



THE MONOPOLIES AND MERGERS COMMISSION

**United Newspapers PLC  
and  
Fleet Holdings PLC**

A report on the proposed transfer of  
Fleet Holdings PLC to United Newspapers PLC

*Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry  
by Command of Her Majesty  
August 1985*

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## **Group appointed to discharge the functions of the Commission in relation to the investigation into the proposed transfer of Fleet Holdings PLC to United Newspapers PLC**

1. In pursuance of the powers vested in him by virtue of section 4 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and Part II of Schedule 3 thereto, the Chairman directed that the functions of the Commission in relation to the proposed transfer of Fleet Holdings PLC to United Newspapers PLC reference should be discharged through a group consisting of the following members of the Commission:

Mr M B Bunting  
Mr P H Dean  
Mr L Kelly  
Sir Godfray Le Quesne

2. He further appointed himself, being a member of the group, to act as Chairman of the group.

3. In pursuance of the powers vested in him by virtue of section 4 of the said Act and paragraph 22 of Schedule 3 thereto, the Secretary of State appointed for the purpose of this investigation the following additional members who, by virtue of the said paragraph 22, were also members of this group:

Lord Annan OBE  
Mr J Clement Jones CBE



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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

1.1. On 25 March 1985 the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry received an application, which was amended by letters dated 25 March 1985 and 24 April 1985, for his consent under section 58 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 (the Act) to the transfer of certain newspapers, of which Fleet Holdings PLC (Fleet) is proprietor, to United Newspapers PLC (United).

1.2. On 24 April 1985, in pursuance of section 59 of the Act, the Secretary of State referred the proposed transfer to the Commission for investigation and report. We are required under section 60(1) of the Act to make our report within three months of the date of the reference. The text of this reference, dated 24 April 1985, and the text of a further reference dated 14 June 1985, are reproduced at Appendices 1.1 and 1.2.

1.3. Section 59(3) of the Act requires us to report whether the proposed transfer may be expected to operate against the public interest, taking into account all matters which appear in the circumstances to be relevant and, in particular, the need for accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion.

1.4. Section 61(1) of the Act requires us to include in our report definite conclusions, with an account of our reasons for those conclusions, and such a survey of the general position with respect to the proposed transfer, and of the developments that have led to that position, as in our opinion are expedient for facilitating a proper understanding of our conclusions.

1.5. Notices inviting any person or organisation to submit evidence to the Commission on the proposed transfer were inserted in:

*Financial Times*  
*The Times*  
*The Guardian*  
*Daily Telegraph*  
*Daily Express*  
*Daily Star*

*South Wales Argus*  
*News and Weekly Argus*  
*South Wales Echo*  
*Cornwall Courier*  
*West Briton & Royal Cornwall Gazette*

1.6. We also invited evidence on matters affecting the public interest from the Press Council, from organisations which represent newspaper proprietors, including proprietors of provincial newspapers, from organisations which represent newspaper employees, including the TUC and affiliated unions, from the CBI and the Independent Broadcasting Authority. We also asked for comments from local authorities and chambers of commerce in those areas of South Wales and Devon and Cornwall where Fleet's paid for provincial newspapers circulate.

1.7. We obtained written evidence from both parties to the proposed transfer and we held two hearings with each of them. Both Fleet and United were represented by Counsel at the meetings. We also held hearings with representatives of the National Union of Journalists and the Association of Free Newspapers.

1.8. Some of the evidence collected during the course of our inquiry was of a confidential nature and our report contains only such information as we consider necessary for a proper understanding of our conclusions.

1.9. We thank all those who have helped us in our inquiry, particularly United and Fleet.