, other employers followed suit, and printing unions were no longer in any position to oppose such changes, much less to define what work deserved pay and what did not. The Mirror Group papers would eventually leave London altogether to produce at Watford, just as had been feared decades earlier.[113] By that time, all that was left of Fleet Street's printing community were ghosts indeed.

[113]Matthews, *Provincial Press*, 191; Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, 367–73; Gennard, *NGA*, 501–14.

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