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Introduction

Parliament and the Press: A Case for Synergy

KARL W. SCHWEIZER

Two contending interpretations have tended to dominate recent scholarship on Georgian and early Victorian Britain: one, comprising historians like L. Colley, J.V. Beckett and especially J.C.D. Clark depicts a stable church-state, an *ancien régime* (along continental lines) sustained by traditional modes of authority: conservatism, orthodoxy, landed wealth, harmony within the governing *élites*.¹ The other, represented by J. Brewer, R. Porter, M. Pittock² and others, emphasizes more the theme of dissonance: endemic, underlying fissures within politics and society that, interactively, challenged authority, engendered controversy and hampered the cause of national unity during this period.

According to the first, what we might call ‘Anglo-centric’ school, parliament functioned as an obdurate bastion of oligarchy, highly resistant to constitutional change, unwillingly and only at the eleventh hour accommodating aspirations of radical and reformist circles. Or put differently, parliament was ‘coaxed, bullied sometimes dragged into granting those initial political liberties which formed the basis of western democracy’.³ Throughout this scenario, the press occupies a distinctly ambiguous place: its expansion, range and vitality acknowledged yet its actual role in political life marginalized; the ‘culture of print’ is viewed more as a mirror of society than an active influence on affairs of state or catalyst in the growth of national political awareness with destabilizing consequences for aristocratic dominance.⁴

Within the second academic paradigm, parliament appears very much in flux – the institutional setting for inter-ministerial struggles between and within organized political groups, themselves buffeted by amorphous pressures, interests and opinions which

¹ See *inter alia*: J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832* (Cambridge, 1985); *idem*, *Revolution and Rebellion, State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1986); *idem*, *The Language of Liberty 1660–1832. Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo American World* (Cambridge, 1994); J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660–1914* (Oxford, 1986); L. Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT, 1992); J. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century. The Peerage of Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1984); R. Price, *British Society, 1680–1880* (Cambridge, 1998).

² J. Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976); R. Porter, *English Society in the 18th Century* (1982); *idem*, ‘English Society in the Eighteenth Century Revisited’, in *British Politics and Society from Walpole to Pitt*, ed. J. Black (1990), pp. 29–52; J. Black, *The Politics of Britain. Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685–1789* (New York, 1997); K. W. Schweizer, *Statesmen, Diplomats and the Press: Essays on 18th Century Britain* (Lewiston, NY, 2002), introduction.

³ P. Lawson, ‘Hanoverian Studies: The Impact of Recent Trends on Parliamentary History’, *Parliamentary History*, VII (1988), 131.

⁴ B. Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press* (1996) ch. 1: J. Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (1987) pp. 114–15.

served to shape the structure of politics, its sustaining ideology and, consequently, the dynamics of decision making.⁵

The press is viewed in two ways: either (*pace* Brewer) as a potent agent of change (and persuasion), which by fuelling and empowering extra parliamentary agitation expanded the political nation; or more skeptically, particularly regarding its putative impact on parliamentary politics – an impact, it is argued, that appears to rest on easy assumptions about the undifferentiated nature of press content and influence over protracted time spans. Such an approach, arguably, fails to capture the complex, multifaceted pattern of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century press activity,⁶ and hence the true political ramifications of such activity.

Drawing attention to this problem, Professor Jeremy Black has recently proposed a corrective by way of a more nuanced methodology – one that contextualizes and illustrates specific circumstances and exigencies: the precise context that gives press productions their meaning and significance.⁷

Some progress in this direction has been made,⁸ though the wider implications still await more developed analysis. Further research is also needed on the linkage between what, hitherto, has been seen in largely segregated terms; namely, the interactive nature of parliamentary and press development, focusing on areas of reciprocity and co-operation, thereby highlighting how the two institutions evolved symbiotically – becoming agencies for a pluralism of opinion and critical debate that enhanced political awareness countrywide, transcended traditional class distinctions and alignments and so facilitated the progressive liberalization of British political life. Such reassessment requires that historians broaden their frame of reference to include the cultural dimension of formalized politics – those varied adaptations (and innovations) which significantly altered social relations, notions of legitimate authority, citizenship ideals, and definitions of the ‘political nation’. The essays presented here aim to illuminate some of the features distinctive to this process, provide a sampling of current work in the field and encourage rethinking and further research. In different ways, the contributions also consider how the relationship between parliament and the press has wider relevance for the so-called ‘public sphere’ originally formulated by J. Habermas – that social space between the private world and the state in which the ‘middling classes’ – the urban bourgeoisie – would gradually expand their political consciousness, ideology and representation against a background of altered authority structures, new channels of communication, class identity, moral improvement and social reform. Various the essays tend to validate the growing notion that Habermas’

⁵ I. R. Christie, ‘The Changing Nature of Parliamentary Politics 1742–1789’, in *British Politics and Society* ed. Black, ch. 4; J. Rule, *Albion’s People. English Society 1714–1815* (1992), ch. 1.

⁶ Similarly, doubt has been expressed about the validity of assuming a simple causal connexion between the press, its associational milieu of clubs, coffee houses, taverns etc. and the growth of radicalism, as this transforms parliament simply into ‘a sphere for the conduct of public politics’ and downplays its importance in other critical areas: cf. Black, *The Politics of Britain*, p. 77. Also we must remember as has been observed of an earlier period, that ‘political knowledge and intelligence extended unevenly and with great difficulty beyond the great demographic concentrations’. *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, ed. B. Dooley and S. Baron (2001), p. 7.

⁷ *Politics and the Press in Hanoverian Britain*, ed. K. W. Schweizer and J. Black (Lewiston, 1989), introduction; Black, *The English Press*, p. 114.

⁸ See the bibliography in *idem*, *The English Press*; cf. Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, *passim*.

conceptual structure was perhaps too restrictive, 'enlightened' rather than narrowly 'bourgeois' (at least in social terms), being a more accurate depiction of the public sphere since the political discourse shaping its transformation combined input from both conservative as well as reformist elements.⁹

That the underlying impetus of this phenomenon is pragmatically related – at least in part – to the adaptive capacity of the English state, emerges clearly from Professor Black's opening paper on 'Parliament, the Press and Foreign Policy' – the latter being a critical area of legislative concern as 'it was frequently controversial and involved in its formulation, execution and debate all the leading political institutions and forces in the country'.¹⁰ Challenging the Clarkian paradigm of parliament as authoritarian part of a reactionary regime, doggedly resistant to change, Black demonstrates by contrast, that the Commons was a permeable forum for policy discussion, ministerial contention and even public opinion – in the author's view, more open to debate than constitutional arrangements might suggest and far from inflexible over policy.¹¹ This amplifies other recent work indicating that currents of change did not threaten stability in the state, but actually benefited, and were utilized by the existing ruling *élite*, in both centre and locality.¹² Part of their governing repertoire, in addition to patronage, political alliances and parliamentary management, involved the astute manipulation of propaganda notably the newspaper press, especially that of the metropolis which, since the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695, had flourished to become an important part of the capital's socio-political fabric.¹³ (The provincial press, too, expanded, in circulation and sophistication – a clear response to the ever-growing demand nationwide for news, foreign as well as domestic.)¹⁴

Anxious to attract the widest readership possible, newspapers, in articulating public opinion could (and did) claim to represent the political nation; this, consequently, prompted politicians – whether in office or opposition – to fashion a climate of

⁹ A point recently emphasized by H. M. Scott, 'The 18th Century: Forty Years On', *International History Review*, XXIV (2002), 856–63. J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). For initial reactions see P. Hohendahl, 'Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture: Jürgen Habermas and his critics', *New German Critique*, XVI (1979), 89–119. Cf. *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed. C. Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), esp. pp. 1–50. P. Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1999); *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820*, ed. H. Barker and S. Burrows (Cambridge, 2002), introduction; H. Mah, 'Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians', *Journal of Modern History*, LXXII (2000), 153–82.

¹⁰ *British Politics and Society*, ed. Black, p. 147.

¹¹ Cf. J. Black, 'Parliament and Foreign Policy 1739–1763', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* XII (1992), 121–42; K. W. Schweizer, 'British Foreign Policy in the 18th century', *History of European Ideas*, XIV (1992), 275–82.

¹² Porter, 'English Society in the Eighteenth Century', pp. 29–52; P. Corrigan and D. Sayer, *The Great Arch. English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 1985). *An Imperial State at War. Britain from 1689–1815*, ed. L. Stone (1994), esp. ch. 5. Cf. J. Epstein, *Radical Expression. Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (Oxford, 1994), chs 4–5.

¹³ Brewer, *Party Ideology*, ch. 3. Cf. F. S. Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England 1476–1776* (Urbana, 1965); M. Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole* (1987); L. Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press 1772–1792* (Lincoln, Neb., 1962); *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. M. Harris and A. Lee (Cranbury, NJ, 1986); A. Jones, *Powers of the Press. Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth Century England* (Aldershot, 1996); R. Astbury, 'The Renewing of the Licensing Act in 1693 and its Lapse in 1695', *Library*, XXXIII (1978), 296–322.

¹⁴ G. A. Garfield, *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper* (Oxford, 1962).

opinion favourable to their cause by exploiting the medium of print (in its various forms), this creating a wider awareness of national issues among the public at large. It would, nevertheless, be mistaken stresses, Professor Black, to posit a simplistic cause and effect relationship between policy formulation and popular pressure – what one might call teleological progressivism. In fact, policy – its goals, timing and implementation – all too often depended on political exigencies of the moment rather than extra parliamentary discontent however expressed or some hazy ameliorative impulse effectively foreshadowing the modern democratic state. Moreover, content analysis has shown that well into the nineteenth century, many papers were initially launched for economic/financial rather than purely political reasons.¹⁵

Still, in proving receptive to print media – however much its impact might fluctuate with circumstances – parliament legitimized the press as the vehicle par excellence of news and opinion, making it a vital component of the political process and so permitting that process to become more responsive, consultative, and accessible. It is here, as Professor Black has noted elsewhere,¹⁶ that the case for an increasingly ‘open society’ – in the sense of a society prepared to allow the free discussion, explanation and modification of policy – can be made most forcefully. This also has notable implications for the ‘public sphere’ since, by operating in a malleable, consensual frame (despite inevitable tensions) parliament and the press widened the context in which decisions were made, altered the traditional balance of coercion and consent, and thus made possible that gradual transformation of social relations, so essential to Habermas’ conceptual model.¹⁷

Interesting evidence of press influence on politics at an earlier period is presented in the substantive essay by Professor McJimsey. There he makes the case that already from 1688, following the ‘Glorious Revolution’, the press supplied substance and intellectual guidance to parliamentary debates concerning the proper strategy to be pursued against the aggressions of Louis XIV – debates which, widely publicized, permeated the political discourse decision makers devised to guide and explain their actions. It was, moreover, within the public parameters of such debates that newspapers (and pamphlets) acquired ample opportunities for pro or anti government intervention and comment. This meant there was a need for ministers (or spokesmen) to accommodate their tactics and interpretation of events to the demands of self-interest, domestic pressures, international dynamics and broader national accountability as reinforced by and refracted through the press.

Newspapers, it is argued in the editor’s paper, were also manifestly instrumental in adding a public dimension to parliamentary politics during the era of the American and French revolutions. Central to this development was the legalization (after 1771)¹⁸ of printed parliamentary debates – an event which made the press a prime constituent, if

¹⁵ M. Peters, ‘Historians and the Eighteenth Century English Press: A Review of Possibilities and Problems’, *New Zealand Journal of History and Politics*, XV (1987), 41–2.

¹⁶ *British Politics and Society*, ed. Black, p. 10.

¹⁷ G. Eley, ‘Re-Thinking the Political: Social History and Political Culture in 18th and 19th Century Britain’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, XXI (1981); J. Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001), ch. 1.

¹⁸ Cf. P.D.G. Thomas, ‘The Beginning of Parliamentary Reporting in Newspapers, 1768–1774’, *English Historical Review*, LXXIV (1959), 624–36; A. Aspinall, ‘The Reporting and Publishing of House of

not creator of a 'public sphere of politics', but one, it must be qualified, mediated by the rhetorical idiosyncrasies of individual papers and their political affiliations at any given moment.¹⁹ At the same time, in affecting positively the internal mechanics of newspaper management itself, parliament aided the growth of a confident, informed and vigorous middle-class press able to articulate the political demands arising from rapid socio-economic change.²⁰ As such the press ensured that political manoeuvres in the centre were refracted through a growing cross section of societal scrutiny and judication while parliament increasingly became a forum for the advancement (though not always) of public aspirations.

Throughout this process, parliament and the press, as social institutions, were not dialectically opposed, standing in a vertical relationship of 'authority' *vs.* 'subordination', mastery and compliance, but on a horizontal level of interdependence and consensus: mutually reinforcing in a shared environment; functionally distinct yet also congruent. Both were integral to the broader phenomenon of 'political culture' which they helped sustain and elaborate, just as they themselves were shaped, transformed and reintegrated once new issues and attitudes were articulated.²¹ This conclusion provides validation of Professor Ian Christie's Ford lectures where, discussing revolutionary agitation in the 1790s and after, he advocated a similar focus on the resilient qualities of Britain's parliamentary systems: an aptitude for self-adjustment that allowed the country to withstand the often turbulent if not violent constitutional challenges of radical dissent.²²

The extent to which communicative practices ultimately transformed national politics is also stressed in Professor Nicholas Rogers's essay by reference to the expanding symbiosis between metropolitan and provincial papers, an associational network of communication which assured that affairs of state received immediate and detailed notice within and outside London alike. Thus the press (as public forum) functioned both as indicator and stimulant of burgeoning political perceptions nationwide,

¹⁸ (continued) Commons Debates, 1771–1834', in *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier*, ed. R. Pares and A.J.P. Taylor (1956), pp. 233–8.

¹⁹ See on this D. Wahrman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Language of Class in the 1790s', *Past and Present*, No. 136 (1992), 83–113. This points in the same direction as J. G. A. Pocock's identification of different languages within contemporary political discourse and Quentin Skinner's illustration of how linguistic actions are integral to processes of self-legitimation. Cf. D. Boucher, *Texts in Contexts. Revisionist Methods for Studying the History of Ideas* (Dordrecht, 1985), pp. 151–250. It is also reminiscent of J. Sommerville's contention that the 'decontextualizing and deconstructing effects of publishing are part of its essential nature'. See J. Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England. Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (Oxford, 1996), p. 3.

²⁰ Cf. M. Harris, 'The Management of the London Newspaper Press', *Publishing History*, IV (1978), 95–112.

²¹ For a heuristic definition of political culture in this context see K.M. Barker, *The Political Culture of the Old Regime* (Oxford, 1987). Cf. *Language, Print and Electoral Politics 1790–1832*, ed. H. Barker and D. Vincent (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. xxxviii–xxxix.

²² Cf. I. R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth Century Britain. Reflections on the British Avoidance of Revolution* (Oxford, 1984). See also: *idem*, *Wars and Revolution. England 1760–1815* (1982). I wish to acknowledge the late Professor Christie's stimulating discussions on this point in the early 1980s, for allowing me to develop my ideas in his seminars, and for his helpful comments on my work in general. Cf. L. Colley, 'The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760–1820', *Past and Present* No. 102 (1984), 104–30. E. Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia. Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain 1789–1840* (2000).

transcending traditional class distinctions and creating new notions of 'political and social space' expressed in popular disaffection and radical foment outside organized party politics.²³ Thus official pandering to popular demands, showcased by the Palliser trial, could easily 'spawn a licentious freedom of the street' to quote Professor Rogers, manifesting itself in public disturbances which became an outlet for pent up social and economic grievances, quite often unrelated to the topic of contention.²⁴ Such a development contributed to what Negt and Kluge, in their post structural critique of Habermas have called 'alternative public spheres or counter publics', a more diversified model, both structural and linguistic of the radical movement reflected in print. This attempt to pluralize the public sphere has been linked with a radical democratic challenge to liberal theory according to which 'a central role of the media should be defined as assisting the equitable negotiation or arbitration of competing interests through democratic processes'.²⁵ These in turn inspired and dominated discussions of independence, citizen rights and the constitutional role of the crown – issues which the newspaper press, in its coverage of parliamentary proceedings constantly kept at the forefront of public attention as the decades passed. Hence in radical circles, a case such as Palliser's easily became conflated with issues of desired electoral reform and was the perfect *cause célèbre* for those ideologues who advocated a thorough overhaul of government to be executed not by parliament – considered hopelessly corrupt – but, once enfranchised, by the wider political nation.

This conclusion bears upon other work of recent years, indicating that by the late eighteenth early nineteenth century, amidst the growth of press enhanced populist pressures, constituted authority as embodied in parliament became steadily more aware of and responsive to 'new ideologies of independence and reform',²⁶ in the process creating a modified institutional context for political action. On this basis a potentially divisive radicalism was preempted by accommodation emanating from above giving rise to political initiatives that in turn led to the call 'for a more rational public authority' and the concept of a 'larger national interest'.²⁷ In this process, parliament would be an ongoing equitable mediator between the two spheres, while the press served the correspondingly essential function of linking metropolis and provinces; welding together formerly disparate communities into a more cohesive

²³ See Brewer, *Party Ideology*, chs 8, 9; *idem*, 'English Radicalism in the Age of George III', in *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Princeton, 1980) pp. 330–60; H. T. Dickinson, 'Radicals and Reformers in the Age of Wilkes and Wyvill', in *British Politics and Society*, ed. Black, ch. 5; A. Hone, *For the Cause of Truth. Radicalism in London 1796–1821* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 49–74.

²⁴ As was also the earlier and more famous case of Lord Bute. See K. W. Schweizer, 'English Xenophobia in the 18th Century – The Case of Lord Bute', *Scottish Tradition*, XXII (1997), 6–25.

²⁵ K. Gilmartin, *Print Politics. The Press and Radical Opposition in Early 19th Century England* (1996), p. 6; O. Negt and A. Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience. Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis, 1993); J. Vernon, *Politics and the People. A Study in English Political Culture, 1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993); O. Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791–1819* (Oxford, 1984), introduction. See also the essays in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis, 1993), esp. pp. 105–31.

²⁶ *Language, Print and Electoral Politics*, ed. Barker and Vincent, p. x.

²⁷ G. Eley 'Re-Thinking the Political', p. 430. Cf. J. Money, *Experience and Identity. Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760–1800* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 28–9.

political unit and advancing the notions of 'politeness and civility' as essential to a well ordered society.²⁸

With traditional patterns of politics thus reshaping, there arose a concomitant need for revised governmental techniques of press management—the subject of Dr Ellis Wasson's paper which challenges historical orthodoxy by placing the whig party's well chronicled difficulties with the press alongside their contrastingly successful sponsorship of the *Penny Magazine*; an enterprise calling for initiative, resilience and imagination. Wasson's skillful exegesis of neglected primary and secondary sources shows how the whigs—relying on political operatives with press savvy, men like Edward Ellice and Joseph Parkes—exploited newly available production/distribution techniques to enhance their media visibility and broaden public support. Indeed, Wasson argues forcefully, in creating the 'first genuine mass market publication in history', whig leaders not only showed perceptive adaptability to the new spirit of the age, but also expanded the potentiality of print, advocated ideals of 'progress' and 'enlightenment' and thus, by containing the potential appeal of radical extremists, engendered considerable stabilizing influence within society.²⁹ Innovatively deploying print to transmit information over space and time, allowed the whigs to communicate more effectively with the expanding electorate of the reform period, while public arenas—meetings, debating societies, petition campaigns—combined to reinforce the representation of emancipatory ideas and images in the popular press.³⁰

The degree to which the politics of print, radically manifested in the so-called 'new journalism', had intensified by the early twentieth century is thoughtfully explored by Professor Ian Fletcher who discusses how parliament was pressurized by a radical press into passing the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1912. Aimed at addressing the lamentable issue of 'white slavery', this legislation, after prolonged delay, was in large measure the culmination of intense exertion by the socialist and suffragist press whose concerted efforts, it is demonstrated, served the critical function of ideologically integrating feminists and industrial workers alike into a cohesive (if transitory) political culture that yielded higher levels of participation, politicization and independence: a different mentality of legitimate governance. In his recent revisionist work on the British press, Professor Black has noted that during the post chartist decades, 'there was a broadening out of public culture without any matching degree of articulation or popularization of radical languages or options'.³¹ From Professor Fletcher's essay it now appears that the interpretation of print and popular agitation as modulated

²⁸ *Language, Print and Electoral Politics*, ed. Barker and Vincent, pp. x–xi; Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, pp. 6–7; F. O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties. The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 250–86. Cf. N. Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998); J. Black, 'The Press and Politics in the 18th Century', *Media History* VIII (2002), 175–82.

²⁹ As G. Eley once perceptively observed, 'Though an insurrectionary tradition became firmly rooted in the popular movement after 1800, and radicals seldom died from violent confrontation with the forces of order, this implied no democratic form or principle. In fact, despite its revolutionary potential in a context of severely restricted franchise, the panacea of universal suffrage left the radical movement especially vulnerable to "reformist" concessions of a more limited kind.' 'Re-Thinking the Political', p. 441.

³⁰ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 20. Cf. Epstein, *Radical Expression*, pp. 32–5.

³¹ J. Black, *The English Press 1621–1861* (Stroud, 2001) p. 192. Cf. J. Saville, 'The Ideology of Labourism', in *Knowledge and Belief in Politics. The Problem of Ideology*, ed. R. Benwick et al. (1973), pp. 273–6.

through and dramatized by the 'white slavery' controversy engendered more refined discursive strategies which gave at least temporary ideological cohesion to unevenly integrated class interests,³² and reconstituted parliament for constructive social and programmatic intervention. This in turn was to advance and further reformulate the 'public sphere', in the sense of making it a structured setting in which ideological contestation could take place,³³ and wherein became embedded the leftist political alliances of the Edwardian era. The unifying impact, however, of such contestation for the labour and women's movement as a whole, beyond the crisis discussed by Professor Fletcher, still awaits proper demonstration.

That the symbiosis between parliament, its leaders and the press continued at an accelerating rate as the century proceeded, is clearly illustrated in Professor Thompson's article on the colourful career of Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Times* and *Daily Mail*. Prematurely dead at age 57, Northcliffe has traditionally been overshadowed by other notable contemporaries, but now we are offered a fuller picture of Northcliffe's activities from the late 1890s until the end of the First World War, the central period of his power and influence. In persuasive detail, Professor Thompson not only demonstrates that Northcliffe played a vital role in the 'shell controversy' which hastened a change of government in 1915, but also in the critical debate on conscription and subsequently in the United States as an unofficial propagandist for the British cause prior to American entry into the war. Drawing on his recent monograph study of the press lord,³⁴ Professor Thompson disposes of numerous misconceptions, throws new light on the intricate relationship between military/political leaders and public opinion in a wartime setting, and ends by concluding – with validity I think – that Northcliffe's influence especially after 1914, 'graphically demonstrates the magnified power of the Press in the new conditions of total war', and one might add as 'an active force in history',³⁵ that has endured to the present day.

In conclusion, it is only left to say that if this volume encourages greater integration between staple, often narrowly defined, political and (theoretically more sensitive) social history, its purpose will have been achieved. Such integration would – at the very least – broaden perspectives on British political culture, of which parliament and the press were – and one might argue – still remain an integral part.

³² See the interesting reflections in *Communication and Citizenship. Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*, ed. P. Dalgrew and C. Spark (1991), pp. 27–31.

³³ Cf. A. Reid, 'Politics and Economics in the Formation of the British Working Class: A Response to H.F. Moorhouse', *Social History* III (1978), 347–62.

³⁴ J. L. Thompson, *Northcliffe. Press Baron in Politics* (New York, 2000).

³⁵ B. Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, p. 2.