

Prime Minister

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This conference has been summoned to discuss the position of the media in society, their problems and tasks. No one is better acquainted with these tasks than press people themselves, unless it be the readers and recipients of the news and the messages conveyed by the press. We readers often know a good deal about what the press ought to be - or ought not to be. So it has always been and will undoubtedly continue to be in future. But in a dialogue between the press people themselves and readers it should be possible to arrive at points of view

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which should form a natural part of the debate on the position of the press in the society of today and tomorrow.

One of the principal rights we enjoy in a democratic society is the freedom of expression. The right freely to express our opinions in print and speech without fear of reprisals is for us an irrevocable right.

In this country, freedom of expression is enacted in our Constitution. It will never occur to any responsible person in our country to make any alterations to this Article.

But, as is the case in other forms of human relationships, there are both written and unwritten rules which must not be broken. In some cases these rules can be clearly expressed. In most cases, however, they are necessarily subject to

individual judgment. We should stipulate, as a general rule of universal applicability that all of us in our statements in the press and in other media should observe the same forms as we generally feel should apply to open and straightforward forms of human contacts.

We often refer to the "Press" as a single entity.

But the press consists of many newspapers and periodicals. Particularly in an assembly such as this, with almost 350 representatives from 33 countries, it is clear that you represent a great variety of newspapers both as regards circulation, tradition and origin, ideology and commercial background. A newspaper with five to six million readers will have greater resources, a greater breadth of coverage, greater opportunities for acquiring better equipment and better facilities for rapid

distribution - than a small newspaper. Some of our papers here in Norway only have a circulation of a few thousand copies and would, from the technical angle, perhaps be regarded as simple to publish.

But all these newspapers have their proper place in a viable and free democracy. They form a significant part of such a democracy. Without them, a democracy would not be complete. It would be like taking away one of the colours from the rainbow. Then it would lose something of its colour spectrum and span.

What about the influence and the effect newspapers have on political life?

It does not necessarily follow that this increases in direct proportion to circulation and mode of presentation.

Those of us who went through the Second World War and enemy occupation know very well that even the poorest stencilled little news-sheet had a greater effect in shaping public opinion than all other kinds of propaganda.

We know that a wall poster in Shanghai can contain a message of great significance to millions of people in many continents.

A recognition along these lines may lead us to ask whether it is so absolutely essential that newspapers should be enabled to produce feature material in four-colour pictures and with super-layout in offset. Perhaps at least some readers would prefer to get their paper at a reasonable hour of the day.

To be able to pick up the newspaper from our own door-mat or letter-box every morning is something we take absolutely for

granted in the rich part of the world. A certain amount of unparliamentary language can even be heard if it happens that the paper has not arrived at the usual time. Yet there are hundreds of millions of people who never get a newspaper at all. And even supposing they did, they would still be unable to read it.

This is a serious deficiency in the opportunities open to people for keeping themselves informed and for exchanging views. The solution of these massive problems requires a huge effort both from the communities concerned and from others with the resources and ability to step in and lend their support. I am very glad to see that the International Press Institute has taken these tasks so seriously and that it has contributed towards their solution.

In recent years the Nordic countries - and possibly certain other countries - have introduced state support for the press. The interesting fact is that it is the press organs themselves which have raised the matter with the respective governments. That is to say, there has been no question of an initiative on the part of the State in order to gain influence over the press. Underlying the desire for state support there is a common interest emanating from the press and the political organs in the country: we want to have a press coverage that is differentiated, allowing for all the different ideological points of view, and we want to keep the local press alive.

It looks as if this interplay of forces works reasonably well. If anyone were to ask whether the Norwegian press is reticent, as a result of this state support, when it comes to

adopting a critical attitude on questions of interest to society at large, I would answer a very definite 'no'. Anyone who has read Norwegian newspapers will be able to confirm that this is so.

The press has, of course, often been called the Fourth Estate. Press people emphasize that the press must adopt a critical approach. On that point I agree. We politicians always have to keep in mind the fact that the press does not exist purely and simply for politicians.

But the press also shares in the responsibility to society. It is the press and the other media which often set the tone of public debate, as well as the form it is to take.

It is in the balance between the open, often sharp criticism on the one hand and, on the other, the responsibility which important institutions in the community have that the press

should exercise its functions.

It is good to know that press people and the press organizations themselves are so greatly taken up with these questions. Here in Norway this aspect has been expressed in the "Show caution" placard prepared by the press organizations. It acts as a sort of ethical premise for the work of the press. The concluding sentence in this code is:

"From the printed word derive both power and responsibility.  
Do not misuse it!"

I understand that it is along these lines of thought that the conferences of the International Press Institute are held.

I wish you every success in your endeavours.