

FREE PRESS

JOURNAL OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR
PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM
No. 65 Price 40p July/August 1991

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Towards media freedom: A manifesto for the 90s

Knowledge is power. In an age of immediate world-wide communication those who control the flow of information, and the images and interpretations used in its communication, wield enormous power. Yet fundamental to any democracy is the right to know and the right to self-expression. These rights are dependent on access: access to information from a wide variety of sources, and access to others through the press, radio and television.

We live in a limited democracy. Information is variously controlled, restricted or distorted by the government or by the actions of the small groups of people who own and control the media.

The owners of the media frequently have shares and directorships in other major companies and common interests with the government. Journalists are often dependent on these same bodies for information.

What reaches us tends to be a highly filtered version of reality. There is little relation between the news media's bias in the analysis of world affairs towards the interests of a dominant western elite and the cultural diversity of the societies it serves, including contemporary Britain. The routine anti-trade unionism, racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of stereotyping which are still prevalent in much of the media serve to further marginalise the contribution large parts of the community make to society.

The regulatory authorities for broadcasting are themselves appointed by the government of the day while the commercial media is dominated by the need to deliver audiences with buying power to advertisers. It is sensitive to pressure from powerful commercial organisations.

In recent years the government has placed numerous restrictions on the media. These have ranged from the overt controls exercised during the Falklands and Gulf conflicts to the October 1988 Broadcasting Ban on actual speech by representatives of 11 northern Irish organisations to routine official secrecy.

There are still over one hundred laws in this country which make disclosure of information an offence. In 1990 an even more restrictive Official Secrets Act came into force, removing any public interest defence for the leaking of classified information.

At the same time ownership of the press and broadcasting has become ever more concentrated. Instead of increasing diversity, new technology has been used as a stick to beat the unions and cut jobs. The deregulation of commercial broadcasting will strengthen this trend and increase cross-ownership, not consumer choice.

Media monopoly, government patronage and state controls have meant that on the most serious issues of the past decade — Ireland, the Falklands, the peace movement, the 1984-5 miners' strike and the Gulf conflict — the public has not had access to the detailed information and plurality of opinion it

needs in order to reach informed positions. Instead issues have been presented in a highly partisan manner in order to rally public support behind the policies of the government.

For democracy to flourish there has to be change in the media — change that will promote media freedom by encouraging diversity, openness and choice. This will require a complete break from the market principles of the Tory government's media policy.

A free market in communications results in the restriction of free speech by encouraging the growth of media monopoly. Instead legislation is needed which enables participation in the media and prevents the concentration of media power in fewer and fewer hands.

In this special issue of *Free Press*, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom offers for discussion proposals both for immediate reform and a longer term debate on democratic media structures. All our specific proposals are premised on two fundamental beliefs:

- that everyone has the right to information, news and opinion, and the right of access to the printed word and to the airwaves, so long as such rights are not abused to incite violence, race hatred or sex discrimination;
- that those who control the media should be publicly accountable.

What follows is not a blueprint but, we believe, the necessary basis for discussion on democratic regulation of the media in the 1990s.

A Ministry for the Arts and Communications

A unified ministry of the Arts, Media and Communications may seem either a utopian fantasy or a step towards an Orwellian Ministry of Truth. In fact it has a social, cultural and economic logic aimed at stopping the media and communications industries being the profitable businesses of an economic elite subject to the political pressures of government.

The media and communications industries are already highly controlled, which is not the same thing as being democratically regulated. Broadcasting comes under the Home Office. The government appoints the Board of Governors of the BBC, appoints the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority, and the personnel who staff the complaints bodies - the Broadcasting Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council. On issues of competition broadcasters are also answerable to the Office of Fair Trading and Ofstel, largely British Telecom's watchdog.

According to Channel 4's director of programmes, Liz Forgan, broadcasters are now answerable to five bodies and seven programme/advertising codes at a cost of £21 million a year. This is £4 million more than the combined cost of regulating BT, British Gas and the two electricity companies about which there are far more complaints. In addition the 1990 Broadcasting Act also made broadcasting subject to the Obscene Publications Act, gave the police a role in the 'regulation' of television and retained

CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS & BROADCASTING FREEDOM

Office Tel: 071 923 3671 (24 hours)
Fax: 071 923 3672

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extensive reserve powers for direct intervention by the Home Secretary.

The only reason similar controls are not applied to the press is because the government can rely on most of it to remain compliant through the shared economic and political interests of its proprietors, and its willing co-operation with the notorious D-notice and Parliamentary Lobby systems. Big Brother may not be watching all of us yet but is having a good go at limiting what we see and read!

Telecommunications is most often the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry and has its own regulatory quango, Ofstel. However, the prime concern of the DTI is promoting the Tory government's market philosophy in relation to telecommunications.

One result is that BT is prevented by law from integrating television and telecommunications with the result that the country is being cabled piecemeal by predominantly US and Canadian controlled transnationals with different systems and little concern for local interests.

Telecommunications and information technology are the industries of the future. They will be the motor force of economic development just as other communication systems, the canals and railways, were in previous centuries.

European Community researchers are predicting that 40 per cent of all employment will be dependent on these industries by the year 2000. This will have an immense impact on our society and culture, but instead of being socially regulated these developments are being driven by market forces.

What exists at the moment is a system of haphazard, undemocratic and unaccountable control strongly influenced by the policies and pressures of the government. The Home Office, with its culture of secrecy and obsessions with security, is a particularly inappropriate ministry to be controlling broadcasting which should be committed to freedom of information and freedom of expression.

It is the Home Office which gave us the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Minister responsible for the Broadcasting Ban. Amongst other legislation that curtails media freedom has been Section 9 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, which can turn journalist and photographers into unwilling agents of the state, and the Contempt of Court Act which prevents full coverage of the

administration of justice and can even lead to journalists being threatened with prison for refusing to disclose their sources. An Official Secrets Act with no public interest defence became operational in 1990.

One reason for creating a new Ministry for the Arts, Media and Communications, which would take over the responsibilities for the various media currently shared between the Home Office, the DTI and the Arts Minister, is precisely to remove narrow political pressures and challenge vested economic interests. The second is to create a coherent strategy for the arts, media and communications industries. The third, and most important, is to stress that these industries are social and cultural assets which should be democratically controlled.

Democratic broadcasting authorities

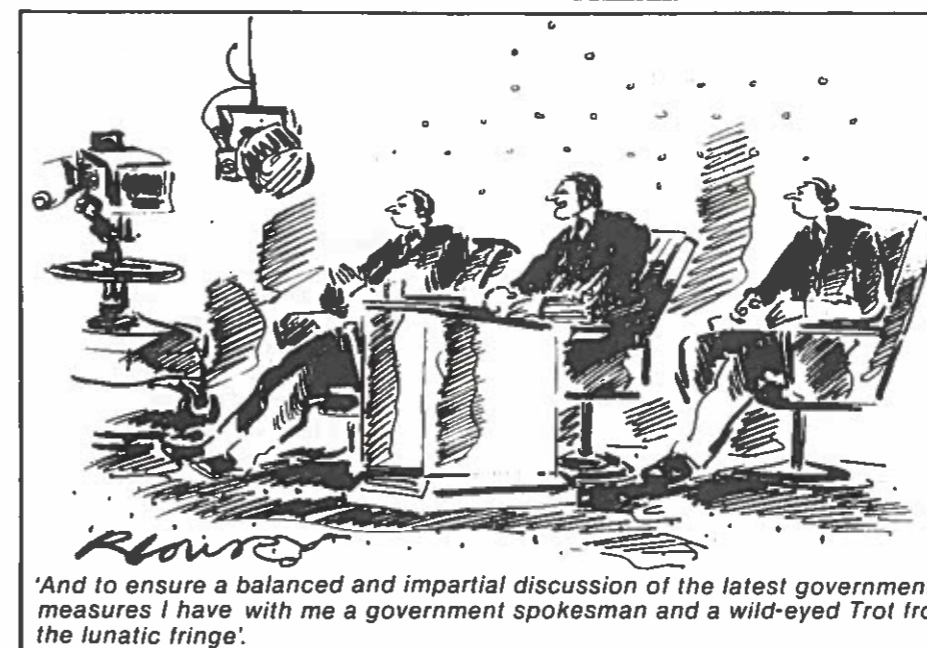
The Ministry of Arts, Media and Communications will have responsibility for the BBC. In addition to terrestrial radio and television broadcasting its responsibilities will include satellite and cable television, computerised information services, telecommunications, print, publishing, the arts, cinema, and media ethics.

Its central remit will be to promote diverse, democratic and accountable media, with high ethical and professional standards, accessible to the public. To assist this process all media legislation and regulations would carry requirements on equal opportunities in employment, equality of representation and a statutory right of reply to factual inaccuracies.

An elected Commercial Broadcasting Authority will take over the functions of the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority. At regional level a series of Media Councils will act as supervisors of local broadcasting services.

In place of 'the great and the good' representing establishment interests, these authorities will reflect the diversity of interests and people in society. They will be representative of all citizens, trade unions and employers and, where relevant, local communities and directly elected where feasible.

All of these authorities will be responsible for promoting public service broadcasting responsibilities across the range of media they regulate: ensuring the dissemination of information, education and entertainment; maintaining high standards in quality and content of programmes; and providing a wide range of programmes as a whole and with respect to the days of the week and the times of day at which they are broadcast.



The authorities would also be responsible for monitoring all media organisations to ensure they have effective equal opportunities policies. Specialist stations will be expected to maintain a similar quality of service and be equally accessible and accountable.

Accountability means injecting democratic checks and balances based on local involvement and worker participation in the decision making processes. Diversity can only be achieved by providing resources which will require a radical review of the methods of financing the media in this country. Experiences in Europe and beyond should be drawn on for developing democratic practices at local and national level.

• **BBC TV and Radio will remain the cornerstone of public service broadcasting and under a new BBC Charter the rights of citizens and programme makers will be emphasised.**

To protect the Corporation from political patronage Governors will be appointed for fixed terms from candidates proposed by the elected regional Media Councils. For the same reason the licence fee will be retained but set by an independent review body. It will be related to ability to pay with the elderly, housebound and people with severe visual disabilities exempt.

• **The Commercial Broadcasting Authority will take over the responsibilities of the ITC and the Radio Authority. In supervising the disposition of commercial TV, radio, satellite and cable franchises it would work with appropriate regional and local media bodies.**

The CBA would be decentralised and conduct the franchising process in public, revoking the franchises of those companies which do not meet their contractual obligations.

Commercial franchises already in operation will continue until the time period of the franchise expires, although divestments may be required if the franchise holders are in

breach of new legislation on cross-ownership. Subsequently franchises would be subject to mandatory re-advertisement at ten year intervals. Standards of service would be the main criteria for awarding franchises. Radio franchises would be awarded for ten years and be subject to similar provisions.

• **Satellite TV will be regulated in accordance with agreements which a future government would have to make at an international level to safeguard standards and domestic production quotas.**

Subject to European agreement, any company transmitting into this country on a satellite not regulated by the UK will be required to meet standards of programming as operated in this country. Internationally agreed penalties would be devised for operators who breached those standards. Ownership of satellites transmitting from abroad to the UK would be classified as domestically owned media for the purposes of ownership and control legislation.

• **Local cable franchises will be awarded on public service criteria.**

Stations would be expected to be run with a mix of finance and this may be done by pooling cable advertising revenue on a national scale to provide the revenue needed to promote diversity and choice.

• **The major operators of radio will be the BBC and the Commercial Broadcasting Authority. Both will have new obligations relating to access and accountability and be required to put money into community based programming and transmit a wide range of material.**

A system would be developed to regulate the distribution of advertising revenue across the medium.

• **A new tier of community radio stations, funded by grants, advertising and loans would be set up.**

Ownership requirements in all systems would prohibit concentration.

Regional Media Councils

Elected regional media councils will be responsible with the BBC and the CBA for franchising local media outlets on public service criteria.

The BBC and the CBA would run the stations but the Councils would have a general supervisory role, backed up with legal powers. They would revoke franchises of groups which failed to maintain programming obligations, access and equal opportunities policies.

Funding sources for local media outlets will be a mixture of central funds, grants, start up loans and other forms of revenue. Community stations would be non-profit distributing and be covered by legislation preventing cross-media ownership.

Franchises will be awarded according to the needs of the community to which the station proposes to transmit and would be dependent on:

- commitment to worker participation;
- commitment to equal opportunities in employment and representation;
- commitment to the NUJ Code of Conduct and to the Right of Reply;
- obligations to make a percentage of programmes locally;
- obligations to involve local people in the making of programmes, subject to union conditions of employment being operated.

Media Councils, working with the Media Enterprise Board, will also encourage media and communications education, media literacy and the rapid expansion of local resource and information centres. Services would include:

- low cost equipment loan schemes (audio, video, photographic etc);
- access to computing, desk top publishing and printing facilities;
- space for meetings and training courses;
- accessible mobile media resources and cheap transport for groups with equipment;
- local distribution services;
- archives of regionally produced video and audio material;
- research into inter-active technology for people who are housebound and people with disabilities;
- access to national computer data bases.

Fighting media monopoly

The central challenge facing campaigners for media freedom in the 1990s is how to promote diversity in media ownership and reverse the dangerous concentration of media power in the hands of a few transnational companies.

Murdoch's and Maxwell's domination of the national press is illustrated in the table on the right. Debt may have forced Maxwell to sell his 20 per cent stake in Central TV and raise £400 million from the sale of Pergamon Press, but he retains control of 25 per cent of the national newspaper market and extensive international publishing interests. Murdoch, now a US citizen, ditched his Australian nationality to build a US media empire based on Fox. In this country he already has a near monopoly of satellite broadcasting to add to the 33 per cent of the national press he controls. His BSkyB channels predominate on the cable network.

But this pair are small fry compared with the German Bertelsman and the Italian Berlusconi. A year after the new Channel 3 franchises have been in operation they will be able to buy out British commercial television broadcasters.

A legal right to distribution

Press distribution systems are also controlled by a handful of companies. Growing concentration of ownership in this area in the absence of a legal right to distribution, gives distributors, wholesalers and the major news chains powers of life and death over publications. This is a form of covert censorship.

TNT delivers to 237 provincial wholesalers and to 6,350 retail shops in the greater London area. In addition to News International titles TNT delivers the Daily and Sunday Telegraph. This represents nearly 40 per cent of newspaper business. News Corporation, the parent company of News International, has a 12 per cent shareholding in TNT. National Freight Corporation, through its subsidiary, Newsflow, delivers Mirror Group, Express Newspapers, the Mail and Guardian. This represents nearly 60 per cent of business.

In 1987 and 1988, in the wake of the Wapping dispute, there was a dramatic reduction in the number of regional wholesalers with whom Murdoch and Maxwell were prepared to deal. News International wanted to reduce from 1,000 wholesalers to 182 regional franchises, while the Mirror Group went from over 2,000 to 230. With TNT and Newsflow monopolising distribution, these plans were forced upon the retail newsagents.

Although the established large wholesalers like WH Smith, John Menzies and Surridge Dawson saw their profit margins squeezed by the tendering process forced upon them, it was the small wholesalers who really suffered. Many, if not most of them, went to the wall or were bought up by the larger companies.

WH Smith distributes to 22,000 retail outlets through 100 wholesale branches (53 per cent of Confectioners, Tobacconists and Newsagents). It has 423 high street shops and 66 airport and station bookshops. John Menzies wholesales to 13,000 retail outlets (28 per cent of CTNs), through a wholesaling network of 87 branches concentrated in Scotland, but with an increasing presence south of the border. It has 232 shops and 67 bookstalls/kiosks. Surridge Dawson owns 41 branches, and, together with the 233 branches owned by the smaller wholesalers, serve the remaining 9,000 (19 per cent) CTNs in the UK.

- We need legislation, similar to that which exists in France, to guarantee all lawful publications the right to distribution.

in the bids for the new Channel 3 franchises (see table on page 6 for fuller details).

In a perceptive analysis, made in 1974 on the eve of the communications revolution, Raymond Williams wrote: 'The technology that is now or is becoming available can be used to affect, to alter, and in some cases to control our whole social process. And it is ironic that the uses offer such extreme social choices. We could have inexpensive, locally based but internationally extended television systems, making possible communication and information-sharing on a scale that not long ago would have seemed utopian.'

'These are the tools of a long revolution towards an educated and participatory democracy, and the recovery of effective communication in complex urban and industrial societies. But they are also the tools of what would be, in context, a short and successful counter-revolution, in which, under the cover of talk about choice and competition, a few para-national corporations, with their attendant states and agencies, could reach farther into our lives, at every level from news to psycho-drama, until individual and collective response to many different kinds of experience and problem became almost a choice between their programmed possibilities.' (*Television Technology and Cultural Form* p151)

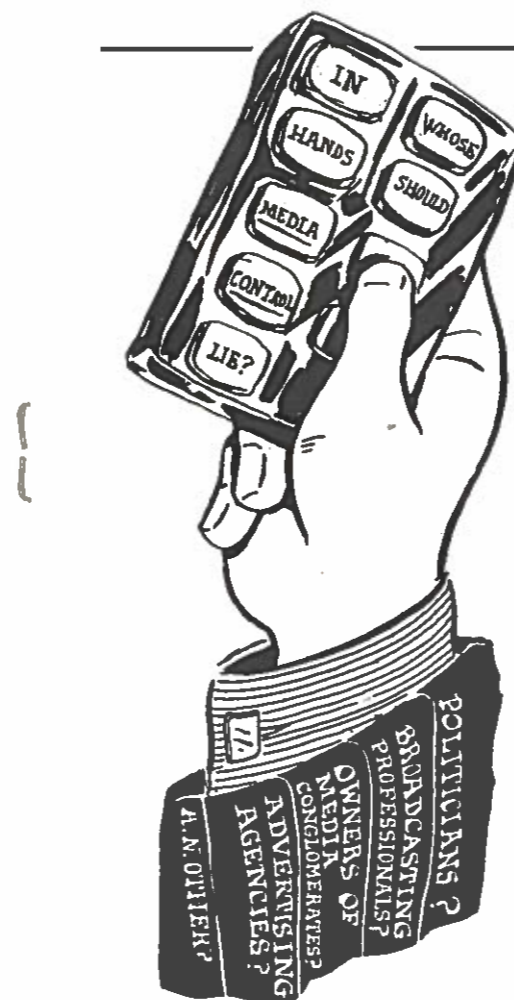
This is the stark social and political choice we face. If communications are to be in any sense representative, restrictions on monopoly control of the media must go hand in hand with the provision of broadcasting and publishing facilities open to everyone and under democratic control.

At a minimum, any British government seeking restrictions on concentration of ownership would have to win support for measures at a European level because of Community legislation.

Legislation should strictly limit the number of media outlets which any one company can own or have a major stake in. It would include a clear definition of what constituted 'a media independent' and take measures to prevent concentration and cross-ownership between television, publishing and computer based information systems. We would argue for:

- the principle of 'one owner, one outlet' covering national newspapers, national radio stations, satellite television and regional commercial television channels with a bar on cross ownership between these four outlets;
- making local regional monopolies covering television, radio, cable and newspapers illegal;
- making it illegal for one media supplier to own two media operations in any one county or region;
- legislation to guarantee all lawful publications the right to distribution.

This area is beset with technical difficulties relating to definitions of ownership, control and influence, and to the economic and organisational consequences of divestment. Authority to make decisions on



these issues could either be delegated to a revamped Monopolies and Mergers Commission, with powers to act independently of the government and organise divestment, or to a Media Enterprise Board acting as a special section of the Ministry of Arts, Media and Communications. The crucial point however, is that policy should be geared towards dealing with these issues and not ducking them because of their complexity or the concerted opposition of vested media interests.

Breaking the grip of the media monopolies is only one half of the equation. The other half is the active promotion of diversity. The cost of publishing, distributing and promoting newspapers, magazines or TV programmes is a major reason why the media remains controlled by a tiny elite. As long ago as 1977 the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Press called for a National Printing Corporation to provide a competitive public sector in the industry and a launch fund to assist new publications.

The growth of other media has dated the specific proposal but not the principle.

- A Media Enterprise Board, funded by a levy on all media advertising, should be established to supervise the funding of new initiatives. It would work with Media Councils at local level to improve training in communications technologies, both within education and at non-vocational level, to encourage greater media literacy and participation.

Circulation figures and percentage share of national newspapers sales
(Based on average daily circulation Jan/June 1991)

By title	Jan - June 91	% share of circulation
<i>Dailies</i>		
Sun	3,692,788	25.2
Daily Mirror/Record	3,718,534	25.4
Daily Mail	1,719,819	11.7
Daily Express	1,564,596	10.7
Daily Star	878,891	6.0
Today	490,049	3.3
Daily Telegraph	1,074,580	7.3
The Times	406,123	2.8
The Guardian	431,423	2.9
The Independent	394,438	2.7
Financial Times	288,429 (Dec - May)	2.0
Total	14,659,733	100%
<i>Sundays</i>		
News of the World	4,807,646	28.9
Sunday Mirror	2,805,904	17.0
The People	2,338,014	14.1
Mail on Sunday	1,940,401	11.7
Sunday Express	1,622,846	9.8
Sunday Sport	371,287	2.2
Sunday Times	1,176,616	7.1
Sunday Telegraph	576,438	3.4
Observer	579,045	3.5
Independent on Sunday	385,045	2.3
Total	16,603,242	100%
	Daily	Sunday
<i>By owner</i>		
News International	31.3	36.0
(Sun, Today, Times, News/World, Sun Times)		
Mirror Group Newspapers	25.4	31.0
(Mirror, Record, Sunday Mirror, People)		
United Newspapers	16.7	9.8
(Express, Star, Sunday Express)		
Associated Newspapers	11.7	11.7
(Mail, Mail on Sunday)		
Daily Telegraph	7.3	3.5
(Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph)		
Guardian/Manchester Evening News	2.9	
(Guardian)		
Newspaper Publishing	2.7	2.3
(Independent, Independent on Sunday)		
Pearson	2.0	
(Financial Times)		
Lonrho		3.5
(Observer)		
Apollo		2.2
(Sunday Sport)		
Total	100%	100%

Cabling for access

Electronic communication and information technology systems give the appearance of an exclusive and expensive business-oriented technology. Yet to gain access to them all people need is the facility to plug in a phone or a TV set.

The latest technologies have the potential to extend and enhance the democratic process. They could provide easy two-way access to public services for pensioners, the housebound, people with disabilities and the geographically isolated.

Cable brings with it the possibility of genuinely local television and radio stations, run by and answerable to the communities they serve. Employment and leisure opportunities, inter-active training and education could be opened up for individuals and communities previously denied access to these services.

But this potential will not be realised by market forces. The result of this will be a patchwork of local networks, excluding more isolated or unprofitable areas, using different technologies and controlled by unaccountable transnational corporations. At present there are no ownership controls and no service delivery requirements on franchises.

An integrated approach to the development of a national communications network is needed, with a programme for cabling the country with a uniform technology capable of meeting all foreseeable demand.

- **British Telecom has the infrastructure and expertise to build a genuinely democratic and interactive communications system based on the development of a national fibre optic grid. But BT must be returned to social ownership to protect consumers from the abuse of market power by a private monopoly.**

The technology involved is so versatile that telecommunications and broadcasting services could be integrated in one network, with a whole range of services and signals - moving colour pictures, voice, data and graphics - transmitted down hair-thin optical fibre in a single cable. Similar networks are currently being developed in the European Community creating the possibility of an European grid serving individuals, community groups, trade unions and business.

At the opposite end of the scale 20 per cent of households, often those with the greatest need, still lack the most basic instrument necessary to make contact: a telephone. Some of the enormous profits generated by telecommunications should be used to extend the public call box system and ensure every household has a phone.

The Ministry of Arts, Media and Communications would be responsible for establishing a democratic Communications Council to plan, monitor and regulate the uses of electronic communications.

Cross-ownership in the Channel 3 franchise bids

CONSORTIUM	MAIN SHAREHOLDERS	TARGET
Consortium For Independent Brodcasting LWT	Polygram (30%) Hoare Govett (25%) Mentorn Films (15%) Working Title (15%) Palace Group (15%) Institutional Investors	London Weekend Thames, TVS
Carlton Television	Carlton (90%) Daily Telegraph (5%) RCS (5%)	London Weekend Thames, TVS
CPV-TV	Charterhouse (7.5%) David Paradine (2.5%) Virgin (28%) BHC (28%) Electra(18.5%) Island World (15%)	Thames, TVS, Anglia
Thames Meridian	Thorn EMI (58%) MAI Group (20%) SelecTV (15%) Central (20%)	Thames Thames, TVS
TVS Daybreak TV	Canal Plus (10%) Generale des Eaux (10%) MAI Group (20%) Daily Telegraph (20%) Carlton (20%) ITN (20%) NBC (15%) Taylor Woodrow (5%)	TVS TV-am
C3W	Flextech (20%), United Artist Entertainment (20%) Hit Communications (5%) RTE(10%) Craig Shipping (10%)	HTV
C3WW Merlin TV	TSW (less than 20%) financial institutions Associated Newspapers (20%) Trillion, Chrysalis	HTV HTV
HTV Tele West TSW Three East Anglia	Institutional investors Shore Capital Stockbrokers Institutional investors EMAP, CLT, Daily Telegraph, Don Taffner Guardian/Manchester Evening News (5%) Norwich Union (9%), Romulus Films (5%) BHC International TV Inc (28%)	HTV TSW TSW Anglia Anglia
TV Northern Ireland	W&G Laird, Thompson Regional Newspapers, Raymond Hutchinson, Winemark	Ulster
Lagan TV	Andrews Holdings (16%) Hastings Hotels (16%) Fraser Homes (16%) Barney Eastwood(16%), Trendale Investments (15%), WAL Holdings (6.4%)	Ulster
Ulster North East TV	Institutional investors Border (12.5%) Granada (75%) Institutional investors, Newcastle Chronicle & Journal	Ulster Tyne Tees
Tyne Tees Viking TV	Vaux Group (20%) Yorkshire TV (20%) TVF (15%) Barr & Wallace Arnold Trust (27%)	Tyne Tees Yorkshire
White Rose	Local newspaper groups, Chrysalis, Nick Ross, Viscount Lewisham	Yorshire
Yorkshire TV North Of Scotland	WH Smith (20%), Pearson (20%) Scorer Films, Pentex Oil, KTZ, British Linen Bank	Yorkshire Grampian
Granada Sunrise	Granada Group Guardian/MEN (20%) Disney (15%) LWT (20%) STV (15%)	Granada TV-am
Central Grampian Channel	Carlton (20%) DC Thompson (20%) Abtrust Institutional investors, Channel Hotels & Properties (13%)	Central Grampian Channel
Scottish TV-am North West TV	Banks and institutions Banks and institutions Tyne Tees (10%) Yorshire (20%) Mersey TV (5%) 3i (10%) Trinity Int (20%) Causeway Capital (5%)	Scottish TV-am Granada
West Country TV	Associated (20%) Trilion (10%) Brittany Ferries (15%) SW Water (20%)	TSW area
C3 Caledonia C3	Undisclosed Guy de Faye, Richard Hall, Spencer Pryor, John Nettles	Grampian Channel
Border TV	Cumbrian Nespapers (19%) Mirror Group (15%)	Border

The right to know

We can only enjoy democracy if we are free to make up our own minds. We need a free flow of information and opinions and the right to demand accurate answers from those in positions of responsibility or power.

British government and administration is riddled with obsessive secrecy. National security is invoked to avoid scrutiny of government activity while business invokes commercial confidentiality to smother criticism.

While the public has restricted access to information, more and more information about the public is being compiled on computers controlled by credit agencies, private firms, the police and other public authorities.

We need Freedom of Information legislation covering policy issues and personal files to ensure that the public and private sectors are obliged to explain the decisions they take on our behalf as voters and consumers.

- **A Freedom of Information Act will place the onus on government, public authorities and commercial organisations to justify why information should be withheld.**

- **A 'whistle-blowers' clause will protect public servants or private employees who break confidentiality in order to expose government or commercial malpractice.**

Legislation or measures introduced by the Tory government since 1979 which infringe the right to know or the right to report will be repealed:

- **Section 4 of the 1981 Contempt of Court Act which gives the courts power to ban all reporting of a case, Secret justice leads to injustice;**
- **Section 10 of the same Act which has seen journalists threatened with jail and fined for refusing to disclose their sources, a professional ethic;**
- **Section 9 of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act which allows the police to get hold of journalists' notebooks and unpublished photographs by persuading a judge that they are needed for the purpose of a criminal investigation. Journalists do not cover demonstrations or meetings on behalf of the police but on behalf of the public to provide it with information. If journalists are being equated with informers this could render them liable to attack.**
- **the Official Secrets Act will be scrapped and replaced by one which allows a public interest defence and**

Raising standards

The promotion of diversity in media ownership will remove many of the economic and managerial pressures which encourage low standards.

Public cynicism has rarely been greater. According to a recent opinion poll only two thirds of people trust the news they see on television and only one third what they read in their papers. And the majority of people have no means of redress against bias and lies because they cannot afford to use the law.

Two key reforms are needed to protect citizens and the majority of journalists who want to see higher standards of reporting:

- **measures based on Scandinavian practice should be introduced to guarantee journalists the right to report free of interference by proprietors by placing these rights within their contracts;**
- **the enactment of a statutory Right of Reply to factual inaccuracies, administered by a democratically appointed Media Commission, supplemented by the provision of legal aid for libel actions.**

The Commission would employ a Right of Reply Advisor to assist people in seeking and enforcing either the prompt correction of

mistakes or a right of reply. The aim would be to reach a speedy remedy with the paper or broadcaster concerned. Corrections or replies would appear with the same prominence and space as the original article. Where no agreement is reached the complainant would approach the Media Commission which would adjudicate on the case within 28 days.

The Media Commission would work under the direction of the Ministry of Arts, Media and Communications and be answerable to Parliament on media standards. It would take over the responsibilities of the existing Press Complaints Commission, which is slow and ineffectual because it is dominated by the vested interests of the newspaper industry, and the work of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission.

The Media Commission's terms of reference would include the defence of media freedom and the maintenance of high ethical standards. As such it would welcome 'third party' complaints. It would operate a Code of Practice based on that of the National Union of Journalists and publicise this widely.

omits government wrongdoing from its protection;

- **Section 28 of the Local Government Act which restricted the provision of education, literature and artistic activities connected with lesbian and gay sexuality;**
- **the October 1988 Broadcasting Ban.**

The Ban flouts the democratic rights of citizens supporting legal political organisations to hear their representatives' views out of their own mouths, and the right of the public at large to the fullest possible reporting and information on the northern Irish crisis.

- **Informal censorship through the D-notice and Parliamentary Lobby systems will also be scrapped.**

Media freedom and media licence are not the same thing. Material which denigrates people on the basis of their race, sex, sexual orientation or religion is an attack on democratic rights, preventing individuals and groups exercising their civil liberties and playing a full and equal role in society. We support a Bill of Location of Pornographic Materials to promote the civil rights of women by restricting the places where pornography can be sold.

In the extreme cases where it may be necessary to restrict freedom of information and expression in order to defend other civil liberties, this should not be decided behind closed doors by unaccountable people but be the subject of public debate and democratic decision.

The Broadcasting Standards Council, limited to issues relating to taste, decency and the portrayals of sex and violence, will be abolished. Instead the Media Commission would assist independent research into all aspects of the impact of press and broadcasting on social attitudes and behaviour.

The freedom of media workers to organise is another defence of media freedom. De-recognition of unions and the imposition of personal contracts means not only poorer working conditions but an increase in the power of proprietors and editors. Journalists will be unable to collectively challenge poor editorial standards or proprietorial interference. Print unions will be unable to apply sanctions in pursuit of the right of reply.

- **The repeal of anti-union legislation and a legal right of recognition is required.**

There should be a greater emphasis on industrial democracy within the media. Workers should have the opportunity to elect representatives onto editorial committees and boards of management to counter commercial influence on editorial decisions and monitor employers' practices.

The CPBF does not think that the measures in this manifesto could be achieved overnight. Nor do we argue that we have the monopoly on insights into what structure a more diverse, accountable and accessible media system would have. We do, however, believe these issues are fundamental to a democracy and should be discussed more widely in order to reach broad agreement on how the media can be reformed.

The aim would be to get an incoming government committed to a specific programme of reforms as soon as it enters office. Some measures - such as Right of Reply legislation, reform of the Official Secrets Act and Freedom of Information law - are relatively straightforward. Legislation on ownership and control and the creation of a democratic system of regulation for broadcasting are very complex. But if there is agreement in principle, ways will be found.

In future issues of *Free Press* we will be developing some of the themes and proposals in this manifesto. What we need now is your ideas: on radio, cable, local television, issues of the arts, music and theatre that have not been dealt with here. Please send them in.

The CPBF will also send speakers to your group or organisation to lead discussions on these proposals.

Finally, get bulk copies of *Free Press* to distribute. We will supply these post free at 25p per copy for orders of 10 or more.

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Campaign Objects

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom was launched in 1979 to campaign for diverse, democratic and representative media. It has the support of 27 national trade unions and numerous union branches, Constituency Labour Parties and individual members. The Campaign's objects are:

- To challenge the myths of 'impartiality' and 'balance' in broadcasting and 'objectivity' in newspapers by campaigning for the genuine presentation of the diversity and plurality of society.
- To challenge the myth that only private ownership of the newspaper industry provides genuine freedom, diversity or access.
- To challenge the myth that the present forms of ownership and regulation of broadcasting guarantee editorial independence, democratic accountability or high programme standards.
- To carry out research and generate debate on alternative forms of ownership and control of newspapers and broadcasting in order to guarantee freedom from either state control or domination by business conglomerates, and encourage the creation of alternative media including those sympathetic to the labour movement.
- To work for press and broadcasting that are free of materials detrimental to any individual or group on the grounds of gender, race, class, religion, sexual preference, age or physical or mental ability; and to seek equality of opportunity and achievement in the media for disadvantaged groups.
- To encourage debate on the implications of technology advances in the media, to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded and that commercial interests do not override public accountability
- To campaign on the general principles in the Minority Report of the 1977 Royal Commission on the Press, including proposals for a National Printing Corporation to provide a competitive public sector in the industry and a launch fund to assist new publications.
- To campaign for the replacement of the Press Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission with a statutory based Media Commission with power to receive complaints and enforce the right of reply, and promote basic standards of fairness and access to the media on behalf of the public. The Right of Reply is fundamental to redressing inaccuracies and bias.
- To campaign for a reduction in the legal restrictions on freedom of publication and increased access to information through a Freedom of Information Act and reform of the Official Secrets Act and similar restrictive legislation.
- To campaign for the legal right of access for publications to the distribution system, and a guaranteed right of display.

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d) Supporting membership (includes free CPBF publications)	£20	i) 10,000 to 50,000 members	£95
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		k) Over 100,000 members	£375

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CPBF EMERGENCY FUNDING APPEAL

We would like to thank all of you who responded to our Emergency Appeal last month.

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As of the end of June we had received £2,946.08 in donations and £1,784 from standing orders: a total of £4,730.08 towards our target of £20,000.

Please keep up the good work. Every penny of that £20,000 is needed to campaign against the type of abuse of press power highlighted in this month's *Free Press* in the case of the *Mirror* and the miners; to fight the tabloids routine denigration of peoples because of their colour, sex or sexual orientation; to struggle against government policy of turning over commercial television to the same media moguls who dominate the press; to seek to establish diverse, democratic and responsible media. Give as an individual and raise a donation from your organisation. Keep the money coming in!



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