

FREE PRESS

JOURNAL OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR
PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM
No. 66 Price 40p Sept/Oct 1991

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CENSORS

The third anniversary of the Government's broadcasting ban on 11 Northern Irish organisations will be marked this year by a conference on censorship and secrecy.

Censors and Secrets takes place on Saturday 19 October, three years to the day after the imposition of the ban. It aims to involve more trade unionists in actively opposing censorship by highlighting the rising tide of censorship and secrecy in Britain, not solely the broadcasting ban.

The ban itself barred from the airwaves the voices of Sinn Fein's MP and its councillors and the spokespeople for a number of other organisations. With the imposition of the restrictions Britain became perhaps the first country in the world to ban a legal party with an elected MP from being heard on radio or television. It added new censorship to the already long list of television programmes on Northern Ireland - more than 60 between 1970 and 1988 - cut or banned by the broadcasting authorities at the behest of the government.

Official secrecy is a British disease which denies all of us the right to know what is going on. It increasingly affects trade unionists in the workplace and as citizens. Workers are denied information which could affect their own health and safety and job security, and can face the sack if they blow the whistle on company activities which are exploiting or endangering the public.

The government's Citizen's Charter claims to support the opening up of public services, making them more accountable. In practice contracts are being imposed across the public sector which prevent staff from speaking out on what is happening in their services. Health workers have been disciplined for revealing the impact of government cuts on the NHS. Rail workers have been warned they can expect similar treatment if they expose faulty maintenance work such as that which caused the Clapham rail disaster.

Hundreds of thousands of workers are gagged by the Official Secrets Act. The new Act robs civil servants of the possible defence that they leaked information in the public interest, and makes such offences punishable by imprisonment.

Workshops and plenary sessions at the conference, led by representatives of the unions most affected, will concentrate on these issues.

- The broadcasting ban and censorship on Ireland. How should trade unionists campaign for the lifting of censorship?
- Media censorship and security - the Gulf War. How can media workers challenge self censorship?
- The Official Secrets Act - can it be reformed or must it be scrapped? What rights should public servants have to inform the public?
- A Freedom of Information Act - the public's right to know. How could it work to help trade unionists and how does legislation work in other countries?
- Security and surveillance - GCHQ. Where does security end and state subversion of legitimate trade union and political activity begin? What should trade unionists be prepared to do and what rights - including union rights - should they have to resist?
- Information at work. How do we stop growing restrictions on workers' rights to speak out?

The conference represents a new departure in building opposition to the broadcasting ban and censorship. Initiated by the National Union of Journalists, the Conference is already sponsored by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, the broadcasting union BECTU, the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, the National Communications Union, the Campaign for Freedom of Information and Liberty. Book now!

Jeremy Gardner (NUJ)

Censors and Secrets

10am to 6pm

Saturday 19 October

NATFHE Conference Centre

27 Britannia Street

Kings Cross, London WC1.

Credentials: £10 per delegate
from organisations/£5 for individuals.

Cheques to: October 19 Conference, NUJ,
314 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP.

For more details phone Tim Gopsill.
071 278 7916 ext 200.

AND SECRETS

GAGS (1): THE STATE

Early in 1990 a new, tough Official Secrets Act came into force. The Act replaced the 'catch-all' Section 2 of the old 1911 Act, which made the leaking of any official information, however trivial, a criminal offence.

Section 2 was finally discredited by the acquittal in 1985 of Clive Ponting, a senior civil servant who had leaked official documents showing that Ministers had misled parliament over the sinking of the Belgrano prior to the Falklands war.

The government could still act against leaks by applying for injunctions under the civil law of confidence. But to the government this law was badly flawed. It provided no penalties. It could be used to ban a programme or book but not to punish those responsible. More importantly, it allowed a 'public interest defence'.

The Official Secrets Act 1989 puts jail back on the agenda. Anyone leaking or publishing protected information now faces up to two years imprisonment.

The Act applies to information about security and intelligence, defence, international relations, information supplied by foreign governments, law enforcement and anything relating to a warrant authorising telephone tapping, mail interception, or a break-in by the security services.

In some areas, such as defence, the prosecution would have to show that the leak was at least potentially harmful. In others any disclosure is automatically an offence, even if the information is innocuous or has been published before. All disclosures about authorised telephone tapping or security service warrants and disclosures of information supplied in confidence by foreign governments are in this category. A journalist could be imprisoned for something which caused no demonstrable harm of any kind.

But the most oppressive aspect of the law is the lack of any public interest defence. A journalist or civil servant will not be able to argue that a disclosure was justified because it revealed corruption, negligence or scandalous abuse of authority.

The Act was forced through parliament with restricted debate, disguised as a liberalising measure. Former Home Secretary Douglas Hurd called it 'a charter for liberty' and 'an essay in openness which has no parallel in the history of our government since the war'. Nothing in the Act justifies those descriptions.

Its real message is: if your choice is between exposing wrongdoing and staying silent, stay silent. That is why it is an unacceptable, oppressive measure.

**Maurice Frankel, Director,
Campaign for Freedom of Information**

LIES

The propaganda war

The war in Ireland is fought on several fronts. One of the most vital yet least exposed is the propaganda war. Disinformation - official lies - is part of the armoury. Colin Wallace is a past master of the art who has the unique experience of having been both a practitioner and victim of it. *Phil Chamberlain* spoke to him.

Wallace entered Lisburn barracks, the British Army's Northern Ireland HQ, as a public relations officer in May 1968, just as the civil rights demonstrations were beginning. Being one of the few Irish people there his local knowledge proved invaluable. Initially the work was routine.

'We spent a lot of time showing journalists around for "local boys" stories - after all there is something chilling about seeing heavily armed soldiers outside of Woolworths. As the army got more involved with terrorist incidents we had to deal with allegations of harassment and brutality, all the kind of things that happen when the army goes on the offensive. As a unit we were doing a good job, putting the army's side of things, not that the army got it right all the time.'

This continued for three years up to 1971. Wallace believes his role changed with the failure of internment and the realisation by the authorities in Whitehall that they were in for a long haul. They decided to build up the intelligence network. 'MI5, MI6 and the army set up a psychological warfare section, the strategic arm of the intelligence side. Our role was to provide the disinformation to cover their activities, false driving licences and so on.' This department, operating under the cover of the press office, had an extremely well equipped photographic and printing section. It liaised directly with the intelligence community, at that time jointly run by MI5 and MI6.

Then, of course, came disinformation to confuse the opposition. 'We put out false information on say, why certain bombs were going off, so they wouldn't be able to correct their mistakes.' The actual process depended on the story. If it was to cover up an intelligence operation 'information could be attached to a disillusioned member of an opposition group to take the spotlight away from the actual source'.

'You could also produce a false background brief and show it to journalists in great secrecy saying "you can't make use of it but I'm allowing you to read it" - knowing full well that if you gave it to the right person it

would be out in the open in 20 minutes, coming from the journalist and not from you. Or you could get a story printed in an overseas paper first, get the cutting back and show it to the journalists here.'

In hindsight some of the stories planted by Wallace's team seem ludicrous: pictures of Russian submarines supposedly off the Irish coast, stories of Vietnam veterans helping the IRA. Why were journalists and newspapers so gullible? Wallace is not totally surprised.

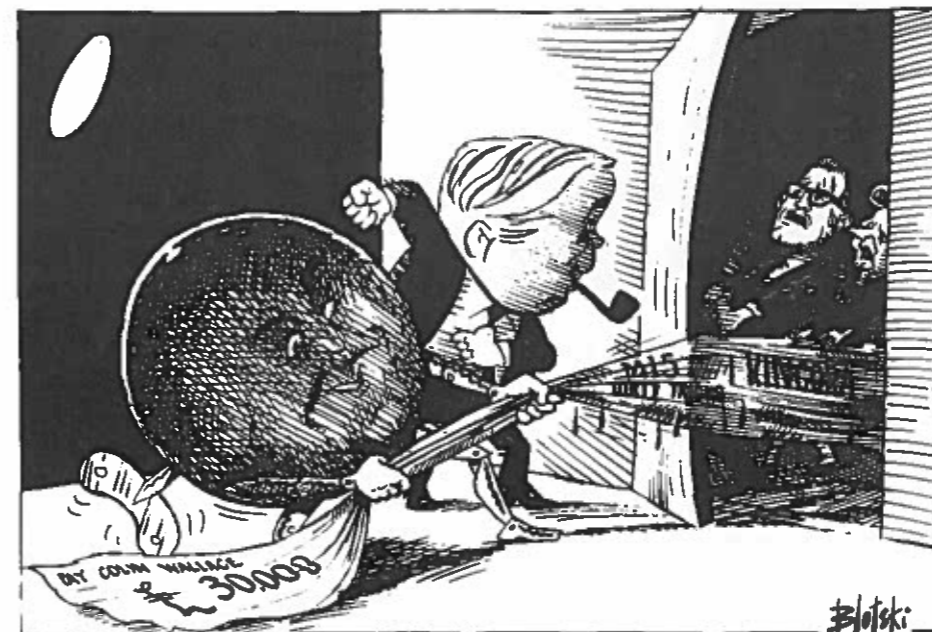
'The slightly more bizarre stories had the most appeal because journalists' natural inclination is to get something really different. Providing you prepare the ground properly,

'Wallace is an embarrassment now not just to the authorities but to the press. Journalists and newspapers have been shown up as conduits for disinformation.'

and have corroborating evidence, it will work. The inclination is not to believe, but deep down the journalist wants it to be true. If there is a more than even chance it is true or, to be more cynical, you get someone who agrees it can't be disproved, they will run it. But you got to target the right newspaper and then the reporter.'

Even the best were fooled. Others seemed to have made it all too easy. 'Reporters came across who never went near the IRA. They sat in their hotel rooms and wrote their stories and their sources were the Northern Ireland Office, the RUC press office and the British Army press office. Now we say this thing about the IRA. The journalists can't check it and even if the IRA deny it they are not going to believe them - and the editor wouldn't print it anyway.'

Wallace is an embarrassment now not just to the authorities but to the press. Journalists



After years of official denial the government appointed David Calcutt QC to investigate Wallace's claim that he was unfairly dismissed in 1975. In August 1990, Calcutt agreed and recommended the Ministry of Defence pay £30,000 compensation.

and newspapers have been shown up as conduits for disinformation. It is an uncomfortable experience for them which has helped government attempts to discredit him using the same methods.

For years the authorities were able to divert media attention away from Wallace's allegations - the cover up by leading Unionist politicians and the security services of the sexual abuse of children at Kincora boys home, and operation Clockwork Orange against Harold Wilson and the 1974 Labour government - by secretly rubbishing him as a Walter Mitty figure. This culminated in a full page hatchet job by David McKittrick in the *Independent* on 2 September 1987.

In fact it was Wallace's refusal to get involved in this second propaganda war, working against the government he was supposed to be serving, and the Kincora cover-up - the true story he leaked but could never get printed - that eventually led to his dismissal.

In 1973 a new intelligence supremo was appointed to overcome rivalries between the different intelligence services. He was an MI5 officer and his appointment coincided with the expansion of MI5's F branch which dealt with domestic subversion and industrial unrest.

'There was growing paranoia in the intelligence community about the implications of a Labour government in power, mainly due to the unilateral disarmament policy and the attitude to the Common Market. Pressure was being applied by the American's who funded part of their intelligence and co-operated on electronic warfare and satellites.'

Under the 1947 UKUSA Treaty Britain shared information with the US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Britain. 'The US was going through a period of great paranoia at home and saw the prospect of a politically suspect UK government withholding

information. Added to which they were suspect of British intelligence and Wilson himself.'

Wallace feels the smears spread as part of Clockwork Orange had a discernible effect. 'When you think of Harold Wilson now, what springs to mind? The tales of positive vetting, illegitimate children, communist influence. How effective it was I don't know but everyone I've spoken to has heard one of those stories.' Presumably the same is true of his work in Ireland.

Wallace has a warning here for any future Labour government. 'The Labour Party don't want to believe it but after the next election the same thing could happen again. Parliament has to defend itself against the misuse of the intelligence services.' The same applies to the media.

Ironically Wallace was eventually dismissed in 1975 on the charge of leaking classified material to a journalist. His cover job title did not admit his true role and it was under that he was disciplined. In a Kafkaesque hearing he found himself dismissed 'under my false job description by people who knew it was false'. The importance MI5 attached to Wallace and what he knew extended to framing him for manslaughter, for which he served six years.

Sixteen years later Wallace stands part vindicated by the Calcutt inquiry which ruled he had been unfairly dismissed. He is still struggling with the media to establish the truth of all his story. The rest of us are no nearer reading or seeing the truth about what is happening in Northern Ireland. The propaganda war continues.

Further reading:

Who Framed Colin Wallace? by Paul Foot. Described by Robert Kee in *The Spectator* as 'the finest and most alarming example of investigative journalism I have ever read'. Available price £5.70 (inc. p&p) from CPBF.

GAGS (2): WRITS

Whenever pressure mounts for a statutory right of reply, newspaper proprietors are the first to scream against state interference in the press.

No such qualms inhibit them when it comes to issuing their own gagging writs which constitute not just pre-publication censorship but a denial of freedom of speech. Following his acrimonious departure from the *Mirror*, ex-editor Roy Greenslade had the following summons served on him in June by Mirror Group Newspapers (prop. R Maxwell).

'1. An injunction to restrain the Defendant, whether by himself his servants or agents or otherwise howsoever from:

a) making or publishing any statement or doing any act which it might reasonably be expected would damage the reputation of:

i) the Plaintiff [MGN]; or

ii) any holding company (within the meaning of Section 736 of the Companies Act 1985 the 'Act') for the time being of the Plaintiff; or

iii) any subsidiary companies (within the meaning of Section 736 of the Act) for the time being of the Plaintiff any of any such holding company;

(the companies referred to in paragraphs (i), (ii) and (iii) hereof being together referred to as the 'Companies').

iv) any company in which any of the Companies is the holder of not less than 20% of the equity share capital or to which any of the Companies renders substantial managerial, administrative or technical services;

(the companies referred to in paragraphs (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) hereof being together referred to as the 'group').

v) Robert Maxwell or any other director of any of the companies referred to in the Group;

b) not to divulge, or make use of, for his own benefit or purposes or for the benefit or purposes of any other person, firm, corporation, company, association or business entity (except as required by law) any trade secrets or confidential information (including but not limited to terms of contracts or arrangements, existing and potential projects, budgets, finances, information regarding customers, clients or suppliers, disputes, legal proceedings, business development and/or marketing programmes and plans) belonging to or which relate to the affairs of any company in the Group, or any of their customers, clients or suppliers, which has come to his knowledge during the course of his employment by the Plaintiff;

2. An enquiry as to what damages may have been suffered by the Plaintiff arising from a breach by the Defendant of an agreement in writing between the Plaintiff and the Defendant made in or about March 1991....'

Similar writs are often served on papers and journalists by powerful corporations and individuals to stop public scrutiny of their activities.

But do not feel sorry for Greenslade. The former Maoist from Dagenham has just signed up as consultant for *Today* (prop. R Murdoch) commenting: 'It will be a pleasure to go back and work for a proprietor who understands newspapers.' *Plus ça change...*

BANS

Ireland: The censored subject

On October 19 1988, the then Home Secretary Douglas Hurd announced to the House of Commons that he had issued notices to the BBC under its Licence and Agreement and to the IBA under the 1981 Broadcasting Act, prohibiting the broadcasting of direct statements from eleven Northern Irish organisations and any person supporting or inviting support for these organisations. Three years on *Sharon Copeland* and *Mick Gosling* look at the impact of the ban and the challenges to it.

The banned organisations included eight loyalist and republican paramilitary groups which were already outlawed and one legal loyalist paramilitary group, the Ulster Defence Association. The other two organisations were legal political parties: Sinn Fein and the smaller hard-line Republican Sinn Fein.

Ironically, these powers of veto on broadcast matters had last been used in 1964 by Tony Benn. As Postmaster General he had issued directives to the BBC and IBA to refrain at all times from broadcasting matters which used subliminal techniques. Douglas Hurd offered two justifications for his rather cruder ones.

Hurd asserted that the appearance of representatives of these organisations in broadcast coverage had 'caused widespread offence to viewers and listeners throughout the United Kingdom'. Secondly, the broadcast media provided an 'easy platform to those who use it to propagate terrorism'. (*Hansard* 19 October 1988) These tendentious claims did not obscure the fact that a legal political party was the real object of his attack.

Two weeks later, during the House of Commons debate on the ban, Hurd quoted approvingly from one Irish newspaper: 'Sinn Fein are not being silenced...merely put in their place.' In the last general election Sinn Fein had won 80,000 votes - 40 per cent of the nationalist vote. These voters were the ones being put in their place: the ban effectively disenfranchised them, denying them the right to hear their own representatives and telling them they did not hold a legitimate political opinion. It further denied the wider public the right to full information and debate on the Northern Irish crisis.

In questions to the Home Office it emerged that Douglas Hurd's claim of widespread offence to viewers and listeners was not based on actual complaints to the broadcasting authorities, but on a MORI poll conducted on behalf of *Reader's Digest* in 1988. This claimed to show that 69 per cent of those

interviewed disapproved of terrorist organisations being allowed to express their views on television.

But no republican paramilitary organisation had been interviewed on television since 1979, when a spokesperson for the Irish National Liberation Army was interviewed in the wake of the assassination of Airey Neave. The BBC's audience research at that time showed 80 per cent of viewers sampled supported the decision to broadcast. A year after the ban was introduced John Birt, the BBC's deputy director-general, argued in the *Daily Telegraph* (16.10.89): 'There is no evidence the BBC can uncover that our audiences are offended by responsible and relevant journalism'. The IBA similarly recorded no complaints.

What of the easy platform to propagate terrorism? The only detailed research on this claim has been that carried out by the Glasgow University Media Group. In *Speak No Evil, The British Broadcasting Ban, The Media and the Conflict in Ireland*, the Group reviewed Sinn Fein interviews and appearances on network television news in the twelve months either side of the ban, October 19 1987 to October 19 1989.

The study found just 17 formal interviews with Sinn Fein on BBC News out of a total of 633 on Northern Ireland as a whole in the year preceding the ban. By contrast Tory MPs and Ministers were interviewed 121 times with the then Northern Ireland Secretary, Tom King, being interviewed no less than 50 times. (p26) Sinn Fein were given no studio interviews, which confer status and allow for an exchange of views.

Appearances where Sinn Fein representatives were seen or their voices heard totalled 93. However, more than three quarters concerned items dealing with violence, and journalists' questions were routinely hostile. It ranged from: 'How does it feel to be branded one of the guilty men, Mr Corrigan...You're very silent Mr Corrigan' (BBC1 18.00 9.11.87) to 'do you feel that you have a better

line to God and God's wishes than the bishops and the clergy do?' (BBC2 *Newsnight* 31.3.88). Such coverage hardly provides an easy platform to Sinn Fein. (p42)

The ban itself had an immediate and dramatic effect. In the six months following the ban Sinn Fein's press office experienced a 75 per cent fall in enquiries from print and broadcast media, although newspapers were not affected by the ban. Over the year to October 1989 BBC television news appearances fell to 34, a drop of more than 63 per cent. Of these appearances 20 were in items about violence and nine of the remaining 14 concerned the broadcasting ban itself! (p37 and 39) 1989 was the twentieth anniversary of British troops on the streets of Northern Ireland, creating considerable media interest.

'Health warnings' have at times been used to indicate the effect of the ban. For example a BBC 'health warning' on 14.8.89 stated that: 'Under the government restrictions we cannot broadcast the sound of an interview with a Sinn Fein representative but we can report that...' However, when on *Inside Ulster* (BBC NI 21.1.89) an interview with Danny Morrison was subtitled, it was decided to end the practice for local news because, according to one senior executive: 'It looked so dramatic it looked like we were seeking to make a point.' This decision was endorsed by an editorial policy meeting and then extended to network news. There has been no general policy of acknowledging that *all* reporting on Northern Ireland is subject to the government's broadcasting restrictions.

'The government does not want any views that are contrary to their own about Northern Ireland to be aired. It is almost as if they think that if they stop criticism of their policy in Ireland, the problem will go away.'

David Miller,
Glasgow University Media Group

Formal censorship is compounded by the problems of giving 'health warnings', voicing over or reporting speech, and meeting tight deadlines when everything has to be referred upwards. John Conway, the former Editor, News and Current Affairs, at BBC Northern Ireland explained the problems:

'The perception has grown up that we can still interview Sinn Fein about the state of the roads, blocked drains or other innocuous local issues. Not so. Every broadcast interview with a member of the party has to go through a much finer filter and that's what becomes so time consuming for editors and their journalists...

'To ensure that an interview with [a] councillor could be broadcast, the news editor at Radio Foyle had to check with me in Belfast and I, in turn, had to consult with senior colleagues in London about potential legal and policy implications before the green light to broadcast was given. All that for the everyday voice of grassroots politics which local radio is there to articulate.' (*Aerial* 24.1.89 quoted in *Speak No Evil* p22)

More and more Sinn Fein is simply left out along with any critical analysis of the official view of the Northern Irish crisis which portrays its enemies as terrorist gangsters lacking any political motivation. Anyone dissenting from this standpoint becomes simply an apologist for terrorism. That applies to opposing the ban itself.

'This step will provoke an immediate flurry of protest from Sinn Fein and the supporters of terrorism,' declared Douglas Hurd. Hurd's attempt to intimidate potential opponents of the ban sat uneasily with his assertion that: 'The terrorist act creates the fear, the direct broadcast can spread it. The men of violence and their supporters have used this access with skill. They do not hope to persuade but to frighten.' Who is trying to intimidate who?

As the government intended, the ban has silenced many more voices than those of Sinn Fein. Richard Stanton, a Brighton Labour Councillor and Errol Smalley, uncle of one of the Guildford Four banned from their local radio stations. In November 1988 Ken Livingstone received an internal BBC memo to regional reporters which read: 'It has already become clear that it is the government's intention to stop us carrying actuality of figures such as Ken Livingstone or Senator Edward Kennedy should they express direct support for any of the named organisations.'

History has to be re-written: filmed speech of Eamonn de Valera and Sean MacBride was banned from a schools programme dealing with the history of Ireland.

In November 1988 the IBA banned The Pogues song '*Streets of Sorrows/Birmingham Six*' protesting the innocence of these men and the Guildford Four. Under the terms of the broadcasting ban the IBA deemed it to be 'supporting or soliciting or inviting support' for a listed organisation because it 'contained a general disagreement with the way in which the British government responds to and the courts deal with the terrorist threat in the UK'. (*Observer* 20.11.88) The ban was maintained after the release of the Guildford Four because, in the words of an IBA spokesperson, 'the Birmingham Six are still serving sentences as convicted terrorists'. (*Sunday Correspondent* 22.10.89) The ban was only raised weeks after the Birmingham Six were freed.

As David Miller of the Glasgow University Media Group says: 'The government does not want any views that are contrary to their own about Northern Ireland to be aired. It is almost as if they think that if they stop criticism of their policy in Ireland, the problem will go away.'



19 October 1990: Broadcasting union leaders (l to r) Jake Ecclestone (NUJ), Alan Sapper (ACTT) and Tony Hern (BETA) deliver invoices to the BBC, ITN and Channel 4 demanding they share the costs of the legal challenge to the government's gag.

Both the BBC and IBA refused to take legal action over the broadcasting ban despite their verbal opposition to it. Channel 4 received more favourable legal advice but also declined to act. It was left to the broadcast unions, and the National Union of Journalists in particular, to challenge the ban in court.

The judgement was, however, that the Home Secretary was acting within the very wide range of powers given him by statute, licence and agreement. On February 7 1991 the Law Lords dismissed the journalists' appeal on the grounds that the freedom of expression guaranteed in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights had no bearing on the legality of the ban.

It remains to be seen whether the European court will be more sympathetic but the outlook is not hopeful. A parallel case brought by journalists with the support of the NUJ and the Irish general union SIPTU against Section 31 of the Irish Broadcasting Act - which bans both the reporting and broadcasting of Sinn Fein statements at all times including during elections - was dismissed by the European Commission for Human Rights in April 1991.

The Commission ruled that the journalists' rights to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the Convention had been infringed but then said the restrictions had 'a legitimate aim'. The Commission produced an extraordinary argument in defence of the ban on electoral broadcasts: 'Equality of treatment for citizens in the exercise of their right to vote does not give the citizen a right to demand that all political parties competing in an election be granted radio or TV coverage.'

And despite the fact that the Commission knew that the Irish Supreme Court had turned down earlier appeals against Section 31 it ruled: 'The fact alone that their claim may be

unlikely to succeed does not mean there is no effective remedy.'

Sinn Fein itself challenged the ban under the 1973 Northern Ireland Constitution Act which outlaws discrimination by a British government minister against groups or individuals on grounds of religious belief or political opinion. A Diplock Judge dismissed the challenge in September 1990 on the grounds that Sinn Fein did not have a 'legitimate political opinion' and therefore the Home Secretary was correct in imposing censorship.

In a scathing editorial *The Irish News* dismissed the ban as a 'recipe for totalitarianism'. 'It suggests not only that there is such a thing as a "legitimate political opinion" but also that the British Home Secretary is the appropriate person to decide on whether the views of political parties are acceptable. It is now, according to Mr Justice Carswell, perfectly reasonable for a politician in government to restrict the propagation of opposing views because he considers them not to be "legitimate opinions".' Sinn Fein is also off to the European Court.

So far every judgement that has arisen from the legal challenges to Section 31 and the broadcasting ban has confirmed that these measures attack not just the freedom of expression of those directly affected but undermine the ability of the whole of society to operate democratically. The longer they remain and are legitimised the greater the temptation to extend them to other groups and the greater the pressure within the media to steer clear of all controversial issues which challenge the government.

Further reading:
Speak No Evil, Glasgow University Media Group £10 *No Comment: Censorship, Secrecy and the Irish Troubles*, Article 19 £3.95 *Ireland: Censored Subject*, Sinn Fein £2.50 *Ireland: Propaganda War*, Liz Curtis £9.95. All available from CPBF. Add 10% p&p minimum 50p.

SMEARS

Granada, World in Action & MI5

Recent revelations that the American CIA used the Bank of Credit and Commerce International to pay 500 British agents, including 80 working in the media, was a timely reminder of how seriously the security services take the influence of newspapers and television.

In their new book *Smear: Wilson and the Secret State* (Fourth Estate £20), Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay detail the machinations of the British secret state and its allies in the media and the Conservative Party against the former Labour Prime Minister. Disinformation, harassment, surveillance and media manipulation were all deployed against Labour MPs and trade union leaders.

The notion of the 'fourth estate' reporting and exposing injustice takes a battering. Indeed, the authors see sections of the media as a powerful buttress sustaining the secret state: "agents of influence" ranging from actual agents of the security services, conduits of official leaks, to senior journalists merely lusting after official praise and, perhaps, a knighthood at the end of their careers.'

With the announcement due in October 1991 on who has won the franchise bids for the ITV stations, *Free Press* readers will be particularly interested in the antics of the security services at the birth of commercial television in the mid-1950s. The traumatic experience of Conservative electoral defeat in 1945 was blamed by some Tories on the BBC's 'pro-Labour bias'. Winston Churchill, for example, was convinced that the BBC was 'honeycombed with communists'.

Conservative support for commercial television rested on the belief that the new stations, tied to the profit motive, would redress the perceived imbalance. When Sidney Bernstein, head of the successful Granada Cinemas and a well-known socialist, bid for the Northern franchise the alarm bells started ringing within the secret state.

In this article, specially adapted from *Smear*, Stephen Dorril relates the tortuous history of Granada, *World in Action* and MI5.

For thirty years *World in Action* has shown a healthy appetite for investigative journalism which has largely been absent in the supine world of current affairs programme making. This partly explains why the programme has suffered a sustained attack by the Tories, who since the Profumo Affair in 1963 have regarded Granada's flagship as a subversive threat. This long running campaign aided by the security services was initially aimed at Granada's founder the theatrical impresario Lord Sidney Bernstein.

According to former MI5 officer Peter Wright, Bernstein from a Jewish and emigre family, who joined the Labour Party in 1917 was 'a very suspicious character and had a file'. This fat file was started in 1925 when Bernstein helped form the influential Film Society which showed for the first time in this country 'classic' Soviet films. Special Branch kept the Society under surveillance because it was, as the Beaverbrook press put it, 'engaged

in furthering the subversive propaganda of the Bolsheviks'.

MI5 was particularly concerned about the activities of the Society's London agent, the 'notorious communist' Willi Muzenberg. A Reichstag deputy, Muzenberg escaped Germany following the fire and went to Paris, where he set up offices for a world-wide anti-fascist campaign under the auspices of the Comintern (the Third Communist International). Muzenberg recruited 'Comintern agents' who were essentially political agents; there is little evidence that he recruited 'spies'. To keep an eye on the independent minded Muzenberg the Soviets planted Otto Katz on him, a Czechoslovakian refugee and probable Soviet intelligence agent. Katz became Muzenberg's contact with the various British anti-fascist groups and, in particular, with Bernstein.

In the thirties, Bernstein threw himself into legitimate anti-fascist activities. However, his role in financing many of the international campaigns drew him to the attention of MI5, who viewed his friendship with communist anti-fascists with deep suspicion.

In 1936 the anti-fascist struggle began to focus on the problems in Spain. Katz was

instrumental in setting up a committee to agitate against the British Government's non-intervention policy and he co-operated closely with James Klugmann at Cambridge and Bernard Floud at Oxford. Bernstein helped by donating a portion of his cinema takings to the Joint Committee for Spanish Relief.

As the Second World War approached, MI5 stepped up their surveillance of Bernstein and when he tried to visit Spain they refused to let him leave the country. In 1940, when he was offered the post of Head of the Film Division within the Ministry of Information, the Ministry's chief, Duff Cooper, was visited by MI5. Cooper was told that he could not employ Bernstein because 'Sidney was known to visit the Russian Embassy every week. With this, they began to outline what amounted to a formal declaration that Sidney was a member of the Communist Party.' This was untrue. Bernstein had never been a member of the Communist Party nor had he visited the Embassy. Cooper told MI5 to get lost.

In 1940, Muzenberg, who had latterly been imprisoned by the French Government, committed suicide. In May, Otto Katz moved to Mexico where he remained throughout the war years. In 1946, equipped with a Czech passport, he left for Prague, where he worked for Soviet Intelligence. Accused of being a British and Zionist agent during the notorious Stalin show trials, he was hanged in December 1952.

In the late forties, Bernstein was introduced to the President of the Board of Trade, Harold Wilson, who was responsible for protecting the British film industry through quotas on American films. Bernstein was to the left of Wilson but the two got on well and for the first time Bernstein contributed money to the Labour Party. MI5 duly took note.

'Conservative Party enthusiasm for the new service rested on the belief that the BBC's bias towards the Labour Party had been largely responsible for the Party's 1945 election success. The commercial stations, the Tories believed, tied to the profit motive, would redress the balance.'

In the mid-fifties, Bernstein's Granada Cinemas bid for one of the contracts for independent television. The setting up of commercial television was a long and often bitter battle, which involved a good deal of dirty ticks and the involvement of free enterprise pressure groups such as Aims of



Industry. Bernstein, a known left-winger, posed a threat.

Kenneth Clark, the man responsible for issuing the new licenses, later revealed that: 'Government circles put a good deal of pressure on the Independent Television Authority to turn down Granada's application'. Apparently, 'there had been a last minute wavering at the Authority over Sidney's reputed early membership of the Communist Party'. Clark, who knew the Granada boss well, 'made inquiries of MI5, and was reassured that Bernstein was not a party member. He threatened to resign if Granada was not given the contract. Objections were withdrawn.'

Bernstein's employment of known left-wingers annoyed the secret state. In 1955, Labour MP Bernard Floud joined as an executive, as later did Blunt's friend and wartime intelligence officer, Leo Long, believed by MI5 to have been working for the Soviets. Three years later, the *Daily Mail* started a campaign against Granada's 'socialism' and soon 'complaints from the ITA, and protests from the advertisers, were joined by attacks from the Conservative Party'. During the Profumo Affair and the 1964 General Election particular attention was paid to *World in Action*. Right-wing loathing of it continues to this day.

In 1967, when Wilson considered making Bernard Floud a junior minister as a matter of routine he received a security briefing. MI5 dug into their extensive files. 'Wilson was told that Floud, who had been an open Communist at Oxford, had been recruited to the Soviet cause by James Klugmann, and had recruited others.' By 1967 following the debriefings of the Establishment traitor Anthony Blunt, MI5, in the shape of Wright, had constructed a complicated conspiracy theory based on nothing more than guilt by association. It

centred around a supposed 'Oxford Comintern' which paralleled the infamous 'Ring of Five' at Cambridge. The fact that some of its members were now associated with Granada suggested to MI5 that a Communist cell was situated there.

In the autumn of 1967, Wilson gave his permission for Floud to be interviewed by MI5. Floud admitted his past involvement with communism but denied any connection with Soviet intelligence. However, MI5 refused to believe his denial. Plunged into a 'suicidal despair' by the death of his wife in January 1967 and subject to a series of intimidating interrogations by Wright, Floud killed himself on the night of 9 October. In 1969 against the advice of MI5 Wilson ennobled Floud's boss, Bernstein.

When the old guard in MI5 were replaced by 'the boys' and the subversive threat was no longer seen to be the Communist Party but the new left, attention shifted to the younger staff at Granada. In the mid-seventies, MI5 and the Special Branch tried to recruit a number of Granada employees as informants on their *World in Action* colleagues.

The expanded F Branch (domestic subversion) within MI5 had begun a trawl through the left in an attempt to stop the movement's 'long march through the media institutions'. Although such concepts are now difficult to take seriously the secret state still views *World in Action* as a subversive threat.

In the continuing franchise battle, which unlike the setting up of commercial television in the fifties displays little sign of security service involvement - in the North West just a rough, tough business battle between Granada and Phil Redmond's consortium - the secret state will be content to sit back and allow commercial forces to eventually drive out such investigative programmes.

WHISPERS

After rebelling against the lobby system of Government 'briefings that never took place', *The Guardian* has quietly rejoined the system. Not that you would notice.

Despite its front page proclamations of journalistic integrity when it left the secretive briefings, the paper has returned not with a bang but a whimper. *The Scotsman* is thought likely to follow suit, having been excluded from John Major's private 'chats' during the coup crisis in the USSR. This will leave *The Independent* as the only paper not openly colluding with the government's off the record briefings.

It was the *Independent* that roundly criticised the lobby system when the paper was first launched. Political editor Anthony Bevins asserted that they would not be attending these meetings to be spoon fed by Margaret Thatcher's Press Secretary Bernard Ingham. At the height of his powers, Ingham controlled a budget of £168 million and a staff of 1,200 and held four interlocking spokespersonships.

Non-attributable briefings contributed to a cloud of secrecy surrounding government dealings. Accusations could be made with impunity and allegations of abuses of the system were rife, with Ingham accused of attacking Ministers via the briefings. In the wake of the *Independent's* decision to boycott, *The Guardian* and *Scotsman* followed suit.

However, since the boycott, material obtained from lobby briefings via other journalists has been widely used by these papers. Journalists had the choice of using these unattributable sources or going without and persuading their colleagues to boycott the lobby in favour of an open system of government briefings.

Antagonism to the system has weakened since Thatcher's demise. John Major is regarded as more open with the media and Bernard Ingham was replaced by Gus O'Donnell. Once the PM's office agreed to the *Guardian's* request that quotes from the briefings could be attributed to 'Downing Street sources', and with the term gaining in usage amongst the press and on news bulletins, the *Guardian* decided to rejoin the briefings for an 'experimental period'. Michael White, *The Guardian's* political editor, attended a briefing and deemed the atmosphere less polluted.

The problem is that the whole system stinks. Although material is more readily acknowledged to have come from 'Downing Street sources', Ministers are still being allowed to evade responsibility for material they wish the press to use. An unaccountable government and unaccountable press serve each other's interests to the detriment of open government and democratic accountability.

Angela Kelly

1991 LABOUR PARTY FRINGE MEETINGS

National Justice for Mineworkers/CPBF

Arthur Scargill President NUM
 Peter Heathfield General Secretary NUM
 Dennis Skinner MP
 Tony Benn MP
 Mick Gostling National Organiser CPBF
 Chair - Billy Etherington Convenor NJM

7.30 pm Sallis Benney Theatre
 Tuesday 1st October Grand Parade, Brighton

**Women's Section CPBF
 Labour, Women and the Media**

Jo Richardson MP Dawn Primarolo MP
 Chair - Helen Kuttner National Council CPBF

1.00 - 2.00 pm Royal Albion Hotel
 Wednesday 2nd October Old Steine, Brighton

Dissent, Democracy & Media Freedom

Tony Benn MP Secretary CPBF
 Mark Fisher MP Publicity Officer NCU
 Tom O'Malley Joint President BECTU/Chair CPBF
 Linda Quinn
 Chair - Tony Lennon

6.30 pm Royal Albion Hotel
 Thursday 3rd October Old Steine, Brighton

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Stephen Dorril

co-editor *Lobster* and co-author with
 Robin Ramsay of *Smear! Wilson and
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