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END THE BROADCASTING BAN

by GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

THE IRA cease-fire announced on 31 August must rapidly lead to the end of the discredited Broadcasting Ban which on October 19 will have been in force for six years too long.

The ultimate foolishness of the ban was underlined by an actor's voice-over as Gerry Adams announced the cease-fire – this, in spite of the fact that whilst the government maintains the ban it is itself talking and listening to Sinn Fein. For journalists reporting the news it is also a real barrier. Keith Baker, head of news and current affairs at BBC Northern Ireland explained: 'The restrictions have a huge bearing on your ability to turn things around, particularly at the moment when we are handling hourly bulletins and rolling news programmes.'

In a session at the Edinburgh TV Festival, Getting It Wrong, a former Director of Information at the Northern Ireland Office, David Gilliland, CBE, talked about his experiences from 1969 to 1987. Describing the ban as 'politically inept' he told the audience, 'The only sensible thing to do would be to drop the ban. You have someone saying something on screen, you cannot hear their voice, but you can hear the words spoken by an actor.'

The session was a useful reminder that the ban itself is only one symptom of the difficulty of reporting Northern Ireland: tensions between politicians, the media and the military went much further back than the 1988 ban.

Labour's Northern Ireland Secretary, Roy Mason, saw the media as part of the problem, and the BBC as disloyal to the government. At a dinner given to open the new BBC studio in Belfast on 4 November, 1976, Mason launched into a tirade, saying the BBC was 'disloyal, supported the rebels, purveyed their propaganda and refused to accept the advice of the Northern Ireland office on what news



ABOVE: After the years of protest, now is the time to end the ban...

to carry.' He proposed a three-month ban on reporting paramilitaries.

Political pressure on broadcasters meant the BBC had already introduced a reference up system in 1971, which is now enshrined in its programme guidelines, and requires any programme maker with an idea for either factual or fictional work related to Northern Ireland to refer the idea to the controller of BBC Northern Ireland or other senior management. The Independent Television Commission also operates a reference code.

It is essential that the maximum pressure is built up to ensure the end of the Broadcasting Ban, but we should remember also that other laws can impede journalists and broadcasters reporting Northern Ireland.

David Miller of the Glasgow Media Group argues, 'There are four main ways in which coverage has been restricted. Direct censorship, the use of existing laws, intimidation by successive governments, and the PR strategy of the government to set the framework of the debate as a tribal conflict in which Britain is simply trying to do its best – but really plays no part. All four have combined to place limits on the coverage of Northern Ireland. Television has not covered Northern Ireland properly. It will only be able to do that when the government decides it can.'

YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

The TUC unanimously passed an emergency resolution on Northern Ireland. One section said, 'Congress recognises that now, more than ever, an informed public discussion is essential for a lasting settlement. Congress therefore calls for the lifting of the Broadcasting Ban imposed by the British Government.'

Journalists, broadcasters, the Lib-Dems, Labour and the trade unions – we all want the ban lifted. As the party conference season approaches we have to put the maximum pressure on.

▼ For the facts on the ban read the CPBF publication, *Interference on the Airwaves*.

▼ Use the heightened interest in the future of Northern Ireland to write to your local paper or air your views on local radio.

▼ Let your MP know where you stand on this issue, and also write to Stephen Dorrell, the National Heritage Secretary at 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH, to urge an end to the restrictions.

▼ If you are in a political party or trade union raise the issue and get resolutions passed at your next meeting.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MEDIA

A Labour Party Conference London 13 July 1994

Report by MIKE JEMPSON

IT WAS NOT a pretty sight. The 21st Century Media Conference began with Former SOGAT General Secretary Brenda Dean welcoming News International's Director of Technology Peter Smith to the platform to lecture the Labour Party on how to direct traffic on the communications super-highways.

It ended with David Elstein, Head of Programming at BSkyB, thanking Shadow Heritage Secretary 'Mo' Mowlem for the chance to help shape Labour Party policy on the media.

The £230-a-head talk-shop at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster on 13 July was co-sponsored by the Cable TV Association. The original idea had come from the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, which had a rather different agenda in mind, but with the Labour leadership now as convinced as the media that they are the Government in waiting, the whiff of power and the shadow of dollar signs permeates all.

The message from the top Johnnies of the media industry (all men, of course) was very simple - Britain's media regulatory system is too restrictive for the economy's good. If the special terms written into the 1990 Broadcasting Act for Murdoch applied to one and all, Britain could rule the world again.

British Telecom, the Cable Television Association, News International, the British Media Group, and the BBC spoke as if with one voice. Unless we are free to compete for poll position on the super-highways of the future, the British telecommunications industry will resemble an old jalopy and we shall be swamped by sub-standard fare from elsewhere.

It took Ray Snoddy of the FT to bring them down to earth with a reminder of politician's past failure to second guess the future. 'Don't pick winners,' he advised Labour legislators. 'Avoid "visions" of the future, take note

of consumer choices, and above all develop flexible legislation.'

But the then acting Labour leader Margaret Beckett MP had beckoned the 'sector shaping the cultural and economic life of the nation' to set out its stall.

Nodding in her direction Alan Rudge, BT's Managing Director Development and Procurement, set the scene.

'The Labour movement is the child of the Industrial revolution. That revolution was about technological development and transportation. The new revolution is about the movement of data. Digital technology allows instantaneous transmission of text, sound, moving and still images, and one optical fibre has the capacity to allow a two-way conversation between every person on earth simultaneously.'

Any organisation not prepared to operate at such speeds 'will not survive', he warned.

The new communication technologies are by their nature international, and their convergence makes nonsense of petty national restrictions, he asserted. The major British players must be free to make the most of the price advantage available to those who move first and fastest.

Labour's long-standing commitment to a national broadband cable network is now 'the most important issue for Britain's future', he purred. If only the date set for a review of the BT/Mercury duopoly were instead the date on which both could enter the broadcasting market place...

Richard Woolam, Director General of the CTA, took up the theme. The belated cable explosion, funded largely by overseas private investment, is the result of the 'liberalisation of telecommunications in the UK', he said, predicting that 75% of the population will be cabled up within a decade. Over the next four years that could mean 24,000 new jobs 'mainly in sales, marketing and customer services.'

Speaking on behalf of the British Media Group (Guardian, Pearson, Telegraph and Associated Press) Harry Roche, Chair and Chief Executive of the Guardian Media Group, and a Director of PA and Trans World Communications, articulated the industry's resentment against the true beneficiaries of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Freed from such restrictions News International and Sky TV have been able to steal a march on everyone else, and set up toll-booths on the super-highways. The answer is not to divest Murdoch of his empire, he claimed, but to allow everyone (sic) to compete on

the same terms. National newspapers should not be shackled to minority share-holdings in terrestrial broadcasting. The arrival of interactivity has broken down the final telecommunications barrier, only restrictions on cross-media ownership remain...

Murdoch's representatives objected to suggestions that Sky's gatekeeper role in satellite transmission, and its new pan-European encryption deals amount to near monopolistic control, but NI's Director of Technology Peter Smith acknowledged that management of delivery systems is where the real power now lies...

Diversity, he insisted, is not related to ownership but to the decisions of the customer and to systems of payment. For him 'the customer is king', and to discover what we really want from the new technology, we need only ask what people are willing to pay for.

Digital technology is creating a new level playing field, and labour should have the courage to let loose the main players.

In a thoughtful contribution ITC Chief Executive David Glencross admitted that changes were needed in media ownership regulations, and opted for 25% of the advertising market share as the upper limit on a company's control within the TV industry. But he stressed that any new rules must prevent the development of monopolies.

Leslie Hill (Chief Executive, Central TV and chair of the ITV network) wanted the cross media ownership rules to be relaxed, and suggested leaving all decisions about TV takeovers to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission - as happens, with little restrictive effect, in the newspaper industry. He too thought market share should be the main determinant, but an intervention from HTV raised doubts about whether all the ITV companies share his bullish views.

Party member and former LWT supremo Greg Dyke warned Labour that 'yesterday is not available', although in the past protectionism and regulation had helped to generate the quality product that is British broadcasting.

He remarked that in the multi-channel TV future, Britain's broadcasting industry owed much to French insistence during the GATT negotiations that 51% of broadcasts on Europe's TV networks should be produced in Europe.

He too attacked NI's unfair advantages, and called for more open competition. But, he said, it costs twelve times as much to make a British TV drama as

to buy-in a ready made import. We would still need the BBC to 'fill the gaps' with public service broadcasting. And he agreed with Melvyn Bragg that the Treasury should hand back the current franchise fees to fund PSB programming on commercial channels.

It was an idea that also found favour 'in principle' with Bob Phillips Deputy Director General of the BBC. He offered partnership deals with the commercial sector, and affirmed the Corporation's commitment to increasing its commercial earnings from 5 to 15% of its revenue.

Unsurprisingly he welcomed the White Paper's support for a continued license fee, but rejected the 'two extremes' of public service purism and privatisation. For economic and cultural reasons, he insisted, it made sense to develop British 'Influence' internationally through joint private-sector/BBC deals.

At home he said the BBC's commitment was to more regional programming and programme making, and he announced that those who are 'regularly employed on short-term contracts' would be brought back in-house. He blamed 5,000 job losses and the introduction of short term contracts on the quota system.

Viewers, listeners and readers (or 'consumers;' as they were quaintly called) had no voice in this talk-shop, and there were plenty of unhappy journalists and production workers present.

Gerald Kaufman MP, chair of the Influential National Heritage Select Committee, was clearly at home with all he heard, and even Tony Young, General Secretary of the National Communications Union seemed to acknowledge that the media moguls are setting the right agenda for a new consensus politics.

However Robin Cook MP indicated that he would want a strategic role in the development of telecommunications if he takes charge of the Department of Trade and Industry.

'Mo' Mowlem kept all her options open and everyone confused in a closing speech that promised a 'positive regulatory agenda to promote competition and counteract monopoly pressures', and stressed the importance of harnessing the new technologies to improve educational and health service provision.

Labour has certainly cottoned on to Bill Clinton's belief that the information super-highways are a fast-track to enhance democracy. It has yet to realise that they might also be a slip-road to government by the multinationals.

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▼ The NUJ and the CPBF are planning their own 'easy access' conference on Ownership and Control issues early in 1995. Watch *Free Press* for details.

The Future of the BBC

White Paper Still Leaves Question Mark Over It

by GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

YOU WOULD have been forgiven if, reading the national press the day after the publication of the White Paper on 6 July, you thought the BBC's future was secure. In the face of political pressure, especially from the Tory right, for an end to its 70-year-old special status under Royal Charter, the White Paper confirmed its renewal for ten years from 1997.

Of course, many of the house papers of the Tory right put the boot into the White Paper. The *Daily Star* called the White Paper

'White Wash' and described the BBC as 'a bastion of intellectual snobbery, grown fat and arrogant on a drip-feed of public money. SELL IT OFF.' This was the message too in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*. In more thoughtful form the *Financial Times* leader asked why the BBC should not be steered towards the private sector, to engage in the international market in the same way privatised British Airways had been able to. Instead the White Paper established 'two BBCs in uneasy harness with each other, one maintaining a familiar public service, the other driving hard into global markets. Eventually a choice will have to be made, but the government lacks the courage to make it now.'

But most of the quality press gave the White Paper positive endorsement and for many papers John Birt was the hero - 'How Birt persuaded the Conservatives to call off the dogs,' *The Times*; 'The Man Who Saved the BBC's Licence,' *Today*; 'Birt's BBC is given its reward,' *The Independent*; and *The Guardian* charted 'The Birthing of the BBC' indicating his key role in the charter renewal. So, were our worries unfounded, and can we now rest easy with the BBC confirmed in its primary role as the main public service broadcaster in the United Kingdom? Unfortunately not.

There are key areas of concern that need to be highlighted in the White Paper debate. One is signalled in the White Paper's sub-title, 'Serving the nation: Competing world-wide', which bifurcates the organisation into a national public service broadcaster and a global media player. The injunction that the BBC should develop its commercial activities at home and abroad, expand sales of its programmes, and develop international television services in cooperation with private sector partners, will reinforce backdoor commercialism. How can public service broadcasting principles successfully co-exist with the commercial and entrepreneurial priorities

that drive BSkyB or CNN?

There is no commitment to fund the BBC by the licence fee after 2001. How will the BBC be financed between 2002 and 2006? The White Paper states: 'In the longer term, it might become possible to transfer all or some of the BBC's services to a subscription system.' Also there is no indication of the level at which the licence fee will be set between 1997 and 2001. Competition has caused broadcast inflation to rise faster than the Retail Price Index (RPI) so if the licence fee is linked

to the RPI the BBC could find itself unable to compete with cash-rich cable and satellite channels for key sporting events like Wimbledon and the Commonwealth Games. As financial resources are squeezed programme quality, staff morale and commitments to regional production will also be affected.

The White Paper is often very vague, with pious phrases. For example the role of the BBC governors will be 'to look after the public's interest in the BBC, not to manage it' and yet it suggests the Board 'should include people with international business experience and commercial awareness, to enable it to exercise effectively a strategic oversight of the whole range of the BBC's operations.' How are the public and business interests reconciled?

There's clearly a job to be done to clarify policy proposals in the White Paper, and continue the campaign to defend public service broadcasting. The CPBF will be submitting its comments on the White Paper. If you or your organisation care about these issues and want further information contact the CPBF National Office for material on our campaign to defend the BBC. Comments on the White Paper to:

Broadcasting Policy Division
Room 411, Department of National Heritage
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH (by 31 October 1994).

CLOSEDOWN

by Tom O'Malley

"...gathers together in one place so much valuable and essential information that any student of UK broadcasting policy needs."

PROFESSOR NICHOLAS GARNHAM

Special CPBF offer. Individual orders only. The book will be on sale at £11.95. Send a cheque (made out to CPBF) for £10.50 (inc. P&P) to receive a copy of Tom O'Malley's new book.

MEDIA IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIETY

JO TREHARNE reports on a new campaign to protect public service broadcasting in Europe

FOLLOWING THE launch of the CPBF's 'BBC '94' Campaign in June this year, the International Federation of Journalists have announced a new European-wide campaign to defend Public Service Broadcasting.

The Campaign to Defend Public Service Broadcasting was formalised at a two-day conference held by the IFJ in Brussels at the end of July ('Europe in the Air - The future of Public Service Broadcasting'), where the CPBF presented a paper on European broadcasting legislation and the impact of deregulation. The conference was attended by broadcast industry trades unionists from 20 European countries. The main conclusion drawn from the conference was that throughout the 1980's and early 1990's, deregulation of the broadcasting industry has led to a general decline in the provision and standard of public service broadcasting throughout Europe. Rob Corbett, of the UK's broadcasting union Bectu, gave a scathing criticism of the British Government's approach towards regulation of the media, and of the 'internal market' created in recent years by the management of the BBC - Producer Choice.

The Campaign's launch statement draws attention to the shift towards monopoly ownership structures in broadcasting that have been the result of deregulation, with all the attendant implications for diversity of expression and opinion. The Campaign calls on all European governments to protect democracy by creating accountable PSB systems within their respective broadcasting industries.

The Campaign statement reads in full:

WE BELIEVE:

THAT the coexistence of public and private broadcasting is only tolerable if independence, plurality and variety in programming is protected and the financial standing of public broadcasting is secured;

THAT the concept of 'public service' must be a duty covering the public information services of all broadcasting enterprises, the private as well as the publicly funded;

THAT European governments can only protect democracy by ensuring that everyone has the right to freedom of expression and opinion.

WE DEPLORE: deregulation in European broadcasting which, by favouring com-

mercial interests, has driven media towards monopoly and shifted power from the public to the advertiser, and

WE CONDEMN: all governments in Europe which have failed to create accountable and democratic public service broadcasting systems.

WE NOTE: how transnational media conglomerates threaten democracy by the suppression of expression and opinion.

WE DECLARE: that it is essential to develop, within the European Union and the Council of Europe,

1. a legal framework which guarantees public service broadcasting, thus protecting the cultural and social diversity of communities;
2. a legal prohibition on the continued growth of private monopolies in Europe;
3. national and European-wide regulatory structures to protect editorial independence in broadcasting. All regulatory structures must be balanced in representation of civil and political society and not dominated by any political faction or related organisations.

The Campaign to Defend Public Service Broadcasting has the following objectives:

1. To protect and defend the public service role of audiovisual media and to restore broadcasting structures which, from public administration and independent sources of funding, can benefit all of the community.
2. To create a framework which guarantees the professional and ethical role of journalists and programme makers.

The Campaign is directed towards the political institutions of Europe, primarily the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Committee on Security and Cooperation in Europe and should be developed in cooperation with the European Broadcasting Union.

In addition, the Campaign appeals to representative organisations of civil society, journalists and media workers throughout the European broadcasting sector to secure professional support for the creation of broadcast media in the service of society'.

The International Federation of Journalists represents more than 180,000 journalists in 35 European countries, and can be contacted at:

International Press Centre, Boulevard Charlemagne 1, Bte 5, B-1041 Brussels, Belgium. Tel: 010 32 2 238 09 75.

TUC '94 RMT and the Media

MEDIA ISSUES kept popping up at this year's TUC, which was dominated by the dispute between Railtrack and RMT's signalling workers. At one fringe meeting railway worker Bob Crowe had the audience in stitches with his description of media antics to expose him as a university-educated militant infiltrator into the railways. 'I once went to the College Arms in Walthamstowe,' he said.

When he became a railworker at the age of 15 they were so desperate that whoever introduced new recruits won a £50 bonus. 'There's a real expose for the *Daily Express*: London Transport pays a bounty for everyone who recruits a militant to work on the railway.'

At another fringe, Peter McNestry of the pit deputies union, Nacods, drew attention to the role of a firm of consultants, run by Adam Sedgewick and Hilary Wharfe, two former managers with British Coal. During the 1984-85 pit dispute they were key figures in the battle for media mastery, and to demoralise the miners. According to Peter McNestry they were part of a 'cocoon' around Ian MacGregor, NCB chairman, and deputy chairman James Cowan, who organised the publicity offensive against the miners from November 1984.

This included the press announcement of Friday 2 November announcing that miners who went back by 19 November would qualify for bonus and holiday payments which could provide total pay packets of up to £650. In the ensuing weeks a media blitz was orchestrated about the 'drift back to work', 'new faces' and a 'surge'. News reports using inaccurate figures were accompanied by a massive press advertising campaign sustained through the following months.

Wharfe and Sedgewick finished with British Coal in 1990, formed a consultancy and picked up contracts advising on industrial relations in Poland, and from British Rail, analysing ways to get changed working practices introduced with Aslef. In the third week of the RMT signalling dispute their company, now called Sedgewick, Wharfe and Weston, moved into Railtrack's offices. Peter McNestry wonders whether they are going to be using their strike breaking expertise, acquired in the pit dispute, against RMT now.

My life was wrecked by rail union rapist

Key Media Policies Agreed

Congress grappled with a number of issues affecting the future of our media.

A timely resolution on cross-media ownership from the Writers Guild of Great Britain was moved by general secretary Alison Gray, and strongly supported by Tony Burke, GPMU deputy general secretary and John Foster, NUJ general secretary. The resolution instructed the General Council to 'work closely with media and telecommunications unions and the CPBF to: 1) develop policies which promote diversity of opinion in the media, 2) encourage a strong UK production base in broadcasting; and, 3) oppose any further concentration of ownership in the media particularly the campaign for the relaxation of the rules on cross-media ownership.'

In a blunt warning to Tony Blair, Tony Burke said, 'Beware of Aussies bearing gifts, because there will be a very high price to pay for Murdoch's support. This Faustian pact will lead to eventual disaster and Labour would do well to leave it alone.' The National Communications Union (NCU) urged action 'so that the country can benefit from the opportunities of the information revolution' and called on the government to 'develop a coherent strategy for tomorrow's information infrastructure' and develop 'broadband services for all citizens and all regions of the country'. The resolution also wanted the regulatory constraints removed which inhibited companies like BT and Cable and Wireless from offering both telecommunications and entertainment on the same network.

Bectu won support for action to defend public service broadcasting, and to ensure that quotas for European programming within the Television Without Frontiers directive are regulated and enforced. In the face of enormous US domination of international markets the directive should also apply to cable and satellite operators who are not at present covered by the provision.

'JAIL NIGHTMARE OF RAIL STRIKE RAPIST' was the headline chosen by The Sun on one day in its less-than-balanced coverage of the rail strike. During the dispute, the RMT union has come under steadily increasing hostile fire from the Tory press, in particular The Sun, the Express, the Daily Mail and The Sunday Times. In time honoured tradition, the press have chosen to focus on individuals and peripheral issues rather than on the facts of the dispute.

The Express and *The Sun* concentrated their most caustic attacks on an RMT union executive sentenced to five years for rape at the end of June this year. *The Express*, describing the man as 'a key strategist behind the campaign which has crippled the nation's rail network', went to the trouble of finding and interviewing the rape victim, who specifically and helpfully mentions finding the continuing rail dispute distressing. *The Sun* reported that other offenders in the same prison as the official were angry that the dispute would jeopardise prison visits, and that as a consequence the 'union militant' was fearful of reprisals (this 'exclusive' was based on quotes by that infamous source; 'A Friend').

The second big tabloid story of the dispute focused on the ITF conference (or '10-day jaunt' - *The Express*) in Switzerland attended by RMT General

Secretary Jimmy Knapp at the beginning of August. The press made headlines of the most trivial facts of Knapp's trip - the fact that his partner (a divorcee!) also attended, that the hotel room had (shock!) a mini-bar, and of course that while he was so obviously living it up on the Continent 'millions of commuters face another day of strike misery'. *The Sun* also accused the RMT of squandering members' subscriptions ('CASH SCANDAL OF JIMMY KNAPP GRAVY TRAIN' 11/8/94), in an article based on a leaked financial report. *The Sun* claimed that the report was ignored by RMT - something the union dismisses as a lie (significantly, the only Tory MP that *The Sun* could get to comment on the report was publicity-conscious backbencher Terry Dicks).

The broadsheet coverage of the dispute was particularly misleading in the *Sunday Times* ('HARDLINERS TRY TO STOP KNAPP RAIL SETTLEMENT' 31/7/94), which chose to focus on so-called 'hardliners' or 'militants' on the RMT executive (including one who retired in December 1993), and the influence that they have on the union. One quote from a 'moderate on the RMT executive' claimed that; 'Jimmy has lost patience with them, but is increasingly their hostage'. The RMT denounces this quote as 'fiction', and calls the rest of the allegations 'fanciful rubbish', 'guesswork' and misleading.

Meanwhile, the broadcast media continue to show footage of disgruntled commuters staring up at blank departure boards, whilst giving disproportionate publicity to the 'drift back to work' syndrome (sound familiar?) by interviewing working signalmen.

No surprises, but yet another indication of how media ownership and control, and in particular press ownership, can affect the public perception of The Truth.

JO TREHARNE

SUPERHIGHWAY FOR SALE

Will The Public Have Room On The Road? A US View...

by FRANK BEACHAM

EVER SINCE Vice President Gore propelled the metaphor of the 'information superhighway' into the public consciousness, Americans have been repeatedly assured that the digital communications revolution will enhance the lives of everyone – rich and poor – by creating instant, low-cost access to the world's greatest information resources. Yet to observe the continuing feeding frenzy among the world's most powerful media corporations, the real prospect of the superhighway is starting to resemble an endless, ad-cluttered strip mail through cyberspace. The intense infighting among cable, telephone, broadcast, computer, publishing and other corporate power brokers is focused on how to slice the huge new media pie among themselves. So far, the public's interest in the information future is waiting at the far end of the line.

The scramble to commercialize the information superhighway came after the Clinton administration's decision that private industry, and not the cash-starved federal government, would build any new national communications infrastructure. Since then, potential network users became 'customers' and entertainment programming supplanted public-interest information as the predominant form of 'content' that would flow through the system's pipelines.

At the 1993 Big Picture, an annual entertainment business symposium, Home Box Office chair Michael Fuchs threw cold water on the idea that the huge increase in channel capacity of the new networks will result in greater diversity.

'Everyone says 500 channels,' said Fuchs. 'The independent filmmakers raise their hands and say now you are going to have to buy my movies. No! Those 500 channels are going to be reconfigured old channels. There'll be eight HBOs, multiplexed. There will be 100 pay-per-views and there will be 10,000 shopping channels!'

Over the past year it has become increasingly apparent that the public interest is virtually irrelevant to the media giants. 'Nobody wants to go out and invent something and invest hundreds of millions of dollars of risk capital for the public interest,' said John Malone, chairman of Tele-Communications Inc., the nation's largest cable TV operator. 'One would be fired as an executive of a profit-making company if he took that stance.' (ABC World News Tonight, 30.9.93)

The only way to insure public rights on

the information superhighway is to write them into law, said Herbert Schiller, a media analyst and critic who has written extensively in information highway issues. 'Not only does it have to be written into law, but you must have implementation backup by strong organizations,' he said.

Enter Jeffrey Chester, executive director of the Washington DC-based Centre for Media Education. Chester's group has launched an initiative to educate and organize consumer advocacy groups on information superhighway issues.

'The information superhighway is being designed to meet the needs of Madison Avenue,' said Chester. 'We want 20 percent of the lanes on the superhighway turned over to non-profit and public interests.' This 20 percent public area, Chester said, would be an 'electronic commons,' where free access would be available to all citizens.

'A vibrant telecommunications civic sector will be an essential counterbalance to the commercial forces which will dominate the information superhighway,' Chester testified during a subcommittee hearing on telecommunications policy at the U.S. House of Representatives.

'Hundreds of channels will be continually barraging viewers with programming and advertising tailored to the most desirable demographic groups and households,' Chester said. 'The bulk of services will be shopping channels and pay-per-view programming. Indeed, phone and cable executives are openly discussing "pay-per-hour" or "pay-per-minute" schemes. High speed printers will sit atop TV sets, continuously printing coupons and other sales pitches.'

Chester, whose efforts to insure public

access are being backed by nearly 100 public interest organizations, including FAIR, also insisted that the concept of universal service – a fundamental element of today's telephone industry regulation – be applied to the information infrastructure. 'By universal access we mean everybody has to have access to an instrument that provides some kind of interactive communications service in their home,' he said. 'A certain amount of information or programming should be made available at little or no charge to all citizens.'

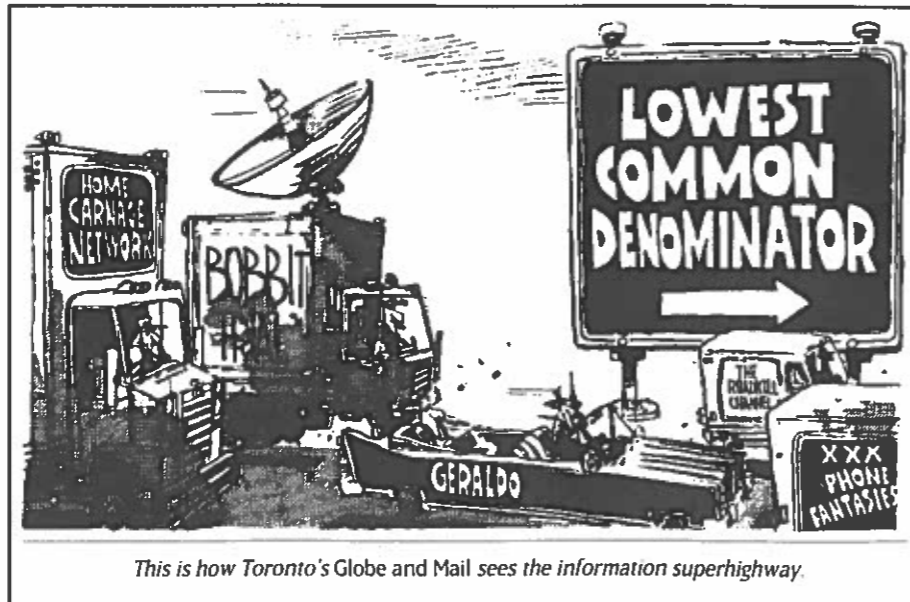
The funds to make universal access available must come from the corporations that will enjoy enormous profits from the information superstructure, said Chester. 'We have to force these companies to pay for it out of their revenues and profits,' he said.

But Schiller warned that universal access is not enough. 'Universal access is a very deceptive term. Sure it's desirable, but it's got to be backed up by further kinds of support, so whoever does have access can also really use it.'

A long time observer of information technology, Schiller says he is pessimistic about the eventual outcome of the battle for control of the information superhighway. 'The question basically is: Who's going to run the show? Will it be run by telephone companies, cable companies and entertainment conglomerates, or will it be run for the public interest,' he asked.

The media companies will obviously give you more commercial TV, video games, home gambling... 'a lot more of what you've already got,' Schiller continued. 'At the moment, those interests are strong and are prevailing.'

This article appeared in the July/August issue of EXTRA, the magazine of the US media pressure group, Fair and Accurate Reporting (FAIR). It raises important policy issues which are just as relevant in the UK. Free Press invites comments and articles on this topic.



This is how Toronto's Globe and Mail sees the information superhighway.

Journalists Launch European Freedom of Information Campaign

IT'S ALL A BIT confusing for ordinary mortals. For the past two years repeated declarations at European Union summits have been in favour of greater transparency. There's even a new EU information code which claims that "the public will have the widest possible access to documents held by the Commission and the Council." However a catch-all clause provides the power to "refuse access in order to protect the institution's interest in the confidentiality of its proceedings."

The Guardian has been trying to get access to several Council documents in order to provide background information on recent EU decisions. Some papers relating to a child labour directive were handed over, while others on immigration were withheld. When the paper appealed to EU foreign ministers, they ruled that nothing should have been handed over in the first place.

In May the paper took its case to the European Court of First Instance in Luxemburg, which deals with complaints against abuses of power by EU institutions. Although European Court cases can often take years, this court moves more quickly, and the initial defence of the Council's position was published at the end of August. It was a defence of official secrecy, dismissing calls by heads of government for more openness in EU affairs as "of an eminently political nature and not binding on the community institutions."

At the heart of all this are some vital principles, and The Guardian campaign links into another broader concern which affects the Scandinavian countries now seeking to join the EU. As a

statement by the Nordic Journalists' Unions says: "Public law concerning access to official information is significantly more advanced in the Nordic countries compared to that which exists in the EC and member countries. Nordic governments cannot withhold official information from the public or keep elected bodies closed, without seeking legal exemption."

The Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which is backing The Guardian's court case, has also launched a campaign for greater public access to EU information. Arguing that "secrecy must give way to transparency in government and freedom of information in administration" the IFJ believes action should be taken at a European level to safeguard freedom of expression and opinion in Europe, as set out in Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

The IFJ is calling for:

- ▼ A European-wide Freedom of Information Act
- ▼ the circulation of minutes of Council of Ministers meetings, publication of the voting record of Ministers and public access to official working documents
- ▼ support for journalists who are forced to go to law to challenge the secrecy of the Council of Ministers
- ▼ urging journalists to submit demands for information to the EU. "Media themselves must take up the challenge of secrecy which rarely operates in the public interest and is too often a cover for incompetence and political manoeuvring."

For further information contact the IFJ.

Labour Party Fringe MURDOCH & THE MEDIA MONOPOLIES: The Democratic Challenge

Wednesday 5 October 1.00pm
Royal York Hotel, 242 North Promenade,
Blackpool

Speakers: Alan Plater, Writers Guild of
Great Britain, Tony Banks, MP and Will
Hutton of The Guardian.

BBC Campaign Meeting in Sheffield

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE BBC?

Tuesday 11 October, 7.30pm

Speakers: Sylvia Harvey (Sheffield
Hallam University) Tony Lennon (BECTU)
and Colin Bourne (NUJ)

The Workstation, Paternoster Row (2
minutes from British Rail and Pond Street
Bus Station)

A Joint Sheffield NUJ/CPBF meeting

For further information contact CPBF
(North) 0977 646580

LETTERS

Dear Editor

It is bitterly disappointing that, according to a Guardian report, Labour's front bench has become "a recent convert to more relaxed cross-media rules."

At a time when Murdoch is out to bankrupt and eliminate the independent and other newspapers, Labour leaders are weakening their earlier plans to restrict press magnates from becoming TV moguls as well. Instead the Party should be strengthening them. The example of Mr Berlusconi, who used his joint media domination to become Prime Minister of Italy, should be warning enough.

This is a serious retreat from former Labour policy. Its Press and Publicity Committee, which I chaired along with the Media Study Group, worked hard on the best way to prevent further concentration of the media in a few hands. James Curran, a distinguished member, proposed that no group or individual should be allowed to own shares in more than one ITV, cable or local radio company. Secondly, no group should be allowed to own shares with voting rights in both press and broadcasting.

Labour's election manifesto in 1983 said it would prevent acquisition of more newspapers by large press chains. It would protect freedom of expression by prohibiting joint control of the Press, commercial radio and TV. An upper limit would be fixed on the number of major publications in the hands of a single proprietor. (One daily and one Sunday paper, in my view, are enough.)

We have fallen behind many Western countries in these respects. Murdoch, for example, could not proceed with television stations in New York and Boston because he already owned big circulation newspapers in those cities. Axel Springer, the Murdoch of Germany, was stopped by its law from acquiring five national magazines because of his ownership of Bild and other journals.

As Labour's supreme policy-making body is its annual delegate conference, which meets in the autumn, it would be a breach of the constitution to discard present policies before then. Yours sincerely

Frank Allau, Prestwich, Manchester

NUJ/GPMU STATEMENT

Individual CPBF members will receive with this issue of *Free Press* a copy of a joint NUJ/GPMU statement on union rights at Mirror Newspapers. It was given to delegates at this year's TUC Congress. If you get *Free Press* via a bulk order and would like a copy of the leaflet, send SAE to CPBF National Office.

LEEDS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

runs from 13-28 October

The CPBF will have a stall in the festival marquee (15-23 October) in the City Centre. If you live in the West Yorkshire area and could help to staff the stall at any time during the festival, please contact CPBF North on 0977 646 580.

Special events at LIFF include a three day conference on censorship 21-23 October. Further information from LIFF on 0532 478 308 fax 0532 477747

INTERFERENCE ON THE AIRWAVES: Ireland, the Media and the Broadcasting Ban



Essential background reading on Ireland and the Broadcasting Ban.

Price £4.50 (includes post and packing), from CPBF National Office

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.

- Speakers:
- BBI Morris, TGWU
 - Tricia Davis, UNISON
 - John Edmonds, GMB
 - Jo Morris, TUC
 - Roger Lyons, MSF
 - Alan Johnson, UCW
 - Phillipa Clark, trade union researcher
 - John Foster, NUI
 - Will Hutton, The Guardian
 - Anne Gibson MSF
 - Richard Hyman Warwick IRRU
 - COSATU South Africa

Keynote conference speakers: TONY BLAIR AND JOHN MONKS Campaigning for the Future

Unions 94 Conference Sat 19 Nov, TUC Congress House London
 Unions representing millions of members are backing the Unions 94 project, including MSF, GMB, UNISON, TGWU, IPMS, USDAW, AUT, UCW and GPMU
 Book early for free book or free subscription. Delegates paying £25 or individuals paying the full rate of £15 who buy the first 225 tickets for conference can choose one of three free gifts, they are: 1 Labour's High Noon: the government and the economy 1945-51, ed. Jim Fyfe, Lawrence and Wishart (100 available worth £17 each). 2 Coping with the Miracle: Japan's unions explore new international relations, by Hugh Williams, Pluto Press (75 available worth £15 each). 3 A three month subscription to New Times (50 available worth £8 each). 4 A three month subscription to New Statesman (50 available worth £17.50 each). Subscriptions will begin from September, books will be dispatched in September. Fill in the form below right away...

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