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CAMPAIGN NEWS

"Towards Media Freedom"

A new and much expanded version of the booklet that launched the Campaign is under preparation.

This new edition of "Towards Press Freedom", as the change in title suggests, will explain the background to the Campaign's aims.

It should be ready this coming Spring, and will provide a useful basis for debate, discussion and recruitment.

CPBF London Women's Group

In error the group's meetings were given as every third Wednesday of the month in the last issue of F.P.

In fact we meet on the last Wednesday of each month. Phone the CPBF office for the venue (01 437 0189)

Liberal view on media

At the Liberal Party Conference the media were the subject of a day-long Commission.

Delegates were highly critical of the media, particularly the growing centralisation of media power, government secrecy, media harassment of individuals and the suppression of 'minority' beliefs. The Liberals are already committed to democratic changes in media structures, support community-based local radio, and identify strongly with the current campaign for Freedom of Information legislation.

An encouraging aspect of the debate was the wide area of agreement between the Liberals and the CPBF. Delegates expressed concern about the growing press monopolies, declining standards in Fleet Street and the ineffectiveness of the Press Council. The impact on the media of technological change, and government legislation, such as the Police and Criminal Evidence, and Video Recordings Bills were also considered in depth. The Campaign's lunchtime fringe meeting, addressed by Mike Power and Loretta Loach sparked off a lively debate, particularly on the role of media workers and their trade unions.

Good News on Sunday?

National Committee members Loretta Loach and Mike Power have joined the advisory panel of a group investigating the launch of a new weekend national newspaper.

The project is still in its early stages, but a major feasibility study is planned and approaches are being made to private, union and other sources for financial backing.

With the right-wards shift of the Sunday Times and Observer, the virtual extinction of investigative journalism in Britain, and no Sunday substitute for Morning Star, Guardian or independent-minded readers a range of options might be open for a new, mass appeal paper.

DIARY EVENTS

1985 AGM AGENDA

The Campaign's Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday 2 March 1985 at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square in London.

As the CPBF has organised three national conferences on the media during 1984, and there are plans for a national women's conference in 1985, our AGM will focus on issues of particular concern to the Campaign itself.

- Among items on the agenda will be:
- * Extension of the Campaign's Aims to include specific commitments to tackling media sexism and racism, and the adoption of a Code of Conduct on Sexism which is being formulated by the London Women's Group.
 - * Discussion of the role of our increasingly numerous and active regional groups.
 - * Consideration of Campaign funding and finances in the light of the possible demise of the GLC as a source of support.
 - * Discussion of alternatives to the Press Council, centred around the varied ideas which have appeared in Free Press.
 - * Plus, of course, any other issues that members wish to raise.

Motions and nominations to the National Committee are welcomed.

Further details of the AGM will appear in the next issue of Free Press.

SAT 15 DEC CPBF DAY CONFERENCE

"The Right of Reply in Broadcasting"
Conway Hall, London SE1. With leading figures from BBC and independent radio and TV News and current affairs. See p.5

Mining the media

The NUJ is assembling material for a booklet on media coverage of the miners' strike.

If you have stories, cuttings, information or photos which might be relevant, you can still send them to Lesley Wood at the CPBF office, and she will forward them to Acorn House.

Become a CPBF donor!

Help to keep alive the vital issues of media freedom and the Right of Reply. There is no time to lose

I/We wish to make a donation towards the £20,000 campaign target.

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FREE PRESS

JOURNAL OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR
PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM

No. 26 NOV - DEC 1984 20p



Andrew Ward (Report)

MAXWELL: Why did Labour turn a blind eye

By Christopher Hird
of Diverse Reports

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom has again written to the Labour Party National Executive to express concern at the leadership's role in Robert Maxwell's takeover of Mirror Group Newspapers.

The move follows an earlier approach, to which there had been an extremely unsatisfactory reply. This summer the CPBF wrote to all members of the NEC asking if the NEC had given Maxwell an indication that they would not oppose his takeover. All those who replied said that to their knowledge he had neither sought nor received such an undertaking.

However, subsequent revelations have shown that whilst Maxwell may not have been in formal contact with the NEC, he did approach senior Labour figures. And the behaviour of the Labour leadership casts serious doubt on their commitment to a diverse and non-proprietary press.

In October the Channel Four current affairs programme Diverse Reports revealed that Neil Kinnock had abandoned a press statement hostile to Maxwell, following pressure from Roy Hattersley and a phone call from Maxwell.

In his reply to the CPBF Mr. Hattersley referred the Campaign to his articles in Punch, which opposed Maxwell.

Maxwell's ambition to own a national newspaper is well known, though only now has the level of his determination become clear. For years he has assiduously courted the Labour Party.



INSIDE: SEXISM in the media p.3

Paul Foot p.5

Freedom Association
v.
John Jennings
Background to the Libel
case and Appeal details
p.4

CAMPAIGN AGM
Sat. 2 March 1985
Conway Hall
Red Lion Square, WC1
OUTLINE AGENDA
p.8

MERRY XMAS
TO FREE PRESS
READERS
but don't forget
we still need

£20,000 —
So how about a little
Christmas box for
the campaign

FILL OUT THE
DONOR CARD
ON THE BACK
PAGE — NOW



There are other routes to change than simply reforming the Press Council argues PATRICK HUGHES

Intervention, Agitation, Legislation

Two types of regulatory agency exist supposedly to control the Press and other sectors of the media.

Non-statutory bodies such as the Advertising Standards Authority and the Press Council, and statutory bodies like the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, and the forthcoming Cable authority and telecommunications agency 'OfTel'.

Both sorts are essentially cosmetic, and John Foster (FP24) avoided the temptation to propose some new form of regulatory agency, and concentrated rightly on proposals to change the ownership and control of the Press.

But if we are to effect such changes we need to take account of the growing integration of the Press with other sectors of the communication industry.

And we need to create channels for action which supplement trade union strength, especially to protect the interests of women and ethnic minorities who are under-represented in media unions.

In my view we need a three-pronged approach to the task — intervention, agitation and legislation.

First principles

Companies in different sectors of the industry are linked through cross-ownership, and their operations are often integrated through one conglomerate (eg Pearson, publisher of the Financial Times, shares ownership of Yorkshire TV and the Yorkshire Post with WH Smith, and has interests in satellite communications.)

Challenges to such forms of ownership need to be equally integrated, and proposals for change in one sector need to take account of relationships between that sector and others. To concentrate on just one sector would be like trying to arrest a centipede by handcuffing one leg.

There is a common discussion about the social responsibilities of workers and owners in the chemicals and armaments industries, but not nearly enough about the similar responsibilities of those in communications to encourage and enable people to make more sense of the world and their place in it.

We should expect this to be expressed in the content of the printed and broadcast media, through interactive telecommunications systems able to receive and transmit information from all sources, and in the use that is made of new Information Technologies to break up the monopolies of information ownership.

The fulfilment of this social responsibility should show itself in the consistent, coherent and equitable presentation of as many and varied points of view as there are in society.

It must also mean an end to the current domination of the communications industry by multi-nationals, monopolies, conglomerates and rich individuals accountable at best to a handful of (often corporate) shareholders.

We should be working for a mix of public and private companies, worker/consumer co-ops, Trusts and Foundations.

No diversity — no comment.

Levelling Out

Two new publications have emerged from the remnants of the original "Leveller" collective. Both lay claims to being worthy successors to that much-missed radical current affairs magazine.

"Monochrome" has an anarchic flavour, and comes in tabloid form. The first issue has a centre-spread by Linda Pickard and Ken Loach on the ludicrous notion of balance in TV news and documentaries.

It costs 10p, supports the miners and is run as an open collective, meeting every Thursday at 7pm in the old Leveller office, 52 Acre Lane, London SW2.

A forthcoming issue promises "a complete and up to date history of the National Front in Britain", and there is heavy emphasis on employment issues.

"Traces" is a monthly run by designer Sue Baker and Ian Henshall, formerly of the Leveller and Oxford's Back Street Bugle.

They stress that they represent no single political viewpoint, and offer a blend of current affairs, leisure and youth-oriented material.

Their eventual goal is to produce "a middle-brow, mass-market radical weekly", but have started with less ambitious aims.

Traces is being distributed through independent bookshops at 40p, and three issues have been produced so far. In a six month trial period the publishers hope to build a readership and advertising revenue which will set them on the road to expansion.

The Traces collective is keen to hear from advertisers, campaigners, cartoonists and writers and can be contacted at 87 Kirkstall Road, London SW2 4NE.

Intervention

Media organisations — the Press, Broadcasting, Databases, Electronic Publishing companies — should be regarded as "publishers" of information, instead of primarily as "producers" of information, as at present. And the larger media organisations should contribute a percentage of their revenue to assist smaller organisations with shared services — data-bases, accountancy services, publicity, advertising revenue generation and collection.

The CPBF should help to generate this process by encouraging regional groups to act as information networks, collecting and disseminating information and views from those under-represented in present news gathering routines.

Agitation

Each political party should be urged to have a spokesperson on "communications".

Each local authority and Trades Council should be urged to have a Communications Committee to monitor the activities and development of the communications industry in their area, and co-ordinate action and policies.

Neighbouring local authorities should be urged to establish Regional Communications Assemblies to deal with strategic communications issues.

The CPBF should similarly encourage its affiliated organisations to set the ball rolling with their own spokespeople on communications, and establish Media Research Units to provide them with briefings on communications issues. Imaginative use could be made of computerised data services to assist this process.

Legislation

We desperately need a Right of Reply Act to cover all media; a Freedom of Information Act which establishes a legal Right to report; a Data Protection Act to establish a legal Right to Correct; and an Intellectual Property Act to prescribe who can profit from owning information, and circumscribe the use of "profitability" to block freedom of information.

The Campaign should monitor and contribute to discussions and proposals around these four areas of legislation. Through its own Media Research Unit it should provide briefings to inform all those involved in getting such legislation onto the Statute Book.

London Work Out Mark II

There are still plans to launch a free sheet aimed at the unemployed.

Survivors of the team of journalists who produced the pilot "London Work Out" in July last year, have been seeking finance to make it a regular paper possibly with a new name.

Despite difficulties with the July 1983 issues, the group say that demand and interest in the idea has come from advertisers, local authorities and the unemployed.

London Work Out is based at 9 Poland Street, London W.1.

SEXISM: time for a Code of Conduct

WE RESIST:

- the gratuitous display of women's bodies in the media;
- irresponsible media treatment of instances in which men kill, attack or harass women;
- sexual stereotyping, including the routine representation of women as sex objects and as 'housewives', as being diminishing of both women and men;
- the racist portrayal and neglect of black women and women of other ethnic minorities;
- hostility to and misrepresentation of lesbians and male homosexuals in the media.

WE SEEK TO PROMOTE:

- a positive representation of women that reflects all aspects of their contribution to economic, social and political life;
- a reform of language to avoid sexist usage;
- recognition in the media of the women's liberation movement as a responsible and necessary social force.

A Code of Practice urging media workers to avoid creating or processing sexist material has been drafted by a group brought together through the CPBF's regular women's meetings.

The draft has now been sent out to a wide range of women's organisations to get their reactions and suggestions — and particularly the views of black and ethnic minority women.

There is still plenty of room for amendment, and any ideas received by the end of December will be incorporated into the final version.

This will be brought to the Campaign AGM in March 1985, for approval by all CPBF members.

At the annual conference there will also be a move to introduce two new aims into the Campaign's constitution, referring specifically to women in the media.

The Code of Practice will be accompanied by a more detailed set of guidelines — in

by Kate Holman, NUJ

pamphlet form — giving guidance to journalists, broadcasters and print workers on encouraging a more positive image of women in the media, using non-sexist language and illustrations.

The idea of such a Code came partly from the joint statement against racism agreed by the NUJ and NGA some years ago. In line with that statement, the draft Code of Practice has been kept short and succinct, so its main points can be easily read and taken in.

We hope that once it is finalised and endorsed by the Campaign, the Code will be adopted by all media unions nationally. This would be an important demonstration to media proprietors that the unions believe discrimination against women to be unacceptable, and are prepared to take a stand against it.



None of us pretend that it will change overnight the sexist attitudes that still prevail among some media workers.

But debating the Code in union chapels, shops and branches will provide a valuable opportunity to make members aware of the issues involved, and why the derogatory way women are generally presented in the media at present is harmful not only to 51 per cent of the population, but to everybody.

Swindon news — it's cheaper by cable

A confidential memorandum from the editor of the Swindon Evening Advertiser, Patrick Wheare, to Nicholas Herbert, editorial director of Westminster Press, the paper's holding company, confirms journalists' worst fears about the introduction of cable television in Britain.

Swindon Cable, owned by Thorn E.M.I., went 'live' amid a blaze of publicity on September 17. More than 10,000 homes were already on cable in the town. How many new subscribers the company has been able to attract is not known, but it is thought to be relatively few.

Households already on cable get the service for £2 a month. New subscribers must pay £15 a month.

But it is the relationship between the new company and existing media in the town which is most interesting. For several months before going 'live', Swindon Cable had been using a

news service supplied to it by the local independent radio station, Wiltshire Radio. Wheare's memo says that the cable company was dissatisfied with the news service and that Thorn/EMI wanted the local paper to provide the service.

Just prior to going 'live' Swindon Cable used a local freelance journalist, Michael Stares, who runs Swindon and Cotswold News Service, but Wheare's memo makes clear that he was a stop-gap... "though he would not be given this impression."

From the outset of the cable mania, the NUJ has feared that cable companies were interested only in easy profits — whatever they might say in franchise applications to the Home Office — and that assurances about providing an alternative local news service to the community would be quickly forgotten.

What Wheare's memo makes cynically clear is that companies like Westminster Press — which owns the biggest string of provincial papers in Britain — are

ready to sell their own editorial output to any competitor if the price is right in order to kill competition. Thorn/EMI, says Wheare, "seem to be thinking in terms of starting by possibly paying a lump sum per annum to us for a teletext news service. We'd offer them so many stories up-dated so many times per day etc." Wheare mentions £5 a story or £100 a day for 20 stories.

He goes on, with endearing frankness: "David Burroughs (the manager of Swindon Cable) is anxious that at this stage none of this information is directly attributed to him. This is partly, I think, because under the Home Office licence Thorn should not be seen to be doing deals with us and cutting out other possible news sources like local radio — or recognised freelance agencies, and partly because although he would like to work with us others in Swindon Cable are not so keen."

Calling for "speedy action", Wheare says: "If we do not take up the opportunity to provide news and advertising for (Swindon Cable) with the chance to strengthen our position in this field, we could find Cable tv not only threatening the Evening Advertiser, but also providing the opportunity for someone else to build up a strong news and feature team in the town."

Needless to say, when the NUJ chapel at the Evening Advertiser kicked up a fuss over management's decision to publish a weekly cable tv supplement, Mr Wheare had the gall to take them to task, concluding his rebuke: "We will continue to keep union representatives and editorial staff informed of any proposals connected with Swindon Cable or if there are any policy developments regarding the sale of news and pictures."

Any developments, Mr Wheare?

Do you think FREE PRESS is missing something? Perhaps it's that letter, news item, cartoon or article you've always meant to send in. It's never too late. Put it in the post to CPBF, 9 Poland Street, London W1 3DG.

This issue of FREE PRESS edited by Mike Jempson. Copy for FP27 should be sent to the CPBF office by January 1st 1985.

Have you persuaded your organisation to affiliate to the Campaign yet?

The issue of media freedom is important to everyone. The Campaign Office has a Speakers List of members willing to address local meetings, on a wide range of media topics.

Why not send for a copy, and help to get people interested in your area. The Campaign needs new members, and we all need to keep a watchful eye on the media.

Among the unions, representing people from all walks of life, which have affiliated are:

ABS, ACTT, AGSRO, ASLEF, ASTMS, BF&AW, COHSE, CSU, NATFHE, FTAT, FBU, GMBATU, MN&AOA, NALGO, NATTKE, NGA'82, NUJ, NSMM, NUHKW, NUM, NUPE, NUSEamen, POEU, SOGAT'82, SCPS, STE, TWU, T&GWU, UCW, USDAW.

Contact the Campaign Office NOW and build the C.P.B.F. in your area.

What kind of Freedom?

John Jennings, a founder member and former Secretary of the CPBF, is being sued for libel by the Freedom Association.

What is the case about?



Pat Mantle

FREEDOM AND GENERAL PINOCHET

In October 1983 the Freedom Association published an article on the Pinochet regime in Chile. It included comments like these:

"Pinochet's Chile has been the scene of one of the most interesting economic and constitutional experiments in the world today."

"Pinochet... is a statesman on the model of Gen. Franco, whom he greatly admires."

The article, in their paper the *Free Nation*, was written by Brian Crozier, an influential figure in the Freedom Association and a member of their editorial board.

John Jennings strongly criticised and condemned these opinions in an article in *Free Press* of November/December 1983. It is over this article that he is being sued.

The Freedom Association claim he called them "racist and/or fascist".

John Jennings denies that this is what he wrote, but maintains that what he did say was fair comment on a matter of public interest.

WHO ARE THE FREEDOM ASSOCIATION?

The Freedom Association (formerly NAFF—the National Association for Freedom) rightly claim to be an influential and effective pressure group. They have campaigned for monetarist economic policies, free enterprise, cuts in public expenditure, a reduced role for the state, privatisation of public services and stronger legislation on the trade unions.



Armed forces arrest Orlando Letelier, Defence Minister in the Allende government, 6 Sept. 1973. He was assassinated in Washington, 21 Sept 1976.

WHY NOT JUST APOLOGISE?

John Jennings has declined to give the apology demanded and wants to defend the libel action. At the AGM of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom in April 1984 he said an apology might protect his family's house and mortgage. But he felt it would be a betrayal of those who have suffered under brutal and murderous dictatorships in countries such as Chile, and he does not see why he should apologise for expressing his honest opinion.

WHAT PRICE FREE SPEECH?

Libel actions can be astronomically expensive. There is no legal aid.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom fully supports John Jennings' stand but it does not have the funds to finance court actions of this kind.

He is being sued in his personal capacity. If he loses it could cost £50,000 or more—and this does not include any damages which might be awarded against him.

Freedom of expression can therefore come rather expensive!



Li Ching-sun Prisoner of conscience in Taiwan

Li Ching-sun, now aged 66, was a prominent journalist and former newspaper editor. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in December 1971, more than a year after his arrest on charges of 'sedition' in November 1970. His life sentence was reduced to 15 years' imprisonment in July 1975.

At the time of his arrest Li Ching-sun was Deputy Director of the state-owned national radio and chairperson of the executive council of *Ta Hsu Wan Pao* (Great China Evening News). He had previously been editor of the *Central Daily News*, the daily paper which represents the views of the Kuomintang, ruling

party of the Republic of China, of which he is believed to have been a long-standing member.

He was tried under martial law legislation by a military court in December 1971, on charges that included membership of the Chinese Communist Party, passing government secrets to Chinese communists and attempting to foment a revolt in Taiwan. None of the charges referred to activities more recent than 1949. Li Ching-sun said he had confessed to the charges against him under duress.

Amnesty International believes that the real reason for the action against Li Ching-sun is that he occasionally wrote articles critical of the government, alleging corruption and inefficiency.

Having spent a number of years in prison on Green Island, Li Ching-sun was moved in early 1983 to Jenai prison. Reports suggest that he suffers from diabetes and low blood pressure.

Amnesty International
British Section, 5 Roberts Place,
London EC1R 0EJ

WE NEED £10,000 URGENTLY!

A 'John Jennings Defence Fund' has been set up by the CPBF, but with a separate bank account and its own trustees. We need money now to be sure he can fight the case through to the end. Of course, if he loses, it will cost him a lot more than £10,000.

Please help

Please send a donation.

Make cheques payable to the 'John Jennings Defence Fund' and send them c/o Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 9 Poland Street, London W1 3DG. Fill in the form below.

I enclose a cheque/PO for as a donation to the John Jennings Defence Fund.

Name

Organisation (if any)

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RIGHT OF REPLY



Andrew Ward (Report)

Paul Foot on the Right of Reply

"WHAT ARE we to do about the media?" No question was more anxious or shrill at the Labour Party conference, and none, in my view, so badly answered.

The media reaction is not so much in their enthusiasm for the formal representatives of the Right, such as the Tory Party. It is their class bias, most obvious whenever there is an industrial dispute, which is most odious.

How curious then that the 'solution' most favoured on the left is one which appears to ignore the class divisions in society.

This is the famous 'right to reply', demanded with such force not just in Labour Party conference reports but also by high-powered campaigns such as the Campaign For Press Freedom.

Their argument is that the best way to deal with the abuse of trade unions and trade unionists by the media is to pass a Law through Parliament which forces the media to publish the replies of those who are abused or vilified in the Press. That way, the judges, and perhaps even the police, will be able to ensure that 'a fair crack of the whip' (to coin a phrase) is given to those who get nothing but abuse from Press and television.

No sooner is the problem 'solved' this way, however, than other problems arise. In what circumstances will people or organisations get the right to reply?

Answer: of course there will have to be some judicial process, some independent body. Such a body must be seen to be even-handed. Perhaps something like the Press Council, or 'three wise men' chosen from the ranks of people who understand judicial processes, will deliberate over each case.

or their corporations to every one of their victims.

The libel laws which do not afford legal aid, and are therefore resorted to almost exclusively by the rich, will be strengthened by yet another barrier to any sort of investigative of challenging journalism.

Consider, too, papers like

FREE PRESS will be publishing replies to this article, so if you have a view on the Right of Reply, write in.

Obviously, each side will have the right to legal representation, and the people who can afford the most of that will have the most of it. Newspapers in particular will defend their columns with hosts of barristers and solicitors, never mind the expense. The balance of the whole process will automatically tip against the working class or even average-income complainant.

A more serious objection seems to me that the 'right of reply' will be used most, and to the most damaging effect, precisely by the people whom it is meant to curb.

Although they are shrinking, there are still places in the media where rich and powerful people and companies are under attack. These places are under pressure anyway, but will be under much more if there is a legal right to reply. If such a law came into force, it would be used by at least two wealthy and powerful people

Socialist Worker or *Militant*, whose most obvious purpose is to challenge the existing order.

Are they to be immune from the new laws? Or will not the people they attack have constant recourse to the courts and tribunals so that their pages will be ordered to be cluttered up with bromide apologies and half-statements of 'reply'?

Courageous left-wing editors may reply that they will not comply with such a law. But they will look very silly refusing to obey a law which they themselves have demanded.

The problem is that, in class society, law lines up with one class against another. And any attempt to right the class imbalance by 'even-handed' and 'fair-minded' laws, usually tips the balance still further the other way.

Reprinted from SOCIALIST WORKER 20 Oct. 84

FTAT hammers the Press Council

Jack Moss, editor of FTAT Record, the journal of the furniture trade union, recently suffered a knock-back from the Press Council.

In March Woodrow Wyatt wrote a column in the *News of the World* entitled "Let's vote in secret". It contained what was regarded as an unjustified slur on FTAT, implying that the union had something to hide about the form and conduct of a secret ballot in 1976 which resulted in the election of a Communist Party Member as General Secretary. The editor of the *News of the World* refused to publish a reply from Mr Moss, which explained that details of the ballot arrangements had been published at the time on Woodrow Wyatt's own printing press!

The Press Council threw out Mr Moss' complaint about the failure to publish his

response to Wyatt on the grounds that he "had failed to establish a case warranting adjudication by the Council".

Jack Moss says that his complaint was "testing the claims of the Press Council to be willing to provide redress for injured parties." He would not recommend this course of action to anyone else.

In the latest issue of FTAT Record he writes, "Such a negative response justifies entirely the Right of Reply as a Right, not at the whim of a sterile and ineffective Council."

CONFERENCE THE RIGHT OF REPLY IN BROADCASTING? HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE PEOPLE'S RIGHT OF REPLY IN RADIO & TELEVISION?

Saturday 15 December
County Hall London
10.00am

Organised by the Campaign for

Press and Broadcasting Freedom, ABS, ACTT, and NUJ

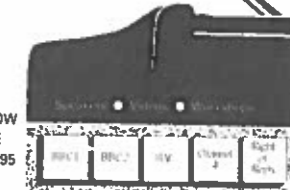
Delegates £5

Individuals £2.50

Unwaged £1

CRECHE

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1984 — Boomtime for the Campaign

BY MIKE POWER

1984 has seen a massive expansion of contact between our Campaign and other organisations.

Fringe meetings at political conferences have included the Liberals, Young Liberals, Plaid Cymru, Ecology, and Labour parties.

Around 200 people joined the discussion at our Labour conference meeting on "Should Labour talk to the media?". One third of the delegates attended our Ecology conference meeting, and half the Media Commission came to our lunchtime session at the Liberal conference.

Thanks to an extensive programme of fringe meetings throughout the summer, national trade union affiliations now represent 7½ million union members — 75% of all those affiliated to the TUC — and regional and branch membership is up.

Many unions have been extremely generous in their support — providing rooms, producing literature and distributing our material. NALGO helped us to produce a 12-unit exhibition "Stand up to the Media".

Our work on the miner's strike has been widely acknowledged, and CPBF speakers have shared numerous platforms with the NUM and miners' support groups.

In Milton Keynes recently there was an audience of over 100, and in Norwich 130 came along and decided to set up an East Anglian Campaign Group.

This year has seen the launch of a North-West Group at a one-day conference in Manchester, and an East Midlands Group. The Wales CPBF got a boost from its Cardiff conference on "The Media and Democracy", and the London Women's Group has been joined by two geographically-based London Groups.

Growing concern about Britain's distorted media is reflected in the wide range of groups we have spoken to, from the Cambridge Fabians, to South West London Young Conservatives, Downham Women's Afternoon Group, Swindon Media Workshop, and the Advertising Practitioners Association.

We even ran a class for the sixth form at Eton College, who were visibly agitated by our video "Why Their News is Bad News".

In November, at Marxism Today's "Left Alive" event, the CPBF session on "Miners and the Media" was packed out and over 100 heard the Campaign debate with Clive Thornton and Tom Baistow on "The Decline of Fleet Street".

We end 1984 with the Right of Reply in Broadcasting conference, but we shall be up and down the country to many more local events before our AGM in March.



● John Sutton (L) interrupts Eric Moonman and Robert Maxwell.
JOHN CHAPMAN

Singing whose tune . . .

Harmony was short-lived at the traditional Labour Weekly meeting which kicked off this year's Labour Party Conference.

Angered at the presence on the platform of Mirror mogul Robert Maxwell, London Central SOGAT member John Sutton struck the first note of discord.

He reminded the audience of the bitter dispute at the Radio Times Park Royal works, where Maxwell did away with his and other SOGAT members' jobs after years of faithful service.

There were more surprises to come. The meeting's theme was the idea of a Labour Daily. The CPBF had no place on the platform, but Mr Maxwell waxed eloquent.

He announced his intention to appoint an ombudsman at the Mirror to deal with readers' complaints, and guaranteed the Right of Reply.

When challenged as to whether his political affiliations were a mere proprietorial whim, Maxwell said there was no way he would not support the Labour Party.

In the very next breath he let it be known that the Mirror would not campaign for the election of a Labour Government led by Tony Benn or his ilk.

Labour and the media

The media has a well-practised ability to divert people's attention from the important political issues. This was one of several themes explored at the Campaign's Labour Party Conference fringe meeting in Blackpool.

Opening the meeting Jake Ecclestone welcomed Robert Maxwell's plans to appoint a newspaper ombudsman at Mirror Group Newspapers, and later NUJ Executive member Vincent Hannah also expressed an interest in the idea, saying however, that an ombudsman must be seen to be independent of both the proprietor and the editor, and that all staff should play a part in either the election or appointment of such a person.

The main theme of the meeting, "Should Labour talk to the media?" had been raised by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. Geoff Cutting of CLPD said that the media are hostile to the Labour Party and the 'socialism we are trying to put forward'.

The leader of Islington Council Margaret Hodge said that it was very easy and tempting to make out a case for not talking to the media.

"We should talk, but we must use the skills of the opposition to beat them at their own game. We have to be as good at public relations as any commercial body, and we're not at the moment. We must not talk in jargon, and we have to produce press releases and leaflets in a straightforward language that people understand."

The right of reply in broadcasting was dealt with by Laura Vincent, Assistant General Secretary of ABS/ETA. She pointed out that while many of her members were low paid they were still prepared to make time at union meetings to debate how they can have more control over editorial policy, and how to implement the right of reply.

The personality cult beloved of the media was attacked by Tony Benn. He said that if the media present politics in terms of personality they

deny people a knowledge of what politics is really about. It is a deliberate form of censorship.

Roy Hattersley referred to one form of bias which manifests itself in the flawed objectivity of a few political journalists who identified the rise of a centre party as the new force in British politics. They now have a vested interest in proving themselves right by demonstrating the strength, sanctity, advantage and success of the Social Democratic Party.

Yes to legal Right of Reply

A legal right of reply for victims of media distortion took another step forward at the Conference itself. A composite motion called on the next Labour Government to introduce a legal right of reply as a matter of urgency, and for the Press Council to be given full legal powers to enforce it.

On behalf of Labour's National Executive Betty Boothroyd said they had the will to make the necessary changes in the law, and accordingly sought acceptance of the composite.

She said that a legal right of reply would have to be imposed right across the spectrum, equal in its application to all publications.

Don't bottle up your anger or frustration. Make a New Year Resolution now — write to FREE PRESS with your views on Press and media distortion, or the Campaign's activities.

Media Management

BUT KEEP YOUR LETTERS SHORT AND TO THE POINT

Media in chains

Governments on every continent, and from every political ideology, are guilty of repressing the freedom of expression which is essential to every writer. In Amnesty International's experience, restrictions on the freedom of the press go hand in hand with repressive measures such as the imprisonment of citizens for non-violent expression of their political or religious beliefs, torture and political killings of civilians by government agents.

British Amnesty groups are working for the release of journalists in Czechoslovakia, Mauritania, Pakistan, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, East Germany, South Vietnam and Yugoslavia. In the past few weeks alone, we have heard of clampdowns on press freedom in Chile, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Journalists are in the front line all over the world, and we are therefore happy to provide details of their cases to those working in the media in this country. International pressure provides protection for all journalists, and it is in the interests of all members of the profession, all over the world, to speak out on behalf of their colleagues who are in prison, and to protect everyone's future.

Sue Adams
Press Officer
British Amnesty
5 Roberts Place
London EC1R 0EJ.

Free Press is rightly concerned at the political and social bias of the press, television and radio. But it has sadly failed to examine the extent to which this bias is caused not by the prejudices of those who work in (or even own) the media, but by those who control the news and information it needs. In particular it has yet to look seriously at how the government and other state agencies are able to manage the news.

The official No. 10 Lobby system has been well described by Peter Hennessy and others. Less well known are the lobbies run by almost every government department. These lobbies are of profound political importance.

It is now known, for example, how the Ministry of Defence was able to get "misleading" stories reported during the Falklands campaign.

So craven is the defence correspondents' lobby that it refused to give the Commons Defence Select Committee, then investigating the management of Falklands news, tapes of government spokesmen repeatedly and outrageously lying during lobby briefings.

Sometimes ministers can even create a special little lobby just for themselves, as Cecil Parkinson did when giving an unattributable briefing to Andrew Neil of the Sunday Times berating Sarah Keays (reported as "Mr Parkinson's friends speak out").

Even where the indefensible lobby system is not used, the government is frequently able to manipulate news, by misleading statements, briefing non-specialist journalists, etc.

Not the least interesting feature of many political stories is who is reporting the story and why. This type of manipulation is pervasive, and extends to most areas of government activity, as any researcher or pressure group worker knows.

REVIEW Liberalising the media?

Ray Beaty's starting-point is that "There is no coherent set of ideas and attitudes . . . (about the mass media) . . . which can be put into effect (sic) if and when radical Government comes to power."

He asks major questions to fill that gap, but leaves them unanswered. Some people will find that stimulating. I think that raising unanswered questions and calling this a policy is akin to scattering interference on the airwaves and calling it broadcasting.

The pamphlet's core can be presented thus: Problem: Decision-making in the media is centralised and London based. Solution: Devolve decision-taking to the Regions.

Problem: Ownership & control of the media is concentrated in a diminishing number of hands. Solution: Legislation to diversify ownership, and to break-up and democratise the BBC and the IBA.

Problem: Only a narrow range of views and cultures appear in the media. Solution: Increase and extend "access" broadcasting; establish a Media Commission to ensure it happens, and to promote and preserve publications.

The pamphlet is right to point up the desire of many "radicals" to combat centralism by placing themselves at the centre!

As Beaty says of what he calls the Labour left; "Why don't (they) think again and start to campaign for real local power . . . ?" No-one can object to "real local power", of course . . . provided that it's your definition which is accepted.

What does local power mean? What would it change? Beaty quotes Cardiff Broadcasting Company's (CBC) commercial radio station, and the neighbourhood cable radio stations at Swindon and Milton Keynes, but ignores their programmes, (Are they different?) and the economics, (why did Swindon close and CBC amalgamate to avoid collapse?).

Beaty fails to address the central question around "regional" and "access" programmes: why aren't they more popular?

He doesn't explain why. "Irritation at central decisions . . . has not led to any coherent public demand for devolution of power . . . People are content to grumble and leave it at that."

Since devolution is so central to Beaty's arguments, perhaps he should compare his own position to that of another group he rightly chastises: "Radicals criticising the phone-in often sound to me like elitists lacking respect for the opinions of ordinary people."

The lack of answers suggest an absence of strategy. But the pamphlet does offer an agenda on which we can all work to achieve change.

PATRICK HUGHES

● "Free Speech: How to Reform the Media" by Ray Beaty
Association of Liberal Councillors £1.00

As information officer for Youthaid I have seen numerous recent stories on the success of the Youth Training Scheme, which clearly originate from the government and which are either misleading or completely untrue. Corrections to these stories are rarely if ever made.

The CPBF wants to help end irresponsible and biased reporting. To do that you not only need measures to deter irresponsibility but also ones to encourage responsibility.

What about some proposals to help journalists who want to do a thorough investigative job? What about a campaign against the lobby system, for a start?

Ian Willmore
98a Northview Road
London E8

Press on film

I thought you might like to know about some of our films and videos that deal with the question of reporting.

They include 'The Black Sheep of Whitehall' about the Sarah Tisdall case; 'Body Image' about the intimidating effect of pin-ups; 'And Now for the Bad News' about the influence of multinational news agencies on developing countries; 'The Peace War' on CND; John Pilger's 'The Truth Game' about nuclear arms propaganda.

Incidentally we also stock 'Why Their News is Bad News' and 'It Ain't Half Racist, Mum'.

Campaign members can get more information about all our titles by writing to us at the address below.

Eric Walker
Concord Films Council, 201 Felixstowe Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9BJ



REVIEW

The Secrets File

I recently filled out forms for a Cheque-Save account. Days later Abbey National phoned me at work.

"Something awkward turned up," I was told, when a private credit agency ran a check under instruction from my bank (who denied all knowledge of it). "Like what?" "Can't say." But I could pay 25p for a form to request an explanation I would be unlikely to get.

Under pressure it turned out that a previous tenant of my council flat had probably defaulted on a bill. (This review will no doubt turn up on a credit agency file one day).

When I was teaching years ago, I told parents about damaging and inaccurate items on their children's secret reports and made my own alterations. I was regarded as a traitor by my fellow professionals.

This is the stuff of "The Secrets File" — a devastating account of the 'British disease'.

Obsession with secrecy puts all of us at risk. What we're not allowed to know about we can't protect ourselves from, whether it is industrial pollution, nuclear weaponry, false allegations on a police computer or planning decisions about a new motorway.

Such issues are dealt with in essays by Des Wilson, Maurice Frankel, Ron Bailey, and James Michael who contributes an illuminating chapter on Freedom of Information overseas.

The blustering defensiveness of successive governments when confronted with demands for changes in the law is briefly but graphically illustrated. And perhaps the most sinister aspect of this sorry saga of secrecy in high places is that so much turns on the whims of the powerful. Political expediency and the interests of capital matter more than the public's right to know.

My only quibbles are that "The Secrets File" has evidently been edited in haste, and that while the net has been spread wide, many areas of secrecy have slipped through.

Nonetheless, an invaluable introduction to the Campaign for Freedom of Information. Buy it — at the bargain price for FP readers.

MIKE JEMPSON

The Secrets File
Ed. Des Wilson
Heinemann p/b £4.95
Special Offer for FREE PRESS readers — £3.95

Send cheques or p/os with your order to the CPBF office now, while stocks last!

CFOI membership costs £7.50 p.a. More details and copies of the CFOI newspaper "Secrets" (50p) are available from: 2 Northdown St., London N1 9BG.