

**'ROUSING THE BRITISH-SPEAKING WORLD':
Australian newspaper proprietors and freedom of the press, 1940-1950**

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Abstract

This paper provides an assessment of the role of Australian newspaper proprietors, most notably, Sir Keith Murdoch, Lloyd Dumas and Eric Kennedy, in campaigning for the freedom of the press in opposition to the proposed United Nations Covenants and its Geneva Conference of 1948. Drawing upon extensive private and Commonwealth Press Union correspondence, it outlines the main steps taken by Australian proprietors and seeks to explain the range of factors, internal and international, which led to their intense lobbying of the Press Union and other press organizations, both British and American, in the context of the United Nations, the Cold War and the Press Union's own conferences of 1946 and 1950. The author has conducted a nationally funded study on the Press Union in conjunction with British-based Indian scholar Dr Chandrika Kaul.

This paper provides an assessment of the prominent role played by Australian newspaper proprietors, most notably, Sir Keith Murdoch, Lloyd Dumas and Eric Kennedy, in campaigning for freedom of the press in opposition to the war-time Labor government, in the first instance, and subsequently against the proposed United Nations' Freedom of Information Covenant during 1948. It begins by briefly outlining the domestic war-time situation, including divisions within the newspaper industry, before examining the escalation and internationalisation of the Australian campaign in the post war period. Drawing upon extensive private correspondence, it outlines the active steps taken by Australian proprietors in the latter instance, and seeks to explain the range of factors, internal as well as international, which drove them to lobby the British Council of the Press Union, Dominion newspaper interests and those in the United States.

This analysis will build upon previous work by the author and other media historians (Kaul, 2006) in examining the complex role of the Press Union, including the willingness of the Dominion press and its delegations to use the Press Union as a vehicle for private and political interests, as well as larger Commonwealth concerns (Cryle, 2002). While its lavish Imperial Press Conferences across the British-speaking world appear increasingly predictable in their format and agendas, driven as they were by social intercourse and an opportunity to fraternise with high society (Cryle, 2007), they were also underpinned by important issues of politics, business and diplomacy. As such, these quinquennial gatherings provided colonial proprietors and politicians with valuable opportunities for networking within and beyond their respective delegations. Theodor Fink, in the 1920s and Keith Murdoch in the 1940s each played

a guiding role in the selection of local delegates and in setting particular agendas and issues for conference discussion. It is clear, moreover, from the Murdoch-Dumas correspondence, that such agendas were set well in advance of the Imperial Press Conferences and a measure of support galvanised both internally and within the British-based Council of Press Union. In this respect, its voluminous conference proceedings, valuable as they are for comparative and historical purposes, have less to say explicitly about the often intense lobbying which preceded them. For this reason, a study of the post-war episode attempted here, relies primarily for source material upon private correspondence between the major local protagonists, not all of whom chose to attend the conference events.

Previous studies of the Press Union and its antipodean delegations have highlighted the willingness of the Australians, in particular, to aggressively pursue their own interests, often in conjunction with their Newspaper Proprietors' Association, in order to extract competitive concessions on cable charges and wireless facilities. In this context, one of the key players of this study, Lloyd Dumas, an editor for the *Herald* group and close confidant of Keith Murdoch, had already played a significant part as editor-manager of the *Sun-Herald* cable service in London (Dumas, 1969, p.38). Subsequently as senior executive of the Adelaide *Advertiser*, he exhibited unswerving loyalty to Murdoch, while his access to the Press Union in London would prove invaluable in the sustained post-war campaign. As evidence of their close working relationship, Dumas was appointed acting manager of the Herald and Weekly Times group during Murdoch's brief but unpopular period as Director General of Information in 1940 (Younger, 2003, p.372). But domestic issues and local frustrations with the war-time constraints placed upon the newspaper industry had equally played a part in igniting the campaign for press freedom at home and abroad.

A feature of the Australian Imperial Press Conference delegations, less conspicuous in their New Zealand or Canadian counterparts, was their competitiveness and divisiveness, a trait which also threatened their cohesion and effectiveness (Potter, 2003, pp.142-144). In part this was due to the historical absence of a single Press Association in Australia and to the exclusive tactics of the various Sydney-Melbourne newspaper combinations who controlled the flow of cable news. (Cryle, 2006). Despite the merger of two rival associations in the late 1930s (1937), divisions

resurfaced over the rationing and stockpiling of newsprint during World War 2. Murdoch, writing to Press Union Chairman, John Astor, explained how the Australian industry had again divided into rival associations when the Fairfax and Syme families split with the Melbourne *Herald* and other Sydney papers over the issue. The two *Herald* groups, Murdoch's Melbourne-based HWT and Fairfax in Sydney, controlled Australian Newsprint Mills, the Tasmanian-based venture which, after intensive experimentation in the 1930s, was in a position to supply local newsprint to hard-pressed newspapers as the war-time shipping and import crisis intensified (Souter, 1981, p.539). By early 1941, when newsprint imports and production came under the provisions of the National Security Act, Australian Newsprint Mills had begun to produce its own paper but was not yet in a position to fully meet domestic demand. In following months, press pagination declined as much as 50 per cent from 1938-39 levels, while metropolitan titles fell as much as 60 per cent (Kirkpatrick, 2001, p.7). Faced with the serious loss of revenue which resulted from their reduced size, the two *Herald* groups split over which commercial strategies to meet the crisis. While the appetite for war news guaranteed sales, a trend recognised by Murdoch and the HWT's decision to reduce advertising space, Fairfax, on the other hand, opted to reduce its news content to retain its lucrative advertisements. This became a significant point of difference between the joint Australian Newspaper Mills owners, one which persisted during and after the war (Griffen-Foley, 2000, p.170). Dumas, then President of the Australian Newspaper Conference, recalled the "vigorous opposition" of the Fairfax and Syme families to Murdoch's views, adding that:

Personally, I thought the two leading classified papers had made out a good case, but my association with the Melbourne *Herald* forced me into that camp, when a compromise could not be reached (Dumas, 1969, p.59).

Caught between Murdoch and other metropolitan proprietors on this occasion Dumas regretted that "Australian newspapers are controlled by men with strong personalities and vigorous methods of asserting themselves" (1969, p.58).

Even before the Curtin Labor government came to power in late 1941, in an atmosphere of national crisis, press freedom and government regulation became catchcries to unite the Australian newspaper factions both during and after the war. Well before the celebrated Sydney clashes of 1944 with the censorship authorities,

Australian press proprietors employed the public relations firm of J. Walter Thompson in 1941 to mount a sustained campaign on their behalf over the injustice of newsprint rationing, and the gazetting of regulations to control media outlets (Dumas MS, 2 July 1941). Despite outlays of more than one thousand pounds, the campaign was not a great success and Murdoch's Herald group balked at prolonging it in favour of the personal lobbying which had proved effective with Curtin's predecessor, Robert Menzies. With most ANPA members favouring a renewed publicity campaign against regulation in early 1942 (Dumas MS, 2 January 1942), Murdoch remained at odds with many of his fellow publishers over political strategy and preferred to lobby Curtin and his Ministers in person. As Director-General of Information under Menzies, he was a forceful lobbyist of senior politicians. His unpopularity in that role over the unsuccessful introduction of measures requiring newspapers to correct errors, made him an unlikely spearhead of the post-war United Nations campaign and serves to explain Dumas' ongoing role as go-between across the different industry factions and organisations.

Nevertheless, the protracted sense of siege under the Labor wartime administration of Curtin and Evatt, as a result of newsprint rationing, undoubtedly motivated a resolution on press freedom proposed by the Australian press delegation at the 1946 Imperial Press Conference convened in London (Cryle, 2004, p.6). At the same time, Murdoch and other Australian delegates in attendance were expected to report back to the Australian industry on British attitudes towards a series of important new post-war developments which would elevate the issue of press freedom to international significance and reunite Australian newspaper proprietors in the process. One of these developments, the landmark establishment of a Royal Commission into the press by the British Labor government in 1947, was to be overshadowed by moves within the United Nations to "incorporate the principle of Freedom of Information into its Charter" (Cryle, 2004, p.9) at its 1948 conference. Rather than upholding Western attitudes, such an exercise, in the eyes of the Australians, constituted a manifesto for self-determination by General Assembly members, along newly emerging North-South lines.

In the early war years, strong personalities and the prospect of ever-dwindling newsprint supplies exacerbated divisions within the Australian industry. If Keith

Murdoch wielded influence within the Australian Newspaper Commission (ANC), Eric Kennedy, managing director of the *Sun* newspaper chain, led the rival Australian Newspaper Proprietors Association (ANPA) which by now included such groups as Packer's Consolidated Press and Denison's Associated Papers (Griffen-Foley, 2000, p.118). In their dealings with the two Herald managers, Murdoch and Henderson, Packer and Denison were each inclined to aggressive individualism. Although Murdoch and Dumas had supported Packer's bid for the presidency of the ANC before the war, he was neither trusted nor liked by his established print rivals (Souter, 1980, p.116). But it was Ezra Norton, of *Truth* and *Sportsman* notoriety, who tested the patience of the war-time industry still further by applying for a licence to publish a new paper, the *Daily Mirror*, at a time when newsprint austerity was forcing most papers to drastically reduce their pagination. When Senator McLeay, the Minister for Trade and Customs, initially acceded to Norton's request, Sydney papers protested vehemently and had the decision overturned (Souter, 1980, p. 187).

Divisions created by official prevarication over the *Mirror* request and by Norton's insistent lobbying of Labor ministers were compounded by the unwillingness of Murdoch and the Melbourne press to support the Sydney protests. In April 1940, Murdoch penned an angry note to Hugh Denison, owner of the *Sun* group, over personal criticism for failing to support the Sydney cause. Murdoch was adamant that: "All or nearly all of the Federal Government are against you, the leading Canberra officials are against you, and the protest cannot succeed" and he went on to justify his own position on the grounds that:

in this matter, the Liberty of the Press is involved. If the power of the Customs department is to be invoked to limit newspapers, then we are at the beginning of the destruction of the freedom of the press (Murdoch MS, 27 April 1940).

Their exchange confirmed ongoing differences not only between Sydney and Melbourne interests but also between broadsheet and tabloid owners, in so far as Murdoch had allegedly voiced criticism of Denison and his Sydney *Sun* for "wasteful" use of newsprint.

Despite their control over Australian Newsprint Mills, neither of the Herald owners was comfortable with the Labor government's move in 1942 to regulate the use and

distribution of newsprint, an industry of their own creation, through the establishment of a newsprint pool and quotas for individual publishers. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, which had established its own measures for rationing and stockpiling its own newsprint resources in anticipation of the war, found itself in the invidious position of having to make further reductions, based on its previous output. The situation grew more acute in April 1942 when overseas imports were suspended altogether and smaller rivals began lobbying the Labor government for the introduction of a uniform size for all newspapers, a direct threat to their existing market position. Despite enjoying its own newsprint supplies, as joint owner and pioneer of the Tasmanian Boyer paper mill, Keith Murdoch and the Melbourne *Herald* group felt equally aggrieved with the new regulations which forced it to share precious supplies with rivals who had refused to support the Australian Newsprint Mills venture in its expensive start-up phase. Dumas, estimated in mid July 1940 that investment by the Herald and Weekly Times in the domestic newsprint industry exceeded 400 000 pounds, excluding the ongoing costs still required to expand production and meet the shortfall. But if Murdoch was convinced that he had done more than any proprietor to establish the local newsprint industry in the wake of the depression, he was losing control over the war-time newspool, which now came under the Prices Commission, while its transactions were monitored by the Department of Trade and Customs (Dumas MS, 13 August 1943).

When he was later lobbying the British and Dominion press over the United Nations developments, Murdoch was forced to admit the existence of these two distinct bodies, a situation which threatened to compromise the post-war campaign under discussion. In this polarised situation, Dumas proved his diplomatic worth to Murdoch by negotiating behind the scenes and using freedom of the press as a rallying point. The turning point for the Australian industry, in Dumas' own estimation, was an historic conference of editors, one of the few held until that time, at which a combined gathering of the two rival organizations "unanimously adopted a resolution strongly opposing the Convention" (Dumas, 1969, p.143) being proposed by the United Nations. As incoming President of the reconstituted ANC in early 1948, Dumas was successful in forging a common front in the face of this perceived external threat. This concerted response on the part of Australian proprietors involved a division of responsibilities, whereby Eric Kennedy of the ANPA undertook to lobby

the Australian government, especially Evatt's Department of Foreign Affairs, while Dumas alerted the Press Union and the British to their concerns. Kennedy's and the ANPA's co-operation was in part driven by dissatisfaction over the Australian government's decision to send a representative "other than an experienced newspaperman" to Mexico as its delegate on UNESCO's Co-ordinating Body for the Press (Commonwealth Press Union, 1958, p.10). After protests at this official action, ANPA was represented by an 'observer' but relations with the Chifley Labor government remained guarded.

The rising star of Evatt within the United Nations served only to heighten the Australian Newspaper Conference's antagonism to the United Nations Freedom of Information draft covenant, on the grounds that it would pave the way for the reintroduction of draconian legislation modelled on war-time controls. Evatt had played a less adversarial role in his war-time dealings with the press than belligerent colleagues like Calwell. During the 1944 clash, for example, he had convened a conference with newspaper proprietors after Calwell had precipitously ordered the seizure of offending copies. In his autobiography, Calwell confirms their differences in this regard, recalling that: "Dr Evatt always seemed to be keen to live on good terms with the newspapers, but I never thought it possible" (Calwell, 1972, p.88)

affirming, for his own part, that:

Tightening Australia's libel laws, because they give too much liberty today to those who own and control newspapers, has always been one of my unfulfilled ambitions (Calwell, 1972, p.88).

Advice from the Crown Solicitor led proprietors to the troublesome conclusion that war-time censorship could be resurrected and press inaccuracies suppressed, where they were deemed likely to 'injure friendly relations with other states' (Dumas to Astor, MS, 14 November 1948). Writing to Dumas, Ralph Simmonds, editor-in-chief of the Melbourne *Herald*, summed up the industry's misgivings when he observed that:

If Evatt Labor and Ward possessed the power at Canberra and were backed by an international agreement calling upon them to give effect to that resolution, can you imagine the limits that would bind them? I'm afraid I could not sleep easy in my mind about it (Dumas MS, 29 May 1948).

Lingering concerns about the Labor government's willingness to enforce the correction of press errors persisted well after Keith Murdoch's controversial war-time involvement as Director-General of Information. During September 1943, Dumas sent Murdoch the copy of a resolution by the Socialist League "requiring newspapers to publish corrections", with the further recommendation that papers "publish in full any ministerial statement which was declared to be of public importance" (Dumas MS, 31 August 1943). Despite Curtin's own background as a journalist, newspaper proprietors grew anxious that left-wing critics might be in a position to implement their demands. During 1942, the Press Censorship Advisory Committee created by Curtin as the body to liaise between government and proprietors had deteriorated into a stalemate (Kiernan, 1978, p.98). When Scullin resigned as its first chairman and Bonney, as Chief Censor, dismissed Murdoch's suggestion that the Committee should be working to alleviate censorship rather enforce it (Walker, 1980, p.215-16), the stage was already set for a showdown under the incoming Calwell. In contrast with the unfavourable industry reception to his earlier Department of Information appointment, Murdoch was now backed by the ANPA over his stand against the government. Following similar protests by Fairfax and Eric Kennedy of Sun Newspapers, the ANPA sent a letter to Prime Minister Curtin expressing its want of confidence in both the Press Censorship Advisory Committee and his Ministers.

Early war-time suspicions of Curtin Labor over newsprint rationing and price controls deteriorated dramatically once Arthur Calwell was appointed Minister for Information in 1943. Calwell's animosity towards Keith Murdoch and the Herald group was deep-seated, based on the latter's involvement as a 'kingmaker' in the Lyons years and his criticisms of both Labor and Calwell in signed articles published in his own papers (Calwell, 1972, p.90; Younger, 2003, pp.266-69). The failure of the Press Committee and the pattern of escalating provocation which ensued in 1944 has been well documented in the case of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* and its defiant editor, Brian Penton (Buckridge, 1994, pp. 259-264; Walker, 1980, pp.201-224). In ordering the seizure of copies of the offending *Daily Telegraph* issues for challenging the government regulations, and suspending five other Sydney papers, Calwell overreacted, jeopardising in the process the government's campaign for a 'Yes' vote referendum on post war powers (Tennant, 1970, p.159). A successful challenge to the press regulations in the High Court by the Sydney proprietors, including Packer and

Norton, laid the basis for more concerted post-war action and brought a measure of unanimity to the otherwise turbulent Sydney scene.

R.B.Walker, in his chapter on the press and the post-war years, contests the accepted view of the war-time Australia as characterised by consistently harsh censorship, identifying many breaches of military security on the part of the press (1980, p. 224). But the proprietors were unanimous in perpetuating a 'socialistic' view of the war both within Australia and overseas, including the collective conviction that Evatt's assurances of individual liberty under the constitution would be overridden. In the short term, the 1944 controversy involving the *Daily Telegraph* helped rehabilitate Packer within the Murdoch camp. While the two rival groups, the ANC and the ANPA, continued their war-time competition over newsprint rationing into the late 1940s, the industry was, as a whole, impatient with the continuation of rationing and supportive of Packer's threat to take legal action in the High Court to redress their grievances (Griffen-Foley, 2000, pp.169-170). If opinion within the Australian industry appeared unusually united over the seriousness of the United Nations threat, the Australians made little initial headway in their efforts to arouse the British. In mid November 1948, Dumas made contact with John Astor, the *Times* proprietor and British Chairman of the Press Union Council, six months after the United Nations freedom of information conference, conveying the misgivings of the Australian section and requesting that "the united weight of the British, Canadian and United States press" be used "at least to hold up this matter until further examination" (Dumas to Astor, MS, 14 November 1948). Without awaiting a response from London, Dumas undertook to cable individual British editors, and write to Canadian representatives, while lobbying his New Zealand contacts in person on the issue (Dumas, 1969, pp.62-63). But, since both these Dominions were inclined to follow the British section, the key to persuading the organization as a whole lay in London. This would require more intensive lobbying by Dumas and the Australians, since the British Council, acting on the advice of its Geneva representative, Murray Watson, editor of the *Scotsman*, had already agreed to the resolution in question on 6 January 1949 (Dumas, 1969, p.19). Astor politely informed Dumas that "the whole question was most thoroughly considered", adding that he (Dumas) would be "disappointed at the outcome" (Dumas MS, 13 January 1949), whereupon Dumas decided that more drastic measures were required. Australian press representatives had received

assurances from Evatt, in their absence from the United Nations Geneva gathering, that no domestic legislation was being contemplated by the Labor government to restrict press liberty in Australia, but they remained suspicious, based on indirect feedback they had received to the effect that government representatives had circulated unfounded criticisms of their newspaper press in their absence.

In early 1949, Dumas, seizing the initiative, flew to London to address the Press Union himself, taking time to reread the United Nation's draft resolution in the plane in order to provide the Council with detailed objections. He was suspicious of Evatt and his department and no less exasperated with Murray Watson's position as the Press Union's British adviser, remarking to the Australian section's Secretary, Trevor Some, that "how he can be unconcerned about it I just do not know!" (Dumas MS, 18 January 1949). In correspondence to Murdoch, he described his London trip in terms reminiscent of Billy Hughes' war-time visit, as no less than a mission to rouse the British Council and the British people from what he deemed to be inexplicable apathy. (Dumas MS, 10 February 1949). At a full Council meeting held in London on his arrival, Dumas put his case with sufficient vigour to sway Astor who appointed a sub committee to examine his case. Astor's *Times* colleague, Alan Pitt Robbins, had little difficulty in recommending that "the Convention was full of dangers and should be deferred" (Dumas, 1969, pp.145-46). Dumas wrote enthusiastically to Murdoch in the aftermath of "our first clear victory today" on the United Nations Covenant, explaining how he had traversed the document "clause by clause" and anticipated that the decision would be communicated to all sections of the Press Union from London by the end of that month (Dumas MS, 17 February 1949).

Elated by his success and encouraged by Murdoch, Dumas joined the Press Union delegation in its visit to raise the issue with Hector McNeil, the British Minister responsible for United Nations affairs. He described the ensuing discussion to Murdoch as an "extraordinary interview" (Dumas MS, 8 March 1949), in which McNeil and British delegates present at Geneva explained the genesis of the third covenant draft as the outcome of their own diplomacy with a range of other parties, including the Indians, French and Swedes. In the face of their protestations about its inoffensiveness, Dumas changed tack alerting them to what the Australians deemed to be dangers in the second draft covenant concerning the correction of newspaper

errors. The upshot was that, McNeil, as the British Minister who had sponsored one of the covenants, now found himself in the potentially awkward situation. He felt unable to pursue this initiative, for fear that the Russians, in particular, would capitalise on any British volte-face and preferred to let Dumas, Kennedy and Murdoch take the running on the issue in future negotiations. If the intention of the British Council, when lobbied by Dumas, was to simply postpone a decision by the United Nations until the various sections had considered it in the lead-up to the Canadian Press Union conference in 1950, Dumas and the Australians, relying on a combination of British complacency and stiffening American resistance, pursued their own independent course of action and diplomacy, in order that, to cite Dumas, "the whole thing" would "go overboard" (Dumas MS, 8 March 1949).

Only a few days after the delegation visit, Dumas flew on the same plane as McNeil to New York for a meeting of the Assembly. Rather than confront Evatt who continued to reassure him, (Dumas, 1969, p.146) he lobbied the Americans in person. Their position had been summed in mid January of 1949 by a leading member of the Society of Newspaper Editors as "sceptical", in so far as the offending draft appeared "so vague and so general that no nation would know what it was agreeing to" (Dumas MS, 14 January 1949). But while such UN resolutions lacked binding power, their elevation into conventions would have greater binding power on Americans and Australians alike. It was a point which Dumas was keen to press home to his advantage. After gaining the support of the American Society of Editors, he studied the United Nations drafts closely with a representative of the State Department in order to clarify their common concerns. Dumas, still in touch with the Canadian press representatives, was heartened to learn that, in the wake of the Press Union debate, they were now prepared to urge the postponement of the draft resolution's adoption, pending further investigation. Unable to remain for the duration of the New York sittings, Dumas advised his Canadian contacts to lobby Hector McNeil and to "fight hard on these issues" alongside Irwin Lanham, the President of the American Society of Editors, whom Dumas described as a "tower of strength", in order to force its postponement (Dumas MS, 18 March 1949).

The upshot of opposition on the part of the United States and other European states was the shelving of the draft covenant on freedom of information. One of the

arguments subsequently marshalled against it within the Press Union itself was a concern that it might be interpreted to uphold the draconian wartime legislation introduced and sustained in African and other smaller British territories (Cryle, 2004, p.10). Dumas was obviously proud of the campaign outcome, claiming that he "had as much to do with killing it as anyone", including Murdoch (Dumas, 1969, p.147). He had anticipated correctly that his own national organisation was more in tune with the anti-communist and anti-Soviet sentiment of the Americans than with the British. On a larger canvass, he also confirmed American fears about Evatt and the Labor government's attempts to reassert itself diplomatically after the war. Evatt, with support from Chifley, objected to exclusive American access to Manus Island for the purposes of establishing a base there. Dumas (1969, p.148) while overseas, tried unsuccessfully to convince Chifley to intervene in the stalled negotiations over Manus Island and to override Evatt on the grounds that the Americans lacked confidence in his External Affairs Minister. But Evatt's biographer, Allan Dalziel, defends his subject against persistent insinuations on the issue, stating that:

The Manus Island business was frequently dragged out as an example of Evatt's alleged blundering and mulishness in the conduct of international affairs. No matter how often he explained the reasons why Australia would not hand over this island to American control, the Press and its sycophants would be out in full cry as if Evatt had betrayed Australia's future defence preparations (1967, pp.40-41)

Throughout the episode, Dumas had acted as Keith Murdoch's emissary and followed his interventionist example in lobbying at the highest levels of government.

Subsequently, Keith Murdoch expressed to Dumas his intention of bringing an American resolution on press freedom to the 1950 Canadian conference in support of their joint position. (Dumas MS, 31 December 1948). By this time, Murdoch's health was declining and he balked at the prospect of undertaking a protracted overseas trip, but he was urged to take this on when his proposed replacement, Sir Errol Knox, suddenly died. As bickering over the selection of delegates continued into 1949, Murdoch was still having misgivings, but the Australian section of the Press Union, no doubt buoyed by Dumas' efforts, was as adamant as ever about its stance over the freedom of the press. In February 1949, its annual meeting approved a resolution condemning the Australian government's exclusion of the press from the Geneva deliberations and its subsequent failure to make its report available to the Australian

press (Empire Press Union, 10 February 1949). With suspicion of the Labor government and Evatt running as high as ever in press circles, Murdoch still appeared dissatisfied with his successors as potential heads of the Press Union section (neither Dumas or Kennedy stood against him); he decided, under the circumstances, to lead the Australians at the 1950 Canadian event, accompanied by his wife and young son Rupert, then 19 years of age and en route to Oxford. Despite the ever-present prospect of factionalism, Murdoch was well placed to sustain unity and the mutual convictions of Dumas and Kennedy concerning the threat posed by the United Nations. In March of 1949, while Dumas was visiting London and New York, he had written to Chifley, then Labor Prime Minister, to communicate the concerns of the Press Union's Australian membership over the UN's draft convention on Freedom of Information, Alleging that there were "dangers not previously apparent" in the draft, Murdoch urged that Australia's delegation to the United Nations Assembly press for its postponement (Dumas MS, 17 March 1949). In his detailed letter, Murdoch considered that while the intention of the draft was "no doubt unexceptional", any subsequent introduction of local legislation providing "unspecified penalties" would act as a check on foreign correspondents and "might be used to strike at the fundamental liberties of the press" (17 March 1949). As Packer confided to him prior to the event, the feeling within the Australian camp was that they "could put forward a really good case demonstrating the very vital part they are playing in the maintenance of a free press" (Murdoch MS, 13 Sept 1949).

It was to be a performance made possible by the hectic lobbying of the previous year. For while Murdoch at Ottawa spoke forcefully to a series of Australian resolutions urging the removal of wartime restrictions, including newsprint, the real diplomacy had been undertaken behind the scenes well before the Canadian conference event in mid 1950. Collectively, the Australians, speaking on the need for press freedom, aired their wartime grievances forcefully. If the British appeared willing to compromise and the Indian delegation supported the thrust of the United Nations Covenant, Frank Packer launched an aggressive attack on the proposed UN code of ethics as a further infringement of press liberties. (Cryle, 2004, p.8) In this, he was aided by the presence of an American representative, Robert McLean, President of Associated Press (AP) who went so far as to label the UN intervention as "part of an authoritarian communist plot" (Cryle, 2004, p.10). Although British reserve softened some of their

objections, the Australians had the satisfaction of inserting their resolution to the effect that:

All members of the Empire Press Union should urge their governments to refuse to accept any United Nations convention which compromises or weakens this principle in any way or condones the freedom of press controls now operated by governments of authoritarian countries (Cryle, 1969, pp.4-5).

Arguably, the Australians' pre-conference diplomacy surpassed their conference performance, as Murdoch himself admitted. Yet divisions were never far from the surface. As conference head of the section, he noted in private that Packer was inclined to overstate the Australians' case and confessed to Dumas that "the Australian lot has a bad tail", when delegates like Sir John Butters, the managing director of his own Herald and Weekly Times group, showed "too little interest" in the proceedings (Dumas MS, 19 June 1950). But this study, grounded in their correspondence rather than the conference proceedings, confirms that freedom of the press was not only the longstanding credo of the Press Union as an organisation, it had welded the competitive and outspoken Australian industry into a formidable lobby as part of its post-war mission to "rouse the British-speaking world".

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