

ENQUIRY CONFIRMS PRESS COUNCIL'S FAILURE

by John Jennings, secretary CPBF

DO YOU EVER feel like complaining to the Press Council? If so, don't. You may as well not bother.

That is one conclusion which frustrated victims of press bias and misreporting may well draw if they read the experiences of fellow-sufferers who have gone in ahead of them and eventually reached the front of the long complaints queue.

As one person who tried to bring a complaint — the secretary of the Golders Green Unitarian Church — put it: "the Press Council is more concerned in defending the press than in defending people against inaccurate and damaging reporting."

Evidence

Devastating evidence to support this argument comes in the first-ever 'consumer survey' of people who have complained to the Press Council. Their experiences, comments and criticisms form part of the report of an enquiry set up two and a half years ago by the Campaign for Press Freedom (as we then were).

It is now published as a book, *People Against the Press* by Geoffrey Robertson, who chaired the enquiry (and it is available direct to CPBF members at a reduced price).

The enquiry contacted almost a hundred persons and organisations who had used the Press Council's complaints machinery, 77 of whom replied. Some of the individual cases highlight dramatically the problems with both the press and the Press Council.

• **'Jumping the Housing Queue'** The *Daily Express* wrongfully implied that a mother and her three children had done just this. It not only failed to correct errors in the story, but published readers' letters repeating the untruths.

The mother was subjected to abusive letters and further hostile comment in her local press.

The Press Council's judgement was a serious indictment of the *Express's* conduct. But the complaint took over 10 months to adjudicate. The delay prolonged the distress and difficulties with neighbours. The *Express* eventually published the council's adjudication on page



Geoffrey Robertson

four (rather than on the front page, where the original report had appeared) and without any apology.

And local papers which had taken up and repeated the allegations did not publish it at all.

• **'Prostitutes, Pornographers and Wife-Swappers'** These were the accusations levelled at the several hundred residents of a West Bromwich housing estate as a result of a sensationalised and inaccurate article in their local paper. The Press Council, in one of its strongest-ever judgements, inflicted the "severest censure" on the paper for a "deplorable example of sensationalised journalism".

But Mr Peter Snape, the local Labour MP who had brought the complaint on behalf of his constituents, said he was "largely dissatisfied" with his experience of the Press Council and would be "fairly unwilling to go through the whole business again".

It took over nine months before the hearing and a further six weeks before the decision was announced. There was obstruction and delay in the council's procedures. And the upheld complaint was not given the prominence in the paper which the offending, front-page lead had given originally.

Lengthy delays

• **The Falklands VC Hero Sergeant Ian MacKay** was posthumously awarded the VC after being killed

in action in the Falklands. The *Sun* printed what claimed to be an interview with his widow who spoke of her feeling whilst "hugging her children at their home in Rotherham, Yorkshire".

But the *Daily Mirror* exposed the interview as a deliberate fabrication. Mrs McKay was not in Rotherham but in London at the time, and had not even spoken to the *Sun*.

The "quotes" were manufactured in the *Sun's* offices, with the help of secretaries who were asked how they would feel if their husbands had died winning the VC, alleged the *Mirror*.

A member of the public, a woman from Walthamstow, wrote to the Press Council taking up the *Mirror's* allegations. But this complaint is apparently still dragging on, even though the *Mirror's* attack on the *Sun* story was made in October 1982 and the Press Council was asked to act two weeks later.

The Press Council now claim to have a 'fast track' procedure for dealing speedily with matters of factual inaccuracy!

The Council's investigations so far seem to have concentrated on asking the woman which newspaper she was complaining about, the *Sun* or the *Mirror*, and then what evidence she could produce to prove the *Sun* interview was not genuine.

The idea that they might themselves pick up a telephone and ask Mrs MacKay whether she really was interviewed by the *Sun* is obviously too dangerously radical for the Press Council.

Discouraging

It is hard to avoid the suspicion that the Council's procedures are designed to put people off and to actually discourage complaints against the Press.

In the period July 1977 to March 1980 a total of 1,566 complaints were made to the council. Of these, 1,061 were withdrawn or delayed and 309 disallowed (ie deemed frivolous). This leaves 155 which were actually adjudicated on and 73 upheld.

In other words, only 4.66 per cent of complainants were successful, a great many having given up part-

way through the procedure.

But what comes across clearly in *People Against the Press* is that even a large proportion of these successful complainants remain dissatisfied customers. As Geoffrey

continued on back page

Members of the Press Council Enquiry, which was established by the Campaign for Press Freedom

SARAH BOSTON Freelance film director and writer, past vice-president of ACTT

GEOFFREY DRAIN General secretary NALGO, member of TUC general council.

JACOB ECCLESTONE Deputy general secretary NUJ, past member of the Press Council.

GEOFFREY GOODMAN Assistant editor and industrial editor, *Daily Mirror*, member of the third Royal Commission on the Press and joint author with David Basnett of its minority report.

RICHARD HOGGART Warden of Goldsmith's College, writer, author and past member of the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting.

JOHN MONKS Former journalist, now a district officer of NALGO.

RUSSELL PROFITT Race relations adviser to Brent Borough Council, Lewisham Councillor and former headmaster.

GEOFFREY ROBERTSON Barrister and author, editor of *Guardian's* legal column.

MURIEL TURNER Assistant general secretary ASTMS, member of the TUC general council and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

PHILLIP WHITEHEAD Former MP for Derby North and Labour spokesman on higher education and the arts. Writer and broadcaster.

KATHERINE WHITEHORN Associate editor and columnist on *the Observer*.

Case for Labour 'Daily'

THE FEASIBILITY OF a new labour Movement newspaper has been established in a report by Lord McCarthy. The report, initiated by the TUC, proposes the launch of a 32-page tabloid with a cover price of 18p and a full-time staff of 230. The new daily newspaper would reflect the aims and interests of the labour and trade union movement.

The report envisages that the format of the paper would be like a daily newspaper, with news, features, letters, advertisements, articles, crosswords etc. McCarthy believes it to be important that it should provide a general service, ie entertain as well as inform, and make its readers feel that they are receiving all round value for money.

To meet these criteria the report lays down general but very definite requirements:—

"The new paper would concentrate on being a genuine newspaper, offering new standards of excellence in British journalism and giving accurate coverage and objective analysis of what is happening in the world — at home and overseas.

"It would not treat news and issues in a sensational or trivial way and it would not be sexist or

racist, doing without the kind of 'pin ups' which have become an offensive and unacceptable feature of so many tabloids.

Comprehensive & Progressive

"It would give comprehensive coverage to all aspects of society and would aim to explain and inform on the changes and developments in British life.

"The new paper would be a progressive, radical newspaper in its political and social views but would aim to be objective in its treatment of all issues. It would have the support of the trade union and labour movement and would offer critical support to it — but it would certainly not shrink from criticism of the movement's institutions or policies — as well as those of the



Lord McCarthy

Daily Telegraph

business world and the political parties where this was justified".

The TUC has welcomed the report, and General Secretary Len Murray said there was a "strong commitment" to the newspaper project from the General Council.

The report has been circulated to affiliated unions for their initial response. The results of these first soundings will be reported to the July meeting of the General Council, when it will be decided what recommendations are to be made to the annual congress in September.

NOTHING LOCAL ABOUT IT

THERE'S NOTHING LOCAL about London's local Radio. This was the verdict delivered by Local Radio Workshop in its report *Local Radio in London*, which is now republished as *Nothing Local About It*.

The report is based on an analysis of materials broadcast in one week by London's three 'local' stations: Capital, LBC, and BBC Radio London. It was written by LRW, Black Women's Radio Group, Women's Airwaves and Rest of the News, with special contributions from SWAPO and the London Business School. In addition the new report contains a selection of

responses to the original report.

Nothing Local About It details the poverty of local radio output and suggests the reasons for this. It calls into question the adequacy of the existing local radio system and contains proposals for the future development of radio that would radically alter the relationship between stations and listeners. Price £3.95 (paperback), £10.50 (hardback). Comedia Publishing Group, 9 Poland St., London W1. For more information about *Nothing Local About It* contact: Tom O'Malley or Gloria George at *Local Radio Workshop* 01-402 7651.

Public hearings on cable

THE PUBLIC HEARINGS on cable, which are being jointly sponsored by the Great London Council and Sheffield City Council have been rescheduled to take place on 11 and 20 July. The hearings were due to take place before the election. The sponsors have taken advantage of the delay by extending the process of consultation; and accordingly would welcome any more submissions of evidence, and in particular responses to the Government's White Paper which was published recently.

If you would like any help with evidence, or wish to discuss anything relating to the hearing, contact:— Nicholas Garnham, Greater London Council, Public Hearings on Cable, DG/IE Room 6b, The County Hall, London SE1 7PB 01-633 5909 or John Darwin, Employment Dept., Sheffield City Council, Palatine Chambers, Pinstone Street, Sheffield 0742 75515.

Courses for black journalists

THE BLACK MEDIA Workers Association has launched a series of courses designed to enable Afro-Caribbeans and Asians to get jobs in the media. The first two six-week courses started on 23 June at the Polytechnic of Central London. The courses consist of newspaper layout and subbing in print journalism, and scriptwriting and presentation in radio journalism.

The second set of courses start on 8 September and will cover, news writing and reporting and the technical aspects of the radio studio.

The courses are funded by the GLC and are recognised by the NUJ, ACTT and ABS. They are run by experienced practitioners and are restricted to London-based students. The courses are free to students selected by the BMWA.

Commenting on the courses, Sadhana Ghose, BMWA National Organiser and Co-ordinator, said:— "Station managers and local editors say that trained blacks do not apply for jobs. As they do not provide the necessary training we have decided to do so ourselves."

Further details of the courses are available from: Sadhana Ghose, Black Media Workers Association, 180b Holland Road, London W14 8AA. Tel. (0494) 775610 9am to 12pm.

National Committee 1983/84

The members of the new National Committee of the CPBF, elected at the AGM in May are:

Section 1 (Individuals)

John Jennings
Tim Yarnell
Beulah Ainley
John Foster
Nik Oakley
Loretta Loach

Section 2 (NUJ)

Jake Ecclestone
Charles Tremayne
Eddie Barrett
Aidan White

Section 3 (Print TUs)

George Jerrom — NGA
Geoff Dixon — SOGAT



Thatcher's 'free' press — Fleet Street's cheer leaders.

MAIL NUJ BREAK OUT

by Mike Power



Leader-less Express on 6 June.

BY A MAJORITY of 5-1, a Chapel meeting of *Daily Mail* journalists protested at the bias in the paper's coverage of the General Election. At a routine Chapel meeting to discuss a wage claim, the resolution which was inspired among other things, by the *Nissan Jobs Lost if Labour gets elected* scandal was raised and carried.

A reply was demanded by 1 June

from the editor, Sir David English, although no threats were posed. He wheeled out the usual nonsense about "nobody tells me what to print in my paper".

The NUJ Chapel received virtually unanimous support from the NGA Imperial Chapel at its meeting two weeks later. It was noted that if the *Mail* continued its present policy, then readership could be affected thereby risking future employment opportunities.

Express and Observer follow suit

During the election campaign, the NGA Chapel at the *Observer* protested about a Conservative Party advertisement in the paper. They demanded space for a reply, and when editor Donald Treford refused they walked out, causing a four-hour stoppage in which 200,000 copies were lost.

The first edition of the *Daily Express* of Monday 6 June appeared without its leader after NGA members demanded space to reply and editor Sir Larry Lamb refused.

The article distorted attendance at the People's March for Jobs Rally in London and the Chapel responded immediately.



NOW OUT...

PEOPLE AGAINST THE PRESS

By Geoffrey Robertson

Report of an independent enquiry into the Press Council, initiated by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

If you have ever felt like complaining to the Press Council about something you have read in the papers, this book is essential reading. It gives a thorough analysis of the workings of the Press Council — and devastating evidence of dissatisfaction with the Council's performance and procedures.

SPECIAL OFFER — HALF PRICE TO CPBF MEMBERS

The CPBF set up the independent enquiry which produced this report and we are committed to securing the widest possible debate of its findings. We have negotiated with the publishers, Quartet Books, for CPBF members to obtain copies at only £3.95, including postage (full price is £7.95).

To CPBF, 9 Poland Street, London W1

I am a member of the CPBF. Please send me copies of 'People Against the Press'. I enclose £.....

Name

Address

.....

.....

TWO new pamphlets from the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

Are you in the picture?

If you aren't, then you should read this introduction to the way television works. It looks at the way television portrays working people, women, black people and issues like nuclear arms and Northern Ireland. It also summarises the organisation of the major TV stations.

Price 50p

Rejoice — The Media and the Falklands by Susan Greenberg & Graham Smith

The media coverage of the Falklands war was often sensational, distorted and inaccurate. Government manipulation of the media was even greater than normal and news was noticeable as not necessarily being the truth. In this booklet, the authors chronicle the media coverage of the war, and highlight just how jingoistic they were.

Price 80p

Both publications are available from the Campaign for £1.00 9 Poland Street, London W1.

Please send me a copy of Rejoice! and Are you in the picture. I enclose a cheque/postal order for £1.00;

NAME

ADDRESS

Media in the 80s

IN MAY THE CPBF held what proved to be a constructive and well-attended joint Conference and AGM. The theme of the weekend (May 7 & 8) Conference/AGM, was 'Media in the 80s'.

The Conference/AGM comprised a series of workshop seminars on various media issues, including Industrial Reporting; Local Radio; Industrial Democracy in the Media; The Role of the Media in General Elections; Right of Reply in Broadcasting; Media and the Bomb; and Freedom of Information.

Speaking at the opening session on Sunday morning, Gerry Gillman, general secretary of the Society of Civil and Public Servants drew delegates' attention to the words used by the media. Trade unions always "demand" and "claim" while employers "offer". One never heard of a trade union "offering" to accept and employer's "demands", or of employers "rejecting" a union's "reasonable pay claim".

Unions

On the role of the media, Mr Gillman said it was necessary to differentiate between the editorial content of newspapers and the work of the industrial and labour correspondents. In the 1950s the media identified wild-cat and unofficial strikes as lying at the root of Britain's labour relations troubles — then the unions were too weak to control their members. Today the unions are too strong! "The media never ask why it is people are driven to strike".

In the workshop on Industrial Reporting, the day before, John Lloyd, Labour Editor of the *Financial Times*, said that in the 1960s trade union militancy became perceived as a "problem", and industrial reporting became intertwined with political reporting. Today, industrial reporters are pushed to holding a view that trade unions themselves are a "problem" requiring control.

One of the main items on the agenda of the AGM was an emergency motion on *Tribune*, moved by secretary John Jennings and amended by James Curran. The amended resolution as carried is printed below:

Tribune Emergency Motion (as amended)

This AGM welcomes the offer by the secretary and national committee of the CPBF to mediate in the dispute at *Tribune*, and views with dismay the attempt by Lord Bruce of Donnington and Mr John Silkin to take control of the paper by the manipulation of moribund shareholdings, and the removal of worker directors from the board of *Tribune*.

The Campaign for Press and



Gerry Gillman — "The media never ask why unions are driven to strike."

Broadcasting Freedom believes that agreement should be sought on a new structure of control and ownership for the paper in line with the principles of both the CPBF and the labour Movement. Any such agreement should include:

1. Withdrawal of the legal action against the *Tribune* staff;
2. Establishment of an editorial advisory board;
3. Readers' participation in management and representation on the management board;
4. Staff representation on the management board;
5. Opportunities for the organisation of the Labour movement, including Constituency Labour Parties and trade unions, to share in the ownership and management of the paper if they wish;
6. Guarantees that *Tribune's* position as a paper supporting the Labour Party while also encouraging wide debate on socialist ideas and policies will be maintained;
7. Arrangements to ensure that the interests of the existing shareholders are adequately considered.

John Jennings

Two motions on the funding of local branches — one from West Midlands calling for 40 per cent reimbursement, and one from Wales calling for 60 per cent were defeated.

A second motion from West Midlands calling for regional representation on the National Committee was remitted, while another motion resolved to support the formation and development of regional branches was carried.

Motion on the Right of Reply, Industrial Democracy in the Media and the Press Council were also carried.

Alan Richardson

Sheila Gray

with collective bargaining leading the way. But what of editorial control? This becomes a political question for the trade unions. Meanwhile, the diversity of the press, through industrial democracy, could be enhanced by a re-structuring of the industry.

The radical re-structuring should include

- A launch fund for new publications
- Guaranteed distribution/retail outlet
- Break up monopolies of all media
- Replace the Press Council with a tougher, statutory body.
- A statutory right of reply, a freedom of information Act and reform of Official Secrets Act.

The two workshops on industrial democracy covered much more ground with other radical suggestions such as a franchise system for newspapers.

The crucial element of these discussions led inexorably back to one, more fundamental question.

What is the role of the press in today's society?

Geoff Dixon

Media and Election coverage

THE CAMPAIGN'S ANNUAL meeting was given a briefing on how members could intervene during the run-up to the general election.

More than 40 people attended a special workshop at the meeting to prepare a set of proposals. Among the ideas which emerged were:

- That the Campaign should issue a statement appealing to journalists to abide by the NUJ Code of Conduct and for all media workers to challenge any attempts at distortion and bias in favour of one party;
- That all election candidates should be urged to include the Campaign's aims and the need for reform of the media in their election material;
- That the Campaign should carefully monitor the press, radio and television during the election period.

Initiatives

It had also been hoped that, given more time, the Campaign could organise regional initiatives and a national press conference to launch its election strategy, but the election was called two days after the meeting leaving little time for detailed organisation.

Members at the annual meeting agreed that the calling of a general election has given the Campaign the best opportunity to assess the bias of the media in full flow.

The Campaign national committee took on the work of carefully checking on the election coverage of each national newspaper. The intervention by media workers — journalists at the *Daily Mail* who complained of the paper's Tory bias, and printworkers at the *Express* who challenged an anti-Peoples' March for Jobs leading article —

showed that at this election the media was put under closer scrutiny than ever before.

Election Special

The Campaign issued the following 'election Special' on how to challenge media bias and seek fair election coverage.

Does your local newspaper, radio station, or regional TV give fair coverage of the policies and views of the political parties?

As the general election approaches, mass media bias becomes particularly damaging to those who question the status quo. So here is what you and your party or other organisation can do to challenge that bias and seek fair election coverage.

1. Write to the editor of your local paper, the manager of your local radio station, the news editor of your regional TV station and ask how they intend to ensure fair coverage in the election.

How will policies be put over? Will there be a bar on the kind of character assassination that took place over Labour's candidate in the recent Bermondsey by-election?

2. If you are not satisfied with the response, seek a meeting with the union representatives on the newspaper, radio, or TV station concerned, to discuss your view and what the unions can do to help. The head offices of the media unions or the campaign may be able to assist you in contacting local representatives.

3. Remember, the campaign advocates the right of reply to inaccurate or misleading reports, and this position is supported by all the media unions, together with the TUC. Do not hesitate to demand it, and seek union co-operation if necessary.

The campaign's pamphlet, 'Right of Reply', will assist you. It's available at 40p post-free from the campaign office.

4. You can assist the campaign by sending us a report of your experience in dealing with the media during the election.

5. The role of the mass media in setting the agenda for political debate has come to the fore in recent years. Let's make the media an issue in the election!

Ask your local candidate where they stand on the policies and aims put forward by the campaign.

Don't let the media let you down!

Aidan White



Mike Jempson

National organiser's report

THE LAST YEAR has been an extremely encouraging one for the Campaign, having doubled its membership to 1,680 compared to 922 in May 1982. It is not far short of its aim of employing two full-time workers and one part-time worker, and it has established a permanent office in the centre of London at 9 Poland Street, W1.

The Campaign has played an important role in extending the debate on who owns and controls Britain's media. It has also responded to various developments over the last year which have placed the issue of media freedom in the forefront of people's minds.

One of the most memorable media issues of the previous year was the Falklands War. The CPBF publicly defended journalists in the BBC and elsewhere who were being hounded by the Government for their coverage of the conflict. After the war, when the debate over the media's role was still fresh in people's minds, the Campaign jointly organised a meeting on the



Phil Kelly

subject with Fleet Street CND and JANE.

The Campaign has just published a pamphlet on media freedom and the Falklands. Details appear elsewhere in this issue of *Free Press*.

The other major development last year took place in the sphere of broadcasting, where the Government's Information Technology Advisory Panel (ITAP) advocated the immediate introduction of cable television. The disturbing recommendations in the Hunt Report which followed, sparked off a major debate about accountability and democracy in British broadcasting. The Campaign published a book by the Conference of Socialist Economists Communications Group as a contribution to this debate and co-sponsored a conference on cable television last December.

Fundraising/Projects

The Campaign needs more secure finances in order to function consistently and effectively, and to confront all media issues in the 80s with confidence and imagination. One of the most important things

to remember is that fundraising cannot be isolated from the Campaign's activities as a whole. Accordingly it has aimed to raise money for particular projects which will generate future income as well as raising money for general running expenses.

Funding has been secured for a project which arose out of last year's right of reply work among the media unions during the health workers' dispute. NUPE and NALGO are jointly sponsoring a video film on the media and the health workers which will be publicised and distributed on its completion.

Open Door

The successful production of the *Open Door* programme *Why Their News is Bad News* which was broadcast in February led to a very generous donation of £3,000 from one of the viewers. The programme generated a wealth of interest in the Campaign, and as a result several dozen members were recruited. The programme was an impressive challenge to the notion of impartiality in news and current affairs broadcasting. Its presentation and content reflected the wide range of support which the Campaign

What the Doctors ordered — TV and the Right of Reply

THE RIGHT OF Reply Campaign which culminated in the near success of Frank Allaun's Private Member's Bill has concentrated mainly on the Press. There has been little or no discussion of the principle in relation to Television. The Broadcasting group at the 1982 Right of Reply Conference even declared that the demand "had little to offer in broadcasting."

This is partly because there are clear limits on what the Right of Reply could be expected to achieve, especially in isolation from other major changes. It is the drip-drip effect of television that gives it its power rather than tabloid-style factual distortions and personalised attacks.

The more subtle problems of television would be scarcely touched by the Right of Reply — the power to "set the agenda", the routine use of explanatory frameworks based on "consensus" assumptions, the regular misrepresentation and exclusion of certain views, particularly on the left.

Nonetheless it is worth looking at those few examples when Rights of Reply have been granted in television, if only because of what they reveal about the kinds of pressure the TV institutions do or do not respond to.

Balance

Open Door has never been tied by the rules of "balance" and in 1976 two particular editions provoked so much controversy they led to Reply programmes. The British Campaign to Stop Immigration led to a Response by the Community Relations Council and Palestine Action/Free Palestine triggered a

enjoy. The video will be available for hire and sale.

GLC

An application has been made to the Great London Council to fund the Campaign's work in London, which has met an enthusiastic and encouraging response. One of the projects will involve a study of local and national newspaper coverage of the current GLC administration.

Publicity Campaign

Last October a publicity campaign was launched which increased membership and raised over £4,000 in individual donations. However, threats of legal action by the Freedom Association caused the Campaign to incur extra costs. Nevertheless lessons can be learned from such attacks, which only strengthen the Campaign's resolve for greater freedom and accountability in the media.

To enable the CPBF to be more vigorous and creative, the incoming National Committee must consolidate the gains, reduce the costs of servicing the membership, develop publications projects and increase activities in radio and television.

Loretta Loach

Zionist reply by the Anglo Israel Friendship leagues.

More interesting was the case of *Panorama* in 1980. There was such a furore from powerful sections of the medical profession over the programme about brain stem death, involving the criteria by which people are judged dead, the BBC reluctantly produced a major debate on the subject, giving both sides space to present their own case. By comment consent the programme was a success. It was illuminating, challenging and entertaining, but regrettably not a model for anything similar since.

More revealing was the refusal of either the BBC or the IBA to concede to the collective demand made in 1981 by 74 MP's, 23 Union General-Secretaries and a large group of academics, for a series of programmes on the issue of TV bias. Where the doctors succeeded, elected representatives failed. Indeed later that year the BBC killed off a 6-part continuing education series, *On Television*, which partly tackled the issue. Early draft scripts from leading academics and critics were dismissed as "largely theoretical" and "unlikely to seize the interest of our audience".

Pressure

Rights of Reply may not suit Television on the lines proposed for the press, but the demand should not be too lightly dismissed. The successes show what pressure can sometimes achieve and the failures show how important the issue is. Television is too powerful for it not to remain a primary site of struggle for the Right to Reply.

Giles Oakley

A Question of Racism

Absence Makes The Heart Grow Fonder?

by Robert Findley
West Midlands CPBF

RECENTLY, THE BBC's 'The Heart of the Matter' devoted a programme to the issue of the media's coverage of racist attacks. This programme, which I considered to be very good, raised some very important points that I feel both anti-racists and media workers have let slip.

The two major issues seem to be the way in which the increasing number of racial attacks upon members of the black communities are being either played down or ignored. Secondly, the approach of the media requires us to reconsider the role of the media itself and the way in which the Code of Conduct introduced by the NUJ should operate.

In order to address these issues it is important to understand some of the developments that have taken place concerning racism and the mass media. Academic studies on the question began during the 1960s and a number of articles and pamphlets appeared in the early 1970s written by academics and leading journalists.

In 1974 *Racism and the Mass Media* by P. Hartmann and C. Husband² appeared. The following year saw a seminar organised jointly between the NUJ and the Community Relations Commission at which Denis MacShane presented a paper on the NUJ Code of Conduct. This paper looked at specific do's and don'ts of reporting race related stories.

If some interest in the matter had been shown in the early 1970s, then in the late 1970s it became a major talking point. From the middle of the decade through to the victory of Thatcherism, we witnessed a daily diet of racist reporting at both a local and national level. We saw the popular and not-so-popular press provide print for openly racist arguments and there was no need for the National Front 'to kick their way to the headlines' because the press appeared willing and waiting to grasp their every word.

According to two new books, *The New Racism* and *The Empire Strikes Back*,³ what we were seeing was an emergence of a new form of racism which was not limited to the fascists or far-right in the Tory Party, but found an articulated voice in the British state itself. The lid had been taken off — the racist flood-gates were flung wide open.

As a response to these events, anti-racists and media workers formed the Campaign Against Racism in the Media. CARM published a pamphlet called *In Black and White*, which showed examples of racist reporting and argued how and why this should be stopped. In 1979 it also produced an *Open Door*



programme entitled, *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum*.⁴ Both the CARM and NUJ put a great deal of effort into promoting the Code during this period and there can be little doubt that in many areas this has been very successful. The amount of blatant racism has declined however, what I would regard as 'common sense' or indirect racism both appear in the media. The use of the Code of Conduct is also producing a contradictory situation which, owing to the structure of the media and the deep-rooted racism in society, can only harm the interests of black people in Britain. Let me explain this more fully.

With the Tory victory in 1979, the country moved further to the right and the seeds of an authoritarian state were well and truly sown. The fascist groupings fragmented into hundreds of splinter groups having fared badly in the General Election. Since then they have spent much of their time either trying to re-group or tearing each other apart. Nevertheless, there still exists a hard core which whilst no longer commanding the headlines, have been busy inflicting violence upon the black communities. Since the General Election of 1979 the anti-racist movement too has fallen into isolated groups up and down the country.

Racism far from disappearing has become more violent and extreme. The state itself being one of the major culprits with hundreds of deportations, police harassment and criminal frame-ups. The riots of 1981 saw how quickly the black youth were both 'fingered' and singled out for treatment. The media did very little to dispel the myth that these were 'race riots'.

Journalists tell me that some

advancements have been made. The number of positive stories about the black communities is increasing as is the number of TV programmes containing black actors or dealing with black issues. I agree things have slightly changed, but the truth remains that in the press the lives of black people hardly exist except when they are seen in terms of being a 'problem'.

This leads us back to the programme, *The Heart of the Matter*, because it showed how editors did not like covering the issue of 'racial attacks'. Three basic themes seemed to lay at the heart of their concern. First, many 'attacks', they argued could not be proved to be of a racial nature. This is the same kind of argument heard from the police and which the black communities find so insulting. It also highlights the relationship that exists between the media and the police when it comes to reporting crime. The press dare not hurt its prime source for material.

Second, there is a genuine fear amongst journalists and editors that if too much is made of racial attacks then, copy-cat attacks will follow. I can understand this concern, however, I consider not to report the attacks does not aid the black communities either. Whilst having sincere worries, these media workers fall into the biggest trap of all. The structure of the media, like the society in which it operates, reinforces racism by excluding black people from forms of representation.

Professor Stuart Hall argued that questions of 'race' become externalised from our way of thinking. They are treated as if they have nothing to do with the body politic. Black lives, their history and their culture are both treated as 'alien' and are absent from what is generally

regarded as the British 'way-of-life'. Imagine then, if it was not blacks who were being attacked, but whites. Would the media attitude be the same? Would it keep silent? I honestly think not! We would see a great outcry and a 'moral panic'. One has only to consider the events of the early 1970s and the role the media played around the 'moral panic' over mugging. The media follows society's lead: blacks are viewed as the 'problem': even when in reality they are the victim of the problem which is racism.

However, because the British have always seen other 'races' as the 'outsiders', then there is a general and deep-seated attitude which implies: "If 'they' do not really belong here, why unduly concern ourselves?" This is found at all levels of society and exists within the daily 'common sense' arguments we hear on the streets. Why should the newspaper or TV office be different? Is not discrimination a physical example of exclusion? The NUJ has argued for years for the need to see more black media workers. The inter-connections must be made. We must stop the practise of seeing 'minorities' as having less value or less say than the 'majority'.

This aptly leads onto the final point made by the editors concerning racial attacks. They turn to the NUJ Code of Conduct and argue that they do not want to use 'race' or 'colour' in a negative report. They say that by reporting racial attacks they feel they may be presenting racial matters in a harmful way. Here lies a neat and damning 'Catch 22! The Code of Conduct, instead of being used to prevent racist reporting is also being used as a 'closure' against the interests of the black communities. This needs serious thinking about!

The result of all this seems to place the black communities in total isolation and feeling under-siege. This is also how it came across in the TV programme. It has been impossible in this short space to outline the whole argument, however, certain things should be clear.

1. More work is urgently required on the study of race, racism and the mass media. There is a growing need to question the structure of the British media in general and the ways in which it excludes not only racial groups, but others, such as the disabled, gays and, in particular, women who suffer from different although similar 'closures'.

2. The NUJ Code of Conduct must not only be defended but extended. Media workers must continue to explore ways in which to make the media open to those who are the subject of their craft. The 'Right to Reply' is but one area.

1. *The Heart of the Matter*, BBC 1, May 1983.

2. *Racism and the Mass Media* by C Husband & P Hartmann Poynter Davis 1974

3. *The New Racism* by Martin Barker *The Empire Strikes Back* by CCCS Race and Politics Group CCCS/Hutchinson Press 1982

4. *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum*, BBC 2, February 1979.

Communications Ministry — is it a possibility?

by Patrick Hughes

MY REACTION TO Michael Meacher's proposals for a Ministry of Arts, Communication & Entertainment (first presented to last year's Labour Party Conference) in *Free Press* May/June 1983 is ambivalent.

I agree that a break is needed from the traditional division and conflict of governmental responsibilities regarding communications and the media. For the present government, a way out of the chaos and incoherence in communications policy which beset its predecessor would be to create a new Ministry of Communications. By the same token, the Labour Party's Parliamentary Opposition needs a spokesperson on communications who would combine and expand the relevant areas of responsibility of present shadow spokespersons for industry, home affairs, and for the arts.

The difference between a Tory and Labour ministry of communications would concern the objectives, ownership and control of the technology and the systems of communications production and distribution, including:

Is there guaranteed access at a neighbourhood level to production & distribution facilities for the use of neighbourhood groups?

Will the establishment & development of an integrated communications infrastructure contribute to the development of the UK telecommunications manufacturing sector?

Is there full democratic control at a regional and national level of the data and programmes to be transmitted?

Will the purchasing policies of a Ministry of Communications lead to a communications system whose design, operation, and maintenance procedures are significantly simpler to understand by non-specialists than its predecessors?

Where I differ from Michael

Meacher's proposals of the scope of the responsibilities which a Ministry of Communications would need in order to provide a framework of accountability for communications and Information Technology. In my view, such a Ministry would have to be concerned not just with the operation of the communications, media, and entertainments sectors, but also their technological & organisational development. In current practical terms, I feel that a Labour Shadow Spokesperson on Communications should be asking questions about each particular technological development, e.g.:

Will it increase the range of socially-useful products, in the form of components, data, programmes, etc., or will it increase & centralise military or managerial control?

Will it stimulate and contribute to the development of a UK electronics-components manufacturing sector?

Will it facilitate improved access & training to ensure diversity in the data, programmes, etc. which it is involved in distributing?

Such questions challenge the popular distinction between "technical" and "political" issues, and replace the question of "How to" develop new communications and information technologies with questions such as "Whether to", "For whose benefit?", and "Under what conditions?". At both national and regional levels, the producers and consumers of the communications, entertainment and information technology sectors should be enabled to ask such questions, and to discuss the current and future developments in these quickly-integrating industries.

The scope of a Labour Ministry of Communications would have to

be broad to be effective. It would have to cover anything from technological innovation to public performance, because the communications companies (e.g. Sony, AT&T, GEC, Xerox) have been operating in this way for some time. These companies have introduced new information and communications technologies as part of a general re-structuring of social relations around production and consumption of programmes, data, and information generally. For instance, over the last thirty years we have seen a shift in the UK from a BBC monopoly in which broadcasting was under social control, to a private sector monopoly in video cassettes and discs which is outside of social control.

If that re-structuring occurs outside of social control, it can result in a re-structuring of consciousness, too. The current expansion in the volume of material available via new communications technologies such as video, cable, and satellites hasn't been accompanied by an increase in the range of views and ideas expressed in the new media. Eg videocassettes consist almost solely of feature films, with no news, current affairs or "cultural" material, and with very little "educational" material. Moreover, that reduction in diversity tends towards the reactionary, as illustrated by the rise of video pornography.

This re-structuring is happening so quickly that policy in one area — eg cable, or, say, the press — can't ignore the others, eg computerisations, telecommunications, satellites. Consequently, the Labour movement requires policies which democratise and develop the communications industries as part of a coherent strategy for economic and industrial development.

Attempts to re-structure an industrial or economic (or "cultural") sector in the interests of working class people have tended to merely support and protect local or national capital, with the inequalities in wealth & opportunity which that entails. A major cause has been the "parliamentary-bureaucratic" style of intervention. Accordingly, attempts to achieve social control of the communications industry — which is what a Ministry of Communications would represent — need to be based in mass movements, eg the Trade Unions, neighbourhood & tenants' groups, women's groups . . . oh yes, and the CPBF! Mass Actions by those movements should run in parallel with the bureaucratic measures in the Town Halls and in Westminster. Failure to form such alliances will force the Labour movement to submit to the current dominance of the communications companies in the balance of political forces around the development of communications.

REGIONS

WALES

THE WELSH NATIONAL party Plaid Cymru had virtually zero coverage on network BBC and ITN broadcasts during the recent General Election campaign. The party points out that the Conservative Labour and SDP/Liberal Alliance had constant coverage on all network news programmes, all of which were transmitted in Wales. There was no compensatory coverage on BBC Wales or HTV.

The burden of Plaid Cymru's case is that:

1. Plaid Cymru should receive reasonable coverage on network television;

2. The imbalance should be rectified to some extent by a compensating variation by the BBC within Wales itself. A concept which the BBC does not accept.

The only results of repeated representations to the BBC during the campaign which Plaid Cymru

is aware of are: BBC Election Call (Dafydd Wigley, PC, and Gordon Wilson SNP); BBC Wales *On the Spot* with Dafydd Wigley 27 May.

Plaid Cymru's poor coverage was further compounded by the fact that BBC Wales deliberately cut-down on Plaid news items. Radio Wales 7am news bulletin was monitored during the first week of the campaign (except Thursday). Every bulletin referred to the Conservative, Labour and Alliance; not one referred to Plaid Cymru. Copy was put over in good time for all these bulletins and the station was telephoned several times during the week to press for inclusion.

S4C Welsh language TV news prepared by the BBC for transmission at 7pm. On Tuesday 17 May there was a total of 13 minutes election coverage. The breakdown was as follows: 12 minutes to Conservative, Labour and Alliance; 30 seconds to Plaid Cymru; 15 seconds to Scottish National Party; 20 seconds to an independent candidate.

On Wednesday 18 May, a press conference to launch Plaid Cymru's Gwynedd campaign was held in Anglesey. Arrangements made by the BBC to attend were cancelled by the BBC in Cardiff.



ENQUIRY CONFIRMS PRESS COUNCIL'S FAILURE

Robertson writes: "A remarkable picture emerged of a complaints commission whose procedures seemed to give more cause for complaint than the conduct of the newspapers it was investigating."

When we look at the council's funding we see that this comes almost entirely from the newspaper proprietors. Of the total £155,744 funding in 1979, the biggest contribution, £79,998, came from the national newspaper owners, the NPA. Next biggest was the £50,803 from the provincial newspapers. And most of the remainder came from the Scottish and periodical publishers' associations.

Could this be a clue to the Press Council's ineffectiveness? Do the newspaper owners, pay their contributions in order to defend the public against the press, or the press against the public?

Independent enquiry

Geoffrey Robertson's book is a first class report, providing a thorough analysis of the Press Council's work and activities, including much valuable information that cannot be mentioned here. The enquiry which he chaired, though set up by the Campaign for Press Freedom has operated independently of us and come to its own conclusions.

But it is on the conclusions that the CPBF's national committee part company with the author. Considering its devastating exposure of the council's failure to carry out its primary functions, the conclusions in the book's final chapter come as something of a disappointment.

It argues for a Press Ombudsman, with statutory support, operating alongside a reformed Press Council. Our national committee, at their June meeting, called for a new and independent Press Authority with full statutory powers to enforce the right of reply.

Meanwhile the Press Council as present constituted should be boycotted, they said. Complaining to the Press Council is actually worse than doing nothing. It only lends credibility to an organisation which time and time again has betrayed the people's trust.

People Against the Press, by Geoffrey Robertson, is published by Quartet at £7.95 and is available through bookshops. But members of the CPBF can obtain copies from us direct at half-price. (£3.95, including postage). See separate order form in this issue.

Free Press is published by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 9 Poland Street, London W1. Typset by S Colmer 0442 53701 and printed by Spectra (UK) Ltd 0442 211895. Articles for publication should be sent to Nik Oakley, 4 Old Mill Road, Hunton Bridge, Kings Langley, Herts. 09277 64049.

REGIONS

West Midlands

THE ROW OVER the Tory advert to woo black votes was an appropriate footnote to the West Midlands CPBF's latest meeting — 'Racism and the Media'. It was one of those few occasions when black issues hit the headlines since the riots of two years ago and the debates about community policing that followed — a point put in a broader context by the speaker, Sadhana Gose, from the Black Media Workers Association.

The debate centred on two points. The first was the number of black people (politically speaking the BMWA unites Asian and Afro-Caribbean people under that title) actually working in the mainstream media. Sadhana argued that it was not simply a question of training,

of the population are black their representation in the media industry is only 1%. In this respect, perhaps to some peoples surprise, the local Birmingham Post & Mail group is no worse than the national average.

The second point was the representation of black issues and people in the media. To illustrate the point Sadhana showed a video of part of the Friday Alternative programme. It consisted of interviews with white women, relaxed in their homes and freely spouting their racism. The only counter was brief on-the-street 'vox pops' with a few black people. If this was CH4's 'alternative' then, as Sadhana noted, it was a sad state of affairs.

The debate that followed was undoubtedly the sharpest, politically speaking, that this series of meetings has sparked. The strength of feeling and the diversity of views was reflected in the discussion about the way forward — how far, for example, must black people organise themselves autonomously, what (if anything) can whites do to assist,



Eastern Eye — taken off the air during the General Election.

there are many black media workers who are simply not offered the jobs their abilities and qualifications merit. The meeting voiced strong feeling about the racism apparent in the fact that although roughly 4%

how committed are the unions — NUJ, ACTT etc — who recognise and support the BMWA and what are the possibilities for training and production of the film industry using the flourishing regional net-

work of film workshops and the ACTT's Workshop Declaration.

The most topical issue was CH4's decision to take *Black on Black* and *Eastern Eye* off the air during the election period and amalgamate them into a special one-off programme — the West Midlands CPBF responded to the BMWA's call for a lobbying of CH4 by writing to J. Isaacs and circulating copies of the letter. (This action brought a response from Jeremy Isaacs on CH4's *Right to Reply* programme).

Following the AGM of the Campaign, at a meeting of West Midlands members there was established a monitoring of the local daily newspapers as well as the regional tv news in the run up to the election. (The local Trades Union Resource Centre and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies are conducting the tv monitoring). While bias in the usual, well documented manner is a regular feature of the print media our aim is to immediately stop any outright distortion of the kind that Peter Tatchell so recently suffered. Our many supporters in the NUJ throughout the region would be called on to assist in this. We informed all Labour party candidates in the W. Midlands as well as the main offices of the other parties that this exercise was being undertaken.

Plans are in hand to widen our base a little and try to cater more adequately for the many members based in the Coventry and Warwickshire area and those in the Walsall/Wolverhampton district by having meetings in those centres in the autumn. Any one interested in helping please contact Rob Burkitt on 021-359-4192/2403/5545.

Rob Burkitt

Take a step towards press freedom — by distributing Free Press

THE Campaign for press and Broadcasting Freedom's *Free Press* is essential for all those who have had enough of media distortion.

It provides information on how the right of reply can be demanded and won. It challenges the existing forms of media ownership and control.

Free Press is not short on ideas and analysis — about what lies behind media bias, and what can be done about the Press Council, how the monopolies which distribute the press can be challenged, the whys and wherefores of a labour daily, and why we have to put an end to official secrecy.

The action is there, too! *Free Press* is helping to build the Campaign, and it reports on the local and national activities which are letting thousands of people know that they can take on the media moguls and win.

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