

PICTURE POST

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Picture Post was not the first pictorial publication in Britain when it appeared on 1st October 1938. It had been preceded by the Illustrated London News, The Sphere, The Tatler, and the Bystander.

Picture Post was different. It was designed to appeal to all classes, not just the upper echelons of society. It was a new style of photo-journalism, which caught the popular mood, and enabled it to gain a circulation of 1.7 million within two years.

It was extraordinary, not least because it relied on the very background and talents of three extraordinary individuals, Stefan Lorent, Tom Hopkinson, and Edward Hulton.

Stefan Lorenz came to England as a refugee from Nazi Germany in 1934. He was a brilliant but quixotic Hungarian photographer, who had started working as a film cameraman and a film director, and had then moved to Munich and become editor of an illustrated paper, the Munchener Illustrierte. This was one of a number of illustrated papers in Germany in the 1930s which had developed a new style of photo-journalism. This involved the use of the camera to develop a journalistic story rather than the traditional text story with pictures derived from multiple sources, captioned to help develop the story. He arrived in Britain, got a job at Oldham's, and persuaded them to start a picture paper, but he chafed at the traditional management style of a large organisation, and left.

While there, he had met Tom Hopkinson who had "come to recognise photography as a journalistic weapon in its own right so that if - like myself at that time - you are determined to promote causes and affect conditions, photography can be a potent means for doing so"

Lorent borrowed money from a girlfriend to start a pocket magazine called Lilliput. Hopkinson was still at Oldham's.



The third member of the trio was Edward Hulton, a barrister, who had inherited a considerable fortune from his father's sale some years before of the Evening Standard. He planned to develop a newspaper empire, and had started by acquiring Farmers Weekly, Nursing Mirror and then Lilliput.

Lorent was appointed Editor at Hutton Press, and he appointed Hopkinson as Assistant Editor. Hulton agreed to put up the money to start Picture Post, and the first issue appeared on 1 October 1938.

Lorent had promised Hulton he could sell 250,000 copies, but, with the aid of a brilliant advertising campaign, which included putting "eyes" on London buses, sales amounted to a million copies within a few weeks and within size months, sales reached a million and a half.

Picture Post was liberal, anti-Fascist and populist. It campaigned against the persecution of the Jews in Germany. In January 1941, "A Plan for Britain" proposed minimum wage, full employment, a national health service, planned use of land, and a complete overhaul of education and was thus a forerunner of the Beveridge report.

Picture Post had a very distinguished team of photographers and writers and also freelance contributors including G.B Shaw, and Dorothy Parker.

Stefan Lorent left for America in 1940, since he feared the Nazis would imprison him again if they occupied the UK. Tom Hopkinson became Editor. Circulation increased to nearly two million by 1945, but then declined to

around 1.4 million in 1949. By this time, the tension between Hulton, the very conservative owner, and Hopkinson's socialist views, and Hopkinson was dismissed in 1950. The paper lasted another seven years under various editors, and circulation declined to less than 600,000 when it closed in July 1957

The pictures from Picture Post are now part of the large Getty archive.



Picture Post

Additional notes

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Further Reading:

Picture Post, 1938-50, Tom Hopkinson, 1970

Picture Post Album, Robert Kee, 1989