

FREE PRESS

JOURNAL OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR
PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM
No. 67 Price 40p Jan/Feb 1992



MAXWELL, THE MIRROR AND DEMOCRACY

Robert Maxwell was a media megalomaniac. In common with other media moguls who built world wide empires in the 1980s he was contemptuous of any conception of press freedom. He boasted that his ownership of newspapers gave him 'the power to raise issues effectively'. In his own words he described them as a personal 'megaphone'.

His apparent ability to make or break the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party through the editorial policy of his papers created a formidable and insidious obstacle to campaigns for media reform. Faced with an overwhelmingly hostile national press, the leadership of the Labour Party was so fearful of losing Maxwell's backing that democratic reform to break the concentration of ownership in the press was written off the political agenda.

Maxwell's hunger for power and influence made him as ruthless in his dealings with colleagues, workers and political opponents as he was with commercial competitors. The so-called 'socialist millionaire' - a personal admirer of Margaret Thatcher and publicist-in-chief for tin-pot despots throughout Eastern Europe - was red in tooth and claw, not in politics.

Maxwell was one of the first employers to use the government's anti-trade union legislation, turning it against printers on the *Radio Times*. When they resisted he smashed up his own company's printing presses. While Murdoch battled it out with the print unions at Wapping, Maxwell took the opportunity to force through massive redundancies and changes in working practices at Mirror Group Newspapers. He triggered one of the longest running disputes in British labour history when he sacked 23 workers at Pergamon Press for taking part in a completely legal strike in defence of union recognition and negotiating rights.

He personally authorised and led one of the most sustained campaigns of character assassination ever seen in the national press, that directed against Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield of the National Union of Mineworkers. Unlike Maxwell, the discredited allegations against them of financial wrongdoing and personal gain have sunk without trace. Now documents stolen from the NUM have surfaced in Maxwell's safe - uncovered by the same fraud squad which, at the *Mirror's* insistence, investigated but found no case against the miners' leaders.

Now we know that the man who was lauded by the political and commercial establishment as 'larger than life' in the immediate aftermath of his death, was also a crook who stooped so low as to bug the offices of his colleagues.

When Maxwell was alive the web of companies he controlled was so intricate that even his former legal adviser, Susan Heilbron, could not figure out the relationship between them. She resigned after working for him for just seven months. Since his death the revelations have flooded out: shareholders were lambs to be fleeced and pension funds convenient assets to be raided for financial chicanery.

But, of course, we had been warned. Inspectors appointed by the Department of Trade and Industry declared in 1971 that he was unfit to run a public company. This was in the wake of the 1969 Leasco scandal when Saul Steinberg withdrew his bid for Pergamon because the accounts were not accurate. Maxwell had used transactions from his

private family companies to inflate Pergamon's share price.

The inspectors' third and final report in November 1973 was damning. Maxwell, it said, 'had a reckless and unjustifiable optimism which enabled him on some occasions to disregard unpalatable facts and on others to state what he must have known to be untrue ... he is not in our opinion a person who can be relied upon to exercise proper stewardship of a publicly quoted company'.

Sir Walter Coultts, appointed chair of Pergamon in 1969 to sort the mess out, had by 1974 turned the company round to solid profitability. He offered a verdict on Maxwell: 'He's so flexible, he's like a grasshopper. There's no question of morality or conscience. Maxwell is Number One and what Maxwell wants is the most important thing and to hell with anything else.'

Yet less than 18 months after the DTI inspectors' final report, Maxwell was back in the headlines. He took over the struggling *Scottish Daily News*, produced by a workers' co-operative in Glasgow, courtesy of a £1.2 million grant from the same Department of Trade and Industry. The newspaper failed. Maxwell went on.

But given the official warnings 20 years ago, why was it only after his death that all the stories began appearing about his appalling treatment of people and fraudulent financial dealings? One explanation is his penchant for litigation. Those who wrote anything remotely critical were subject to the easy recourse of the wealthy bully - the courts.

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MIRROR, MIRROR, BACK TO THE WALL, WILL IT CHANGE OR WILL IT FALL?

The day following Robert Maxwell's death, the *Daily Mirror* carried a sickening 15-page eulogy headlined 'The Man Who Saved the Mirror'. The fact that sales, which had topped five million in the 1960s and stood at 3.4 million when Maxwell took over, have dropped below three million today was passed over.

Columnists queued to praise him. The editorial contrasted the 'anarchy and greed within the print unions and cowardice and incompetence amongst the management' when the saviour arrived in 1984, with the paper today: 'The *Daily Mirror* you are reading today is strong editorially, strong financially, strong technologically and strong on integrity.'

Rarely has a newspaper had to ask for a right of reply to itself. Within days, the saviour had become the fount of all evil for *Mirror* staff high and low. It was discovered that Maxwell had struck at something fundamental to journalistic ethics and integrity - their money. Mass conversion followed.

In scenes reminiscent of former Communist Party *apparatchiks* in the Soviet Union falling over themselves to deny they had ever been communists, Maxwell's loyal servants revealed to the world that they had always been dissident rebels against the great satan. The former were more convincing.

Maxwell's reign at the *Mirror* was a disaster from the start. He arrived pledging editorial independence. Within days he had re-written a Geoffrey Goodman column on the miners' strike. Following the protests of one of the most experienced and respected industrial correspondents in the national press, Maxwell begged forgiveness and promised never to do it again. 'I fooled myself

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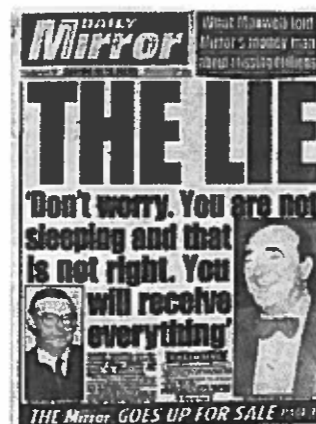
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that he'd keep his promise,' Goodman said after he left 18 months later.

Worse was to come. Under Maxwell, the *Mirror* pursued the *Sun* in its down market pursuit of readers. The topless pin-ups may now have gone, but there was the appalling use of full colour photos of the Hillsborough victims, the witch hunt with Central TV against miners' leader Arthur Scargill, and the brutal treatment of *Mirror* staff themselves. Indeed, it was only the much awarded column of Paul Foot, the incredible revelations of the Cambodian holocaust by John Pilger and the occasional crusading one-offs on domestic issues which saved the *Mirror* from ignominy.

But no one seriously committed to plurality of opinion and diversity in the media as an essential component of a democratic society can afford to be neutral about the fate of Mirror Group Newspapers. In the aftermath of Maxwell's death the media was filled with speculation about possible buyers for a still profitable media group: the Pearson group in Britain; the Italian Silvio Berlusconi's huge media group FinInvest; the German publishing giant Bertelsmann, and Kerry Packer, the Australian media tycoon.



Mirror journalists decided that no longer were they prepared to be pawns in the media monopoly game. In the *Mirror* Comment column on 6 December 1991, a ringing 'Where We Stand' statement was published. This reported the minimum conditions that staff were prepared to accept from any future owner.

'The *Daily Mirror* and our sister papers should not be sold to the highest bidder if that bidder is not prepared to maintain the traditions and principles we hold dear.

Of course the banks can sell the business but they can never sell our hearts.

Any future owner must honour all trade union agreements, continue the independence of the editors from an owner's interference and maintain the papers' political and social stance, including their support for the Labour Party.

These are our minimum conditions, laid down at a mass meeting of *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror* and *People* journalists and they were not joking.

These journalists then gave a solemn warning that they would fight for these principles.'

1992 is election year. Last time round in 1987, seven out of 11 national daily papers were unequivocally pro-Conservative. The *Daily Mirror* was the only mass circulation tabloid that was pro-Labour. If, in the run up to the election its political impact is neutered or switched to other political parties, this will have an impact on the election's outcome.

Maurice Edelman in his *The Mirror: A Political History* (1966) wrote: 'Labour could have won the 1966 election without the *Mirror's* help, though not necessarily in the face of the *Mirror's* opposition.' A 1992 verdict would have to be even more cautious unless some way is found to ensure the survival of a lone Labour voice amongst the tabloids.

A management buy-out is a serious possibility, although *Mirror* staff will want to consider what conditions and controls they would need to exercise over people who, until recently, were more than happy to dance to Captain Bob's tune.

Nevertheless, the 'Where We Stand' column of 6 December conjures up a vision of the *Daily Mirror* as a campaigning, hard-hitting, fearless paper. A paper that we need. It certainly was not that under Maxwell and a lot of people should examine their conscience. But the *Mirror* does have a rich and honourable history which needs to be resurrected, and that is certainly worth campaigning for.



The Independent

cont. from p1

When two hostile biographies appeared in 1987, Maxwell the litigant went on the rampage. The first book, *Maxwell: A Portrait of Power* by Peter Thompson and Anthony Delano, was withdrawn. The second, *Maxwell the Outsider* by Tom Bower, sold out its hardback run but got no further. Maxwell blocked the paperback edition on three occasions, going so far as to buy the publishing company, Sphere, when it acquired the paperback rights. In all, the author received 11 writs.

There was another biography, a piece of hagiography written by Joe Haines who first opposed Maxwell's takeover of the *Mirror* and then became his most loyal courtier. He was paid by Maxwell himself to write the book. This is the same Joe Haines whose column in the *Mirror*, 5 December 1991, had the title 'He Who Pays The Piper'. How very appropriate!

A recent BBC *Panorama* programme, 'The Max Factor', which alleged the £1 million Spot the Ball competition in the *Mirror* was rigged by Maxwell so it could never be won led, inevitably, to more writs.

But Maxwell's readiness to use the libel laws is too easy and convenient an explanation. News organisations could have

nailed Maxwell if, instead of worrying about the £200 per hour to employ specialist libel lawyers, they had committed the time, effort and money needed for painstaking journalistic investigation of his activities. But this would have gone against the sensationalism, instant news and cut and paste journalism which became prevalent in the press in the 1980s. Shoddy work and sliding standards went hand in hand.

In fact, Maxwell only started his climb to the really big time in 1980 when he bought the British Printing Corporation. He cajoled and bullied the unions into redundancies and new working practices. The former chairman of Cortaulds hailed him as a role model: 'If Britain had six more Maxwell's the country would have no more worries.'

Turning BPCC round also earned him the undying gratitude of the National Westminster Bank. Other top City institutions followed. The merchant bankers Rothschilds acted for him in the 1980s as did Samuel Montagu. The latter launched Mirror Group Newspapers on the market despite its private reservations.

Politicians queued to be courted. Not one but two former Attorney Generals, one Labour, one Conservative, courted Maxwell

and sat on the boards of his companies. Lord Silkin and Lord Havers, who between them occupied the most senior legal position in the country from 1974 to 1987, gave legal respectability and an aura of legitimacy to Maxwell's doings.

Then there were the top-notch accountants. Who better than Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte? They audited the books of Maxwell's most important companies and pronounced them clean. And so more money rolled in from the banks.

By 1987, thanks to BPCC and following the acquisition of the Mirror group in 1984, Maxwell was the biggest printer in Europe. A year later he moved closer to his dream of a global media empire when he bought Macmillan, the United States' second biggest publisher, and Official Airlines Guide, for the inflated price of \$3.3 billion.

It was the move which probably broke him, and many must have been aware of the money that slushed around between his public and private companies as he struggled against financial collapse.

However this was the 1980s. The deregulated economics of the Thatcher and Reagan years created the opening for financial crooks to present themselves as the swashbuckling entrepreneurs of a freshly liberated capitalism. It turned the minor fraudster of Pergamon into a major pension fund thief able to transfer hundreds of millions of pounds between public and private companies with apparent impunity.

As the *Financial Times* noted (7 December), Robert Maxwell had been around for 40 years but only became a major tycoon in the 1980s. 'The conditions were perfect for him and many other unscrupulous operators. Financial deregulation meant huge lines of credit were available from bankers unused to working in competitive conditions. At the same time standards of auditing were going from bad to worse, and the general willingness to comply with the spirit rather than the letter of the commercial law was breaking down under the forces of competition and greed being unleashed on both sides of the Atlantic.'

The politicians knew, the City knew and the media knew. Yet at his death they rallied to pay tribute to the outsider who was truly one of their own. Prime Minister John Major wished us 'to marvel at an extraordinary life, lived to the full'. Neil Kinnock praised him as 'a steadfast supporter of the Labour Party and a man with a genuine commitment to the advancement of the British people'. Paddy Ashdown thought him a unique part of our national scene.

Perhaps the bitterest pill to swallow is this. Maxwell was never a newspaperman but a power hungry businessman. Far from being the saviour of the *Mirror*, the paper declined both in sales and standards under his ownership.

Whether the Maxwell years prove to be simply a disastrous interlude in the history of a once great newspaper or proof of the terminal decline of the popular press remains to be seen.

Mick Gosling and Granville Williams

THE PRICE IS WRONG

The sale of the century of commercial television is over. Viewers and workers in the industry will be the losers. Andy Egan, research officer with the broadcasting union BECTU, reviews the sorry saga.

The government's self-proclaimed shake-up of ITV completed its first stage on 16 October 1991, when the Independent Television Commission announced the results of the franchise auction required under the Broadcasting Act 1990. Ironically, Margaret Thatcher, the driving force behind the auction, had to declare herself 'mystified ... and heartbroken' when her own favourite company TV-am, got the chop.

The former Prime Minister is not the only one to be dismayed, albeit for different reasons, at this farcical auction and the longer term implications for British broadcasting. One significant winner, however, was the Treasury. Early estimates indicate that in 1993, the Channel 3/ITV companies will pay £100 million more to the Treasury than they would under the present levy system. In other words there will be £100m less available for programme making. In percentage terms, the levy paid to government last year amounted to seven per cent of revenue. The equivalent figure for 1993 is estimated at 20 per cent.

The uneven outcome

The outcome of the auction (summarized in Tables 1 and 2) was very uneven, and the whole process looks increasingly ludicrous. Firstly, in a professedly competitive auction, only five out of 16 franchises were actually awarded to the highest bidder. In three other cases (Border, Scottish, Central) there was only one bidder. The remaining eight franchises, half the total, were decided on quality grounds, on criteria that have not been made explicit by the ITC.

An obvious anomaly was the range of bids as a proportion of expected revenue. The greatest gainers were the sole bidders - especially Central and Scottish - who obtained lucrative franchises for minimal outlay. At the other extreme a number of very high bids were ruled out on quality grounds, presumably because, in the ITC's view, the bidders could not sustain a high quality service while paying off very large sums to the Treasury. This would explain why TVS and TSW both lost to lower bidders. However, exactly the same criticism could have been levelled at successful bidders such as Yorkshire and Tyne Tees, who are now committed to very high payments as a proportion of likely revenue.

The uneven outcome means that there are already some obvious stronger and weaker players in the future C3 network. Central, LWT, Granada and Scottish look to have the

Incumbent	Successful bidder	Backers/Partners	Type of franchise
Thames	Carlton	Carlton (90%) Daily Telegraph (5%) RCS Video (5%)	Publisher
TVS	Meridian	MAI (65%) Central (20%) SelecTV (15%)	Publisher
TSW	Westcountry	Associated Newspapers (20%) SW Water (20%) Brittany Ferries (15%) Trillion (10%)	Producer
TV-am	Sunrise	LWT (20%) STV (20%) Guardian (15%) Disney (25%) Carlton (20%)	Producer

financial strength to play a major and independent role. On the other hand, the financial burdens on bidders such as Anglia, Yorkshire, HTV and Tyne Tees may make them economically weak and vulnerable to takeover in the future.

The new entrants

Four incumbents lost to outsiders. Thames was the biggest casualty, losing to Michael Green's Carlton TV, which plans to operate as a publisher-contractor. Publisher-contractors will commission programmes from independent production companies rather than produce their own programmes.

TVS lost to Meridian, which is chaired by Labour life peer Clive Hollick and again plans to operate as a publisher. TSW lost to Westcountry, which is 20 per cent owned by Associated Newspapers and chaired by John Banham of the Confederation of British Industry. Ironically, TVS and TSW were both outside winners in the last franchise round, displacing Southern and Westward respectively.

Apart from sympathy for those who stand to lose their jobs, few, other than the former Prime Minister, will regret the passing of TV-am, which failed its quality threshold some years ago and which outreached everyone else in ITV in its anti-union policies.

It will be replaced by Sunrise, in which the *Guardian* and Disney have significant stakes.

Judicial review

All of the above assumes that the outcome of the auction remains in line with the ITC's original announcement. This, however, is open to legal challenge through the process of judicial review. Disappointed losers such as TSW, TVS and TVN (which failed in its bid for Ulster) had this option and TSW has already won from the Court of Appeal the right to a full review. At the time of writing its case is before the courts.

Judicial review is a very risky option. The focus is on how the ITC reached its decisions, not on whether those decisions were right or wrong. It is an expensive gamble, and even if a particular challenge were to prove successful, the likely outcome is that the ITC would be asked to reconsider all applications for the franchise in question. It would then be perfectly possible for the ITC to award the franchise to an applicant other than the one making the challenge.

Industrial relations

The overriding immediate impact on broadcasting staff will be in the form of further redundancies and casualisation. The

number of jobs in ITV has already fallen from 16,000 in 1989 to 12,000 today. A further 2,200 jobs are now at risk in the losing incumbents, let alone any further shake-out elsewhere.

Thames aim to lose 1,000 jobs by 1993 in its plans to transform itself into an independent producer, employing about 400 workers at its Teddington studios, with possible interests in satellite and Channel 5. Carlton, in taking over the Thames franchise, plans to employ only 360 staff.

TVS (with 800 staff) and TSW (250 staff) and TV-am (400 staff) have all announced redundancies. In the case of the latter two companies this is without any current collective agreement on redundancy terms. Meridian, the winner of the TVS franchise, will operate as a publisher, with less in-house staff, and Westcountry wishes to use personal contracts for its proposed 167 staff.

Apart from the basic issue of job cuts posed by the incursion of the publisher-contractors, broadcasting unions will also be concerned about further threats to working conditions throughout the network and the need for recognition and collective agreements with newcomers. On a more optimistic note, the unions have already come through a very difficult period of restructuring and rationalisation in the run-up to the auction. The lessons learned, and in particular the successful joint-union approach at local and national level, means they are well placed to make an impact in the coming period. It is also inevitable that there will be some increase in production in the lead up to the franchise changeover in January 1993.

Ownership trends

The outcome of the auction is not the end of the story in terms of the ownership pattern of ITV. In the first place, friendly takeovers of small franchises by larger ones are now allowed. There is continuing speculation, for example, on the possibility of a Scottish/Grampian link-up.

More fundamentally, hostile takeovers will be allowed from January 1994. At any point a number of predators, who have avoided the difficulties of the auction process, may choose to enter the market. The outcome is likely to be a greater concentration of ownership in ITV as is anticipated even by George Russell, Chair of the ITC.

Some changes are already in place: Carlton has a stake in Central, which in turn owns 20 per cent of Meridian; LWT owns 20 per cent of Sunrise; Yorkshire has a close association with Tyne Tees. We can also anticipate greater interest from foreign companies within the European Community. Currently, the only significant presence is from the Italian media group RCS Video, which has a 5 per cent stake in Carlton, but when the market settles, others may be tempted to enter.

Viewers lose out

The ultimate losers from the whole sad process will be viewers. The result of a more



disjointed and badly resourced ITV network will be poorer and less varied original programming on television screens. A Labour victory at the General Election could bring some improvement for viewers with a more

stringent application of the ITC's quality provisions. But a more fundamental review of our broadcasting system will be necessary to reverse the destructive outcome of the present government's broadcasting policies.

Winner	Bid (£)	Bid as % of advertising revenue	Reason
Border	52,000	0.5	sole bid
Scottish	2,000	0	sole bid
Channel	1,000	0	quality
Central	2,000	0	sole bid
Anglia	18m	18	highest bid
Carlton	43m	20	quality
LWT	8m	5	quality
Grampian	0.7m	4	quality
Tyne Tees	15m	28	highest bid
Granda	9m	6	quality
Ulster	1m	4	quality
Meridian	37m	22	quality
Westcountry	8m	20	quality
HTV	21m	21	highest bid
Yorkshire	38m	30	highest bid
Sunrise	35 m	40	highest bid

The Press Compliance Commission

Just over a year ago the government put the press on probation. It was given until mid-1992 to put its own house in order or face legislation. As a result, the Press Complaints Commission came into being in January 1991, operating a 16 point Code of Practice drawn up by a committee chaired by Patsy Chapman, the editor of the *News of the World*.

Lord MacGregor, chair of the PCC, is now pleading for more time. He claims the PCC is working. But despite the well-publicised success of Clare Short MP, a review of the PCC's adjudications reveal that self-regulation won't work in the next 60 years leave alone the next six months. The PCC's message to the press is carry on regardless.

If you are a chief constable, Conservative councillor, upper class or a multi-national company, there is a chance that the PCC will take seriously complaints about inaccuracies, failure to correct mistakes or invasion of privacy. If you are Neil Kinnock, non-British, non-white, gay or a peace campaigner, forget it.

Clause 14 of the PCC's Code of Practice seems straightforward: 'The press should avoid pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, religion, sex or sexual orientation ...'

Yet in its first six months of operation the PCC upheld only one complaint of racism. A letter in a Sunday newspaper from a Jewish centre was headed by a caricature of a Jewish figure. The complainant described it as unnecessary, obscene and offensive. The newspaper published both an apology and an angry letter.

In dealing with anti-semitism there was no talk of third party complaints, or 'no prima facie breach' of the PCC code because a group, not an individual, was attacked. Yet this has been the PCC's response in every other case.

A complaint against a national tabloid headline, 'Where the **** are the French', was dismissed on the grounds that Clause 14 'dealt with references to a specific person and not unnamed groups of people such as "the French"'.

In an item about the Gulf War, a columnist used the terms 'Iraqi wogs' and 'slimy bastards' in references to Muslims. Racist and insulting? No breach of the Code said the PCC, 'as the references were general and not to individuals'. Similarly, the use of the word 'Krauts' in a national newspaper headline 'was not applied to a specific person so did not amount to discrimination in the Commission's terms'.

A reader who complained that a magazine called our European partners 'wops' was told that 'a passing reference of this kind, not pinned to an individual, did not breach the Code'. The PCC actually managed to recognise that a cartoon of a drunken Irish man who thought a parking meter was a restaurant was a racial stereotype. But as 'this was not applied to any individual' the

complaint was dismissed. The PCC has defined racism out of existence.

'People's sexual conditions and sexual orientation are generally private matters on which newspapers are not justified in reporting or commenting,' warns the PCC. Except if you are a left-wing Labour councillor in Lambeth. Councillor Rachel Webb is transsexual and spoke on a television programme about transsexuality in 1983. As far as the PCC is concerned, that justified the *Evening Standard*, *Sun* and *Sunday Times* in rehearsing this fact when the papers reported on Lambeth Council eight years later. One wonders when a report will begin 'the self-confessed heterosexual and Prime Minister John Major ...'

And if you are gay? In a reversal of a previous Press Council decision, the PCC ruled that the use of the words 'queer' and 'poofster' to describe homosexual men in a national newspaper article was not derogatory and discriminatory under the terms of Clause 14. This extraordinary ruling was made on the grounds that 'a reference to sexual orientation was necessary in the context of the article, which was headlined "Queer Street"'.

Clause 4 of the PCC's Code warns that: 'Intrusions and inquiries into an individual's private life without his or her consent are not generally acceptable and publication can only be justified in the public interest.'

Coronation Street star Chris Quentin complained that the only reason the *News of the World* smeared an exclusive about his sister's life as a prostitute all over its front page was because of her link to him. Chris Quentin is not a particularly savoury character, and has seen fit to sell his own kiss and tell stories to the gutter press in the past. Nevertheless, his complaint seemed fair. But in an extraordinary adjudication, the PCC dismissed his complaint because 'he had virtually no privacy left to invade'.

Today newspaper gave major coverage to a row between four youths and Neil Kinnock while he was ticking off his daughter, together with emphasis on her private life. Chucked in were what the paper agreed were unsubstantiated and malicious quotes which *Today* claimed were 'balanced' by positive ones. Typical gutter journalism without any possible public interest. No problem, said the PCC: 'Leading politicians seek, experience and must expect regular exposure in the press. This article dealt largely in trivia about Mr Kinnock and his family in which readers might be interested. The PCC does not regard it as malicious or as an intrusion into privacy.'

The PCC has reminded complainants on many occasions that newspapers are under no



Lord MacGregor

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duty to be impartial or balanced - presumably in case we had not noticed! When a Labour agent complained about gross political bias, back came the reply from the PCC: 'Editors are entitled to take a particular viewpoint, and there is no obligation on newspapers, as there is on the broadcasting media to be impartial.'

But Clause 3 of the PCC's Code says: 'Newspapers, while free to be partisan, should distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.'

So what did the PCC make of a report in a national tabloid on an anti-Gulf war demonstration headlined 'Parade of traitors who shame the nation'. The article went on to

POLITICS & THE REGIONAL MEDIA

Are We Being Served?

It's election year - and the regional media will play its part in projecting the policies and propaganda of the campaign.

A recent book, *What News?*, by authors Bob Franklin and David Murphy, analyses Britain's local and regional press. Its conclusions are depressing. Papers are local in name only and large corporations, often multinationals determine the nature, policies and politics of local papers. One section of the book is an analysis of the *Yorkshire Post's* coverage of the 1987 election campaign.

What will happen this time round? And how will regional TV cover the issues?

Public meeting:

Monday 24th February
7.30 pm
30 York Place, Leeds

Speakers include:

Bob Franklin, co-author *What News?*
Colin Bourne, National Union of Journalists
Plus representatives from regional press and broadcasting.

Further information: Tel 0532 429 696

Organised by the Yorks and Humberside CPBF in association with the Regional TUC Media Committee.

describe peace demonstrators as 'treacherous misfits', 'slimeballs' and 'rat-droppings' who the columnist reckoned should be 'banged up in jail'. Merely a 'robust' piece said the PCC, 'the writer was entitled to express his views in this way'.

Slumping standards are not confined to the tabloids. It was the *Independent* which chose to publish not only the names, but the addresses and photographs of men charged with indecency offences. The PCC dismissed a complaint about this.

Some fair better than others. The PCC has regularly used the excuse that complaints come from 'third parties' to refuse to consider cases of discrimination in reporting. But a Tory councillor had a complaint upheld against the Brighton *Evening Argus* for identifying and publishing the address of a policeman who was the stepfather of a man convicted for kidnapping. This, said the PCC, was a breach of Clause 10 of its Code: 'The Press should generally avoid identifying relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime ...'

However, when a widow complained that a newspaper report of a £14,000 damages award to her for the loss of her husband used her full address, the PCC dismissed it. In a ruling of monumental hypocrisy, the PCC said 'it would resist any attempt to restrict the right of the press to report court proceedings and their outcome'.

Stuffed full of the representatives of the industry it is meant to be regulating, the PCC is a rotten borough. It operates double standards. It defends lies and bias in the name of editorial independence. It defends invasion of privacy when it supports the interests of the newspapers' political masters. It does nothing to promote high ethical standards, but excuses the inexcusable.

In other words, the PCC is doing exactly the job the government set it up to do: defuse campaigns for specific measures to reform the press, such as a statutory right of reply to media lies, and ensure the government has its kept press in the run up to the Election.

The PCC is a political fix. The CPBF looks forward to its early demise.

Mick Gosling

An apology and an appeal!

Production of *Free Press* has been disrupted by the continuing financial problems of the CPBF. Members and affiliates will not lose out on their subscriptions as these run on a cycle of six issues. Our funding appeal fell £10,000 short in 1991 leaving our full-time worker no alternative but to take another job.

The CPBF's funding problems stem from the fact that our traditional sources of support are themselves in financial crisis: local authorities can no longer finance specific projects; our loyal trade union affiliates are having to cope with union busting, declining membership and financial stringency.

The National Council has approved a series of measures to minimise our costs. *Free Press* is now typeset and distributed by ourselves and our membership system has been brought in-house. We have begun talks with our major sponsors on developing media training and advice packages. Our pre-election conference on **Freeing the Media** (see back page) could be a major fundraising event if well attended - so please book now. Individual members and local affiliates have responded magnificently to our financial appeals - and please keep the money coming in. There are other ways you can help the CPBF's work in addition to making donations:

- * set up local meetings and groups
- * take out a regular standing order
- * sell extra copies of *Free Press*
- * send stories and articles in to us.

The need for the CPBF has never been greater. We began in 1979, appalled by the press coverage of the so-called 'winter of discontent' and the bias of the press in the run up to the General Election. Twelve years later nothing has changed. Despite the much vaunted hype of the print revolution, all but one of the new national newspapers launched in the 80s has folded or been taken over. Concentration of ownership has grown apace. Both the BBC and commercial television have faced ferocious government onslaught. Standards have declined and democracy has been undermined by these developments.

The CPBF and its supporters can claim some credit for the situation not being worse. Our persistent campaigns and parliamentary lobbying for a statutory right of reply and against concentration of ownership have kept the issue of media reform on the political agenda.

The next *Free Press* will be a hands-on guide to monitoring and fighting media bias in the run up to the election - rush in your favourite examples now. And keep giving us all the support you can and spread the message! See you at the March conference and the Annual General Meeting in May.

FREE THE MEDIA

a major one day conference on reforming the media
 28th March 1992
 10.00 - 5.00

NATFHE
 27 Britannia St,
 London WC1

Underground/BR/Thameslink: King's Cross

Participants include: Eric Barendt, James Curran, Tony Lennon, Jean Seaton, Denise Searle. Plus speakers from BECTU, GPMU, NCU, NUJ, and the Labour Party.

Conference fees (including lunch & refreshments):

Delegates £15.00 Individual: £7.50/£5.00 concs.

Further details from

CPBF, 96 Dalston Lane, London E8 1NG. Tel 071 923 367

Notice of CPBF Annual General Meeting

Sat 16 May 1992
 9.30 - 4.30
 NATFHE, 27 Britannia St,
 London WC1

The 1992 AGM of the CPBF will take place on Saturday 16 May.

All individual members are eligible to attend and vote.
 Affiliated organisations can send voting delegates on the following basis:
 below 1,000 members, 1 delegate;
 1,000 - 10,000 members, 2 delegates;
 10,000 - 50,000 members, 3 delegates;
 50,000 - 100,000, 5 delegates;
 100,000 members and over, 10 delegates.

MOTIONS from individual members must reach the national office not later than SATURDAY 4 APRIL.

NOMINATIONS for the NATIONAL COUNCIL, which meets monthly in London, are invited in the following categories: individual members, 6 seats; members of the NUJ, 4 seats; workers in print, 4 seats; workers in broadcasting, 4 seats; other trade unions, 4 seats; other organisations, 6 seats; CPBF regional groups, 2 seats each; CPBF sections/sub-groups, 2 seats each. Deadline for nominations to be received is SATURDAY 2 MAY.

REGISTRATION. Individual members and delegates are urged to register in advance to allow the national office to plan conference packs and refreshments. We are asking individuals to make a contribution of £2 each, and organisations a contribution of £5 per delegate, to cover the cost of these items and childcare.

CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS. Members or delegates requiring childcare facilities are asked to contact the national office not later than SATURDAY 2 MAY. We need details of names and ages of children and any dietary or medical requirements in order to plan proper arrangements.

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM		AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION	
a) Individual membership	£10	f) Less than 500 members	£15
b) Unwaged	£5	g) 500 to 1,000 members	£20
c) Household (2 copies <i>Free Press</i>)	£15	h) 1,000 to 10,000	£40
d) Supporting membership (includes free CPBF publications)	£20	i) 10,000 to 50,000	£95
e) Institutions (eg. libraries) (includes 10 copies of <i>Free Press</i> , plus free CPBF publications)	£20	j) 50,000 to 100,000	£185
		k) Over 100,000 members	£375
			FP67

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £

Name
 Organisation (if applicable)
 Address
 Postcode Tel

PLEASE RETURN TO CPBF, 96 DALSTON LANE, LONDON E8 1NG