

## Now a word on their sponsors

IT IS virtually unheard of for newspapers to disclose the backroom deals with advertisers which play a powerful part in shaping the press.

An exception is *Bedfordshire on Sunday*, which recently published an account of how the local estate agents' association switched 15 pages of weekly advertising from the *Bedford Times* to the *Bedford Journal*, and then back again.

The initial move meant a loss to the *Bedford Times* of about £½m a year, and it only regained the property advertising last October by cutting its former ad rates by 60 per cent. Frank Branston, the editor and managing director of *Bedford on Sunday*, added that 'no paper with a serious interest in gaining or retaining their advertising will be overkeen to attack them'.

He commented: 'Any newspaper editor who claims to be completely unaffected by advertising considerations is a liar.'

The newspaper followed its expose with an article by GEORGE JERROM, national officer in the print union NGA, which we publish here.

The exposure of the deals made over property advertising raises problems that

## SOGAT wins ban on debt adverts

ADVERTISEMENTs for an obnoxious form of debt collection known as warrant sales no longer appear in the Scottish press, thanks to action taken by the print union SOGAT.

The adverts gave the name and address of a debtor and announced the date of an auction of personal possessions – the warrant sales – in the home, often in front of neighbours.

The announcements appeared in more than a hundred Scottish daily and weekly papers until SOGAT members imposed a boycott. The action was decided by the union's Scottish division in November, as part of the Scottish TUC's campaign to have the sales abolished.

As *The Scotsman* pointed out in a report of the boycott: 'These sales have been criticised for causing distress in cases of hardship.' Alan Watson, finance secretary of SOGAT's Scottish Graphical Division, describes the practice as 'barbaric and repugnant'.

Now the Sheriff's Offices, which are often private debt collectors, have had to resort to circulating handbills locally, and SOGAT members have been instructed to boycott these, too.

'We're very pleased at the support we've received from our members,' says Alan Watson. 'It has been unanimous.'

The Law Society of Scotland is not quite so happy. It stated: 'Our concern is that if established newspapers for any reason are not prepared to carry statutory statements the whole fabric of society and rule of law is imperilled.'

Alan Watson says: 'In our opinion the freedom of the press in this country is a myth. It's confined to a handful of millionaires to peddle whatever political line happens to be fashionable.'

'However, our action in instructing members not to handle warrant sales should not be taken as an indication that we would wish to set ourselves up as a body to censor the press. It should be seen as a one-off action.'

'We will continue to play our part in the campaign for greater democracy, access, and accountability in the press.'

have been of major concern in the printing industry for some considerable time.

First the influence exercised by advertisers. In 1949 the Royal Commission on the Press, under the chairmanship of Lord Reith, stated 'we have evidence that individual advertisers occasionally seek to influence the policy of a newspaper or to obtain the omission or insertion of a particular news item'.

This pressure from advertisers is most difficult to pinpoint and in 1962 the Royal Commission on the Press, under the chairmanship of Lord Shawcross, recommended that the newly-formed Press Council should 'have authority to hear complaints from journalists of undue influence by advertisers or advertising agencies and give full publicity to their findings'.

This influence not only pervades the newspaper industry at both national and provincial level, but clearly pervades the magazine market.

A working paper for Lord McGregor's Royal Commission entitled 'The Women's Periodical Press' indicated that in the International Publishing Corporation, which controls 70 per cent of the women's magazine market, some magazines are handed their advertising schedules and required to build editorial content around them.

The pressure from advertising departments in these circumstances can be intense.

A commission of inquiry into advertising in 1964 cited evidence from Katherine Whitehorn, who currently writes for the *Observer*, that she had withheld the names of manufacturers from her consumer column

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Contributions to *Free Press* from campaign supporters are most welcome. The deadline for the May-June issue is 15 April. Send your contribution to: Geoffrey Sheridan, 116 Cazenove Road, London N16. Day Tel: 01-359 8189.

*Free Press* is published by the Campaign for Press Freedom and is sent free to members. Individuals and organisations are invited to place multiple-orders (supplied at a discount rate) for distribution at meetings and workplaces, etc.

In spite of the risks of pressures from advertisers, documented here, *Free Press* is taking the plunge! The rates are: whole page £120, and pro rata down to a quarter page; semi-display and classified £4 a column inch.

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Typeset/design by Redesign (TU) 01-837 6039

because she was conscious of the possible effect upon advertising revenue.

It is perhaps this form of self-censorship which has led to the comments in the latest Royal Commission's statement on the influence of advertising. It stated that 'no Royal Commission could expect to learn what happens from those directly concerned, for it would not be in their interests to speak about the success of advertisers in exerting pressures of that kind.'

'The previous Royal Commission failed to find concrete evidence and none has come our way either. In saying this we are not denying that it takes place, only that we are unable to document it.'

There are other reputable journalists who have, over a period of years, pinpointed the influence advertisers have on the freedom of the press.

Kingsley Martin, for many years editor of the *New Statesman*, states categorically in his autobiography: 'I am shocked when it is pretended that advertisers do not influence editorial policy. During Lord Northcliffe's attacks against Kitchener in 1915 *The Times* was half its size, because of the withdrawal of advertising. The attacks stopped.'

Two years ago the Press Council adjudicated against the Wales Gas Company, saying that the withdrawal of adverts was a blatant attempt to put improper pressure on a weekly newspaper.

The second main influence of advertising that naturally develops from the financial crutch they provide to the industry can best be seen by a breakdown of the amount of monies that are available to the press in any one year.

In 1979, £347m was spent on national newspapers; £593m on regional newspapers; £180m on magazines and periodicals; £203m on trade and technical journals; £54m on directories, including the Yellow Pages, and £119m on press production costs, making a grand total of £1,496m in one year as the crutch to maintain the free press.

It is the view of my union and others in our industry that this root cause must be challenged in order that advertisers do not exercise that major influence over the freedom of the press.

## Join!

**MEMBERSHIP**  
Individuals: £3 a year.

**AFFILIATIONS**  
Below 1,000 members: £5; 1,000 to 10,000: £10; 10,000 to 50,000: £15; 50,000 to 100,000: £25; more than 100,000 members: £50.

I/We would like to join the Campaign for Press Freedom as an individual/affiliated organisation and enclose . . . £

I/We would like to receive . . . copies of each issue of *Free Press* at a discount rate.

**NAME**

**ORGANISATION**

**ADDRESS**

Campaign for Press Freedom  
274/288 London Road, Hadleigh,  
Essex SS7 2DE.

# FREE PRESS

## Bulletin of the Campaign for Press Freedom

## THATCHER'S 'TIMES'

RUPERT Murdoch got his papers – and in the fullness of time will no doubt get his ermine too; the Thomson Organisation got rid of an embarrassing albatross and quietly forgot about its pledge to keep the papers going for 21 years; and the papers themselves got a new lease of life . . . of a sort.

Typically, only the cause of press freedom was the loser.

Some good may yet emerge from the whole squalid business, however. By allowing one man – and a man with Murdoch's reputation, at that – to control so massive a chunk of what people in Britain can read, the political and business establishments



have weakened, perhaps fatally, their case that only a commercially-owned press can provide the variety and independence necessary to a free press.

The absurdity of such an argument becomes even plainer with Murdoch controlling 35 per cent of the national daily and

## Media workers advise Brum unions

from a Birmingham correspondent

BIRMINGHAM Trades Council has set up a media advisory group, mainly in response to anti-trade union campaigns by the Birmingham *Evening Mail*.

One of the most vitriolic was aimed at the former Longbridge convener, Derek Robinson. Along with the Labour group on the city council, the trades council had already decided not to speak to journalists from the *Evening Mail*, a move which preceded the departure of the paper's editor-in-chief, David Hopkinson.

The media advisory group is an extension of this action. Composed of members from each media trade union, the group produced a media directory which has been sent to each shop steward and union official in the Birmingham area.

by Jake Ecclestone  
former NUJ FoC of *The Times*

Sunday newspaper market. As the illusions are stripped away, so the case for political intervention becomes stronger.

If it has done nothing else, the chicanery of the Thomson Organisation and the connivance of the government has demonstrated beyond all doubt that the people who really matter – the readers – are, under the present system of press ownership, treated with total contempt.

The immediate battle to save *The Times*, its sister Sunday and the three supplements, has in one sense been lost.

There were several reasons for the defeat, beginning with the secrecy imposed by Thomson British Holdings. Whether this was commercial expediency or a smoke-screen, behind which a deal struck many months before was presented, as has been suggested, seems to matter less than the fact that something of public concern – something affecting the well-being of our society – should be hidden from sight.

Thomson's again managed to mislead the public. The 11-month lockout of 1979 has become fixed in peoples' minds as a strike; this time they seem to have convinced everyone that only Murdoch was willing to buy the papers. In both cases the truth was forgotten.

The vetting procedure was a sham from start to finish. The four 'national

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directors', Lord Greene (formerly Sid Greene of the NUR), Lord Dacre (Hugh Trevor-Roper), Lord Roll (a director of Warburg's, the merchant bankers acting for Thomsons) and Lord Robens, who made up the vetting committee together with Sir Denis Hamilton (chairperson), William Rees-Mogg and Harry Evans, were supposed to have laid down criteria against which potential purchasers would be measured.

They failed to do so, thus dishonouring their public responsibilities; they gave Murdoch the most cursory examination a few hours before he was announced as the favoured bidder.

The government, at Margaret Thatcher's behest, broke the spirit if not the letter of the law to make things easy for buyer and seller, exposing again the monopolies commission legislation for the sham that it is. The Secretary of State for Trade, John Biffen, listened politely to what worried journalists were urging on him in the way of safeguards, and proceeded to ignore all their suggestions.

Perhaps understandably – though I believe wrongly – the printing industry unions welcomed Murdoch and urged that the Monopolies Commission should not examine the matter. Their difficulty, as with the NUJ, was to reconcile repugnance for Murdoch as a proprietor with the defence of their members' jobs.

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Further information from: NUJ Birmingham Branch Secretary, 21 Coronation Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29.

## BBC backs down over security films

THE transmission on 23 February and 2 March of two *Panorama* films of the security services and on invasion of privacy represents a gain for press freedom and the NUJ's Code of Conduct.

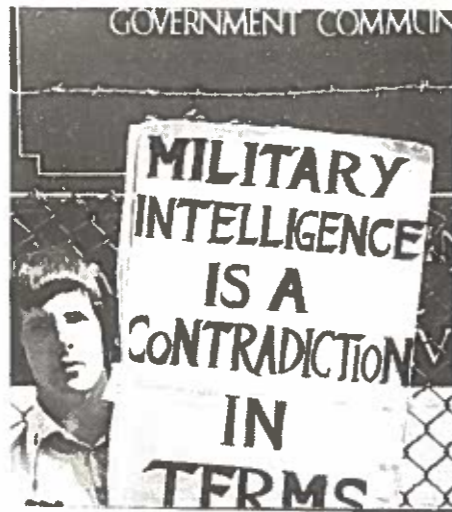
Journalists in the BBC successfully resisted an attempt by the Director-General, Sir Ian Trethowan, to delete large portions of the programmes following pressure by the security services and the government.

It is regarded as the first victory over enforcing the Code of Conduct in a major journalistic organisation.

Work on the films began nine months ago and the *Panorama* team were, from the outset, subjected to unrelenting pressure from Trethowan. Abusive memos flew around the BBC TV centre as he tried to assert that investigation of the operations of the British security services was out of bounds to BBC journalists.

Trethowan's position was that *Panorama* should discuss their accountability to parliament without actually telling the public what they do. In particular the Director-General:

\*Ordered Tom Mangold to stop contacting past or present agents, an unprecedented intrusion into the right of a journalist to maintain his/her sources.



\*Tried to force his views on individual members of the *Panorama* team by confronting them privately.

\*Demanded a special cassette copy of the films which he spent 15 days considering.

Following widespread reports that Trethowan had shown the tapes to the security services (cynics detected two separate hands making cuts on the transcript of

the films) the NUJ chapel at Lime Grove met to take action.

A hundred and ten journalists expressed alarm at the actions of the DG and with the full backing of the ABS and all other unions in broadcasting sought a meeting with the Director-General. Led by Vincent Hanna, who is a member of the NUJ executive and a committee member of the CPF, they obtained assurances from the Director-General that there would be no restriction placed on journalistic inquiry in the BBC. Trethowan withdrew his orders to Mangold and sued for peace with the journalists.

He subsequently approved the final version of the films which *Panorama* editor Roger Bolton (who was sacked and reinstated over the 'Carrickmore incident') said made no concessions to the outside pressure.

Hanna stated: 'The films contain no new, sensational matter, but they shed daylight on the security services for the first time in a mass circulation programme. Apparently the government cannot stomach having 8m *Panorama* viewers share the sort of knowledge which is normally confined to readers of the *New Statesman*.

'The programmes justify the Campaign for Press Freedom's continued interest in censorship in the media. And it shows what can be done with united shopfloor action.'

## Why you haven't read, seen or heard all about it

by Geoffrey Sheridan, editor, *Free Press*

THE cause of press freedom in Britain has scarcely fared brilliantly thus far into 1981.

Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of Times Newspapers has landed him with control of 35 per cent of British daily and Sunday papers in terms of circulation. Murdoch's style of editorial intervention in the three continents spanned by his press empire will not give rise to any anxiety in Downing Street.

The takeover of the *Observer* by an accredited 'unacceptable face of capitalism' adds to the urgency of promoting policies which provide an alternative to private ownership of major national newspapers. This is also the question of whether proposals such as that of the Labour Party for a national print corporation can be divorced from action to bring them about.

Down the round in the Strand, the Appeal Court upheld the verdict - now to go to the House of Lords - that the NCCL's legal officer was guilty of gross contempt when she showed to a journalist Home Office documents which had been read out in open court. Among Lord Denning's concerns was that the resulting article had been critical of prison policy.

So much for freedom of information, which the Tories ditched when they voted down Labour MP Frank Hooley's Bill last month. They thus followed the example set by the last Labour government. The fact that Ronald Reagan's administration aims

to curtail the US's Freedom of Information Act should point us in the right direction.

Meanwhile much of the mass media is engaged in their valiant battle to uphold the status quo by presenting us with the 'nice' people leaving the Labour Party because of the 'totalitarians' on the left.

The fightback proceeds. The TUC is in the process of setting up a feasibility study into the launch of a daily paper sympathetic to the labour movement. At the local level, the *East End News* launches as an alternative weekly on 13 March. In North London, journalists on the *Camden Journal* continue their official strike against the closure of the paper. Last month they led a 300-strong march against cuts in Camden.

Bias and censorship have taken some knocks. The *Panorama* films on the security services have been screened, and the BBC hierarchy was also obliged to broadcast an Open University lecture against the nuclear arms race, which it had originally refused to transmit.

While those campaigning against the Deptford fire massacre in which 13 black people died point out that the media would show more concern about the burning of a dogs' home, journalists backed a sub-editor on the *Wimbledon News* who refused to put through a National Front letter. A day's industrial action ensured that the sub-editor kept his job and that the letter went into the wastepaper bin.

At the end of last month black media workers came together at a one-day seminar supported by ACTT and the NUJ, which officially launched the Black Media Workers Association. Racism in the structure of the industry and in the content of its output were among the items on the agenda.

The same unions organised a conference on media censorship of the issues

of Northern Ireland, on which the TV series *The Troubles* and *A Sense of Ireland* have recently shed a little light.

The Campaign for Press Freedom is shortly to publish a pamphlet on the right of reply, explaining why it is a right, how to obtain it, and giving examples of where it has been achieved. The Commission of Inquiry into the Press Council, which was initiated by CPF but is now working independently, has decided its terms of reference and is inviting submissions.

If you have not already joined the campaign, the time is now. Since 1 January 1981, 85 individuals have joined up, and 40 organisations have affiliated. The total membership is 400 individuals, 50 sponsors, and 350 organisations. Fill in the form on the back page - you will not be alone!

Addresses to note: NCCL Contempt of Court Appeal, 186 King's Cross Road, London WC1. Tel: 01-278 4675. Labour Committee for Freedom of Information, 1 Grange Gardens, Grange Road, Cambridge. *East End News*, 17 Victoria Park Square, London E2. Tel: 01-981 1221. *Save the Camden Journal Campaign*, 38-40 Camden Road, London NW1. Tel: 01-485 8207/8. Black Media Workers Association, 29c Lanhill Road, London W9. Tel: 01-282 8846. Commission of Inquiry into the Press Council, 1 Dr Johnson's Buildings, Temple, London EC4.

## COME TO THE AGM

THE Campaign for Press Freedom's second annual general meeting is to be held on Saturday, 9 May, at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1, beginning at 10.30am.

All individual members, including sponsors, are entitled and encouraged to attend. Affiliated organisations can send from 1 to 10 delegates, depending on their size.

Nominations for the national committee and motions for debate have to be submitted by 10 April. The future of the campaign will be in your hands at the AGM. Be there!

## What's a feminist like me doing on a magazine like this?

by Sally Feldman, editor, *Love Affair*

'OH, God, Greg - I want you,' I murmured as he crushed me to him and covered me with fierce, hungry kisses. 'I... I love you...'

This is the stuff of real-life romantic fiction - the kind of fiction that you can read each week in *Love Affair*. As its title suggests, this IPC magazine deals primarily with love, romance, sex - matters of central concern to young teenage women.

With a circulation of around 120,000, it is obviously an enticing package.

In our pages you can read about the problems and conflicts of the heart, set against a backdrop of teenage life: the

## COUNTER SPACE

from the Committee for Press Distribution

ALL magazines are distributed, but some are distributed more than others. So goes the title of the first chapter in *Where is the Other News*, the first detailed account of the political bias operated against the left in the distribution of newspapers and magazines by the monopoly wholesalers in Britain.

CPF has launched the Committee for Press Distribution because access to distribution is as much a part of the freedom of the press as the right of reply or the freedom of information.

Distribution is controlled by: monopoly wholesalers who choose which publications to distribute; libel laws that can be used against the distributors, wholesalers, and retailers, and are therefore sometimes used by these groups to exclude 'contentious' publications; and by the Restrictive Practices Act which prevents newsagents from acting together to boycott a wholesaler, or even from having a collective voice in demanding certain publications.

Increasingly, monopoly wholesalers are buying up the independents and carving up the business between themselves.

The Committee for Press Distribution aims to provide information on the problems in distribution; to campaign for change in the libel laws; and to examine the need for a Monopolies Commission investigation of the Smith-Menzies position - the 1978 inquiry whitewashed the big wholesalers.

We also want to work towards a proper availability of radical publications through access to the distribution system, as of right. How this works in France is explained in *The Other Secret Service*.

The work of the CPD, with a paid part-time co-ordinator, is to be funded by donations. If you would like to sponsor our efforts, or require more information, write enclosing a SAE and even a cheque, to: Liz Cooper, CPD, 4th Floor, 18 Granby Row, Manchester 1. Tel: 061-228 0536 (Fridays is best).

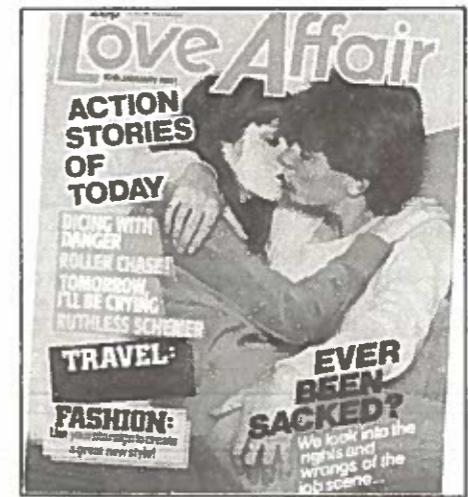
'Where is the Other News', on the news trade and the radical press. Price £1.25. *The Other Secret Service*, on press distributors and censorship. Price 60p. Both publications from: Minority Press Group, 9 Poland Street, London W1.

disco, the bowling alley, the skating rink; motor bikes, parties, strict parents and persuasive fellas. There are fashion spreads and beauty tips, gorgeous pin-ups in full colour, personality quizzes, prizes, and showbiz gossip.

In short, it's a super recipe for the heart of the typical young woman of today. Or is it?

The sort of accusations levelled at publications like ours are: You're not presenting an accurate picture of life. Should you really be telling teenage girls that boys and romance are the most important factors in their existence? Aren't you feeding popular myths about the relationship between the sexes?

To some extent these accusations are justified. A magazine with a title like *Love Affair*, with a mooning couple on every cover, and a basic content of stories about romance and sex, is undoubtedly appealing to girls who are obsessed with boys. And, yes - I guess it's feeding that obsession.



But within that context, what exactly do you find? Helpless female victims who long to be rescued by knights in shining armour, and to be spirited off to the gorgeous palaces of marriage? Girls who are dependent on men for support? Girls who rival each other to win their boyfriends at all costs? Submissive, silly, childish, petulant girls?

Well, no. I'd argue that our readers get a bit more for their money than that. First of all, our stories, with their irrepressible first-person narrators, are not really romantic in form. Our characters never rely on Fate stepping in and rescuing them from cruel destiny.

The stories are, rather, confessions, which means that our heroines are wrongdoers. They are people who have learned from past mistakes, and want to pass on their wisdom to the reader, by telling their stories. Once that form is established, the field is wide open.

In the past year, for example, we have had heroines who are race prejudiced; sniff glue; fight at football matches; break the confidence of their mates; blackmail; shop-lift; tease a friend who's been raped; trap boyfriends into marriage; are too possessive; run away from home; neglect work or domestic responsibilities...

In each of these stories, the 'sin' is used not simply to create an exciting story, but to pinpoint attitudes or forms of behaviour. We will create stories like these to pass on our own morality - to guide our readers through the confusions and frustrations they encounter.

Our heroines are rarely passive or helpless. We've had stories of girls who form a rock band, girls who drive minicabs, girls who choose their own destiny and make their own futures - and the atmosphere we try to create is one of constant excitement and challenge. While we won't suggest alternatives that would be too remote from our readers' lives, we're always trying to comment on the choices they do have.

What's a feminist doing working on a magazine like that? I think I'd be answering for most of *Love Affair's* staff by saying that we have a commitment to our readers - we know how to entertain and inform them. And we also like them. That is what makes us vigilant about the kinds of topics that directly affect our readership.

For example, we are well aware of the propaganda fed to young girls about topics like abortion, contraception, rape. If these subjects come up in stories or in our problems page we are careful to present an uncompromising, honest and often radical stand.

Though our heroines are sinners, their sins are never: 'I invited rape,' or 'I killed an innocent unborn child.' Our heroines may choose abortions - or they may decide against them. But, either way, the stress is on their right to make the choice, and we try to be unemotional about the subject.

Rape is a frequent factor in our stories, but we try to discourage any impression that girls 'ask for it'. They may not take the threat of rape seriously enough; they may not report it promptly after it's happened; they might have a questionable attitude to it. But we do our best to combat the rampant sexism with which subjects like this are treated in the rest of the popular media.

A girl may fancy someone because he's 'tough'; she may think it's glamorous to be knocked about. But our stories are used to show how widely unhealthy this kind of attitude is.

*Love Affair* also tries positively to guide and inform readers on all kinds of modern problems: unfair dismissal at work; unemployment; alcoholism; sexism; race prejudice; premenstrual tension; overeating. We are becoming more and more confident of our ability to deal with challenging topics, as we stretch the limits of the form we work in, and which we understand.

It's a far cry from the feminism of *Spare Rib* or *Shocking Pink*. It's a mass paper - with a conscience.

We all feel that, given a large, female readership who trust and enjoy us, we must continue to strive for balance between the entertainment we know we do well, and the instruction and inspiration which makes us more than just another love comic.

●In the next issue: the young feminists' magazine 'Shocking Pink' puts its case.

# Polish workers reach for a free press

by Neal Ascherson

THE call for a truthful press has been and remains one of the central demands of the Polish workers. To an extraordinary degree, workers in all branches of employment spontaneously made the newspapers – often local rather than national – their first target.

The recognition of the importance of truthful reporting to their cause was hardly understood by the workers in the 1956 upheaval, but was very much more clearly voiced in the 1970 strikes. In 1980 it was commonplace to hear of strikes or strike threats to secure proper reporting of local grievances or Solidarity press statements.

The Gdansk agreements in August included provision for Solidarity to have access to the mass media and to print its own journals. The government's failure fully to satisfy these promises is still a source of mistrust and resentment.

As recently as 13 February a national print workers' strike to win the implementation of these points and a speedy passing of the bill limiting censorship was only called off at the last moment.

The censorship questions remain central. The agreements promised a law which would not abolish censorship but would set it under rather general statutory limits – official and state secrets, national security matters and so on would be protected by the censor. The law would also include provision for journalists to appeal to a court against a censor's decision.

However, in spite of strong pressure from Solidarity, no legislation has yet come before parliament.

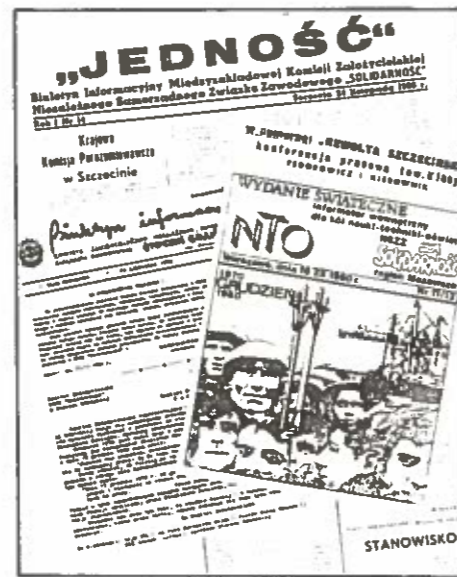
The concession over censorship is regarded with great misgivings by the hard-line elements in the Polish United Workers' Party leadership, and by the Soviet Union. Meanwhile the censors continue to operate, but erratically.

Especially in the weekly press, there is today an outpouring of lively and critical journalism. Certain subjects – demands for the replacement of officials, Rural Solidarity and its demand for registration as a peasants' trade union, and of course relations with the Soviet Union – are still closely censored.

But at peaks in the continuous political crisis, huge queues for the papers form early in the morning.

The intelligent and critical party weekly *Polityka* is in such insatiable demand that only a large bribe to the keeper of a newspaper kiosk secures a copy, and Poles are prepared to pay the equivalent of over £5 for a weekly whose cover price is a few pence. The same is true of the independent Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, published in Krakow.

Solidarity already publishes weekly journals in various centres which reach a wide public – *Solidarity* in Gdansk, *Unity* in



Szczecin, and *Independence* in Warsaw – all apparently untouched by the censors. These journals, which all originated as cyclostyled strike bulletins in miniature format, now look more like normal newspapers, especially the boisterous and well-produced *Unity*.

*Unity* is produced by print and paper workers who ensure supplies of good-quality paper, apparently without reference to the official production plans of their enterprises. It may be reaching well over a hundred thousand readers in the West Pomerania region.

Warsaw has had much greater problems in finding a conventional printer, and all Solidarity journalism is hampered by the extreme rarity of equipment like IBM-style typewriters, and of Xerox machines.

## Let's sort out the union journals

by Richard Keeble, executive editor of *The Teacher*, newspaper of the NUT (personal capacity)

**NO ONE** is the labour movement can be satisfied with the political orientation of the national dailies, with the ideological assumptions that govern their assessment of news values, nor with the distribution of ownership within the newspaper industry in the country as a whole.

In seeking a solution to these age-old problems, attention has again focused on the possible creation of a new daily. And certainly the feasibility study into the project being undertaken by the TUC is of crucial importance to the future success or otherwise of the trade union movement.

Yet one of the basic questions which the study must not ignore is whether it will be politically advantageous to divert both resources and attention on to the new daily and away from the trade unions' own newspapers. Today these tend to be ignored or merely derided as boring mouthpieces for the general secretaries and executives of the unions concerned.

Indeed, union journals are largely understaffed and underfunded and since most of them are monthlies they can rarely hope to provide any up-to-date news and campaigning services for their members.

If the Polish experiment stabilises, this will be the most independent press in East Europe, perhaps including Yugoslavia. But there will inevitably be struggles, not only over the modified censorship but over circulation.

There will have to be a compromise between the government's habit of allocating circulation on the basis of political desirability, by limiting print runs and manipulating the paper supply, and the huge potential demand for the more independent publications.

*Tygodnik Powszechny*, for example, could probably sell four times its present print order if it were allowed to. It remains to be seen what will happen to the non-legal 'samizdat' press, which has been flourishing with a profusion of titles for the last four years.

Some, like the literary review *Zapis*, may well be licensed. Others, like *Robotnik* (Worker), the organ of the Committee for Social Self-Defence (KSS-KOR), may find the going harder.

While official pre-censorship remains, the demand for unofficial publications expressing points of view outside the limits of any Solidarity-government consensus will probably survive.

● *The East European Solidarity Campaign* – 10 Park Drive, London NW11 – is raising funds to send equipment to the Polish workers and to build a solidarity campaign in Britain.

● *The International Metalworkers' Federation's Report of IMF Mission to Poland* includes reports on several newspapers. It is available from: IMF, 54 bis Route des Acacias, 1227 Geneva, Switzerland.

Only one trade union, the National Union of Teachers, has sufficient belief in the value of union journals to support a weekly that is able to speak not only for the union but for the whole teaching profession and for the trade union movement more generally.

Thus while trade unions could soon be asked to fork out substantially to launch a new daily, these same unions, bar a number of notable exceptions, are failing to show any real commitment to the journals they already own.

All this has serious implications for the unions which no labour daily can hope to grasp. The extension of democracy and participation within their ranks, the building up of political education among members, the encouragement of full and open debate on all issues are crucial tasks facing unions today – and bright, well-researched, informed union journals can best tackle them.

Too many union leaders will perhaps rush to support the idea of a labour daily simply to evade these basic issues, but really trade unions should be putting their own houses in order before moving on to the dream palaces of the national daily.

● What do you think of the idea of a labour daily? Should one be launched, and if so, what kind of newspaper should it be? Send your comments to *Free Press*.

# DAYLIGHT ON CORRUPTION

THE CAMPAIGN for Press Freedom is backing the re-launch of one of Britain's best-known 'alternative' papers – the Welsh magazine *Rebecca*.

The magazine, which has also received endorsement and a £100 grant from the NUJ's national executive, needs £40,000 to move to a monthly schedule.

With seven years experience behind it, there are good grounds for believing that *Rebecca* will not go the way of short-lived 'alternative' papers.

Founded in 1973, the magazine has slowly and painfully evolved a new brand of investigative journalism. *Rebecca* tackles the issues the established media in Wales won't touch.

Its bluntly named *Corruption Supplement* looks at local government corruption, political patronage in education and malpractice among government departments. But choosing the subjects is only part of the story and a great deal of time and energy has to go into these articles before they are finally published.

There is no doubt this approach works. The latest issue of *Rebecca* sold at least 9,000 copies, far more than the normal sale in Wales for *Private Eye* (1,800) or the *New Statesman* (1,200).

The magazine appeals to all classes, including remnants of the Welsh aristocracy, but has significantly succeeded in attracting a substantial and loyal working class readership.



by John Parkinson, secretary, Preston Trades Council

IT IS now 18 months since Preston Trades Council decided to establish its own journal, *Preston Worker*.

It was a decision easily justified by the media reaction to the 'winter of discontent', but it also reflected dissatisfaction at the bureaucratically-controlled trade union press.

There have now been five issues of the 20-30 page journal, with a print run of 2,500-3,000 copies. This has been based on sales to shop stewards committees, union branches, and at many other political and trade union functions.

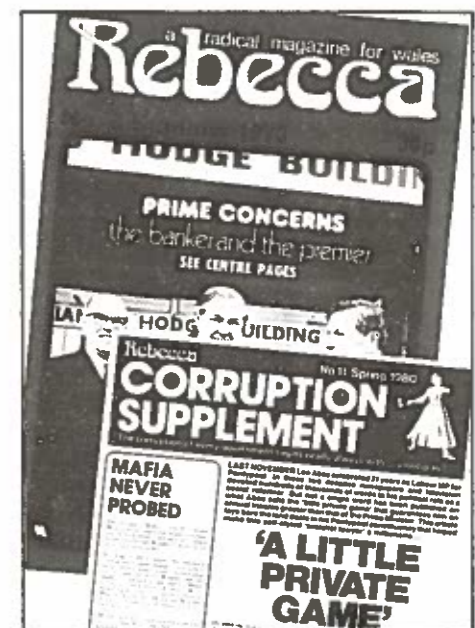
by Paddy French, editor, *Rebecca*

The paper is not just successful in terms of sales. Over the years its uncompromising and hard-hitting style has made the headlines. Although best known for the corruption reporting that helped create the climate in which 17 trials have taken place in the past four years, *Rebecca* has also dissected the business alliance between Jim Callaghan, George Thomas and the Welsh merchant banker Julian Hodge.

The latest issue reveals that Leo Abse, Labour MP for Pontypool, has been a property dealer in his own constituency.

But investigative journalism – it only means that reporters do their job properly – is expensive and time-consuming. With almost no resources and just one full-time journalist *Rebecca* had to sacrifice regular schedules in favour of well-researched articles. In the past seven years there have been only 11 issues (with six *Corruption Supplements*).

The new, re-designed *Rebecca* aims to give Wales, for the first time, a news magazine that covers all of the country in



both its languages.

To do this properly, the paper will need five reporters (one a Welsh-language journalist) backed up by an intelligence unit and a tailor-made cuttings library. Hence the need for £40,000.

A leaflet providing more information, including the inside story of the extraordinary way in which *Rebecca* won and then lost a £31,000 Welsh Arts Council grant, is available from: The Hosts of *Rebecca*, 15 Windsor Esplanade, Docks, Caerdydd.

## Preston Trades Council makes headlines

Such has been the response to *Preston Worker* and the associated printing operation that the trades council recently agreed to help establish a printing co-operative with its own premises in the town centre.

This move was designed to cater for a rapidly expanding printing shop which had outgrown a backroom in a house, and to act as a focus for trade union and socialist activity in the district.

The initial operation had small beginnings. The expertise of a former print-worker and an active, campaigning trades council led to the purchase of an A4 printing press, the raw materials for Letraset layout, platemaking (at first with the help of the local poly), and printing.

With the trades council and other campaign bodies gradually swamping Preston in leaflets, and with the warm, if surprised welcome that *Preston Worker* received, the attraction of the printing operation and the trades council grew.

Orders for cheap printing flooded in from Labour Party wards, trade union bodies, and for factory bulletins. Even booklets on health and safety, labour history, and Vietnam were churned out. The turnover grew and grew, until it now stands at five times the budget of a relatively well-heeled trades council with 20,000 affiliated members.

We have provided access to people who would otherwise have been unable or unsure of how to proceed. Two other trades councils have now established printing operations as a direct result of our efforts,

and several others are following closely.

The most striking aspect of the whole operation has been the latent talent that has been discovered. People who would walk miles to avoid machinery, or who claimed two left hands, now happily apply themselves to design, layout, and machine repair and operation.

The flood of ideas and energy has not been confined to the practical field. After all, design and layout are all about how to formulate and present ideas. The production of *Preston Worker* is a battleground over content, style, and direction.

Putting resources under the control of rank-and-file trades unionists has given us the chance to put ideas and experiences into practice.

The co-operative is formally independent, but sponsorship is being sought from the labour movement and other groups. Involved are a broad range of individuals, many from the trades council, and some unemployed.

The fact that the co-operative is based on a centre has enhanced the Socialist Centre-type of approach many of us seek to generate. The only criterion for involvement is a commitment to working in and for the co-operative.

It is our intention, given time, to expand our work and take on, train, and employ unemployed people.

● Further information from: John Parkinson, 28a Whitby Avenue, Ingol, Preston, Lancs. Tel: 0772 731089 (5pm-7pm).

# The merger, the millions, and the minister

'THE Secretary of State is satisfied that neither *The Times* nor the *Sunday Times* is economic as a going concern and as a separate newspaper and that if, in each case, the newspaper in question is to continue as a separate newspaper the case is one of urgency.'

by Jake Ecclestone

John Biffen was easily satisfied – or perhaps the political pressure on him to find a loophole in the law was just too great.

In any event, he brazened it out and refused to send either *The Times* or *The Sunday Times* for examination by the Monopolies and Mergers Committee.

The news that their paper was 'not a going concern' came as a surprise to the journalists on *The Sunday Times*. S G Warburg and Co, the merchant bankers handling the sale for the Thomson Organisation, had told potential bidders in strict confidence that the group was expected to make a trading profit of £8m in 1982 and £14m in 1983, the bulk of which would come from *The Sunday Times*.



## Thatcher's 'Times'

continued from page 1, column 3

In such a situation the two cannot be reconciled, which is why only political action by Parliament can prevent such takeovers in future – or, indeed, divest Murdoch of the power he now has.

The journalists tried to resist and failed. Our doubts as to Murdoch's fitness to own the papers were brushed aside, our demands that the matter go to the Monopolies Commission were rejected, our requests for legally binding safeguards to protect those who refuse to slant their stories were ignored.

We were, indeed, merely part of the furniture – to be bought and sold.

Was it not strange, then, that Biffen could tell the House of Commons on 27 January that his accountants from the Department of Trade had carried out a detailed investigation 'into the financial position and future prospects' of both papers?

On the basis of the figures for the first 11 months of 1980, he had concluded that the *Sunday Times* would make a loss of £600,000.

Unfortunately for John Biffen it later emerged that the accountants had done their calculations on the figures for the first nine months only, and that the pre-Christmas advertising boom meant that the loss was nearer to £200,000. A loss of that size on a turnover between £50m and £60m could scarcely be taken to mean that *The Sunday Times* was not viable.

But, when the will is there,

figures can be made to prove anything. In this case they gave Biffen the excuse to hand over the papers to Murdoch without the tiresome possibility that a public inquiry would look under too many stones.

The *Sunday Times* journalists, meeting three days after Biffen's Commons statement, were less than convinced by his argument. They decided to challenge the minister in the High Court under a writ of *mandamus*. They engaged leading counsel and accountants from the City firm of Cork, Gully.

A week went by, the accountants reported that they were far from satisfied by the figures which Biffen had used, and all looked set for an entertaining legal action. Had the minister perhaps got it wrong?

We shall never know. Murdoch called in the NUJ chapel leaders, offered them a spurious additional safeguard to their independence, and a snap meeting of the chapel was persuaded to see the folly of their ways. Exactly why they should have given up when Murdoch was in a tight corner is one of life's little mysteries.

What is certain is that his offer to put two working journalists onto the board – one each from *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* – was worthless.

They were to be chosen and appointed by Murdoch himself, and in the event they were announced as Louis Heren, deputy editor of *The Times*, and Peter Roberts, managing editor of the *Sunday Times*.

Heren's attachment to editorial integrity may be judged from his remark on BBC television that he was 'bored by principles'.

If the Fair Trading Act of 1973 does not apply in such a situation, one might reasonably ask whether it serves any purpose at all?

Many were undoubtedly thankful that the papers were to continue and that job losses were not to be as great as Murdoch at first demanded, but there are few now who still believe that the relative balance and integrity of the papers can long survive, even with Harold Evans as editor.

Among journalists the mood is one of apprehension, laced with anger and fear. Justifiably, too, although the real effects of Murdoch's ownership will only be seen over time – subtle, almost imperceptible changes in what stories will be covered, what prominence they will be given, how they will be written.

The long-term result of his interference, of course, will be to drive out those with most integrity.

And the effect of that will be to weaken resistance still further among those left behind.

That process is already under way. As in Australia and America, the best will go first – those with no stomach for the violent prejudices and ruthless slanting of news which has been the distinguishing feature of Murdoch's 80 or so newspapers around the world.

Those who point to the 'safeguards' deceive themselves. The journalists on the board are appointed by Murdoch and represent no one; the national directors are appointed by Murdoch and are powerless; the editors, well . . . they, too, are appointed by Murdoch through his directors, and Murdoch has a way with editors who don't conform. He fires them.



The new Times boss as portrayed in the Daily Mirror. Drawing: CHARLES GRIFFIN

## When journalists went on strike over Murdoch's propaganda

JUST over five years ago members of the Australian Journalists Association on three of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers went on strike in protest at the editorial content of their papers.

On the *Australian* the suppression of stories, the re-writing of headlines, and the general and persistent bias against Gough Whitlam's Labour Party in the run-up to the general election became so intolerable that on 2 November 1975 a letter of protest was sent to proprietor Rupert Murdoch, signed by 75 members of staff.

The letter said the paper was becoming a 'laughing stock' among influential Australians and that its staff were being treated with 'derision'. The signatories said they did not dispute Murdoch's prerogative in deciding the editorial policy of the paper.

They went on, however: 'It is not so much the policy itself but the blind biased, tunnel-visioned, ad hoc, logically confused and relentless way in which so many people are now conceiving it to be carried out, both in the editorial and news columns.'

It has all been, as the *New Statesman* so crisply put it, 'a stinking scandal'. A more effective demonstration of the need for a strong and vigorous Campaign for Press Freedom would be hard to imagine.

After nearly 18 years as a journalist on *The Times* I am happy to be leaving now, hopeful that the 'Old Lady' – for all her conservatism – will survive but less than optimistic about her future style.

Jake Ecclestone, a member of the Campaign for Press Freedom's national committee, is shortly to take up his elected position as the NUJ's deputy general secretary. He has been succeeded as NUJ Father of the Chapel at *The Times* by Paul Routledge, who is a CPF sponsor.

The writers declared: 'We cannot be loyal to a propaganda sheet. We are loyal to the best traditions of journalism and must remain so to retain our sanity.'

'We cannot be loyal to those traditions, or to ourselves, if we accept the deliberate or careless slanting of headlines, seemingly-blatant imbalance in news presentation, political censorship and on occasion distortion of copy from senior, specialist journalists, the political management of news and features, the stifling of dissident and even unpalatable impartial opinion in the paper's columns.'

The journalists asked for a 'round table talk' with Murdoch and his senior aides. Murdoch did not reply.

Two weeks later Murdoch was sent a note saying that his failure to respond was to be made public. Murdoch then wrote back saying that no meeting was possible because the editorial staff were helping his 'enemies'.

The journalists then held a meeting at which it was agreed that management and staff should abide by the Australian Journalists' Association's code of professional conduct.

The anti-Whitlam slant of the three papers continued, however, and on 8 December 1975 a general meeting of AJA members voted for a two-day protest strike on the *Australian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mirror*. The following is the text of their statement:

'The AJA members of News Limited are acting in defence of the principle of fair and honest journalism. They are concerned not with the proprietor's right to express his views in editorials but against the very deliberate and

blatant bias in the presentation of news.

The AJA members believe this bias has become so obvious to readers that they could well believe that we are in part responsible for it.

We have therefore felt necessary to dissociate ourselves entirely from the desecration of the traditional and historic ethics of journalism, which we expect of ourselves and of our employers and which we sincerely believe that readers expect of both of us.

In no way is our move intended to support any political party. We believe, as Mr Murdoch says he believes, that political judgements lie with the public.

But we also believe that it is the duty of the press – the duty of all those involved in newspaper production – to see that the facts, the opinions and the analyses on which judgements can be made are presented fairly and honestly. We believe that any paper which blatantly ignores this duty cannot enjoy public respect.

The AJA Code of Ethics forbids that we deliberately slant the news, and we have followed this code. Our members have not 'managed' the news by omitting some

stories and distorting others through headlines and opening words.

Of course AJA members have political opinions. We, too, have the right to vote. But we have not before, and do not know, seek to impose these views any more than we desire to deprive Mr Murdoch of his. Our action is unprecedented in Sydney journalism only because the circumstances are unprecedented.

In making this statement public, we emphasise to those who read it that we are in no way trying to influence their votes. Nor are we trying to stifle the dissemination of news.

Rather, we hope that our action will inspire all journalists and proprietors in Australia to give the public the value it deserves and, we are confident, will demand.

Freedom of the press is not a right owned by publishers nor by journalists. It is a right that belongs to the people of Australia, a right to know all the facts and viewpoints so that people can make intelligent judgements on the political, social and personal issues which affect their lives. It is because we believe readers to be intelligent that we have taken this stand.'

## Wolcott — a frame-up

by Imruh Caesar, Henry Martin, Colin Prescod, and Memelik Shabazz

MOST of the reviews of *Wolcott* in the popular press panned it as poor television. As black media workers our response from within the black community has to go further.

Not since the American series *Roots* by Alex Hayley have we been treated to the kind of black television blitz that ATV's presentation of *Wolcott* gave us. In mid-January, the black-centred, four part, cops-and-robbers drama swamped the nation for three nights solid, with a two-hour double dose on the final night.

This unprecedented broadside aimed to give much more than an everyday story of a black policeman. It sought to provide the nation with an acute, closely observed, but entertaining picture of the inner-city, black community – the 'natives' mainly at play, and hardly ever at what you'd call work.

At one level *Wolcott* appeared to be the most malicious and desperate advertisement yet devised to attract black people into the police force. Everything was thrown in to present a recruitment pitch. The bent-copper is portrayed. Racist coppers are shown verbally abusing blacks – even the black in uniform.

The hero *Wolcott* is shown as a man sensitive to all these abuses and corruptions, militantly defensive of his blackness, but still with a rationale for being a cop. The basis on which this trick is turned, is the misrepresentation and/or criminalisation of the entire black community.

We were presented with a series of stagey, black stereotypes. Re-inforced were the notions of wayward, mugging, and murderous youth, and parents absent or unable to cope with them, in a community full of black mafia gangsters.

We had the US 'junkie' phenomenon presented as a black youth problem in Britain. Black women were represented as either ineffectual, or strong but confused (when they weren't prostitutes).

We had militant, political blacks treated dismissively, and shown as irrelevant to the black youth predicament, as well as being sadly naive about the real degree of criminality in their community.

It was effectively a frame-up. But what were we being framed-up for?

*Wolcott* fights a heroic but finally a losing battle with his people. These criminal and degenerate

Anthony Lewis, the *New York Times* columnist, wrote on 4 February 1980 that Murdoch's *New York Post* was a 'mangy sheet' which had been responsible for the 'grossest distortion' in its treatment of Senator Edward Kennedy.

Lewis quoted the conclusion of an editorial in the *Columbia Journalism Review* that '... the *New York Post* is no longer merely a journalistic problem. It is a social problem – a force of evil.'

The same editorial said the *New York Post* is 'written and presented so as to appeal to the basest passions and appetites of the hour. The front pages regularly play on two emotions: fear and rage. And all too often what follows is meant to turn white against black, the comfortable against the poor and the first world against the third.'

Abe Rosenthal, the executive editor of the *New York Times*, has said he wishes Murdoch would disappear from New York along with his 'mean, ugly violent journalism'.

All that is part of Murdoch's miserable record. From *The Journalist*, journal of the NUJ, February 1981.

ghettos can't be cleaned up even by a division of Wolcotts, really. This deeply immoral and confused community is beyond the pale for even the missionary cop, black or white.

It is a situation that calls for hard, creative, liberty-taking policing. Between the law abiding citizen and these monsters in the ghetto, stand the police. That is what the picture painted of the fictional black community promoted.

Meanwhile, in real life (so to speak), the police look like swinging their lobby to gain the powers for placing communities so defined under seige. Blacks are threatened with the real possibility of being prisoners in the streets!

Four hours of dramatic misrepresentation – all the more effective because the audience is not used to seeing blacks on TV – is bad news for blacks. There are strong rumours of a series.

In part, the way out of this situation could involve employing more black writers and producers for TV, but that won't be enough in itself. We are not concerned merely to have more black hands in television. The new writers and producers, black or white, must be responsible to and respectful of the black community, and alert to the urgency of anti-racist imperatives in British mass media.

●To complain about *Wolcott*, write to: Jean Martin, Head of Audience Relations, ATV Network, ATV Centre, Birmingham B1 2JP.