FREE PRESS

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ELECTION WATCH 92

Dancing to the Tories tune

The election campaign in the media started well before John Major pressed the start button for the official campaign. Already pro-Tory bias has shown itself and so has its potential effect on voters.

That bias exists is not in itself the problem. George Orwell observed that anyone who writes anything about current affairs is almost certain to be biased on account of having opinions. The problem is this bias is only admitted on opinion and editorial pages, not in the selection and content of 'factual' news stories.

The health of a genuinely free press depends on its ability to search out and present facts. In the most famous election scam of all times, the Tories deceived the whole of the press and radio with a forgery known as the Zinoviev letter and went on to win the 1924 election.

Nothing on so grand a scale has yet happened in this election, despite the desperate efforts of the *Sunday Times* with 'Kinnock's Kremlin connections'. But Conservative Central Office is still trying with the circulation of a 259-page scrapbook of cut, paste and stitch-up on the allegedly 'hard left' causes supported by Labour MPs.

Most of the media has relayed with relish the stories dictated by the Tories. Tales of Labour's supposed plans to raise taxes high, spend prolifically, cave in to the unions and leave Britain defenceless have received widespread coverage despite having little foundation in reality. Labour spokespeople may get a reply, but the agenda is set by the right.

In January acres of space and time was given to the question: would a Labour Government lift the ceiling on employees' National Insurance contributions in stages or all at once?

This was not a very big issue compared with the depth of the recession



Buying votes? Kenneth Baker turns the election into a lottery.

and rising unemployment or the state of our health, education and other public services. And there was no comparable attempt to publicise the Tories' own tax plans prior to the budget.

But the Tory Party was calling the tune and the press — not just the right-wing tabloids but the broadsheets too — duly followed. The result? In two weeks the opinion polls moved steadily from giving Labour, on average, a two-point lead, to giving a one-point lead to the government.

Three percentage points in the votes on polling day will more than likely determine who forms the next government.

Since then the relentless questioning of Labour's tax plans has continued. There's nothing wrong with such questioning but many stories have been based on false and frequently denied assumptions, and they have served to distract attention from the government's own economic performance.

Why does the press do this? Why are its interests so tied up with the

Conservative Party? The main reason is its ownership.

All the right-wing tabloids and most of the 'heavies' are owned by big companies with considerable interests in other countries or industries. A third of our national press is owned by Rupert Murdoch. Eighty-five per cent of it is owned by just three companies.

It's a similar pattern in the provincial press, where most evening titles are owned by six chains, themselves all part of bigger publishing empires. Small wonder there is such scant regard for facts and so little diversity of opinion.

The CPBF wants to establish just what impact media bias has on the issues discussed and the way people vote in this election. We are asking members and supporters all round the country to be Election Media Monitors and check out local media coverage while national papers are monitored in London. We want to build up a picture of how the media influences our democracy.

Tim Gopsill
Be a Media Monitor! See pages 2 and 3.

THE CPBF ELECTION COUNT 1992

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Pick a local paper — or a broadcast news bulletin — and keep an eye on it right through the election campaign.

The project is running for four weeks from MONDAY 16 MARCH TO SUNDAY 12 APRIL inclusive. If the election is not called for 9 April, please start monitoring from the date the election is announced to the first Sunday after polling. The aim is to cover the official campaign, and the way the outcome is covered.

For newspapers, just log the contents of the front page and leading articles. This should be done even if the election campaign is not covered. For broadsheets, with a number of stories, you will have to use your judgement on what the main story is. On radio or TV, log the bulletin headlines of the programme you wish to cover.

To be an Election Media Monitor involves a commitment to checking one local medium — daily or weekly newspaper, radio or TV news programme — every issue, or every programe. It necessarily involves a certain amount of form-filling to log the results.

Thre are TWO FORMS: one on this page listing the media monitored, which need only be filled out once; and opposite a daily check sheet. All should be completed and kept, and mailed back to the CPBF within a week of polling day.

The daily form records not just the space given to each party and the way coverage is slanted, but also the issues that are covered.

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Media	mon	itor'	s re	port

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This selection shows which party is being allowed to set the agenda and is as significant as the way the issue is treated.

On your daily montoring report:

- write out the main newspaper or bulletin headline
- measure the story including the headline which should be measured for each column it appears in
- assess any bias. Please be careful to register bias only if it is in the text (or headline) and not in the subject matter

selected. If a party scores an 'own goal' in some way, but it seems accurately and fairly reported, register it as neutral

- assess newspapers' editorials for direct party bias
- the form must be photocopied and filled out every day.

The project is of value only if it is complete, but at the same time it could be a fascinating exercise for you.

The CPBF will analyse the reports and publish the results in *Free Press*.



Daily Mail front pages on three consecutive Mondays in January show how Conservative Central Office used it to set the political agenda for the rest of the media. Fond of attacking the 'Loony Left', the Mail has a long tradition of supporting far-Right causes. It supported the British Union of Facists in the 1930s and carried the notorious headline 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts' (15 January 1934). What is not so well known, is that the Mail's then sister papers, the Daily Mirror and the Evening News, under the control of Lord Rothemere supported the campaign. The following week (22 January 1934) the Mirror ran 'Give the Blackshirts a Helping Hand' while the Evening News ran a competition for the best letter on the theme 'Why I like the Blackshirts'.

CPBF ELECTION COUNT 1992 - Monitor's Daily Report

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Please photocopy this page for every day of coverage

It's better to be a poor party in government than a rich party in opposition,' quipped Lord McAlpine, Conservative Party Treasurer, before the 1987 election. He was justifying an advertising spree of £3.6 million — £2 million more than Labour could rustle up — on a series of newspaper adverts with the slogan: 'Britain is Great again. Don't let Labour wreck it.'

Already we are witnessing a ruthless deployment of public resources to ensure Conservative survival. The public sector borrowing requirement is set to shoot up to £30 billion. Civil servants have been used to promote what is essentially Conservative Party propaganda in the Citizen's Charter and the dubious exercise of costing Labour's spending programme.

And then there's the media, where the party of the have-nots will be struggling to get its voice heard through a media owned and operated by the haves. After all, political correspondents with salaries between £40,000 and £50,000 per year, generous expenses and big cars, won't be overjoyed by Labour's tax proposals.

The media is already an election issue, and it needs to become even more so. In this respect, the Sun is seriously in need of a maths lesson. Attacking Labour's whingeing over media 'dirty tricks', the Sun came out with this stunner on 11 February: 'Of 11 dailies, five are pro-Tory, five are on the left and one uncommitted. Of nine Sunday papers, four are Tory, four are Labour and one uncommitted.'

Among the tabloids the Daily Mirror is the lone Labour voice. A story circulating a few weeks back suggested that the Sun might shift to a pro-Labour

The rat packhacks

The dirty tricks have already started. Granville Williams looks at what we can expect from the regional media in the coming battle.

stance, but that role seems to have fallen to Today — also from the Murdoch stable - which has been even-handed with an exclusive Neil Kinnock interview. A cynic might suggest the reason for this is a desperate attempt to win back readers to a paper which has lost 15 per cent of its circulation in 12 months and is down to 430,000 sales.

Simple lists and circulation figures don't tell the whole story. Pro-Conservative doesn't mean a formal or passive endorsement. The links between Conservative Central Office and papers like the Express and Mail are intimate, and one of the best commentators on this process is the Independent's Anthony Bevins. Bevins wrote on 3 February 1992;

'Having worked for nine years as a political correspondent on the Sun and the Daily Mail, I count myself as something of an expert on the insidious nature of the process. To survive and rise in, or on, the "game", you pander to the political

prejudices of your paymasters, giving them the stories that you know will make them salivate.

That means putting a sparkling gloss on anything to do with the Conservatives and their policies, while denigrating, or "ratting", Labour,

Tory Party Chairman, Chris Patten, and other ministers are in regular contact with favourably disposed editors, steering them in the right direction on the propaganda campaigns of the day, says

The partisan mendacity of papers like the Express and Mail has a wider impact, though. Stories planted on their front pages about rifts in the Labour leadership are taken up by other papers and by television and radio news editors and given wider credence. Bevins warns: 'While the rat pack hacks are paid to dance to predominantly Tory tunes, television and radio news editors should consider their influential role. They should remember that they are free

STEVE BELL

THE OWNERS

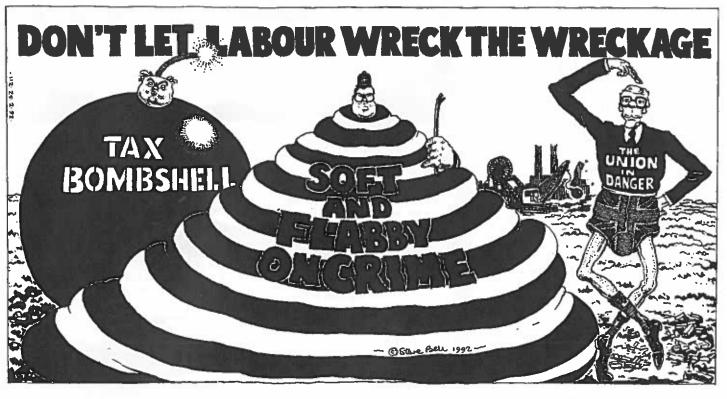












iournalists, and that their first duty is to the voter at large. They have not been press ganged into the rat pack. So why volunteer?'

If the picture is pretty bleak at the national level, what can we hope for from our regional media? Will we get decent analysis, showing the impact of party politics on the region?

> You cannot hope To bribe or twist. Thank God, the British journalist.

> > **But seeing what** The man will do Unbribed, there's No occasion to. 5

> > > Hubert Wolfe

The Yorkshire Post is the authentic voice of Conservatism in the region. Its owning company used to be called 'The Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Group' and is now part of United Newspapers, owner of the Daily Express and lots of others.

Lord Stevens of Ludgate, Chairman of United Newspapers, has clear views on the political stance of his papers. 'I would not have been happy to be associated with

papers echo my political views. I do not interfere and say enough is enough, I don't ram my views in, but I'm quite far out to the right.'

The Yorkshire Post's articles of association still require it to be a Conservative newspaper. But sometimes the awkward inconsistencies of Conservative policies hang uneasily with regional concerns.

The destruction of the coal industry is one example where the paper has featured bishops, politicians and industrialists defending the industry against pit closures and publicising the case for European Community money to breathe new life into coal communities. But only up to a point. Arthur Scargill and the NUM get far more cautious coverage.

When the chips are down - and that's at General Election time - the focus is clear. What News? by Bob Franklin and David Murphy, analysed West Yorkshire local press reporting of the 1987 General Election and found the Yorkshire Post's coverage to the most overtly partisan of the sample surveyed.

They found a very high number of 'negative appraisals' of the Labour Party in routine election coverage. An analysis of 25 lead stories revealed that 22 dealt with election issues. All 22 supported the Conservative Party.

Another worrying trend is the fate of regional broadcasting. Cutbacks in the BBC, both TV and radio, have stretched the service in the region, and Yorkshire

a left-wing newspaper. I suppose the Television is struggling with the consequences of its high franchise bid. Regional news programmes are expensive and clearly choices are going to be made about where the scarce money goes in the future. Broadcast editor. Marta Wohrle. argued at the time of the bids that if franchise winners overbid and revenue fell below projection, it would mean

> 6 Rich Tories cannot Pay a fee to Get their propaganda On the BBC

But seeing what The BEEB will do Unfee'd, there's No occasion to.

Lines in a lift at BBC Manchester. possibly inspired by John Major's apperance on Desert Island Discs?

cutting back on programme budgets and tearing up franchise promises. 'The programmes most likely to be at risk are the much vaunted regional offerings. Network spending will be committed each year and its network programmes which bring in audiences," she wrote.

Let's hope it doesn't happen. The situation is already grave enough.

From Smear to Polling Day

The battleground of the coming election will be London and the south — and the battle will be dirty. The Conservatives have targeted 14 allegedly 'hard-Left' London MPs and Labour-run councils in the capital.

On Friday 6 March, the London Evening Standard ran a front page story headlined 'Tories name the hard-Left London MPs'. What was presented as a factual news story was simply a regurgitation of Conservative Central Office claims contained in Who's Left, the Tories election bible of selective quotations (price £30!). The article was liberally sprinkled with quotes from the Conservative Party Chairman, Chris Patten, with no counterbalancing comment from the Labour Party.

Inside the Standard, a full page 'Special Report', based wholly on the Tory dossier, was headlined 'The London Tendency'. It contained potted extracts on 14 London Labour MPs. None were allowed to comment on the causes they were alleged to have supported or the context of statements attributed to them. The Standard accepted without question — and without informing their readers of the methods used in compiling the report — the Tories interpretation of the meaning of Early Day Motions the MPs had signed and comments they had made.

It was a classic example of a newspaper reporting a carefully timed piece of party propaganda as news and lending it credibility by not questioning it. The Standard's reporter, Tony Maguire, emphasised that the dossier was 'an explosive move marking the end of months of shadow boxing and the start of the real election campaign'.

THE PRESS GANGS UP

Britain's national newspapers are overwhelmingly partisan to the Tories. In the 1987 General Election they lined up like this:

Conservative

Daily Express, The Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Star, Daily Telegraph, The Times, Financial Times

Labour

Daily Mirror, The Guardian

Social Democrat

Today

The Independent didn't endorse any party

MONUMENTALLY INCOMPETENT

The London Borough of Hackney

Hackney Council has banned staff from calling female colleagues 'girls'. A council spokesman said that anyone using the term would be disciplined. (The Sun, 23rd March 1991)

Hackney Council took a full-page advertisement to promote its course for black, bereaved lesbians - at a cost of around £1,300. None applied. (Daily Telegraph, 13th April 1991)

ouncil's own a

(Fraud Squad already investigating that age claims and use of town hall telephones for (Daily Mail, 24th October 1991)

Enquiries to: Nick Archer, GLA, CCO, 32 Smith Square, SW1.

[ref: councils.nja February 1992]

How the Tories are preparing to trash one local Labour Council

But was Maguire, who specialises in hatchet jobs on trade union and Labour Party activists, reporting the 'news' or helping make it? The length of the story indicates it was meant to be a front page lead. It was knocked from that spot by the big news that Richard Branson was selling Virgin Records to Thorn EMI for £650 million. The wealth of detail from Who's Left in the Special Report suggests Maguire had access to the information it contained well in advance of its official launch.

The Evening Standard comes out of the same stable as the Daily Mail. It has a circulation around 500,000 copies and its readership stretches deep into commuter land. Like the Mail, although its ink no longer smears, its contents continue to do so. The Standard is an important weapon in the Tory arsenal to trash London's Labour MPs and councils, affecting votes not only in the capital but throughout the south east.

Using the same techniques as Who's Left, Central Office scribes have drawn up lists of knocking stories for ministers on a hit list of London Labour-run councils. Aside from out of date, selective and just plain wrong statistics, the stories are culled from the local and national press. This form of recycling may be the Tories attempt to prove themselves environmentally friendly. However, garbage is garbage and many of the stories were misleading, inaccurate or inventions when they first appeared in print.

It works like this. A local Tory politician claims the Labour council is allowing the Anti-Poll Tax Federation to use council-owned property as the base for its campaign for non-payment. The local paper reports this. Chris Patten repeats this fifteen

months later and it is reported as a factual news item in the national press. In doing so the press endorses Tory propaganda that the reason Labour-controlled inner city authorities can't collect the Poll Tax is because they don't want to.

The story outlined above refers to Hackney Council. It is not true. It first appeared in the Hackney Gazette on 12 October 1990. It appears in a Central Office memorandum referenced February 1992. It was used by Chris Patten last month and duly appeared as a 'factual' news story in the Sun, Mail and Express. None of the papers checked the story with the council press office.

Another hoary old myth the Tories will be circulating about Hackney Council is that it spent £1,300 on a full page advertisement for a course for black bereaved lesbians, after all, the Daily Telegraph said it did on 13 April 1991. The story is not true. A small ad which would have cost £30 appeared on the council's own page in the local paper. However, the story does have the great advantage of appealing to racist, sexist and homophobic prejudices. And, of course, it is not the government's straightjacket on local authority spending but wasteful, 'Loony Left' Labour authorities who are responsible for the failure to maintain decent local services.

Hundreds of stories of this type will appear during the election campaign. They will be picked up gleefully by most national newspapers who will not bother to check them at source but report them as 'news' because Tories say they are true. In the unlikely event they are challenged, they will be able to refer to their kept press as the source. Thus is the circle of lies and deceit closed.

Mick Gosling

'If I were a rich man...'

In 1988 Margaret Thatcher's of the Whitehall press corps to ensure Thatcher and the government's policies never Private Members Bill on Right to Reply and Legal Aid for Libel, presented by Ann Clwyd MP.

As well as arguing for a right of reply to factual inaccuracies, the Bill put forward the idea that ordinary folk should be allowed legal aid to pursue libel actions. This was not endorsing the libel laws, but arguing that where a remedy exists to media lies it should be available to all, not just the rich.

Thatcher's government was famous for vigorously defending the privileges of the rich. True to form, she made sure that they would not have to share the privilege of making a nice packet out of using the expensive libel laws.

But has she now heard the cry of her faithful servant Bernard Ingham? In his less than candid and rambling autobiography, Kill the Messenger, the loyal press secretary for 11 years at Number 10 reveals that he slogged through 5,000 lobby briefings, 30,000 individual briefings and ate over 1,000 lunches with journalists for the good of her cause. It's enough to make a lapdog sick. But Bernard soldiered on, marshalling the minions

got the media they deserved.

Yet now Bernard lets out a dark secret. Perhaps a dazzling light on the road to obscurity has revealed to him how the rich and powerful can fend off the unwanted abuses of the press the poor cannot. For hidden on page 319 of his confessions is a startling admission which suggests that perhaps, just perhaps, he was a closet supporter of the principal of legal aid for libel

'If I were a rich man, I should be far richer by now because of the libels committed against me over the last eleven years.'

If only Bernard had recognised this in 1988 and advised Thatcher to call off the ministerial hounds during the right of reply campaign.

But then again, someone who has suffered so many briefings and so many good lunches -'I certainly ate well, whenever I was given a choice in London' (p320) — in such a difficult cause cannot be expected to have much insight into the trials and tribulations of working people. They do not have access to the courts for libel, nor, as he did, instant access to every media outlet in the country for the price of a telephone call.

Tom O'Malley

NWCPBF ELECTION WATCH 92 CAMPAIGN MEETING

If you want to do more than shout at the TV screen or moan about media bias, ELECTION WATCH 92 needs you.

A News Conference to launch ELECTION WATCH 92 will be held one week after the announcement of the Election date.

The NWCPBF will be producing a leaflet which will highlight sources of media bias and ways to complain and challenge it. We will have an ELECTION WATCH phone line to give advice and assistance.

A meeting for anyone interested is being held on THURSDAY 12 MARCH. 8.00 pm Conference Room, 23 New Mount St, Manchester, Tel 061 953 4013.

CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS & **BROADCASTING FREEDOM** Tel: 071 923 3671 (24 hours) Fax: 071 923 3672

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MEDIA RACISM BOOK

Writers required for section on Asian experience Please contact Evelyn Reid

for details on 071 242 2548 (daytime).

Notice of CPBF Annual General Meeting

Sat 16 May 1992 9.30 - 4.30NATFHE, 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.

'AFTER MAXWELL — THE "MIRROR" AND THE MEDIA'

PUBLIC MEETING

THURSDAY 19 MARCH — 6.45pm Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

Speakers include: Arthur Scargill (President, National Union of Mineworkers) - Lesley Miller (GPMU MoC, "Mirror" Group) - Pergamon NUJ - John Mitchell (GPMU National Officer dealing with Mirror Pensions) - Ian Chandler (NUJ FoC, the "European") Chair: Jim Mortimer (former Labour Party General Secretary and ACAS chair)

SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS AND THE GRAPHICAL PAPER AND MEDIA UNION

FREE THE MEDIA

a major one day conference on reforming the media 28 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 Individuals: £7.50/£5.00 concs.
Send cheques to:

CPBF, 96 Daiston Lane, London E8 1NG. Tel 071 923 3671

BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW!

Communications media should not be at the whim of 'market forces', but rather placed within a political and legal framework which specifies tough minimum safeguards in matters of ownership, programme content and decision making procedures. John Keane, The Media and Democracy

As the General Election nears the evidence of media bias and timidity mounts. The national press is desperate to retain a Conservative government. The BBC and ITV, after years of attacks from the Thatcher and Major administrations, seem prepared to let the political agenda be set by the right-wing national press. The case for media reform is demonstrated on a daily basis.

The CPBF will be campaigning for the new Parliament to free the media from the whim of market forces. It will be the task of our supporters to push MPs into legislating for a statutory right of reply, effective curbs on concentration of ownership, and the establishment of funds for strong, publicly accountable and responsible new media across the press, TV, radio, cable and satellite.

The CPBF conference, Free the Media, on 28 March, is intended to focus the discussions of our friends and supporters on campaigning priorities and tactics. Out of the conference will come ideas and proposals for practical action at a national and local level to secure a freer media in the 1990s.

Make sure that you and your trade union branch, constituency party or community group are represented at the conference. Please register today!

Tom O'Mailey National Secretary CPBF

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM AFFLIATION BY ORGANISATION

a) Individual membership	£10	f) Less than 500 members	£15
b) Unwaged	25	g) 500 to 1,000 members	£20
 c) Household (2 copies Free Press 	s)£15	h) 1,000 to 10,000	£40
d) Supporting membership		i) 10,000 to 50,000	295
(includes free CPBF publications)	£20	j) 50,000 to 100,000	£18
e) Institutions (eg. libraries)	£20	k) Over 100,000 members	£37
(includes 10 copies of Free Press,	plus fre	e CPBF publications)	
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I/We want to join the CPBF and	enclose	a cheque/PO for S	

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