

ARGUMENTS ON

TIMES NEWSPAPERS LIMITED

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 22, 1982.

FROM: MR. RUPERT MURDOCH

TO: Mr Harry Evans.

SUBJECT:

Dear Harry,

Thank you for your letter of February 21. You know that I have been concerned about the fluctuations in The Times staff of journalists that had so much attention recently; I am frankly disturbed by the decision of Messrs Hennessy, Berthoud, and Berlins to leave you. They are names long associated with The Times and they should not be lost without a great deal of thought.

My chief area of concern about the paper is one I have raised with you several times: the paper's stand on major issues. Of course it takes attitudes, but I fail to find any consistency in them, anything that indicates unmistakably the clear position of conscience that a great newspaper must be seen to hold. Just what that position is, it is your duty to define, and it cannot be mine.

But it must be defined with clarity and authority and even repetition.

Sincerely,



PS. The story in this morning's Times about our troubles contained at least eleven errors of fact.

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THE TIMES

Times Newspapers Limited, P.O. Box 1,
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From the Editor

23 February, 1982

Mr Rupert Murdoch
Chairman
The Times

WRITER:
Rory
Feb 22 Memo for Mr R
1982

Dear Chairman,

I am naturally disappointed at your cursory comment on the detailed report of our first year which I volunteered to you. May I comment on the points you make in your note?

1. Your main message to me on staff was originally to hire talent to renew the paper. Lately, it has been to get staff numbers down urgently. All the new recruits have settled down well. I cannot understand, therefore, why you should say you are concerned about the fluctuations in staff. They are an inevitable consequence of what you encouraged and, what, indeed, was required.

As for the individuals you mentioned, you are very badly misinformed. Two of them were recommended for severance by their heads of departments who found their performance inadequate. The Deputy Editor and other senior colleagues agreed with this judgment. Both these individuals then also told me during interview that these judgments were fair and correct: they acknowledged that they had not been making a proper contribution for some time. The third individual let it be known quite early that he did not share your - and my - sense of direction for the paper. I hope you were not taken in by the effete and embittered nonsense in The Spectator.

2. I note what you say about clear policies for The Times. I am not accustomed to being accused of lacking a conscience, rather the contrary. You have not, as it happens, made this criticism on several occasions to me but only once (7 January 1982) though I have been made aware of what you have said to other members of the staff when I have not been present.

Cont'd . . .

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The Chairman

23 February, 1982

I would contend that The Times has given consistently clear leadership on a number of central if contentious issues:

Allied unity in the defence area (Trident being a particular); Western cooperation in the economic area, especially to stabilise currencies and prepare the way for new economic growth, an original view on which we have led opinion internationally;

Consistent support of this Government's approach to pay, especially in the public sector, which the Chancellor has acknowledged was crucial in winning the civil service pay battle;

Campaigning to improve the banking and financial support for industry where some progress is now noticeable and for competition in banking as in industry: We gave the clearest lead of all the British press over the Royal Bank of Scotland and did get the anti foreign banking legislation stopped; specific reform of the trade unions;

Campaigning for free trade against protection;

Consistent opposition to Marxist infiltration of British politics and industry; Support for President Reagan in his ultimately strong response to the Polish crisis (November 28, 1981, refers especially); and a concerted effort to revitalise Allied unity. Running through these and other editorials there is a continuous concern for the individual and for the values of our free societies, independent of party and of vested interest.

Interestingly, you will recall that The New York Times featured on the new Times particularly picked out the improved strength and clarity of the editorials. Would it not be better to discuss such matters?

But of course, while being consistent in our editorial position, we have deliberately opened the paper to a diversity of views in the belief that truth will triumph and that our readers, especially, want a fully informed debate rather than a monolithic line of propaganda.

Yours loyally, Henry

P.S. I did ask the Director of Corporate Relations to identify the 11 errors of fact in The Times report of our own affairs. He was able only to identify one, a statement by a trade union source, which appeared elsewhere and that we have corrected.