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A British Legacy?: The Empire Press Union and Freedom of the Press, 1940-1950

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify and analyse, in the first instance, those key developments that contributed to a resurgence of international debate over freedom of the press in the aftermath of the Second World War. For this purpose, the focus will be on the Empire/Commonwealth Press Union and its postwar conferences at London (1946) and Ottawa (1950) respectively. The renewed prominence given to issues of press freedom at these gatherings was not only a response to censorship and war-time changes, but reflected the onset of a new world order. The Empire Press Union, established in 1909, had previously held five major imperial conferences during the first half of the century. The Press Union enjoyed ongoing success in lobbying governments and companies to reduce high press cable rates across the Empire. Its conferences, normally convened at five year periods, were established forums for the discussion of ongoing imperial communication issues and were attended by British and Dominion delegations, comprising metropolitan proprietors and editors. Freedom of the press emerged as a conference issue in the wake of censorship by governments during World War One, albeit without the complexity or divisions which characterised the sustained debate of the 1946 and 1950 conferences. This article will argue that, during the latter gatherings, Australian conference delegates, rather than their British counterparts, emerged as the most vocal proponents of freedom of the press, reinforcing in the process a cultural divide between British-speaking empire loyalists like Australia, New Zealand and Canada on one hand, and those member countries in which nationalist and independence movements were becoming prominent, most notably on the subcontinent.

Censorship and Freedom of the Press

The role of the Empire Press Union, conceived in 1909 as a mouthpiece and forum for British-language newspapers throughout the Empire, was changing in a period of rapid decolonisation, a change reflected in the organisation's decision to alter its name to the Commonwealth Press Union at the 1950 conference.[1] Throughout the first half of the twentieth-century, the Press Union conducted regular conferences in London and the Dominions to discuss issues of common interest, including press cable rates, newsprint rationing, and the advent of broadcasting. By the time it reconvened after World War Two, the Empire itself was itself undergoing rapid change.[2] The Cold War framed a bipolar world order in which the United States confronted the growing power of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, and in which smaller nations including Commonwealth countries were becoming increasingly embroiled in international forums such as the United Nations. In the aftermath of World War Two,[3] while Britain remained a significant third force in Europe, the loss of India and Palestine, along with

the decision to suspend aid to other trouble spots like Greece and Turkey, were symptoms of a British domestic crisis and a portent of Britain's accelerating international decline by the 1950s. In this shifting context and in view of growing international instability, debates within the Press Union itself over freedom of the press became more polarised, with more outspoken Dominion delegations such as Australia's arguing for a British-based rapprochement with the United States on behalf of "the free world."

In their seminal work, *Four Theories of the Press*,[4] Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm have contrasted the libertarian theory of the press, traditionally upheld in the West and by the Press Union itself, with the Soviet communist theory of the press. While the former supported media freedom from censorship and extolled the role of the press as an extra-legal check on government,[5] the Soviet model was more tightly regulated and integrated into political and party structures.[6] Debate over freedom of press at the Press Union conferences in 1946 and 1950 was not limited to a consideration of these two conflicting models, although these differences were often implied; rather, it focussed on the respective merits of the pre-war libertarian consensus and reformist calls for a more socially responsible press emanating in Britain and the United States. The reluctance of many former British administrations to relinquish wartime controls over the press further complicated the debate. While some delegates railed against old-style authoritarianism, others detected conspiracies by government censorship emanating from the East as well as the West.

The recent experience of wartime controls by Commonwealth countries was an immediate incentive for including freedom of the press on the schedule for the Empire Press Union's 1946 London conference. On one hand, the mood of the conference was self-congratulatory; the conference's longstanding pledge to secure the penny-a-word cable rate had been achieved after more than three decades of lobbying (it had been successfully upheld at a previous Bermuda conference in December 1945.[7] On the other hand, the imposition of wartime censorship on Britain and the Commonwealth countries left a legacy of resistance and resentment. These controls were seen as arbitrary and excessive, especially by press representatives of Commonwealth countries such as Australia and India which were subjected to additional local restrictions. Some newspapers at the Press Union conferences were represented by editors and not journalists, and the result was that newspaper proprietors and their associates exercised a preponderant influence. Delegates discussed the newsprint shortages and rationing, which reduced news and revenue, as a form of indirect control that stifled newspaper criticism and debate.

At the London conference in 1946, despite initial protestations, a consensus emerged among Press Union delegates that the British wartime administration had managed its wartime security measures more astutely than Commonwealth countries. While acts of political suppression, most notably of the pro-Russian *Daily Worker*, took place in Britain under the *Defence Act*, during the war the established daily press had been taken into the confidence of officialdom and was effectively co-opted into the Allied cause. Despite fears of published information being used for the purpose of German bombing raids and the subsequent secrecy of D-Day operations, a voluntary, rather than mandatory, system of censorship remained in place. Relations were sufficiently cordial for the British wartime censor, Brendan Bracken, to attend

the conference and seek to assuage the conference delegates' lingering postwar concerns about the intermediary role being played by the government's corps of information officers:

> Such a service must not in any way endeavour to put over propaganda for a particular point of view . . . But there is one other side of this. One has to be concerned with the status of the newspaper correspondent . . . I must confess I sometimes think some correspondents in Britain do suffer from what I may describe as an excess of docility.[8]

Francis Williams, a British wartime official and author of *Press, Parliament and People*, subsequently explained that the American and Dominion wartime correspondents had been more active than the British in opposing the compulsory censorship of cables to the point where both groups considered removing their offices from London to New York in order to access Allied reports more fully.[9] Ultimately, the Americans were able to exercise more effective anti-censorship pressure and achieve a degree of relaxation over cable reports.

In part, considering this situation and the conduct of their own administrations, the Empire Press Union delegates delivered a more critical report on wartime censorship than their British counterparts. While conceding that British measures had been more liberal, Sir Keith Murdoch, an Australian newspaper proprietor and head of the 1946 Australian delegation, deplored the willingness of his own government to take action "against the newspapers on a wide scale."[10] During the war, official efforts to harness the co-operation of Australian editors had not been as sustained as in Britain, and personal antagonisms, in the case of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, precipitated bitter recrimination between government officials and the newspaper editor concerned. Murdoch himself had accepted the post of Minister of Information with the Curtin wartime administration in Australia, only to find that the opposition of his newspaper associates to wartime press controls placed him in an invidious position; he decided to resign when his own legislative drafts were not well received by the industry.[11]

Speaking at the 1946 conference, Murdoch's subsequent denunciation of "a very swollen Department of Information – with a legion of offices" appears as much designed to bolster his own credibility with the Australian delegates as to put a case against censorship on behalf of the Commonwealth countries. At the same event, he concluded his remarks with a call for "a free and candid press" and argued for the removal of newsprint rationing that had reduced wartime papers to as little as four pages an issue. In a potential challenge to the Press Union itself, Murdoch advocated a rapprochement between the British and American press for the purpose of "a great English-language press conference."[12] The ground-breaking Bermuda conference on postwar communications, held in 1945, and attended by British and Dominion representatives as well as the Americans, had opened the possibility of greater Anglo-American cooperation. By invoking terms such as "the free press of the world," he was recasting classical liberal discourse within the emergent bipolar rhetoric of the Cold War.

Redesigned to incorporate the misgivings of Commonwealth delegates attending the 1946 conference, the initial four-point Australian resolution in support of press freedom and expression, along with greater access to news, was subsequently expanded into an 8-point

resolution on freedom of the press. The delegates' wartime experiences were synopsized in "clause 6" which condemned the British practice of censoring overseas cable news. In the immediate post-war period, antipodean concerns shifted from the cost of press cables to the delays between the "lodgement of press telegrams in London and their receipt," with distant centres like New Zealand that incurred as many as nine delays for any message.[13] Not surprisingly, the New Zealanders applauded Murdoch's call under point 8 of the resolution for the clearing of "obstructions and obstacles" from "all channels of communication." Censorship was formally lifted in Britain in September 1945 and regular air communication became available; but the British Post Office remained unwilling to grant priority to the press for air dispatches or to favour one class of senders such as newspaper correspondents.[14]

Prior to the conference in March 1946, a Press Union Annual General Meeting, held in London, regretted "the unfortunate tendency in Whitehall to include services to the Empire Press with those of the foreign press."[15] With the Canadians still insisting on equal treatment for their correspondents, the British government granted Commonwealth correspondents access to a press room in the new British House of Commons. Despite their host status, Canadian delegates did not play a prominent role in debates over press freedom. They appeared content to let the Australians take the lead, while providing support along with the New Zealanders.

Colonial Press Legislation

The tendency among British Commonwealth countries and territories to invoke wartime or arcane restrictive legislation was perceived by the Press Union as an on-going threat to press liberty, especially in an era of postcolonial uncertainty. In 1946, of long-term significance for the Press Union was "clause 5" of the same conference resolution condemning the banning of news "save only for reasons of military security in time of war."[16] The conference's libertarian delegates always viewed the imposition of censorship on the grounds of national security as potentially regressive.[17] The South African chairman, S.H. Veats, reflected these concerns in reminding delegates that: "There is always a tendency to continue restrictive measures long after the emergency which made them necessary has passed. The voluntary surrender of power is unusual, if it is not absolutely unnatural."[18]

During the London conference, Nigeria, where wartime censorship had been re-introduced, was discussed. Other instances of censorship included Malta, whose delegate, the Hon. Mabel Strickland, accused her government of expecting the press to uncritically reproduce official handouts, and Fiji, where delays and censorship of cable news were alleged.[19] Although such incidents usually involved crown colonies rather than more established Commonwealth countries that were still under the control of the Colonial Office, they nevertheless attracted widespread attention. In several of these instances, the legal precedent for censorship employed by such governments predated wartime measures. In Bermuda, the government revived an "obsolete prerogative of British parliament, long discussed in Britain"[20] In a similar vein, the Maltese Ordinance in question was based upon earlier colonial legislation against the press which appealed to the British government for its abolition as early as 1941. Malta was one of a growing number of postwar colonial administrations which empowered local Governors or their representatives to enforce the free publication of government information and the

correction of "published mis-statements."[21] By 1949, the Press Union added Uganda to its concerned list and protested against the prosecution of newspapers in Cyprus and Mauritius.[22]

In each case, the Empire Press Union vigorously contested these measures through the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Colonial Office. It identified the potential for abuses in the unchecked power and personal influence of colonial Governors.[23] At the 1950 conference in Ottawa, one reason for devoting an entire session to colonial press laws and inviting Colonial Office officials to participate was an assumption that the ongoing threat to press liberty was greater in smaller colonies where governments press relations assumed greater intimacy, and where "it is a serious matter for a colonial editor to become *persona non grata* at Government House."[24] According to this view, greater visibility, and the lack of an established press in smaller colonies, left editors and proprietors more exposed to arbitrary and, in some cases, vengeful authority.

By the time of the Canada conference in 1950, Press Union member countries remained disunited, with a minority of the countries sympathetic to local administrations who had justified press restrictions by arguing that inflammatory or inaccurate reporting promoted discontent and disorder. Rapid moves by India towards independence during 1947-48, along with the trauma of partition from Pakistan, instilled a different perspective among delegations from the subcontinent.[25] Despite their differences, Indian and Pakistani delegates espoused the unorthodox view that regulation, even censorship, could be justified where the press risked becoming a vehicle for racial and religious hatreds.[26]

In preparation for its 1950 Ottawa conference, H.E. Turner, the Press Union's secretary, circulated a memorandum to delegates outlining recent developments across the colonies. Forty-one of the colonies were administered by the Colonial Office and the remainder by the Commonwealth Relations Office in England. As a participant at the session on colonial press laws, the head of the British ministry's Information Department advocated visits to the colonies by Commonwealth journalists and the establishment of local Press Union branches as two means of facilitating the development of a "free responsible, reliable and technically efficient press."[27] At the same session, the sole Maltese delegate and editor, the Hon. Mabel Strickland, explained that her country's Draconian press legislation, "one of the severest press laws in the Colonial Empire,"[28] was the legacy of a state of emergency declared prior to World War Two and the declaration of war in Italy.

At the conference in 1950, debate raged over postwar press legislation, and one discussion involved Indian and Pakistani delegates and editors, Durga Das and Altaf Husain. They echoed C.P. Scott, the widely respected proprietor of the *Manchester Guardian*, in his eloquent appeal for greater press introspection and restraint. While accepting the Colonial Press Union's ideal of press freedom, Husain emphasised the fragility of democracy in Pakistan and questioned a general assumption within the industry that governments are "necessarily and inevitably wicked."[29] He outlined the circumstances surrounding a ban imposed on his own paper and the decision to suppress a second publication, the *Civil and Military Gazette* in 1949 for a period of three months. He argued against the Press Union's proposed motion condemning these actions on the grounds that a conference in early 1950 of Pakistan editors of which he was president,

had unanimously supported the government's action against the *Gazette* and that the *Gazette's* British editor had agreed with the government's decision.

Husain's defence of the Pakistani government on the grounds of promoting "press responsibility," and his proposed amendment to the Australian motion to take into account "religious susceptibilities"[30] when considering freedom of the press was not well received by other delegates. For Australia, Frank Packer, the outspoken proprietor of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, declared himself "rather frightened by our friend from Pakistan," and upheld the liberal doctrine of press freedom by forcefully repudiating "any form of outside control."[31] Prior to the Ottawa conference, the Australian delegation had already elevated the issue of free press above any other. In late 1949, writing to Murdoch, the delegation head, Packer asserted that:

> The Australians could put forward a really good case demonstrating the very vital part they are playing in the maintenance of a free Press. . . a Press which I feel is free, vigorous, and independent [sic] to a point which I feel is unequalled in any part of the world, or most parts of the world.[32]

Yet, such was not entirely the view of Australia painted by its own delegates at Ottawa. The delegates' attention remained focussed on their opposition to local wartime censorship rather than upon discussion of the rapidly changing postwar environment. During the session prior to Packer's speech, Arthur Shakespeare of the *Canberra Times*, for example, recounted the wartime suppression of Packer's *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney, before concluding that "the battle is not over" against "censorship by intimidation."[33]

At previous conferences, Australian Press Union delegates had supported delegates from other Dominions in their fight for press freedom. Of particular concern, for example in South Africa, was legislation proposed in 1925 requiring that all published articles during elections be signed by their authors rather than appear anonymously.[34] The Australian delegation of 1950, however, went much further than reminiscing about what was after all a single Sydney-based censorship episode. By speaking out against press restrictions in smaller countries such as Malta and Pakistan, the Australian delegation played a significant role in galvanising Press Union opposition to the imminent prospect of postwar regulation through Press Councils and draft resolutions by the United Nations, albeit using a retrospective case. While the Maltese scenario in certain respects resembled the arbitrary authority exercised by nineteenth-century imperial Governors, new demands on the press for the published correction of errors, equally repugnant to many delegates, were part of the ongoing debate around the role of Press Councils and contemporary calls for greater press responsibility. Australian delegates, taking a libertarian line, lobbied against any further impositions on the press, unlike some smaller territories and new nations which advocated continuing wartime restrictions. In contrast, Labour governments in Britain and the West opted for a middle course. All three arguments were deemed equally provocative.

A Commonwealth Precedent?: The British Press Council

The timing of the London conference, in mid-1946, meant that the Press Union was not fully cognisant of an important new development to emerge later that year: the establishment of a British Royal Commission into the Press. This comprehensive Royal Commission of 1947-49, the first of its kind in Britain, corresponded with the establishment of other official press inquiries in countries such as the United States and South Africa. Initiated by the National Union of Journalists, rather than by the Labour Government, the British inquiry constituted a fresh challenge to owners, some of whom suspiciously viewed the inquiry as an alliance between unions and government to constrict press freedom. The 1950 Ottawa conference was the first broad forum of the Press Union at which the British Commission's recommendations, and the emerging press doctrine of social responsibility underpinning them, were debated.

The findings of an American commission on freedom of the press, published in 1947,[35] confirmed the British view that voluntary codes for the industry were no longer sufficient when the conservative power wielded by wealthy newspaper proprietors was considered. According to Peterson, the commission's recommendation for an independent agency to scrutinise postwar American media further confirmed that the libertarian view of press freedom was now "obsolescent." If the American wartime inquiry cast a wider net by scrutinising trends toward cross-ownership of print, broadcast media, and film, the British Royal Commission focussed predominantly on newspapers and allegations of their inaccuracy and political bias. Rather than viewing press freedom as a given or proprietorial right, the British Commission characterised freedom of the press as a broad political ideal that was under increasing threat from concentration of ownership power. The outcome of this situation, it contended, was "a progressive decline in the calibre of editors and in the quality of British journalism"[36] which, if unchecked, would endanger not only the freedom of the press, but ultimately the welfare of the country. According to this new discursive framework, the future role of the press was not to safeguard its own liberty, as many Press Union delegates continued to advocate, but to "save the press from itself" by intervention and legislation if necessary. Despite these reformist aspirations, the final recommendations of the Royal Commission, like those of its American counterpart, remained more cautious, stopping well short of divestiture or legislation. Rather the Royal Commission proposed self-regulation by the industry itself through the establishment of a "General Council of the Press" which would act as a watchdog on irresponsible journalism and contribute to the "freedom and prestige of the Press" by speaking with a unified voice on its behalf.[37]

The British newspaper industry reacted slowly to the 1949 recommendations of the Commission. To Levy, the historian of the Press Council, there was "no real enthusiasm for such a body"[38]; consequently, when the Press Union reconvened in Ottawa in 1950, little work had been done towards drafting a constitution for the Council. While not implacably opposed to the idea of establishing the Council, the Ottawa conference with its British delegates remained ambivalent. In the course of discussion, British proprietors had in fact voted 18 to 7 in support of a Council. British delegate E.J. Robertson (*Sunday Express*) justified his opposition in the vote on anti-union grounds — this, at a time when fear of left-wing pro-communist

organizations was peaking in the west. In particular, Robertson denounced the prospect of union representation on the Council as "most dangerous,"[39] noting that it was a proposal which had not been canvassed in the Commission's Final Report. His concerns were addressed by another British delegate, Noel Vinson (*Western Morning News*), who reminded the conference that the British Press Council was to be a voluntary organisation rather than a statutory authority. Invoking C.P. Scott's lucid comments, he went on to caution that there are "occasions when public opinion leads the press and this is one of them."[40]

As the 1950 conference proceeded, during the protracted eighth session devoted to freedom of the press, the formation of a British Press Council was not merely being discussed as a national issue, but was considered by other delegates as an important precedent which, if adopted, would in all likelihood be imitated by governments in Commonwealth countries. This development was therefore viewed with widespread concern, especially given the liberal wartime record of the British. Such concerns were only heightened by the prompt and disconcerting action of the Indian and Pakistani press in establishing its own central committees and conferences as a means of self-regulation. Indian delegate C.R. Srinivasan contended that "[w]e have created a body which seeks to preserve the freedom of the press against unintelligent and uniformed interference by a government in a moment of pique. . . governments have not dared to ignore the advice we have given.[41]" Srinivasan's appeal for self-regulation and industry co-operation went largely unheeded by the other delegations. Decolonisation and India's neutral stance towards the Cold War played their part. Additionally, the prospect of nationally-based Press Councils competing with and even supplanting local Press Unions may have been perceived as a threat by the Press Union itself and to the dominance of the large newspaper proprietors heading its delegations.

Delegates reacted volubly and critically to the Indian proposal. On behalf of the Australians, Frank Packer challenged the assumption that the freedom of the press "can go hand in hand with any form of outside control."[42] In uncharacteristically reflective mode, Packer, who had recently contested an Australian Code of Ethics for the press in the courts in the lead-up to the Canadian Conference, considered the findings of the British Commission to be inconclusive and the Press Council proposal as an unacceptable imposition. One of the most contentious developments, linked to both colonial press legislation and the prospect of Press Councils, was a requirement for the press to correct published errors. Between the wars, ongoing issues of responsibility and overweaning proprietorial influence, so evident in an age of press barons, were implicit in the British Commission's (1947-49) concern with falling professional standards among editors and journalists more generally.

The role of Commonwealth delegations in the politics surrounding self-regulation stiffened British resistance to a Press Council. As well, the discussion in the 1950 Ottawa Conference were likely a factor in the ongoing reluctance of British proprietors to move decisively. Packer's stance was endorsed by Ronald Horton (*New Zealand Herald*) and Rupert Davies (*Whig Standard*) who was head of the Canadian delegation and vice-chair of the conference. A common feature of the Australian and New Zealand delegations was their dynastic character and sheer dominance of key newspaper proprietors. Not only did the Commonwealth Press Union, renamed in 1950 after operating as the Empire Press Union for 41 years, risk becoming a

mouthpiece for Newspaper Proprietors' Associations during the freedom of the press debates — overwhelming the views of editors and journalists in the process — but its pronouncements lent weight to deep-seated concerns, voiced in the postwar inquiries, that proprietors continued to wield disproportionate, and at times irresponsible, influence in public life. Significantly, several decades elapsed before a Press Council would be adopted in Australia, and even then, it functioned primarily as an industry-based watchdog for the press rather than as a force for self-regulation or social responsibility.

Freedom of Information and the United Nations

In addition to the ongoing debate engendered by the British Royal Commission on the freedom of the press and freedom of expression, discursive shifts were also occurring at international levels in relation to the term "freedom of information." In part, freedom of information implied an extension of classical press doctrine to broadcasting, which had come into its own during World War Two at a time when newsprint became scarce. "Freedom of information," however, also extended the scope of debate to the suppliers of news, agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press, which were looking to re-establish and extend their influence across the globe.

Postwar idealists such as British author Francis Williams, invoked the phase "freedom of information" in opposition to ongoing censorship which he denounced as "the enemy of international understanding."[43] As a wartime censor and combative editor, he espoused libertarian principles and a suspicion of interventionist post-war administrations. Williams was an invited speaker at the 1946 Press Union Conference where he hailed moves by the newly-formed United Nations to incorporate the principle of Freedom of Information in its Charter. One of the self-appointed roles of the United Nations after 1945 was to confirm that news agencies and the media themselves remained pre-eminently Western in their information bias. The issue of information monopoly, previously raised by Commonwealth delegations at pre-war Press Union conferences, was recast along broader East-West and North-South polarities, with the Press Union focussed on the former and the United Nations on the latter.

Increasing use of the term "freedom of information" coincided with trans-Atlantic developments and a growing rapprochement between the Press Union and the American media. The Bermuda conference of November-December 1945, attended by British and Dominion representatives as well as the Americans, achieved unanimity on the longstanding issue of international cable rates and helped lay the basis for a new global information order. In this new order, American broadcasting and news agencies, less adversely affected during wartime than Reuters, were poised to play an integral role. At the same time, Commonwealth countries negotiated the collective purchase of Reuters, which would cease to be solely British-owned.[44] Murdoch himself, who had played an active part in the Reuters sale, echoed Williams' idealism at the London Conference by calling for "freedom of the press to be redefined to extend to our rights to availability of news."[45] Reflecting geopolitical shifts in the Pacific as well as the Atlantic, Murdoch advocated "a great English-language press conference" in order to pursue this objective. For delegates like Murdoch, freedom of information, like freedom of the press, corresponded with the reassertion of Western values and an expanding free market, rather than with the self-determination espoused by contemporary postcolonial movements.

In reality, the new information order offered more of the old, with greater freedom given to media industries rather than to their expanding audiences. Nevertheless, this was only one strand of the debate. A combination of colonial and international developments would prove unsettling for this emerging English-speaking media alliance. In addition to the British Royal Commission (1947-49) and a similarly-motivated Commission in the Unites States, the activities of the United Nations culminating in a 1948 Geneva conference on Freedom of Information galvanised the Press Union to greater vigilance and lobbying. These developments served to explain the regular annual meetings that Press Union members attended in London throughout the critical period 1946-1950. In a move indicative of its nervousness at the prospect of a British Press Council, to pre-empt this new possibility, the London Section of the Press Union began to convene annually under the title, "Council of the Press Union."

In preparation for the 1950 Ottawa conference, one of the Council of the Press Union's urgent priorities was to closely scrutinise three relevant draft conventions generated by the United Nations. Several of its proposals remained contentious. The "International Right of Correction" broached issues of ethics and professional conduct which were anathema to many proprietors and delegates. But the most contentious within the Press Union and the United Nations itself remained the Freedom of Information proposal. The memory of wartime censorship and ongoing concerns over colonial press legislation ensured that the Press Union resisted any attempted qualification by the United Nations to the principle of press freedom even on the grounds of national security. In March 1950, three months before its Canadian gathering, the Press Union circulated its own draft response to the United Nations, contending that: "Restrictions specifically applying to the Press should operate only in times of an emergency and then, only under safeguards. . . Such restrictions should be textually agreed in advance between the Government and appropriate Press organisations."[46]

The Press Union's preoccupation with the UN resolutions was consistent with its concerns about self-regulation and the prospect of further press legislation in the Dominions as well as in smaller Commonwealth dependencies. In anticipation of the Ottawa conference, the Australians, especially Lloyd Dumas, Murdoch's *Herald* and *Weekly Times* colleague, played an active part in preparing a draft response to the UN proposals. At the conference itself, however, Murdoch's delegation proposed a still stronger stance based on an Australian Newspaper Proprietors' Association resolution to the effect that "any infringement on the freedom of the Press should be resisted by every section of the community as marking the first step towards authoritarian government."[47] Arguing the case for the Australians, Packer denounced the work of the UN and freedom of information as "dangerous" in so far as it "could be used by a government to suppress news and even criticism of the government's regime." Contradicting the Indian delegates, Packer seized upon the UN's draft code of ethics, generated at Montevideo only a few weeks earlier, as a potential infringement of press liberty.

In this stand on freedom of the press, the Australians were not alone. George Ward Price, a British delegate, considered the question of the regulation of the press by international law as "of greater urgency than the question of establishing a press council in England."[48] Other participants including the invited American representative, Robert McLean, were inclined to see UN intervention as part of an authoritarian communist plot. McLean, who was President of the

Associated Press newsagency, spoke for the large American interests in the way that Packer had on behalf of Australian interests. He considered the UN drafts as "extremely dangerous" and promised that "any action to meet them head on would I know receive the heartiest accord in the United States."[49] McLean and the news agencies feared the prospect of international regulation and independent competition along the lines mooted by the recent American Committee of Inquiry. In upholding liberal doctrine, American arguments, bolstered by constitutional authority, resembled those of the Australians. British delegates, under the influence of C.P. Scott, were more prepared to compromise on matters of self-regulation.

At the conference, Australian attempts to stiffen British resistance and force the issue met with only modest success. Murdoch, en route to London after the conference, reported to Dumas that: "I gave Packer the job of leading for Australia which put forward the resolution. Frank did poorly in his first speech but well in his second and short effort, although as is his wont he was unnecessarily forthright. He put some proposals that would never be argued."[50] Ultimately, the British resolution prevailed with the addition of the last paragraph of the Australian resolution recommending that "all members of Empire Press Union should urge their governments to refuse to accept any United Nations conviction which compromises or weakens this principle in any way, or condones the form of press control now operated by governments of authoritarian countries."[51]

Conclusion

Commonwealth delegations such as Australia, and to a lesser extent, Canada and New Zealand, continued to play a significant role in Press Union deliberations, especially in postwar debates over freedom of the press and over freedom of information more generally. To some extent, this was predictable given the restrictions of wartime censorship. Between 1940-1950, however, the onset of decolonisation and the advent of the Cold War gave the debate about press freedom a heightened intensity. During the same period, the Press Union became less concerned with communication costs and infrastructure, and more preoccupied with reiterating its own values and ideologies. Significant divisions emerged at a number of levels in response to both British and international developments, as the new doctrine of social responsibility for the press challenged long-held libertarian assumptions and raised the prospect of regulation in the process.

Whether the Australian and supporting delegations were merely calling for a return to the pre-war status quo is doubtful. Rather, in calling for closer communication ties between English-speaking peoples and the United States, the delegates were active in defending press freedom against new internal critics as well as perceived external enemies. The internal critics had come to regard press freedom as a Western construct, while in forums such as the United Nations, the external critics, such as the Soviet Union, steadfastly denounced the "capitalist" Western press as an enemy of the people. In addition to identifying and mapping the complex rhetorical shifts involved in this intensive round of postwar debates, this analysis confirms the reactive role played by Australian and other Dominion delegations in stiffening British resistance, where possible, to the prospect of self-regulation. Fears were expressed by Dominion

delegates that any such reforms, once imposed in Britain, would be subsequently adopted elsewhere. As the vocal mouthpiece for Newspaper Proprietors' Associations, the delegates were at least successful in postponing any serious discussions of social responsibility and press reform, the discussion of which might compromise their own interests in the Dominions along the lines of the emerging British Press Council. In summary, the British legacy of a free press had taken root, albeit unevenly, in the larger British-speaking world including the United States, where it would assume a new level of ideological intensity and controversy with the onset of the Cold War.

Notes

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3. David Reynolds, ed., *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 79.
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7. Denis Cryle, "The Empire Press Union and Antipodean Communications: Australian-New Zealand Involvement, 1909-1950," *Media History*, 8, no. 1 (June 2002): 49-62.
8. Henry Turner, *The Sixth Imperial Press Conference* (London: Empire Press Union, 1946), 30.
9. Francis Williams, Press, *Parliament and People* (London: Heinemann, 1946), 18, 221.
10. Turner, *The Sixth Imperial Press Conference*, 44.
11. Desmond Zwar, *In Search of Keith Murdoch* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1980), 91-92.
12. Turner, *The Sixth Imperial Press Conference*, 45-46.
13. Turner, *The Sixth Imperial Press Conference*, 69.
14. Empire Press Union, *Report of the Council*. 36th Annual General Meeting (London: EPU, 12 March 1946), 5.
15. Empire Press Union, *Report of the Council*. 36th Annual General Meeting, 7.
16. Turner, *The Sixth Imperial Press Conference*, 119.
17. One need only allude to remarks by the current Commonwealth Press Union Director, Mark Robinson, and the title of his 2002 address, entitled "Fighting for Press Freedom, A Battle Never Done," to understand the longer-term significance of the Empire Press Union's anti-censorship role. See his "Fighting for Press Freedom: A Battle Never Done," *Round Table*, no. 366 (2002): 493-502.

18. Turner, The Sixth Imperial Press Conference, 47.
19. Turner, *The Sixth Imperial Press Conference*, 51-52.
20 Empire Press Union, Report of the Council. 39th Annual General Meeting, 3.
21 Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 151.
22 Empire Press Union, *Report of the Council*. 39th Annual General Meeting (London: EPU, 14 June 1949), 3
23 Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*. 149.
24. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 150.
25. Peter Townsend, *The Last Emperor: Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolsen, 1975), 217 ff.
26. Ever since this conference, such views have been voiced in international forums and represent a significant challenge to the dominant ethos of the Press Union. Third World countries were inclined to regard free press theory as a Western and pre-eminently British construct.
27. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 42.
28. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 33.
29. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 93.
30. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 96.
31. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 99.
32. Murdoch Papers, Canberra, National Library, 13 September 1949, Packer to Murdoch.
33. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 89.
34. Turner, *The Imperial Press Conference in Australia*, 91-96.
35. The Commission on Freedom of the Press, *A Free and Responsible Press: A General Report on Mass Communication: Newspapers, Radio, Motion Pictures, Magazines and Books* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1947).
36. Royal Commission on the Press 1947-49, *Report* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, June 1949), 4.
37. Royal Commission on the Press 1947-49, *Report*, 172, 177-78.
38. H. Phillip Levy, *The Press Council: History, Procedure and Cases* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 9.
39. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 104.
40. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 109.
41. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 100.
42. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 98.
43. Williams, *Press, Parliament and People*, 225.
44. Graham Storey, *Reuter's Century: 1851-1951* (London: Max Parrish, 1951), 242.
45. Turner, *The Sixth Imperial Press Conference*, 45.
46. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 147.
47. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 70-71.
48. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 85.
49. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 78.
50. Sir Lloyd Dumas Papers, Canberra, National Library, 10 July 1950, Murdoch to Dumas.
51. Turner, *The Seventh Imperial Press Conference*, 112.