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WAPPING – A 'Cultural Chernobyl'

by REINER LUYKEN

DIE ZEIT

REINER LUYKEN is Special Correspondent for
the Hamburg paper, Die Zeit

MAYBE I am naive. I find it shocking that the biggest newspaper offices in Britain are shielded by security arrangement worthy of a penitentiary. The array of surveillance equipment at News International's Wapping plant is truly oppressive. I've never seen this anywhere else in the world, not even at *Izvestia* or *Pravda*. The nightmare of the brave new world has become reality in the country which always prides herself as the champion of a free press.

I find it also disturbing that Rupert Murdoch's ideology – the primacy of commercial imperatives over principles like freedom and the right to know – has become an embedded and accepted part of life in this country.

I recently researched a lengthy article for the German weekly *Die Zeit* on News International. It turned from a story about Murdoch's ever growing empire into a story on the pollution which the cultural Chernobyl in Wapping has spread throughout the British media.

Self-censorship is now so commonplace, that journalists admit to it without blushing. The phenomenal power of the new breed of editors – dictators in their own right – goes unchallenged. Sir David English, chairman of Associated Newspapers, seemed surprised when I even questioned his contention, that the raison d'être of a newspaper was the generation of profit.

Ever increasing concentration of ownership is being taken for granted. Peter Preston, editor of *The Guardian*, flatly denies that his publisher's joint campaign with Associated Newspapers and others to remove existing legal constraints on cross-media ownership might clash with his paper's editorial stance.

The commonly used term 'media industry' is itself telling. News and



WAPPING: the most secure industrial site in Britain. Photo: Stefano Cagnoni (Report)

knowledge in the much talked about information society are commodities, arbitrarily exploitable and solely at the mercy of consumer demand. Diversity of opinion has been replaced by the stereotyped logic of greysuited businessmen. I have lived in Britain a long time. Nowadays, I turn to the *International Herald Tribune* for diversity of opinion. The standardization in this country's 'media industry' leads to unification of thinking. News International's director of corporate affairs only expressed what many people in the industry think when she asked: 'Journalism? What's that got to do with it?'

Am I being too harsh? Maybe I am spoilt. *Die Zeit* owes its existence to the soldiers who fought and died on the beaches of Normandy to free Europe of Nazism. The enthusiastic spirit of rediscovered freedom of that time is still alive in the paper. One of the founding editors, Gräfin Dönhoff, now well into her

eighties, and still in her office every day, commented recently on suggestions for it to take a more market orientated approach: 'We have always made a paper which we liked and enjoyed, and we did well with it. Why change?'

Die Zeit has a circulation of just under half a million copies. It doesn't make a fortune for anyone, but it does well for itself. When a new editor-in-chief is appointed it is preceded by a vote. If you come along with a story against the grain – well, that's the way it is; it is going to be accepted.

I am telling you this, not to show off how we do it, but to show that the true spirit of freedom, which Britain brought back to Germany in 1945, can still survive. In Britain too?

Reiner Luyken's articles, 'The World in Rupert Murdoch's Net', appeared in *Die Zeit*, 27 May, 1994. If you read German and would like a copy send \$1.00 to cover photocopying and postage to CPBF.

'GROTTY' BUT IMPORTANT

Bob Franklin reviews a new pamphlet on the life and death of Leeds Other Paper

TONY HARCUP, a former journalist on *Leeds Other Paper*, has written an engaging and informative history of this Leeds based alternative newspaper which began life during the miners strike of January 1974. *LOP*, as the paper was affectionately known, adopted the title of the Chartist newspaper *Northern Star* in 1991 in an effort to lift its readership beyond 2,000.

Like all good stories, the paper's history is replete with both humour and pathos. Harcup recalls, for example, how the metal plate for the first issue was kept flat by placing it under a television with someone standing on it. He also reports the less happy occasion when the financial manager was arrested boarding a boat with the paper's funds.

The paper enjoyed many journalistic successes, including its coverage of the Helen Smith case and its exclusive leaking of the government pamphlet *Protect and Survive*. But regrettably, after twenty years struggling to survive on the iron rations of Thatcherism, the paper finally closed after 820 issues, on 20 January, 1994, twenty years to the day after its first issue.

Everything about *LOP* was alternative. Its alternative organisational structure included open editorial meetings but had no place for an editor. It was bought by an alternative readership who were alienated from mainstream media. It followed an alternative news agenda informed by alternative news values. An internal discussion paper titled 'Views on the News' was explicit - 'Politically, a good news story is one that reinforces the ability of the mass of people to do things for themselves'.

Consequently, *LOP* published different kinds of stories to its rival *Yorkshire Evening Post*. While *YEP* coverage of the Chapeltown area of Leeds, where the city's Afro-Caribbean community is cen-



tered, focused on prostitution, drugs and rioting, *LOP* reports included stories about a new multi-cultural centre, a police community forum, and a proposed dance centre. *LOP*'s coverage of the 1984-85 coal dispute stood in sharp contrast to the hostility of much of the orthodox press. *LOP* was less interested in stories about personalities, whether union or coal board leaders, than in trying to record events as they impacted on the lives of ordinary people. Radio Four's *Wilko's Weekly* described *LOP* as a 'parish magazine of Leeds dispossessed'.

But *LOP*'s alternative agenda prompted opposition and hostility not merely from the local politicians and business people who were so often the focus of its investigatory journalism, but also the racist political right, other local newspapers and occasionally, individuals within the local NUJ.

The demise of the paper reflects the

more general fortunes of the alternative press throughout the 1980s and 1990s. At a time when the independently owned traditional weekly newspapers are being supplanted by corporately owned free papers with little news content, there are few opportunities for the 'dispossessed' to articulate their concerns.

LOP was one such forum; small but not insignificant. A worker on the paper remarked very poignantly, 'it was only a grotty little thing produced on a few sheets of recycled paper that 2,000 people would buy, but that doesn't measure up to the impact it had over the years. It had a profound effect on Leeds in its small way'.

For those interested in the local press, issues concerning the editorial objectives of a local newspaper, or the debate concerning a more democratic ownership of Britain's media, there is much of value in Harcup's account of 'this grotty little thing'.

A *Northern Star*, *Leeds Other Paper* and the *Alternative Press* by Tony Harcup is available from CPBF (North) price £3.50 inc P&P.

Orders to CPBF (North)
24 Tower Avenue, Upton near Pontefract,
West Yorkshire WF9 1EE.



He went on: 'We are particularly pleased to have seen off Virgin Radio, who had proposed that the whole of the remaining band should be used for a new national service. There are now over 100 community radio groups aspiring to establish local radio services for whom the Radio Authority decision gives a green light.'

But the Radio Authority decision didn't please everyone. The *Sun* newspaper had an editorial condemning the authority's 'old fogeys' for supporting 'tinpot' local stations rather than Virgin. The paper's support for Virgin was, of course, entirely unrelated to the fact that Virgin buys its hourly news service from Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB.

1996 the chances of community access to local radio licences should be greatly increased, although anyone applying for a licence will have to show they have the resources to survive the stipulated eight years.

Debate over what should happen to the 105-108 MHz section of FM had been dominated by the 'Get Virgin on FM' campaign. But small operators headed by the Community Radio Association successfully lobbied for part of the waveband to be reserved for new locally-based low-power radio stations.

'This is a turning point in the development of community radio in the UK,' said Steve Buckley, director of the Sheffield-based Community Radio Association.

RADIO - FM IS NOT VIRGIN TERRITORY

by Tony Harcup

Supporters of a more pluralistic media won a significant victory when the Radio Authority rejected Richard Branson's typically brash campaign for Virgin Radio to monopolise the last available section of the stereo FM waveband.

The decision means that from January

BT PHONE HOME

Convergence and control in the new world of telecommunications

by DAVID SOUTER
HEAD OF RESEARCH
NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS UNION

TELECOMMUNICATIONS and broadcasting are converging into a single data transmission industry. The framework within which they are regulated has failed to take this into account and is now out of date.

Both industries have changed enormously in the last decade.

Broadcasting has seen the rise of cable and satellite channels, internationalisation of production and transmission and the redistribution of radio spectrum between a wider range of competing stations.

Telecommunications has been transformed from a national public sector monopoly into a highly competitive private service industry, offering a tremendous range of new services.

Technology has transformed and is transforming both. Each year sees innovation, new research and investment extending the scope and variety of service offering. Telecoms and broadcasting ten years from now will be as different again, as today's industries are from those ten years ago.

Regulation has failed to keep up with these changes, and the future of Britain's broadcasting and communications industries is being prejudiced as a result.

The telecom's regulator OFTEL and the Department of Trade and Industry have barred BT and Mercury, the main telecoms operators in the UK, from conveying broadcast entertainment into households over their telecommunication lines. Instead, they have given the holders of the

country's monopoly cable television franchises a unique right to combine broadcasting and telephone in this way.

The aim of this policy - known as cable asymmetry, is to encourage the development of local competition in telecommunications where competition has mostly arisen in the long distance and business markets. Ironically it may lead to less competition in both telecom and broadcasting in future - and to increased American involvement in both.

Not surprisingly North American telephone companies have been quick to seize advantage of the opportunity presented by the asymmetry. US and Canadian phone businesses own 90% of British cable TV.

Decisions about CATV programming and deployment are being made, as a result with little reference to broadcasting priorities or needs. Telephony offers much better long term business prospects than challenging BBC TV and BSkyB for television viewers.



ALL WIRED UP AND NOWHERE TO GO

by Jo Treharne

WHATEVER happened to access Television? All those shiny promises - made over a decade ago - by potential cable operators for genuine local programmes, have all but lost their gleam.

Terrestrial broadcasters have leapt gleefully onto the access bandwagon with programmes such as 'Open Space' and 'Speak Out' - but these are heavily structured environments which soon revert to the 'them and us' mentality of the broadcasting establishment.

The potential for cable technology to provide a vehicle for genuine local, accessible programming has, quite sim-

ply, not been realised.

But this is not a result of a shortage of ideas, energy and commitment from those organisations and individuals wishing to be involved. And to a certain extent, nor can the operators themselves be held to blame. According to ENCOM, the community access remit for cable operators as set out in the 1990 Broadcasting Act is "not worth the paper it's written on".

The cable operator is required to provide a 'community' channel, but any guidelines as to what the content of that channel should be are non-existent, with the result that most operators will simply provide text - or if you're really lucky, non-moving pictures as well.

Ultimately what this means is that the onus remains on programme makers in the community to provide the local programming, all or course free of charge to the cable operator.

In theory, cable can and does provide access to local programme makers. But the operators will - quite rightly - not transmit technically sub-standard material, nor will they transmit materi-

And British telephone customers are losing, too. BT and Mercury could roll out broadband - mostly fibre optic - infrastructure far more quickly to far more customers than the cable companies can do. A broadband network would offer a whole new range of interactive and niche services to the public and to British business - from home shopping to new training and educational opportunities, from remote access to libraries to narrow casting by and for minority communities.

The problem is that, without the opportunity to carry entertainment as well as telephony, the investment costs make it commercially unviable for BT and Mercury to roll out fibre into the domestic market. And the danger is that, with the opportunity to combine both services, the US-owned cable companies could end up with a monopoly in local telecommunications as well as cable TV.

The NCU wants to see fair competition in the transmission of both telephony and broadcasting. That means the asymmetry rule should be lifted ahead of the government's earliest target date in 2001. Otherwise, British infrastructure will fall behind that of Britain's major competitors.

But regulation should continue to be applied where it really matters - in encouraging access to services and discouraging monopoly control of information. The opportunities presented by new technology are there to be seized, but not abused.

al that may be politically damaging to the company. The programme makers therefore need to provide or have access to all the resources necessary for making programmes, and they need to get it as cheaply as possible (remember nobody gets paid for this!), whilst at the same time ensuring that quality doesn't suffer.

This includes all shooting and editing equipment, the people and the ideas. They must also be prepared to compromise themselves intellectually, as the operator retains editorial control over all output.

Quite clearly, this takes a lot of time and organisation. In North London, a group of independent programme makers (LOCO TV) are presenting a united front by pooling ideas, equipment and talent in order to get their material into the local network, an often frustrating and time-consuming exercise in negotiation.

It remains to be seen whether programmers in other areas will be willing to commit the time and energy it takes to make local cable a success.

INFLUENCES IN THE UK CABLE INDUSTRY

AS PUBLICITY for the 'super-highway' of the future grows in intensity, and the realisation that such media distribution vehicles do not yet exist dawns, it is time to consider not just who is going to own the 'super-highways' but who is going to own the trunk roads, roundabouts, suburban rat-runs and country lanes, and thus control new media access to the 24 million or so households in the UK.

BT is going to be the biggest player in the game. It already has end-user residential connections, the switched technology to support multiple connections of all kinds of media anywhere in the country, and the regional, national and international networks to interconnect with anyone anywhere else. Despite all the fuss over competition from Mercury and cable TV companies BT still controls the connections to more than 97% of all residential end-users.

Mercury has no end-user connections of its own in the residential market and although there are a number of new companies entering the telephone-only market using wire-less technology their penetration is not likely to be significant amongst householders.

The big newcomer to the game is cable TV. Cable companies in the UK are allowed to operate telephone systems. Of the 125 cable franchises awarded by The Cable Authority between 1985 and 1990 more than 70 are now building or operating cable TV and 46 of them are offering telephone services.

The latest industry statistics from the ITC (April 1, 1994) are:

Operating franchises	65
Broadband homes passed	2,990,077
Broadband homes connected	642,377
Average penetration	21.48%
Pay/basis ratio	149
Franchises with telephony	46
Telephone lines installed	376,795
Residential lines	338,533
Business lines	40,262
All cable homes passed	3,634,988
All cable homes connected	800,648
Average penetration	20.88%

The web of ownership of cable is tangled. When the 1984 Cable and Broadcasting Act came into law it was the express intention of the Government that these companies should be dominantly owned in the UK, and they had to be controlled by UK shareholders. Not very much happened. The 1990 Broadcasting Act got rid of these ownership restrictions. The 125 franchises are owned by small handful of

companies, most of which are owned in turn by overseas corporations. Because of joint ventures and other alliances the easiest measure of ownership is "equity homes" - that is, the number of households within the held franchises calculated by the percentage ownership of those franchises.

Current Ownership - by MSO (Multiple Systems Operator)

Company	Equity homes	% completed
Nynex Cablecomms	2503595	13.34%
TeleWest Cable Communications	2495888	27.04%
BCETI	1733933	20.59%
Cabletel UK Ltd	1203130	6.92%
SBC Cablecomms	1156800	31.43%
Videstron	716303	30.71%
Comcast International	708305	24.01%
Telecentral Communications	630875	33.43%
General Cable Ltd	630489	18.98%
Singapore Telecom	527448	8.41%
Diamond Cable	439500	4.59%
US Cable	257000	0.00%
Eurobell	246000	0.00%
Devamba Group	195423	100.00%
IVS Cable Holdings	141193	8.85%
SWALEC South Wales Electricity	124000	8.87%
British Telecom	120000	54.07%
Sasktel	112375	12.77%
English Cable Enterprises	104588	4.91%
Yorkshire Water	74534	3.60%
Foody Cable	46154	12.77%
John Laing	40134	12.77%

The Comcast holding includes two franchises held by Avalon Communications and over which they hold an option to acquire. Diamond Cable is 70% owned by the same group which owns English Cable Enterprises. The two operate entirely separately and as the Diamond deal was done recently it is not yet clear how these holdings will eventually be identified.

With a few exceptions English companies have fractional ownership. Further details of the background of those in the list above is:

Eurobell	UK consortium with European shareholders (including a Gatty Trust company)
Devamba Group	private UK (Scottish) company
British Telecom	one wholly owned franchise - Westminster
IVS Cable Holdings	owned by Flextech plc which is in turn 60% owned by TCI (US)
SWALEC	South Wales Electricity utility - minority local partner
Yorkshire Water	utility - minority local partner
John Laing	minority partner in Leicester through its community interests division

The influence British owned companies have on the cable industry is thus small. Others who have interests include:

Cable and Wireless, which has a stake in BCETI and through its subsidiary Mercury Communications a few tiny shareholdings elsewhere, and;

National Westminster Bank, through its merchant banking arm, which has provided funds for BCETI operations in Leeds.

So who are the big operating companies in the table above, who owns them and why?

The Top 12

Nynex Cablecomms wholly owned by NYNEX - the regional Bell operating company (RBOC) for New York and New England.

TeleWest Cable Communications 50% joint venture between US West (another RBOC) and Telecommunications Inc (known as TCI) - the world's largest cable company

BCETI a joint venture between Bell Canada (telephone company), Jones Cable (US cable company) and Cable and Wireless

Cabletel UK Ltd owned by International Cabletel, a merger between GCOM (US cellular telephone company) and Insight Cable (US)

SBC Cablecomms 75% owned by Southwestern Bell (another RBOC) and 25% by Cox Communications (US media conglomerate)

Videstron Canadian cable company owned by French Canadian interests (the UK company is 30% owned by BCETI)

Comcast International US cable company which also has cellular interests. Its importance in UK is disproportionate to its holding as it is the manager of joint venture franchises.

Telecentral Communications joint venture between CUG Cablevision (Canadian cable company) and Talm Corporation (Canadian telephone operator)

General Cable Owned by Générale des Eaux, the French utility company. Like Comcast its importance in UK is disproportionate to its holding as it manages joint venture franchises.

Singapore Telecom Minority partner.

Diamond Cable 70% owned by English Cable Partners (backed by Goldman Sachs) and 20% by Diamond Cable - both US companies.

US Cable US cable company - still seeking funding for UK operations.

It is estimated that by the end of 1994 some £2.5 billion will have been invested in the industry (about 30% of the total required) but the actual number of end-user connections (TV or telephone) will still only be a small proportion of the potential. Only one half of the franchises awarded by the end of 1990 have so far been started and six have been finished although a number more are close to completion. Only one of those six completed offers telephone services.

There is thus a lot of work still to be undertaken before the cable industry is anywhere near reaching the significant audiences which will offer the owning companies profits to liberate back home.

Cable Industry Growth

	1992 Actual	1993 Actual	1994 Est	1995 Est	1996 Est
Homes built	611,272	831,373	1,500,000	2,000,000	2,400,000
Homes cumulative	1,954,829	2,786,202	4,300,000	6,300,000	8,700,000
New TV subs in year	171,350	171,261	377,577	586,000	774,000
TV cumulative	440,182	611,423	989,000	1,575,000	2,349,000
New telephone lines in year	85,764	207,392	390,000	700,000	1050,000
Telephone lines cumulative	106,989	314,381	700,000	1,400,000	2,450,000

The Actual figures are from ITC quarterly statistics and the estimates are based on figures prepared by the Cable Television Association.

The influence of the telephone opportunity in bringing in funding to build UK cable franchises is clear. What is less clear are the medium to longer term intentions of the big corporations who have got the sector underway.

International Cabletel floated a major funding issue in the US money market in 1993 and Comcast issued a prospectus in spring 1994 which was withdrawn during the stock market fall in May. TeleWest has issued a pathfinder prospectus and it appears that 25% of the joint venture will be sold in the London and New York markets. General Cable and BCETI have also both indicated that they will be seeking a London listing in the not too distant future. It is likely that others may follow.

New Franchises

The ITC has begun a new round of franchising. Two franchises have been advertised to date and under the 1990 Broadcasting Act these require cash bids, just like the radio and terrestrial TV franchising process.

The first of these franchises is West Kent. Bids were received from Eurobell £1,600,210.75p BCETI £1,140,000.00p

The franchise has been awarded to Eurobell as the highest bidder. The bid involves extensive use of new wire-less cable technology (MVDS) and build progress will be monitored by the ITC. Build progress of the earlier franchises is the responsibility of Ofstel.

It is generally anticipated in the industry that franchises covering up to a further 2 million homes will be advertised during the next two years. It is expected that all mainland UK towns of 25,000 households or more will be covered by franchises by the time this exercise is completed. It is quite likely that these new franchises will be awarded to existing franchise owners. The chances of new operating companies coming into the market are relatively remote

Local Competition

Of greatest long term concern is the growing relationship between the cable-system owning companies and TV channels, publishers and the likely creators of the interactive software which the future 'super-highways' are meant to be all about. Under existing legislation and licences cable operators are absolute 'gateways' to their networks. They have the final decision about which TV services is carried to their customers. The framework has been created which allows a 'vertically integrated' business which generates profits for the eventual (overseas) owner at every stage in the process of getting a TV programme to the screen, and which allows the final distributor in that process to keep out any competition.

There is a clause in the operating licence which gives the ITC powers to determine matters of competition in TV services but there has been no reason yet for anyone to challenge a cable operator under this clause. It may well come, and surprisingly it could come in the small local market rather than the national/international arena. Informally the ITC has already indicated that it would not wish to rule against an operator who was investing in building new networks even if it meant that by failing to act they supported anti-competitive practice.

All bidders for cable franchises under the 1984 Act were required to make statements about their plans for provision of local and educational services. Few operators have even attempted to start to try to meet those obligations, yet third party companies have no automatic right to go onto the local networks to attempt to fill this opportunity. Until recently the financial viability of such an operation was questionable, but with the development of interconnects between cable networks, and the steady growth in subscribers, larger audiences have become available.

The investment made by the cable companies is creating some interesting new markets and it will be in no-one's interests for local television to be dominated by the operators - especially when the eventual ownership of those companies is in Denver, or New York, or Toronto, or Singapore.

Roger Wilson

Roger Wilson is the Editor of Inside Cable, the UK cable industry's only dedicated newsletter, and author of 'Local Television - Finding a Voice', due to be published in July (Dragonflair Publishing ISBN 1873801 077 £19.95).

because the costs of establishing a viable business on what will be the geographical margins of the industry are disproportionately

Programming

The big fear has always been that the essential subscription nature of cable television will enable it to acquire events which have hitherto been accessible to anyone through 'free' broadcast TV.

The cable companies have the infrastructure in place to fulfil this opportunity (or threat - depending on your viewpoint). Sporting events are the big target and already the UK TV and radio rights in the 1996 Cricket World Cup have been acquired by a consortium of cable companies. A deal has been done with Wimbledon to put out two hours of highlights of this year's championships every night on a cable exclusive channel (Wire TV). And in the USA TCI has acquired the rights to the next four World Heavyweight Boxing bouts featuring Lennox Lewis with the intention that they will be cable exclusive and pay-per-view in the UK. It is worth considering that TCI is the eventual owner of United Artists Programming Ltd. UAP owns, operates or has stakes in 11 TV channels on UK cable and satellite including Discovery, The Learning Channel, The Childrens Channel, Bravo, Country Music Television and Wire TV.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM... Buy them and shut them up

As debates over media pluralism in Europe hot up, Victor De La Serna of El Mundo gives a personal view of media ownership in Spain

FM RADIO is for all-news programmes, for hard rock or for symphonic music, the gurus said. No way, in a country with lively competition between large AM networks with 'conventional' programming, for a network exclusively made up of FM stations to compete with the AM giants for a large national audience. It took less than a decade on the air for Antena 3 and its general manager, Manuel Martin Ferrand, to prove the gurus wrong.

By 1992, Antena 3 had overtaken the powerful SER network of AM stations (over six years old) for the leadership in audience, according to independent surveys. Lean and mean, with young and cheeky journalists conducting punchy public affairs programmes, sports and talk shows, the new network attracted listeners (more than 2 million daily, on average) and advertisers in droves, and the profits piled up. It was hailed as one of the most notable achievements in modern European commercial broadcasting.

By mid-1994, Antena 3 had almost disappeared from the FM dial. Its local stations merged, one by one into SER or one of its subsidiaries. The main Antena 3 network, or what is left of it, bereft of its lively, iconoclastic commentary and with a vast disappearing audience, was scheduled to go off the air in June.

What had happened?

The SER network and its parent company, the Prisa Group, which also owns the newspaper El Pais, and a large chunk of

Britain's The Independent, has found the ideal solution to its competition woes: if you can't beat them, buy them and shut them up.

Officially as minority partners of the Godo group, (La Vanguardia), which used to own Antena 3, Prisa took de facto control of management and after setting up a holding company for both radio networks last December proceeded to swallow Antena 3 into oblivion.

Small shareholders who saw the value of the stock plunge, and aggrieved journalists forced to resign from the network, protested loudly and attempted to take their cases to court. But Spain's anti-monopoly mechanisms are slow, inefficient and politically influenced. While they moved at a snail's pace, the 'merger' proceeded unhindered.

Concentration, long a foreign problem has suddenly burst onto the Spanish media scene as a dominant concern.

It was surprising and unfortunate that the IPI's latest World Press Freedom Review's report on Spain ignored this fact entirely, focusing instead on the bickering among media and on purported controversies surrounding one newspaper editor. Press freedom is not a factor in such, more or less trivial anecdotes.

On the other hand, a dwindling diversity of voices in the different media as a result of concentration and increased government pressure on the surviving media are genuine cause for concern when press freedom is at stake. Both are real present day problems in Spain. So the record should be put straight.

Hollick attacks media controls

Lord Hollick has publicly attacked the state of UK media control, calling for a single regulator for broadcasting; 'All media organisations... should be required to operate within a common framework of law and regulation,' he said. He went on to criticise ownership laws; 'The current anti-monopoly legislation is ineffective, illogical and simply reflects historic vested interests.'

Radio takeover bid

EMAP is attempting to bid for the country's second largest independent radio operator, Trans World Communications for £71.1 million. With a provisional agreement to buy all

Concentration is not only obvious in the pervasive domination of a group such as Prisa in all sorts of media (daily press, radio, pay-TV, satellite TV and soon, predictably cable TV) - with all sorts of official blessings. It is also apparent in the fast spectacular advance by another media empire, the Bilbao-based Grupo El Correo, which is gobbling up one regional newspaper after another at a quickening pace, and will soon dominate this sector thoroughly. It has also begun to forge an alliance, still modest (a small exchange of stock between parent companies), with Spain's second largest newspaper ABC. Controversy and hard-hitting reporting have not been hallmarks of Correo group newspapers in the past.

Spain does not have such sophisticated wide ranging laws to prevent media monopolies as can be found in other Western nations. What laws there are - such limitations on ownership in commercial television - seem to be flouted often, and without risk.

The second threat to press freedom - government meddling - temporarily faded from attention when the snap General Elections in June 1993 interrupted the legislative process to modify the country's Criminal Code. The intended changes included much heavier penalties for 'slander' and other 'crimes of opinion'. Legal experts agree that the aim of the government was to hinder or entirely discourage the kind of aggressive investigative reporting which has brought so much discomfort to the Socialist executive.

Now deprived of an outright majority in parliament, the cabinet has not yet attempted to re-introduce its proposals. That should provide no lasting comfort to journalists who know that many of the backers of the original proposals remain in power and are merely biding their time.

VICTOR DE LA SERNA

Assistant Managing Editor, El Mundo

(This article first appeared in IPI Report May/June 1994, the journal of the International Press Institute).

the 22% share of TWC's share, it would give EMAP a 51.5% majority which, it claims, would keep it in compliance with radio ownership rules. However the takeover bid would mean EMAP holding eight A and B licences.

Tusa attacks Birt reforms

John Birt's reforms of the BBC could divide the organisation claims John Tusa. 'An institutions ethos is not owned by its management: it is owned by its staff.' He went on to say that although reforms were required management techniques would turn programmes into 'products'. Tusa also criticised the introduction of 'performance indicators.'



BOOK REVIEWS

Packaging Politics by Bob Franklin Edward Arnold, £12.99

Bob Franklin, Reader in Journalism at the University of Sheffield, paints a bleak picture of the state of journalism in the British media of the 1990s.

He cites *Newsnight* presenter Jeremy Paxman quoting a fellow journalist: 'You should always ask when talking to a politician "Why is this lying bastard lying to me?"' But the reality is that such questions are not asked often enough, and resources are rarely ploughed into checking the answers.

The reason is explained in two useful chapters which carefully chronicle the changes in both the newspaper and broadcasting industries over the past few years.

The growing number of newspaper monopolies, staff cuts, casualisation of the workforce and assaults on trade union

rights for journalists have all contributed to weakening the role of newspapers as journals of investigation. The commercial TV and radio franchise system, aped by the Birtist BBC with 'Producer Choice' and so on, have produced a similarly unchallenging broadcast system devoted to chasing ratings on the cheap.

According to Bob Franklin, media-conscious politicians and their spin doctors have filled the resulting void with endless soundbites and photo opportunities. The result is that voters' attitudes are influenced without them being given much in the way of information.

Packaging Politics would have benefited by broadening the definition of politics beyond party politics, but it is nonetheless an excellent book that should be digested by Labour movement activists well before the next General Election.

Tony Harcup

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BBC CAMPAIGN UPDATE

THE CPBF's 1994 BBC Campaign continues, following a successful first public meeting in London on the 27th of June. The contributors at the meeting - Tony Benn, Roger Bolton, Europe Singh and Tony Lennon - all gave their own individual ideas about what should constitute Public Service Broadcasting and what they believe the CPBF should be campaigning on. The meeting was attended by professionals in the broadcasting industry, journalists, trade unionists and a number of concerned individuals.

The emphasis was very much on a forward-looking approach to public service broadcasting in the future, rather than on the protection of the BBC as a monolithic and secretive state run broadcaster. Tony Benn said: 'I wouldn't give a penny for Birt's BBC, but I would die in the last ditch for Public Service Broadcasting'. Roger Bolton - who began his production career at the BBC and now runs his own production company - insisted that some of the thinking behind Producer Choice is sound, but that it had 'been taken too far'. Bolton also called for the broadcasting industry to be brought under the authority of one regulatory body.

The response to our 94 Campaign has so far been positive. We are aiming to raise the level of campaigning after the DNH publishes its White Paper on the BBC, and the Labour party has responded.

There are still some postcards and campaigning leaflets available. If you belong to a CLP or union branch, why not consider ordering a number of these to distribute. If you would like a more detailed overview and analysis of the PSB debate, the CPBF's publication 'Selling the Beeb' is available at £2.99 (Inc. p+p) from the national office.

CPBF FRINGE MEETING BEEBSkyBEEB OR...?

TUC Blackpool 1994
Media Policies for the
Millennium

Tuesday 6 September
Opera House
Circle Lounge Bar

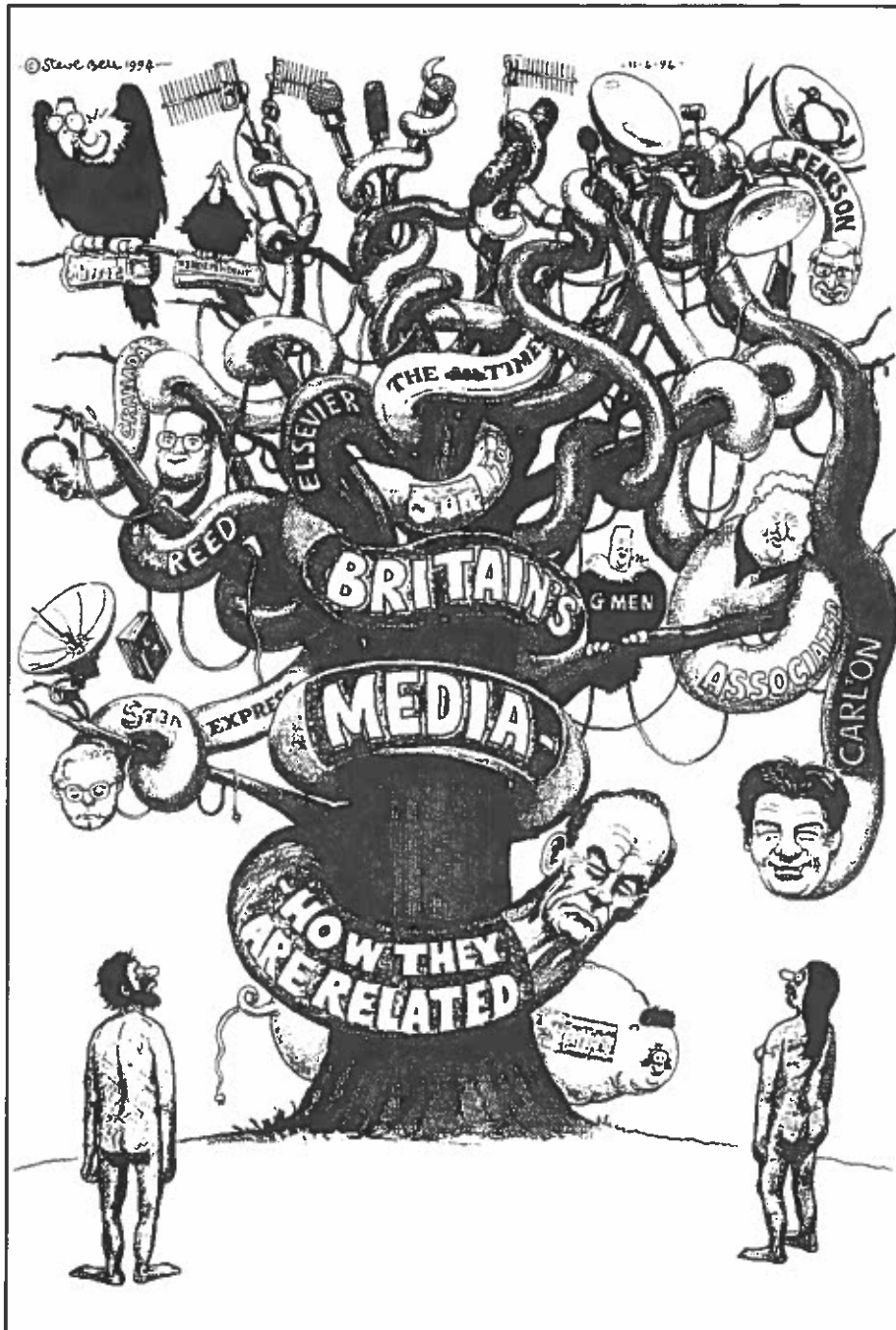
12.25-2.00 SPEAKERS INCLUDE: JOHN FOSTER, NUJ GENERAL SECRETARY, AND TONY YOUNG, NCU GENERAL SECRETARY

MEDIA NEWS

by Robert Elias

BROOKE TO GO?

Heritage Minister Peter Brooke is believed to be willing to relinquish his post or offer his resignation prior to the cabinet reshuffle.



Media Ownership PUTTING YOU IN THE PICTURE

Berlusconi's Italian election victory dramatically underlined the dangers of excessive media concentration.

A spectre is stalking Europe, and it needs to be challenged. Powerful media corporations want irksome cross-media ownership restrictions lifted, and they are deploying sophisticated lobbying techniques to mould political opinion. In the UK the government's cross-media ownership review trundles on behind closed doors, and a European Parliament Green Paper, Media Concentration and Pluralism is being considered. That's why two new publications from the CPBF provide timely and essential information and arguments on the media ownership debate. Britain's Media: How They Are Related is a full colour A2 Poster (£2.99) and a book by Granville Williams (£4.99) which analyses and documents the distortions to democracy of excessive media power.

CPBF members can obtain the book and poster for a special price of £5.50 inc p+p. SEND ORDERS TO CPBF, 8 CYNTHIA STREET, LONDON N1 9JF.

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