

Bulletin of the Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom

Campaign gets big boost, but

RIGHT OF REPLY BILL FAILS BY THREE VOTES

EVEN GOD GAVE Adam the right of reply — how can the media be exempt?

A fairly devastating argument, you might think. It goes back to first principles and is not easily dismissed as coming from the so-called 'loonie left'. It was, in fact, a bona fide, fully paid-up member of the establishment speaking — Sir Derek Walker-Smith MP (Conservative, Hertfordshire East).

But those who think they are greater than God — the Murdochs, Matthews and Rothermeres — remained unmoved.

The House of Commons debate on Frank Allaun's Private Members Bill gave the CPBF's right of reply

"The Press Council, in my experience, does two things: the first is nothing..." Roy Hattersley, (Labour).

campaign one of its biggest boosts since we launched it two years ago, and showed how far the message has spread.

Significantly the measure, entitled the Right of Reply in the Media Bill, attracted a number of Conservatives and Liberals to the ranks of mainly Labour supporters. And most of the Conservative speakers put up to oppose the Bill were forced to admit there was something seriously amiss in the media.

But the Bill failed by three votes to secure the 100 needed to enable it to proceed further when it was debated on Friday 18th February.

The mover, Frank Allaun MP, himself a member of the NUJ and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, said "as long as we have a press that is owned and controlled by millionaires, there is no complete cure. This is a limited reform."

The Bill would give the public a right of reply to factual misreporting or misrepresentation, he said. In the case of daily newspapers the reply would have to be published within three days.

It was not primarily intended to protect politicians. "Most Members of Parliament are quite capable of looking after themselves. It is ordinary people with whom I am concerned."

He quoted examples, and immediately the debate focused on another area of major concern to the CPBF — the Press Council.

A mother and her children had been accused by the *Daily Express* of jumping the council housing queue. It also said the family had come over from Ireland to do so.

"She was not jumping the queue," said Mr Allaun. "She had lived for 25 of her 30 years in England and was born in Britain." The *Daily Express* refused to print a denial and the case went to the Press Council.

They upheld the complaint, but it took so long that the damage was done, with "grief and trouble caused to the mother among her neighbours."

Conservative MP Sir Derek Walker-Smith seconded the Bill. "It is formulated on the maxim *audi alteram partem*," he said, "— hear the other side."

And he added, "Even God himself did not pass sentence on Adam before calling on him to make his defence... If God accorded to Adam the right of reply, how can the media claim to be exempt?"

Tony Benn, congratulating Frank Allaun on his initiative, said it was a modest Bill. "The fact that it attracts the support of Conservative Members shows that."

The House would not accept the Speaker setting the agenda for MPs the way the media set the agenda for

"The Press Council... is a paper tiger — if that is not too much of a pun." William Benyon (Conservative).

society, he said. And the way the agenda was set was shown in the different treatment of dissidents. Comments on the Soviet Union were very different from the treatment of the women on Greenham Common.

And industrialists who had visited Toxteth had said they were amazed. Why? "Because the problems of poverty do not normally reach the agenda until there are riots. There is then mass coverage of violence, having ignored the problems that led up to it."

Quick to disassociate himself from Tony Benn, William Benyon, Conservative, nevertheless backed the Bill. There was general agreement that the press was not held in high esteem, he said.

"It is thought by the general

"If God accorded to Adam the right of reply, how can the media claim to be exempt?" Sir Derek Walker-Smith (Conservative).

public to be powerful, unaccountable and, by and large, unscrupulous." The Press Council, which was supposed to put matters right, was held in open contempt by some newspapers and completely ignored by others.

"It is a paper tiger," said Mr Benyon, "if that is not too much of a pun."

Two other Labour members, both of them founder members of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, Roy Hattersley and Phillip Whitehead, weighed in heavily with strong support for the right of reply proposals.

"The extraordinary thing about British newspapers is that they are almost entirely biased in a single direction," said Mr Hattersley. But though this bias was generally against the Labour Party, he said, "those of us who have been in the Labour Party for 30 years have learnt to live with that and to regard it as the natural course of events."

But individuals who fall outside the newspapers' point of view "trade unions, members of all the minorities and radicals in general" are treated unjustly, he said.

And "private individuals who

"If a tabloid newspaper describes a 12-year-old schoolgirl as big, black and very, very nasty, what kind of reply does she have?" Phillip Whitehead (Labour).

wish to remain private" are publicly pilloried. The Bill's application would not be without difficulties, said Mr Hattersley. He regarded it as "largely unworkable and wholly desirable".

Phillip Whitehead, an ex-broadcaster, who is also a member of the Commission of Enquiry into the Press Council, set up by the CPBF took up the arguments that the Press Council was the appropriate body to provide a remedy.

Their enquiries had shown that those who complained to the Press Council and whose complaints were upheld were largely dissatisfied, he said.

The average delay was 10 months, he said. The Press Council say this is now down to six months, but "that it still an unconscionable delay".

"Much of the thinking behind the Bill is based on the attitudes of those who have belonged to the trade union movement and are part of the Campaign for Press Freedom!" Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Conservative).

Mr Whitehead said he would prefer a press ombudsman on the Swedish pattern rather than a judicial panel as proposed in the Bill.

The Tory opposition came from Jonathan Aitken (who as Michael Meacher quickly pointed out owns about 20 per cent of TV-AM and is the great nephew of Lord Beaverbrook) and from ex-editor Sir Angus Maude.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Conservative, East Grinstead) warned of the unpleasant consequences of passing this kind of legislation. Much of the thinking behind it, he warned, originated with a body called the Campaign for Press Freedom!

And he obligingly quoted at length from our pamphlet on the right of reply.

For the Government Mr David Mellor, Home Office under-secretary, urged right honourable gentlemen

The police bill —

'Repressive, dangerous and disastrous'

Jake Ecclestone

LABOUR PARTY LEADER Michael Foot has described the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill as "repressive"; Jack Jones, former general secretary of the T&GWU, who sat on the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure, says it is as dangerous as anything spawned by Mr Tebbit; and Patricia Hewitt, general secretary of NCCL says it would be "disastrous".

If you feel that such comments are predictable, then consider also the hostility towards the Bill from the British Medical Association, the Law Society, the Magistrates Association and even *The Times*. What sort of Bill is it that can attract sustained and reasoned criticism from such a wide spectrum of British social and political life?

Put crudely, the Bill proposes a massive extension of police powers and a corresponding erosion of citizen's rights. Indeed, parts of the Bill are a not-too-distant echo of Hitler's early legislation of 50 years ago. Certainly, if it enacts the Bill, Parliament will bring about a qualitative change in the way we are policed — replacing consent with coercion — and, in the process, almost casually destroy the individual's right to confide in professional advisers.

It is this aspect, particularly, which I want to draw to the attention of CPBF supporters. I believe

that the bond of confidentiality between a journalist and his/her source is the keystone to all serious, investigative journalism. Without this guarantee of anonymity, the journalist's sources will dry up and journalism itself will wither — at least, that brand of journalism which is genuinely concerned with protecting the public good.



Clauses 9 and 10 of the Bill, which the Government is hoping to push through Parliament before the summer recess, will make it impossible for a journalist — or any other professional confidant — to promise that the source of a story will forever remain secret. Or, rather, they can

and in the same position or at an equivalent time.

- A panel consisting of a judge along with members of the public would deal with complaints within 10 days.
- Fines of up to £40,000 could be imposed for failure to comply.

The National Union of Journalists welcomes Mr Frank ALLAUN MP's Media Bill and its provisions for a statutory right of reply. It notes with particular satisfaction that the Bill has received all-party support from a number of back-bench MPs. While the NUJ has reservations about certain details and aspects of the Bill it nevertheless believes that the Bill has already performed a valuable public service by focusing attention on the need for an adequate right of reply for aggrieved and concerned individuals and organisations who feel they have been unfairly treated by the media. Such a right of reply has been NUJ policy for many years and the NUJ's Code of Conduct specifically enjoins journalists to afford the right of reply to persons criticised when the issue is of sufficient importance.

make such a promise but the state can intervene and break it.

Clause 9 will enable a police officer to apply to the local tame magistrate for a search warrant. Before granting the warrant the magistrate must be satisfied that:

- there are reasonable grounds for believing that a "serious arrestable offence" has been committed; and
- there are reasonable grounds for believing that evidence relating to the offence *may be found* in the premises named in the warrant.

The proverbial coach and horses can be driven through such masterpieces of draughtmanship, since nowhere is 'serious arrestable offence' ever defined.

Clause 10 deals with material held in confidence by those who have obtained it as part of their job — doctors, lawyers, priests, bank managers, journalists and so on. If the police want to sift through any material of this kind for the evidence they are after, they have to go before a circuit judge and apply for:

- an order requiring the person in possession of the confidential material to hand it over to the police within seven days; or
- a search warrant — to be executed by force, if necessary.

Judges will be required to issue search warrants only if a) the material is not produced in response to an order within seven days or b) the judge thinks that to make such an order would lead to the material being concealed or destroyed.

As *The Times* has pointed out, none of these absurd provisos will hinder the police who will, in future, be able to go on unrestricted "fishing" expeditions, searching through all manner of notes, files, tapes etc, copying what they please in the hope or expectation that somewhere, sometime, they will find something to incriminate someone!

The implications and dangers of such powers should be obvious to everyone who cares about civil liberties in general, and press freedom in particular. If you care, please write to your MP to protest; please raise the matter through your local, trade union, political, religious or social groups; and please force — through letters and phone-in programmes — your local media to raise the issue.

Albert Einstein once said: "The political apathy of people in time of peace indicates that they will readily allow themselves to be led to the slaughter later".

It was a chilling remark — an apposite epitaph for civil liberties and press freedom in Britain.

For further information please contact me at the NUJ (01-278 7916) or the NCCL (01-403 3888).

Union women attack media bias

MEDIA FEATURES ON the Agenda of this year's Women's TUC Conference at Scarborough.

The British Actors Equity Association is calling for the TUC to establish a monitoring committee to deal with complaints related to discrimination on the basis of sex.

Both the TGWU and the ACTT want the TUC to actively campaign against the degradation of women and their portrayal as sex objects. The TGWU also want to ensure that no sexist material is allowed to be used within trade union journals.

It's our media says Scargill

LEADER OF THE National Union of Mineworkers — Arthur Scargill, has called for "common ownership" of the British media.

Speaking at the annual European Management Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Mr Scargill told an international audience of leading politicians, bankers and businessmen that he would like to see a "society where people own and control the means of production, distribution and exchange and — in essence — control their own destiny.

"I want for Britain a society which devotes its energies to people and not to profit. I want a society with total accountability which includes common ownership of the communications media, radio, television and the Press, all of which in Britain are currently owned by individuals or organisations with a vested interest in preserving a capitalist state."

Press on Nilsen monitored

IN THE LIGHT of the media's handling of the Ripper case, Attorney General Sir Michael Havers warned the Press that he is monitoring reports on the Nilsen case.

He used a Commons written reply to Labour MP Rob Brown (Leith) to give the warning.

He said: "I am sure that those responsible for the publications and broadcasting concerning the circumstances surrounding the arrest and charging of Mr Nilsen will be mindful of the contempt of court laws, of the provisions of section 8 of the Magistrates Courts Act 1980 and of the general principles that every man is innocent unless and until proved guilty in a court of law and is entitled to a fair trial.

"For my part I am continuing to monitor such reports with all those considerations in mind."

The Media as Public Interrogator

Alan Richardson and Nik Oakley

THE DISTORTED AND unbalanced media coverage is one of many disturbing aspects of the Oxford social security fraud exercise mounted by police and DHSS officials last September. This is one of the findings of a recently published report by five welfare organisations.

The report, *Poor law**, also condemns the police, magistrates and DHSS officials for denying the arrested claimants their statutory rights.

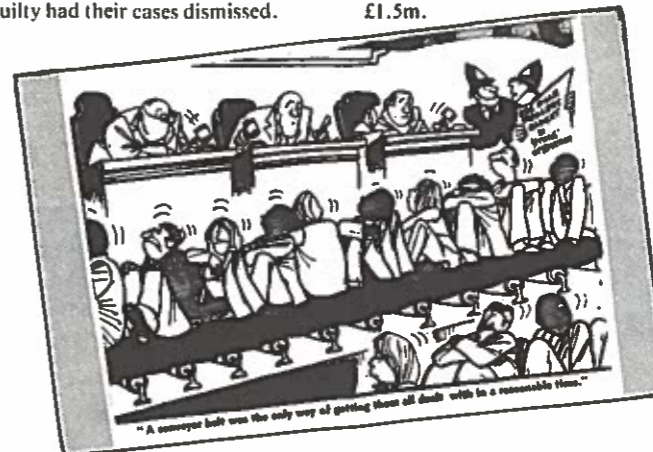
On 2 September, 1982, 283 people who walked into an unemployment office in Oxford found themselves arrested on suspicion of fraud.

The press called it 'The Sting'. The 'temporary' office was a fake set-up by Thames Valley Police and the DHSS to catch people who had been giving false addresses to claim extra money.

The 283 were held throughout the day and denied the limited rights allowed to people under arrest. Over 100 of them were eventually released without charge.

The rest were herded into special Courts. Almost all were denied legal representation and refused bail. Later, they were sentenced to prison after summary hearings — although the majority of those pleading not guilty had their cases dismissed.

While the *BBC*, *Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Mirror* were rather more cautious, preferring to put their figures a little lower. Both *The Times* and *ITN* agreed with *The Express* with a staggering amount of more than £1.5m.



Thames Valley Police "carefully stage-managed the part which would be played by the press and television. They alerted TV crews in advance and held a press conference on the day itself which all the details were put across by the police themselves."

It was unfortunate that the story broke during a slow news period, thus giving the media the opportunity to blow it up out of all proportion. Banner headlines ran across the tabloids, and *The Star*, *Sun* and *Express* likened the set-up to the fake betting office in *The Sting*.

Further analysis revealed just what discrepancies the copy contained. The numbers of people arrested, the time and cost of the operation were all exaggerated out of all proportion. But more inaccurate was the amount of public money which had been saved. *The Sun* and *The Star* put it at £1.5m

It would have been one thing if the media coverage had stopped there. But it went on, and to some extent it got considerably worse, with the emphasis on 'scroungers' 'blacks' and 'Irish'. It did not help of course that *The Sun*, *Mail* and *Standard* managed to 'find' people who were only too prepared to say that they had easily defrauded the DHSS.

Blatant discrimination is very often the prerogative of *The Sun*. They featured a cartoon depicting about 50% of those arrested as being black. In reality only four of the 283 arrested were black; two were released without charge, one had his case dismissed and one was convicted. This cartoon is now the subject of a complaint to the Press Council.

Very few newsmen turned their attention to the landlords who were gaining from their tenants on

Supplementary Benefit. Needless to say the tabloids completely ignored it. Indeed not much attention was paid to the tax dodgers who according to the *Morning Star* "sting us all for £4,000m a year."

What should really have come out of all these investigations, was the inexcusable mass arrest by the police and the DHSS, and the pitifully small No Fixed Address rate of £18.60; which *The Standard* admitted made it very tempting to fiddle.

Most papers also chose to ignore just how many cases were dismissed through lack of evidence. With the exception of *The Guardian* and *The Oxford Mail*, the press omitted to mention that one of the police officers involved was about to be investigated for alleged fabrication of evidence.

Ros Franey's excellent published research into the case, published as *Poor Law** and sponsored by CHAR, Child Poverty Action Group, Claimants Defence Committee, National Association of Probation Officers and the NCCL, makes a number of recommendations relating to the media coverage of the case.

"The NUJ should consider the implications of the report for Article 3 (on accuracy and distortion) and Article 4 (on rectification and the right of reply) of the NUJ Code of Conduct. In addition, the NUJ and the ACTT should issue guidelines on the reporting of social security stories similar to the guidelines which exist in their respective codes of practice on the reporting of race relations."

In order that the press should be 'aware' of the 'other side of the story', Franey recommends that 'Community groups and relevant agencies should take initiatives to try to establish contacts with the press and inform journalists of the issues at stake.'

* Available at £1.95 from any of the above organisations.



It ain't half racist, mum

'Many black people imagine prejudice when it doesn't really exist,' said the TV producer. 'I don't actually know any black people,' he confided, 'but I do know some Polish immigrants.'

'It ain't half racist, mum' takes on the press, radio, and television. Twenty-one media workers contribute their experience and observations of the way black people are dealt with — in news and documentary, drama and comedy. Internationally, the coverage of southern Africa and Idi Amin comes under scrutiny.

The black community is advancing its own media: radio programmes for and by blacks in Liverpool and London are discussed.

'It ain't half racist, mum' is part of the fightback: how the Black Media Workers' Association is countering job discrimination; what the labour movement is (and should be) doing; the response of the journalists' union. It concludes with a step-by-step guide to taking up your own complaints.

Comedia Series 10
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to put their faith in a speeded-up Press Council.

With 90 votes in favour and 7 against the Bill missed by three the 100 it needed in all to secure a second reading. But the principle of a legal right of reply is now official Labour Party policy.

The press proprietors' tactics of trying to kill the argument by ignoring it is clearly not going to succeed.

What the Bill would provide

Members of the public would have the right of reply to allegations made against them or misreporting or misrepresentation by the press, radio or TV.

- The right would apply to individuals, organisations or companies.
- Replies would have to be printed within three days — or 24 hours immediately before a general election.
- In the case of periodicals the reply would be in the next issue.
- Replies should be of equal length

Eye lets rip on the Mail

John Jennings

EITHER THE Daily Mail were lying to the Press Council over the 'Yorkshire Ripper' affair, or they had been engaged in a criminal conspiracy to defraud.

This is the interesting argument in an article, 'No cheques please, we're English' in *Private Eye* of 11 February.

And the 'Eye' draws attention to the hitherto not-widely-reported fact, that Mr Alwyn Robinson, managing director of the *Mail* group, is also vice-chairman of the Press Council.

It was a *Private Eye* story which apparently prompted Mrs Doreen Hill, mother of the last of 'Yorkshire Ripper' Peter Sutcliffe's victims, to protest about newspaper offers of vast amounts of money to members of the murderer's family. Mrs Hill wrote to the Press Council and to the Queen. She also spoke at a meeting in London organised by the print union NATSOPA and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

The Press Council has now published a lengthy report on the whole question of cheque-book journalism and the Ripper case. The *Mail* and a number of other papers are criticised or severely censured.

But the question is, what will be done to enforce minimum standards of basic decency? And the answer, as usual, is nothing.

Private Eye had originally said, in January 1981, that the *Daily Mail* "appears to be leading in the squalid race to 'tie up' the Sutcliffe family. While lorry driver Peter Sutcliffe is remanded in custody, his wife Sonia had made a deal with the *Mail* worth £250,000."

In their 11 February report on the Press Council findings, *Private Eye* notes that *Mail* Editor Sir David English launched an attack on *Eye* under the heading "The Anatomy of a Festering Lie!"

The *Eye* report continues:

What the *Mail* said, in its editorial and in its initial defence to the Press Council, was that four days after Sutcliffe's arrest, 'Sir' David English decided that no money would be paid to Mrs Sutcliffe. However, 'in order to keep lines of communication open to Sutcliffe's solicitor', Mr David Tytler, assistant editor, wrote that any agreement would need a condition that a 'substantial proportion' of the payment would go to a charity to benefit sorrowing relatives of Ripper victims.

"The *Mail's* defence, in other words, was a flat denial of any intention to make a contract, with a little pat on its own back for coming up with the idea of directing 'a substantial proportion' of any money, should it ever be forced to make such an unpalatable deal, to charity.

"This last tiny exaggeration proved the *Mail's* undoing. The Press Council believing what it read in the newspaper, politely asked to see a copy of Mr Tytler's heart-warming letter. Terribly sorry, said the *Mail*, the copy had 'gone missing'. (Which was not surprising, because this

letter had soon been superseded by another from Tytler which removed the 'substantial proportion' condition entirely. He wrote: 'The negotiation could also include the possibility of making some kind of provision for the other families who have suffered)."

Private Eye continues:

"The Council, which has no power of any sort and is not renowned for its investigative acumen, then had the bright idea of asking Macgill (the Sutcliffe solicitor) if he still had the letter in which the good Tytler talked of charities for the suffering.

"Dramatically, Macgill responded by sending his entire file. It contained all the letters, and the draft contract, and other documentary evidence. It must have seemed as though the *Mail* had been caught out in a colossal and sustained lie.

"But as everybody knows, truth can be stranger than fiction. And for editors and executives of newspapers whose proprietors pay its salaries, the Press Council applies the test of innocent until proved very guilty. So let the *Mail's* amended defence, once it was confronted with the documents it had not been able to produce to the Council, now be heard:

"Sir' David English did decide, four days after Sutcliffe's arrest, not to pay Sonia a penny. Several senior executives were told of this decision. It was then decided to mount a massive three-month pretence: letters, meetings, negotiations, with senior partners, detailed contracts, senior counsel — all to give the appearance of a determination to pay Sonia large sums of money.

"And the purpose of this expensive and time-consuming deception of the Sutcliffes and their lawyers? In the immortal words of English, 'to spoil any operation by rivals and to work toward a confidence-building situation where we might get an interview with Mrs Sutcliffe without paying any money to her.'

"Now a reasonable jury, even at Snaresbrook Crown Court, might find it difficult to credit that the best way for a newspaper to get a free interview is to offer six-figure sums for it," says *Private Eye*.

"If it was all a charade, how to explain that detailed contract? Well, in the words of the (amended) defence, the *Mail's* lawyers were told that 'the draft should avoid paying money to Mrs Sutcliffe, but that this should not be made crudely apparent.'

"Unfortunately for this explanation, the contract was accompanied by a covering letter from Tytler to Sonia's solicitor, confirming that 'the monies would be paid on Mrs Sutcliffe's directions. As even lawyers employed by the *Mail* must know, this covering letter would be interpreted by a Court as part of the

deal.

"The Press Council had great difficulty in swallowing the *Mail's* defence. Its faculties for scepticism were somewhat exercised by the evidence of the April meeting between Tytler and Sonia Sutcliffe in which he offered her large sums for the syndication of her story, an offer withdrawn later the same day on instruction from English:



"The charade, if it was a charade, became so elaborate and convoluted, that this suggestion (that the *Mail* would pay her for overseas syndication rights) was put to Mrs Sutcliffe by an executive of the newspaper who then telephoned and told his editor of it, and then, on his editor's instructions, withdrew it from Mrs Sutcliffe the same day. It is hard to understand the purpose of this move and countermove if, indeed, the executive concerned had known for three months of his editor's decision that no money was to be paid to Mrs Sutcliffe. The editor's rejection of the suggestion was only likely to detract from the 'confidence-building situation' which he was trying to create."

"After making this, and several other, telling points at length against the *Mail's* defence that it was all an elaborate subterfuge, the Press Council turned about and delivered its decision.

"The Council has been given assurances by four editorial executives of the *Daily Mail* that they knew of the editor's decision that the paper would not pay any money to Mrs Sutcliffe at an early stage in January. The Council has concluded it should accept these assurances."

"The Council, in five brief lines, simply censures the *Mail* for setting out to deceive Mrs Sutcliffe. The awful suggestion that its executives consistently 'deceived the British public and the Press Council itself is, in this fashion, laid unequivocally to rest."

"*Private Eye* entirely accepts the Press Council's judgement in this matter. It is an object lesson in how circumstantial evidence, however strong, may incriminate totally innocent men. Any other verdict would have been unthinkable.

One reason why it is unthinkable is that Mr Alwyn Robinson, the managing director of the *Mail*, was

one of those who assured the Press Council that 'I was aware, early in 1981, of the decision not to offer any money to Mrs Sutcliffe.' This must be correct. After all, Mr Alwyn Robinson is Vice-Chairman of the Press Council.

"Now that the regrettable *Private Eye* story has been comprehensively dismissed by an independent and impartial tribunal, there remains the matter of the Council's finding that 'a group of senior editorial executives including the editor set out to deceive Mrs Sutcliffe.'

"It is a fact, often remarked upon by lawyers, that the net of criminal conspiracy can be cast rather wide.

Conspiracy to defraud, for example, is committed by any agreement between two or more persons dishonestly to deprive another of a valuable right, or to injure (i.e. spoil) such a right.

"Mrs Sutcliffe had an extremely valuable right. The *Mail's* editorial executives set out by agreement to deceive her into parting with it, by diverse false and fraudulent devices. Over a three-month period they dishonestly pretended to her and to her lawyers, an interest in purchasing her valuable right, by way of false representations (oral and written) and even by drafting and sending a contract they had no intention of signing.

"The object, says Mr English and his executives, of all this craft and

cunning, was to 'spoil' the value of Mrs Sutcliffe's property, and indeed to try to trick her into giving it away free of charge. She did not, in the end, give it away free to the *Daily Mail*, but a conspiracy is committed at the time its participants agree to embark on it.

"Among textbook examples of agreements held to be criminal, Archbold (the lawyer's bible) helpfully lists: an agreement to use false and fraudulent representations to convince a horse-owner to part with his property at a lower price; an agreement to pretend, by dishonest representations, that there are people willing to buy shares, and a conspiracy to enter sham bids at an auction.

"If the *Eye's* story about earnest negotiations had been true, there would have been no possible criminal offence, as the learned Mr Gray pointed out. However, the *Mail* executives all swear it was just a confidence trick, and the Press Council believes them. There will be those who will draw conclusions by applying the law to the admitted facts. They may even draw their conclusions to the attention of the authorities. The authorities are the Attorney General (c/o the Law Courts, Strand, London) and the Director of Public Prosecutions (21 Buckingham Palace Gate, SW1). The nearest police station to the *Daily Mail* is Snow Hill."

Footnote:

The CPBF has been campaigning for some time for all publications to enjoy the right of distribution through the wholesale network. We are pleased to hear that newspapers John Menzies have at last relented and are now distributing *Private Eye*.

WHY THEIR NEWS IS BAD NEWS

Loretta Loach



DURING FEBRUARY, THE Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom took over the BBC *Open Door* slot with a programme called *Why Their News is Bad News*. It was presented by two of the Campaign's sponsors; Julie Christie and Julie Walters and it was a powerful and effective challenge to the myth that we in this country are all equally well served by our broadcasting services.

The programme demonstrated that for those who hold views different from the prevailing consensus that the media favours and reinforces, it is a constant struggle to be heard. Julie Christie explained that "if television speaks to us as though we all have the same opinion, in practice it applies different rules for describing different sections of society. It depends on whether you are black or white, straight or gay, man or woman, powerful or weak".

Research was done on the July 1982 ASLEF strike and this became a test case to examine the broadcasters' claims that they are impartial in their views and current affairs coverage. The 'disturbing conclusion' was "that most of the coverage especially on the news, came from the point of view of British Rail management". The Tory and Labour Party conferences provided further evidence to explode the myth of impartiality. The media favours the middle ground of the political spectrum "that coalition of people who are on the right of the Labour Party, who are on the left of the Tory Party and who centre around the SDP and the Liberals. Their views are the view of the Civil Service it is the view of the media". The material reinforced the conclusions of many academic studies that have shown that news treats political views of the right quite differently from those of the left.

Television's ability to set the agenda for our understanding of certain issues is what makes it so powerful. Julie Christie argued that, "the issues TV selects, the interpretation it has of events and the comments it makes on public personalities — shape our lives. Our perception of what is happening in the world is as much determined by what we don't see on TV as what we do see". Here TV's record on Northern Ireland and the Falklands war came under heavy criticism. In a democracy the role of the media should be to inform the public on the issues on which they have to base their choice. These are two important examples where this has not been the case and censorship has been successfully marketed to us as 'responsible' editorial policy.

A list of banned and censored programmes rolled on the screen, giving a startling reminder of how

much is missing from the picture we have of events in Northern Ireland.

The programme also featured lively interviews with Anthony Barnett, author of a book on the Falklands war called *Iron Britannia*, Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone two of the right wing's press favourite whipping boys and Steve Forey a train driver and member of ASLEF.

The media's play on personalities is the concluding subject of the programme and in a very moving soliloquy Tony Benn says "I don't think this is a problem for individuals, I think the problem is that by this process whole bodies of opinion of people — the homeless, the people who are unemployed, the people who are discriminated against, that their case is destroyed and anyone who puts their head above the parapet at any level then finds the machine gun is turned on them in the hope that they will be frightened away from doing or saying what they are doing".

The Campaign's office has since been flooded with letters and telephone calls in response to the programme. Words of encouragement and offers of help were made to develop the work of the Campaign. It received mixed reviews in the *Daily Star*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Listener*, the *Morning Star* and on the BBC *Did You See* programme.

Why Their News is Bad News runs for 30 minutes and in the words of one dissenting BBC journalist, "It is an interesting and

Christie: "Television speaks to us though we all have the same opinion".

intelligent contribution to the debate on media bias". If you wish to hire the programme or make further inquiries about it please telephone 01 437 2795 or write to CPBF 9 Poland Street, London W1.

A question of balance



PIER Brendan's book on press barons — withdrawn after legal threats from Rupert Murdoch, but now reissued — quotes the Platonic Murdoch intro (a real example from his San Antonio News): "A divorced epileptic who told police she was buried alive in a bathtub full of wet cement and later hanged upside down in the nude, left San Antonio for good this weekend. The tiny half-blind woman, suffering from diabetes, recounted for the News a bizarre horror story filled with rape, torture and starvation." The Yorkshire Post did quite well at the weekend: "The butcher whose beautiful ex-wife vanished without trace nearly four years ago was fined yesterday for not putting enough meat in his sausage." Would it have been worse if he had been filling them with too much meat?

Friday Alternative — The Media and The Falklands

Mike Power

CHANNEL 4's *Friday Alternative* on *The Media and the Falklands* was a confirmation of the views expressed in our campaign's *Open Door* presentation (BBC2 23 Feb) that balance and impartiality in TV News broadcasting is a myth.

News Editors Peter Woon (BBC) and David Nicholas (ITN) were on hand to tell us that TV news had a good war and never knowingly reported anything that was untrue.

Nicholas awarded TV news nine out of 10 having done everything possible to be fair. Woon told the "truth as far as able," despite TV crews threatened with imprisonment, an 8,000 mile distance, picture relay problems and that "the MOD hadn't got its act together." All these problems were easily overcome in time for Margaret Thatchers visit to the Islands in January.

Despite the self congratulatory of our TV news heads evidence clearly shows that they were nobbled both wittingly and unwittingly. Stuart Hood, a former head of BBC TV news believes that "TV news had given in to pressures that might have been resisted."

In a state of military conflict real problems exist for journalists in seeking honest coverage. Lives are at stake, political pressures,

editorship from the MOD and so on; a time perhaps when the widely ignored NUJ code of conduct should be close to the heart.

This is not to suggest that every journalist abandoned professionalism or totally gave in to all the demands of sensation-seeking editors. Nor did they all willingly accept and promote without question the MOD's line.

However this detailed look at some aspects of the Falklands coverage, including exposure of the secret minutes of the BBC Editors and Current Affairs Committee; coupled with the BBC's refusal to allow access to its news film, revealed how the scales of impartiality became unbalanced.

The opposition to the war, which was polled at 30% at its height, never received fair coverage. Neither did the parliamentary opposition who tried according to Tom Dayell MP; "Day after day to get their view over," but "the BBC would have nothing to do with them."

Panorama invited some dissident voices only to unleash a political backlash. "Odious and subversive," said Sally Oppenheim about a basically safe programme, whose editor John Carey cringingly pointed out had "emphasised that the British cause was utterly right."

There was nothing impartial about the media's acceptance of the Government's lack of doubt to Britain's right of sovereignty over the Falklands. Abundant evidence of secret F.O. documents and academic research that raised doubts was deliberately ignored. Most of the information was available before the conflict started.



Nicholas: self congratulation

The Belgrano sinking and Port Stanley airstrip bombardment were prime examples of news management to suit the preponderating 'majority' view. In the early days of the action, photographic evidence showed that the airstrip had not been knocked-out. Yet reports were adjusted daily to create the impression.

Viewers powers of reason were given a further test when film of a clearly marked Harrier shot down in the raids was treated with a mock commentary as though the pictures were faked.

When the Belgrano was sunk there was a widely held belief that it was a deliberate escalation of the war. The object being to ensure a total military victory and scuttle the Peruvian peace plan. A *World in Action* programme that contained these views expressed by Paul Rogers of the Institute of Peace Studies Bradford University, was taken off 20 minutes before its scheduled broadcast. The editor claimed that supporting evidence for Rogers was too weak, but "with hindsight he has been demonstrated to be right."

The exposures continued. Deliberate mistranslation of Argentinian dispatches. Analysis of hours of news broadcasts revealed a minuscule number of critical comments, while favourable and justifying reporting of Britain's position overwhelmed. David Nicholas of ITN in a rare moment of candour admitted failure to caption censored reports unlike those from Poland and Zimbabwe. And the bereaved were not to be interviewed by order, unless they had received posthumous awards.

The language of the war was partisan throughout. The Belgrano sailors were 'missing' or 'lost' while on the Sheffield they were 'dead' or 'had died'.

The media went into overdrive to ensure that all the latent prejudices of the British people were extracted, confirmed and geared-up for the victory parade. It is not enough to blame the MOD's censors who told Robert Fox of the BBC "we only want you to print the good news." Most journalists passively accepted the role of cheerleading a consensus in Britain around the government's policy.



REGIONAL TV ATTACKED

Nick Arthur

TELEVISION SEEMS TO be full of important issues at the moment. The activities behind the scenes appear to be as gripping as the soap operas on the screen. Is David's sexual chemistry with Anna strong enough for TV AM to lay the golden egg? How long can Jeremy stick with alternative producers before he caves in to the advertisers? Why does Selina look so tired? Is it because everybody has stopped watching?

Of course, according to the broadcasters, they haven't. It's just a problem with the BARB computer; a quick kick will soon sort it out.

But away from the ballyhoo of TV AM and Frank Bough, few people pay much attention to a regular audience which far exceeds the estimated five million who watch

Breakfast TV. Yet every evening up to 15 million will sit and watch their local magazine news programmes as they are broadcast around the country: *Look North*, *Reporting Scotland*, *Calender*, *Scene Around Six* — half hour programmes at peak viewing time.

The presenters of these programmes are household names in their own areas. More people in the North East have heard of Mike Neville than Ronald Reagan. Stuart Hall in Manchester gets a bigger crowd at a fête than Tranmere Rovers on a Saturday. The power of these programmes in influencing local events — particularly industrial disputes — can be immense. But only a fraction of the resources spent on network programmes are

allocated to the local output, resulting in triviality, inaccuracy and lack of analysis.

Sadly, little discussion of these issues emerged at a public meeting in Birmingham about the role of regional television. Ian Connell, a member of the West Midlands Campaign and a Communications lecturer, attacked the local magazine programmes — *Midlands Today* and *Central News* — as being middle class, middle aged, trivial and often irrelevant. In front of a packed hall, the local TV bosses generally accepted the criticisms, but gave little sign of change. The large number of television reporters present were probably disappointed that their editors emerged mostly unscathed from the debate.

At one point the discussion boiled

down to counting the number of factory workers present. The head of *Central News* was claiming he had a more working class pedigree than the majority of the audience. He asked how many people worked in factories. One hand went up. Where do you work? The BBC, was the reply.

All the editors present were well informed about current criticisms of news coverage on television, but generally dismissed them as being academic over-indulgence. The head of *Central News* told the meeting that his programme would plead guilty to the charges made against it. "It may not suit the likes of academics" he said, "But our audience likes it."

His audience does, if you compare it with the ratings for *Midlands Today*, the BBC rival. But then, of course, there is *Crossroads* to thank for that, a ratings bonanza in the Midlands.

The BBC's own programme, as

CENSORSHIP AND CUTS ON CHANNEL 4

CAMPAIGN MEMBERS MAY be surprised to learn that Channel 4 has twice refused to show an 18-minute film about trade unions and the unemployed, made for its youth access programme *Whatever You Want*, unless the access, Mike Sabin and the director Jon Sanders agreed to substantial cuts. Those cuts, amounting to one third of the film, all contained criticisms of Mrs Thatcher and the Tory Government, and would have completely destroyed the balance of the film. Keith Allen, the presenter has since resigned.

William Boyd of the *New Statesman* commented "None of the observations or comments were either staggeringly original, intolerably idiosyncratic or lunatic Left hell-raising. So why were the cuts demanded? Is someone running scared? Paranoia? There seems absolutely no point in having access programmes — where minority opinions are expressly solicited — if that 'access' is so illogically conditioned. Someone, somewhere, owes us an explanation."

Another access film, a play, by a young Irish writer, Ray Brennan has also been refused transmission on *Whatever You Want*. This time on the grounds that it is "too strong for young people", the very audience for whom it was written. The play was commissioned by Jon Sanders and WYW, after Ray Brennan, along with hundreds of other young people wrote in to the programme. The result was *Tansy Lambert is Dead, OK?* a 35-minute drama about the life and death in borstal of a young Cockney.

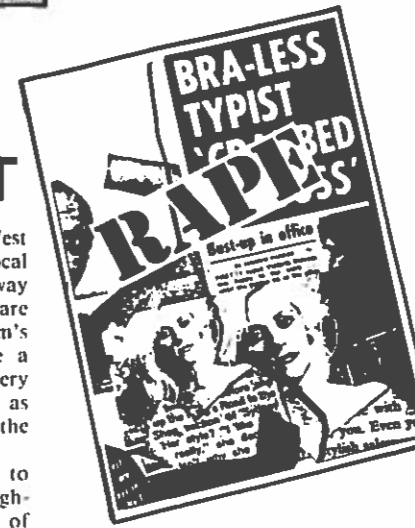
Channel 4 agrees that the film is of outstanding quality and has promised that it will be shown "sometime", although it won't say when or on what programme. It seems to be employing delaying tactics in the hope that the problem will go away — exactly what happened with the union film. Not

REGIONS RAPE CODE OF CONDUCT

JOURNALISTS IN THE West Midlands have joined with the local Campaign to try to change the way that rape and sexual assaults are reported by the media. Birmingham's NUJ branch agreed to finance a leaflet which has gone to every journalist in the Midlands area, as well as branches throughout the country.

The leaflet urges journalists to junk outdated reporting which highlights the most titillating aspects of sexual crimes, and downgrades other details which are often more relevant to the story. The most important thing to avoid, says the leaflet, is suggesting innocence or guilt by the

victim, particularly when journalists jump to the conclusion that she was "asking for it."



Rape Code of Conduct leaflet available from NUJ, 23 Cleveley Drive, Chapel End, Nuneaton, Warks.

WALES CAMPAIGN UNDER WAY

THE NEWLY-FORMED Wales Campaign is planning a second conference on 9 April in Cardiff, to plan a specific programme and decide its financial and constitutional relationship with the CPBF in London.

Work is also under way on a directory of the media in Wales which will include an introduction to the aims of the campaign, an explanation of the NUJ code of conduct and a guide to how to pursue complaints. It will list the media, their circulation or broadcasting area and who owns them. It will also explain the union structures and give advice on drawing up press releases, holding press conferences etc.

A bilingual leaflet to recruit new members and outline the campaign's

aims is also being prepared and it is hoped to bring out translations of some of the campaign's publications.

The extra cost of publishing in both Welsh and English is one reason why the Wales campaign will be pressing for a larger share of membership and affiliation fees paid to London from Wales.

There was a strong section of opinion at the launch meeting last November which objected to the idea of being a 'regional committee' of the CP&BF and wanted the Wales campaign to be both financially and constitutionally independent. Arguments were equally forcefully made for the need to ally with the CPBF and to support the work done in London — all of which is relevant to Wales. This is a matter to be resolved in April.

There were about 40 people — mainly from South Wales — at the launch meeting, which was addressed by Mike Power from the national committee. An indication of the political difference between Wales and England was that not one representative of the Labour Party came — although all CLPs had been invited twice. Neither the BBC or HTV covered the meeting, though reports were carried in the *Western Mail* and *South Wales Echo*.

As a result of his work in organising the conference on behalf of the Cardiff NUJ branch, James Stewart was told he would not be getting any further freelance work with BBC Wales. The management involved (who are NUJ members) objected to the fact that he was involved with 'pressure groups in the media'. The union has taken up the case.

The campaign in Wales can be contacted via James Stewart, 96 Wyndham Crescent, Canton, Cardiff. Tel (0222) 45645.

The initiative for the leaflet came following the successful Campaign meeting reported in the last issue of *Free Press*. Journalists from popular newspapers debated with members from the Birmingham Rape Crisis Centre, at a public meeting.

Further action could come from the NUJ after their Annual Delegate Meeting in April. A motion has been tabled calling upon the union to draw up guidelines on the reporting of rape, which are to be publicised to its entire membership. Its expected that many of the West Midlands guidelines will be incorporated in the code, if it goes ahead.

COMING EVENTS

Community Radio Conference, Sheffield Polytechnic. Saturday & Sunday 9, 10 April. Details: Carolyn Leary (0742) 667730, evenings, or John Hanlon 22991, day 738572 (evenings).

Media in the 80s, a conference organised by the CPBF at Goldsmiths College SU, London SE14. Saturday 7 May. Followed by cabaret & disco. Details: see back page of this issue of *Free Press*.

Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom AGM, Goldsmiths College SU, London SE14. Sunday 8 May at 10 am. Details: see back page.

LETTERS

Rape coverage I was concerned to read in your report (*Free Press 16*) of the meeting on press reportage of rape organised by the West Midlands Campaign, that I am supposed to have said that press reports of rape are often fabricated.

What I did say was that newspapers, typically both trivialise and sensationalise violence against women, and reinforce common stereotypes of women, and rape.

Given that the press carries rape reports more often and in greater details than other forms of media, and that women who have experienced it find rape extremely difficult to talk about, it follows that newspapers are a major source of information from which the majority of the public form their views about rape, and that the press plays a large part in generating, as well as reproducing, myths about 'sexual' violence. I think this is different to fabricating reports, which suggests that newspapers actually make them up.

The meeting itself was extremely lively, with a great deal of criticism expressed about the way the press reports rape, and the way in which the police treat women. Given the circumstances, I guess it's not surprising your reporter got her/his facts confused!

Heather Powell
Rape Crisis Centre
Birmingham

John Kinnear!

Media in the 80's

CPBF Conference and AGM

Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th May at
Goldsmiths College Student Union
Lewisham Way London SE14



Participants so far:

James Curran Jake Ecclestone Aidan White Giles Oakley Gerry Gillman Roy Lockett Sandra Horne Trevor Hyett Anna Coote Patricia Hewitt John Mitchell Frank Allaun George Jerrom Gus MacDonald

This year our AGM is linked to a day conference which will contain a series of events from 10 am Saturday morning until midnight. The AGM will take place the following day.

Hopefully many will attend for the whole weekend, members, non-members and friends are welcome to all events, although voting and speaking rights at the AGM Main Sessions are restricted to members only.

Saturday's Conference on the media in the 80's will have two main sessions to open and close the day with separate themes. Workshops will take place before and after lunch with limited themes defining problems and hopefully solutions on major topics in the media: planned subjects are: TV what's wrong: TV changing the picture: Industrial reporting: Media and Health Workers dispute: Industrial Democracy in the Media: Freedom on Information: Sexism-Images: Sexism-Rights: Local Radio: Racism-Images: Black Workers in the media: Labour Movement Daily: Media and the bomb: Alternative local papers.

After the Conference there will be a showing of a series of videos and some entertainment in the bar during the evening meal. At 8 pm the Cabaret will be hosted by Ben Elton, who scripted the "Young Ones" and will be appearing in "Al Fresco". From 10 - midnight there will be a disco.

Sunday's AGM aims to be as practical and activist as possible, given that the Campaign's business has to be conducted.

Agenda

- 10.00 - 10.30 Registration
- 10.30 - 11.30 Opening Session with guest speakers also secretary/organiser/treasurer's reports.
- 11.30 - 1.00 Workshops
- 1.00 - 2.00 Lunch
- 2.00 - 5.00 Business: Motions/Rule Changes/Election of Committee.

Workshops planned

Industrial Democracy for media Workers: Geographical organisation: Dealing with the local media: Right of reply (a) printworkers (b) broadcasters. Throughout the weekend meals will be available in the Student Union Bar.

Trade Unions affiliated to the Campaign: ABS, ACTT, AGS & RO, ASLEF, ASTMS, BF & AW, COHSE, CSU, NATFHE, FTAT, FBU, GMBATU, MN & ADA, NALGO NUJ, NATTKE, NGA 82, NSMM NUH & KW, NUM, NUPE, NUSeamen, POEU, SOGAT 82, SCPS/SPOE, TWU, T & GWU, UCW, USDAW.

REGISTRATION FORM

(please tick where appropriate)

Name.....

Address

Telephone

Saturday Conference only 10am - 5.30pm

waged £3 unwaged £1

Saturday Cabaret/Disco evening only 7.30 - midnight

waged £3 unwaged £1.50

Day and Evening Combined 10am - midnight

waged £5 unwaged £2

Sunday AGM admission to members and observers is free

Enclosed fee £..... cheques to: CPBF, 9 Poland St, London, W1.

CRECHE (bookable in advance only)

Saturday 10am - 5.30pm

Sunday 10am - 5.30pm

except 1.00 - 2.00 lunch break

Age of child

ACCOMMODATION (may be floor space)

Saturday night - How many people?

CAN YOU OFFER ACCOMMODATION?

How many beds? floorspace

Please return to CPBF, 9 Poland Street, London W1 3DG