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ARTICLE: “Alberta Press-Control Bill Said Flagrant Confiscation”, Edmonton Journal (October 2, 1937)

“Government Attempting to Seize All Paper Has to Sell” Action Seen Tantamount to Seizing Goods of Merchant

The Alberta press-control bill, introduced in the legislature Thursday, is “the abolition of freedom and a flagrant confiscation of the property of the daily and weekly newspaper publishers of the province,” Elmer E. Roper, editor of The People’s Weekly and long prominent in labor and C.C.F. ranks here, charged in an address Friday night.

When predictions were heard a week ago “that the government ...was contemplating taking legislative action to interfere with the freedom of the press, we had no idea that the measure which would be passed would be anything like as drastic as the act which was introduced Thursday,” Mr. Roper said.

He addressed his protest against the bill to “people of various kinds of occupations – laborers, storekeepers, manufacturers, farmers.” He drew analogies purporting to show by reference to these businesses the effect the press control bill would have on the papers of the province.

Points Analogies

“I want to ask you, if you are a wage earner, how would you like it if the legislature passed an act which would compel you to take off one day in every 10 from your work and spend it without remuneration in doing a house-to-house canvass on behalf of the political policies of the government of the day?”

“Or, if you are a manufacturer, how would you like to have the government order that one-tenth of the time of your employees must be spent in promoting the political propaganda of the party in power?”

“Or if you are a storekeeper, how would you like to have an agent of the government come into your place of business and say, ‘Look here, in addition to all your other taxes you must give the government 10 per cent of all the goods you buy from the wholesalers?’”

“Or if you are a farmer, how would you like the government to pass a bill which would compel you to plant one-tenth of your acreage in noxious weeds?”

“No, I don’t think you would like it. Well, that is just exactly what the government of Alberta is doing to the newspapers through the bill now before the legislature. We are compelled to devote one-tenth of our space to anything that the government may decide we must print.”

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“Without Payment”

“Without any pay for it we must give up that much of our space to promoting the political propaganda of a government whose policies are abhorrent, or be fined \$1,000, go to jail or be put out of business. That in substance is what the press control act means to the newspapers.”

“But that is by no means the worst feature of the bill. Much more important than sending a newspaper publisher to jail because he refused to publish the asinine insanities of an imported person, is the fact that if the press must come under the control of the chairman of the Social Credit board, as the act provides, then any pretence at democracy in this province will have gone.”

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ARTICLE: “The Axe Falls”, Lethbridge Herald (October 1, 1937)

“Herr Hitler” Aberhart of Alberta has spoken. The Alberta press is to be muzzled. British tradition of 200 years has been shattered, and Alberta is on the way to dictatorship.

The Bill to muzzle the press, ironically called “An Act to Ensure the Publication of Accurate News and Information,” is now before the legislators at Edmonton and will be steam-rolled through the House within the next day or so.

When and if the measure goes into effect the chairman of the Social Credit Board or someone he may name to act for him may, without any trial, without giving any reason, suspend publication of any newspaper or periodical published in the Province of Alberta. That’s the freedom of the press as understood in present-day Alberta.

The Alberta government can, under the Act, demand that a newspaper publish the truth. We wonder what the truth is. A few weeks ago the Herald, on information furnished by the sitting member, Hans E. Wight himself, published the statement that he had resigned his seat in the House – a matter of great public interest to his constituents and to Albertans at large. The next day the Premier issued a statement at Calgary saying that Mr. Wight had not resigned. But Mr. Wight had resigned, and he is not now representing Lethbridge in the House at the special session of the Legislature. Yet under the iniquitous Act brought down in the Legislature on Thursday the Herald would be forced to publish Premier Aberhart’s statement free of comment and free of charge.

And if the Herald did not publish Mr. Aberhart’s statement, then the Herald would be liable, without being taken into court, to be forced to suspend publication until such time as the Cabinet got good and ready to allow publication to begin once more.

The press gag measure is an assault upon the liberty of the British people which they fought for and won more than 200 years ago. It may be expected that they will again be willing to fight the issue to a successful conclusion, for they very well know that, if a press gag can be enforced upon them by the Government now in control at Edmonton, it is but a step till religious liberty and freedom of speech are taken away from the individual.

The issue is clear.

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SPEECH: CBC Broadcast Transcript (June 5, 1937)

William Aberhart, CBC Broadcast June 5, 1937.

... I am sorry that any names should be brought into this broadcast, but I crave your indulgence to make a correction.

Last Saturday in this same series from Winnipeg, broadcast by Mr. Ferguson, he stated that I desired to have all daily papers in Alberta come under my censorship every morning.

This is far removed from the truth. In fact it is a plain undisguised falsehood. At no time have I ever expressed any such idea nor have I ever desired to have such control. There is a vast difference between the licensing of the press and the daily censorship of it.

Evidently Mr. Ferguson has a very vivid imagination or he has taken the Freedom of the Press so trustfully that he has believed all that it has published, even though, in this case, it is entirely false and has been used for vicious propaganda purposes.

Please accept this correction in the spirit it is given...

The question that must therefore be decided is not, "Should the press be free?" but, "Is the freedom of the press being properly conducted in its regular channels?"

It seems to me that the great question to be decided in any sphere where liberty is recognized is the line of demarcation where liberty ceases and license begins. The dictionary defines liberty as "freedom from despotic control," that is control exercised merely and solely to please or satisfy the whim or the fancy or the purpose of the individual or group of individuals who are directing the citizens for personal advantage.

This is the basic idea of British liberty. The Britisher is master in his own sphere or realm - in his own home. His possessions are his own. He can do with them as he will. His religion is entirely voluntary. He can worship in his own way, no one daring to make him afraid.

But life today is complex. It is no longer merely individualistic or paternal. People have combined into a state, and the individualistic law of the liberty of the jungle no longer can be maintained in its entirety. The state refuses to allow the Britisher to inflict inhuman cruelty upon his wife, his children or even his domestic animals. Civil liberty therefore is a freedom limited by laws established for the welfare of the community generally or of the state as a whole, rather than of the individual.

I conclude therefore that modern liberty lies in the freedom of the individual from selfish control, duress, fear or exploitation inflicted by another or others. If an autocrat, or a plutocrat, or a large corporation controls, directs or regiments the actions of any individual or number of individuals

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without their consent, these latter have to that extent lost their liberty in the true sense of the word...

After some thought I am inclined to agree with Walter Lippman, who a decade ago wrote that the crisis of democracy is a crisis in journalism.

It seems to me that in the decade which has passed, this crisis of democracy has been followed by decadence instead of recovery, and it is feared that the so-called free Press is rapidly dying, and its freedom with it.

I am wondering if we should not do everything in our power to revive it and restore its freedom.

If anything is to be done to restore the press to its proper place in the public consciousness, we must consider wherein its weaknesses lie, and prescribe some form of rigid discipline that will enable these weaknesses to be removed...

...I propose to summarize [the weakness of the modern press] under four headings:

1. Commercial

It is claimed that newspaper standards are too often determined by a preponderant desire for circulation, which is so basic to large advertising returns.

2. Patronage

Most newspapers today are subservient to local political machines, and therefore colour their news items in accordance with the propaganda of the political party supporting them. The policies of the paper are therefore intended for the welfare of the party, and not for the welfare of the community.

3. News and Moral Values

Dean Ackerman declares that news values of many papers are often superficial and trivial. Headlines frequently do not correctly reveal the facts nor the tenor of the article. A great majority of the reporters are quite inaccurate when reporting interviews, and it is not an uncommon thing to find that news and photographs even are falsified.

4. Social and Educational

Too many of our citizens have learned by experience that the newspaper violates the individual right of privacy.

Newspapers unhesitatingly make heroes of criminals by glowing accounts of wrongdoing, vice and the sordid details of lust and violence...

This discussion is hardly complete without the further consideration of some means which might accomplish such a result but my time is up. Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen.

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SPEECH: CFCN Broadcast Transcript

I can see that in spite of all that one can say in protest, the newspapers who are the mouthpiece of the financiers persist in publishing falsities that are entirely unfair and untrue! They determine to confuse all who they can beguile into reading their spurious articles and they want to give Alberta a black eye in the sight of the world. We've had letters from South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and they tell us that what is put in their papers about Alberta would make you sick. Not a bit of it is true, copied from this paper, and copied from that paper, our own papers... Now ladies and gentlemen if this is done in the name of liberty of the press we must question such liberty! I fear I am going to be forced to come to the conclusion that the caliber of men who are managing these papers is so low as to be unsafe to claim liberty at all. They shouldn't be at large! This again I say to you is the statement of a disordered, distorted, mad brain. The only purpose seems to be to place the Premier of this province in a bad light in the eyes of the people of this province as well as in the eyes of the world. Why else would they tell such a confounded falsity from beginning to end?... I feel certain that the citizens of Alberta will soon come to the judgment that something should be done to curb the mad-dog operations of certain of the financial newspapers! We license doctors, we license lawyers, and school teachers and businessmen and auto drivers and hotel keepers for the protection of the public. Why shouldn't the newspapers be licensed also? And licensed for the protection of the public – just the same thing – be required to live up to a certain standard of truth and honesty in their publications? I wonder if such an action would meet with the approval of the citizens of this province? Alright! This is a matter that will receive my immediate attention when I return from the Coast after a little holiday! I hope they are listening in so they'll know what is coming. I hope they don't start to holler like the bond-holders: "You never gave us notice." They know it now! I want to show them that if we can handle their bosses, the financiers, we can handle the henchmen!

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LEGISLATION: The Accurate News and Information Act

“The Accurate News and Information Bill,” An Act to Ensure the Publication of Accurate News and Information (Reserved for the Signification of the Governor General’s Pleasure - October 5th, 1937).

Whereas it is expedient and in the public interest that the newspapers published in the Province should furnish to the people of the Province statements made by the authority of the Government of the Province as to the true and exact objects of the policy of the Government and as to the hindrances to or difficulties in achieving such objects, to the end that the people may be informed with respect thereto.

Now, Therefore, His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, enacts as follows:

1. This Act may be cited as *The Accurate News and Information Act*.
2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise required, -
 - a. “Chairman” means the Chairman of the Board constituted by section 3 of *The Alberta Social Credit Act*;
 - b. “Newspaper” means a paper containing public news, intelligence or occurrences or remarks or observations thereon, printed for sale and published periodically in parts or numbers at regular intervals not exceeding thirty-one days between the publication of any two of such papers, parts or numbers, and includes a paper printed in order to be made public weekly or oftener, or at intervals not exceeding thirty-one days containing only or principally advertisements, and a paper containing accounts of events occurring within thirty-one days before the date of publication.
3.
 - i. Subject to the other provisions of this section, every person who is the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of any newspaper published in the Province, shall when required so to do by the Chairman, publish in that newspaper any statement furnished by the Chairman which has for its object the correction or amplification of any statement relating to any policy or activity of the Government of the Province published by that newspaper within the next preceding thirty-one days.
 - ii. Every such statement shall have written upon it a certificate in the following words: “The foregoing statement is published by the direction of the Chairman of the Social Credit Board,” which certificate shall be printed at the foot of the statement to which it relates.
 - iii. Every such statement shall be printed with the type ordinarily used in the printing of the newspaper.
 - iv. The length of any statement required to be published shall not exceed the length of the statement corrected thereby and such statement shall be given the same prominence as to position, type and space as the statement corrected thereby.

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- v. Every requirement by the Chairman for the publication of any statement shall be in writing signed by the Chairman, and shall be deemed to have been duly made upon the receipt of the requirement together with the statements referred to therein at the office or usual place of business of any of the following persons, namely, the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of the newspaper.
 - vi. Every statement so required to be published in a newspaper shall be submitted in the language used in the publication of such newspaper and shall be published in the next regular issue thereof after the day upon which the requirement for the publication thereof referred to in subsection (v) is received at the office or usual place of business of any of the following persons, namely, the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of the newspaper.
 - vii. No statement required to be published pursuant to this Act shall contain any notice or other matter the publication of which is required to be made pursuant to any other statute or which is ordinarily published as advertising.
 4. Every person who is the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of any newspaper, shall upon being required so to do by the Chairman in writing, within twenty-four hours after the delivery of such requirement at the office or usual place of business of any of the following persons, namely, the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of the newspaper, make a return in writing setting out every source from which any information emanated, as to any statement contained in any issue of the newspaper published within sixty days of the making of the requirement and the names, addresses and occupation of all persons by whom such information was furnished to the newspaper, and the name and address of the writer of any editorial, article or news item contained in any such issue of the newspaper as aforesaid.
 5. No action for libel shall be maintainable on account of the publication of any statement pursuant to this Act against any person who is the proprietor, editor, publisher, manager or printer of the newspaper publishing the same or against any employee of any such person or against any person on account of any subsequent publication of any such statement.
 6. In case the proprietor, editor, publisher or manager of any newspaper has been guilty of any contravention of any of the provisions of this Act the Lieutenant Governor in Council, upon the recommendation of the Chairman, may by order prohibit, -
 - a. the publication of such newspaper either for a definite time or until further order;
 - b. the publication in any newspaper of anything written by any person specified in the order;
 - c. the publication of any information emanating from any person or source specified in the order.
 7.
 - i. Every person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Act or who makes any default in complying with any requirement made in pursuance of this Act shall be liable to a penalty not to exceed five hundred dollars.
 - ii. Every person who contravenes any of the provisions of any Order in Council made pursuant to section 6 of this Act shall in respect of every such contravention be liable to a penalty not to exceed one thousand dollars.
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- iii. Any penalty which any person is liable to pay pursuant to any provision of this Act shall be recoverable either by suit brought by the Chairman in any court of competent civil jurisdiction, or upon summary conviction upon the information or complaint of the Chairman or of some person authorized in writing by the Chairman to lay such information.
8. This Act shall come into force on the day upon which it is assented to.
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