

could not afford was to be dull; and straight, objective information was not supposed to be interesting. So, the reporter who wanted to be successful looked for rumours, scoops and leaks. He wrote today on the news of tomorrow. He put the emphasis on personalities rather than on events. He appraised rather than informed. He was interested in the surface rather than in performance. He had few real political friends, but he was grateful to those who enabled him to produce his daily article, or his news broadcast "every hour on the hour". In the old days, he used to work hard to find an official source for his information. Later on, it became easier for him to rely on cabinet leaks originating from ministers' offices.

This general situation was always tempered by noble exceptions, and has improved in the last few years. But, at least until very recently, the minister who was not pre-occupied by his public image, as projected by the mass media, could not continue for long to be a successful politician.

There is here a paradoxical situation which I would like to explore more fully. My contention is—and I could substantiate it by an impressive set of facts—that the mass media do not have a decisive impact on public opinion, at least in so far as politics is concerned. It would take too long for me to outline the factors which account for this situation. I will add, however, that most politicians share my view and recognize, in theory at least, that the mass media do not effectively guide or faithfully reflect public opinion. Ministers could, therefore, afford to ignore them, at least up to a point. A few successful politicians—and I will not mention any names tonight—have done just that.

Until recently, however, most politicians were "newsworms." They were as fond of rumours, scoops and personal stories, as most reporters. Both groups lived in the same isolated world, although they usually despised each other. This cohabitation produced strange results. In most cases the politician was almost unconsciously mystified by the reporter. Thus, while the mass media had little impact on the public, they had a great deal of influence on the politician. There lay the secret of the rising power of the press.

It was in this restricted context that a minister could not ignore the mass media with impunity. If he enjoyed a good press, he was envied and respected or feared by his colleagues. If he had no press, he had no future. If he had a bad press, he was in serious trouble indeed, because he became, even for

his own associates and colleagues, a political liability in spite of the qualities he might have. That is why it became almost essential for a successful minister to have a dual personality, to smile even if he did not feel like it, to talk when he should have remained silent, and to say the "right" thing, in spite of his own convictions. That is why ministers also had two ears, one for the press and one for their policy advisers. What they heard from their two ears was often incompatible. The danger was that the desire to preserve the public image might prevail over the requirements of the public interest. In any case, during that evolution, it became evident that civil servants had to share with the press the monopolistic influence they used to have on ministers. From then on, ministers had to live in the limelight. That new position also contributed to the twilight of civil servants.

The power of the press and of the mass media may be declining, for the time being at least, but there is another new pattern emerging which will tend also to reduce the influence of civil servants while not contributing to increasing the importance of ministers. It has to do with the working of Parliament. In the immediate past, Parliament had really very little to do with the legislative program, which originated mainly from the Establishment, which also prepared the ministerial speeches required for its presentation. It was expected that once a bill had been accepted by Cabinet, on the advice of the Establishment, it would also be approved without modification by Parliament. The Opposition could speak as long as it wished, but it would have been a great sign of weakness on the part of a minister to accept any of its suggestions. As to the Government backbenchers, they were expected to be seen when votes were called, but not to be heard.

That situation is changing quite rapidly. We can even speak of a quiet revolution in Parliament. The private member, after having lost his administrative influence, which is a disguised definition of patronage, is now acquiring a legislative role which he should have had all along. Several factors account for this change—the improvement in the quality of members, the succession of minority governments and the length of sessions.

It is fair to say that the evolution really originated from the Government side in 1963, again as a result to a certain extent, I would readily accept, of the minority position of the Government. Competent backbenchers became tired of having to sit in the house for long hours and months with very little to do.