Automation in Newspaper Industry and the Response of the Employees: The General Scenario

In this chapter the researcher desires to examine the technical aspects of the problem before he can pass on to the story proper. The shock with which newspaper workers and employees received the advent of phototypesetting can be understood in the diagram depicting the two-set-ups—the old and the new.

Figure 6.1 taken from Anthony Smith's Goodbye Gutenberg shows how the new technology of computerised phototypesetting does away at a single stroke at least six stages of the work process, and in the process the same strata of workers wither away. We have to remember that this is the minimum—an oversimplified representation, for computers are employed in the details of each stage, plus in the job and process departments and in accounting and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The old</th>
<th>The New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copybank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linotype machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headcasting machines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proof Press → Type Storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof Read</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrections</td>
<td>Photo composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page Make-up</td>
<td>Page Paste up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matmold</td>
<td>Camera Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype</td>
<td>Plate Maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press ——&gt; Distribution ——&lt; Press</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Anthony Smith: Goodbye Gutenberg
Oxford, Oxford University Press 1980
p. 82.

**Figure 6.1** The Old and the New Systems: A Comparative Estimate
The Old | The New | Surplus rendered
-------|--------|----------------
Composing | 227    | 54             | -173
Rotary    | 94     | 30             | -64
Process   | 111    | 16             | -95
Commercial Printing | 169    | 50             | -119
Maintenance | 18     | 22*            |
Central Despatch | 57     | 20             | -37
Workshop and Electrical | 30     |                | -28

Total  706  192  -514

*maintenance and electricity


Figure 6.2 Staff Potentiality
office work to do away with an even greater number of phases in work and the workers.

This picture will become more concrete in some definite exposures, given below. We refer to the comparative diagrams between the old and the new systems as regards work-flow and consequences of staff potentiality in a newspaper. The second diagram (figure 6.2) is simplified and computed, and the details are reproduced in appendix. In another diagram (figure 6.3) we find a revealing comparison of the work-flow charts under the old and the new systems, from the study done by the Statesman Employees union.

A close scrutiny of these diagrams shows that while simplifying the production process the new system was going to harm job potentiality in an untold way. Rotary was comparatively a secondary matter. The biggest blow was clearly coming on the core of the hot metal system the composing department.

The workers in the study found that whereas 227 men were required for the hot metal composing, as shown in figure 6.2, this would come down to 170, as represented in the chart on PTS-cum-offset printing shown in the appendix. It meant a more than 50% cut, since this figure was going to represent both composing and printing. Correctly speaking, counterposing figure 6.3 to both figures 6.2 and 6.4 this would be 108 in place of 379 (227 composing plus 152 Rotary). It was
But earlier, the workflow was quite different. Even in one single department, the picture was something else and complicated. We give an example of the Rotary system.
Machine Minder's Desk (1)

Moulding Supervisor (Senior) (2)

Stereo Casting Supervisor (3)

Rotary Supervisor (4)

Rewinding Supervisor (5)

Stereo Mouldingman (2a)

Stereo Castingman (3a)

Rotary Machinemen (4a)

Rewinding Machinemen (5a)

Clerks (6)

Central Despatch (7)

Total Staff in Rotary 152.

Source: ibid.

Figure 6.4 Workflow Chart in Hotmetal System for Rotary
going to be thus a cut of almost 4 times. Even if assuming that this is a bit simplified representation, the meaning was clear and the workers lost little time in grasping the real issue at stake. Once they understood the technological processes with implications on work-speed, output per worker, amount of work force required etc., they lost no time in clamouring against new technology. The implication and impact were so direct, clear and forceful that powerful unions of graphics and typographers in the United States or Great Britain had to oppose it, even if they felt that the prevalent technology was fast turning obsolete and more they hindered the process of change, the more they were going to be thrown out of work with the obsolescence of the enterprises in the market. It was a classic catch 22 situation.

The Dilemma of ITU

As an International Typographers Union (ITU) official in the USA exclaimed:

Automation has its place in society. But ruthless, selfish and irresponsible automation with the ultimate goal of total uncoupling of the human element is probably going to draw even the aloof, ivory-tower advocate of such a system into the very vortex of this whirlpool of chaos he is helping to create. 2

2. Ibid., p. 237.
It could be stated that it was, perhaps, impossible to expect those being sucked into the whirlpool to appreciate its beauty as a natural phenomenon. But, aside the remark, the dilemma of the ITU official is evident. In those days of early sixties when automation was coming to printing industry, they could not deny the technological superiority of an automated process; on the other hand, they did not know how to keep the interests of the workers intact in the face of such a change. As yet no offensive strategy had been worked out. That was to come slowly, evolve with experience.

But it is not that unions under a new set up became stupefied. After the installation of cold type and especially after a heavy programme of computerisation, the whole atmosphere of the newspaper of course changed. It passed from being a mechanical industry to an electronic one. Wage bargaining started taking place in a different atmosphere among people "whose standards have changed." Complaints started to be made about humidity and dust, weariness, fatigue and boredom, when for 80 years scarcely anyone complained about the heat, noise and smell of molten lead. This was the new consciousness that automation was ushering in among printers and printing unions.

The reorganisation of newspaper industry had its effect upon news agencies too and troubles are sure to erupt here too. A very recent report states that with the assumption of
ownership of the United Press International (UPI) by the Mexican businessman, Mario Vasquez Rana, there is a 25% pay cut of members of the staff and a cut in the staff strength too. The UPI has been one of the big four worldwide news agencies, but it has been losing out to AP, Reuters and Agence France Press in competition. Now after being taken over by the owner of El Sol Chain of Mexican dailies, increasing in past ten years from 36 to 70, UPI has been equipped with up-to-date satellites and computer equipment.

As a whole, it was found that automation in newspaper industry, instead of reducing labour militancy, stoked up militancy further - only in a new form. And this happened


in other industries too, as we have seen earlier. The new form was evident from the rise in collective bargainings. Indeed, collective bargaining signified not only an unabated flow of workers' demands, but the willingness of the management as also its ability to meet the workers' demands halfway. As one industrial researcher noted, "union-management confrontations over technology were most serious during this period (i.e., after introduction of automation in the fifties) in newspaper printing, railroads, and East Coast longshoring" in the USA. These confrontations were spread over from strikes and shut down to collective bargaining and specifically workers in printing industry led by the ITU demanded preservation of the real value of existing benefits against erosion by rising costs, deepening of existing benefits like increasing hospitalisation days, spinning off new benefits like diagnosis, medical care, shifting financing of benefits from employee to employer, radical demands on work-environment that led subsequently to the enactment in the US in 1975 of Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), and development of new institutions, skills and professions to negotiate, evaluate and administer the benefits.


That the new technology could never suppress worker's militancy in spite of an 'enlightened management' was misjudged by even sympathetic and discerning observers. The new rebelliousness was inherent in the introduction of new technology, which was lost sight of even by Anthony Smith. Smith writes:

Clearly there is a dwindling requirement for traditional typesetters and modern offset presses require far fewer operators and machine minders **. All of the new electronic text systems (now generally known by the generic name 'videotex') are highly labour intensive in typesetting **. What is really at issue is whether all those engaged in industry during this period of its total reshaping are collectively capable of the imaginative leap necessary from temporary securities of present to the rearrangement of roles and functions of future.**

As the earlier cited workflow charts prove, there is simply no question of collectively switching over to new technology by the workers, nor can they achieve any imaginative leap. The new technology is new, because it cuts down the labour force and in order to keep work force at its numerical present level, a business with new technology would have to expand hundredfold. Even then other cost-cutting devices would surely appear.

All forms of computerised technology threaten printers with the diminution of jobs and, therefore, however strong

---

6. Anthony Smith, op. cit., sec. 6, pp. 207-09.
their organisation, with the inability to pass on a valuable property right - skill - to sons, nephews and other family connections, they are threatened with the reduction in skills necessary for remaining in jobs. It is a blow to their pride as a group and as individuals who have invested a high proportion of their lives in obtaining the right as well as the skill necessary to perform the job. They are threatened with the loss of their collective jurisdiction over typesetting, which is in large part being handed over to reporters and editors in modernised newsrooms in the USA, Europe and elsewhere.

The workers were initially confounded when automation had started. Should they cooperate or should not? Would the union demand merely a control over its introduction, or would it voice altogether radical demands along with the demand of control? It was a dilemma, which has persisted all along and has weakened union response to it. The attitude of the ITU in the US towards all the new techniques, such as teletype setting and other early tape devices, for speeding up the operation of composition equipment, was to cooperate with the introduction of equipment as long as their own men operated it. But this was a narrow guild attitude, which would not tackle the dilemma in a satisfactory way. ITU's policy of establishing complete control over the phasing in and operation of new techniques logically led it into undertaking its own training and even development
work. Its early technology agreements all involved agreeing either to train its own member to work on the new machines or to permit the employers to find and train substitutes.

But the competition and surfeit of new technology produced by the IBM, Fairchild and RCA brought about a welter of new projects, models and systems and left the trade unions in a dilemma. Should they continue their normal policy of cooperating with new technology on condition that they were given total control over the manner of its introduction? Should they slow down the arrival of new equipment? What other means could be adopted for safeguarding the jobs of their members? Until the computer arrived, all new techniques had been introduced on a rising market for labour, but now there were problems in the newspaper industry arising from the arrival of television and it was by no means clear that the cheapening of printing methods would continue to lead to an overall increase in jobs. The dilemma accentuated more due to an attitudinal vacillation also. America being the land of enterprise, industrial unionism and collective bargaining, a theoretical-political analysis of the phenomenon of automation and a programme of action based upon that was found wanting among union leaders and militants. The unions were simply not cut out for that role there. It has thus been always a defensive response to new technologies, a line of sorting out issues around the negotiation table, a policy of being captive to the
initiatives of management. And so, though the 114-day strike that blacked out the whole of the newspaper publishing of New York - nine papers in all - was basically fought to recover union power in the negotiating process, the strike failed to wrest back the initiative.

Strong unions waited, while weak unions fell. Significantly, the unorganised workers were attacked first and ITU's policy of overall defensiveness left the big strong unions inactive when the bell rang for them. Thus, in the early 1960s computers began to make their way into composing rooms, but mainly of newspapers where unions were not recognised in any case like the Los Angeles Times or Oklahoma City Times. But in Toronto, Canada, when after an unsuccessful negotiation over introduction of computerised typesetting 900 workers walked out in 1964, one paper Telegram claimed that it had managed to produce editions of 60/70 pages with only 120 out of 200 journey men normally employed in the composing room. This was similar to what happened years later in Calcutta, when in course of the Anandabazar Patrika strike, workers were sure that a morning edition was out of ability of the management for most had joined the picket, the management actually brought out a morning edition. And that dealt the crucial blow on the strike.

The ITU very lately recognised the avalanche like flow of new technology and came to recognise very late that no
longer would the policy of accepting new techniques in exchange for jurisdictional recognition over new techniques and work protect the workers. As Smith comments:

They (the printers) watched their 500 union locals fall victim to a mosaic of little tragedies all over the country as publishers wrested with new techniques in a combination of idealistic modernizing, technological machoism, and often a lust for union breaking. Total ITU membership has dropped from 114,141 in 1976 to 88,900 in 1977 and with the coming of techniques likely to abolish the paste-up stage of newspaper production, this hoped-for plateau is liable to fall by another 20,000.7

Now being resigned to automation, the unions are often more keen on their pension rights than the right to specific functions. They realize the need for interunion solidarity, as the corner-stone of any policy designed to preserve the union's power and position vis-a-vis management in the era of computerisation when functions could switch constantly from one group of workers to another. Because of a lack of

7. Smith, p. 225.

theoretical-political insight and excessive industrial unionism, the workers had treated the new machine as another form of that ubiquitous automation rather than a fundamental change in the nature of printing business. Instead of viewing in totality, they kept concentrating on economic demands and refused to reduce them even at times when their jobs were threatened.

The management, of course, took full advantage of the situation and said that the workers wanted to work less at factory and more at home (which is in a sense true and is being propagated all the more today in the organs of established opinion8). But to the printworkers the lesson to be drawn from the newspaper fatalities of the 1960's was quite different from that generally propounded by management. To the management automation would come any hour and it was in the interest of the workers they did not object to its introduction particularly in weaker papers, where job condition and security were all the more absent. The workers would hasten only their insecurity by delaying the modernisation. The management would take the view that 'featherbedding' or the insistence by workers that the paper hire more men than it was necessary at higher rates per hour

than it would afford, bad led to the demise of old and much-loved newspapers. To the union, the lesson was that job security was weak indeed for men employed in financially weak newspapers and that insecurity made them the ideal victim of modernisation.

Another important development took place. There was a shift of internal power from workers to reporters. In comparison with those of the United States, there is a relaxed attitude towards computerisation in many European publications (though the Times story today would tell something else). Clerical workers, journalists and graphical workers are all deeply and equally concerned about the new technology and its consequences upon gaining work. However, these groups tend to negotiate separately with their employers. They have different perspectives on the technology and different sets of expectations as workers. They represent professional craft, unskilled and white collar groups who traditionally have belonged to different social classes or strata with different levels of political consciousness. Thus, rarely, they have achieved a unified response - a serious flaw in their response to automation. Hence, in agreements that they separately conclude, they unintendingly harm each other's interests.

However, as Smith tells us, there are other examples also. "In Sweden journalists and typographers actually did
come to an agreement (without the participation of the employers) over new technology—and decided that the traditional demarcations should continue." In the Netherlands, workers claimed 'boredom supplement to wages' on the ground that the new machinery reduces them to mere checkers and correctors of shot-setting machines and the employers have conceded that no employee may be forced to use a VDT (Video Display Terminal) against his will. In Denmark, there was strike in demand of these provisions in 1975.

In brief, everywhere complexities arose in the wake of newspaper modernisation. The newspaper industry was, in a sense, 'the dove sent from the ark of mechanical civilisation' to test the waters of computerisation. It was the first of the traditional, major industries to start the process of complete transformation to computerised methods—a transformation that, as we have seen, changes the nature of the tasks of information industries as well as their methods. In Japan, the management posed that they were the protector of the workers thrown at the mercy of modernisation. The other extreme was the US—the only country where it was possible to discuss the massive change without dealing first with the human question. In between was Europe, with a relaxed attitude—particularly because of

her welfare capitalism, which cushioned off much of the adverse effects of modernisation, and where capitalism witnessed the growing importance of political process vis-a-vis market role. Sweden provided a very good example of such cushion against the effects of modernisation.10

We shall relate here two examples of the fight going on in the newspaper in the wake of modernisation, one of the journalists and the other of non-journalist employees. These two may show the nature of the fight very much influenced by modern technology.

Struggle By Mediamen In The Context of New Technology

The first story tells us how the journalists fought against the tobacco merchants in the pages of newspaper and t.v.,

Other cites some examples of such cushion, of which to name only a few (p. 146):

Other further showed that the costs of social welfare rarely directly fell upon the employee. For example, in a figure of 1977 he found that an insured person did not pay a single kroner with regard to health insurance, parents' insurance, dental insurance, labour market cash grant, paid very little for disability and voluntary health insurance.
the organs which are precisely financed to a heavy degree by these merchants. The battle to break the smoke ring has always been between capital and health. And in this battle advertisements are the most powerful weapons in the hands of the tobacco giants, public interest groups headed by journalists and health activists are also using counter advertising methods to defeat the power of tobacco capital. The tobacco giants have argued that their advertisements do not appeal to new customers or young men and only encourage brand switching. But flaws of this argument revealed themselves. It was definitely found that advertising actually gives smoking the society's seal of approval. That is why it has been so vitally important to the industry, which spends billions of dollars on advertising.

Now what set the battle was that newspaper and other advertising media were a part of the smoke ring, the media which were now being torpedoed from within by journalists and other creative mediamen. But the media depended upon the bounty of the smoke merchants like Philip Morris, Imperial Group Ltd., the Rembrandt Group etc. The first salvo was fired by the health activists who changed the caption of billboards and faced light punishments with the argument that they were 'improving the billboard' as necessity, to prevent a greater evil. Examples: A Benson & Hedges advertisement was covered with the words 'Their Gold Your Lungs'. Dunhill became 'Lung Ill'.

Examples: A Benson & Hedges advertisement was covered with the words 'Their Gold Your Lungs'.
A huge Marlboro advertisement atop a building above the traffic was modified overnight from Marlboro to 'It's a bore'. Animation was used as a technique extensively. The smoke ring, protecting six giant MNCs - Philip Morris, Reynolds, American Brands (all in the USA) British American Tobacco, Imperial Group (UK) and the Rembrandt Group (South Africa) - responded again by reassuring that cigarettes were of low tar content and deadly diseases would not attack the smokers. The Marlboro cowboys that symbolised that 'cigarettes made you virile, not sick' were changed into reassuring that Marlboro cigarettes were of low tar content. At this juncture, the mediamen took up the next round of battle - a very stiff one, if we remember that tobacco has been a part of particularly American history. Tobacco helped the early American colonies to survive and financed the Revolution by serving as collateral for loans from France. The role of the journalists was crucial since the tobacco industry spends around two billion dollars globally. Many newspapers and magazines are heavily dependent of cigarette advertising which they are loath to jeopardise, particularly in times of economic recession. Of that two billion dollars, half the amount was spent in the United States.11

The financial year 1980-81 was not a good one for Britain's tobacco company, Imperial Tobacco and the last thing it wanted was a concerted anti-smoking campaign by one of Britain's most prestigious Sunday newspaper, the Sunday Times. At that time, The Sunday Times magazine was taking nearly three quarters of a million pounds worth of cigarette advertising. The magazine for October 19, 1980 contained a double page advertisement for Benson & Hedges; a Rothmans advertisement for Dunhill and two Imperial advertisements. The edition won an award for its journalism and caused a fierce backstage row with Imperial, since it devoted most of the written space to a feature by its medical correspondent on a heart transplant operation. He profiled seven such men who had undergone that operation and six of them had been heavy cigarette smokers. He believed smoking had contributed to their present state and even named the brands and the number of cigarettes they consumed. On the page opposite the story, where in Imperial brands had also been named was an advertisement for Embassy. The Sunday Times Advertising Director understood the extent of trouble that would come when he was informed by the editor that brand names were being mentioned. It was late now to pull back the ad feature at that stage and go for another weekly edition. Further, a new plate would be heavy costly. So, the decision was to go ahead, publish the thing and wait for
the sky to break loose. As expected, on next Monday the Advertisement Director had to apologise to the agency and Imperial was given a couple of free spots by way of compensation.

But the wound was not to be healed. Shortly afterwards, The Sunday Times sports section ran a series on 'How I gave up smoking and became fit'. The Imperial and the Agency now charged the edition with unbalanced views of smoking, which not only covered a medical report, but affected sports section also. The Sunday Times denied the existence of any unbalanced view, while a top level Imperial Executive suggested that good things be spoken also regarding tobacco. At that stage, however, Imperial did not threaten to withdraw the ad-financing of the paper. But it did suggest that the paper should restate its policy. The Sunday Times Board met and Harold Evans, the editor defended the right to editorial freedom. Evans was an old hand at these storms for he had fought in past the famous campaign against Distillers, the manufacturers of drug Thalidomide. His campaigning journalism with counter-ads won awards but lost his paper around £5 million worth of advertisement. He now told the medical correspondent that the Ad. Department had accepted that editorially the paper should be free to draw attention to health risks of smoking, but felt very badly let down that the paper was also attacking the advertising of cigarettes and thereby appearing to undermine
It was now a classic catch-22 situation. The Board was not in favour of a ban on accepting cigarette advertising and such a decision was more unlikely against the looming shadow of take over of The Times and Sunday Times by Australian newspaper tycoon Rupert Murdoch. Nevertheless, the editor on behalf of the Board prepared a statement clarifying Sunday Times' policy, as suggested by Imperial. Evans made four points: a) the policy of the paper was to cover issues without fear of favour of ad. revenue - and that applied to cigarette as well; b) brand names should be published wherever smoking was covered; c) although the paper might occasionally criticise some aspects of cigarette advertising, it was not running a campaign against cigarette advertising per se (as Evans said, it would have been hypocritical to do so while accepting such ads); d) the advertising sections of the newspaper were just as free to state product values as the editorial columns were to point out health risks of smoking.

But the campaigning journalist, Oliver Gillie, was not satisfied with the clarification of Evans and accused the latter of coming down. Meanwhile Murdoch took over the Times Group, Evans became the Times Editor and many advertising executives left to seek work elsewhere. Imperial moved away from the Sunday Times with nearly half a million pounds of advertising by not rebooking the sports for the coming year. Though Imperial claimed it to be a purely
commercial decision in switching over to Sunday Express, both Sunday Times staff and New Statesman alleged it was a blackmail.

But while in U.K. Imperial was subtle, in the U.S.A. Philip Morris, the manufacturer of famous Marlboro, was characteristically and in a typical American way, abrasive and decisive in reaction. A very popular t.v. programme produced and shown in U.K. by Peter Taylor and Director Martin Smith of Thames Television was called "Death In The West - The Marlboro Story". Immediately after the 60 minutes feature was shown in U.K., CBS of the U.S.A. showed interest in it and decided to show it on American Television Network. Immediately, Philip Morris went to court, took out an injunction, a settlement was quietly made and 'Death In The West' was consigned to the dumping can.

Peter Taylor kept on pursuing the Marlboro story, discovered that except a lone survivor, John Holmes, all other cowboys shown in the world famous ads of Marlboro had died of excessive smoking and cancer and Holmes was also counting his last days with the help of a thirty-foot rubber oxygen tube. He further found that the later ads and commercials of Philip Morris were truly shot in the real Marlboro country but with its own cowboys and horses! The most famous Marlboro cowboy Darrell Winfield had meanwhile died of emphysema.
Newspaper Employees in Britain and Computerisation

Now on to our second story; the struggle of non-journalist newspaper employees of The Times, London, against computerisation, against Rupert Murdoch. The story has not yet ended, just with workers' defeat and hence we have to rely solely on contemporary accounts. We have not yet any authentic and exhaustive account and analysis of the Times saga.

The Backdrop. As we know, the London Times had already been under closure for a significant period in 1930-31, when employees had successfully blocked computerisation. But Times was in a financial stringent condition, saddled with obsolete technology and large overhead cost. Fleet Street executives estimated that with computer technology, a newspaper could make a profit with a circulation as low as 300,000. In contrast, the Star, a national daily tabloid remained unprofitable despite a circulation of 1.5 million. In fact, the crisis of Times that was forcing it to opt for modernisation was not a crisis of the Times alone, but was symptomatic of the entire pre-automated technology of the Fleet Street industry. The British Government was forced to appoint a

There are a few noticeable aspects of the whole story, as far as our discussion is concerned. The fight that the mediamen launched against advertisers was new in dimension, since previously editorial freedom had been fought against the state or the proprietor, but never against the financiers and that also consciously on a public cause. Just as the ads were the particular product of a technological environment, so also were the counter ads. The television played an important role. And though the above struggle can not be mechanically related to the effect of photo-composing upon the journalist employees, the vital fact of a particular milieu is very clear in this case. Only in a modernised set up the journalists could have been so powerful and the need of a 'story' (the prime need in today's paper - we have to remember the rise of investigative journalism in the wake of computerisation) could be equally pressing as the need of ad-financing. Public interest stories on health, drug, environment, corruption, butchery, red-tapism have become integral part of modern day journalism. These features have become at the same time some sort of missionary campaigns of social interest. In the old Gutenberg set up this could be rarely visualized.12

12. The militancy of the journalists has been contemporary to the militancy of the office employees facing and subject to computerisation. The employers have never been satisfied with the degree of computerisation introduced and have urged on for more automation. The militancy has been the direct outcome of such pressure. See, for example: Fortune - "The Puny Pay Off From Office Computers", May 16, 1980 (Los Angeles). Fortune laments, automatic office tasks rarely lead to substantive savings. Productivity has not increased and previous work system has not changed.
Royal Commission into the working of Fleet Street industry as well as small newspapers of countries in the seventies. The Reports of the Commission, headed by McGregor on both national and provincial newspaper industry clearly brought out the critical state of technology as well as industrial relations. The Report on the National Press admitted that there were difficulties in assessing the economic performance of each newspaper title (p. 10, para 26), implying thereby that the arguments of owners were not always self evident. The Report admitted: "The industrial relations implications of the introduction of a new technology into national newspapers are complex ...." (para 77). Desperately and helplessly the Report suggested in paragraphs 55 and 56, the formation of Joint Standing Committee on industrial relations and new technology in the wake of impending confrontations during technological switch over. However, in the same breath (para 57) it said, "it is difficult to predict to what extent guidelines produced by the committee will affect in house implementation of plans ...."

Indeed, no such joint standing committee could prevent the outbreak of confrontation in The Times. Murdoch evidently had to curb the unions first, for as the Report suggested, in the old process, with inumerable stages of production, unionization at every level was entrenched and life was to the managers hell, as compared to the alluringly simple process of new technology. The Report presented a table (table 6.1).
Table 6.1
Location of Occupations and Union Memberships in the Production Process of U.K. National Newspapers

News & Pictures
Wireroom operators
Telephoto operators
Photoplasts

Process Department
Process workers
Process provers

Foundry
Stereotype settings
Moulding Department

Composing & Reading Departments
Linotype operator
Piece case hand
Permanent time hand

Linotype assistant
Proof puller

Maintenance
Engineers
Engineers' assistants
Electricians
Electricians' assistants

Machine Department
Machine manager
Break hands
Oilers
Magazine hand
General assistant

Ancillary
Messengers
Doormen
Cleaners
Firemen
Clerical
Administration
Canteen & Catering

Publishing Department
Indoor Outdoor Wholesale Employees for Circulation

To quote the Report on some pertinent points, regarding the state of newspaper industry just before the technological change:

"A combination of factors have resulted in the erosion of the industry's general market position recently. These have included inflation and its effect, together with the downward floating of the sterling, of sharply increasing the price of newsprint by some 120% between 1970 and 1975. (Newsprint represents 28 to 33% of the operating expenditures of each house.) At the same time circulation has declined (although circulation revenue has increased as a result of higher cover prices), advertisement volume has dropped and revenue has generally remained static, and fixed costs (such as telephone charges, postage and rates have increased)." (Para 27)

The Report added:

"Finally, though the economic state of the industry has stimulated a reappraisal of industries realtions, the process began fairly slowly. One reason for this is that employee representatives were unwilling to believe that the situation was as critical as some newspapers had stated. ..... Employees and their representatives have required to be convinced that the economic difficulties facing national newspapers were real and this has taken some time." (Para 30)

The Report noted fierce competition:

"Exceptionally fierce competition, both for readers and advertisers, is a dominant feature of newspaper business"
and editorial activity, and strongly influences the conduct of industrial relations in the industry. The 1970 NBPI report (National Board for Prices and Income) found that the effect of high cost levels was to give an advantage to the newspaper which can operate at a high level of output, enabling it to spread its costs more widely. Because the achievement of a higher circulation and consequent economies of scale raises these costs, the result, is that 'the break-even point at which the weaker paper can begin to make a profit is raised to successively higher levels.' In short, the strong may become stronger and the weak weaker." (Para 31)

It is clear why Times became the sitting duck for Murdoch. In fact the above quoted NBPI Report in its para 15 argued that "the Government should help to finance a redundancy programme."

This competition affected "the attitude of the printing trade unions, plant closures and redundancies have created a general feeling of instability." (Para 32). Further:

"The number employed by national newspapers has declined steadily from 41,590 in September 1970 to 37,367 in March 1975 (10%). Between March and October 1975 we estimate that the numbers employed in the industry dropped by a further 2%." (Para 38)
With such a web of entrenched unionism, it was clear that the platitudes of the Royal Commission regarding joint committee would not convince the Fleet Street managers to follow a 'soft' line of cooption towards the unions of the newspaper industry. Murdoch was thus no accident. A confrontationist managerial strategy was thus almost ordained by the circumstances.

Rupert Murdoch's first foray as an Australian tycoon into the British fourth estate was the takeover of the Sun, the News of the World titles - neither of them serious newspapers, but both best-selling in their respective categories - daily and weekly. But when Murdoch, now a US citizen took over The Times and its sister publication, The Sunday Times that Britons and the Fleet Street sat up and started taking notice of him. According to Harold Evans, editor of The Times, Murdoch successfully evaded any scrutiny by the Monopolies Commission by coming to an arrangement with Margaret Thatcher that he would be spared of the inspection by the Commission and his papers would support the ruling Conservative Party in future. Sir Harold's claims have been yet unchallenged. Consequently, The Times and Sunday Times survived financially. The Times again picked up after a falling circulation, but both became an uncaring paper, difficult to distinguish either paper from the official organs of the Tory Party. Particularly, the social investigations of the Sunday Times were a matter of past. 14

Employees' Struggle

Amidst such a conservative surrounding, a showdown with labour was inevitable and became only a matter of time. Murdoch first attempted to ease out a substantial chunk of the work force with a 'golden handshake' and met some success. But towards a fully computerised newspaper, doubtless encouraged by the example of the provincial hero, Eddy Shah, something more drastic was necessary. Eddy Shah had clearly set the precedent of defying the unions in starting the ultra modern "Today", a low cost 44-page paper, whose 21 pages can be changed through the print run so that late news may be included. He fought the unions and typical of electronic technology, he went to the electricians for a single union agreement. The old Gutenberg printers had clearly become outdated. The new entrants were electricians and journalists, resembling office typists. 15

To completely by-pass the union and the workers was thus the strategy. Murdoch planned for a new site. Indeed, celebrating The Times's bicentenary, Murdoch proudly escorted Queen Elizabeth around its famous traditional location in

Central London, little revealing that he was plotting, at the same time, permanently close down this age-old establishment. Wapping was the new site for The Times. A letter written by Murdoch's solicitors advising him that the cheapest way to get rid of 1000 print workers would be to dismiss them when they were on strike, thereby avoiding statutory redundancy payments, leaked out. The unions got alert and though Murdoch insisted that the solicitor's advice was sought on a purely hypothetical basis, their fears were reinforced by the tough labour regulations introduced in The Guardian. At almost the same time, another British press magnate Robert Maxwell dismissed more than 700 journalists and printers employed by his two Scottish publications, The Daily Record and the Sunday Mail. The dispute had erupted when members of the Sogat-82 print union and members of National Union of Journalists (NUJ) refused to take over the production of a new colour edition, fully computerised, of the best selling national tabloid, Daily Mirror, as part of a reconstruction plan. Clearly The Times saga has erupted at a time, when the British newspaper industry has been passing through a period of intense restructuring. Maxwell followed the lead given by Eddy Shah,


when he announced that his coloured tabloid Good Day will be low cost, computerised and less labour intensive just like Shah's Today. Six institutional investors have been backing up a group of former Daily Telegraph editors in bringing out a competitive daily and a financial paper too of similar nature to give Daily Telegraph and the Financial Times a run for their money. The Daily Mirror utilising the appearance of Today has told the workers that 6000 people are a really heavy load compared to latter's 500 strong work force. It has been able to wrest unprecedented concessions from a union representing printers and clerical workers, including the elimination of 1600 jobs.18

Thus Eddy Shah's has been commented by a perceptive columnist as a "big bang effect"; and the former editor of London Standard Charles Wintour hopes, "this year will see the most amazing explosion of newspaper industry since the days of Northcliffe." 19

But this amazing explosion was to come at the cost of labour and the newspaper barons gleefully remarked that the arrogance of organised labour would soon be facing its doomsday.


19. Viscount Northcliffe was born in Ireland as Alfred Harmsworth in 1865 and is regarded as the most spectacular figure in British newspaper history. He controlled among other publications, the Daily Mirror, the Daily Mail, and The Times and introduced such popular innovations as serials, women's columns and social gossip.
first symbolized by the defeat of coal miners and next the imminent collapse of printers' union, the National Graphical Association. In fact, the defeat of NUM was the signal to start the offensive against printers, who were now quickly pushed to defensive stand. Whereas formerly the paper ran by management "giving in" to union, now the new technology enabled the paper to run where the union had to "give in" in order to survive. In the words of an industrial relations advisor, John Carhill, "the militant unions had been chastised."

This was then the setting, in which the Murdoch offensive against workers started. But before we go on to the narrative of the offensive, let us take a quick look at table 6.2.

It will be clear from the table 6.2 that Rupert Murdoch is the single biggest press baron in the UK (commanding 36% Fleet Street's output) and his offensive has hence been most strong in the process of restructuring the industry. The printers concede that change was inevitable; but what forced them on the warpath was the desperate need to save their jobs and a regulation of the pace of change. The electronic age newspaper industry could of course be a legitimate area of expansion, as the moderate electricians' union contended, but Murdoch insisted upon an end to the closed shop system and a guaranteed no-strike clause. In East London Wapping, a new £250 million plant was set up to print his new evening paper, the Post and when printers of the old plant smelt rat, Murdoch threatened to move the other papers too to the new site, if his demands were not conceded. While negotiations were on, Murdoch suddenly moved the Times to Wapping, sacked 6000 employees,
### Table 6.2

**Britain's National Newspapers, 1985**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>1975</th>
<th>1986</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Rupert Murdoch</td>
<td>3,446</td>
<td>4,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
<td>Robert Maxwell</td>
<td>3,968</td>
<td>3,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>United Newspapers</td>
<td>2,822</td>
<td>1,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>Associated Newspapers</td>
<td>1,726</td>
<td>1,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Star</td>
<td>United Newspapers</td>
<td>(began 1973)</td>
<td>1,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>Conrad Black</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>1,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>Guardian Newspapers</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times</td>
<td>Rupert Murdoch</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>Person P.L.C.</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News of the World</td>
<td>Rupert Murdoch</td>
<td>5,479</td>
<td>5,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mirror</td>
<td>Robert Maxwell</td>
<td>4,188</td>
<td>2,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Express</td>
<td>United Newspapers</td>
<td>3,715</td>
<td>2,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail on Sunday</td>
<td>Associated Newspapers</td>
<td>(began 1982)</td>
<td>1,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
<td>Rupert Murdoch</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>1,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Telegraph</td>
<td>Conrad Black</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Tiny Rowland</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Time Chart by Joe Lertola, New York (17 March, 1986)
and forced the printers onto a losing war. It was the most confrontationist and cruellest step ever undertaken by a media organization in Great Britain. Murdoch's holding company, News International, once again as in the case of miners' strike, secured court support, when the court awarded sequestration of one of the union's funds for secondary picketing. The Thatcher regime had already revised labour laws to the effect that the protest of persons or unions, not belonging to a plant, is illegal. And the non-journalist employees association at Wapping's electronically oriented works is an electrician's union, nothing to do with the printers of old, yet picket started outside the Wapping plant. About 5000 workers with their women and children are staying at the picket lines, the women and children too have demonstrated on their own, two journalists have resigned in disgust, one being Ian Jack, named "journalist of the year" recently, who said, "I felt that if I were to carry on walking through picket lines, I had to have something to believe in, to walk into." But Ian Jacks have been too few; the majority at present following Murdoch's lead, in fact Andrew Neil's lead, who as editor of Sunday Times had commented regarding workers' agitation against leaks at the Sellafield nuclear plant in Scotland, in an editorial: Sellafield makes money, people should not make a fuss about it.
Wapping plant had been variously labelled as Fort Knox, Fort Wapping, Fort Murdoch with unprecedented security, electronic searchlights, barbed wire and special heavily guarded conveyances. Police was always at hand with Murdoch's own security force to pound upon the strikers and arrests were common. Coloured television everyday had displayed knots of people gathered in the lashing wintry chill outside a barbed wire fortress; blurred figured walking past coils of wire, crossing into 10 foot electronically controlled gates covered by swivelling security cameras. This is not a Berlin wall, but a wall to prevent workers picketing at the plant. Murdoch's whole strategy has been to face negotiations with TUC (the umbrella body of unions in the UK) from a position of strength, where he will reinstate some of the dismissed workforce and give a reasonable pay-off to the rest. But for the present, he must face the test of an increasingly fierce resistance from the unions standing up for the removed employees' rights.

Murdoch's hack writers including the redoubtable William Frankel of the Times have of course been rejoicing the situation. Frankel's two succeeding despatches, published in an


Indian papers do not make any attempt to conceal the glee. One screams: "Murdoch Winning Battle with Print Unions"; the others "Murdoch's opponents On The Defensive". The despatches describe how shivering workers stamp their feet in picket line to keep them warm; how slogans like "Go home yank" (since Murdoch has recently acquired US citizenship) become increasingly desperate and how the workers today are essentially in a defensive position in contrast to the miners who were offensive in their actions and self-confident. Today the printers know that the old plant is strategically a losing location and Wapping is able to print all the papers and editions with a comparatively handful of employees, Therein is the crucial factor - the new technology at the disposal of Murdoch.

Frankel's despatches reveal, Wapping was the ploy to provoke the unions into strike, whereby Murdoch could issue dismissal of 5000 employees. When the two unions refused to concede both his two demands; legally binding no strike agreement or/and a severely reduced workforce, Wapping started operating; printers thereupon declared strike; Murdoch issued dismissals. Under English laws, while strike is lawful, individual strikers may be dismissed for breach of their contract of employment. Murdoch also skillfully handled labour laws and prevented SOGAT members working at wholesale distributors from "blacking" (i.e. refusing to handle) his papers. The

Union disobeyed the injunction and faced fine and a sequestration of its assets amounting to a staggering £17 million. Frankel rejoiced in his despatch that the new technology was showing its full potentiality and he said that the act of solidarity by the Labour Party in refusing to speak to Times correspondents could easily be disdained by Murdoch.

Murdoch has now come up with a novel stratagem. He has offered the old premises worth around £12 million to the unions and a cash settlement of £50 million. The "last chance" has been rejected by the unions. Apart from the tribe of Frankel, however some other journalists are lining behind the workers. Journalists of the tabloid Sun, Britain's largest circulating paper, have voted against continuing to work at Wapping high-technology plant, reversing their earlier decision to join the wapping plant ignoring the strike of 5500 employees.

The present position appears to be a stalemate. The tactical advantages lie with Murdoch, but the only counterweight with the workers i.e. mass assembly of picketers, seems to be more and more effectively employed. However, Murdoch's latest offer has thrown the opponents in a quandary.


For, the Labour Party is interested in the offer, since British papers are overwhelmingly anti-labour and pro-Tory. But it is a challenge too, for they have to show that contrary to Murdoch's assertion, a daily can be profitably run in the present market structure. We are back to square one - to the dilemmas that syndicalism faces of which we had earlier spoken.

The Time magazine published a cover story some months back: "Stop Press Revolution In Fleet Street". The cover page showed two computerised-like graphic prints of Murdoch and Eddy Shah. The story revealed that through all their blistering tactics Murdoch has achieved what should be his sole concern: profitability. In 1986 the annual loss of The Times and Sunday Times was more than £30 million. Today the after-tax profits £7 million. Formerly ads filled up 28% of available space, today 38%. Formerly there were legions of foreign correspondents, today only 16 on its staff, compared to 30 for the rival Financial Times. Obviously, the quality and coverage have gone down. But profitability has been brought back. It is estimated that the new technology and leaner staff will save about £80 million. This is crucial at a time when he has purchased seven television stations (cost: £2 billion), 20th Century Fox (£675 million) and a

bunch of business magazines (£ 350 million) in the USA. For this he had to seek finance from banks and offer 20th Century Fox Shares to the US investors. So behind the exit of the era of Fleet Street, when a Times editor can say, "The computers are wonderful", lies the complicated story of rise of a mega-giant in media. It only proves our earlier assertion of the link between monopoly and technology.

Under the leadership of Brenda Dean, the embattled union head, the printers have argued that this profitability and restructuring have come at the cost of only workers. They had no option but to strike, for majority of them could not go to the £ 140 million Wapping hi-tech plant in any case and most now over 45 or 50 could not now acquire new skill and Fleet Street could hardly now absorb them with Guardian or Daily Mail - all planning to move over to high tech plants away from Fleet Street. Hence the printers so doggedly refused to allow computer terminals into newsrooms and computerised printing technology into the pressrooms. Murdoch or Shah's two-million terminal computer system manufactured by Hastech, a US firm, along with Digital Equipment Corporation, Computer or Atex system, a subsidiary product of Eastman Kodak can store enough words to fill a month's worth of newspapers as well as 450 photographs. Editors can put together complete pages on the computer screen lines, text and pictures as needed. The finished pages are then transmitted by high frequency radio links to the printing plants, where the pages are copied onto
plates, using a laser process. The papers are printed from these plates on offset presses.

So powerful is the new technology, viciously imposed by money power that both the major unions, National Graphical Association (NGA) and Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT) - have been understandably scary. They have defied Thatcher's new labour laws referred to earlier, faced wage and asset freezes, and the combine of new technology - press magnates-financiers-government. In a poster they have lampooned Murdoch as Nazi Hitler and his method as "Australian/USA solution". The Time report clearly states that apart from profitability union-curbing was another aim. For that a blackleg union was hired - the EEPTU (Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union) which has "reputation as a pragmatic group willing to split with other unions and make its own deals".

As the strike, picket, production continues,British government remained the watchdog for Murdoch. A senior official said, "Fleet Street is one of the great bastions of luddism." Perhaps so. And the way the battle ended, British press was never the same. The new "Luddism" within all probability.

26. ibid., "Fleet Street papers lost nearly 96 million copies in union disputes last year."
end up, just like two centuries back, over the defeat and collapse of victim-workers.

The Times episode may be said to be a typical instance of what may happen in the event of a head-on fight between workers and employers on computerisation. In such a situation, the state with its full panoply of legal, economic and political resources is usually on the side of employers and the workers are a valiant loser. The Times has been a typical case, how technology proceeds through a process of class struggle and at the expense of the workers.

Some Observations

But generally, such head-on clashes occur at the last instance. In most of the cases the confrontations are indirect, along circumstantial issues, where workers are fighting either rearguard actions or accepting the new technology as fait accompli, and then fighting for positive forward demands. However, such all-out confrontations can never be ruled out, where the decisive breakthrough is made by forcibly suppressing workers' protests, trade union militancy and decisively altering the balance of power in the plant, industry or trade. This has happened in London Times, it happened here also in ABP strike in Calcutta. A report to the I.L.O. observed at the end of 1981: The actual figure (of how many jobs are displaced by a machine) is uninimportant; the main point is that whatever the number of workers displaced, this constitutes
a net social loss in a country like India, in which open
employment amounts to some 15 million persons and actual
unemployment may be a great deal higher, perhaps around 100
million."

But this report also holds relevance to developed coun­
tries too, where a galloping inflation is accompanied by acute
unemployment, which explains the sharp reaction to automation
from the rank and file workers, who otherwise were thought to
be accustomed with technology and technological progress. The
report adds:

The employment impact of technological change is an
issue of increasing concern in printing industries
in countries at all levels of income. In developed
countries existing jobs are at stake; in developing
countries, it seems inevitable that printing will
create fewer job opportunities than would have been
the case 20 or 30 years ago for the same volume of
print. They (the machines) have been designed to
employ less and less labour. Indeed the justifica­
tion for investment in the latest technology in
most newspapers has been that it can replace high-
wage labour. Moreover, the investment can earn
tax-relief, a gain to which may be added the savings
through fewer labour disputes (because of fewer
workers and possibly less unionisation). An added
bonus to profits lies in the fact that computer photo­
sotypesetting lends itself to the development of news­
paper in certain directions e.g., increasing the
volume of classified advertisements placed by
individuals.27

27. Referred to in the Study made by the National
Confederation of Newspaper And News Agency
Employees Organisations, op. cit., p. 30.
Anthony Smith has spoken of a deep bias against labour in American political culture, which frequently results in arbitrary introduction of new technology, not always guided by strict technological considerations.

Disputes have broken out over the issue of health hazards of new technology. The Second Tripartite Technical Meeting for Printing and Allied Trades, convened by the I.L.O., met in Geneva from 22nd September to 1st October 1981. The above report was made to this meeting. The meeting noted the increasing use in the printing and allied trades of video display units; which in course of processing may affect the health of operating workers.

The I.L.O. was advised to carry out an extensive study to investigate the full range of possible psychological, physical and any other possible effects of the use of VDUS and on the basis of the said investigation make suitable recommendations helped by suitable expert advice for limiting possible negative effects to the maximum extent possible. In the USA the trade unions have frequently demanded a curb on indiscriminate use of VDUS, an improved medical check up of brain, eyes and back and a flexibility in setting the VDS to make the operator comfortable. Four Federal Agencies in

the USA detected cancer possibility. The Inter-Agency Regulatory Liaison Group document contains a warning. A list includes 15 occupations which involve close cancer incidences and one of the occupation on the list is newspaper printing which has a 126% excess cancer incidence due to radiation and other causes.

In an I.O.J. (International Organization of Journalists) newsletter danger has been sounded on VDU use and the consequent radiation hazards. It calls for strict monitoring, essential today. Apart from eye problems, it refers to instances of miscarriages with regard to women working with VDUs. It refers to the Australian Journalists Association, which thinks "that the permitted radiation levels in western countries are considerably higher than in Soviet block countries."29

The 3rd Consultative Conference of the trade unions of graphic industry in Asian and Oceanic countries was held in Frunze, the Soviet Union from 21-23 May 1986. The conference demanded that the gains of technological development be legitimately shared by graphical workers by way of reduction in working hours, higher wages, better service conditions, better pension and similar schemes and better overall terminal

29. Reprinted in the 25th Conference brochure of All India Newspaper Employees Federation, Calcutta (11-13 April, 1986).
benefits to retrenched workers. It was recognized that structural changes in the industry are under way; waves of technological innovation creating new serious problems for graphic workers. The conference noted that solution to all the problems depends to a great extent on the unity of action and reinforcement of solidarity of graphical workers against the attacks upon workers and trade union rights. The meeting declared the need for tripartite meets of representatives of trade unions, government and employers' organizations.30

In another conference held immediately after the Frunze meet, almost the same sentiment was voiced. It was the Sixth International Consultative Conference of the trade unions of Graphic (Printing) industry held in Sofia, 27-29 May, 1986, attended by 68 trade unions from 62 countries. In the Sofia meet, it was pointed out that a unilateral computerization by the owners was facing a stiff resistance from the workers, since due to the very nature of graphic industry, workers are intellectually more organized and vocal. The ongoing information revolution has had a growing impact not only on the quality and diversity of printing and allied trades, but also on workers, their working conditions and employment. The I.L.O. representative said that extensive use of chemicals

in the printing process have made necessary the installation of purification plants. He further said that the integration of printing, electronics and communication technology has resulted in a new coinage, "printronics". The expanded use of fibre optics is making possible the establishment of integrated digital, networks to convert and consolidate various operations and systems - thus transforming the 'printing function' and the printer. The conference noted very succinctly: technological change in printing challenges the trade unions on two main fronts (a) the absolute number of jobs available (b) and the distribution of these jobs within the labour force in the printing industry.

Some issues are pertinent to this challenge. These may be summarized as, as the I.L.O. representative said: (a) new technologies tend to be inherently labour saving; (b) new technologies transfer the skill input in printing from the human being to the machine; (c) modern technologies transcend traditional demarcation lines between craft still in the printing industry; (d) some of the skill requirements associated with new technology are so different from those found in conventional printing that an existing group of personnel involved in printing may find it hard or impossible to adjust to the extent required; (e) the introduction of new technologies tends to imply the recruitment into the printing industry of employees from other industries like chemicals or electronics, and others whose qualifications
are much higher in comparison with the acceptable requirements or criteria hitherto in practice.

Only with a stable job market and an expanding business these above points can be tackled to the satisfaction of workers. Ashai Shimbun, Japan's leading newspaper, sells 12 million copies of its daily edition. It has the most advanced automated technology in the world. It has a single union and it could switch on to the new system without a single worker being fired, retrenched or redundant. It has all its details worked out far in advance in consultation with the union. But clearly, such examples are rare.

Today's trade unions are not only concerned about plant level employment, but overall employment too. It was noted that unions have become more responsive to the demands of women workers, part time workers, flexible schedule, day care and equal pay for comparable work. Occupational safety and health, burden of speed-up. Once again like the Frunze meet, this meet has also noted that with more extensive use of chemicals, there is more exposure to solvents, mainly alcohol, toluene, printing inks, developers, organic peroxides, glues and pastes. This has caused skin diseases, in particular contact dermatitis - the most frequent health hazard in printing industry. Other risks are conjunctivitis, other eye injuries, poisoning through ingestion and inhalation, fire and explosion. The VDUS have led to eyestrain and operator fatigue. A 30-minute break after every 2 hour
period was demanded. The storage and handling of chemicals have been declared as equally important issues.

The Sofia Conference called upon the Third Tripartite Technical Meeting for printing and Allied Trades to come up along with a general report a technical report on employment and income security in the light of structural and technological change in printing and allied trade, and a further technical report on conditions of work also.31

From the preceding brief and sketchy survey we have seen that technological transformation has not been a peaceful affair, it is steeped in social struggles, struggles of various nature, where even violence is not ruled out. There is then again no uniform level of transformation everywhere - it depends upon the concrete material situation prevalent in the plant, trade and country. We have further witnessed the involvement of white collar staff too, the so-called aristocratic knights of the press industry - the journalists, who have been increasingly drawn into the vortex of contradictions arising in the wake of transformation. There is the open involvement of state too on the side of 'technology', 'progress', 'transformation' and the line-up is complete:

31. Letter from AINEF to all affiliated units, 23 July 1986 (Circular No. 29/86), New Delhi.
on one side, the workers desperately fighting to maintain their survival, on the other hand press barons, electronic giants, the state, capital, technology and last but not the least, the ideology of technologism. It is a losing situation for the former - a typical catch-22 position, where if they succumb, they perish. If they resist, they only endanger their own company's existence in a cut-throat market. They are trying to come out of this dilemma by means of meaningful, positive demands, where immediate survival demands are strengthened by social security calls too, emphasising health, environments, overall employment etc. 32

We have now to see how far the Indian situation fits in with the international scenario, keeping in mind the obvious fact that India is a backward country where many of the typicalities of western social development would not apply. We shall discuss this problem in the next chapter.

32. On the office-automation and VDT front:

A report from the U.S. office of Technology Assessment estimates that office automation can lead to productivity increases ranging from 15 to 85% depending on the industry. But according to the National Association of Working Women, clerical wages have actually declined by 1.5% between 1983 and 1984, a trend identified as downwaging. "Meanwhile, an information kit on the campaign to secure state and local legislation requiring a range of VDT health and safety protections is available from the campaign for VDT safety, 1224 Huron Road, Cleveland Ohio 44115 or call (216) 516-1699.

- An advertisement in a ladies' magazine published in the USA shows how strong is this concern for health.