

# How the Campaign answered back in the Mail

By Mike Power, NGA, Daily Mail

A RIGHT of reply was won in the Daily Mail to an attack on the Campaign for Press Freedom following representations from the National Graphical Association's delegation at the TUC.

The attack came in Paul Johnson's 'Conference Commentary' on the final day of the Trades Union Congress in an article headlined 'Where they don't give a damn for freedom!'

Johnson referred to the closed shop as 'that Stalinist cancer at the heart of the movement' which 'continues to do its dirty work'. Most of his leader-page article was devoted to the battering which media bias received from delegates at Congress and the motion on the media which was passed overwhelmingly.

Describing CPF as the 'Campaign for Press Censorship' - it happened to be the first time the campaign was mentioned in the Mail - Johnson advised: 'When British unions revert to a more rational pattern of behaviour, the media will seem kinder.'

On the day of publication the NGA delegation, which was led by the union's general president, Les Dixon, contacted the imperial father of the chapel at the Mail, to request a meeting with the editor, David English, that afternoon.

A TUC delegate set off to join the talks and request that a reply be published. It was pointed out that Johnson's article was the first-ever mention of the Campaign for Press Freedom in the Mail, and that he totally misrepresented views stated at the campaign's fringe meeting.

In English's absence, the IFoC and delegate obtained an agreement with a deputy that a reply should be written which would be considered by the editor.

Although we conceded that a news story in the same issue of the paper had partially redressed the balance, we argued that Johnson's strident invective needed to be answered.

A reply was submitted to the editor, who said that he had received two dozen letters on the issue from readers, the large majority in support of Johnson. However, he accepted that we had a point of view and suggested that the piece be written as a letter.

This was done and a 250-word letter, signed from 'an NGA delegate to the TUC', a half page of letters on the issue of 'Unions and a free press'. My letter explained what the Campaign for Press Freedom actually aims to do.

The request for this reply had the support of the NGA. How other less weighty sections of the community can obtain redress against the distortions and misrepresentations that appear daily in the press is an urgent matter for the campaign.

# ITN offers Benn five minutes

ITN's coverage of the Labour Party conference, like that of the rest of the mass media, began by putting the commentary of Shirley Williams, Bill Rodgers, and David Owen up front.

After one News at Ten bulletin, which featured a lengthy report of a 'Gang of Three' fringe meeting before a commentary on the conference itself, Peter Sissons of ITN offered Tony Benn five minutes on News at Ten.

Benn turned down the offer, telling Sissons: 'You're here to cover the conference.' He had told reporters that he would not be available for interview.

At a Tribune fringe meeting, Benn said: 'I've been in parliament for 30 years, 20 years on the NEC, and in government, then they offer me five minutes.'

'They're not interested in what you say. They ask me to debate Shirley Williams, or

some topic that they set up. They're imposing their own pattern on British politics. It's the denial of real coverage,' he added, 'in lieu of media coverage.'

\*Following a 'Benn-is-a-looney' article by the Sun's political editor, Walter Terry, Tony Benn wrote to the NUJ chapel on the Sun asking for advice on what action he might take, and suggesting that perhaps he could discuss the issue with the chapel.

Father of the chapel Malcolm Withers put this request to a chapel meeting. It was defeated by 60 votes to three.

Those opposed to the idea argued that 'we couldn't have any old ex-Cabinet member wandering in and attacking one of our members'. They suggested that since Benn is an NUJ member he could pursue the matter through the union's complaints procedure.

## Step up action on media racism

AT a meeting attended by some 300 people, Camden Committee for Community Relations called on media unions and black minority groups to join together in a campaign against media racism.

The meeting, held in London on 14 October, saw *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum*, an exposé of TV bias made by the Campaign Against Racism in the Media, and a video tape of a racist film commercial for Silk Cut cigarettes (based on the Zulu War), against which Camden CCR has complained to the Advertising Standards Authority.

The films were followed by a lively and often heated discussion between the audience and a panel of journalists.

Although two of the panellists, Peregrine Worsthorne of the *Sunday Telegraph* and Lindsay Mackie of the *Guardian*, defended the British media's record on race issues, the overwhelming view of the meeting was that most media coverage, whether directly or otherwise, reflected and reinforced racial prejudice and stereotypes.

Zareer Masani, Camden CCR's public education officer, called on members of media unions to take up the issue of racism-awareness within their professions by discussing racism at union meetings, organising anti-racist workshops and training sessions, developing contact with

black community groups, and putting all possible pressure, including industrial action, on management in cases of racist reporting.

He also called for more active participation by the general public, and especially black people, in opposing media racism by complaining against it and, where necessary, picketing and occupying media offices to demand the right of reply.

'We who are so consistently the subject of bias and misrepresentation,' Masani said, 'cannot wait for a miraculous change in the structure and attitudes of the media. We have to act here and now and make our voices heard.'

CCCR has produced a leaflet, 'If it's Racist, Complain!', backing up these proposals.

Further information from: Zareer Masani, Camden Committee for Community Relations, 1 Robert Street, London NW1 3JU. Tel 01-388 1942/3. Details of 'It Ain't Half Racist, Mum' from: CARM, PO Box 50, London N1.

## Membership

INDIVIDUAL membership of the campaign costs £3.

ORGANISATIONS can affiliate for an annual fee at the following rates, depending on size of membership.

Less than 1,000 - £5; Between 1,000 and 10,000 - £10; Between 10,000 and 50,000 - £15; 50,000 to 100,000 - £25; more than 100,000 - £50.

Write to John Jennings giving your name, or the name of the organisation and its secretary as applicable, and your address. Cheques should be payable to Campaign for Press Freedom.

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# FREE PRESS

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## We can't let the rich decide

By Paul Routledge, Labour Editor, *The Times*

LORD Thomson's decision to withdraw from national newspaper publishing and sell Times Newspapers has dramatised all the arguments of the Campaign for Press Freedom.

Coming so hard on the heels of the closure of the London *Evening News*, and the uncertainty over the future of the *Daily Star*, the move vividly illustrates the mockery of proprietorial ideas of a free press.

In the case of the Hapless *Evening News* we had the unedifying spectacle of very rich men shuffling the pack to deal themselves a better hand.

And when *The Times*, the *Sunday Times*, and the supplements were put up for sale, media attention turned immediately to the Press magnates who might want to increase their slice of the market and to big money interested in getting in on the Fleet Street act.

Reportage of what was quickly dubbed 'the sale of the century' fitted in the framework of assumptions about newspaper ownership: that it is the preserve of millionaires and wealthy multinationals keen to exercise social influence.

However, at *The Times* many of the journalists feel the time has come to break with those assumptions and demand a say in their own destiny and in the destiny of what is still one of the world's great newspapers.

The most remarkable aspect of the affair so far is the sudden but apparently heartfelt conversion of the paper's editor, William Rees-Mogg, to the cause of industrial co-partnership.

From being 'superhawk' on the board of directors of Times Newspapers during the harrowing 11-month lock-out last year, Rees-Mogg now wants to put together a syndicate of 'talent, management and money' to publish the paper. The journalists would have a participatory stake.

In this initiative, Rees-Mogg has the widespread support of the editorial staff, who actually proposed something very similar during the shutdown in 1978-79.

A limited liability company, Journalists of The Times, was formed 'to ensure the survival of the papers with their traditional character, editorial independence and integrity'. It now has 260 share-holders.



## Press Council enquiry launched

THE Campaign for Press Freedom has established a Commission of Inquiry on the Press Council. This follows widespread criticism of the council, and the decision of the National Union of Journalists to withdraw its representatives.

The terms of reference for the commission, which holds its first meeting at the end of November, are:

To examine as a matter of urgency the setting up of a genuinely independent system of monitoring the press and broadcasting which would provide a forum for complaints by the public and ensure the right of reply for victims of bias and distortion, taking into account the need for speedy action, effective redress, financial independence, and a structure and membership which would be broadly representative and would at the same time command credibility with all parties.

In particular to consider whether: the system should be statutory or non-statutory; the same system should cover both the press and broadcasting; and whether investigation should be separate from adjudication.

The members of the commission are: Sarah Boston, ACTT; Geoffrey Drain, NALGO; Jake Ecclestone, *The Times*; Geoffrey Goodman, *Daily Mirror*; Russell Profitt, teacher and Lewisham councillor; Geoffrey Robertson, barrister; Jeremy Tunstall, City University; Phillip Whitehead, MP and ex-broadcaster; Katharine Whitehorn, *The Observer*.

## FP goes bi-monthly

To help build the Campaign for Press Freedom, the bulletin will now be produced regularly every two months. Your next Free Press, for Jan-Feb 1980, will be a bumper 8-page issue.

To take the bulletin on the road to a healthy circulation we would like to ask you a favour: Order your copies now! Nearly 200 organisations are affiliated to the campaign and we want to be able to distribute bundles of each issue to these and other organisations.

Free Press now has a cover price of 10p. Organisations can purchase copies for sale at 5p each - even less in the case of large orders. So that we can keep administration at a manageable level and pay our bills, we would like pre-payment for orders.

Please place your order with CPF as soon as possible. Members of the campaign will continue to receive free copies.

Free Press needs your news and views. Ideas for the bulletin, letters, meeting and conference announcements and reports, reviews of publications and programmes on the media, cases of censorship and bias, and other articles on press freedom from campaign supporters are all welcome.



# PLUSES AND MINUSES in the battle against media sexism

Angela Phillips

IT'S a good six years since the headline 'Redhead takes on Honey Blond' appeared, providing us with one of the finest examples of the trivialisation of women by the media. That 'redhead', Barbara Castle, has since become a Euro MP while the 'honey blond', Margaret Thatcher, has risen to the most powerful job in the land — and not because of her brand of shampoo.

Yet sexism is still alive and well and to be found in every form of media from the patronising DJs on local radio to page 3 of the *Yorkshire Miner*.

Superficially there have been improvements. There was nothing during the last election which quite matched the nauseousness of 'Blonde bombshell Margaret Bain took over as the glamorous face of Scottish Nationalism from party pin-up Margot Macdonald'.

Still, some of the epithets used to describe Margaret Thatcher, by those who least admire her, betray the ease with which people on the left can employ sexism as a weapon.

Calling her the Iron Maiden may seem an amusing way to link her personal characteristics to her social policy, with a passing reference to the steel industry, but try transposing the description to a man.

Man of Iron sounds more like praise than criticism. It certainly has none of the connotations of sexual insult that go along with the female version. Ms Thatcher's sexuality should not be the point at issue.

A possibly more worrying trend is what was recently described in *New*

*Society* as 'the soft pornography of rape reports' which is being used to jazz up the columns of some of our more serious newspapers as well as the racier tabloids which have thrived on it for years.

It is bad enough having naked female bodies used to sell newspapers. Surely using stories of mutilated female bodies is even worse.

While women are over-represented as decoration, in the hard news stories the position is reversed. Strike reports still refer only to men unless the numbers of women involved are large enough to earn the title 'petticoat rebellion'.

Even in reports this year about the Polish strikes, the leading role played by the female crane driver who triggered the dockyard strike was consistently played down. One television report described her as 'frail', presumably to fit in with the motherly persona they had endowed her with.

One of the worst omissions is that of stories which particularly concern women. As I write this, the Tory government has just published a consultative document on maternity pay. The proposals — all cutting back women's rights — went

largely unnoticed on television and in the popular press. No doubt the men who make the news find it hard to get excited about levels of maternity pay.

Even when (rarely) a women's issue becomes the centre of real controversy, articles tend to be rationed.

During the campaign against the Corrie Anti-Abortion Bill, for example, the numbers of unused stories could have papered the wall of a newsroom. News editors were afraid of 'overkill'. Strange that nobody gets tired of looking at bodies — only of information on how to control them.

One of the most hopeful signs of possible change is the sudden surge of interest and indignation from within the media unions. At the NUJ's women's conference, the workshops on sexism were by far the best attended.

Members of the Women's Broadcasting and Film Lobby (c/o 28 Torbay Rd, London NW6) have also been putting on the pressure to brush up the image of women. The non-union organisation Women in Media plans to set up a media monitoring group to channel consumer complaints back to media workers.

It remains to be seen whether WIM will actually involve media unions in their plans. Certainly, if there is to be any real change in attitudes to women it must come from within, through the changed consciousness of media workers.

Marion Bowman, chairperson of the NUJ's Equality Working Party, adds: Press freedom was a key issue discussed at the first ever conference for women in the National Union of Journalists, held in London in October.

The conference, attended by nearly 200 women journalists from all over Britain and Ireland, had four main themes: training and job opportunities; conditions of employment; organising women in the union; and sexism in the media.

'If numbers are anything to go by, the workshop on sexism in the media was the most significant,' said one of the conference organisers. 'Over 50

'Both women journalists and the women who are at the receiving end of the media are increasingly angry at the way the media either ignore the issues that are important to women, or trivialise women in order to sell their products.'

Guest speakers from the Danish journalists' union said women journalists had to fight not only for opportunities at work but also for fair treatment of the female public in the press.

Maria Palla, vice-president of the Portuguese journalists' union, described the position of the small number of women journalists in Portugal where she herself was prosecuted for making a film about abortion.

Proposals from the conference workshops called for increased representation of women in the NUJ structure; greater priority for equality issues in union-management negotiations; and more vigorous efforts to counter sexism in the media.

# Who holds the front page?

THE publication by the TUC of yet another contribution to the debate on the media is to be welcomed. *Behind the Headlines* gives the background to what happens to the news once it is created; how it gets into newspapers and other media.

Perhaps the most pertinent sentence in the pamphlet states: 'British democracy relies on an informed and aware public opinion.' It is this which motivates all of us who are now involved in discussing, influencing, and changing the current position within the press, radio and television in this country.

The TUC's pamphlet draws attention to the Royal Commission's Minority Report and discusses the question of a new national newspaper.

It makes certain comments that one might challenge regarding the standards of radio and television as being better than those of the press. I think there are many who would challenge this broad statement but, nonetheless, this does appear to be the view of the TUC Media Working Group.

The current actions of the Campaign for Press Freedom and its Right of Reply Sub-Committee, based on the very positive debate and decisions of this year's Congress, would certainly lead one to challenge the comment in the pamphlet that 'the power to alter this situation, lies in the hands of the owners of the press, the broadcasting authorities and to some extent journalists themselves'.

Certainly there have been no individual initiatives by the current owners or the broadcasting authorities to change the situation. They would seem to be anxious to maintain the status quo and journalists certainly are guilty on far too many occasions of self-censorship, which does not assist in developing a free press.

The unions in the industry have now taken decisions that will lead to their playing a much more positive role in developing and opening the existing media to more people, and certainly the Campaign for Press Freedom is actively progressing its discussions in regard to an alternative press.

*Behind the Headlines* is well worth its 60p as a major contribution to the essential discussion that must continue in order that progress made is of the most positive and democratic nature.

George Jerrom,  
NGA national officer

casting, for schools and the Open University, which is fairly marginal.

'But there is little coverage by the mass media of the patterns of their ownership and structures, and this programme is no exception.'

While the television authorities are occasionally prepared to allow examination of their own bias at ungodly hours — what they never permit on the screens they control is any comment or analysis on the roots of that bias. *Viewpoint*, screened for schools during November, ably reveals a bunch of the biases.

Geoffrey Sheridan



## Press On

### It's your right to reply!

WITHIN a month of the Campaign for Press Freedom launching its right of reply campaign, the demand became official TUC policy. But a motion passed with overwhelming support at Congress is not necessarily the same thing as positive action that gets things done.

This is why CPF has followed up its initiative with publicity within the trade union movement for active support for the right of reply campaign, so that bias and distortion in the mass media do not go unanswered.

We are convening a conference on the right of reply, which is jointly sponsored by the London branches of the unions in print: NUJ, SOGAT, NATSOPA, NGA and SLADE.

The conference, to be held early in 1981, will discuss how and in what circumstances the right of reply should be enforced.

CPF has produced a leaflet for the South-East Region TUC's Month of Action in November, to answer the question: 'What can you do if your activities are ignored or distorted by the press, radio, or television?'

in the media over instances of distorted coverage.

This theme is developed in a CPF leaflet now being prepared for mass distribution. This sets out what you can do to secure your right to reply, and specifies who should be contacted in the media.

NATSOPA and the NGA assisted with research for the leaflet by requesting all their Fleet St chapels to submit details of cases where their members had obtained the right of reply. Among those who have won space to answer back are railway porters, school caretakers, black people, train drivers, printers, gays, and the Grunwick strikers.

With this background of spontaneous and unco-ordinated activity among press workers, there is every prospect that the CPF's right of reply campaign — now that it is backed by the print unions and the TUC — will start to dramatically advance public access to the press.

### Media coverage of Northern Ireland

SEVERAL media unions are supporting a conference which will discuss coverage of events in Northern Ireland. The conference, to be held on 28 February 1981, in the Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham, is being called by the NUJ as a result of a decision taken at the union's annual conference this year.

Support for the Media Censorship on Ireland conference has so far come from ACTT, ABS, and SLADE. It will be an open labour movement conference.

NUJ assistant secretary Bob Norris says: 'Consistent fears have been expressed about the difficulties our members experience in reporting events in Northern Ireland. The conference takes place with no specific prior assumptions about the nature of the censorship involved. We want to debate these issues.'

Details and leaflets from: Bob Norris, NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Grays Inn Rd, London WC1. Tel 01-278 7916.

### East End News launch date

The *East End News* is to launch on Friday March 13, 1981. This decision was taken by over 100 members of the co-operative at a weekend conference in October. Although the original launch target of £25,000 has still not been met, members were anxious not to lose the growing support for the paper by further delays.

Over 600 individuals and organisations are now share-holders in the co-op, and they are being asked to recruit new members to boost the current net capital fund of £15,000. New appeals to trusts and trades unions have also been mounted.

The *East End News* is on the point of formal registration as a Friendly Society, and the first management committee will be elected at an inaugural meeting in Stepney's Half Moon Theatre on Saturday January 10. Staff appointments are expected in February. For more details contact *EEN*, on 981-1221 or at 17 Victoria Park Square, London E2.



## real to reel

TWO young people meet, after a fashion. At a bus stop a young man and woman wait.

Through his mind runs the macho culture of the TV serials, cheap novels and comics: *Joe Clancy was a cop who liked working alone*. Through her mind parades the romantic nonsense of the TV serials, cheap novels, and teenage girls' papers: *Falling in love was never easy at the best of times*.

Interspersed with this mythic world is the halting dialogue of a street encounter. 'Are you busy tonight?' he hesitatingly enquires. 'Get lost,' she replies. *He didn't take that garbage from anyone he thinks. A little tremble of excitement fluttered in my heart, she imagines.*

Thus the two-tiered episode continues — the string of clichés of the fantasy world conjured up by the media, and the rough and tumble of an actual conversation.

When his approach is definitely rebuffed, he considers: *Save your tears, amigo, San Francisco is one tough place*. She concludes: *Love shone all around me and the world seemed to be singing with happiness*.

This vivid sequence is part of *Young Once*, the first of Thames TV's four-part 'Viewpoint 2' series for schools, which shows how various social groups — young people, blacks, trades

unionists, and those on welfare — are presented and represented in the media.

Produced by Alan Horrox and Stuart Hall, and using a wide selection of TV and cinema footage, together with newspaper reports, the programmes unwind a number of the presumptions that lie behind the media's supposed 'neutrality'.

All the classics are there: black people as a problem, trades unionists as mindless militants victimising a mythic 'public', the unemployed as scroungers. And at the end of each programme the IBA's compulsory balancing act, with newspaper editors and programme controllers putting forward the rationalisations.

Gus MacDonald, head of features at Granada TV, sums it up: 'I think we can look forward to a lot of industrial trouble over the next two years.'

'That will be the test of television's objectivity, because standing as we do in the brokers' role at the centre of society, it will be difficult to represent all those attitudes inside those battles which will undoubtedly come.'

'It's noticeable,' says Alan Horrox, 'that in the mass media's view of itself there is some material which looks at the patterns of treatment and perspectives of various groups. This mostly goes out in educational broad-