

THE PRESS, THE PUBLIC  
AND  
THE ADMINISTRATION

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NEW DELHI

1961

*New India Press, Connaught Circus, New Delhi.*

## FOREWORD

With the attainment of Independence and the acceptance of the concept of the Welfare State as the national goal, the role of the Press in India as a vital medium of communication between the people and the Administration has been gradually undergoing a new orientation. In view of the importance of this new role of the Press in Indian Democracy, the Institute invited Shri V. K. Narasimhan, Deputy (the then Assistant) Editor of *The Hindu*, Madras, to deliver a series of three public lectures under its auspices on May 1, 2 & 3, 1961. In these lectures, the text of which is published in the present volume, Shri Narasimhan examines the role of the Press in India as a "mediator" between the public and the Administration and points out the changes that are needed, inside the Press as well as in the attitudes of the Legislatures and the Governments towards the Press, to enable it to serve the public more effectively. The great adventure on which India has embarked—the rapid development of the national economy within the framework of a democratic system—confronts the Press with a challenge and an opportunity. The performance of the Press, Shri Narasimhan urges, should be judged by *how* it meets this challenge and utilises this opportunity. I am sure that all who know Shri Narasimhan, his long experience of journalism and academic-mindedness, will read these lectures with much interest.

V.K.N. MENON  
Director

*Indian Institute of Public Administration*  
New Delhi, September 11, 1961

## THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC\*

One of the greatest Generals of all time said that "four hostile newspapers were more to be feared than a thousand bayonets." Coming from such a high source, such a tribute to the power of the Press is highly significant. But it is not military dictators alone who are concerned about the dangerous potentialities of the Press. A democracy is even more concerned, though for very different reasons. As Thomas Jefferson said, no Democracy can survive without a free Press.

The Press, however, by its very nature is not a homogeneous product, recognisable as one and the same thing in all its manifestations. On the contrary, it is as multi-coloured as the number of groups and opinions in any free society. Only in a totalitarian society can the Press be uniform or at least present the appearance of sameness.

The variety that goes with a free Press necessarily makes it difficult to formulate anything like a philosophy or body of principles for the Press which can be rigidly applied to it. In this series of lectures, I shall be primarily concerned with one aspect of the Press, viz., its role as a mediator between the public and the Administration. We have on the one side the public that gets its facts and ideas from the Press. We have, on the other, the Administration which largely provides, by its actions and policies, a substantial part of the facts and views purveyed by the Press and whose policies are influenced by the reactions of the public and the Press to what it does or intends to do.

This mediatory role of the Press does not obviously exhaust all its functions. The newspaper Press of today in many countries has developed largely into a department of the entertainment industry. The bulk of the feature

\*Delivered on May 1, 1961.

articles and reports in many papers and magazines is devoted to the entertainment and amusement of the reader rather than to giving him the fullest information about the most significant social and political developments. The enormous space which the newspapers devote to sports, films, to crime and sex, to gossip of various kinds, shows that the larger political and social purposes of the Press as a medium of information and opinion take a backseat in most of the newspapers in the West. The result is that some of the quality papers like *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the *London Times* and *Daily Telegraph* and similar papers elsewhere acquire an enormous significance and wield an influence far in excess of what their circulations may suggest in comparison with the more popular dailies with multi-million circulations.

In India, the development of anything like a "popular" Press in the sense in which papers like the *Daily Mirror* or *The News of the World* are described as "popular" has hardly begun. Perhaps the most outstanding example of such a paper in India would be the *Dina Thanthi* of Madras, a Tamil daily with over 1,40,000 circulation for its combined editions at 4 centres. The bulk of the Indian Press is very largely devoted to presenting serious news in a serious manner. And because of this the mediatory role of the Press is perhaps more pronounced in India than in Britain or the U.S.A.

The overall meagre circulation of the Indian Press, due largely to illiteracy and partly to the poverty of the people, limits the reach of the Press to a small section of the population with the ability to read newspapers and the capacity to buy them. But the actual area of influence of newspapers is much wider than the circulation figures would suggest. There can be no doubt that, as a medium of information and of ideas, the Press in India is the single largest and most potent opinion-making agency in the country. It is true that the platform and the radio are powerful media and very often the spoken word can be a decisive factor in moving men's minds, where the written word leaves them cold or indifferent.

The role of the Press in India is further enhanced by the fact that, apart from the radio, there is no other continuous medium of information to the public. Its position is crucial for the functioning of our democratic system because, without the regular flow of worthwhile and accurate information about what is being done by legislatures and governments and the Administration generally, the public as well as those who guide them at various levels from the legislators downwards will not have the basic data on which they can judge the performance of the Government and record their verdict one way or the other at elections held quinquennially. Many elected Ministers and legislators tend to look upon a critical newspaper as a kind of nuisance and some of them are inclined to ask how a newspaper is better qualified to interpret the news or reflect the views of the public than a legislator who is elected on the basis of adult suffrage and whose democratic credentials are obviously more demonstrable than any title to a representative role which the Editor of a paper may claim. The error in this line of reasoning is that it misses the fact that a newspaper acquires its representative quality not only from the calibre and disinterestedness of its Editor, but even more from the fact that day after day the paper meets with the general support of its readers. In this sense, while the elected member of a legislature may be responsible to his constituents once in five years and becomes answerable to them perhaps from one election to another, a daily newspaper renews its suffrage every 24 hours. Such power as the Press has is essentially derived from this obligation to retain the allegiance of its readership and extend it. No paper can possibly maintain the continuous support of a large body of men unless they felt that it broadly satisfied them as a source of fact and opinion.

How far is the growth and performance of the Press in India commensurate with the needs of the public in the context of an infant democracy and a developing economy?

While obviously the growth of the Press in India, judged in terms of circulation, does not amount to anything like what it is in the Western countries or even in Japan,

where more than three dailies have circulations running into 3 to 4 million each, the significant fact to be noted about the Indian Press is that since Independence, and even more markedly since the inauguration of the new Constitution providing for elections based on adult franchise, the Press has been steadily growing in strength and importance. To give some quantitative idea of what this growth means, I shall examine the information given in the reports of the Press Registrar in the past few years and try to draw from it certain inferences regarding the present range and influence of the Indian daily newspapers.

Since 1957 we have had a series of annual reports from the Press Registrar and each successive report has been simultaneously more informative, accurate and comprehensive than the one that had gone before. We have had four reports so far for the years 1956 to 1959, (the report for 1959 was published in 1960) from which we can obtain a fair picture of the steady progress of the Press in India, the circulation of newspapers and periodicals, the condition of the Press in the different languages, the pattern of ownership and broadly the rate of growth of the Press.

The first report of the Registrar related to the year 1956. It gave particulars of about 2,000 odd newspapers and periodicals out of a little over 6,000 publications of all kinds registered as newspapers. Their total circulation amounted to a little over 9 million of which nearly a million and half were distributed free. 212 daily newspapers accounted for 26.7% of the circulation (2.4 million); 674 weeklies for 29.1%, while 921 monthlies accounted for another 27.4% of the circulation.

The circulation of newspapers according to languages showed that English papers formed the single largest group (with 459 papers accounting for 25.5% of the total circulation). Hindi papers came next with 403 papers accounting for 16.6% of the circulation. 115 Tamil papers commanded 10.2% of the circulation. Papers in other languages accounted for circulations ranging from 0.7% for Oriya, to 9.2% in Gujarati. The Urdu Press, which surprisingly enough accounts for the third largest number of newspapers

(195) commanded only 6.5% of the circulation. The Registrar's report showed that the total circulation of 212 daily newspapers was 24.6 lakhs (sold 23.2 lakhs, free 1.4 lakhs) of which English dailies (43) had a circulation of 7.3 lakhs. Hindi papers (42) commanded 3.4 lakhs; Gujarati (24) 2.7 lakhs; Marathi (22) 2.3 lakhs; Tamil (11) 1.71 lakh; Malayalam (9) 1.5 lakh; Urdu (19) 1.2 lakh and Kannada (11) 1.1 lakh. The total circulation of the daily newspapers in each of the other languages was less than one lakh.

The position as revealed by the latest report of the Press Registrar, which relates to the year 1959, is as follows:

The Registrar has made a valid distinction between "General interest newspapers" and categories of publications which are not newspapers in the commonly understood sense. The latter have been included in the 'B' category and include such publications as market bulletins and commercial circulars, magazines of educational institutions, house magazines and publicity magazines issued by commercial bodies, serialised fiction, astrological magazines and miscellaneous periodicals like racing-calendars, price lists, law reports, crossword bulletins, etc.

Of the 4,738 newspapers in respect of which circulation figures were available, 3,809 belonged to the 'A' category and commanded 156.46 lakhs (90.6%), while 929 papers belonged to the 'B' category and had a circulation of 16.24 lakhs (9.4%).

While the figures for 1959 are not strictly comparable with those for 1956, there is no doubt that a considerable growth in numbers as well as circulations has taken place in the past four years. Considering for the moment daily newspapers alone, we find that there were 318 'A' category dailies with a total circulation of 42.81 lakhs in 1959. In 1956 the total circulation of 212 daily newspapers was 24.6 lakhs. This represents for dailies alone an increase in circulation by 75% in 3 years. Though in relation to the total population or in comparison with the intensity of circulation secured by daily newspapers in the West or in

Japan, this represents a rather low figure, it should be remembered that it constitutes a fairly high rate of expansion—about 25% a year. Secondly, the circulation figures represent a much larger actual readership among the population. A daily newspaper in India passes through many hands and every copy may be presumed to be read at least by about five readers on the average. In rural areas a single copy of a paper may be the source of information for an entire village.

The trends of the past four years point to certain significant conclusions. One of them is the continuing vitality of the English Press despite the growth of papers in the Indian languages. It is noteworthy that of the total increase in circulation of all the papers during the past four years, the English Press alone accounts for nearly one-third, while the rest is shared by the Indian language papers all the way from Assamese to Urdu. The increase also suggests that the Hindi Press, while coming next to English in total circulation and ranking first in the total number of papers, is by no means as strong as the Press in some of the other languages. If the strength and influence of a Press are to be judged by the average circulation of newspapers in that language, we find an interesting pattern as indicated by the following table :

*Circulations of General Interest  
Daily Papers (A) in 1959*

<i>Language</i>	<i>No. of papers</i>	<i>Total Circulation (including free copies)</i>	<i>Average per paper</i>
1. English	40	11,27,000	28,175
2. Hindi	75	5,95,000	7,933
3. Assamese	1	4,000	4,000
4. Bengali	6	2,18,000	36,333
5. Gujarati	27	3,22,000	11,926
6. Kannada	19	1,67,000	8,789
7. Malayalam	25	3,89,000	15,560

8. Marathi	26	3,50,000	13,460
9. Oriya	4	47,000	11,750
10. Punjabi	5	26,000	5,200
11. Tamil	17	4,39,000	25,820
12. Telugu	8	1,44,000	15,500
13. Urdu	51	2,53,000	5,000

This table reveals the strong position of the English, Bengali and Tamil Press, the average circulation of dailies in these three languages being about 25,000 per paper, while it also reveals the weakness of the Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Kannada and Assamese Press for which the average circulation per paper is less than 10,000.

From a study of the pattern and distribution of newspapers alone we may draw yet another inference that the decision of the Government of India to adopt the "bilingual" formula for Union purposes—the retention of English and Hindi as official languages after 1965—is the most sensible approach to this problem. The dominance of the English Press, as well as the fact that papers in English are published in all the States of the Indian Union, emphasises the continuing role of English as a vital medium of inter-State communication. It is significant that last month has witnessed the launching of two financial dailies in English—a testimony not only to the continuing importance of English in Indian life but also of its role as a medium of all-India communication.

One has, however, to take note of the fact that the circulation of the English Press is largely concentrated in four States, viz., Bombay, West Bengal, Madras and Delhi. 77% of the English papers carried on the Press Registrar's rolls were published from those four States. It is clear that in the Hindi-speaking States, with the exception of Delhi, the English Press is weak and is steadily losing ground.

Another important conclusion to be drawn from the Press Registrar's figures is the uneven development of the Indian Press. In fact, it is this lack of homogeneity which gives rise to many problems in dealing with the Indian Press and in discovering solutions for these problems,

whether they relate to such internal matters as their finances, their techniques, equipment, their editorial performance or the service conditions of their employees, or to such large issues as their role in the making of public opinion. We have in India today a small number of well-established and well-produced newspapers which in their technical competence or their editorial performance can stand comparison with the best papers anywhere in the world. These papers also account together for a substantial part of the total circulation—thus producing an impression of heavy concentration of ownership in the Press world. On the other hand, we have also a large number of struggling papers produced under very difficult conditions and suffering from various handicaps. There is no simple solution to this problem like a price-page schedule, which unfortunately a section of small newspapers seem to regard as a panacea.

A rich diversity in the production of newspapers is inescapable, considering the variety of languages and other interests in a country of India's size. But it is the problem of uneven development of the Press in the different regions which makes it difficult for those interested in the growth of the Press to see that the performance of the Press generally is more or less of the same standard everywhere. The existence of a large number of financially and technically poor newspapers means, on the one hand, that they are open to various temptations and pressures, and, on the other, they are subject to many basic difficulties in effecting an improvement of their editorial performance. A large number of newspapers in the country are not in a position to subscribe to a first-rate news service, much less to more than one news service. They are not able to attract the best men to their editorial staffs. In fact the competition for highly qualified journalists is confined to a few of the top newspapers and there is hardly any free movement of journalists from one paper to another, which very often is a reflection as well as a condition of journalistic independence.

This being the present set-up of the Indian Press, we may ask how far the Press is able to discharge effectively

the mediatory role between the public and the Administration which is the primary theme of these lectures. This lecture is concerned with the Press's relation to its public. In this aspect, there are two obvious functions of the Press: one is the reporting of the news and the other is the purveying of opinion. So far as the reporting of the news is concerned, the Press in India, barring a very small number of well-established papers, (which, however, as already stated, account for a big slice of the circulation), suffers from many handicaps. Even the well-established papers are subject to one great disability. They are not free, because of newsprint quotas and the very high cost of newsprint, to print as many pages as they would like to and to carry promptly all the news they would like to give. There is, of course, a struggle for space even in countries like the U.S. or Canada where the average sizes of newspapers are many times what they are in India. The problem in India is often heart-breaking to any one who knows it from the inside. The enormous growth and extension of political and economic activity since Independence have made demands on the Press which, it must be admitted, the Press has valiantly met in spite of tremendous handicaps, but unless the problem of an adequate supply of newsprint at a reasonable price is solved by the combined efforts of the Government and the newspaper Press, the performance of the Press is bound to be unsatisfactory.

One of the results of an inadequacy of newsprint and the inability of newspapers to increase the size of their newspapers according to the growth in the volume of essential news is a somewhat lopsided and distorted pattern in the presentation of news. For instance, the widespread feeling that the Indian Press is partial to the Governments in power and not quite fair to the Opposition parties in the space allotted to them is largely due to this fact: within the space available to them the newspapers have to carry the pronouncements of Government leaders, especially Mr. Nehru, and all the Chief Ministers and other Ministers in the States, which leave very little space for the reporting of other activities including those of the Opposition.

It is true that to a large extent the corrective for this situation lies in the hands of the newspapers themselves if they recognise that, in the interests of their readers, they have a duty to reflect all sections of opinion and that inevitably the space available has to be rationed fairly between the Government and their critics. Unfortunately, the daily flood of official news is itself so large that few papers can find the time or the men to handle this with the rigour and the judgment with which it ought to be handled if all the really essential items are to be given to the readers without sacrificing the coherence and completeness of the reports. The temptation, therefore, to report *ipsissima verba* what the Prime Minister or some other prominent leader says, though there may be often considerable scope for condensing it, is ever present.

Apart, however, from the inadequacy of newsprint, which affects the well-established newspapers that are in a position to organise a fuller budget of news and have the resources for securing an adequate supply of independent reports and features, more acutely than the smaller papers which suffer from a poverty of both financial and technical resources, the major handicap of the Press generally is the absence of competitive news services or the inability of newspapers to subscribe for more than one news service. The vast majority of newspapers depend on the services of a single agency and many of them are not in a position to arrange for independent reports of their own. This leads to a certain sameness in the presentation of news in the Indian Press and to some extent in projecting the news agency's assessment of developments on the Indian Press as a whole. This is not certainly a healthy situation because very often the bias or even the inadequate equipment of the agency reporter or correspondent affects the tone and quality of the reporting with no corrective check that might be provided by a competing agency covering the same event. If the Indian Press in general is to acquire vitality and enhance its influence, it is essential that, on the one hand, there should be more competing news agencies and, secondly, papers should be able to appoint a large number of

independent correspondents of their own to cover the news. It is somewhat encouraging to note that in the past few weeks a second news agency has been launched, while a third has just made its appearance.

A serious factor which, in my view, inhibits the growth of independent journalism is the proliferation of official information agencies which provide an endless stream of handouts and potted material for the Press. Many newspapers with meagre resources lap up such material avidly and this again results in the predominance of the official point of view in the Press to the exclusion of independent or critical reporting.

The exaggerated and very often unhealthy interest shown in the reports carried in some of the weeklies which specialise in sensational reporting is largely due to the fact that the sober section of the Press indulges so rarely in what may be called investigative reporting. The crusading paper has become a thing of the past and perhaps cannot be revived except by a crusading editor, a man with a single idea and a single mission. The successful newspapers of today cannot possibly be anything like the militant nationalist organs of the pre-Independence era for the simple reason that the reader of today is very different and the functions of the newspaper have widened enormously compared to the situation in the past when the political issue was the sole preoccupation of the upper middle class reading public. But this change in the situation, in fact, calls for greater resourcefulness and greater preparation and competence on the part of editors and editorial staffs generally. A wider range of news has to be covered today and has to be presented intelligently and meaningfully. There is enormous scope for genuine constructive investigational reporting which, while explaining to the public what is happening in various fields of public administration, will also bring to light the lapses of Government and how they can be remedied. This is work which should not be done fitfully but continuously and such investigative reporting alone can redeem the Press from the uniformity and the dullness which characterise most of the newspapers.

In the purveying of opinion the role of the Press is obviously not confined to the comments it expresses in its editorials but extends to the manner in which a newspaper handles its correspondence columns—that is columns devoted to Letters to the Editor from readers,—to the special articles it carries, including those from outside contributors and those carried from its own columnists, whether they write under their own names or under pseudonyms. It is very widely felt today that the editorial has declined in importance nearly all over the world. There are many reasons for this, including, on the one hand, the lack of time on the part of the average reader to read lengthy editorials and to understand an argument, and, on the other, the tendency among readers to form their own views from the news and special articles without reference to the opinions expressed in the editorial. The position in India is certainly different and editorials, despite their colourlessness and the absence of sharp expression of opinions, are read perhaps more widely and more closely than in many other countries. The anonymity which surrounds an editorial is both an advantage and a handicap. It is an advantage in the sense that the views expressed are likely to be regarded as the views of the paper as such and not of any single person who may happen to be the editor. It is a handicap in the sense that very often the impersonal way of writing leads to a certain lack of vitality and intimacy which are associated with the writings of an individual who has a defined outlook and personality of his own.

It should be realised, however, that the influence of the editorial in the shaping of the opinions of readers or in the moulding of public policy is often a function not merely of the views that are expressed or the way they are expressed, but is largely derived from the manner in which facts are marshalled to support the argument. In this sense it is not the argument that is vital but the facts and that is why, it seems to me, the influence of a paper is dependent more on the news it gives, whether that is done in the news columns or in editorials, rather than on the opinions it advocates. I may illustrate this by an example from the

United States which led to considerable heart-searching regarding the role of the Press and its influence as an opinion-making agency. In the 1948 Presidential elections, when Mr. Truman ran against Mr. Dewey, the predominant opinion of the newspapers which supported the Republican candidate and the opinion of all the Gallup pollsters was that Mr. Truman would be defeated. When Mr. Truman won by a long margin, the papers as well as the pollsters were utterly confounded. Why had the Press failed in either influencing or reflecting public opinion? Had the Press really no influence at all on the public mind or were the public indifferent to what the newspapers published or said? These questions were raised and one answer, which strikes me as providing a clue to the problem, was this. It was explained that while the newspapers in their editorials had been highly critical of Mr. Truman and his policies, the news that was carried in nine-tenths of the papers was of rise in employment and rise in wages reflecting the mounting tide of prosperity in the country which was apparent to the readers from their own experience, while the denunciation in the editorial columns may have struck them merely as partisan propaganda. It is a familiar experience in democracy that the voters do not want a change in Government so long as the party in power carries on fairly well and there are no untoward developments such as widespread unemployment or a sharp rise in prices and the like. The Conservative victory in 1959 was again a confirmation of this view. "You have never had it so good. Don't let Labour spoil it", was a slogan which, because it conformed to the general experience of a majority of the electorate, helped the Tories to carry the day.

This experience suggests that the public is likely to be influenced much more by serious factual reports which reflect adversely on an administration than any amount of verbal denunciation in editorial columns. The public has an uncanny way of judging from what it reads about what is happening in the country and from its own day-to-day experience whether things are going well or not. A series of exposures in the Press of maladministration in

various departments or of the Government's failure to deal with certain developments in the economic or political situation effectively and promptly will influence the reader much more than anything that may be said by way of editorial opinion.

An example from a recent Indian development may show how this is in operation in India. The fact that the Government of India has been unable to dislodge the Chinese from the areas which they have occupied in Ladakh has had a more decisive effect on the public's attitude towards the Government's China policy as well as towards the Communists and China than anything that the Press may have written against Communist China at any time.

This, again, points to another important danger against which the Press and the public have to guard themselves. The frequent publication of reports that an army regime in Burma has been able to clean up the administration or that President Ayub's military regime in Pakistan has been able to put down corruption and blackmarkets is likely to undermine the public's faith in democratic methods which not all the editorial denunciation of dictatorship and expatriation on the virtues of democracy can possibly retrieve.

All this points to one conclusion : That in the ultimate reckoning it is facts that must speak and influence opinion.

The Indian Press, in relation to its public, faces today two types of challenges. On the one side, there are the demands of a situation created by a rapidly developing economy within the framework of political democracy. By and large it must be said that the Press is meeting these demands within the limitations inherent in its own internal economy such as paucity of newsprint, slow development of circulations and advertising revenue and the general meagreness of financial and technical resources. In comparison with the bulk of the Press in many other countries the amount of space which the Indian Press in general devotes to reports of the proceedings of legislatures and important political and economic bodies and the attention paid to the

reporting of economic and social developments is considerable. Foreign observers of the Indian Press have been struck by the minimal importance attached here to trivial 'human interest' stories which loom so large in the Western Press. But other demands which the Press has to meet have yet to be discovered by studies of what the reader wants, the areas of his ignorance as well as of his interests, and the adaptation of newspaper content as well as presentation to the changing interests of a population emerging from a pre-industrial rural society to a modern technological age. There is already evidence of attempts of the Press to meet these new demands in the new features introduced by some of the Indian papers, but we need more surveys by the Press to find out how readers are reacting to their papers, what types of news interest them, what they feel are the major gaps in their newspapers, and so on. Some of these studies ought to be undertaken by the new schools of journalism that have come up in different parts of the country and many could be initiated by individual newspapers or by organisations of the Press like the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference and the Indian and Eastern Newspapers Society. One of the vital investigations which will have to be undertaken soon by the Indian Press is to find out how far the Indian Press, by the way it presents news as well as by the way it comments on the developments in the country, is projecting the concept of national unity or is failing to do it. We are a vast nation divided into large linguistic groups with historic associations and long traditions as distinctive entities. At the same time, the idea of Indian unity has kept us together in a remarkable way despite political vicissitudes and social upheavals. Today we have formidable challenges from within and without to the unity that was partly enforced on us by the British in the past, but which after Independence was consolidated constitutionally to an extent that had never before been realised at any time in Indian history. But between a constitutional achievement and an emotional unification there is a wide gap and the forces of separatism can easily gain the upper hand over the forces of integration unless all the resources of political statesmanship are

mobilised to prevent such a disaster. The Press in India has perhaps the most decisive role to play in the task of promoting national unity. Unless it applies itself to this task as a continuous and compelling obligation, we run the risk of losing the battle for unity.

In a sense, the Indian Press at the beginning of the seventh decade of the 20th century is well poised for facing its most difficult responsibilities as well as its most exciting opportunities. The growth of literacy in the past ten years and the fact that all the State Governments are determined to achieve universal primary education within the next five years for all children of school-going age will mean a tremendous growth in the potential readership of newspapers. The rise in the national income brought about by the Plans will result inevitably in a large increase in the number of newspaper buyers, as well as a considerable increase in advertisement outlays by the new industries in the country, whether in the public or the private sector. Compared to the growth of newspaper circulations in the past decade, what can be achieved in the Sixties and in subsequent years will be enormous. As against a total circulation for any newspaper brought out from more than one centre of not more than 2,00,000, we may expect before the present decade is out, individual newspapers achieving circulations of several lakhs, if only they will seize the opportunities that are opening out before them and are not handicapped by artificial restrictions relating to supply of newsprint and machinery. While the better produced English newspapers may still have a fairly good future, at any rate for the next 25 years, the real future is for the Indian language newspapers which are yet to come into their own. The problem before them is to discover the formula for building up mass circulations from among potential readers who run into millions for the smallest linguistic group in the country. I have no doubt that some day these mass circulations will be achieved.

But it is not enough that we have papers with mass circulations; we must ensure that, by and large, they serve larger social purposes and are devoted to higher ends than those which animate the "popular" multi-million circulation

papers in the West. It was said of the *Manchester Guardian* that it made "righteousness readable". The task in India is to make sober and socially purposive journalism acceptable and appealing to a mass reading public. Herein lie the challenge and the opportunity.

## THE PRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION\*

I should like at the outset to explain that I use the expression "Administration" for the purpose of this lecture in the broadest sense of the term to cover every agency of the State from Parliament to the panchayat, from a Union Minister to a village official, engaged in the administration of the country. It is obvious that the Administration as defined in this broad sense makes its impact on the Press in different ways at different levels and in different capacities and reacts to the Press also in different forms.

We have, for instance, Parliament and State Legislatures, coverage of whose proceedings occupies so large a part of the newspapers' columns for the best part of the year. There are, next, the Central and State Governments, whose activities, again, take a big slice of newspaper space. The reporting of local bodies such as municipalities, district boards, where they exist, and panchayats varies according to the nature of the paper, the area of its circulation and the type of its readership and occupies a large or small proportion of space as the case may be.

The efficient, prompt and adequate reporting of the activities of these various bodies is obviously a very vital element in the functioning of the democratic system. Democracy has been defined as Government by discussion or Government by consent. An essential condition for the successful functioning of this form of Government is that the citizens, who directly elect their legislators and indirectly their rulers responsible to those legislatures, should be continuously informed of what is happening in the legislatures and in the Government. The Administration, for its part, must be equally anxious to ensure that its proceedings are faithfully and properly reported in the Press. Thus, it may seem that primarily both the Press and all those engaged in the Administration have a common purpose viz., to keep

\*Delivered on May 2, 1961.

the public informed of what the Administration is doing or planning to do. But obviously also there is a certain conflict of interest, a conflict which is partly due to the fact that the Press is run by people with different political opinions and with different ideas as to what the aims and purposes of Government should be and, therefore, by persons who may not always see eye to eye with the powers that be, and partly because those who run the Administration are anxious that the Press should constantly present them in a favourable light or at least not in an unfavourable light. Moreover, the fact that the modern newspaper is a highly capitalised venture calling for very large resources has often meant that its ownership is in the hands of the well-to-do or commercially successful persons whose attitude towards public policies is often determined by their economic background. The spectacle of a Labour Government in Britain assailed from every side by a predominantly Tory Press has perhaps even a parallel in what we witnessed in Kerala during the brief rule of the Communist Party in that State when the Nambudiripad Ministry had to face the ceaseless barrage of a powerful and influential anti-Communist Press. In fact, it is the possibility of a Press functioning in total opposition to a Government in power and being able to survive as an independent force that is perhaps the main guarantee of the survival of democracy in any country.

Democracy, it may be urged, grows in an atmosphere of enlightenment and instruction. It will not be easy to make a really informed electorate the passive instruments of any press, however powerfully backed, financially or otherwise, it may be. The fact that in countries like Sweden, Denmark and Holland the Press is almost vertically divided in the nation along party lines shows that where a large body of citizens hold certain views, they will have newspapers catering for their prejudices. This implies that if the electorate is predominantly socialist in its outlook, it would be virtually impossible for what may be called the "capitalist" Press to dominate the thinking of the bulk of the electorate, whatever devices it may adopt, because there would be a fairly influential socialist Press to counteract it.

The point of this excursion into the political complexion of the Press is that under a democratic system, as the Government is constituted by the party (or a combination of parties) commanding a majority in the Legislature, it may often find itself strongly opposed by newspapers which are in disagreement not merely with individual measures of the Government but with its entire philosophy and programme. To deal with an opposition Press of this nature naturally presents a problem for the Administration.

In fact the perennial problem of the freedom of the Press is related to the ever-present possibility of conflict between a newspaper (or even the Press as a whole) and the Government in power. (The decision of the Ceylon Government to do away with the present form of ownership of newspapers in the Island and to substitute in its place some kind of controlled public ownership of the Press, is an extreme manifestation, in an ostensibly democratic country, of the desire, which every Government in some degree or other has, to make the Press subserve its purposes.)

The question, therefore, of the degree of freedom that the Press actually enjoys or should enjoy is of the utmost importance in determining the kind of relationship that should exist between the Press and the Administration. So far as the position in India is concerned, it is a matter for gratification that, by and large, the Indian Press enjoys a degree of freedom which compares well with the position in Britain or the U.S.A. We have, first of all, the Constitutional guarantee of "freedom of expression". The courts so far have been very liberal in upholding the amplitude of this freedom. And although, in 1951, the Constitution inaugurated in 1950 was amended with a view to widening the range of restrictions on the freedom of expression that could be imposed by the State and the amendment was followed by the passing of the Press (Objectionable Matter) Act in the teeth of almost unanimous opposition by the newspaper Press, the net effect of the amendment on the freedom of the Press has been negligible. The Press (Objectionable Matter) Act itself has been allowed to lapse after an

uneasy and anaemic existence for six years and today we can boast that there is no specific law directed against the freedom of the Press as such apart from such general legislation affecting freedom of speech and expression as has been on the Statute-book including such laws as the laws of libel and defamation.

Does this mean that the Press enjoys the amplest freedom it needs for the discharge of its public responsibilities? Or does it mean that the freedom is so wide that it may well degenerate into (and has occasionally degenerated into) licence?

Within the past year or two many things have happened which have brought to the fore the question of how the Press has used its freedom and whether there is not a case for imposing some kind of restriction on papers which promote provincial or communal antagonisms, apart from those which openly indulge in what has been described as yellow journalism. The delegation of Members of Parliament which enquired into the disturbances in Assam last year was of the view that some degree of control over the manner in which newspapers reported riots and similar disturbances was necessary in the interests of preventing incitement to disorder and exacerbation of public feelings in an emergency. More or less the same issue has come up as a result of the conduct of certain newspapers in Madhya Pradesh following the communal disturbances in Jubbulpore.

At the recent annual session of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference the Prime Minister referred to the tendency in certain newspapers to inflame communal passions through "false, distorted and exaggerated reports of petty events" and said: "when through headlines and articles public disorder was created it could not be tolerated by any one." The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh as well as some members of the Legislature have expressed their condemnation of the manner in which a section of the Press had played up the incidents in Jubbulpore. A suggestion for dealing with such a problem is that during periods of communal disturbances the Press should publish only reports furnished by the Government till the situation

improves. The more responsible section of the Press in M.P. has not taken kindly to this proposal on the ground that a complete reliance on official reports would partly discredit the Press and, what is more, prevent the Press from giving the public reports based on independent investigation and gathering of news. To insist on proper verification is one thing; but to compel the Press to publish only official handouts would be entirely different. There is also another aspect to be considered. In a sense, even the culpable section of the Press reflects the state of public and political feeling in such situations and the need for restraint is as great on the part of political parties as on that of newspapers themselves. Nobody can deny that a mischievous or sensational report can do considerable damage at a time when public feelings have been roused by some incidents. There would be a case for taking some stringent action against an individual paper or publisher who indulges in whipping up public feeling.

The A.-I.N.E.C. and the Congress Working Committee have decided to enquire into all the circumstances relating to the Jubbulpore disturbances and the part played by the Press in fomenting them. It would be interesting to know to what extent the Press was responsible, by the way it reported the news or commented on it, for aggravating the situation.

#### THE PRESS AND THE LEGISLATURE

As the Legislatures in India—the Union Parliament and the State Legislatures—are, under the Constitution, the instruments of legislative action and the ultimate authorities from which the Executive derives its power and to whom it is answerable for the way it has exercised it, the relations between the Legislatures and the Press should be regarded as of fundamental importance in the discharge of its responsibilities to the public by the Press. To sustain the elements which go to build up confidence in the parliamentary system of Government the Press must not only uphold the prestige and dignity of these bodies by adequate and proper reporting of their proceedings but also strengthen

their position in the administrative structure by spotlighting their role as a forum for the ventilation of public opinion in all its diversity and as the ultimate authority for the correction of abuses and lapses in the administration.

From the nature of the functions of the Legislatures and of the Press, there should normally be very few occasions for conflicts between them. Occasions when a newspaper has to criticise what takes place in a Legislature in a manner which affects its prestige or the prestige of the members of the Legislature in the discharge of their responsibilities should be very rare. Nevertheless there have been cases in India during the past ten years when one or other newspaper has come into conflict with a Legislature for the manner in which it has published a report or has commented on certain proceedings in the Legislature and the latter has initiated proceedings against the newspaper for breach of the privileges of the House.

It is a tribute to the generally responsible way in which the Press has conducted itself that there has been no occasion when the Parliament has had to take any action against a newspaper for breach of privilege. This is, however, not the case with regard to the State Legislatures. There have been instances—luckily not very many—when papers have been found guilty of breach of privilege. In nearly all the instances the papers either expressed regret or the Legislature decided not to take any penal action against the paper. A notable exception is the case of *The Times of India* in 1953 when the Bombay Legislative Assembly held that an editorial which the paper had written on certain proceedings in the House was an attack on its dignity and constituted contempt of the Legislature. The Editor of the paper, however, claimed that it was fair comment and that he had not committed any breach of the privileges of the House. The Assembly did not accept this contention and decided by way of punishment to withdraw the press facilities granted to *The Times of India* till an unconditional apology was given. As this action was well within the power of the Legislature, the paper had no opportunity to take the matter to the courts to decide whether and to what extent

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there were constitutional limitations on the privileges of the Legislatures arising from the Fundamental Rights chapter of the Constitution.

This instance, as well as some of the subsequent instances in which newspapers have been hauled up for alleged breach of privileges of the Legislatures, raised the question as to how far the provisions of the Constitution regarding privileges of the Legislatures in India can be reconciled with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed to the citizen and how the conflict between these provisions, to the extent there is a conflict, should be resolved. The omnibus manner in which the privileges of the Legislatures have been described by the Constitution—viz., that “the powers, the privileges and immunities of each House of Parliament, and of the members and committees of each House, shall be such as may from time to time be defined by Parliament by law and, until so defined, shall be those of the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and of its members and committees, at the commencement of this Constitution”, with a like provision in respect of the State Legislatures—has not certainly been conducive either to the elimination of ambiguity relating to the privileges of the Indian Legislatures or to a clear definition of the ambit of press freedom vis-a-vis the Legislatures. Following the initiation of privilege proceedings against newspapers in a number of States, there has been a general demand from the Press that the privileges of the Legislatures should be clearly defined as envisaged in the Constitution so that there may be no harking back to some of the extraordinary interpretations of the privileges of the House of Commons which were made many decades ago and which have long ceased to have any practical relevance because the House of Commons has not acted in the same manner for many years. Although the actual pin-pricks caused to the Press by privilege proceedings have been few and far between, the feeling that any State Legislature may choose to act on the basis of a wide and undefined power may make the Press less free and outspoken in the discharge of its functions than it ought to be and is entitled to if the right of free expression

has any meaning. A recent instance in which an editorial in a Madras paper led to the initiation of privilege proceedings against the paper is likely to bring to the fore in a sharp form the entire problem of Press freedom in relation to the Legislature.

I must, however, make it clear that the danger of a Legislature asserting its rights vis-a-vis the Press or the public is less to be feared than the likelihood of the Press not making adequate use of all the material that becomes available, either from the proceedings of the Legislatures or the reports of the Committees set up by the Legislatures, for exercising vigilance over the Administration and bringing to the attention of the public lapses in the Administration and how they should be corrected. A valued member of the Lok Sabha, with whom I had a discussion on this subject, was of the view that newspapers in general were not making much use of the material provided by reports of Estimates Committees, Public Accounts Committees and other bodies set up by Parliament as they ought to if they wished to make informed and responsible criticism of the Government and to bring about much-needed reforms. I recognise that there is great substance in this criticism. The only excuse that may be pleaded even by the better-equipped and well-financed newspapers is that the flood of printed material that pours into a newspaper every day is so overwhelming that it is practically impossible for any newspaper to keep track of all the reports and make the best use of them unless it had a much larger staff than what it has now. One way in which Members of Parliament can help the Press to focus public attention on the more important findings of various Parliamentary Committees is for those interested in specific reforms to draw the attention of newspapers, either through special articles or otherwise, to the reports of these Committees. I wonder how many back-benchers in Parliament who, because of the pressure on Parliament's time, rarely get an opportunity to speak in Parliament, care to study the reports of these various Committees and write to the Press about them. It is likely that some M.P.'s, who are interested in specific questions, may keep in touch with special

correspondents of newspapers in Delhi and pass on to them important items of information regarding the matters in which they are interested and some exposures or constructive criticisms may result from this process.

This, of course, does not obviate the need for at least the more important papers in the country, which can afford the expense, having a special group of men on their papers who will make a continuous and thorough study of important political and economic issues on the basis of the authoritative reports of Parliamentary and other official bodies that may be issued from time to time and place before the public an informed analysis of problems.

In this connection I may mention one of the lacunae in the present arrangements in India for the objective study of important national problems: a close relationship between the Legislatures and the academic world of the kind which exists in the United States. It is quite a common practice in the U.S. for either House of Congress to invite some University body or other to make a study of a specific problem and submit a report, which can provide the data for a critical appraisal of official policy in that sphere. For instance, some time ago the U.S. Senate got prepared, with the help of men belonging to different Universities, a series of reports on different aspects of America's foreign aid policy in operation in various countries. The reports were illuminating and objective and provided a great deal of valuable information and a searching analysis of how the foreign aid programme affected the American economy as well as the economy of the recipient countries.

I have heard a complaint from many academic men who would like to write to the Press on problems discussed in Parliament that it is not easy for them to get many official reports or the reports of Parliamentary proceedings and of Parliamentary Committees. I should like to make a suggestion that special steps must be taken by the Governments and Legislatures to see that copies of the reports issued by them are made available at least in all the Universities as promptly as possible for the benefit of academic men. I have had occasion to discover from Professors of Colleges

in a place like Madras that they are not able to get any copies of even reports like the Draft Third Five-Year Plan for several months after they had been published and one or two copies which a newspaper may get have to be circulated among a number of persons. This is a highly unfortunate situation because it stands in the way of informed discussion of public policies. There must be at least one place in each important city with a population, say, of more than one lakh where all the reports of Parliament can be had for reference and study by any one who may wish to do so. This seems to me to be an essential requisite to give meaning and content to parliamentary democracy.

#### THE PRESS IN THE LEGISLATURES

Before I pass on from the subject of the relations between the Legislatures and the Press to those between the Government and the Press I should like to refer to one other matter which affects the freedom of the Press as well as its internal economy and harmonious working. I refer to the discussions which frequently take place in Parliament—and occasionally in the State Legislatures—in regard to the Press in general or individual newspapers or news agencies. The Indian Press in recent years has come in for discussion in Parliament in various contexts, especially since the appointment of the Press Commission, whose report constitutes a landmark in the post-Independence career of the Press.

Although discussions about the Press are natural, and interest in the way the Press conducts itself should be expected in view of the growing power of the Press as a purveyor of news and opinion, I have a feeling that the implications of Parliamentary or Government intervention to the preservation of a genuinely free Press are not always borne in mind in the discussions in Parliament on measures to deal with one or other aspect of the Press. Since the publication of the Press Commission's report the Government has sponsored, and Parliament has approved, legislation regarding the registration of newspapers, the service conditions of working journalists and fixing prices and sizes of newspapers.

During the discussions on these measures there has not been evident among the general body of Members of Parliament that concern for the larger aspects of freedom of the Press which, I feel, ought to exist. It often seems as if a small group, which has some special interest in view, has been active in getting these laws through Parliament, without adequate discussion of their many implications. One aspect of the problem which I should like to stress is that in dealing with matters affecting the Press, it would be a good thing if Parliament acted on the wholesome principle that, while bringing to light such abuses as may exist, it should encourage voluntary and internal regulation to correct them rather than promote statutory measures which must inevitably act as strait-jackets for the Press. I well realise, for instance, that the Working Journalists (Conditions of Service) Act has brought considerable relief to large numbers of journalists who had not previously received a fair deal from their managements. But I have also a feeling that it has not radically improved the conditions of the profession in general which, in the ultimate analysis, is dependent on the growth of the Press, financially and otherwise. A piece of legislation like the Working Journalists Act has perhaps benefited the existing men in the profession at the expense of potential entrants to the profession whose avenues of employment and promotion may have been restricted by the inhibiting effect of the Act on the growth of newspapers. I feel that the same rigidity and inhibiting effect on the growth of the Press are present in a legislation like the Newspaper Price-Page Control Act, whose constitutional validity has been challenged before the Supreme Court. I am not concerned with the constitutional aspect, but with the practical consequences of such legislation on the climate of freedom in which the Press must operate if it is to grow to its full stature. Parliament should undoubtedly be concerned about the growth of chain newspapers or monopolies or the concentration of ownership of the Press in fewer and fewer hands. These are evils which are likely to occur under a competitive system. But what a Parliament concerned with maintaining a free Press and the democratic system should consider is whether the

measures it contemplates to remedy one evil are likely or not to result in a worse evil, namely, the regimenting of the Press or the stifling of its freedom. That the Press has to function simultaneously as a kind of public utility and as a commercial venture results in problems which are inherent in that situation. If within that situation, freedom has to be maintained, the main anxiety of Parliament and of Governments must be to see how conditions can be preserved for the freest expression of all points of view and for the uninhibited emergence of new papers whenever any individual or group of persons seeks to launch them. I also feel that discussions in Parliament, which tend to range members of Parliament on the side of the working journalists and against newspaper proprietors, are not good for the smooth running of newspapers. They tend to undermine the basic loyalties of newspapermen to the institutions in which they work and make them look up to an external authority, instead of to their own inherent strength, for the improvement of their conditions. This is likely not only to weaken their sense of professional pride and achievement and their integrity and independence as journalists, but also to turn their attention from dedication to their work to the cultivation of politicians and men in power. Nothing, in my view, is more calculated to destroy the independence and integrity of the journalistic profession than such a shift in loyalties.

#### GOVERNMENTS AND THE PRESS

Contacts between Governments and the Press are by the nature of the case likely to be more continuous and more often likely to lead to friction than relations between the Press and the Legislatures. Almost every day the Press carries reports of Government's decisions, of Ministerial statements, of Opposition criticisms of the Government and one or other form of public expression of approval or disapproval of Government's measures. In publishing these different types of reports the Press, by which I mean every individual newspaper, has to exercise some value judgment or other regarding the space to be allotted, the prominence to be given and in some cases the slant to be

given to a report. The same item of news may produce entirely different impressions on the reader according to the way in which it is featured, the prominence or underplay that may be assigned to it, and the nature of the headlines given. For instance, a headline such as "Opposition M.P. flays Food Minister", would suggest to the reader that the Food Minister got a well-deserved whipping at the hands of the M.P. in question. The same item, with a different headline, such as "Opposition M.P.'s Outburst Against Food Minister", would suggest that the M.P. in question was indulging in an unjustified attack on the Food Minister. It may be that headlines are quickly forgotten and that the impressions of one day are neutralised by the impressions of another. But from the point of view of the Governments and the Ministers concerned there is constantly a cause for worry as to how Government's decisions are presented to the public by the Press.

A Government's main concern is obviously to get across the facts as they seem to it or as it would like the public to know them. But a Party Government, wherever its decisions have been influenced by political considerations, has a natural anxiety to see that the political aspect of its decisions is kept in the background and as often as possible the decisions are presented to the public as being conceived in the general interest.

There was a time when Governments acted on the principle that the Press should know as little as possible about what the Government was doing and the general rule for all officials was to keep the Press at arm's length. In the democratic context this has radically changed and the tendency is to dump the Press with a considerable amount of information and publicity material about Government's activities and intentions. The enormous proliferation of information officials at the Centre and in the States which we have witnessed in India in the past ten years corresponds to a phenomenon that has been observed in many other democratic countries.

There is undoubtedly an advantage for the Press in the existence of these departments. They are a ready source

of information and verification regarding the work of various departments of the Government. But there is too often a temptation on the part of Governments to regard the Information Department as an agency for favourable publicity for the Government rather than as a source of objective and authentic information. The success or otherwise of information officials tends to be judged by the amount of "boost" they are able to secure for the Government rather than by the extent to which they are able to satisfy the calls for information from the Press.

The real role of Information Departments attached to various Ministries should be two-fold: one, to convey accurate information about what is being done in the Ministry and to correct any wrong or misleading statements that may appear in the Press about it; and, two, to convey to the Ministry the comments and criticisms appearing in the Press from time to time. Unless the second function is discharged by the information set-up in the Government with the same assiduity with which they act as conduits for official publicity, they will not be serving the public purpose for which they ought to exist. A real liaison between the Government and the Press can exist only if there is this two-way process of communication. Unfortunately as things stand at present, while the Press is well aware of the work done by the information officials as channels of Government publicity, newspapers have hardly any knowledge of how the Information Departments act as conveyors of Press and public criticism to the Ministries. I have a feeling that newspapers very often get the impression that Governments are only interested in securing good chits and favourable publicity from the Press but hardly show any responsiveness to adverse criticisms in the Press. It is easy to dismiss Press criticism as ill-informed or partisan or as the expression of views of "vested interests". One highly opinionated Minister recently dismissed a newspaper's comment on a piece of legislation as "printed ignorance which passed for wisdom". If the Ministerial conceit that prompted this remark is in any way typical of ministerial reactions in general to criticisms in the Press it would be

unfortunate for both the Press and the Governments. It would be unfortunate for the Governments because they would be shutting their eyes to a major source of public opinion and immunising themselves against any possibility of correction long before the evil consequences of their actions recoil on them and on the public. It will be unfortunate for the Press, because it is likely to lead, on the one hand, to frustration and cynicism on the part of responsible journalists who might come to feel that it does not matter what they say as in any case the Governments are sure to ignore them. On the other, it is likely to breed among journalists a sense of irresponsibility because they may feel that only immoderate and unbridled attacks in the Press are likely to meet with any notice from the powers that be. I am convinced that a development like this would be disastrous for the Press and for our democracy.

This does not mean that I plead for anything which may be looked upon as an understanding or accord between the Press and the Government. What I plead for is a conscious recognition by those in Government that the Press exists not only to serve as a medium for transmitting to the public the information the Government wants to convey to them but also, no less importantly, as the medium through which the Government gathers and gauges the public's reactions to the Government's policies and measures. There is no doubt that in some measure this obtains at present, but I would like to see that it is developed as a conscious process and the Press is also made aware of its operation so that those who write for the Press, whether from inside or outside, will have the feeling that it will be read with attention by those concerned. The periodical holding of press conferences at which Ministers subject themselves to a process of questioning by pressmen is a welcome development, as it provides an occasion for journalists to obtain from Ministers not only information about what the Government proposes to do but also its reactions to the public's criticisms or misgivings about Government's measures.

Now I come to another vital aspect of the relations between the Government and the Press, viz., the protection

of official secrets and the extent to which the Press should be entitled to publish information which the Government might regard as confidential. There have always been controversies in the past with regard to the use of the Official Secrets Act as an instrument for keeping out from the Press not only information which, in the interests of national security, should be kept confidential, but also other information the publication of which might have no bearing on national security but would be inconvenient to the Government. The tendency to mark many types of official circulars and correspondence as "strictly confidential" is clearly open to objection because very often its only purpose is to prevent a public discussion of important issues at the formative stage of decision-making when alone such public discussion would be really useful. The other day the Prime Minister was tempted to remark, following the publication in a newspaper of a report which had been marked confidential by an official department, that "this business of considering documents secret and confidential by the Ministries is carried to an unnecessary extreme, a habit going back to the old days." He added that he would suggest to his colleagues in the Government not to mark automatically the papers they were dealing with as secret and confidential. The report in question related to a memorandum submitted by Prof. Galbraith on the working of the public sector in India to the Planning Commission. The newspaper which got hold of this memorandum and made it public certainly rendered a public service, however inconvenient the premature disclosure of some of Prof. Galbraith's remarks on India's "Post-Office Socialism" might be to the Government.

There is always a bad odour attaching to what has been described as "keyhole journalism", whether it is a case of prying into the private lives of people or into official secrets. But a clear distinction must be made between journalism which brings into the open matters of public moment and public interest which a Government would like to keep away from the eye of the public, for whatever reason, and a journalism which seeks to thrive on unhealthy publicity to unsavoury episodes. Public opinion in India has undoubtedly

been alarmed by reports of the leakage of confidential information to some foreign powers. It is anxious that the nation's security should not be endangered by any leakage of vital information and will welcome steps taken by the Government to prevent such leakages. At the same time, the public has an uneasy feeling that information which is vital to a proper understanding of the country's defence position and the dangers threatening its security is not being given in the proper form and at the right time to the representatives of the people or to the Press. At least with regard to the developments on our border with China, it has been officially admitted that the country was not informed of the Chinese occupation of Indian territory till long after it had occurred.

How far Parliament and the Press should be taken into confidence by the Government in matters like these, without endangering national security by premature or too wide a sharing of information, is a matter for the Government to decide according to circumstances, but the Government may well draw a lesson from a practice which the British Government in India had introduced during the war years when the Governor-General tried to keep the leading newspaper Editors informed in confidence of developments in the war situation. A committee of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference was regularly kept informed of the developments in the various theatres of war and about the defences of the country so that they may know the precise position of the Allies and of India, although all the facts could not be shared with the general public either because that would affect the people's morale or might give comfort to the enemy. I believe that at least in regard to vital matters of defence and foreign policy, this method of sharing confidential information with leading Editors should be resorted to so that the major organs of the Press have an inside view of developments and can take a responsible and constructive attitude towards the great issues of national policy.

The problem, of course, for the Government is to assure itself how far such confidences can be shared with the

Press when it is likely to run the risk of some indiscreet disclosure or an abuse of confidence. There is also the problem of how far the Government can go in this direction without infringing the privileges of Parliament which has a prior claim over all vital information in the Government's possession. It is no doubt true that the contacts which the Government of India maintained with the Press before Independence were dictated by the fact that it was not a Government responsible to a Legislature and was not responsible, directly or indirectly, to the people in any way. The existence of Parliamentary democratic Government has radically altered the situation and the Government may feel much less inclined or obliged to cultivate the Press now than the British regime had to do in the pre-Independence days. But the changed conditions have not wholly obviated the need for the kind of liaison I have suggested in view of the developments in the country and their echoes in Parliament and in the Press such as the furore over Gen. Thimayya's resignation, the recent debate over promotions in the Army and over other aspects of defence and foreign policy and the Press comments on these matters.

#### OFFICIALS AND THE PRESS

I have so far dealt with the relations between the Government and the Press at the highest level of Ministers, but in its day-to-day activities the Press is concerned very often with its relations with the large army of officials operating at various levels in a professedly Welfare State. Officials are to a large extent valuable sources of information for newspapers. They are inevitably also the targets of attacks of one section of the public or another or by aggrieved individuals.

In regard to officials as sources of news there is a tendency among Governments to deny access to the Press to officials at lower levels with a view to preventing premature or inconvenient disclosure of information and also with a view to centralising the agency for conveying official information to the Press. At one time, for instance, the Madras

Government had passed an order that no official except the Chief Secretary should have any contact with the Press at the headquarters of the Government and no one but the Collector should meet the Press in the districts. I feel that this sort of restrictive and suspicious attitude towards the Press stems from an unhealthy anxiety to keep out information from the Press which is bound to leak out sooner or later through some source or other. It is difficult to imagine, in the whole range of activities comprised in the responsibilities of a State Government, many decisions or policies which could be considered of such a nature that information about them should be withheld in the interests of the public. It is only when there is some ulterior political or personal motive behind a decision that there might be a desire to keep information from the public about it till it could be disclosed in a form favourable to the Government but it is precisely such moves that ought to be exposed well in advance so that the public may be aware of what is in store for them. It is in the interests of any Government that is not afraid to face public scrutiny and criticism of its record that it should allow all officials to maintain reasonable contacts with the Press so that any wrong or inaccurate news may be promptly corrected or checked up at the nearest official level and the Press, and through it the public, may have always the assurance that nothing secret or underhand is being done. Governments functioning under free Parliamentary institutions must always act on the basis that at some stage or other the most insignificant of their actions will come under the glare of public scrutiny. That is the price that has to be paid for having the institutions of free Government responsible to a free people. The more friendly and free relations between officials in general and the Press are, the greater is the guarantee that the acts of Government will be properly reported in the Press and the less the chances of the policies and intentions of the Government being misrepresented or misreported in the Press.

#### LOCAL BODIES AND THE PRESS

Apart from the Central and State Governments and their official hierarchies, the public are affected intimately by the

activities of another vital sector of the Administration, namely, the institutions of local Government such as Panchayats, Municipalities, Zilla Parishads and other local bodies. The proceedings of these bodies, involving as they do expenditure of public moneys on a variety of social services, impinge on the rights and interests of citizens in a variety of ways and are naturally of intimate concern to the public. The right of access to the Press to the meetings of local bodies has been a subject of considerable agitation in Britain and other countries. In India, though occasions for conflict between local bodies and newspapers have been very rare—thanks to the fact that elected members of local bodies are appreciative of the value of Press publicity and are anxious to avoid rubbing the Press on the wrong side—there have been instances now and then of municipal councils taking exception to certain reports in the Press and excluding pressmen from their proceedings or denying to the Press facilities for adequately covering their proceedings. I am not aware of any legislative provision in India for ensuring to the Press the right to cover the proceedings of local bodies similar to legislation in Britain. Although no compelling need has arisen for such legislation in India because our local bodies generally are not tempted to keep out the Press, there may be need in the near future for such a provision in view of the prospect of greater interest on the part of the Press in the affairs of these bodies and the growth of more sustained public interest in their work. Both these developments are to be expected with the growth of a new type of newspaper corresponding to the local suburban or district paper in the West—a daily or a weekly paper with a concentrated circulation in a restricted area which devotes the bulk of its space to the affairs of the local community and to the official and non-official institutions serving that community. For instance, I have noted with deep interest and satisfaction the emergence in Tamil Nad, in Andhra and the other States in the South of dailies or weeklies with precisely these restricted areas of interest and serving their communities with distinction and courage. The growth of a local Press of this kind will stimulate intensive public interest in local problems and may be an effective medium

for correcting abuses in the local administration which in the past have remained unremedied because the metropolitan Press was preoccupied with larger State and national problems and could not bring to bear on local affairs the full glare of publicity which alone could serve to correct them. I was told recently about a Telugu Weekly in Chittoor named *Powrayani*—"Voice of the People"—which by its independent and forthright criticism of the local administration had made itself a power for public good, though it was looked upon as an inconvenience by the authorities.

#### GOVERNMENT AS ADVERTISER

I have so far dealt with the relations between the Press and the Government with reference to the editorial side of a newspaper, namely, reporting and commenting on news. Another aspect of the relations between the Government and the Press which has come into prominence in recent years and which was considered by the Press Commission is the role of the Government as an advertiser in the Press and the possibility of the abuse of the power of patronage which Government advertising confers on the Ministry in office. The Press Commission, which went into the question, did find instances in which Government advertising had been given to certain papers as a form of patronage for securing support to the Government or had been denied to other papers because of their critical attitude towards the Government. The Press Commission also found that in this matter the Central Government's hands were generally clean, while the same thing could not be said about some of the State Governments.

On the whole, the principles on which Government advertising should be given have been stated by the Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting in terms which should receive the general approval of the Press and the public. Government advertisement is one mode of expenditure of public money and what applies to the spending of public money in other fields applies also to the expenditure on advertisement. The primary consideration should be that

the taxpayer gets a fair return for the money spent on his behalf. The advertising should yield the return that ought to be expected for the money spent. The media should be chosen primarily with reference to the purpose the advertisement has in view.

The question has been raised on the part of some Governments whether they are obliged to give advertisements to papers which are avowedly partisan papers—those belonging to the Communist Party or communal parties—and whether the general tone of a paper should not be a consideration in giving advertisements. I feel that the question which each Government has to ask itself is whether it is swayed by political considerations in either giving or denying advertisements to a particular paper and whether it has taken all reasonable steps to ensure that in spending public money on advertisement in particular media it is hopeful of a commensurate return. It would be a good thing if the criteria on the basis of which advertisements are distributed are clearly laid down so that there may be no ground for the charge that any particular paper has been specially favoured. In this sphere, as in the administration of justice, it is not enough that the Government acts fairly, but that it should also appear to act fairly.

There is luckily one safeguard which is available to the Press as well as to the public in regard to the abuse of the Government's power of patronage in the distribution of advertisements. As advertisements are by their nature public actions, it is possible for rival newspapers to see immediately whether a Government is acting fairly or not and to bring to the attention of the public and to the Legislature instances of abuse of patronage.

I feel that such instances are eminently a matter for being raised before the Press Council which I am suggesting in my subsequent lecture as a primary agency for raising the standards of the Press and for improving the relations between the Press, the public and the Administration.

### THE PRESS, THE PUBLIC, AND THE ADMINISTRATION\*

Having examined in the first two lectures the relations between the Press and the public, and those between the Press and the Administration, I shall now consider the inter-relations of all the three from the point of view of what I described at the outset of these lectures as the mediatory role of the Press.

The power of the Press, it has been well said, is the power to tell. It is clear that in the discharge of this function the basic guiding principles for the Press are truth and public interest. A great Editor has said: "Comment is free but facts are sacred." No paper worth its salt should sin against the light. It should not obviously publish anything without due verification, much less publish something which it knows to be false. There can be no greater journalistic crime than the publication of deliberate falsehood.

But very often the question arises: should the Press tell the whole truth or how far should it keep the facts, which it knows, from the public. There is a selective function imposed on the Press by the inherent limitations of space. Even the world's most famous newspaper which has the motto, "All the news that's fit to print", indulges inevitably in an elimination process by placing the emphasis on the phrase "fit to print" instead of on the words "All the news".

The flood of reports that pours into every well-established newspaper is so overwhelming that without the spike or the W.P.B. the producers of newspapers will soon find themselves in an asylum. But because rejection is a basic condition of newspaper production, there is constant need for alertness, for quick judgment and, above all, for a continuous sense not only of what is significant in news, but also of fairness to those concerned with the news in

\*Delivered on May 3, 1961.

whatever way. The distortions in reporting on many newspapers arise not only from the hurry and tempo at which the journalists have to work but also from a poorly developed sense of fairness in journalism. (I am not here concerned with the avowedly partisan papers, whether of the Right or the Left, but with those independent papers which are not affiliated to any party though they may support the policies of one or other party.) It is largely a tribute to the Indian Press that in its presentation of news it has maintained a level of objectivity and fairness which is hardly to be seen in many other countries. A study which I made of editorial policy-making and the treatment of news by a number of Indian newspapers with special reference to the existence or otherwise of editorial bias in the handling of news, showed that practically the entire Press was free from "editorialising" in the news columns. The exceptions to these were rare instances of stray reports relating to Pakistan or communal conflicts. (It may be mentioned that the Press Commission, in its report in 1954, had come to a similar conclusion. See P. 343. para 922.) I must confess that my study was limited to the big papers in English and Indian languages and what I have observed in the case of these papers may not be true of some of the smaller newspapers which may have a tendency to sensationalise and distort the news. It would be necessary for a body like the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference to make periodical studies of the editorial performance of papers in the different regions with a view to ascertaining how far they are fair and objective in their reporting and presentation of news and, if there are any lapses, the reasons for their occurrence.

It would be interesting to know, in this connection, how often newspapers receive complaints about mis-reporting of speeches or about unfairness in the treatment of news about particular persons or organisations and how such complaints are dealt with by the editorial staff. The experience of the Press Council in Britain shows that if a forum is provided to which those aggrieved by the decisions of Editors can appeal, quite an interesting variety of complaints against the Press can be brought into the open which

perhaps go entirely unnoticed and inevitably unredressed now. The complaints with which the British Press Council has had to deal have ranged from the right of an Editor to alter the review of a film by a film critic without his knowledge or permission, to cases in which a controversy in the correspondence columns of a paper was closed without giving a particular reader an opportunity to reply. The Press Council has generally been guided by the rule of common sense and fair journalism in giving its views on these complaints and its resolutions represent a body of rules and conventions which it should be the obligation of every good newspaper to observe.

In India, the setting up of a Press Council was recommended by the Press Commission but although the Government prepared a scheme for the purpose it did not go through because of differences between the journalists' organisations and the Editors' and publishers' bodies. Whether the Press Council should be a statutory body, with a proportion of its membership drawn from outside the ranks of the Press, is arguable, but pending the establishment of such a body acceptable to all those engaged in the production of newspapers, I think the A.-I.N.E.C. should set up a small committee which would go into any complaint of unethical journalism and, after an enquiry, give its findings. Whether its decisions are accepted or not, the findings of such a body, as in the case of the resolutions of the British Press Council, will have a moral effect and may serve in due course to raise the tone of the Press. As a journalist and a professional man I have always felt that voluntary regulation by the members of a learned profession is infinitely preferable to any kind of statutory regulation. I feel that senior members of the profession who have a vital interest in maintaining and improving the standards of the Indian Press should take the initiative in this regard and bring into existence a body, analogous to the British Press Council or the Swedish Court of Honour for the Press, which will exercise a moral authority over the Press. The existence of such an authority would be an assurance to any reader or any person affected by anything published or kept out of the Press

that there is a body voluntarily set up by those conducting the Press to whom he could appeal with the confidence that the complaint will be thoroughly investigated. Such a body obviously will have no sanctions. It cannot compel any newspaper to publish any correction whenever it found that a wrong report had been published, but any paper which persistently flouted the findings of such a body would not only suffer a loss of public esteem, but may also lose caste among its compeers. It is interesting to note that the *London Times*, which once used to behave as if, like the King of England, it could do no wrong, has of late begun to publish corrections to wrong reports almost regularly. Whether it is the result of the British Press Council's rulings from time to time or otherwise, it is a good example which every newspaper should follow.

Because any restriction that is sought to be imposed on the freedom of the Press is invoked in the name of public interest, the public should constantly examine whether restrictions in operation or which are contemplated in fact serve its interest. What is really involved in the freedom of the Press is not merely the right of the Press to publish what it likes, subject to the narrow limitations envisaged in the Constitution, but even more importantly the right of the public to be informed in an unrestricted manner. Debates on the freedom of the Press have often been confused or sidetracked by an excessive concern about the rights of publishers or Editors, but there would be a more meaningful discussion of Press Freedom and also of the need to keep restrictions on Press Freedom at a minimum if the public realised that fundamentally every inroad on Press Freedom by a Government really meant a denial to some section of the public or other the information or the opinion in which it is vitally interested. When, as in the case of the Assam or the Jubbulpore disturbances, it is argued that in an emergency special restrictions should be placed on all newspapers circulating in the disturbed area, what must be borne in mind is the right of the public in the area to untainted and independent but accurate news. The Parliamentary Delegation which reported on the Assam disturbances stated that

"neither the Assamese nor the Bengali press showed sufficient regard for truth and sometimes they maintained silence when the withholding of facts was likely to create an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion." The Delegation charged the Assamese and Calcutta newspapers with "failure to maintain a reasonable standard of impartiality and accuracy." They recommended "that Parliament should enact a law that when the President is satisfied that a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India or any part thereof is threatened by internal disturbances or when fundamental rights and security for life and property is (sic) denied to any large section of the people, he may notify a state of emergency for any specified area or areas. On such notification, newspapers circulating in the notified area shall become responsible for the accuracy of the news published and publication of any false and exaggerated news *per se* becomes an offence. The newspapers would also be placed under an obligation to avoid headlines and pictures likely to inflame passions. It would also become obligatory on the Press to publish official contradictions of false and exaggerated news in such place and in such manner as may be directed. A suitable machinery for detecting breaches of these conditions should also be evolved, as also a summary procedure for trial and punishment of such breaches."

The A.-I.N.E.C. has naturally reacted violently to these recommendations and has urged that there should be no Governmental interference with the free functioning of the Press in the presentation of news. The A.-I.N.E.C. has also appealed to the Press to adhere to the code of ethics formulated by it and has urged upon all pressmen "to avoid the path of sensationalism and unenlightened journalism."

The Press, however, cannot escape unwelcome restrictions unless it puts its house in order and creates a machinery which will act as a voluntary corrective mechanism whenever any section of the Press misbehaves. It must also show how the public interest is not served by draconian restrictions which in the name of an emergency bring the Press completely under official control and reduce it virtually to a mouthpiece of the Government. It must be pointed

out that when the public come to know that the Press publishes only official versions of what is happening, they may completely lose all faith in press reports and be prone to lend a willing ear to any kind of wild rumour or gossip. While it is certainly necessary to ensure that the Press takes every care to publish accurate reports whether in an emergency or in normal times, any attempt to control what is published in the Press by the Government should avoid the imputation or suspicion that the news is officially doctored, because that is a sure way of undermining the public's confidence in the Press.

Those who are in charge of the Press, however, should realise the dangerous consequences that may ensue from false and highly coloured or mischievous reports that may be published at a time when public feelings have been roused over some issue. To argue that there should be absolutely unrestricted freedom even in such cases might well amount to asking the authorities in charge of law and order to abdicate their functions in favour of some irresponsible newspaperman or reporter. I feel that the Press in such conditions should have some understanding with the authorities instead of acting in water-tight compartments. The maintenance of peaceful and orderly life is a primary condition of the proper functioning of newspapers, as of other things, and the Press ought to take a co-operative attitude with the authorities without surrendering its independence or freedom. If during an emergency like the last war the Indian Press could evolve the Press Advisory System for tempering the wind to the shorn lamb as it were and mitigating the rigour of the Defence of India regulations in so far as they affect the Press, I do not see why it should not be possible to work out similar arrangements which would isolate venal and irresponsible newspapers and safeguard Press Freedom as well as public order.

This brings me to a vital aspect of the public's relations with the Press in its attitude towards the administration. I am inclined to think that very often a large number of members of the public who are affected by the Government's acts of commission or omission, in one way or other,

believe that it is the duty of the Press to expose the Government's lapses even if they themselves do nothing either to ventilate their grievances or even to bring them to the notice of the Press. It is assumed that there is a special obligation cast upon the Press to go out on a muck-raking expedition in vindication of its role as an organ of public opinion and information. While I do agree that there are numerous occasions in which the Press can legitimately undertake investigations of its own to bring to light abuses of one kind or other, I think it would be extremely unfair to expect the Press to constitute itself into a prosecutor on behalf of the public all the time even when the affected people do not make their grievances vocal. After all, the Press can only report or comment on what happens and reflect public opinion, though occasionally it could influence public opinion on important issues. In its role as a mediator between the public and the Administration, the Press can discharge its function effectively and comprehensively only if every section of public opinion expresses itself in public and sometimes kicks up enough dust for the Press to take note of its existence. What I wish to suggest here is that it would be very difficult for the Press to whip up an agitation against any measure of the Government which it may consider inexpedient or unjust unless those affected by the proposed measure seek to make their views known and demonstrate in constitutional ways the extent of their opposition to the measure in question. I have an impression that quite a large number of ill-conceived and even grossly inequitable measures have been placed on the statute-book in recent years because the public affected by them—it does not matter whether they are a large number or a small group—have not cared to speak out against those measures in proper time or in ways which would make the Press take up their cases. This means that if the public is apathetic the Press by itself can hardly create anything like a live public opinion whose influence will prevail with the Administration. In short the power of the Press to create or influence public opinion is limited by the extent to which the public itself is vigilant and ready to assert itself.

#### WHAT THE PRESS IS ENTITLED TO EXPECT FROM THE ADMINISTRATION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

I have had occasion to refer in the course of my two previous lectures, in passing, to some of the facilities which the Press is entitled to expect from the Administration for the more efficient discharge of its responsibilities to the public. I have referred in particular to access to sources of official news. I shall now refer in brief to other facilities which the Press in India, because of the peculiar disabilities from which it suffers in an under-developed country, may legitimately look forward to. The Press is already enjoying concessions in regard to Postal and Telegraph rates the justification for which is that the Press serves a public purpose. The fact that the Press is also a large-scale user of these services is undoubtedly another important consideration.

One of the things in which the Press is vitally interested is the cost of newsprint. It is unfortunate that the Finance Minister should have recently raised the import duty on newsprint though he agreed later, on the representation of the Press, to reduce the increase which he had originally proposed. I have a feeling that there is an inadequate appreciation in many quarters, including the Government, of the precarious economies of most newspapers in the country and of the need to see that nothing is done to upset their operations by increasing their costs of production. If the Government's solicitude for the Press and its professed anxiety to ensure that there is as large a variety of newspapers as possible are genuine it must consciously seek to remove the factors which inhibit the growth of the Press and to provide those facilities which would help newspapers to grow in number and circulation. Reductions in the cost of newsprint and of other materials should be one of the primary means by which the Government can help the Press, especially the large number of Indian language papers for whom the Government has always expressed special concern.

Greater sympathy and imagination should also be displayed in the application of import licensing regulations so far as the Press is concerned. The requirements of the Press

for up-to-date equipment cannot impose any undue strain on an annual import bill of nearly Rs. 1,000 crores and I feel that the Government should be very liberal in meeting the claims of newspapers for import of equipment for the Press, as the ultimate beneficiaries from the operations of technically better equipped newspapers are the general mass of readers who buy them. There is, I feel, a case also for devising special institutions, in co-operation with Government or otherwise, to extend financial and other assistance to smaller newspapers to enable them to improve their methods of production. This should, of course, be done in such a way that there is no suspicion of political favouritism.

Concessions with regard to travel for journalists in a country of the size of India are, I believe, justified in the public interest because I consider that well-informed journalists are the backbone of a free and responsible Press. At present, travel concessions are enjoyed by correspondents accredited to the Central Government but I do not see why similar concessions should not be given to journalists of all daily newspapers on the same basis. After all, the total number involved is not more than three to four thousand and facilities for this number of journalists to go round the country and acquaint themselves with the conditions in different parts of India will not impose much of a strain on the railway budget, but will greatly contribute to the acquisition of a first-hand knowledge of their own country which, I believe, is sadly lacking today among a large number of newspapermen. To the extent every journalist working on a daily newspaper is enabled to get a good knowledge of different parts of the country by travel, say, within five or six years of his journalistic career, the better qualified he will be to serve his paper and also to take a more responsible and understanding attitude towards national news and developments. It is, of course, primarily the obligation of newspapers to help their journalists to obtain this kind of knowledge and experience through travel. Special payments for holiday travel by newspapers are an essential counterpart of the travel concessions from the Government for which I have pleaded. The occasional invitations to newspaper

representatives to visit specific projects are no substitute for the kind of general concession which is necessary to enable a much larger body of journalists to get acquainted with the changing face of a nation in the making.

#### WHAT THE ADMINISTRATION IS ENTITLED TO EXPECT FROM THE PRESS

Having pleaded on behalf of the public for facilities to the Press from the Administration, I think it is but fair that I should examine what the Administration is entitled to expect from the Press, not merely in its own interests but also in the interests of the public whom the Administration and the Press seek to serve. That there should be fair and accurate reporting of Government's activities and pronouncements goes without saying. That newspapers should observe, as a matter of routine, Government embargoes on advance releases to the Press needs no special pleading. (One of the British Press Council's rulings concerned the failure by a leading London newspaper to observe the embargo regarding a U.N. Report on Hungary, which had been issued in advance to all newspapers. Although the paper defended its action on the ground that some other papers in the U.S. and the U.K. had virtually broken the embargo by publishing summaries of the Report in advance of the release date, the Press Council was critical of the newspaper's action.)

In addition to these normal functions, the Governments in India may expect from the Press that the Press should show them some consideration before giving publicity to criticisms or rumours reflecting adversely on them. One procedure, which I know some papers adopt, not with a view to pleasing the Government but to ensuring that the reports they publish are authentic or justified in the public interest, is to refer any criticisms they might receive from any quarter to the Minister or the official concerned and obtain the official reaction to the complaint. Where the paper feels that the official reply is convincing and that the publication of the criticism is not warranted the official

reaction is conveyed to the correspondent concerned. Where there seems to be some justification for the criticism but the official explanation presents the authorities' point of view, the paper may publish both the versions and leave it to the readers to draw their own conclusions.

From my discussions with some of the leading officials in charge of Government departments and the big public projects, I have found how acutely sensitive many officials are to criticisms in the Press (and in Parliament) which in their view are not based on facts. They have often protested to me that any subsequent correction of a misleading or incorrect report does not really help to undo the mischief that has been done by the original publication. I think there is considerable substance in this complaint and no responsible paper should allow its columns to be used for ventilating complaints or charges against any official department or administrative head unless reasonable efforts have been taken to verify the correctness of the charges. Of course, much depends on who levels the charge, and sometimes papers may be misled by the status or position of a person making the charge into publishing something which may later turn out to be not warranted. It may be that indulgence in unjustified criticism by a prominent public person may recoil on him as much as it may reflect on the paper concerned. The moral responsibility, however, of papers with large circulations is very great, because the mistakes which they publish or the wrong impressions they produce affect the thinking and opinions of large numbers of persons. It is unfortunately only too true of the Western mass circulation Press that the larger the circulation, the less their concern for truth.

This leads me on to another tendency in some of the newspapers to which responsible public men as well as serious-minded journalists have taken exception. The frequent running down of certain public men in some papers has aroused a good deal of concern among many who feel that such campaigns are likely to vitiate public life and place a premium on the blackmailing or slanderous journalist who specialises in character assassination. The difficulty, of

course, is to draw a line between what may be looked upon as legitimate exposure of venal politicians and what is really scurrilous journalism. Where a paper has published what is against the law—of libel or obscenity or defamation,—the remedy must primarily be through the courts, though very few persons in authority are willing to go through the tortuous, expensive and often uncertain processes of judicial prosecution to vindicate their good name. The scurrilous journalist undoubtedly exploits this reluctance on the part of his victim to bring him to trial. But it is difficult to see how else this evil can be checked. It is occasionally necessary for public men to go through the travail of judicial proceedings to bring to book the blackmailing or the scurrilous journalist and where the courts find such men guilty the punishment should be sufficiently deterrent so that others may not be tempted to play the same game. So far as borderline cases are concerned, an appeal to the Press Council may provide some kind of remedy.

The real remedy, of course, for scurrilous journalism is an elevation of the public taste, which enables readers to give short shrift to the papers which exploit sex, crime and scandal.

#### LESSONS OF A CASE STUDY

The inter-action between the ventilation of a public grievance in the Press, the newspapers' response to it and the effect of such combined expression of public opinion and Press comment on the Administration and the ultimate benefit derived by the public from the whole process are illustrated by an example which I should like to cite not because it is by any means extraordinary—it seems, in my view, to be typical of how the relations between the public, the Press and the Administration are generally governed and ought to be governed—but because the whole chain of developments has come to my notice from the inside and it serves as a very fine example to illustrate my thesis. Although I have taken it from *The Hindu*, it is obvious

that similar instances could be cited from any other newspaper if one seeks for them.

The ball was set rolling by the publication of 'Letters to the Editor' and reports from the correspondents of *The Hindu* in two centres in the Tanjore district complaining about the failure of the authorities to arrange for the supply of water and fertilisers for the Kuruvai (short-term) paddy crop for which the cultivators had prepared the land towards the end of June 1960. On the appearance of these reports *The Hindu* wrote an editorial on July 13 titled "What are the Officials doing?" in which the paper took to task the officials in the district for failing to discharge what it regarded as "their most elementary duties which the citizens ought to expect as a matter of course". The editorial concluded with the remark: "If the hapless victims of official callousness look up to the heavens for a sign, it only shows that they despair of getting relief from those nearer home. It is sabotage of this kind that is making our planning meaningless and imposing on the people unspeakable burdens without any return."

The reaction of the Government to the editorial was immediate and, to some extent, what was to be expected. The Minister for Agriculture appears to have got in touch with the district officials in Tanjore immediately after seeing the editorial and obtained a report on the situation in the district and he issued the same day the following statement:

"There has been no difficulty in the distribution of fertilisers in Tanjore district. The District Collector was contacted after reading the editorial note in *The Hindu* today. Even now more than 7,000 tons of fertilisers is available in this district and it will cover the requirement for the entire month of July and a part of next month. More supplies are expected very soon.

"The available supply is being distributed properly. For the purpose of distribution the district has been divided into two zones. Two societies are in charge of the distribution in these zones. It is most uncharitable to attack our officials.

"With regard to water supply for irrigation, the local officers and Collector have not received any complaint so far. As a matter of fact, water has actually reached the lower reaches in the Sirkali taluk and water is available at the tail-end. There is of course reduced draw at the Grand Anicut by about four to five thousand cusecs, but the available 21,000 cusecs is being distributed over all the systems served by the Grand Anicut. We have a very efficient P.W.D. We must remember, however, that there are 25,000 miles of channels in Tanjore district and not all of them are under the P.W.D."

*The Hindu*, in publishing the Minister's comment, added the following footnote: We must rely on the statements of our readers who have complained about the remissness on the part of officials. Invariably in such cases, for one person who takes the trouble to write to the Press there are a hundred who silently put up with their difficulties.

The appearance of the editorial and the Minister's reply thereto were followed by a series of statements from local agriculturists, on the one side, and from the authorities in charge of the distribution of fertilisers in the district on the other and further Letters to the Editor, some supporting the criticism made in the editorial and others defending the Government's position.

The final upshot of it all was what was described in a series of private letters to the Editor from one of *The Hindu's* correspondents from which I quote the following passages:

"After the publication of the editorial in *The Hindu* and the news item I sent subsequently about the difficulties ryots experienced in the matter of supplies of chemical fertilisers particularly in Tirukattupalli firka which I visited, the District Collector and the entire hierarchy of officials bestirred themselves and rushed to the various depots to see whether stocks had reached them and whether distribution had commenced. The District Collector also gave instructions for the immediate lifting of stocks from the

godowns of the Tanjore Co-operative Marketing Federation, the sole stockists in the district, to the different depots.

"The direct offshoot of the editorial was that all the officials not only from the Revenue Department but other Departments as well, evidently under instructions from the Collector, became tight-lipped and for a few weeks it became very difficult to get any information from them. But, in due course things improved.

"The entire administrative machinery is working at supersonic speed from 14th July and your editorial has given a very severe jolt."

That altogether the effect of Press publicity had been wholly beneficial to the public concerned is no doubt gratifying. In fact, one of the by-products of the incident was the hastening of the Government's decision to authorise Gram Sevaks to issue certificates regarding the requirements of fertilisers for ryots in their villages, whereas prior to the editorial only the Block Development Officers or Tahsildars could issue such certificates. One major cause of vexatious delays in the securing of permits by the agriculturists for the purchase of fertilisers was thus eliminated.

So far as the Press was concerned the whole episode had an interesting sequel. Apart from the fact that the immediate effect of the editorial was to make *The Hindu* suspect in the eyes of the Government, it had some adverse reactions on the paper's correspondents in the Tanjore district. One of them, in fact, was threatened by a Revenue official with prosecution for sending 'alarmist' and inaccurate reports to the paper. For a time, the district officials became cool and tight-lipped towards *The Hindu's* correspondents and they seemed to act under the impression that *The Hindu* editorial and the criticisms that had appeared in the paper of the officials had been engineered by local vested interests which were opposed to the new scheme for the distribution of fertilisers through co-operative channels. It took some time for this impression to wear off. *The Hindu* climaxed the whole episode with an editorial on July 26th entitled

"The Proof of the Pudding" in which it made it clear that its concern was not to place the Administration in the pillory but to get relief for the public. In urging the need for improving the system of distribution, the editorial concluded: "Whatever may have been the lapses in the distribution of fertilisers in the recent past, the responsible authorities concerned in Tanjore will agree on the need for energetic steps to see that the legitimate requirements of every ryot in the district are met to the extent possible from the supplies available with them. We need no post-mortem on the past but an assurance for the future."

That this editorial was followed by an improvement in the relations between local officials and the press correspondents as well as by a better appreciation by the Administration in general, from Ministers downwards, of the constructive role of Press publicity are perhaps the most gratifying consequences of the entire episode.

I should like to draw a few conclusions from this case study which have a direct bearing on the thesis underlying these lectures.

- (1) It shows the need for any one with a grievance to seek the aid of the Press to ventilate it. The grievance must have a public aspect to it if the remedy has to come from the public authorities.
- (2) It shows that the first reaction of the Government to any expression of a public grievance is a defensive move to deny justification for such a grievance. But at the same time, because a democratic Government is answerable to the electorate and has to appear to be responsive to public opinion, efforts are initiated to remedy the grievance.
- (3) The Press, in taking up the publication or championing of the grievance of any section of the public and criticising the Government's acts of commission or omission, has to run the risk of being misunderstood or treated with hostility even when the criticism is *bona fide*. But the Press cannot shirk its duty on this account. Critical newspapers

can live down the hostility of Governments if they maintain their independence and objectivity and show that they are animated by considerations of general public interest and not by partisan or personal antipathies.

- (4) It is clear that a grievance which comes to light, if it is genuine and shared by a sufficiently large section of the public, should be ventilated with some persistence for the Administration to take note of it and realise the volume of public opinion behind it. One of the reasons why the petty vexations to which members of the public are often subject in their relations with the Government do not get remedied is the failure of those affected to keep up the agitation and of the Press to follow up occasional expressions of public discontent by a campaign which would focus public and Government attention on the grievance in question.

#### CONCLUSIONS

I may now sum up the broad conclusions that emerge from the thesis presented in the three lectures.

The first major conclusion is that, on the whole, we have in India a free and responsible Press which, within the limits of its resources, financial, technical and other, is discharging its responsibilities to the public, on the one side, and the Administration, on the other, fairly satisfactorily. Its lapses, where they are manifest, are more due to inadequacy of resources and of facilities such as adequate supply of newsprint, rather than to an indifference to its public responsibilities.

There is a tendency towards some concentration of the Press, but this is not at present a serious danger to the freedom of the Press or to the public interest. There is, as the Press Commission found, sufficient variety among newspapers and enough competition among them at all centres to prevent anything like a monopoly influence of a single group. The central problem of the Press now, as it was in

1954 when the Press Commission reported, is to create conditions in which the Press can grow rapidly along healthy lines to serve the increasing numbers of new literates that are coming into the ranks of potential readers for newspapers. Parliament, in considering legislative measures affecting the Press, must devote primary consideration to the question of how they would affect the growth of the Press and the preservation of its independence. I have argued that this consideration has not always been borne in mind in the passing of some of the recent legislation affecting the Press.

I attach the greatest importance to the early setting up of a voluntary Press Council by the organisations representing the three major interests in the Press, namely, the Editors, the working journalists and newspaper proprietors. I feel that a Council consisting of about 15 members, 5 members representing each of the three sections I have mentioned, with a Chairman who is a prominent public person,—preferably a member of Parliament who has also had a background of newspaper experience,—could be set up immediately to deal with a wide range of problems affecting the performance of the Press with which the British Press Council has been dealing. I do not think a statutory body is necessary at this stage, though as a safeguard for the Press Council against proceedings for damages from newspapers or other interests, which may not take kindly to the Council's findings, it might be necessary to have a simple statutory provision conferring privilege on the publication of its decisions. (In Britain, newspapers which have been hauled over the coals by the Press Council, have violently disagreed with the Council's decisions, but have not chosen to take legal proceedings against the Council. The same restraint may not be expected in India, although any decision of the Indian Press Council must be justifiable in terms of public interest and therefore protected.)

I do not expect the Press Council to produce a revolution in newspaper ethics overnight, but as in the case of the British Press Council, it will set up precedents which will go

to build up a body of principles and standards of good journalism and will gradually help to raise the tone of even the more objectionable sections of the Press. Above all, I expect the Press Council to serve as a forum to which any aggrieved person—a reader, a contributor, an official or any person with a grievance regarding anything that has been published in a newspaper or shut out from it—can present his case and have it judged by those whose primary concern will be to uphold the traditions of good journalism. The record of the British Press Council in the seven years that it has been in existence clearly shows that such a body, even when it has no sanctions and no statutory status, can be an influential instrument for correcting abuses in the Press and standing up for the highest standards of journalism.

## APPENDIX

*Correspondence and reports appearing in "The Hindu" and the relevant editorials in the paper which formed the material for the case study mentioned in the third lecture are reproduced below.*

*Letter to the Editor published in "The Hindu" dated July 5, 1960 :*

### NO FERTILIZER FOR TANJORE RYOT

Sir,

The State holds a monopoly of nitrogenous fertilizers and professes to do so for the purpose of preventing private dealers from profiteering and other malpractices. The declared intention of the Government is to allot necessary quantities to recognised wholesale co-operative organisations, who will, in turn, deliver the fertilizers to village co-operatives, almost at the doorsteps of the cultivators.

But how does it work? The cultivator cannot now get the smallest quantity of the commodity anywhere at any price. The private dealers who supplied the fertilizers till the end of the last cultivation season have no stocks. The District Collector, who is the authority for allotting the Government's stocks (which, we are assured over and over again, are ample) to the recognised wholesalers, has not done so far in spite of many appeals for reasons best known to himself. It is now more than a fortnight since water was let down into the Cauvery from the Mettur Dam. Many cultivators have already raised seedlings utilising the water in ponds and pools and the proper life-time of these seedlings in the nursery, that is, before transplanting, is only three weeks. Time is the essence of the matter in Kuruvai (short-term) cultivation. If the seedlings need nitrogenous stimulants, none is available. If the field for transplantation is usually treated by many cultivators with a basal dressing of fertilizers, they cannot do so this year.

Nagapattinam.

K. SUBRAMANYAM

Report from "The Hindu's" Kuttalam Correspondent published on July 13, 1960 :

KURUVAI CROP IN TANJORE DISTRICT  
INADEQUATE WATER SUPPLY

Kuttalam, July 7.

The Kuruvai seedlings here are not having adequate water supply with the result they are slowly withering.

There have been complaints as to why the Mettur Dam should have been opened and water allowed without the authorities ensuring that the regular flow of water could be kept up till the seedlings could be transplanted.

The silt clearance of many irrigation canals and the deepening of the channels have also not been done, with the result that water could not be taken to the fields through the channels.

The mirasdars are doing Varuna Japam invoking the blessings of the Lord of rain to help them. F.O.C.

Editorial in "The Hindu" of July 13, 1960 :

WHAT ARE THE OFFICIALS DOING?

We published the other day a letter from a cultivator in Tanjore saying that fertilizers could not be secured in the district for love or money and that the prospects of the whole Kuruvai crop would be ruined this season because of the failure to apply fertilizers in time. Now comes a report from Kuttalam that the supply of water has been so haphazard that the Kuruvai seedlings are withering and that the authorities have done nothing to remedy the situation. The distribution of fertilizers is controlled by the Collector and there must be something fundamentally wrong with the official arrangements if adequate supplies could not be ensured for cultivators during the sowing season in a district which is the rice granary for the south. We have equally an expensive irrigation department whose only job is to see that irrigation channels are kept in good repair and water is provided to the ryots according to their needs. Neither of these obligations is new or unfamiliar to the departments concerned. Why then are they failing to discharge their most elementary duties, which the

citizen ought to expect as a matter of course? There has been much talk and fanfare about the "Package Deal" for Tanjore district which will enable the district to double its food production in five years. But what hope is there of any such deal, however liberally financed by well-intentioned friends from abroad, achieving anything if the officials on the spot are determined to give a raw deal to the people whom they ought to serve? If the hapless victims of official callousness look up to the heavens for a sign, it only shows that they despair of getting relief from those nearer home. It is sabotage of this kind that is making our planning meaningless and imposing on the people unspeakable burdens without any return.

The following report appeared in "The Hindu" of July 20, 1960 :

FERTILIZER SUPPLY  
POSITION IN SHIYALI TALUK

(From our Correspondent)

Shiyali, July 15.

Mr. K.S. Ramamurthi Aiyar, Vice-President of the Shiyali Taluk Mirasdars' Association, Member of the Tanjore District Irrigation Advisory Board and Member of the Block Development Advisory Committee, interviewed by me today regarding supply of water for irrigation and supply of fertilizers in this taluk, has issued the following statement :

"In the first week of July, the supply in most channels was meagre, not so adequate as to feed the nurseries. But after the 10th of July, the supply position had improved and the tail-end reaches had begun to fare well.

"In relation to the manure position, practically there is no supply of ammonium sulphate especially in areas where the Package Programme is expected to serve. In the South Rajan area in Shiyali taluk, where Kuruvai transplantation has commenced, the ryots are not able to get ammonium sulphate. This is more due to the fact that local authorities have not received instructions as to the manner of distribution of the fertilizers."

This view is shared by Messrs. C. Srinivasa Mudaliar, Secretary of the Shiyali Taluk Mirasdars' Association, and S. Visvanatha Mudaliar, President of the Shiyali Co-operative Urban

Bank and President, the Shiyali Co-operative Land Mortgage Bank, who were also interviewed by me today.

The following report was published on July 21, 1960 :

FERTILIZER SUPPLY IN TANJORE  
ADEQUATE STOCKS AVAILABLE

Madras, July 21.

Mr. V.S. Thyagaraja Mudaliar, President, Tanjore Co-operative Marketing Federation Ltd., Tiruvarur, writes in the course of a statement :

I have read the editorial in *The Hindu* dated July 13, and the statement of the Tanjore Correspondent of *The Hindu* appearing in *The Hindu* dated July 15 regarding the non-availability of fertilizers in Tanjore district. I wish to inform the public that there is no cause for any alarm about the stock position of chemical fertilizers and that stocks are available in all the 63 depots of the Tanjore Co-operative Marketing Federation in the taluks of Tanjore, Orathanad, Arantangi, Pattukottai, Mannargudi, Tiruturaipundi, Nagapattinam and Nannilam. The wholesalers in the Shiyali, Mayuram, Kumbakonam and Papanasam taluks have also taken delivery of the stocks allotted to them from our stockist godowns. As such, there cannot be any difficulty for *bona fide* ryots obtaining their requirements of Ammonium Sulphate provided the ryots produce a certificate from the Block Development Officer in the intensive manuring block and from the Revenue Inspector in the non-intensive manuring area of the block and non-block areas. Total stocks in the stockist godowns as well as retail depots on July 15, 1959, were 11,257 tons in terms of Ammonium Sulphate whereas on July 15, 1960, the total stock in terms of Ammonium Sulphate is 11,636 tons. While so, there is absolutely no justification to be alarmed about the stock position in the district. A part of this stock had been ordered to be released for retail sales against production of certificates from the Block Development Officers or the Revenue Inspectors as the case may be and the stocks so released have all been moved to the respective depots. In the eight taluks under the distribution of the Tanjore Co-operative

Marketing Federation Ltd., 1,807 tons of Ammonium Sulphate is available in 63 depots in this area and there is no depot which has not received the stocks of Ammonium Sulphate. In the taluks catered to by the Tanjore District Co-operative Supply and Marketing Society and the Chandrasekharapuram Co-operative Stores, 330 tons of Ammonium Sulphate have been moved for retail distribution. Even including the stocks released for the whole month of July 1959, the total quantity moved was only 1,755 tons whereas even in the first fortnight of July 1960, 1,704 tons have been moved and are available for retail sale.

Normally for the month of July, the offtake of Ammonium Sulphate is very poor as would be seen from the fact that in the whole month of July 1959, the offtake was only 125 tons for the eight taluks and this year, we have distributed 75 tons up to July 15. From these figures, it would be seen that the demand for Ammonium Sulphate during this month is very poor and the stocks available in the various depots are more than sufficient to meet the normal demand. On the other hand, the demand during this month has always been more for super-phosphate than for Ammonium Sulphate, as would be evidenced by the fact that we have distributed in July 1959 238 tons of super-phosphate and 132 tons of super-phosphate during the first fortnight of July 1960.

We give below the offtake of Ammonium Sulphate from the depots in the *first fortnights* of July 1959 and July 1960 in the places mentioned by the Tanjore Correspondent :

	1959	1960
Orathanad	NIL	5 cwts.
Papanad	NIL	NIL
Gandharvakottai	NIL	NIL
Tiruvaiyaru	2½ tons	NIL
Tirukattupalli	NIL	2 cwts.
Alakkudi	2 cwts.	NIL

From the above it will be seen that it is not usual to have demand for Ammonium Sulphate in the first fortnight of July and the complaint that the ryots have had to purchase fertilizers at high prices from Pudukottai and Tiruchi cannot be based on facts.

The distribution through private merchants of a considerable quantity of manure during last year has now been taken

away and entrusted to co-operatives and we feel that the so-called complaints are engineered by parties who are interested in obtaining a share in the business of distribution of fertilizers. If an account is taken of the ryots who have taken to very early cultivation of paddy seedlings, it would be found that they would be a very small number and there could be no difficulty in meeting their demands for manure if only they had asked for the manure with the necessary certificates from the concerned Officers. The only new requirement to obtain the nitrogenous fertilizers is to obtain the certificate from the Block Development Officer or the Revenue Inspector, which system has been introduced to ensure that only *bona fide* agriculturists are supplied with fertilizers. This system is absolutely necessary to avoid sales to non-agriculturists and to prevent black-marketing in fertilizers.

In order to implement the Package Deal and to intensify production in the district, the officials of the Revenue Department and Co-operative Institutions have been geared up to meet the requirements of the agriculturists and all of them have been enthusiastically looking forward to serve the needs of the ryots. We wish to assure the ryots in the district that sufficient stocks of Sulphate of Ammonia and Super-phosphate are available in all our depots for distribution and they could purchase their requirements of Sulphate of Ammonia on production of the certificates issued by the concerned authorities.

*The following letter appeared on July 24, 1960 :*

FERTILIZERS SUPPLY IN TANJORE

Sir,

In regard to the recent reports and also the leader written under the heading "What are the officials doing?" in your issue dated July 14, complaining about the non-availability and non-supply of fertilizers to ryots by the authorities in Tanjore district, I wish to state that there has been "much ado about nothing". The complaints made against the Collector and other authorities are without justification. I ascertained from the Collector the actual figures in regard to the allotment of fertilizers to various centres in the district. An allotment of 2,453 tons had been made to various centres in the district for the

months of May, June and up to July 14. The actual stock on hand on July 14, after making the allotment, is 7,295 tons (Ammonium Sulphate 2,544 tons, Urea 2,177, Ammonium Sulphate Nitrate 1,679, Calcium Ammonium Nitrate 482, Ammonium Phosphate 393 tons, D.C.A.M.M. Phosphate 20 tons—total 7,295). I understand that primary and multi-purpose co-operative societies have been appointed already as retail dealers for distribution and allotments of stocks had already been made. There are sufficient stocks on hand to meet the requirements of cultivators.

It may be pointed out that fertilizers are used only at the time of Kuruvai or Sambha transplantation. Not even one-fifth of the cultivated area of the district has been ploughed. The transplantation stage has not been reached yet. Such being the actual position, I am not able to understand why large quantities of fertilizers are required at this juncture. For paddy seedlings small quantities of fertilizers are only required and that too of Ammonium Phosphate. So it will be seen that the grievance is imaginary.

As regards the supply of water for irrigation in channels the supply in the first week of July was not so adequate as to feed the nurseries in the east end of the district. This may be due to circumstances beyond the control of the authorities, viz., due to low water level of Mettur Dam. After July 10, the supply of water had very much improved and tail-end reaches have begun to fare well.

Kumbakonam.

T. SAMPATH, M.L.A.

*"The Hindu" closed the correspondence on the subject with the following letter published on July 28, 1960 :*

FERTILIZER SUPPLY IN TANJORE

Sir,

I have read with great attention the statement issued by Mr. Thyagaraja Mudaliar of the T.C.M.F. and the letter of Mr. Sampath, M.L.A., on the fertilizer position in the Tanjore district. All their deployment of statistics does not meet the frontal charge that nitrogenous fertilizers were made available

to cultivators only about a month after water was let down from the Mettur Dam.

It serves no purpose to state that the cultivators who raise seedlings early are few in number. They are the more enterprising. Why should they be deprived of the benefit of fertilizers? Why could not the rationing system, which began to function about the middle of July, have been made to function much earlier? The Government for its part received its stocks many months ago.

Even today it is only ammonium sulphate which is released for use by farmers. There are soils which react better to urea, which the Government has in stock but will not release to the users who ask for them. Why? The farmer knows best what his fields need.

Ammonium Phosphate, which is said to combine the advantages of nitrogen and phosphoric acid, is again kept in stock by the Government but has not been allowed to be used by the farmer. The impatience—if it is such—of the cultivator to go ahead with his work is a precious quality all too rare in our country. It does not deserve to be snubbed.

I am on the executive of a multi-purpose Co-operative Society which has been selected to serve as a depot for fertilizers. We have been keeping a godown in readiness to receive our stock which is yet to arrive. We are eager to receive it and we naturally complain. To dub the like of us who complain as tools in the hands of private traders is not fair. We have a right to state that private dealers should not have been put out of commission before the co-operative system was ready to act. The fewer the dealers the more difficult for the farmer to obtain his needs. "The Package Deal" has really not begun to function in the district, inasmuch as the farmer cannot yet obtain his fertilizer on credit. Many private dealers allowed credit to their customers and this amenity is now not available.

For the farmer to gather in his Kuruvai harvest and to do much of his transplantation for the second crop well before the north-east monsoon sets in is not "much ado about nothing". A few thousand kalams more or less of a harvest makes a huge difference to us farmers and (if we may believe leaders like Nehru) to the whole community.

Nagapattinam.

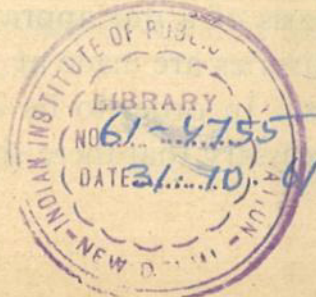
K. SUBRAMANYAM

*By way of ending the controversy, "The Hindu" published the following editorial on July 26, 1960:*

PROOF OF THE PUDDING

Much has been said, since we wrote about the inadequacies in the supply of water and fertilizers for the Kuruvai crop in the Tanjore district, by way of vindication of the action taken by the authorities and the arrangements made to meet the requirements of cultivators. So far as nitrogenous fertilizers are concerned, it is clear from the figures given by the Agriculture Minister and the President of the Tanjore Co-operative Marketing Federation—which is the sole agency for the distribution of ammonium sulphate in eight taluks of the district—that there was a sufficiency of stocks. In the face of this fact, the complaints we have received from agriculturists about the non-availability of fertilizers in some places primarily point to a failure or defect in the distribution arrangements. The trouble seems to be that, because of the introduction of the new system of monopoly distribution through co-operatives this year, there have been delays in the movement of stocks to retail depots. Moreover, it would seem that the insistence on the production of certificates from the Block Development Officer or the Revenue Inspector must have created difficulties for ryots who could not easily get at these officials to obtain the necessary certificates. It must be realised that in some agricultural operations, particularly during the sowing and transplanting stages, time is of the essence of the matter and few agriculturists can afford to go in pursuit of officials while the land calls for their immediate attention. It was out of a recognition of this factor that the Andhra Committee, which enquired into the distribution of fertilizers in the four delta districts, strongly urged: "If the co-operatives are to succeed in winning the enthusiasm and support of the ryots for their monopoly system of distribution of fertilizers, it is essential that they should ensure—(a) that the sales are made at controlled prices; (b) that the available supplies are distributed among the ryots on the basis of a due appraisal of their relative needs; and (c) that the deliveries are made at the door-step of the ryots in their own villages. In order to be able to satisfy these requirements, it will be necessary that there should be one society

for one village, entrusted with its own quota of fertilizers for distribution in the village." The Committee went on to recommend that there should be at least one retail centre for each area covering a radius of five miles and that the aim should be to have as early as possible a co-operative in each village to undertake the distribution of fertilizers. The Committee commented on the fact that while there were 2,324 credit societies and rural banks in the four delta districts, distribution of fertilizers had been entrusted only to 150 societies. An analogous enquiry into the position in Tanjore district will undoubtedly show that, in relation either to the number of villages to be served or the number of co-operative societies available, the number of retail depots opened are all too few. It is the paucity of retail depots and the cumbrous procedure laid down for making purchases of fertilizers which largely account for the complaints voiced by the ryots. And it is no answer to such complaints to proclaim that there are ample stocks. Where the co-operatives are made the sole agency of distribution of an essential article required by the agriculturists, it is the obligation of the agency concerned to see that the goods are made available "at the door-step" of the ryots and are equitably distributed at controlled prices. The mere fact that co-operatives are in charge of distribution is no guarantee that malpractices will not occur or that the cultivators will not get a raw deal. The Andhra Committee, in fact, found that a good deal of the black-marketing in fertilizers in the four districts must be attributed to malpractices by officials of co-operative societies acting in collusion with not very scrupulous ryots. Whatever may have been the lapses in the distribution of fertilizers in the recent past, the responsible authorities concerned in Tanjore will agree on the need for energetic steps to see that the legitimate requirements of every ryot in the district are met to the extent possible from the supplies available with them. We need not a post-mortem on the past, but an assurance for the future.



for one village, entrusted with its own quota of fertilizers for distribution in the village." The Committee went on to recommend that there should be at least one retail centre for each area covering a radius of five miles and that the aim should be to have as early as possible a co-operative in each village to undertake the distribution of fertilizers. The Committee commented on the fact that while there were 2,324 credit societies and rural banks in the four delta districts, distribution of fertilizers had been entrusted only to 150 societies. An analogous enquiry into the position in Tanjore district will undoubtedly show that, in relation either to the number of villages to be served or the number of co-operative societies available, the number of retail depots opened are all too few. It is the paucity of retail depots and the cumbrous procedure laid down for making purchases of fertilizers which largely account for the complaints voiced by the ryots. And it is no answer to such complaints to proclaim that there are ample stocks. Where the co-operatives are made the sole agency of distribution of an essential article required by the agriculturists, it is the obligation of the agency concerned to see that the goods are made available "at the door-step" of the ryots and are equitably distributed at controlled prices. The mere fact that co-operatives are in charge of distribution is no guarantee that malpractices will not occur or that the cultivators will not get a raw deal. The Andhra Committee, in fact, found that a good deal of the black-marketing in fertilizers in the four districts must be attributed to malpractices by officials of co-operative societies acting in collusion with not very scrupulous ryots. Whatever may have been the lapses in the distribution of fertilizers in the recent past, the responsible authorities concerned in Tanjore will agree on the need for energetic steps to see that the legitimate requirements of every ryot in the district are met to the extent possible from the supplies available with them. We need not a post-mortem on the past, but an assurance for the future.

