

FREE PRESS

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PRESS BILL DOWN BUT NOT OUT

IN A Parliamentary tactic that is becoming all too familiar to supporters of a statutory Right of Reply, Clive Soley's Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill was 'talked out' at the Third Reading on Friday, 23 April, writes Jo Treharne.

A handful of Tory backbenchers – supported by the Government – tabled a total of twenty four wrecking amendments to the Bill, ensuring that there would be no time for a vote at the close of session.

Several of the amendments, tabled by Peter Thurnham MP, were reported to have been made following briefings by the News International group during the committee stage of the Bill.

Mr Thurnham strenuously denied that he was acting on behalf of Murdoch's organisation, citing seven other representations made to him by press organisations – including Mirror Group Newspapers, Associated Newspapers and Express Newspapers.

News International defended their



Clive Soley MP 'talked out'

position by claiming that, without the amendments made on the basis of their representation; "there would have been no debate at all during committee". Many will find it refreshing to finally hear News International defend the pro-

motion of democratic debate.

However, all is not gloom and gloom. Over the past few months we have seen debate on press regulation (and self-regulation) increase in scope and intensity. Although this particular Bill appears to have breathed its last, the issue is unlikely to go away. Clive Soley's position, reiterated at the Campaign's Annual Conference, is that there is still a great deal that needs to be done; "The issue will not die. There is now a much greater recognition of the citizen's right to expect accurate news reporting, and there is a growing awareness of the serious erosion of press freedom that has taken place in Britain in recent years."

One important outcome of the debate that the Bill has generated has been the establishment of a support group for victims of press inaccuracy – provisionally entitled Press Wise. It is envisaged that the group will operate as an advice and support network for groups and individuals affected by inaccurate and damaging press reporting.

'Open government' doesn't extend to medicine

by Maurice Frankel

ALTHOUGH THE government opposes freedom of information legislation it says it has adopted a new 'open government' policy. Ministers say they will release information unless there are 'pressing public interest' reasons for secrecy. But the new policy has now proved a conspicuous failure. The government has blocked a private member's bill designed to remove the extraordinary secrecy about the safety of medicines.

A blanket secrecy clause in the 1968 Medicines Act, means that the information which drug companies give the medicines licensing authorities is kept secret. The safety tests are confidential, and even the reasons for licensing or banning a drug are secret. An official who released them would commit an offence and could be jailed for two years. Ironically, if a British drug is sold in the USA this data is readily available under the

American Freedom of Information Act.

The Medicines information Bill, introduced by Giles Radice MP, would have opened such information to the public. At first the government appeared supportive. But the Department of Health later caved in to the drug industry's objections, and the bill was talked out at its Report stage on April 30.

This is more remarkable than it seems. The Conservative election manifesto contained a specific promise to do away with unnecessary secrecy clauses in legislation. The cabinet office has spent nearly a year identifying which restrictions should be repealed. The Medicines Act is probably the worst example on the statute books: so the Bill should have been an obvious candidate for government support. But it appears that cabinet minister William Waldegrave, who is in charge of the openness initiative, wanted to support the bill – but was overruled by the Department of

Health. His defeat was evident from the disdainful way in which Tom Sackville, the junior health minister, referred to the new policy, when he told MPs: "We have to be careful in our enthusiasm for openness ... that we do not err too much on the fashionable side of openness."

The drugs industry displayed remarkably dishonest negotiating tactics. The British Pharma Group, a leading industry body, claimed that one particular clause seriously threatened their commercial interests, and if passed would mean that "companies would cease to use the UK MCA (Medicines Control Agency)", taking their products to Europe instead. But it added that the rest of the bill "with appropriate modifications, is unlikely to create significant problems for research based companies". Believing that the industry would support the Bill if this

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FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF BROADCASTING BAN

October 19, 1993 is the fifth anniversary of the ban introduced by Douglas Hurd in 1988. Two events are planned in Leeds and Manchester on the 18 and 19 October to focus discussion on the issues. Details will appear in the next issue of Free Press. We urge Free Press readers and supporters to organise events in their own areas, too.

RTE LOSE ON SECTION 31

The Irish Supreme Court struck a blow against censorship on March 30 when it ruled that a Sinn Fein trade unionist, Larry O'Toole, had a right to be heard and seen on TV and radio.

Section 31 of the Irish Broadcasting Act allows the government to ban broadcasts by spokespeople from a list of organisations, including Sinn Fein, and the court verdict does not affect that. But it does forbid RTE to extend the ban to cover rank and file members of the listed organisations.

Larry O'Toole was the leader of a bakers' strike in 1990 and five interviews with him were banned, although none of them contained any mention of Sinn Fein. RTE, the state broadcasting organisation, claimed that a blanket ban was necessary to prevent Sinn Fein members from "infiltrating the airwaves" and because of the "diversity of views" about censorship amongst journalists. Both of these justifications were thrown out by the court.

Eoin Ronayne, chair of the NUJ Dublin Broadcasting Branch, said, "This shows Section 31 is an ass and strengthens the case for its repeal. We can now interview Sinn Fein members about cookery or gardening - anything except the conflict in the North"



NALGO Yorkshire and Humberside

Photo: PAUL BRESLIN

by Jonathan Hardy

The conflict in the North of Ireland has led to the most developed system of censorship in Europe. Through the threats and checks of 'self'-censorship, Hurd's Broadcasting ban and the disinformation campaigns of the security services, the British public are rarely given the opportunity to consider alternatives to the pious repetitions that pass for explanations.

Troubled Images brought together a film maker, novelist and investigative journalist with a lively audience of 140 to discuss censorship and reporting on Ireland at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds on 3 April. The event was organised by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom with assistance from Nalgo and Yorkshire and Humberside Arts.

Stephen Dorril, author of several books on the British Intelligence services, described how the military first applied to Northern Ireland counter-insurgency techniques derived from military engagements in countries beyond the gaze of the British media, including shoot-to-kill. Finding themselves under media scrutiny in the early 70s, the military devised its policy of 'grey' and 'black' propaganda. The 1980s saw the spectacular exposes of black propaganda by Peter Wright and Colin Wallace, by now we are also familiar with grey propaganda. Dorril described how investigative journalism has declined, especially in newspapers, to the point that very few senior journalists now cover Ireland and the investment in real 'investigations' has almost ceased.

Glenn Patterson, a Belfast born novelist described the difficulties he experienced writing from and about the Protestant community in the North. In a thoughtful, challenging contribution, he said the main hostility he faced was from paramilitaries, Protestant ones in particular, and more widely from a distrust of the word across the North ("whatever you say, say nothing").

The job of the writer, for Patterson, is to find new words in place of slogans; recognising the importance of 'myths' without accepting them permanently. Author of *Burning Your Own* and *Fat Lad*, Patterson sees himself as one of a number of young writers trying to write accurately about Northern Ireland who feel constrained by publishers' assumptions that readers are not interested in the subject.

Acclaimed actor and film-maker, Kenneth Griffith introduced an excerpt from his 1973 film *Hang Out Your Brightest Colours*. Originally commissioned by ATV and subsequently banned by Lew Grade, Griffith, until 1991, was not even allowed a copy of his own film about the life of Michael Collins. Watching a section where Griffith describes the Treaty negotiations, vividly impersonating each character in turn, only revealed more sharply the huge, deadly silence left by the media's denial of explanation about the conflict today.

In the ensuing discussion, Glenn Patterson, said "murder often starts down the line, as it were, with the taking away of a person's voice". Once the voice is denied, it becomes easier to dehumanise, even kill a person. A recent opinion poll, conducted after the Warrington bombing, showed that over 50 per cent continue to support British withdrawal. Yet in all the national newspaper coverage following that awful disaster, a journalist calculated that only 2 column inches were given to the case for British disengagement. British government censorship and media bias have worked in deadly congruence to suppress information on Ireland. An independent and diverse media is one of the prerequisites for real public debate about Britain's territorial claim and about a conflict which has cost thousands of lives, eroded civil rights and cost over £30 billion since the start of 'The Troubles'.

FUTURE OF THE

BBC

The Government's Green Paper, The Future of the BBC, invited comments and the CPBF response, prepared by Tom O'Malley and Jo Treharne, is printed here.

Public Service Broadcasting

Public service broadcasting in the UK should be protected and strengthened. This can be achieved through the realisation that all channels have a responsibility to provide a wide range of programming, not just the BBC and Channel 4. For the broadcasting system to operate in a manner which serves the public and not just the market, all broadcast output should have positive public service obligations.

Public Service broadcasting should be defined as a set of activities which cover the whole range of potential output and which are not confined to those services which the market cannot or will not provide.

BBC functions and organisation

The BBC should remain a major in-house producer of programming. This means maintaining and developing local and regional production centres.

The Producer Choice system should be abolished. The logic of Producer Choice is to erode the pool of established skills within the BBC.

This will mean that, as a commissioning outfit, the BBC will reach a stage where it is no longer able to sustain a culture of innovation and challenging, quality programming. In addition, we believe that it is illogical, unreasonable and inconsistent to expect the BBC to provide "programme services ... that are or might be at risk in a purely commercial market" through an internal commissioning system that is solely determined by the market.

In terms of access to independent programme makers, it is our view that the current system of legislation (the 25% Rule) has failed to significantly stimulate diversity, and has promoted fragmentation, casualisation and low wages. The system also has serious implications for equal opportunities within the broadcasting industry, making monitoring of appointment and working practices much more difficult.

There should be no fixed quota for independent production for the BBC. Independent production should not become the predominant system of production in the BBC, nor should it exist and be sustained at the expense of the centres of excellence that already operate inside the BBC.

Trade Unions must have a continued recognised role in representing people within the organisation.

Financing the BBC

The licence fee should be retained as the main source of income for the BBC. This would mean that the BBC should not seek to generate additional income through subscription or advertising.

The government must ensure that the licence fee can remain a viable source of income for the BBC. This means asking questions and conducting extensive research into how the changing environment in broadcasting may affect viability in terms of rising costs, public attitudes and the emergence of other payment methods. So far, these questions have not been addressed.

In addition, the government must ensure that the second mainstay of public service broadcasting finance - a regulated system of advertising on commercial channels - is also upheld and properly managed. Commercial broadcasters should be free to compete for viewers, not simply for revenue.

Accountability

The BBC should be founded on an Act of Parliament, as is the rest of the broadcasting system, and not on a Royal Charter. This would be a significant step towards democratising the debate on public service broadcasting in the UK.

The Board of Governors should be elected. The exact method for election could be arrived at after a full public debate. The method for election should ensure that the range of candidates are representative of wider UK society.

There should be a clear outline of the responsibilities of the Board of Governors. This should be enshrined in the Act of Parliament, which should relate mainly to the responsibility of the board to oversee the strategic role of the BBC. This should include the obligations to provide a universally accessible service, to inform, educate and entertain, to fully reflect the variety of cultures that exist in the UK (ie in respect of gender, race, sexuality, disability, age religion etc), to maintain strict editorial independence, to promote investigative journalism, to promote access to programme making for members of the public, to sustain a culture of internal industrial democracy and external accountability, and to operate an equal opportunities policy.

In terms of regional accountability,



CPBF Secretary Tom O'Malley

there should be a system of regionally elected Advisory Boards, with powers to represent the range of interests in their areas. This should include representation of the local workforce within the BBC. The government have stated that this type of administration may lead to "confused responsibilities" (as stated in the Green paper), however, they have offered no evidence to support this, and it is our opinion that this is purely an attempt to keep a firm centralised control on the direction of the BBC. If the BBC is to be truly accountable and representative, then the viewing public must be free to play a part in electing who they wish to see advising the BBC.

The 1990 Broadcasting Act and the BBC

Through legislation contained in the 1990 Broadcasting Act, the government has established pressures within the broadcasting environment which will drive standards down and make it extremely difficult for the BBC to operate as a major public service broadcaster.

The Act removed key obligations to provide public service broadcasting from the Channel 3 companies and Independent Local Radio. These obligations are now confined to the BBC and to Channel 4 - which still need to compete for audience share to ensure their viability as broadcasters. It is our view that this will prove to be a formidable task, and one which the BBC may not succeed in achieving.

The Act prioritises a market-driven system of broadcasting, thus confining the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, to the margins of that system. If the government truly believe that the BBC should continue as a "major broadcasting organisation", then they need to completely re-examine their approach to broadcasting.

This process should include re-examining: the nature of public service obligations; auctioning of franchises; the readvertisement of contracts; the removal of 'light touch regulation'; the introduction of measures to limit cross-ownership, promote diversity of ownership and to inject democratic accountability into the whole system.

The document concludes that policies

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BRITAIN'S MEDIA THE BALANCE SHEET

Session One: Interference on the Air-Waves

Shadow National Heritage Secretary Ann Clywd has been in the news lately, first with her attack on Granada Television and later on the Yorkshire Television takeover of Tyne Tees, expressing her concern over franchise commitments being broken.

She launched the CPBF Conference with a summary of the Labour Party response to the government's Green Paper, *The Future of the BBC*. She emphasised, "Media policy is extremely important for the Labour Party and something we need to give a lot of attention to."

The response, *Putting the Citizen at the Centre of British Broadcasting*, dissects the impact of Conservative broadcasting policy and the Broadcasting Act. 10,000 jobs have been lost since the 1988 White Paper on the future of broadcasting, and the commercial broadcasting system "is now concerned primarily with delivering mass audiences to advertisers," she said.

On ownership and control of the media "no other country in the world allows such latitude" and after the year moratorium "the future ownership and control of ITV companies hangs in the balance," she said.

She strongly condemned government interference over many years in the BBC and told the story how she was prevented by the Sergeant at Arms from showing *Zircon* in the House of Commons. She managed to arrange the showing in the TGWU HQ, only to be condemned by Ron Todd for "bringing the union into disrepute."

The consequence of political interference has been to "weaken public confidence in the BBC" and "besmirch its reputation for impartiality and independence."

Her vision of the BBC is one which is open and accountable, with a viewers' and listeners' council, devolution of powers and budgets to the regions and the Board of Governors scrapped in favour of a Board of Trustees appointed by an all-party select committee.

BECTU President and CPBF Chair, Tony Lennon, emphasised the "massive sea change in the broadcasting industry" but challenged the widespread view that technological change and the proliferation



Ann Clywd, Shadow National Heritage Secretary



NUJ General Secretary, John Foster

of channels would lead to more choice and greater diversity of ideas and expression.

John Foster, NUJ General Secretary, also highlighted the damage to the broadcasting industry, saying that an award-winning lighting engineer with TVS now sells tickets on Winchester station; "That's what we're doing to an industry - destroying the skills and talent."

Discussing attacks on media trade union organisation and media freedom, he said, "Ethical issues are important and we must do something about them, but the only area they can be raised is in broadcasting. They can't be raised in the same way in newspapers where the pressure from owners and editors excludes raising issues."

Session Two: Press Reform: Threats and Promises

Clive Soley MP paid tribute to the work of the CPBF in drafting, lobbying and campaigning on his Press Freedom and Responsibility Bill and argued that the debate had to move forward now that his Bill had been talked out: "How do you regulate the press, who for and for what purpose?" he asked.

Sparks flew in the contribution from Ray Snoddy where he attacked the CPBF for having anything to do with statutory controls of the media, and linked Clive Soley's Bill with the same attack on the press as the Calcutt proposals. He argued that the press had cleaned up its act, and whilst four years ago he would have been for statutory control he was against it now. He said the reason the Channel 4 *Hard News* series finished was because there weren't enough press horror stories around to expose.

CPBF National Secretary, Tom O'Malley, gave a spirited defence of the reasons why the case for statutory control was strong, citing evidence from the Press Complaints Commission's own report on the number of complaints about inaccurate reporting which they received.

Third Session: The Sharp End: Investigative Reporting

Author Stephen Dorril illustrated some of the problems he faces in his investigations into the security services. His book, *The Silent Conspiracy: Inside the Intelligence Services in the 90s*, due for publication the following week, had been withdrawn. Two pages in the book would have to be cut out and replaced. This, he said, was in addition to the number of changes he had had to make as the lawyers went through it



Ray Snoddy of *Hard News* argues against press regulation.

Photos: SIMON ASHMORE FISH



Author Stephen Dorril at the sharp end

for libel or breaches of the Official Secrets Act.

Other pressures against the publication of work like his included the fact that book publishing was now concentrated in the hands of a few conglomerates, and that apart from the *Financial Times* there weren't any newspapers which had teams of journalists involved in long term, serious investigative research. Many had moved away to work for TV current affairs.

Charles Tremayne, Executive Producer, *World in Action* gave a frank assessment of the pressures on current affairs. "There are two conflicting demands - one, to make

programmes with strong investigative journalism and the other to deliver a solid audience share," he said.

Some subjects drew large audiences. *A World in Action* on personal finance had 10.4 million viewers, juvenile crime 11.2million, but a programme on the miners got less than 6 million. In the new world where prime time ratings are important this is an important factor. "I believe that if we don't win this battle *World in Action* won't be there at peak time, and that would be a loss," he said.

CPBF AGM: FOCUS FOR FUTURE ACTIVITY

This year's AGM covered the usual business of electing a new National Council and the financial details, but it also became a very positive forum for discussion on the CPBF's future strategy.

Three aspects were significant: Organisational

The CPBF plans to move its office to a more central location. This will mean easier access for people wanting to use the CPBF book service, as well as involving volunteers more actively.

We're currently negotiating for office space at 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF and, if all goes well, we'll move in July.

Right of Reply/Privacy/Press Freedom

A wide ranging debate on the experience of campaigning for Clive Soley's Bill and what policies we should adopt on privacy legislation, led to a clear commitment to produce a pamphlet clarifying issues and policies. This will be important as the gov-

ernment is now unlikely to introduce privacy legislation until next year.

Ownership and Control

This has always been a core issue for the campaign, and it is now taking on more urgency. It was agreed that the CPBF would commit resources, and make bids to unions for financial support, to update the media ownership information, publish a popular pamphlet and build support for limits of media ownership.

FREE PRESS July/August issue

This will be a special issue on Labour and the Media containing material on media coverage of trades unions/industrial relations/strikes; the Labour Party and the media as well as media education material and research.

If you are interested in contributing, have any ideas or suggestions or can think of useful material please let us know. We need all material in by June 21 at the latest.

SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY

Granville Williams

SOMETHING had to happen to *The Observer*. For over a year now, as investor confidence in Tiny Rowland's Lonrho conglomerate declined, speculation about a sale grew. Losses of £14.9 million in 1991, followed by stringent cost cuts, still resulted in a 1992 loss of £10 million for the paper. And the paper's circulation has declined remorselessly from a high point of 1.1 million during *The Times* strike of the early 80s to a March 1993 figure of 504,331.

The era of the indulgent proprietor, willing to sustain the losses because the paper provided a pliant vehicle for him to pursue his campaigns, or ingratiate himself with despots overseas by influencing the paper's reporting, came to an end.

A revitalised *Observer* under its new owners, *The Guardian* and *Manchester Evening News*, was the solution many people wanted and Lonrho's decision to accept a bid of about £25 million for the title rather than an estimated £30 million bid from Newspaper Publishing (owners of *The Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*) was widely welcomed. The view was that a takeover by Newspaper Publishing would almost certainly have led to *The Observer's* closure.

Independent on Sunday editor, Ian Jack, assured his readers (2 May) that it would have made no sense to kill off *The Observer*, but rather what was envisaged was "a union (which) could only be successfully achieved with the help of many *Observer* staff."

All of this is academic now, but what is certain is that *The Guardian* will have to move fast to cauterise the £10 million annual loss, and that will mean job losses across the board to reduce overheads.

We will either see a hard fought, even bloody, circulation battle for the liberal quality Sunday market, or that ground will be abandoned by the *IoS* as it moves right. The *Independent on Sunday* circulation has gone up, mostly at the expense of *The Observer* (March 1993 figures for *The Independent* were 387,511) but *The Guardian* has the financial resources and marketing expertise which, if it wins the battle, could put the *IoS* on the ropes and threaten the financial viability of *The Independent*.

Also the nature of Newspaper Publishing has changed. The principle that no shareholder could hold more than a 15% stake was established when the paper first appeared in October 1986, but it's gone now.

The Spanish and Italian newspapers, *El Pais* and *La Repubblica* became shareholders in 1990. They recently got agree-

ment to increase their stake to 50%.

All of this is a far cry from the glittering prospect offered in the mid-80s, post Wapping union-busting period when newspapers reduced their workforces and overheads, whilst the Thatcher boom stimulated advertising.

The seductive scenario went something like this. Technology would promote free speech because lower costs would permit the blooming of a hundred paper flowers, with national titles tailored to different types of reader and advertiser. Full colour printing would challenge television for big advertisers' budgets and computers would permit later deadlines and localised editions.

It hasn't happened, of course. New titles, including *The Sunday Correspondent*, were launched. Its first issue was on September 17, 1989 and it closed, in spite of backing from *The Guardian* (£3 million) and *Chicago Tribune* (£10 million), in December 1990. One reason for the paper's failure was the launch of *Independent on Sunday* early in 1990 when it was evident that the readership wasn't there for two new quality Sundays.

The notion that a national newspaper could be launched relatively cheaply was nonsense; launch costs of tens of millions were required, and as much again to sustain it.

The other important aspect is that the Sunday quality market is dominated by the *Sunday Times* with a circulation in March of 1,264,142 and supported by the enormous resources of Rupert Murdoch's *News International*.

Cross media promotion (posters, television commercials), extra supplements creating a monster paper packed with advertising and generating profit to pour back into promotional activity are creating a situation where competitors will be at a great disadvantage.

Murdoch and *Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil must be rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of the competition battling it out whilst they get on with the job of making the paper unassailable. The excessive dominance of *News International* in so many areas of our media, including Sunday newspapers, is deeply worrying, and it is time to raise again the democratic arguments for limits on cross media ownership.

Market forces don't provide diversity of ideas and expression; governments have to ensure that there are ownership limits to make it possible.

REVIEW

A DEADLY JOB:

**THE 1993 REPORT
REPORTERS SANS FRONTIERES**
Published by John Libbey £15.00

At the May press launch for the RSF 1993 Report Channel 4 presenter Jon Snow underlined the changing and increasingly hazardous conditions of a journalist reporting war and disorder. In his own reporting from Nicaragua and El Salvador he explained how journalists went to great lengths to identify combatants that they were journalists. In former Yugoslavia, where 12 of the 61 journalists killed worldwide in 1992 were, it would be a highly dangerous practice. Such openness would invite the sniper's bullet. "The war in former Yugoslavia has now claimed more journalists' lives than the whole of the Vietnam War in 15 years," he said.

Ivor Gabor, at the same event, used the phrase 'envelopmental journalism' to describe the state of press freedom in the Philippines, where in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation, four journalists were murdered, an attempt was made on the life of another and others were sent to prison. The phrase describes the way journalists receive news releases in envelopes containing money as an inducement to publish; if they do, money will come again with the next news release. Journalists who resist such blatant manipulation by the rich and powerful then become targets for retaliation.

The RSF 1993 Report is an essential reference source for any institution where media studies is taught, or for anyone concerned with media freedom. And when politicians come on state visits to this country it's worth checking what the state of press freedom in their home country is by looking at the entry. Take Turkey, for example, a member of NATO and keen to become a member of the EC. Its record in 1992 was appalling, with 12 journalists assassinated by mystery attackers, 121 seizures of publications and 10 journalists in jail.

■ Copies of the 1993 Report by Reporters Sans Frontieres can be purchased from the CPBF (£15.00 plus £1.50 p&p) It is one of the titles in our new mail order media catalogue which is now being prepared.



FLEET STREET CONFERENCE CALL

Former Fleet Street, like the 'former Soviet Union' is dispersed in all directions and facing a period of dramatic change. Events at Mirror Group Newspapers and the Guardian takeover of the *Observer* are the most recent upheavals in the turbulence which has buffeted national newspapers since the mid-eighties.

An important conference, *The End of Fleet Street? The National Newspaper Industry In Perspective*, is planned for February 1994 at City University, London. The conference, organised in association with the CPBF, will cover aspects of the newspaper industry from around 1880-1990 and topics will include:

- * changing definitions of the 'Fourth Estate'

- * the transformation of industrial relations

- * Journalism and the 'free press'

Events in Fleet Street/Wapping in 1986-87 will form a focal point to the conference.

The conference will be of interest to academics, students, practitioners and campaigners and will have both academic style papers, discussions and workshops. If you would like to contribute send a short synopsis (approx 350 words) of your topic area to: Michael Bromley, Department of Journalism, The City University, Northampton Square, London EC1V 0HB.

NUJ CONFERENCE: Press Freedom Policies

The National Union of Journalists has a vital role to play in defending and extending press freedom in Britain and Ireland (the union's membership covers the whole of Ireland) but that role has been weakened in recent years.

The union has been through a very bad patch, due partly to self-inflicted injuries. Financial mismanagement on a monumental scale threatened the union with extinction two years ago (it still has debts of £1.5m and a £1m overdraft) and the fiasco surrounding the election of General Secretary Steve Turner in July 1990 and his subsequent dismissal, costing the union £66,000, are two examples from the recent past.

At the same time the NUJ has, like all unions, been hit by the same wave of anti-union laws. Derecognition of the union on many national newspapers followed Warrington and Wapping, and a new assault on NUJ organisation in the magazine industry is being attempted by companies like Morgan-Grampian (owned by

United Newspapers), Reed and IPC.

But this year's Annual Delegate Meeting of the NUJ, held on an April weekend against a backdrop of Daily Mirror sackings, an impromptu march to MGN newspapers and the news breaking about the *Observer* takeover, saw a new spirit of confidence in the union's future. In part, this is because a new General Secretary, John Foster, (one of the founders of the CPBF back in 1979) can point to good news.

The union's accounts showed a £16,000 surplus compared with a £513,000 deficit the previous year; membership is on the increase, and attempts by the former General Secretary, Steve Turner, to further undermine the union, by setting up the breakaway British Association of Journalists in May 1992, have been thwarted.

The union's policy priorities, in defence of union organisation and members, got clear support at the conference. An example of this is the Reed Elsevier Rights at

Work Campaign, Freedom, a joint GPMU/NUJ initiative. Reed Elsevier is the result of a merger between UK publisher Reed and Dutch publisher Elsevier to form one of the world's largest publishing conglomerates, employing 25,000 workers across 43 countries.

The Freedom campaign highlights the anti-union stance of Reed in Britain which denies 11,000 UK staff the right to have wages and working conditions negotiated by a union, whilst Reed Elsevier employees in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe have these rights protected by law.

The ADM also passed a number of important resolutions on media freedom, the right of reply and media ownership. The media ownership resolution was particularly important, in terms of CPBF campaigning priorities, because it instructed the union "to campaign particularly through its affiliation to the CPBF and the TUC for the introduction of legislation limiting the ownership of newspapers by big publishing groups."

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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	£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
			FP74
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**CPBF NATIONAL COUNCIL
1993-1994**

- BECTU - Tony Lennon, Yossi Bal, Turlough McDaid, Kathy Darby
- GPMU - John Beck, Mike Hicks, Alf Parrish, Terry Henderson
- NUJ - Pat Healy, Tim Gopsill, Mike Jempson, Alex Pascall
- NALGO - Vi Scotter, David Cooper
- NCU - Linda Quinn
- MSF - Paul Cockerell
- WOMEN'S SECTION -**
Helen Kuttner
- INDIVIDUALS -**
Tom O'Malley, Jeremy Gardner, Martin Hughes, Ann Pointon, Christian Wolmar, Mick Gosling
- OTHER ORGANISATIONS -**
Granville Williams (CPBF North), Jeremy Gardner, Jonathan Hardy

● *Future of the BBC; continued from page 3*
being pursued by the government towards the BBC are fundamentally flawed. We believe that recent and current government policy has, in effect, sold out on public service broadcasting principles and has replaced them with a market driven system of broadcasting. This approach will eventually lead to the demise of the BBC.
There should be a full public inquiry into the future of public service broadcasting and the BBC before any decisions are made about the future. This can be done by extending the present charter by one or two years. All the submissions from the public should be listed and made publicly accessible and an analysis of their contents and conclusions should be published by the government. We do not accept that it is proper for a review of a major public institution such as the BBC to be conducted in the closed manner favoured by the government.

**Open
government
doesn't extend
to medicine**

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change was made, Giles Radice dropped the clause. The British Pharma Group promptly issued a new briefing stating that the amended bill would "would wreak real and lasting damage to the industry" and lead British companies to "cease to use the UK MCA".
Yet, British pharmaceutical companies have been using the American Freedom of Information Act to obtain precisely the kind of information they are not prepared to see disclosed in Britain. British FOI requesters include Glaxo, ICI, Pfizer, Ciba-Geigy, Wellcome Foundation, Fisons, Smith Kline Beecham and Boots. Even the Department of Health's Medicines Control Agency has used the FOI Act, according to the US Food and Drug Administration!
At about the same time Mark Fisher's Right to Know Bill - which would give Britain a freedom of information act - was going through its Committee stage in the Commons. The minister, Robert Jackson, made it clear that the government could not support the Bill. It wanted to make more information available - but only on a discretionary basis.
However, there were growing signs of support from Conservatives on the committee for FOI legislation. In a highly significant move the committee rejected an amendment that would have given ministers the freedom to withhold information by issuing unchallengeable certificates that disclosure would damage defence, security or international relations. The amendment was based on an existing provision in the Australian FOI act. But the committee, including all but



Morris Frankel: It's a secret - official!

one of the Conservative members, rejected the amendment - and it was defeated 12-1.
Although the Bill has now completed its Committee stage, it is not clear whether it will have enough parliamentary time to go any further. However, the prospects for a future FOI bill attracting substantial Conservative support now look better than ever.

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