

REYNOLDS'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPER;

A JOURNAL OF DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

VOL. 2 - No. 10

THE HERITAGE of FLEET STREET

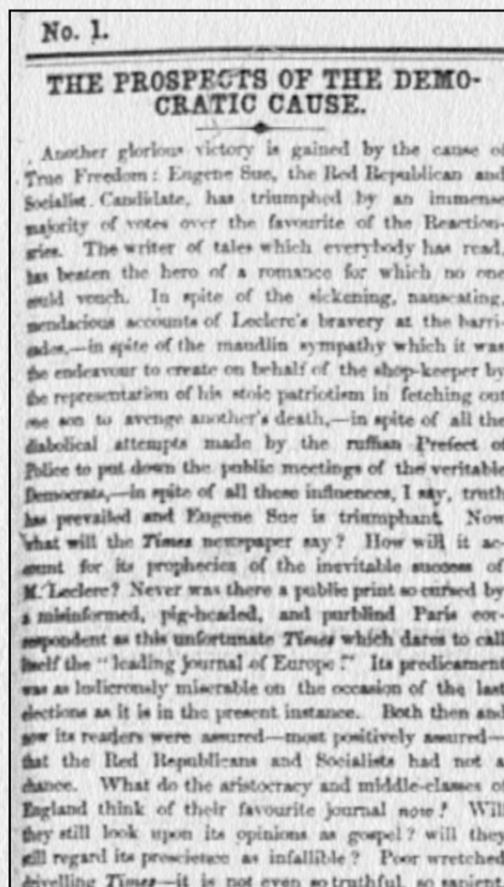
LONDON 2022

Reynolds's Newspaper was one of the most popular and enduring of the mass-market Sunday newspapers aimed at a working-class readership in the Victorian period. It was launched in 1850 by the radical George W.M. Reynolds (1814-1879).

During the 1840s Reynolds established himself as one of the most popular novelists of the period, especially with his serial, *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48). This linked series of gothic tales, set mainly in the criminal underworld, was, according to some accounts, the best-selling novel of the nineteenth century. *The Mysteries of London* became an increasingly radical story as it depicted the plight of the poor, helping establish its author briefly as a leading Chartist. Reynolds spoke at the great Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common in 1848 but thereafter confined himself to fiction and journalism. He launched a periodical titled *Reynolds's Political Instructor* in 1849 which was an explicitly Chartist publication, made up of political commentaries that represented his enthusiasm for the liberal and revolutionary movements that had swept Europe the previous year.

Reynolds brought the *Instructor* to an end in 1850 and replaced it with what was originally titled *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, published by John Dicks. It took the name *Reynolds's Newspaper* the following year which it remained until 1922 when it became *Reynolds News*. The format of the paper was not entirely new. It was clearly based on the kind of journalism sold on a Sunday that had been pioneered by *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (1842-1931) and the *News of the World* (1843-2011). It thus specialised in stories of true crime, police investigations, train-wrecks and other forms of sensation. The paper frequently stressed the way that crime of various kinds was undermining the fabric of social life.

What made *Reynolds's Newspaper* distinctive from other publications was its avowedly radical tone evident in its editorial columns which often drew political morals from crime stories, showing how there was one law for the rich and one for the poor. The paper remained true to the tenets of the Chartist movement demanding universal manhood suffrage and standing up for



the rights of labour. It also continued to report on struggles against tyranny abroad. Reynolds wrote editorial columns under his own name whilst the 'Gracchus' column was written by his brother Edward who became editor after Reynolds's death in 1879. The paper remained the most significant radical publication after the end of Chartism.

Reynolds's Newspaper maintained the old-fashioned radical analysis which blamed the evils of society on the domination of the aristocracy. This meant that its columns were not too different from William Cobbett's denunciations of 'Old Corruption' in the early part of the century. The paper claimed that Britain suffered from 'flunkeyism' (too much deference to the monarchy and the elite). It thus became a vehicle for the republican movement whilst also championing the cause of independent labour representation in parliament. The cost of maintaining the

monarchy and the empire were viewed as a financial burden borne by ordinary people. It tended to approach forms of state intervention with suspicion (as radicals tended to do in that period) because they represented unfair interference with the lives of working-class people. An example of this would be the restrictions on Sunday trading (the one day many could shop) introduced in 1855. It also disliked the temperance movement and championed the right of men to drink. At the same time the paper insisted on its innate patriotism, insisting that it was the selfish elite that did not care about the welfare of the country. Although it originally cost 4d, the repeal of the newspaper stamp duty allowed for the reduction of price to a penny in the early 1860s and a boost in sales. The combination of sensation and radicalism proved very popular with a working-class and lower middle-class readership.

Whilst critical of the Liberal Party, the paper usually supported Gladstone. In the twentieth century, it came to support both Labour and the Co-Operative party. The paper continued to offer sensational and populist types of news coverage with a strong focus on gossip and scandal which meant that for some it was not quite respectable. In 1962 it became the *Sunday Citizen* and only ceased publishing in 1967. The paper was a key location where the political left responded effectively to popular culture.



Reynold's Weekly Newspaper

Additional notes

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