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A sovereign editor: Arthur Mann's *Yorkshire Post* and its crusade against appeasement, 1938-1939

During Britain's appeasement of Nazi Germany, the British press was reluctant to criticise government policy and it came under pressure not to do so. The most powerful national titles were determined to support Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's efforts to appease Hitler. One regional Conservative title, the Yorkshire Post stood out against the consensus. This bold stance was the creation of its editor, Arthur Mann. This paper examines the Yorkshire Post's editorial opposition to appeasement between the Anschluss of March 1938 and the entry of German forces into Prague in March 1939. It explores how Mann resisted pressure from his Conservative proprietors to abandon his stance and examines his understanding of his duty as editor

Keywords: Arthur Mann, *Yorkshire Post*, appeasement, proprietorial pressures

Introduction

Newspapers rarely flatter their rivals. So when, in November 1939, the *Manchester Guardian* praised the *Yorkshire Post*, it was not entirely sincere. The praise marked the merger of the *Yorkshire Post* with the *Leeds Mercury*. This, the *Manchester Guardian* declared, spelled death for a distinctive voice in British public life. Only then did it praise the corpse:

Soundness in judgement, tenacity of purpose, loyalty to principle, the courage to be unpopular ... and even to offend the Party if the Party were not right; these qualities which are the more precious for being rare, have marked the *Yorkshire Post* throughout

the long controversy about British foreign policy which began with Mr Chamberlain's Premiership (*Manchester Guardian* 1939).

Responsible for these qualities was Arthur Mann, editor of the *Yorkshire Post* between 1919 and 1939. An austere individual with 'penetrating observation' and 'shrewd judgment' (*The Times* 1972), Mann was the first of thirteen children of Alderman James Mann, twice mayor of Warwick. He attended Warwick School before joining the *Western Mail* as an apprentice reporter. His first editorship was of the *Birmingham Despatch* between 1905 and 1912. In 1915 he moved to London as editor of the *Evening Standard*. His appointment at the *Yorkshire Post* came after the death of John Phillips, editor 1903-1919. The official historians of the *Yorkshire Post*, Gibb and Beckwith (1954: 62), record that Phillips relished leader writing. Mann was content to delegate this task, but he gave precise and detailed instructions to his leader writers. If the words were not his own, the *Yorkshire Post's* leader columns certainly expressed Mann's opinions.

Mann's bravery over foreign policy was recognised in his lifetime. He was made a Companion of Honour in 1941. And his peers held his work in high regard. James Margach (1978: 53), doyen of the parliamentary lobby for nearly half a century, complimented Mann's *Yorkshire Post* for maintaining 'a robust independence'. Historians, too, have recognised his work (see, e.g., Cockett 1989; Conboy 2011; Hucker 2011; Koss 1990; Meznar 2005). Absent from these assessments have been analyses of the *Yorkshire Post's* coverage of appeasement and what it can tell us about Arthur Mann's understanding of the role of editor. This paper attempts to fill these gaps, using qualitative content analysis of the newspaper's editorials to examine Mann's policy and style.

Appeasement

My question is not whether appeasement was virtuous. Since the first post-war historians of the era concluded that it certainly was not (see, e.g., Churchill 1948; Namier 1948; Wheeler-Bennett 1948), debate on this topic has been fierce. Revisionists have argued that Chamberlain lacked plausible alternatives and post-revisionists, inspired by Parker's study (1993), have returned to themes first raised in *Guilty men* by Michael Foot, Peter Howard and Frank Owen under the collective pseudonym 'Cato' (1940). Historians in both groups recognise that appeasement as Chamberlain deployed it changed over time, incorporating elements

including pacifism, isolationism and deterrence. My purpose is to explore how the editor of one of the few organs of public opinion that challenged it contested its value and purpose.

Gibb and Beckwith (1954) attribute the newspaper's initial opposition to Mann's support for the League of Nation's policy of collective security. Middlemas (1972) shows that this relied upon deterrence, which Chamberlain abandoned in the face of economic weakness and in favour of appeasement. Mann was sceptical about this from the moment Germany reoccupied the Rhineland in March 1936. His antipathy was reinforced by the views of Charles Tower, his chief leader writer, who had been a correspondent in Germany before the First World War. The *Yorkshire Post's* representative in Vienna, L. R. Murray, who had interviewed the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, after the latter had met Hitler, also encouraged him. Murray wrote to Mann that Schuschnigg told him: 'Hitler banged the table and shouted: "I shall get my way because I am ready to run the risk of war and my opponents are not"' (Gibb and Beckwith 1954: 84). This confirmed Mann's view that appeasing Hitler would encourage aggression. And, following the entry of German troops into Austria in March 1938, the *Yorkshire Post's* criticisms of appeasement intensified. Stedman (2015: 33) notes that Mann also revived his newspaper's advocacy of alliances.

Meznar observes that, in his response to the *Anschluss*, Arthur Mann made his newspaper a critic of the British government. 'It had,' he writes, 'failed to appreciate that Hitler's action followed the plan outlined in *Mein Kampf*' (Meznar 2005: 161). In its leader column on 16 March 1938, the *Yorkshire Post* accused British ministers of uttering unrealistic words of moderation and reassurance, while 'some of the worst Jew-baiters in Germany were even then arriving in Austria'. It warned that the Cabinet consisted of men, 'some of whom, at least, are temperamentally unfitted to grasp the realities of the national or the international problem, and still less qualified firmly to deal with them' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938a). This was uncompromising stuff at a time when, as Middlemas (1972: 288) explains, a distinct lack of urgency pervaded the mainstream British press. Among the Conservative titles, the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *The Times* could be relied upon to champion appeasement, and the left press had grave doubts about any alternative. Mann's position was lonely when, as Hucker (2011: 37) shows, Chamberlain's policy had the support of the majority of British newspapers.

Methodology

This study examines the *Yorkshire Post's* opposition to appeasement between 16 March 1938 and 17 March 1939. This period covers the most intense phase of appeasement, beginning with the *Anschluss*, ending with Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and including the Munich Crisis. It includes the months during which Adamthwaite (1983: 281) identifies 'a sizable body of opinion critical of Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy' and 'extensive official influence' working to prevent its appearance in newspapers. Hucker (2011: 36) reminds us that, in July 1938, Chamberlain told a National Government rally in Kettering, Northamptonshire, that, when he recalled the Great War, 'I am bound to say again what I have said before ... in war, whichever side may call itself the victor, there are no winners, but all are losers.' The British Prime Minister was a zealous appeaser. He believed it was popular and, as Hucker (2011) shows, his belief was reinforced by newspaper support.

Arthur Mann faced stiff opposition and it did not come only from the Cabinet and his rivals. The *Yorkshire Post* was a Conservative newspaper. Its first issue of 2 July 1866 explained: 'The political principles of this journal are Conservative' (*Yorkshire Post* 1866) and these principles had not changed by the late 1930s. Published by the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Company Ltd, the appeasement era newspaper was, as Cockett (1989: 100) observes, 'still financially run by and for the Conservative Party in Yorkshire'. Despite this umbilical link to the party of government, Margach (1978: 53) applauds the newspaper's 'robust independence'. Koss (1990) recognises that it went further in its hostility to Chamberlain's foreign policy than any other Conservative title.

A search for all the terms 'appeasement', 'Prime Minister' and 'Hitler' in the *Yorkshire Post's* online archive between the dates specified above produces 224 hits. From these articles I have analysed leaders and other columns that plainly express the newspaper's opinion.

After the *Anschluss*

The leader column of 21 March 1938 reflected on German conduct in Austria, contemplated the emerging Nazi threat to Czechoslovakia and reminded readers of Germany's part in Spain's civil war. It called for a decisive statement as to 'how the power and influence of the whole British Empire shall be used in the preservation of peace and ... the preservation of liberty'. It continued:

Every reasonable man in this country wishes to see appeasement, but no appeasement is worth the name if the whole continent is to continue in a state of uncertainty and terror as to what act of tyranny, heralded by an ultimatum, enforced by invasion, and followed by ruthless inquisition of opinion and expropriation of private property, is to come next (*Yorkshire Post* 1938b).

On 11 April, as the result of the plebiscite endorsing Austria's absorption into the Reich became known, the *Yorkshire Post* turned its fire on Hitler himself:

He says that Germany has no dictator. But what else is a regime under which the free opinions of an intellectually great people are completely silenced? That intolerance exhibited in Germany, and now also in unhappy Austria, is recognised to threaten also the freedom of other peoples (*Yorkshire Post* 1938c).

Mann was playing with fire. Chamberlain favoured emollient treatment of the Führer and he had the support of Sir Neville Henderson, Britain's Ambassador to Berlin, who repeatedly warned that Hitler took press criticism extremely seriously. In March 1938, Henderson met Hitler and concluded that any progress towards enduring peace was stymied by British criticism of the Nazi leader. 'Nothing could be done,' Hitler told Henderson, 'until the press campaign against him in England had ceased' (Henderson 1940: 115). Hodgson (2007: 323) notes that the Ambassador later explained: 'It would not have mattered so much had Hitler been a normal individual, but he was unreasonably sensitive to newspaper, and especially British newspaper criticism.'

Arthur Mann understood the risks. Occasionally he would temper criticism with attempts to understand the new Germany. In May 1938, an example appeared under the headline: 'The lighter side of Nazi Berlin' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938d). It noted that a system of cut-price seats for 'working-class audiences', organised by the Nazi Party's Strength through Joy organisation (*Kraft durch Freude*), had 'benefited the theatres quite considerably'. It was anodyne copy to which even Sir Neville might have assented. But, Mann did not conceal his antipathy towards Nazism for long. In a leader on 20 May, the *Yorkshire Post* warned that Germany's plan was to 'isolate and destroy France as a prelude to colonising Russia' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938e).

Mann's determination to advertise the case against appeasement months before its failure became apparent was made plain in two articles published on the same page in June 1938. The first, a leader, condemned aggression and called for the formation of a 'real league of opposition' to oppose it (*Yorkshire Post* 1938f). The second was a review of a collection of speeches by Winston Churchill. If the rebellious Churchill was a telling choice for a Conservative newspaper, so was Mann's choice of reviewer. John Dundas,¹ a recent graduate in history of Christ Church College, Oxford, was a foreign affairs specialist who had completed his studies in Heidelberg before joining the *Yorkshire Post*. He was already a critic of the Chamberlain Government and would go on to report for the newspaper from Czechoslovakia during the Munich crisis. Dundas's review made it plain that he shared his editor's contempt for appeasers:

Whether one regards Mr Winston Churchill as the heaven-sent leader ... or whether one uses 'Churchillism' as a political swear-word ... all must agree on this – that Mr Churchill makes it perfectly clear where he stands and what he wants. ... In a fog it is so much better to go straight in any direction than to grope in circles (*Yorkshire Post* 1938g).

The Czech crisis

The *Yorkshire Post's* hostility was not yet unremitting, but it was persistent. Thus, on 13 July, it warned that neither of the Axis dictators 'interprets "appeasement" in the same sense as it is employed by the British Government'. Indeed, the international outlook could not be improved while Berlin continued 'to point to Czechoslovakia as a thorn in the side of Germany which the Reich, accordingly, has a right in self-defence to rip out and destroy' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938h). Britons wanted their government to assert itself in pursuit of a fair peace. Eight days later, the leader column directed similar criticism against the Prime Minister himself. He was infuriatingly vague and: 'Straightforward utterances are the best way to prepare a stable peace' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938i).

An opportunity for candour arose on 26 July. The Prime Minister had agreed to a debate on 'the international situation' in the House of Commons. The *Yorkshire Post* hoped he would put an end to 'uncontrolled and conflicting versions' of British policy. Appeasement would be tested against two measures: whether Britain would allow Czechoslovakia to be 'so weakened as to involve the dissolution of the state',

and whether it would prevent Hitler and Mussolini creating in Spain 'a subservient Fascist-Nazi regime'. To date, requests to Mr Chamberlain for clarity on these issues had elicited 'a perfect and absolute blank'. The *Yorkshire Post* wanted to know 'whether the Dictators are now more minded to pursue a course in all areas which will make the maintenance of peace consistent with the preservation of the fundamental liberties of the Democratic States' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938j).

Arthur Mann reported the debate with a masterpiece of presentation. He foregrounded the speech made by Sir Archibald Sinclair, leader of the Liberal Party. Sinclair warned that allowing the dictators to go on increasing their power 'would undermine the foundations of law, justice and international good faith'. The *Yorkshire Post* contrasted this helpful version of its own opinion with the Prime Minister's Panglossian blandishments. Chamberlain chided Sir Archibald for misrepresenting government policy before confirming that the Liberal leader had described it perfectly: 'I cannot imagine anyone in any part of the House who would disagree with what we have so frequently declared to be the main aim of the Government's foreign policy, namely the establishment and maintenance of peace and the removal of all causes of possible conflict, and the amelioration of grievances between one country and another' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938k). The leader lamented the weakness exposed in Chamberlain's approach by its confrontation with the Führer's demands. The Prime Minister had told the House of his plan to send a British mediator to the Sudetenland to make suggestions for a solution to the crisis between the Czech Government and the Sudeten Germans. As Cornfield (1964: 101-102) explains, he did not reveal that the Czech Government had been placed under irresistible pressure to accept the proposal. Instead, Chamberlain conveyed a misleading impression that the Czechs had requested a mediator. The man chosen for the role was the Liberal Lord Runciman. The *Yorkshire Post* noted that his mission might be achieved 'by virtually forcing Czechoslovakia to accept conditions which would make that country ... a mere Nazified vassal of Germany' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938l).

Before the Munich Crisis, the *Yorkshire Post* was not a lone critic of appeasement. Gannon (1971: 154-160) shows that the Liberal *News Chronicle* and Labour-supporting *Daily Herald* advertised the need to oppose German ambitions by force if necessary. He notes that, early in 1938, the *Manchester Guardian* also recognised that the

fall of Czechoslovakia would create an intolerable threat to peace. Conservative titles found little to criticise. *The Times* believed Chamberlain could do no wrong and expressed its view in the immediate aftermath of the so-called Weekend Crisis of 21-22 May 1938.² 'The British Government's policy is clear to all the world,' it explained. 'It is to urge moderation and peaceful methods, to promote mutual understanding of difficulties, and above all to face the fundamental problem of unrest among the minorities and to press for its solution' (*The Times* 1938a). Chamberlain had equal reason to be happy with the mass-market Conservative dailies, the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*. They believed Britain should avoid any entanglement in the affairs of central and Eastern Europe. The *Daily Telegraph* chose not to question Hitler's good faith (*Daily Telegraph* 1938). Among the Conservative press, the *Yorkshire Post* was lonely and forthright.

But, before the Munich Crisis in September 1938, Arthur Mann avoided irrevocable condemnation of Chamberlain and his policy. No sooner had the *Anschluss* reinforced his scepticism than the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Association encouraged Mann to keep his opinion out of his newspaper. Neville Chamberlain met Mann on 21 March 1938. Editor encouraged Premier to be robust in his dealings with Hitler and Mussolini. Chamberlain declined, insisted that he was 'much too busy to read the provincial newspapers' and exited announcing: 'I'm afraid I have an appointment at 11.15 and it is now 11.14' (Crowson 1998: 263-264). Chairman of the company Rupert Beckett wrote to his editor on 23 March 1938, warning that he had read 'with growing concern day-by-day the Y.P. leaders devoted to foreign policy', and expressing concern that Mann might believe Chamberlain should be deposed (Mann Papers 1938).

One consequence was that, even as the *Yorkshire Post's* criticisms became more frequent and direct, the newspaper left open a route to reconciliation. This the editor attempted by deploying a definition of appeasement distinct from the Prime Minister's. Chamberlain's version had come to mean little more than the maintenance of peace at any price short of the surrender of British sovereignty. For Mann it must mean eliminating causes of conflict while adhering to principles of democracy and justice. It would be worthless if it did not permit peoples threatened by Hitler to choose their preferred forms of government. As spring 1938 turned into summer, the tension between these

two interpretations became intense. Yet still the *Yorkshire Post* resisted an irrevocable break with government, party and Prime Minister. When Lord Runciman set off for Czechoslovakia it maintained Chamberlain's fiction that his mission was not an instrument of British policy (*Yorkshire Post* 1938m). It showed similar loyalty in coverage of a speech by Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, praising Chamberlain and reaffirming that government policy towards Czechoslovakia was 'to find a solution which is just to all legitimate interests' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938n).

The road to Munich

Only as the Runciman mission stumbled did Mann move the *Yorkshire Post* towards outright condemnation of Government policy. A leader on 29 August warned that the Nazis were 'using the Sudeten Germans as a means of disintegrating Czechoslovakia in the hope that the fatally wounded state could then be used to forward Hitler's plans for domination of Central Europe' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938o). A week later another declared:

[F]ar from impressing the exponents of power politics with its wisdom, the policy of appeasement was likely to produce on them an impression of weakness rather than strength, and to suggest that we could be blackmailed into paying whatever price was necessary to avoid trouble (*Yorkshire Post* 1938p).

Yet still Mann resisted a final break with Chamberlain. Nothing could be worse, the leader warned, than for dissent at home to undermine the British government's authority at this time of national peril. Now there was palpable tension in Mann's editorial policy. The newspaper had warned that appeasement would bring dangerous consequences. It was delivering them, but Chamberlain did not face the *Yorkshire Post's* wrath. Conscious of his promise to avoid bullying the government and his proprietors' anxiety, Mann did not declare the Prime Minister unfit for office. Czechoslovakia's plight posed such a threat to peace that the *Yorkshire Post* became temporarily cautious. Reflecting on Hitler's speech at Nuremberg on 12 September, the leader column concluded that, while the Führer shook his 'mailed fist', Britain must simply remain watchful and prepared (*Yorkshire Post* 1938q).

On 15 September, with the crisis approaching boiling point, Chamberlain flew to meet the Führer at Berchtesgaden. Here, without Czech

consent, the Prime Minister conceded the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany. The *Yorkshire Post's* leader writer did not know this when he penned the paper's analysis for the edition of 16 September. He realised that Sudeten Germans who were demanding incorporation into the Reich were 'a pawn in the Nazi game'. He feared for peace, but he remained cautious. Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler would have 'enabled the British Prime Minister to appreciate the immensity of the problem'. It was 'a clear advantage' that the two men should have exchanged views at a moment of such significance (*Yorkshire Post* 1938r). Scepticism reasserted itself within days. Now the leader column warned that, in the event of any partition of Czechoslovakia, 'there will be recorded another yielding to aggression, and a further tilting of the whole balance of power in Europe on the side of tyranny' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938s).

The *Yorkshire Post* offered comprehensive coverage of the Munich Conference. This included verbatim accounts of the Anglo-French proposals that left the Czechs with no option but to concede to Hitler's demands, and the full text of correspondence between Chamberlain and Hitler (*Yorkshire Post* 1938t). It published on its letters page debate between those who were optimistic about the prospects for appeasement and those who were ashamed. Mann, however, was under intense pressure from his chairman to recognise Munich as a success for Chamberlain. Meznar (2005: 164) records that Beckett wrote to his editor on 30 September insisting that it was the *Yorkshire Post's* duty 'loyally to support this policy and to cease personal criticisms which alienate Conservative opinion'.

This pressure worked. Mann postponed comment on the Munich Agreement until the House of Commons had heard Chamberlain's explanation of it on 3 October 1938. Now he was scathing. The terms were 'harsh and unconscionable'. Hitler had threatened war to get what he wanted and Britain had bowed to his demands. 'How is it possible that we should feel confident that a man so minded will really prove peace-minded in future?' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938u). But still Mann did not personalise the issue. The *Yorkshire Post* acknowledged that the Prime Minister had been forced to negotiate under constraint. Mere hints of the editor's personal views appeared in two columns. 'Callisthenes' advised readers to pay careful attention to the words of 'the wise, fully informed leader writer' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938v). The 'London Notes and Comment' column recorded that, in the House of Commons, a 'mood of inquiry' had

now replaced the euphoria that had greeted Chamberlain's return from Munich. Labour members were sceptical about the course of events and several 'younger members of the Cabinet' shared their misgivings (*Yorkshire Post* 1938w). Leaders published immediately after Munich expose Mann's indecision. Reflecting on four days of parliamentary debate, the *Yorkshire Post* observed 'the nation remains deeply indebted to the Prime Minister for his unsparring and successful efforts to preserve the peace' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938x).

Condemnation and proprietorial pressure

If such praise was the consequence of proprietorial interference, Mann soon recovered his independence of mind and his proprietors intensified their pressure. Mezner (2005: 165) records that, by early November, the *Yorkshire Post* was sure that Hitler did not want peace and concerned that British policy amounted to 'continual retirement'. Mann's anger boiled over in a leader on 8 November 1938. Attacking *The Times* for championing appeasement, the *Yorkshire Post* declared that far from engaging in 'morbid sensationalism' – a criticism levelled by the London title – it was opposing a palpable German menace. It deplored the futility of attempting to do so through 'a policy which has not only yielded to force or the threat of force', but which had 'gravely reduced the total will and strength available in Europe for opposing such menaces'. Government policy risked further weakening of Britain's strategic position (*Yorkshire Post* 1938y). On the twentieth anniversary of the end of the First World War, Arthur Mann published a leader calculated to offend the Prime Minister. It condemned 'a policy of appeasement indistinguishable from a surrender to threats' and accused its architects of a 'tragic lack of conviction'. It concluded: 'We have not cared deeply enough for the things we won in 1918' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938z). The following day's leader promoted Anthony Eden's warnings about the threat to democracy in Europe (*Yorkshire Post* 1938a1).

As news emerged from Germany of the coordinated attacks on Jews known as *Kristallnacht*, the *Yorkshire Post* highlighted reactions from horrified opponents of Nazism. The leader on 16 November demanded a government of national unity. The *Yorkshire Post* acknowledged that it stood accused of 'lack of party loyalty', but insisted it was advancing the best of Conservative values (*Yorkshire Post* 1938b1). A leader on 19 November reflected on the results of five parliamentary by-elections that revealed public opinion to be firmly against the Govern-

ment. The newspaper lamented 'insidious propaganda from London' that continued to promote the Government's approach (*Yorkshire Post* 1938c1).

Mann was now under intense pressure from his employer. His leader columns were perceived as accusing Chamberlain of endangering the nation and misleading the public. Cockett (1989: 97) records that the editor told his chairman Chamberlain was a 'commonplace politician' when the country needed 'statesmanship and leadership'. Insisting on editorial freedom, Mann suggested that Beckett should back him or sack him. The chairman declined to demand his editor's resignation. A truce endured until 8 December when the *Yorkshire Post* attacked Chamberlain personally.

Headlined 'Encouragement of Aggression', the editorial condemned Chamberlain's foreign policy. By 'repeatedly surrendering to force', he had 'repeatedly encouraged aggression'. The Prime Minister had 'set out with a confident – indeed complacent – belief in his own ability to "talk" the two Dictators into becoming good Europeans'. His approach had invited contempt:

A Prime Minister who is by nature unfitted to deal with Dictators has habitually disregarded the advice of those most expertly qualified to correct his private judgments. If the fruits of these methods, and the complacency behind them, belonged wholly to the past, we might rightly be urged to refrain from retrospective criticism. It is because we believe that Mr Chamberlain's policy is even now threatening the safety of the realm, and is likely in the near future to threaten it with danger still graver, that we are stating in some detail our case against it (*Yorkshire Post* 1938d1).

On the same page Mann published a second editorial entitled: 'The *Yorkshire Post* and foreign policy – A reply to Conservative critics'. This addressed a motion deploring its criticisms of the Prime Minister that had been passed by the York Conservative Association. It insisted on the newspaper's duty to express its opinion and warned that: 'Nothing could finally harm the prestige of the Conservative Party more than that it should, for the sake of a Party advantage, continue to give blind support to a policy which is so gravely endangering national interests as a whole' (*Yorkshire Post* 1938e1).

Mann was at war with his proprietors, and Beckett responded immediately. He wrote to

his editor on 8 December, insisting Mann had 'no right ... to publish these extreme comments against the P.M. as the considered opinions of the Y. P'. His letter suggested that Mann might tender his resignation:

I will no longer be a part of the 'bounding down' of the P.M. by day, and this must cease. I have heard you say more than once that you will never 'write to orders', well, if you consider this letter to be an ultimatum to that effect you will of course make your decision as to the course you will adopt (cited in Mezner 2005: 167).

Beckett informed Mann that directors were 'fed up ... with this steady spate of personal criticism and recrimination' aimed at the Prime Minister (cited in Cockett 1989: 98). Cockett notes that Mann had revealed in a previous response to Beckett that he was finding it intensely stressful to run the *Yorkshire Post* in the face of criticism from his employers. Now Beckett exploited this information, telling Mann that several directors believed 'this nervous strain to be on the increase'.

Arthur Mann did not buckle. He asked the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Company 'whether it is in the true interests of a democratic country that honest expression of opinion by editors and experts trained to study public affairs should be stifled by newspaper proprietors who take their inspiration from interested ministers, from their agents or relatives'. He made a radio programme in which he asserted that responsibility for the editorial content of a newspaper must always reside 'with the man who is responsible for its daily conduct' (cited in Cockett 1989: 99). Here was pure Fourth Estate idealism advanced by an editor who had only occasionally hesitated to operate according to Whig ideals. He explained his principles in a leader column on 3 January 1939. The duty of a journalist 'is to help the public, not to help the statesman'. That other titles were failing to do this was implied by the growing popularity of private newsletters.³ Concentration of newspaper ownership was reducing the diversity of publications upon which freedom of expression depended. Social contacts between proprietors and Ministers of the Crown were promoting self-censorship. 'Fearlessly to enlighten public opinion on topics of vital national importance is the first responsibility of newspapers' (*Yorkshire Post* 1939a).

Eden's friend?

Conservative critics alleged that the *Yorkshire Post's* hostility to appeasement was informed

by Arthur Mann's obedience to the interests of Anthony Eden. His resignation as foreign secretary in February 1938 was taken to imply that Eden opposed Chamberlain's policy. This theory, promoted by the Conservative Whips, asserted that Eden's marriage to Beatrice, third daughter of Sir William Gervase Beckett, a former chairman of the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Company, placed Mann under direct pressure to promote Eden's opinions (Gibb and Beckwith 1954: 81). It was superficially plausible. Gervase Beckett was the brother of Rupert Beckett, who served as chairman of the company throughout the period under scrutiny. The Beckett family were the largest shareholders and plainly they were not reluctant to cajole Mann to promote their views. But Sir William had died in 1937 and, by the time of his resignation, Eden was estranged from Beatrice whom he knew to have been serially unfaithful. Nor need we rely on such circumstantial evidence to conclude that Arthur Mann was innocent of promoting Beckett family interests.

Correspondence between Rupert Beckett and Arthur Mann on the editorial treatment of appeasement reveals nothing to suggest that Mann was encouraged to endorse Eden's views. He agreed with aspects of Eden's critique of Chamberlain, but pressure from the Beckett family aimed to force him in the opposite direction. To the extent that Eden opposed appeasement, Mann endorsed Eden's views. His proprietors encouraged him to do the opposite. There is no evidence of favouritism. The *Yorkshire Post* endorsed the views of several opponents of appeasement, including Winston Churchill and Sir Archibald Sinclair.

The assertion that Mann was promoting Eden's career also relies on the belief that Eden was an early and principled critic of appeasement. As Rose (1982) has demonstrated, this is an imperfect description. Though Eden was later identified by Churchill himself as the 'one strong young figure standing up against long, dismal, drawling tides of drift and surrender' (Churchill 1948: 201), his resignation from government was not based on pure principle. In fact Eden's attitude towards Germany was closely aligned with Chamberlain's. As Rose (1982: 917) notes, one month before his resignation Eden wrote to Chamberlain that, 'I entirely agree that we must make every effort to come to terms with Germany'. Eden resigned because he resented Chamberlain's rejection of an offer by US President Franklin Roosevelt to engage in European diplomacy. He felt 'outraged and uneasy' (Avon 1962: 552) because Chamberlain had

issued his response to Roosevelt without consulting his foreign secretary. He also disagreed fundamentally with Chamberlain over policy towards Italy. Stedman (2015: 121) recalls that Eden expressed belief in a combination of close Anglo-French co-operation and American support as the best way to keep the peace. Mann agreed with this, but there is no evidence that he did so because Eden asked him to, or that Eden cared about the *Yorkshire Post's* opinions.

Conservative pressure

Mann did not come under pressure from Anthony Eden to oppose appeasement, but he faced persistent imprecations to support it from his proprietors. Less direct was the pressure placed on him by Conservative expectation. The *Yorkshire Post* was accustomed to enjoying excellent contacts with Conservative leaders. Williamson (1999: 80) shows that Stanley Baldwin had consulted Mann on several occasions during his premiership as had successive chairmen of the Conservative Party. However, Mezner (2005: 159) notes that Mann managed his life so as to avoid compromising his editorial independence. He eschewed personal friendships with politicians and declined political honours lest by accepting them he might appear indebted. Cockett (1989: 62) recalls that Mann wrote to Baldwin following the latter's offer of a knighthood, explaining: 'I feel that a journalist who receives a title, particularly if that title be suggested as a recognition of political services, may ... lessen his power to aid the cause he has at heart.'

In 1919, Mann had been tempted away from his editorship of the London *Evening Standard* to edit the *Yorkshire Post*. His time at the London title had been highly successful and he had created such enduring features as 'The Londoner's Diary' (*The Times* 1972). He went to Leeds in the certain knowledge that he was moving to the helm of a powerful bastion of northern Conservatism. Cockett (1989: 62) explains that the Beckett family ran the paper then as later to promote the Conservative cause. Mann was content with this. He was a Conservative, but, above all, he was a journalist inspired by Fourth Estate theory, the key tenets of which he articulated via the leader column of the *Yorkshire Post*. Arthur Mann regarded his newspaper as servant of the public interest, not merely a commercial enterprise.

A sovereign editor

In opposing appeasement, Arthur Mann performed a role consistent with the model of a sovereign editor (Tunstall 1996: 101) deter-

mined to supply the public sphere with watchdog journalism. Conboy (2011: 57) recognises that a few such editors survived into the 1930s, but he attributes their survival to the benevolence of proprietors. Mann had no such protection. He relied on integrity and strength of character to resist pressure from his employers and the Conservative hierarchy. He identified appeasement's flaws and used his office to serve his readers and the body politic. Arthur Mann believed he had a duty to scrutinise politicians and policy. He committed to extended reporting and analysis of appeasement to inform his readers and help them to hold their government to account. These ambitions were aided by his remoteness from London and the pressure to support government policy that was applied there by the Prime Minister's press adviser, George Steward (Cockett 1989: 4-9).

Mann was also able to lean on a team of loyal colleagues, prominent amongst whom was Charles Tower, who possessed 'an unexpurgated copy of *Mein Kampf* in the original German' and believed 'Hitler was a reckless megalomaniac bent on war' (*Observer* 1972). Gibb and Beckwith (1954: 86) report that he also took advice on editorial policy and commissioned leaders from: Collin Brooks, later editor of *Truth*; Charles Davy, who subsequently worked as assistant editor of the *Observer*; and Iverach McDonald. No doubt these friends and like-minded employees applauded his independent approach to foreign policy. They had in Mann's *Yorkshire Post* a safety valve through which they could release information and opinion supplied to them by Chamberlain's critics in the Foreign Office.

But Mann alone had to liaise with his proprietors. In his determination to retain undiluted editorial authority he demonstrated his faith in Fourth Estate theory. To him this was no myth invented to glamorise a debased profession. He believed the *Yorkshire Post* had a role to play in political society and that it should 'act as an indispensable link between public opinion and the governing institutions of the country' (Boyce 1978: 21). He considered it his duty to follow where evidence supplied by his correspondents led. His sovereignty as editor compelled him to advance arguments that angered his proprietors and many of his readers. He did not surrender to pressure, though it made him ill, instead he exercised what Stevenson (2002: 26) and Harcup (2004: 6) have defined as agency: the individual journalist's ability to challenge consensus through the exercise of individual conscience. Mann's approach also suggests that

a central tenet in the liberal narrative of media history – that agency operating in a free market will ensure diversity of editorial coverage – is of more than theoretical value. Indeed, Arthur Mann believed his *Yorkshire Post* must be ‘an educational institution that facilitates the rational public discussion of serious ideas’ (Hampton 2009: 27). It was not his fault that, as Hucker (2011: 29) reminds us, Chamberlain chose to ignore press criticism or to dismiss it as misrepresentation. Still less so that he misinterpreted press support that he had won through persuasion as evidence that his policy was popular.

Mann recognised that his work’s importance was enhanced by the loyalty offered to Chamberlain by *The Times* and the similarly compliant *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Observer*. The knowledge that he was standing alone intensified his sense of mission. But his courage and the social value he believed it served were not rewarded by higher sales or profits. Indeed, Arthur Mann’s employers believed that his editorial policies damaged sales and contributed to a growing deficit. This financial failure would end his editorship. Beckett told Mann that losses showed, ‘it is futile to go on vainly attempting the sale of a newspaper in a form and style that the public have shown consistently they do not want’ (Cockett 1989: 128). Meznar (2005: 171) notes that some directors believed ‘the paper was losing money because of its long and critical leaders’. Arthur Mann embraced Bentham’s theory that the sanction of public opinion should work to protect civil society against misrule. He shared James Mill’s certainty that a newspaper could be ‘the greatest safeguard of the interests of mankind’.

His courage eventually won his proprietor’s respect. Meznar (2005, 169) recalls that in the early months of 1939 Rupert Beckett defended his editor. He told the AGM of the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Association the *Yorkshire Post*’s editorial policy was rooted in experience and reason. Answering criticism of Mann, Beckett said: ‘In so far as you ask me to say anything which will tie the hands of this newspaper and prevent it giving free and honest expression of its views on policy which may be vital to this country, I shall not sit here and consent to that’ (cited in Meznar 2005: 169–170). It had become convenient for Beckett to celebrate in public the principle of editorial independence he had worked to restrict.

The end of appeasement

My content analysis ends on 17 March 1939, immediately after the German seizure of rump

Czechoslovakia demonstrated the worthlessness of the Munich agreement. On this day Neville Chamberlain made a decisive policy speech to the Birmingham Unionist Association. He denounced the German leader’s breach of the pledges he had made at Munich and declared Britain’s determination to resist Nazism. Chamberlain had lost patience with Hitler (*The Times* 1938b). Much of the remainder of his premiership would be spent seeking to create the very alliances he had long distrusted as more likely to provoke Hitler’s wrath than to pacify him. Now deterrence through alliances and rearmament replaced the delusion that Germany might be bought off with territorial concessions. Mann would express approval of this approach, long advocated by the *Yorkshire Post*, but he took every opportunity to snipe at Chamberlain and repeat his calls for a broader government. His criticism of other newspapers remained vivid too. Thus, two weeks after Hitler seized the remnants of sovereign Czechoslovakia, Mann seized on a question raised in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister was asked why, five days before the Prague Coup, the national press had been briefed to understand that he believed the ‘international situation gave less cause for concern than for some time’. The *Yorkshire Post* queried why Chamberlain had expressed such confidence only to find ‘five days later Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist’ (*Yorkshire Post* 1939b). This assault was accompanied by a column which reminded readers of many speeches over the course of the previous year in which the Prime Minister had misinterpreted the mood of the dictators (*Yorkshire Post* 1939c). Beckett’s public support appeared to have emboldened Mann.

Conclusion: Mann’s brave and idealistic battle

Arthur Mann would not resign his editorship until November 1939. He did so then because he could not accept the commercial development the *Manchester Guardian* was so pleased to advertise: the merger of his title with the *Leeds Mercury*. He had fought a brave and idealistic battle to preserve his freedom to oppose appeasement. He had denounced the policy and its architect in language so compelling that even his chairman was obliged, in the end, to offer his backing.

But Mann could not accept the diminution of his status implied by the merger of his beloved *Yorkshire Post* with its less prestigious stablemate. His hubris meant that he would never test his ideal of editorial independence in the crucible of a democracy at war.

Notes

- ¹ John Charles Dundas DFC and Bar, born on 19 August 1915, went on to serve as a Pilot Officer in the Royal Air Force during the invasion of France and the Battle of Britain. He was lost in action on 28 November 1940
- ² This came about after an incident on the Friday evening when Czech soldiers shot dead two Sudeten Germans on a motorcycle who tried to run a barrier at Cheb near the German border. Fearing German retaliation, the Czech authorities called up army reservists and Europe held its breath
- ³ Private newsletters, such as Claude Cockburn's *The Week*, were achieving circulations of several thousand per week at this time. They gave newspaper correspondents and politicians opportunities to reveal information the mainstream press would not publish

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