

FREE PRESS

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IT IS ... , BUT WILL IT ALWAYS BE ... ?

The future of THE INDEPENDENT

by Granville Williams

NONE OF the options for the future of *The Independent* are particularly happy ones for those who believe in a pluralistic and independent press. The roots of *The Independent's* problems are undercapitalisation, some poor, and increasingly panicky, management decisions and, of course, the recession. In 1990, when circulation was hovering around 400,000 and the newspaper became strongly profitable for the first and only time, Andreas Whittam Smith, the editor, and his two co-founders, Stephen Glover and Matthew Symonds, made the fundamental mistake of launching the Sunday rather than consolidating on the excellent performance of the daily.

It was a decision made for dubious motives, such as Whittam Smith's personal dislike of the *Sunday Correspondent* and his desire to empire build. Although the *Independent on Sunday* was – and still is – a good newspaper, it sapped the energy of a small company, stunting the growth of *The Independent* as it diverted resources and editorial effort. Cuts were soon inevitable, stimulating the two year decline of the daily from nearly 400,000 to 300,000.

Of course, it is easier to see that with hindsight than in 1990 when *The Independent's* management was worried that a successful *Correspondent* would eventually merge with *The Guardian*, giving both papers strength and stability. But a little bit of thought and delay to allow the *Correspondent* to sink or swim without the added competition of a fifth quality Sunday into a crowded market,

would have been wiser. To be fair, *The Independent* was unlucky, launching the Sunday as the recession began. There is, too, an element of fashion in that *The Independent* is no longer the trendy newspaper to be seen reading, and both titles have remained fourth in their respective markets.

Then, with circulation declining, this year *The Independent* has seen two redesigns, the first totally spurious and disastrously bad, the second a probably necessary decision to go for colour but which had the unwanted side effect of creating two arbitrarily divided sections. The failure in the spring to gain control of *The Observer*, allowing *The Guardian* to set up a seven day operation, followed quickly by *The Times's* aggressive decision to reduce its price to 30p, meant some form of refinancing was inevitable.

A new chief executive, Patrick Morrissey, replaced Whittam Smith who should have left much earlier to concentrate on editing, rather than giving his inexperienced deputy, Symonds, effective control and allowing him to take the paper to the right, just as the zeitgeist, notwithstanding the 1992 election result, began to turn against the free marketeers. Many journalists on the paper see *The Independent's* gung-ho support for the Gulf War as the turning point. Morrissey, with uncanny skill, promptly ensured further circulation decline by increasing the price of the daily to 50p and the Sunday to the threshold £1 mark.

The extra cash was never going to be enough, given the continuing recession. Refinancing is inevitable if the titles are to be saved. Whittam Smith long

favoured getting extra money from the two Mediterranean shareholders, *El Pais* and *La Repubblica*, who between them have over a third of the shares. Morrissey favours drastic cuts in a budget already so pared to the bone that the newspaper at times looks like a collection of news agency reports. Associated, United, the Telegraph and Mirror Group are all in discussions with the board.

The worst option is *The Telegraph*. That would not only risk the future of the titles since continued losses would inevitably result in merger, but would give the new combined group around 60 per cent of the daily quality newspaper market. *The Independent* would become a pawn in a war between Conrad Black and Rupert Murdoch. Associated and United, owners of the *Mail* and the *Express* respectively, might promise editorial independence, but that's as convincing as their claim that they treat all parties at the general election even-handedly. Mirror Group, staffed by ex-Murdoch Rotweilers is no soft option either but at least it would have an interest in preserving editorial independence. Pearson, the publisher of the *FT* and the best hope for the paper's independence, has been resolutely uninterested.

As we went to Press, Mirror Group Newspapers seem to be the main contender in a deal which would give Spanish and Italian newspaper groups 15% of the shares, Mirror Group 40%, with the remaining shares held by the founder directors. Andreas Whittam-Smith, Matthew Symonds and Adrian O'Neill, the three founder directors are associated with the bid. ■

SELLING THE BEEB? Helen Kuttner explains the 1994 BBC Campaign

THE LAST decade and a half has seen a strong attack by the Conservative government on public service broadcasting. It was the 1990 Broadcasting Act which reorganised UK broadcasting around market driven principles, and which will allow the swallowing up of ITV regional companies by the bigger fish, such as Carlton and Yorkshire TV.

But it isn't just Channel 3 which is under threat. The BBC is on the verge of some of the most important changes in its history. Government interference in recent years has resulted in censorship, devaluation of the licence fee, loss of staff and resources, and the appointment of governors and management whose language and actions imply the BBC is more a business than a public service corporation.

A Government White Paper on the BBC is due to be published by the Heritage Ministry in 1994. The Government's Green Paper The Future of the BBC and the BBC's own document Extending Choice - the BBC's role on the New Broadcasting Age already suggest that there is much for the public to be concerned about. A wide public debate is needed in order to influence Government policy in the run up to the BBC's Charter renewal in 1996.

The CPBF is launching a campaign on the BBC in 1994 to publicise the changes that have taken place, our fears for the future as a result of these changes, our views on how the BBC as a public service broadcaster should be



The CPBF pamphlet *Selling the Beeb* outlines in detail the changes which have taken place in the BBC over the last 15 years, and is available from the CPBF office, priced £3.50 incl.p&p.

run, and our ideas for positive action. We plan a wide distribution of leaflets explaining the main points of the BBC campaign, along with postcards for the public to send to their MPs and to the Heritage Secretary, Peter Brooke. We hope to involve trades unions, community groups, MPs and media personalities, in order to put the BBC and public service broadcasting in the forefront of public awareness.

If you would like to get involved in the BBC Campaign, please contact the CPBF office on 071 278 4430.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE BBC

After less than a year in the job the BBC's director of corporate affairs and PR, Pamela Taylor, is leaving. One story is that the Director General was displeased with the poor press he got during her year at the BBC. A difficult job for her really, after the string of Birt own goals, from his tax arrangements to the horror stories surrounding Producer Choice and his awful gobbledegook briefings to the BBC staff.

But there is another question. If Pamela Taylor received between £80,000-£100,000 what did the Lowe Bell Communications Consultancy do for its annual retainer of £350,000? This modest sum is to be reduced by at least £100,000 as part of the BBC cost-cutting exercise but the question remains, what does Sir Tim Bell do for this?

Bell was Saatchi and Saatchi chairman when the company was responsible for the media campaign run by the Conservative Party in the 1979 and 1983 elections, Margaret Thatcher's trusted television consultant and adviser to Ian MacGregor during the 1984-85 pit strike. Saatchi and Saatchi also published in October 1984 *Funding the BBC - The Case for Allowing Advertising*.

PR Week (November 19, 1993) gives one answer. Bell's consultancy "continues to advise on corporate communications and the charter renewal." It's puzzling how someone like Bell can advise on policies to defend public service broadcasting when his track record so far suggests hostility to the very concept.

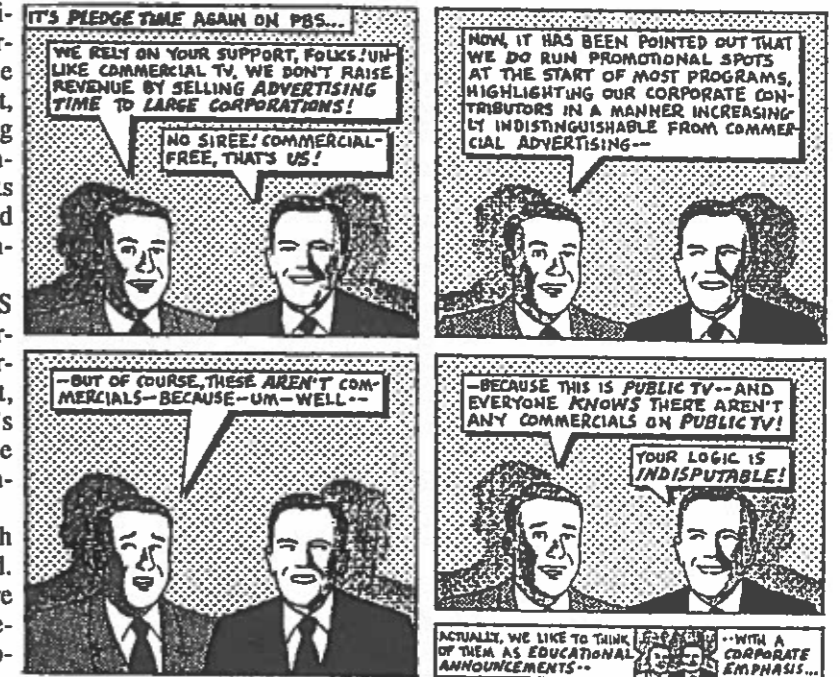
THE BROKEN PROMISE OF PUBLIC TELEVISION IN THE US

FROM THE beginning the mission of public television has been to provide an alternative to commercial television and to reflect the diversity of the American public. The Carnegie Commission report, which led Congress to pass the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, argued that public television programming "can help us see America whole, in all its diversity," serve as "a forum for controversy and debate," and "provide a voice for groups in the community that may otherwise be unheard."

An excellent issue of *Extra!*, the journal of the US media pressure group, FAIR, documents the conservative assault on PBS. As a result of reduced federal appropriations corporate funding is dominant, donating \$90 million or 30% of the funds to PBS's National Programme Service, more than all the funds from federal agencies and foundations combined.

The result is that the clear principles which launched public television are now compromised. When corporations underwrite programmes they are entitled to "enhanced underwriter acknowledgements" or can ensure that awkward issues in programmes are ignored.

For example, an eight part series on oil, *The Prize*, managed to exclude critics of the oil industry and rely on oil executives,



officials from the US and OPEC, conventional business historians and conservative think tank analysts for interviewees.

Bringing it all back home

These quotes are from a powerful speech by Michael Tracey, Director of the Centre for Mass Media Research at the University of Colorado to 350 broadcasters and politicians at the EBU Conference in Brussels.

"Living in the USA has given me at least some insight into the bizarre world of television of the future. What is offered there, and what is being planned is quite probably your future. It is not a pretty sight.

It is one in which news and current affairs have been debased, where the subjects of talk shows are an obsessive picking away at the sores on the face of society, where Oprah Winfrey and Geraldo Rivera and Phil Donahue and a thousand clones reign

supreme as they interview mothers who ran off with their daughters boyfriends. It is a television culture in which voyeurism and pleasure at watching others pain in an endless cacophony of so-called reality television has become a major televisual form.

Where the single, high quality drama is but a misty, dim memory. Where children's television is a new form of child abuse....It is in short a mess, and the single most powerful argument for public broadcasting."

"I am more than a little troubled, sometimes even appalled, by the importing of the language of the market inside the walls of public broadcasting, where one hears talk of internal markets, zero-budgeting, producer choice, the whole cacophony of technospeak.

Whatever you do to describe your financial procedures do anything, but don't call them 'a market' because you cannot employ the language without also importing the philosophy which constitutes its meaning."

"It is somewhat hypocritical that at the very same moment that public broadcasters are being told to reduce their size we see the creation of huge commercial enterprises gobbling up ever more of the planet's culture and journalistic life.

Of course the argument makes eminent sense when viewed from the offices of say, TCI, or News Corporation or Fininvest.

They can only succeed if you are reduced."

CAMPAIGNING IN 1994

Media challenges will come fast and furious in 1994, and the CPBF has to be there influencing ideas and policies for a diverse, democratic and accountable media.

■ Press Freedom vs Press Privacy

Heritage Minister Peter Brooke has promised that the government will publish its long-awaited White Paper review of press self-regulation early in the New Year.

■ The BBC

The National Heritage report on the BBC appeared in December 1993, and the government's own plans are due to be published in the Spring. The CPBF wants to ensure the maximum publicity and debate on the future of the BBC.

■ Media and Ireland

The possibility of peace in Northern Ireland raises the urgent issue of media reporting of Northern Ireland. Ireland has Section 31, Britain its Broadcasting Ban, and it seems clear that part of any peace process must be the ending of reporting restrictions. See feature on p7

■ Racism and the Media

Local elections will lead to renewed interest in how the media report racism. The BNP is likely to stand in several seats, and to use media opportunities to promote racist policies.

■ Ownership and Control of the Media

Who owns the media isn't just of academic interest. An important CPBF project, researching the ownership of the media in Britain and Europe will result in the publication of a poster and pamphlet, and the organisation of a conference in June 1994.

YOU CAN HELP

All of this activity will strain our resources to the limit. If you or your organisation are not affiliated, PLEASE join the CPBF. If you can send a donation, or standing order to the CPBF, ring 071 278 4430 and we will send you a form.

CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM

MAJOR CONFERENCE ON 'THE END OF FLEET STREET'

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and City University Department of Journalism are organising a conference on 'The End of Fleet Street? The National Newspaper Industry in Historical Perspective' at City University, London on 5 February.

The aim of the conference is to take a look at Fleet Street's development in this century, up to and including the events of the 1980s, in a way which brings together historians, journalists, printers and campaigners.

It contains sessions on: national newspaper readership; Wapping; Fleet Street and Political Power; and the boundaries of journalism. It will also have sessions focusing on the industry during the 1980s, looking at monopoly, distribution, and the coverage of key issues.

The people giving papers, or involved in the discussions come from academia, journalism and the media trade unions, and include J O Baylen, Virginia Berridge, Stephen Dorril, Robert M Worcester, Michael Harris, S J Taylor, John C Foster, David Murphy and Bob Franklin.

The conference costs £10.00 for CPBF members, or £35 for others. There is a £6 fee for students and the unwaged. There is access for people with disabilities.



Send your registration fee to: Michael Bromley, Department of Journalism, City University, Northampton Square, London EC1V 0HB Tel 071 477 8221/8234 Cheques should be made payable to City University (Fleet Street Conference)

CROSS MEDIA



As we go into 1994, with the debates on cross-media ownership intensifying daily, we thought it might be timely to compare patterns of press ownership and control at the moment, with the patterns in 1991, writes Jo Treharne

PERCENTAGE SHARE – CIRCULATION

By Title	Daily 1991	Daily 1993-4
Sun	25.2	27.27
Daily Mirror/Record	25.4	23.29
Daily Mail	11.7	12.31
Daily Express	10.7	10.07
Daily Star	6	5.31
Today	3.3	3.98
Daily Telegraph	7.3	7.38
The Times	2.8	3.18
The Guardian	2.8	3.18
The Independent	2.7	2.24
Financial Times	2	2.1

	Sunday 1991	Sunday 1993-4
News of the World	28.9	29.74
Sunday Mirror	17	16.31
The People	14.1	12.54
Mail on Sunday	11.7	12.22
Sunday Express	9.8	10.39
Sunday Sport	2.2	1.51
Sunday Times	7.1	7.89
Sunday Telegraph	3.4	3.94
Observer	3.5	3.21
Independent on Sunday	2.3	2.27

OWNERSHIP

In July 1991, Free Press printed an article entitled 'Fighting Media Monopoly' including as a reference the circulation figures and percentage shares of all the national newspapers.

As we go into 1994, with the debates on cross-media ownership intensifying daily, we thought it might be timely to compare patterns of ownership and control at the moment, with the patterns in 1991.

Firstly, a note about our '1994' figures. Unlike the 1991 figures (Jan-June 1991) these are based on the daily average circulations throughout the month of November 1993 – and therefore may not be an absolutely accurate reflection of the trends (it is more accurate to take the average daily sales across a period of six months).

Circulation overall has declined dramatically since 1991, from 16,603,242 to 13,991,182 in 1994 – a reduction of almost 16 per cent. News International have increased their market share by over 3 per cent on a daily basis, and by 1.6 per cent on Sundays. This would appear to be mainly at the expense of the Daily Mirror, although the Daily Star (Express Newspapers) has also taken a battering – with sales down by over 15 per cent. It should be noted that MGN's market share is being substantially propped up by sales of the Daily Record in Scotland, where sales of around 754,000 carry MGN over the magic 3 million mark, and almost within spitting distance of The Sun.

The principle ownership change occurred in 1993, when the Guardian and Manchester Evening News bought The Observer from Lonrho for £27 million, giving GMEN over a 3 per cent share in the Sunday market. The financially troubled Newspaper Publishing group (The Independent and The Independent On Sunday) has a doubtful future as we go to press, and a New Year take-over of both titles could be in the offing. This will have a serious impact on the patterns of ownership in the 'Quality' sector of the market, with both Associated Newspapers, MGM and United Newspapers expressing an interest.

Source: 'Free Press' issues number 65 July/August 1991, UK Press Gazette 20 December 1993, Mirror Group Newspapers (Daily record circulations).

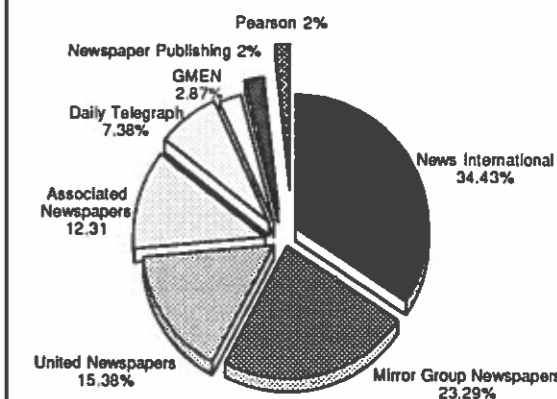
PERCENTAGE SHARE – CIRCULATION

By Owner	Daily 1991	Daily 1993-4	Sunday 1991	Sunday 1993-4
News International	31.3	34.4	36	37.6
Mirror Group Newspapers	25.4	23.3	31	28.9
United Newspapers	16.7	15.4	9.8	10.4
Associated Newspapers	11.7	12.3	11.7	12.2
Daily Telegraph	7.3	7.4	3.5	3.9
GMEN	2.9	2.9	-	3.2
Newspaper Publishing	2.7	2.2	2.3	2.3
Pearson	2	2.1	-	-
Lonrho	-	-	3.5	-
Apollo	-	-	2.2	1.5

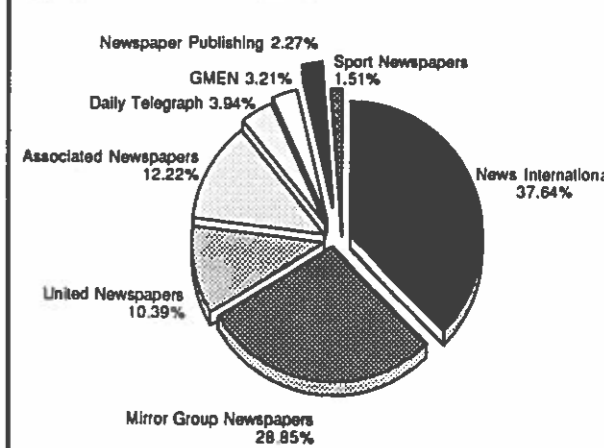
NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP – January 1991 and 1994

1991	1994
NEWS INTERNATIONAL (The Sun, Today, Times, News of the World, Sunday Times)	NEWS INTERNATIONAL (The Sun, Today, Times, News of the World, Sunday Times)
MIRROR GROUP NEWSPAPERS (Daily Mirror, Daily Record, Sunday Mirror, Sunday People)	MIRROR GROUP NEWSPAPERS (Daily Mirror, Daily Record, Sunday Mirror, Sunday People)
UNITED NEWSPAPERS (Daily Express, Daily Star, Sunday Express)	UNITED NEWSPAPERS (Daily Express, Daily Star, Sunday Express)
DAILY MAIL AND GENERAL TRUST (Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday)	DAILY MAIL AND GENERAL TRUST (Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday)
DAILY TELEGRAPH (Daily Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph)	DAILY TELEGRAPH (Daily Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph)
GUARDIAN/MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS (Guardian)	GUARDIAN/MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS (Guardian, Observer)
NEWSPAPER PUBLISHING (Independent, Independent on Sunday)	NEWSPAPER PUBLISHING (Independent, Independent on Sunday)
PEARSON (Financial Times)	PEARSON (Financial Times)
LONRHO (Observer)	SPORT NEWSPAPERS LTD (Sunday Sport)
APOLLO (Sunday Sport)	

% share of daily newspaper circulation (November 1993)



% share of Sunday newspaper circulation (November 1993)



REMEMBERING THE GULF WAR



by Granville Williams

THE WAR between Iran and Iraq, which lasted from September 1980 to August 1988 was the first Gulf War. During it Baghdad increased its military from 243,250 troops to nearly 1,200,000, was armed by the West and raised huge foreign loans, including \$14 billion from Kuwait.

The conflict planted the seeds for the second crisis, when, on August 2 1990 Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait. A recent, and highly recommended film, *Proud Arabs and Texan Oilmen*, reminds us of the real reasons for the Gulf War. The film underlines the point that the oil-hungry United States would not allow a hostile nation to dominate the Gulf and most of the world's oil reserves.

In the course of the crisis nineteen UN resolutions were passed, and the US cynically bribed, bullied and threatened countries into a military coalition, under the United Nations aegis, to pursue the war. Egypt's foreign debt was written off or postponed; Turkey received \$8 billion in military gifts; Zaire received military aid and had debts written off, whilst China got a bank loan and the Soviet Union \$4 billion in loans.

The film also reminds us of the brutal realpolitik driving the US. When the Yemen voted against the UN war resolution 678 on 29 November 1990, the US ambassador walked up to the Yemeni ambassador and said, "That will be the most expensive vote you ever cast." The same day all US aid to the Yemen was cut off and over 1 million Yemenis were expelled from Saudi Arabia immediately.

We see, too, the horrific consequences of the bombing of the Amiriya shelter which stands in sharp contrast to the endlessly replayed video shots of smart bombs hitting sanitised targets with human casualties indiscernible as the screen goes blank.

When the media did attempt to break through such contrived and manipulative images it fell to politicians and journalists to lead the attack. Paul Johnson, in the *Daily Mail*, 18 February, 1991 was outraged by ITN and BBC newsreel footage of the Amiriya bomb shelter devastation:

"Both networks have made themselves instruments, more by stupidity than malice, of Iraqi propaganda." The Sun, ever consistent, talked of the networks thus: "They are a danger to us all. The enemy within."

There are lots of lessons to be learnt from the Gulf conflict and this clear sighted, committed film helps us to disentangle the real issues from the political rhetoric. The triumphalism of US military parades has been replaced by political expediency which requires a humbled Iraq under Saddam Hussein to counterbalance Iran. Kurds in the North and Shi'ites in the Southern marshes are expendable victims of higher geo-political interests.

● *Proud Arabs and Texan Oilmen*, (Platform Films, 51 minutes, 1993) can be purchased on VHS for £17.50 (p&p inc) for individuals; £25.00 (p&p inc) for organisations.

Send orders to Platform Films, 13 Tankerton House, Tankerton Street London WC1H 8HP Tel 071 278 8394.

Letter

Dear Ed

I'm sorry Tim Gopsill found the point of the 'Coach Potato' (FP 76) spread (sic) difficult to comprehend.

My points were a) that far from increasing viewer choice, the Broadcasting Act 1990 has made ratings the central yardstick of broadcast value; b) that chasing advertising revenue is no way of achieving audience satisfaction - let alone expanding choice and quality; and c) that the techniques adopted by broadcasters to hang on to their market share are shifting towards those of the tabloid press.

My attempts to illustrate these points centred on the 'scheduling success' of Michael Grade, which has hauled a few episodes of 'Brookside' closer to the tail end of the Top Fifty ratings and got advertisers thinking seriously about C4 as an option - much to the chagrin of the free marketeers.

Most weeks the top 50 programmes have 8 million plus (Coronation Street boasts around 18 million); most of them are soaps, game shows, and the occasional film (the most popular TV programme of the Eighties was a James Bond film!).

Rarely do news and current affairs programmes ever make it to such dizzy heights. (One edition of News at Ten did make it into the top 50 programmes of the last decade because it was squeezed in during the interval of the Royal Variety Show.)

I trust there will be no groundswell of support for Tim's proposal that membership of CPBF depends upon scheduling skills. We might be handing the last bastion of left-leaning media analysis to Michael Grade and Jeremy Isaacs.

And I do hope Tim didn't hurt himself falling off his stool - he should try slumping in a couch instead.

Mike Jempson, (National Council)

A deadly business

A British trade union delegation to Turkey was arrested last November after visiting the village of Birk in Kurdistan, south east Turkey. The village had been burnt down by the army as part of its scorched earth policy against the Kurdish separatist movement.

With the delegation were two women journalists from *Ozgur Gundem*, the Kurdish supporting daily paper, which has suffered the worst brutality of any newspaper in the world. Nine of its journalists and a dozen other workers have been assassinated in its 17 months of existence. On December 10 Turkish police attacked all of *Ozgur Gundem's* offices, arrested the staff and closed the paper.

The British trade union delegation want to publish their report and have appealed for donations to cover the costs. Send donations to Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre, 92-100 Stoke Newington Road London N16 7XB. Tel: 071 249 6980.

'A REPRESSIVE DEVICE'

The campaign against the broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein and other Northern Ireland groups has been given a great boost by the decision of the Irish government to drop the equivalent ban in the Republic. It was announced on January 11 that Section 31 of Ireland's Broadcasting Act was to be allowed to lapse. Section 31 was the model for the ban introduced by British Home Secretary Douglas Hurd in October 1988. It had been widely predicted that it would be lifted after Michael D Higgins, a well-known opponent in the Irish Labour Party, was appointed to the Arts and Culture ministry in the coalition government.

The Department of National Heritage is conducting a review of the British ban, due for completion in February. This review was announced by the Prime Minister in November, ostensibly with a view to toughening it up by outlawing the practice of "lip-synching". Mr Major professed himself 'outraged' by the practice, favoured by the BBC, of using an actor's voice-over carefully synchronised with the movement of a banned person (Gerry Adam's) lips.

But the review is going wider and covering the whole rationale and operation of the ban. It is understood that even abolition is not ruled out. And this is where politics comes in.

by MARTIN HUGHES

AFTER FIVE years the Broadcasting Ban has failed to reduce the level of violence in Northern Ireland. It has had no effect on banning comment from the IRA and INLA: interviews with members of these organisations were stopped in 1974 when they were declared illegal. Why then has the British Government gone to such lengths to devise and implement such a draconian piece of legislation?

To find out, *Free Press* has spoken to Mitchell McLaughlin, a Sinn Fein Councillor and Chair of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland: "Of the eleven groups affected by the Ban, Sinn Fein is the only legal group with elected representatives; Sinn Fein receives 12 per cent of the vote in Northern Ireland and 40 per cent of the Nationalist vote" said Mr McLaughlin.

"The Broadcasting Ban prevents me, as an elected Councillor, from representing the views of my constituents and of my Party. Apart from the few weeks preceding elections we are also banned from campaigning like any other democratic party. By preventing debate and education, the Ban represents a considerable barrier to the achievement of peace".

Mr McLaughlin is currently challenging the legality of the Ban in the European Courts.

Mark Durkan, Chair of the SDLP in Northern Ireland agrees:

"I see the Ban as a repressive device which restricts public access to a wide range of views; it prevents debate and creates disinformation. The absence of

comment from those affected by the Ban helps to demonise them in the Public eye; conversely, there is a subconscious assumption that whatever is said by groups unaffected by the Ban, must be OK. The Broadcasting Ban is directly aimed at Sinn Fein, in their absence we are frequently asked to speculate on the Sinn Fein perspective, as are journalists."

A peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland can only be achieved through dialogue and understanding, which will create an atmosphere of compromise and consideration. The rhetoric of the "Downing Street Declaration" does nothing to bring this about because it excludes the concerns of those whose Councillors and MPs are gagged.

In the year following the introduction of the Ban, Sinn Fein appearances on British TV fell by 63 per cent and have dwindled further since then. The Ban has created an atmosphere of self censorship amongst broadcasters and has undermined their duty to be impartial. When these effects are combined with

The ban has been made to look even more absurd by the slow but still continuing process towards a settlement in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein has become a 'legitimate' source of news, and the increase in coverage has only drawn attention to the ban.

While the British Government been talking (albeit secretly) to Sinn Fein, it has been preventing viewers and listeners from seeing and hearing the voices of those it has been talking to.

And if Sinn Fein - the only legal political organisation on the 11-strong banned list - is to be brought into formal negotiations, it would be hard to sustain the ban on its spokespersons.

There is no doubt that the censorship provisions in each country have figured in the talks between London and Dublin - though they were not covered in the joint declaration in December. But Michael D. Higgins has confirmed he has had talks with Peter Brooke.

The Irish decision could give the government the cover it needs to get itself off this particularly ridiculous hook. Opponents of the ban, notably the broadcasting unions and the CPBF, have a chance to step up their campaigning. As Martin Hughes reports below, the ban hasn't even achieved what it was supposed to anyway. ■ TIM GOPSILL

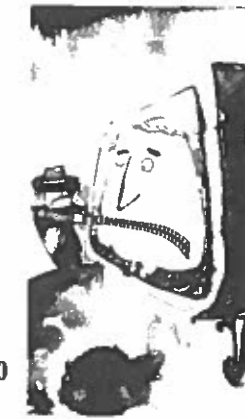
the routine use of misinformation by the RUC and Army, the chances of informed and productive dialogue breaking out, never mind peace, remain remote.

Interference on the Airwaves

by Liz Curtis and Mike Jempson

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"End Ban", Brooke told by Broadcasting Execs

National Heritage Secretary, Peter Brooke, got a clear message from broadcasting executives when, at a private meeting held late last year, they urged him to drop the ban. The delegation was led by Michael Grade, chief executive of Channel 4, with representative from BBC, ITN, ITV and Sky News when John Major called for a review of the ban, and considered tightening restrictions, Michael Grade castigated the ban at an Industrial Society awards ceremony in November: "one of the most ludicrous, outrageous and pointless restrictions on free speech ever imposed in a democracy," he said. After some years of token protest against the ban by broadcasting executives the meeting at the Heritage Department could herald the beginning of more effective opposition. The delegation argued that "it is an intellectual embarrassment that representatives of legal and democratically elected political parties cannot be heard in their own voices on British television."

1994 DIARY EVENTS

The End of Fleet Street?

Conference SAT 5 February
City University, London
Details (page 4)

CPBF NORTH EVENT FILM AND DISCUSSION

Monday 28 February 7.30pm
The Gulf conflict ended at 05.00 GMT on
February 28 1991.

We will be showing *Proud Arabs and Texan Oilmen* at the TUC Regional Building, 30 York Place, Leeds (close to the railway station in city centre). Further details from CPBF North on 0977 646580

CPBF AGM and Conference

Sat 23/Sun 24 April

Put the date in your diary now. The venue and final programme are still being arranged. One idea is to have the event at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield. The venue is close to the M1 and provides a relaxing setting for our AGM. This would allow CPBF members to come with partners and children and enjoy a short break at a Conference centre in the Yorkshire Moors. We would also make arrangements to provide mini-bus or coach transport from London if there was the demand.

The cost for accommodation on Saturday night and food from Saturday through to Sunday lunch would be £35.00 per person. A bargain! Also it would be possible for people living in the region to attend the sessions without staying overnight.

Members will receive a mail-out with full details of the AGM, Programme, speakers and final venue early in February, but please keep the dates free to attend.

NUJ CONFERENCE

Ethics in the Media

Saturday 16 April 1994

Natthe Conference Centre
Britannia Street, London WC1

Further information contact
Lena Calvert at NUJ 071 278 7916

PLATFORM

The Press Complaints Commission and Privacy Laws

by Windsor Holden

IF THE furore surrounding the publication of the Diana ("Gymgate?") photographs did nothing else, it demonstrated quite clearly that David Banks, editor of the Daily Mirror, is even more deserving of the epithet of "arch-buffoon" than Lord McGregor. For Mr Banks' rather touching declaration of his faith in the courts of this land, following his announcement that Mirror Group Newspapers were withdrawing forthwith from the Press Complaints Commission, indicated how little he grasped the extent of possible legislation against the press.

Yet the damage to the credibility of the Press Complaints Commission in the wake of the Mirror Group's (albeit temporary) decision to withdraw might well lead to the implementation of some, if not all, of the recommendations. In addition to proposing legislation against criminal trespass and surveillance devices, and a tort of privacy, Sir David Calcutt proposed that the Commission be scrapped and replaced by a statutory Press Complaints Tribunal.

Such a Tribunal would have the powers to initiate its own investigations without the need for complaints; to restrain publication of material that breached a statutory code of practice; and to impose fines of up to one per cent of the offending newspaper's net annual revenue.

The danger inherent in such a body is that, once in place, its powers would be

abused by those in authority, thus placing in jeopardy not only such tawdry exposes as the Diana photographs, but genuinely investigative journalism. This has been amply demonstrated by the plethora of media curbs that appeared on the statute books under Margaret Thatcher.

It cannot be emphasised strongly enough that Britain is the only country in the Council of Europe which does not possess any positive press legislation, and that while the UK is a party to the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, neither treaty has been incorporated into British law.

Even before the latest debacle, and despite the Commission having reformed its code of conduct, it was difficult to imagine the government responding to overtures from the media regarding positive legislation. Now, the likelihood is some form of statutory body, and stringent privacy laws, a further erosion of such freedoms as remain.

The government were itching for an excuse to legislate (the less said about Matrix Churchill, smear campaigns and the source of Tory Party funds, the better, naturally); well, the Mirror Group has handed them one on a platter. Of course, one man who would have benefited enormously from such legislation was the Mirror Group's late proprietor. One wonders if Mr Banks will appreciate the irony when the government set to work.

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