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Report from the Manchester Guardian, November 1915

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THE PRESS IN WAR-TIME.

ENGLISH EDITORS ON THE CENSORSHIP.

LORD NORTHCLIFFE'S VIEWS.

"I have never met any member of our craft who did not agree that close connection between the Government and the newspapers during war-time is essential to military operations, and a good many of us joined together as far back as ten years ago to urge the Government to prepare for press regulations in the event of war. We had planned for co-operation between Government and press, but when war broke out we suddenly found ourselves under amateur control.

SOURCE 7B

Having been submitted to one unjust prosecution in regard to the publication of matter that was proved to have already appeared both in France and in Germany, I can sympathise with the petty persecution of reporters that has taken place under the Defence of the Realm Act. If every department of the National Services had so bright a record for efficiency and patriotism as has the press, I venture to think that our position in the great war would be a happier one to-day than it is."

Mr. A. G. Gardiner.

Mr. A. G. Gardiner, editor of the "Daily News," and president of the Institute of Journalists, wrote:—

"The point upon which all agree is this: that nothing should be published which would in any way advantage the enemy. This applies, it seems to me, without qualification to the publication of news. It is very much more difficult to interfere in the matter of criticism, and we are all jealous of our tradition in that respect. Yet it would be easy to show that many of our failures during the present war have been substantially attributable to criticism made with the intention of rendering the existence of Government impossible. The main objections which have arisen in regard to the management of the Censorship have resulted from the fact that the purpose has been not to prevent information reaching the enemy, but to prevent information of which the enemy is in possession reaching the British public. That is the chief error into which the system has fallen, and it is an error that ought not to be tolerated, either in the interests of the press or of the country."

SOURCE 7C

Mr. Robert Donald.

Mr. Robert Donald, editor of the "Daily Chronicle," wrote:—

"While I recognise that the liberty of the press must be restricted during the war so as to withhold all information from the enemy without misleading our own people, I consider that the present censorship system is anomalous and unequal in its application. It would be preferable to make every editor his own censor, acting under regulations drawn up under the Defence of the Realm Act."

"Export of Home-Made Libels."

Mr. J. A. Spender, editor of the "Westminster Gazette," wrote:—

"Briefly, I think we must make the best of the defects of the Censor's Department, and address ourselves to the departments which prescribe their regulations. The chief evil, I think, is the absence of correspondents at the front, which ought to be filled in some methodical way. I suggest that after a reasonable interval detailed accounts of operations, giving names and places and other details rendered innocuous by the lapse of time, ought in some way to be regularly provided. I am averse from arbitrary measures for suppressing criticism of the Government, but undoubtedly great harm is done when comments which misrepresent the mind of the country and underrate its efforts are repeated in Allied and neutral countries. There ought, I think, to be some way of preventing the export of home-made libels."

Chairman of Newspaper Society.

Mr. J. S. R. Phillips, editor of the "Yorkshire Post" and chairman of the Newspaper Society, wrote:—

SOURCE 7D

"I do not know much of the inner workings of the Press Bureau; but I do know that this institution is in the hands of able men, who endeavour to put into operation the rules laid down by the War Office and the Admiralty, who alone can be supposed to understand what value the enemy may be likely to find in any statements that may be published.

I see no ground for any serious complaint against the censorship as it has been conducted, and though as a journalist I like to publish all the news that I can, I am quite satisfied, in a period of peril like this, to acquiesce in the decisions of those in authority."

Mr. Hamer, in closing his review of the position, said that much of the friction and misunderstanding that had arisen could have been avoided if the Government had taken the press more into confidence and consultation. It was creditable to the Government that they had so readily removed certain grievances which had been pointed out to them, but these grievances need never have arisen if there had been a friendly interchange of views beforehand. The really live question of the moment was whether there has been such an abuse of the right of free criticism in and by the press as called for active measures of repression. He did not think so. In any case repression of criticism would be a very dangerous practice to introduce.