

THE LAST OF THE RED HOT SUPPLEMENTS

by NORMAN HILL

Just over a year ago, when *This Week*, the newspaper-distributed Sunday magazine, announced that it would cease publication, a spokesman said the publishers had concluded that "the national newspaper supplements may have outlived their usefulness to newspapers and advertisers."

Inasmuch as *This Week* even in its dying days had enjoyed a circulation of nearly ten million and had left behind two other national supplements with more than twenty-three million, that pessimistic statement raised some eyebrows.

Ever since September 1963, when Hearst folded *American Weekly*, the Sunday supplement field had been plagued by advertising losses to television and to a growing list of newspaper-owned, locally edited supplements in major cities. Industry observers, not to mention millions of readers accustomed to receiving the familiar sixteen- to twenty-four-page tabloid-size national weeklies tucked inside their Sunday newspapers, wonder whether the last two surviving supplements, *Parade* and *Family Weekly*, will be able to withstand those threats, and for how long.

Parade, owned by Whitney Communications, is carried in ninety-three newspapers in larger cities. It will add the *Houston Post* next January, bringing its circulation up toward seventeen million. *Family Weekly*, published by Downe Communications, is currently in 248 papers, in medium- and small-size markets. It expects to add seven next year, which will bring its total circulation to nearly eight million.

Since they do not depend directly for their circulation on their appeal to readers but rather on the indulgence of those newspapers that function as carriers, the need to shape their editorial package with both eyes on the newspapers' editors and publishers rather than their readers makes for a unique, sometimes bizarre challenge for the supplement editor trying to please everyone. Some industry insiders believe that this very editorial conundrum was instrumental if not decisive in the death of *This Week*.

Jess Gorkin, who has been with *Parade* for twenty-four years (twenty-two as editor), is one of the most insistent proponents of the view that "a poor product and poor management" were the main reasons for *This Week's* demise. It had lost its "editorial spine," had become bland, and had begun groping for "a magic formula." If it had stuck with a strong editorial policy, and had "done a job to satisfy its readers," he says, *This Week* would be here today. "There was room for all three of us." When, as their troubles grew, *This Week* created an editorial board manned by executives of their distributing newspapers, they were "finished," according to Gorkin. "You cannot edit by committee."

But some industry executives discount editorial policy as a decisive factor. They stress that *This Week* lost some of its leading markets as big newspapers decided they could please readers better and keep all the advertising income by providing their own locally edited supplement. In some cases, the newspapers themselves disappeared, as with *This Week's* New York outlet, the *Herald Tribune*. At the same time, the growth of network, regional, and local spot advertising on television and the availability of regionalized pages in such general magazines as *Life*, *Look*, and *McCall's* cut into the national advertising funds for which the Sunday magazines were competing.

This Week, desperately seeking to replace what it lost as newspaper publishers one by one—in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Atlanta—decided they didn't need it, and squeezed out of its biggest market, New York, was forced to go into smaller newspapers, often "back-to-back," that is, sharing its vehicle with another national or locally edited supplement. Finally, *This Week's* owners, Crowell Collier, threw in the sponge.

That left just two contenders in the nationally syndicated Sunday magazine field, *Parade* and *Family Weekly*. How will they both keep their hundreds of critics—the distributing newspapers—happy with their editorial package? How will they fare economically in a publishing area beset by tightened advertising budgets, the



trend toward local supplements, and the shadowy question mark left by the death of *This Week*, which had been in its heyday the biggest of the three?

Gorkin leaves no doubt about what he thinks needs to be done in the pages of *Parade*. Several years ago he took his stand when he said, "Let's face it. There's too much filler and perennial pap getting into Sunday magazine pages."

Is it possible to avoid pap and cloying blandness when one must strive to please, or at least to avoid offending, a multiplicity of individual publishers, with regional interests and prejudices? A former supplement editor says, "You have dozens of publishers who all think they can do it better. You're under orders to alienate no one."

One insider recalls that when his supplement published an article on actor Sidney Poitier the year he won the Academy Award, "it was made known that should we ever do that again, a certain newspaper in Alabama would not put out the issue that Sunday." On another occasion a California publisher complained about an article in the magazine about public libraries, because they were "socialistic." Bob Driscoll, who has been an editor at one time or another at all four of the

national supplements, including the defunct *American Weekly* and *This Week*, says, "They have to be apolitical, areligious—for John Wayne, apple pie, and motherhood."

When it comes to political coverage, a curious kind of "equal time" syndrome—in which the subscribing newspapers rather than the government are the enforcers—rules the supplements. During Presidential election years, there are separate cover stories on each major candidate, and features on each of their families, or stories of equal length in the same issue, side by side. Bob Fitzgibbon, former editor of *Family Weekly*, who left last July to edit an airlines magazine after sixteen years on the staff, recalls that a few years ago he held out a story on Arthur Goldberg because of rumors he would resign as U.N. Ambassador to run for Senator from New York. If the story had run and Goldberg had become a candidate, "we'd have felt obligated to give equal treatment to his opponent." The story is still in the magazine's inventory.

Similar taboos operate strongly in other areas, including such central issues as Vietnam, race relations, religion, and sex. Gorkin says, "We try to present the facts rather than take a stand." *Family Weekly's* publisher, Mort Frank, with the magazine since 1958, says, "We're not taking a stand for or against Vietnam. We use a feature approach—'The Christmas Gift Our GIs Gave Me,' by Mrs. Bob Hope, 'Diary of a Vietnam Patrol,' 'I Visited My Marine Son in Vietnam.'"

Family Weekly for over a year sat on an article about the Pill by Pearl Buck that, according to several sources, was actually "on the side of Victorian purity." It was killed over the objections of the editor, who tried several times without success to revive it. Frank recalls that, although originally "we were afraid to run it—we paid her for it and didn't use it," it finally ran after a part was cut out that was severely critical of American GIs who left their progeny behind after they had had affairs with Vietnamese girls. Last year, Fitzgibbon wanted to do a story on sex education, but by then the subject had become a "very hot issue," and he decided to kill it. "After you've tried some of these things and they get turned down, you just shy away from them because you know they're not going to see the light of day," he says.

Driscoll remembers that at editorial meetings he attended at all the supplements over a period of years, veteran staff members would caution the editor about story idea after story idea—a chorus of warnings that one newspaper publisher or another "just won't sit still for that." There was continual con-

trovery between the editor and the publisher on each supplement: "The editor wants to put out a good product, but the publisher is dealing with the newspapers and says, 'No, you can't run that.'" The consensus seems to be that finding the happy medium between a vital and vigorous supplement and a bland one that pleases everybody is the prime challenge.

Gorkin, aiming *Parade* at its predominantly big-city readership, strives for a kind of controversy and sensationalism, but without causing undue displeasure to individual publishers. Always looking for a new "barn-burner" story, he sticks with the basic policy he proclaimed in 1966: to publish "controversial, provocative, challenging material . . . in tune with current tastes and trends." Belittling other supplements of earlier days as "scissors and pastepot operations," Gorkin repeatedly asserts his essential policy is to "tell it like it is."

There is still much evidence in *Parade* of fence-sitting in taboo areas. An article describing the war's effect on Saigon's refugees, orphans, inflation, and traffic is blurred innocuously on the cover: SAIGON BECOMES HONDAVILLE, U.S.A. A recital of the statistical records set by the war lists: "farthest away from U.S.; longest war; lowest killed/wounded ratio; most American Presidents involved." A pre-election report on the Senator Hart-Lenore Romney senatorial race in Michigan safely declares that "whatever the outcome, the citizens of Michigan will be winners. Both candidates are eminently qualified, highly professional, and deeply concerned. They are, above all, a gentleman and a lady." A profile of Governor Lester Maddox, while depicting the ardent segregationist as "most unorthodox," "controversial," and defiant of federal court orders, also takes amused note of his "antics" and "wacky ways," credits him with having brought the Governor's office "closer to the people," and concludes that "if Maddox has made atrocious racist statements, he has also appointed the first Negro in the state's history to the State Board of Corrections."

A somewhat gamy feature called "Personality Parade" appears each week. It consists of answers to questions from readers (some industryites charge that the questions as well as the answers are staff-written). Examples: "Q. In Pearl Buck's recent book *The Kennedy Women*, she refers to Joseph Sr.'s 'long relationship with a beautiful actress.' Who was she? A. Gloria

Swanson." "Q. Was David Eisenhower ever engaged to an attractive young divorcée named Judy Tegethoff . . . ? A. He was not. Judy Tegethoff was his father's private secretary. When . . . David's father was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, Mrs. Tegethoff subsequently joined the U.S. Embassy in Brussels, where she is now a member of the Ambassador's secretarial staff." "Q. . . . it was rumored that a prominent American diplomat would soon be transferred to Tanzania if he didn't get rid of his so-called private and confidential secretary. Is President Nixon aware of this situation? A. Nixon . . . hopes that the diplomat in question will come to his senses before the diplomat's wife, fed up with the entire situation, blows her whistle."

A recent column discloses that Shirley MacLaine and TV commentator Sandy Vanocur are "the closest of friends, but Miss MacLaine has a tacit understanding with her husband . . . which permits freewheeling on the part of each." In reply to a question whether actress Lee Remick has ever "recovered from her friendship with John F. Kennedy," *Parade* replies, "Miss Remick has known or met many men in her time, among them the late John F. Kennedy, Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and others." In a somewhat less than chivalrous fashion, the column answered the question "Who is older, President Nixon or his wife?" by stating laconically, "Richard Nixon was born on January 9, 1913. His wife was born on March 16, 1912."

Gorkin is justifiably proud of his consistent success in coming up with newsworthy articles that become wire service stories, sometimes appearing in the Sunday morning news columns of competitive papers. In an inspired wedding of provocative content and promotion, Gorkin a decade ago launched a campaign in *Parade* for establishment of a direct telephone line between Washington and Moscow. When the "hot line" became a reality, President Kennedy wrote a letter to Gorkin expressing his delight that Gorkin's efforts had been "an excellent example of the most constructive aspects of our free press." Attempting to make lightning strike twice, Gorkin has crusaded in *Parade* for the past two years for a new hot line, this time to Peking. He claims there is "interest on both sides" and predicts that within three years or so "it will be."

Some observers feel that *Parade's* aggressive editorial policy has done them harm in the past and may cause future problems. One individual close to the situation said there were times when *Family Weekly* thought *Parade*

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FAILING NEWSPAPERS AND ANTI-TRUST LAWS

by JOHN TEBBEL

In the aftermath of the Newspaper Preservation Act, which became law last July 28, following an interminable legislative process that began on March 16, 1967, the debate continues over whether this legislation means the saving of newspapers from extinction or whether it gives larger newspapers and chains an immunity from anti-trust laws at the eventual expense of smaller papers and the independence of the press in general.

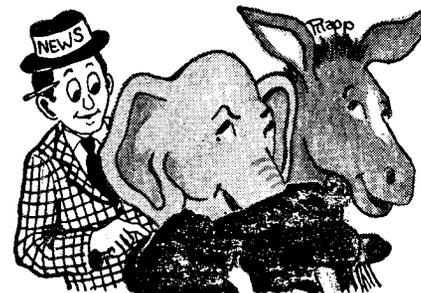
For those who may have dozed off since Senator Carl Hayden first introduced what was then termed the "Failing Newspaper Act," a brief recapitulation of the bill and its history may be necessary. The Arizona Democrat was joined in his sponsorship by fourteen other Senators from states where what are known as "joint operating agreements" exist between two newspapers, a condition that prevails among forty-four newspapers in twenty-two cities. What the Newspaper Preservation Act does is to exempt from the anti-trust laws "newspaper combinations" and "joint newspaper operating arrangements" if these combinations and arrangements are proved to be essential for the survival of a "failing newspaper." Combinations include mergers, consolidations, and the acquiring by one owner, directly or indirectly, of the stock or capital assets of another paper. Joint arrangements include common publication facilities: joint printing, distribution, advertising, circulation, solicitation, and bookkeeping operations; and common advertising rates, circulation rates, and the distribution of revenue. Only editorial operations must be kept separate.

This legislation rose out of an effort by the Justice Department to prevent joint publication of the Arizona *Daily Star* and the Tucson *Daily Citizen*, operating under a common agreement since 1941. The *Star* sold out to the *Citizen* in 1964, and it was this action that the government tried to block by injunction, contending at the same time that the papers had been in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act since 1940 by virtue of their joint agreement. The government's contention was confirmed by the Federal District Court in Arizona, and was later upheld by the Supreme Court. Passage of the Preservation Act nullifies this decision.

Reading through the testimony of some forty witnesses (twenty-five against, fifteen for) at the hearings of the Senate Judiciary Anti-Trust and Monopoly Subcommittee, and the hundreds of thousands of words written on the subject since then, one can only be impressed by the persistence of myths about the newspaper business, even among otherwise sober and highly competent observers. There is an odd, nineteenth-century flavor about much of what has been written, as though the good guys were battling fiercely and idealistically against the bad guys over the preservation or destruction of the First Amendment.

The primary fact to be remembered is that, whatever the philosophical rights and wrongs may be, newspapers are a *business*, and they have been since the turn of the century, when advertising began to be the dominant factor instead of circulation, and when the era of personal journalism began its slow demise. Once advertising became the lifeblood of the newspaper, the character of the industry began to change. True, circulation and advertising were still interdependent and interrelated—the publisher had to deliver the one to get the other—but now it was a competition principally for dollars, not people. This development, coinciding with the gradual disappearance of the great entrepreneurs (Hearst and McCormick were the last of them), also changed the role of newspapers in society. They were no longer the personal organs of powerful men who could play the role of kingmaker in politics, but devices to sell goods, and secondarily to provide news and entertainment in proportions varying with each newspaper. The editorial page, with some rare exceptions, remains what it has always been, a luxuriant garden of ego outlets, but not even many publishers pretend that it any longer has a profound effect on political or social developments.

Observed in this light, the newspaper medium becomes one among several media struggling not only for the attention of the consumer, a fierce competition in itself, but for the advertising money that makes its existence possible—a formidable task in the age of electronic technology. Newspapers are worth preserving not just because they inform the reader about goods and services in a way that other media



have not yet been able to equal (although they will), but because they give him—however imperfectly—information about the world around him in a detailed form unduplicated by the other media. More important, they are the only daily news medium that is not regulated by the government, and the United States is one of the few remaining nations still able to make that statement. The list gets a little smaller every year. That the newspaper press remains an effective, vitally essential watchdog over government is attested by the virulence with which politicians and other self-serving interests attack it and try to throttle it in every conceivable way.

That alone would make newspapers worth preserving in this beleaguered society and sufficient reason to let not even one go down the drain if there were any way to save it. The simple alternative to the Newspaper Preservation Act is the continuing loss of newspapers, which is already alarming enough.

One of the arguments most often heard against the act was that it would strengthen monopoly publishing, and in some of this rhetoric could be heard the ancient echoes of trust busting. But is group ownership necessarily the unmitigated evil it is always depicted as being? There may have been some merit in this argument when the Hearst newspapers spoke unanimously with the voice of W. R., and the McCormick-Patterson axis spoke with the interlocking voices of its powerful directorate, and the lesser press lords so often used their newspapers as propaganda machines. Things have changed today. The world's largest multiple ownership, the Thomson organization, speaks with a multiplicity of editorial voices. Ironically, one sometimes hears it argued virtuously that Lord Thomson should exercise editorial as well as financial control over his newspapers. He owns thirty-five dailies in the United States, the largest number owned by any group here, yet it would be difficult to prove that Roy Thomson is a threat to democratic expression in America.

What about the next five largest groups? Once the Gannett newspapers (twenty-six of them now) could have