

in the world market? Secondly, is this just a British crisis, an indication of the rigidity of the British economy, or is it something exogenous?

The answers to both these depend upon how one views present developments in America. If what is happening is a "minor quaver"—or, as Mr. John Snyder put it, "one of the periodic adjustments which the United States has undergone since the end of the war"—then something, presumably, may be said, sooner or later, about the extent of the out in costs of production necessary. If the price-fall is halted, devaluation with appropriate import policies could also be made to pay. But is it really true that what is happening in America is a minor readjustment and nothing more? It will be some time before an answer to it is found; and till then, there is no saying how much worse Britain's position will become.

It is because of this that the argument that Britain's difficulties are due to the restrictive practices of the Labour Government is quite unconvincing. Belgium, for instance, is in no less difficult a position, in spite of her balance of payments surplus, achieved at the price of approximately 12 per cent unemployment at home. And her difficulties also arise from the extraordinary position occupied by the U.S.A. in the bourgeois world. Clearly, whatever one might say as to who is responsible for the present state of affairs in this country and elsewhere, all efforts to regain equilibrium will be fruitless if the American economy does not steady up soon. And a cut in British costs of production would in no way contribute towards it. If anything, it would work in the opposite direction! It is really the American Government which

should act at this juncture—and as much within America as in London and Paris. It is unfortunate that in spite of it all, Mr. John Snyder should take the

complacent view that nothing is wrong in America. One wonders if Sir Stafford Cripps sends him home if not converted, as least less sure of his stand.

British Press Whitewashed

BRITAIN scans the skies these days—and hopes to see a cloud. But the weather remains as unhelpful as it is mysterious. The drought was broken by a miserable little shower of rain some days ago but that solved nothing and left the ground as dry and dusty as before. And the clouds hurried away as though ashamed.

Farmers are anxious and gardeners are despairing as crops either wither or at best fail to grow. The wells in the villages are drying up and even in the towns householders have to save water and expect to find the supplies reduced shortly. Still the cloudless days follow one another.

Next to rain in scarcity are dollars and the economists scan their skies as earnestly as the fanners. But while we await—somewhat with 'fear and trembling'—the results of the London conference of Finance Ministers, let us take a look at an event of some interest which occurred last week—the publication of the report of another Royal Commission, this time that on the Press of Britain.

The terms of reference given to the Commission when it was set up two years ago led many to believe that much 'dirt' about the domestic life of Fleet Street would be brought out into the open. The Commission was to "inquire into the control, management and ownership of the newspaper and periodical press and the

news agencies, including the financial structure and monopolistic tendencies in control, with the object of furthering expression of opinion through the press and the greatest practicable accuracy in the presentation of news."

What are its findings? The *Daily Worker* greeted the report with the headline "Press Report delights Proprietors" and the *Daily Express* with "The Press is Vindicated". It seems that the hoped-for sensation has been 'averted'. Whether this means that the Commission has been fooled by the pressmen who gave evidence before it or merely that there really is no 'dirt' to be revealed is the question which pre-occupies public opinion at the present time.

On the question of newspaper 'chains' the Commission certainly seems to be rather complacent. It says that it finds that the case against them has been 'over-stated'. It admits that the Kemsley chain owns no less than 17% of the total number of daily and Sunday papers but finds no evidence that the proprietor or his London office exercise any undue influence on the policy of provincial satellites. It contents itself with saying that it would "deplore any tendency on the part of the larger chains to expand."

On the question of the influence of advertisers on the policy of a paper, the Commission's findings are even more negative.

They appear to accept the argument of the Advertising Association itself—"an editor who thinks more of his advertisers than of his readers will soon have neither advertisers nor readers to think of".

More important perhaps are the remarks of the Commission on the general question of bias and distortion of news. It finds that this occurs for two reasons. First, there may be distortion arising out of partisanship in politics. This is described as leading to "a degree of selection and colouring of news which can only be regarded as excessive".

But distortion also arises out of the tendency of the popular (as distinct from what is called the 'quality') press to "attach supreme importance to the new, the exceptional and the 'human' " and therefore to get the "picture

always out of focus".

On this point the conclusion of the Commission is broadly that a country gets the press it deserves. It is mass circulation which leads to triviality and sensationalism and "much is to be hoped from a gradual rise in the level of public taste and judgment as educational standards improve."

All this is very placid and somewhat characteristic of Royal Commissions at their worst. What recommendations does the Commission make?

The main conclusion they reach is that there is no adequate alternative to commercial ownership. They emphatically reject State ownership and are equally opposed to ownership by Government-licensed corporations. "Enterprise in the production of newspapers is a prerequisite of a free press." Moreover, they are not

impressed with arguments to the effect that trust ownership solves the problem.

Does the Commission then accept as inevitable the low standards which are bound to result from the fact that mass circulations are certain to cater for the lowest common denominator?

Not quite. The main recommendation of the Commission is that there should be set up a General Council of the Press' whose object will be to "maintain standards of professional responsibility and integrity". But who is to sit on the Council? "Proprietors, editors and other journalists" with the addition of lay members amounting to 1/5 of the total. What powers are they to have? It is to depend on its "moral authority" alone.

That, then, is the little mouse which emerges.

Democratic Tradition And Social Engineering

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NOWHERE is the need for democratic tradition more keenly felt than in the field of social engineering. This is particularly so when due to certain historic developments a society demands thorough-going reconstruction of its institutions and framework and some group of people take upon themselves the responsibility of effecting such radical changes. This is what is usually described as a revolutionary situation. The Jacobins, for example, in France in 1792 or the Bolsheviks in Russia in the nineteen twenties were confronted with a situation of this type. There may also be less spectacular emergencies where the need and opportunity for attempting radical

solutions to an accumulated body of social maladjustments may suddenly appear. This presumably is the position of the Labour Government in Britain or of the newly independent governments of India and Pakistan. Great transformations are to be effected; and as these transformations are intended to bring greater happiness and opportunities for growth to the community, it is necessary that this intention is not belied in the process. The short cut method of dictatorship therefore becomes unsatisfactory; the institutional changes must time and harmonise with the development of the social ethos. And this development usually lags behind the aspirations of the social engi-

neers unless an already existing democratic tradition becomes active and integrates the beneficial and legitimate among those aspirations into its working.

Take for example the problem of economic planning in modern societies. Advance in technology has opened a perspective of immense increase in the rate of mechanical out-put. But it has also meant, at least under present systems, unwelcome accumulation of power and responsibility in few hands. How such concentrated power may be employed to pervert human mind and to plan destruction has been shown in all its horror by the Nazi and the Bolshevik, experiments in our time. If we are to retain the ad-