

FREE PRESS

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BBC White Paper Shows "Distaste for Democratic Process"

THE CPBF PREPARED a thirty page submission in response to the government White Paper, *The Future of the BBC*. Section One and Two of the response deal with 'Public Service Broadcasting in a Multi Media World' and 'Public Service Broadcasting in Retreat: the European Experience'.

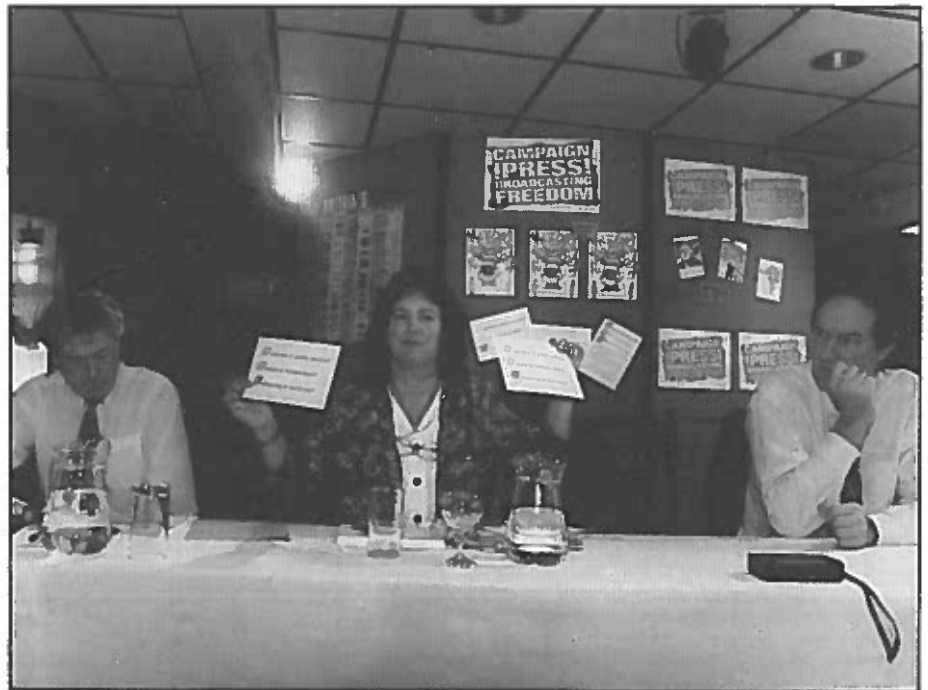
Section Three on 'The BBC, Commercialisation and the New Broadcasting Environment' analyses the impact of Producer Choice and the strategy of the BBC to develop commercial alliances. The final section offers a detailed and item-specific response to the *The Future of the BBC*.

The CPBF recommend that the BBC should be founded on an Act of Parliament rather than a Royal Charter. The submission states that, "Leaving the BBC's constitution in Charter form gives an unacceptable level of power to the government to shape the Corporation's aims, objectives and constitution, power which is not open to detailed parliamentary scrutiny... The decision to maintain the Charter sits uneasily with the government's alleged support for transparency in government".

The section of the White Paper, 'Making the BBC accountable' comes in for particularly withering criticism: "The people who wrote this White Paper - Civil Servants and politicians - betray their distaste for elective democracy... there is no sustainable case against electing the BBC governors, the regional and national councils and any other regulatory body in broadcasting... the kinds of arguments advanced by the White Paper display a dangerous distaste for the democratic process".

The CPBF response argues that the overall direction of policy proposals in the White Paper is misguided and "reveals the government's intention to create an increasingly commercially orientated BBC in a broadcasting environment dominated by market principles".

Copies are available from the CPBF National Office, but please enclose a cheque for £2.50 to cover photocopying and postage.



Pat Healy of the CPBF takes the BBC Campaign message to the Labour Party conference in Blackpool earlier this year. Also pictured are speakers Tony Banks (left) and Will Hutton.

IF YOU WANT yet another argument against throwing media ownership restrictions overboard, consider the plans to float Rupert Murdoch's satellite television business BSkyB on the stock market. The float, announced on Thursday 6 October, led to interesting speculation on the real valuation of the business. Mr Murdoch's own newspaper, *The Times*, valued it at between £4bn and £6bn. The *Financial Times*, whose parent Pearson also has a stake in BSkyB, suggested "just under \$5bn".

How real are these figures? After all, even a figure of £4.5bn would place BSkyB ahead of companies like Thorn EMI or Reed International.

It would be churlish to suggest that Rupert Murdoch uses his papers to positively promote the marvellous opportu-

nity to invest in the floatation.

But there is another issue. As Patrick Hosking pointed out in the *Independent on Sunday*, (9/10/94) "The problem of

valuation is compounded by the fact that there are few independent

analysts not compromised in some way or another. Virtually every New York and London securities house has been pitching for business from BSkyB in some shape or form - in some cases vying with one another to come up with the most flattering view of it".

So we are witnessing massive media and financial power coalescing around common interests.

Let's hope the Department of National Heritage's delayed Cross-Media Ownership Review takes this issue on board.

EDITORIAL

Broadcasting ban quietly dropped

THE NORTHERN Ireland broadcasting ban has gone with not even a whimper. On September 16, a decent interval after the IRA ceasefire, the government quietly dropped it.

This after years of vigorous campaigning by the CPBF, other anti-censorship groups and the unions, and, we are told, strong whispering in ministerial ears by broadcasting executives.

The thing had become an embarrassment to government, and it had a political effect that has rebounded on it heavily.

Since John Major decided to change direction on northern Ireland and pick up Sinn Féin proposals to negotiate, he has been saddled with the baggage of censorship. If the "peace process" is at all serious, it must deal seriously with Irish nationalism.

The ban was part — and actually only a small part — of media hostility to Irish nationalism, and this continues. Ban or no ban, the coverage given to Sinn Féin is minuscule compared with that enjoyed by unionists. Any deal that is eventually reached will be that much harder to sell, because the censorship has created a violently pro-unionist climate of opinion.

The BBC is the worst, and of BBC output, Radio 4's Today programme, which still interviews Ian Paisley, a now discredited and marginal figure.

Statistical comparisons of the coverage of nationalist people and politicians since the ban was lifted have still to be done.

ADVANCE NOTICE
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MEDIA VS THE PEOPLE

TUC CONFERENCE CENTRE, London, Sat 18 March, '95

A major conference on media concentration and ownership and to develop media policies for a democratic society.

Expert international and national speakers. Publicity leaflet available January 1995.

If you can help publicise the conference contact CPBF National Office.

A letter too far...

IT MAY SEEM churlish to criticise Peter Preston for having forged a fax on House of Commons notepaper to obtain Jonathan Aitken's bill at the Paris Ritz, but there is no doubt Mr Preston got it wrong.

There are two considerations in this. The first is the importance of the story. If it is a matter of life or death, or of millions of pounds being salted away by some murky organisation, then clearly the methods used can be more dubious than if one is investigating whether councillor Bloggs failed to declare that he bought a cheap day return rather than a full price ticket.

And on that count Mr Preston was wrong. Of course it is a good story. And the associated tales involving Tim Smith and Neil Hamilton brought about their downfall which is obviously a big feather in *The Guardian's* cap. But with those stories in the bag — though not yet published — and drunk on success, he dreamt up the idea of the fatal fax.

Nobody would deny that it is a good story, but it is not earth-shattering. It certainly appears that Mr Aitken was sailing close to the wind and is slightly economical with the truth. And the prospect of chalking up another Tory scalp must have seemed very tempting. However, in the cold light of hindsight, a bit of doubt over the payment of a hotel bill is definitely in the Endsleigh League of scoops even if at the time it seemed like you were bringing down the Tory government. After all, defence procurement ministers have billions of pounds at their disposal and must get offers to wine and dine at every ritzy establishment in Christendom. The very morality of buying these weapons is itself questionable and potentially a much better story.

The strength of the story has a bearing on the second question, the gravity of the subterfuge. Now, Mr Preston, it was just a teeny-weeny bit naive of you not to realise

that of all the stationery that you could have chosen, House of Commons notepaper probably had the most resonance. Didn't you realise that misusing Parliamentary paper is different from putting on any old false address? Would your editorial columns not fill up with self-righteousness and indignation if someone else had misused House of Commons paper, even in a cause that may seem equally valid?

Then there is the bigger question. The final consideration should have been — what will be the wider effect of this? As for your story, it's pretty well sunk it. What was building up to a good new bout of Tory sleaze has now turned into a row about press freedom. Worse, what you seemed to have missed in your smug Clerkenwell world is that the press is up against it at the moment. There is talk of privacy laws, of regulation, of censorship even, but none of this seems to have entered into your deliberations.

There is a battle going on out there, finely poised in the dying days of a Tory regime, and you go and hand the forces of darkness a pile of ammunition bigger than Mr Aitken ever procured.

But what really sticks in the throat, however, is Mr Preston's claim that he only did the deed to protect a source. That, of course, is a great argument because it stops dead any further discussion of the matter. Protecting sources is the Great Cause of all journalists. We'll fight them in the trenches, on the beaches and, of course, in court, not to reveal our sources. We'll proudly go to jail for that. Only Mr Preston didn't. He let his source, Sarah Tisdall, go to jail instead. It was unforgivable 10 years ago, and it still is now, and it demonstrates, like the current episode, that Mr Preston lacks one of the great qualities needed by all good journalists — nous. And because of that he scored a terrible own goal which we may all end up regretting.

Journalist faces trial on sources

GRANADA journalist Susan O'Keefe is set to go on trial in the Republic of Ireland in January 1995. Her World in Action programme, *Where's the Beef?* was broadcast in May 1991 and made allegations of political favours by Albert Reynolds, the Taoiseach, while he was industry minister in 1987 and 1988, to Europe's largest meat group, the Irish based Goodman International.

Susan O'Keefe refused to name her sources to a tribunal of enquiry which was set up by the Dail, and was charged with contempt by the Irish Director of Public Prosecutions. She has opted to go

for trial by jury. The CPBF has organised a petition, to be sent to the Irish Ambassador in London, expressing its concern over the prosecution. It congratulates her for upholding "the highest standards of journalistic ethics by protecting her sources".

The petition has circulated to NUJ chapels and branches, and if you receive your copy of *Free Press* by mail the petition is on the reverse of the address label. Please do all you can to highlight concern over this important stand for press freedom, and send completed petitions on to the Irish Embassy.

ROBOHACK LIVES!

JO TREHARNE reports on the launch of Channel One, London's new 24 hour cable news station.

"IT'S SO EXCITING I can't tell you. We're going to build a habit, create an appetite. We are pioneers." Thus spake Sir David English, Chairman of Associated Newspapers, commenting on the group's new venture into cable programming — Channel One Television.

Channel One will be launched on November 30th 1994, and will be London's 'video newspaper', utilising a network of cable franchises across the city to bring 24 hour news and features to The Capital. The model for the station is New York One, a 24 hour cable news channel based in, unsurprisingly, New York. The news items are researched, scripted, presented and shot by 'video journalists', alternatively known by the toe-curling abbreviation 'VJs'. The 30 Channel One VJs are mainly young journalists previously employed in local radio or the local press. To say that they are required to be multi-skilled is an understatement — apart from all the duties listed above (some are also required to have specialist knowledge eg in The Arts or Health), rumour has it that the Robohacks will have to negotiate the London traffic, pizza-delivery style, on mopeds.

A small but not wholly insignificant furore surrounded the decision by the ITC to allow Associated Newspapers to operate the London channel. Associated Newspapers are the owners of the *London Evening Standard*, London's only non-free evening paper, and it's not difficult to preempt what the news values of Channel One might be. Interviewed on LBC radio a few weeks after the announcement of the awarding of the franchise, the *Evening Standard's* media correspondent declared that the new channel would be the TV equivalent of the *Evening Standard*, coming directly into a living room near you. This proclamation will undoubtedly cause concern to those Londoners who consider the *Evening Standard* to be overtly right-wing (see the CPBF's Election Monitoring report), distinctly pro-establishment and stuffed with third-rate columnists (I couldn't possibly comment), and who constantly despair, whilst handing over their 30p, the lack of choice of evening

paper in the UK's principle city.

Michael Rosenblum, the man spirited in from New York to train Channel One's VJs, uses the development of print as an analogy to back up the ethos of the channel:

"Way back you couldn't just be a writer. You had to become a monk and serve years of apprenticeship before you were allowed to draw beautiful letters... this is just like the TV networks". True, most people now have access to the resources to enable them to write, but that doesn't automatically make everyone a writer, anymore than the development of point-and-shoot cameras made

everyone a photographer. Camcorders may enable individuals to experiment with a previously inaccessible technology, but there's more to good TV than enthusiasm and a good speaking voice. What's more, most people have better things to do.

Nobody could disagree that cable TV has the potential to deliver an incredible range of programming, opinions and ideas, on a genuinely 'local' basis. But will Channel One really achieve this, and more importantly do Associated Newspapers really want to?

Or is it simply a case of 'The Press is dead, long live Cable'?

Act on media ownership

MEPs demanded action by the Commission on media ownership recently. MICHAEL HINDLEY, MEP for Lancashire South, gives the background.

THROUGHOUT THE 1980s the European Parliament (EP) voiced concerns about the growing concentration of media ownership in the European Union (EU) which could threaten the EU's own often expressed commitment to pluralism and diversity of opinion. The Commission responded with the Green Paper, which in turn Parliament discussed in the form of a report by the Culture, Youth, Education and the Media Committee in January 1994. Angered by the laggardly response to that report, the EP demanded a debate in the October Plenary to pressure the Commission to move the matter beyond the consultation phase.

The report and its reception strike at the heart of several questions; not only the question of media concentration itself but also the complicated and frustrating interplay of European competence versus national competence.

The essence of Parliament's case is that the workings of the 'internal market' will accelerate the moves to trans-European media ownership and also to cross-media ownership. This involves the same contradiction as with products — the abolition of national regulations which could be interpreted as barriers to free trade, favours large companies producing standardised products; this cuts across the idealistic view of many supporters of the integration process that cultural diversity should and indeed could be preserved.

For progressives concerned with the threats to democracy by the concentration of media ownership, EU legislation also

offers a backdoor to put pressure on their own country's legislatures who are reluctant to curb the Berlusconi and Murdoch. For the Labour Party, Europe offers a short cut to reform at home, and indeed there has been some success in moving the social and environmental agenda forward through EU legislation.

Unfortunately, also, 'Europe' offers a diversion for a Labour Party unwilling to commit itself to wholesale reform at home. Witness the retreat here on media ownership, as Blair believes he needs a friendly, or at least 'neutral', press to put him in at the next election.

The original EP resolution called on the Commission "to submit, in consultation with the parties concerned, a proposal for effective measures to combat or resist concentration in the media, if necessary in the form of an anti-concentration Directive".

The Commission responded, with some justification, by doubting that safeguarding media diversity is a basic Community objective, a view also expressed by the EP's own Legal Affairs Committee. The Commission ducked a decision and announced more consultation with another questionnaire. The EP was enraged to learn of the Commission's hesitations and doubts through the press itself, rather than through the formal channels of Commission/Parliament liaison.

The sitting Commissioner, Vanni D'Archirafi prevaricates, and the EP now place its hopes for action on the incoming Commissioner, Marcelino Oreja, who is transferring from Culture to Parliamentary Relations from Energy in January, 1995.

WIDER OWNERSHIP NEEDED FOR LOCAL PRESS

By **TIM GOPSILL**

THE MONOPOLIES Commission has turned down a takeover deal that would have given the Daily Mail group control of a huge chunk of the regional press.

Northcliffe Newspapers, a subsidiary of the Daily Mail and General Trust, had agreed a £92 million buy-up of the Nottingham Evening Post group. A reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) has resulted in a rare use of its powers to recommend to Trade Secretary Michael Heseltine that the deal would be against the public interest.

Michael Heseltine is not obliged to veto the deal and has invited a revised bid from Northcliffe.

Control of the Nottingham circulation area would give Northcliffe monopoly control of all the evening newspapers – and most of the weeklies – in an area of the north and east Midlands, stretching from Stoke on Trent to Hull. It already owns evenings in Stoke, Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Scunthorpe, Grimsby and Hull.

The Nottingham Evening Post is owned by an independent local company, T Bailey Forman (TBF).

The existing Northcliffe papers already cover the biggest single chunk of the population served by one group. Their combined sales are over 500,000 – bigger even than those of the London Evening Standard (which is also owned, of course,

by the Mail group). The Nottingham acquisition would raise the figure to 617,000.

The MMC report is full of statistics of this kind – a fascinating record of the regional press, with maps and tables showing the pattern of control of the whole regional press in England. It also summarises the evidence given in a wide range of submissions to its enquiry. Many of them draw attention to the dangers of big group monopoly control.

Derby City Council, for instance, told the MMC that the Evening Post "showed a much more positive attitude towards the local issues in Nottingham than did the (Northcliffe-owned) Evening Telegraph to Derby". The Council believed this was "because the ownership of the NEP had remained local."

Nottinghamshire County Council was concerned that the NEP "should continue to concentrate on reporting local issues and its views should be free from any partisanship on behalf of political party of other vested interests."

The Council was also concerned that "there should be no exploitation of the paper's near monopoly position by a significant increase in advertising rates, the rate in the Leicester-based Northcliffe title being 26 per cent more than in the NEP." The Leicester Mercury and the Evening Post have similar sales figures: 119,000 and 113,000 respectively.

There were strong objections from jour-

nalists on the NEP, from the NUJ and the print union GPMU. The employers' association, the Newspaper Society, backed the takeover.

But the MMC went with the objectors. It concluded: "There are risks in this transaction which we would expect to have serious consequences for diversity... This would be accentuated because of the degree of operational integration that is likely between the NEP and the other east Midlands dailies, this integration being necessary to achieve the profit improvement to justify the high cost of the acquisition."

"The second concern... is that Northcliffe would use the very considerable market power it would acquire (which) could result in competing weekly publications being forced to close or reduce their editorial expenditure. This could lead to a further reduction in the already limited diversity of opinion or a decline in editorial standards."

TBF is a very profitable company, but wants to sell because it cannot afford the investment required for the large-scale reconstruction of its printing and production operation. It runs a big press at Huthwaite, a green-field site developed in the first stage of computerised technology in the late 1970s, which is now out of date.

Huthwaite was a non-union plant, and TBF was a fiercely anti-union company in those days. In 1978 it sacked 29 NUJ journalists during a national strike. The dispute went on for six years, but eventually the anti-union management was kicked out and TBF settled with the NUJ.

It recognises the union, but Northcliffe titles do not. They are the worst employers in the provincial press – and that is saying something!

Northcliffe is already the biggest regional group in terms of titles, with 13 dailies, and second-biggest in terms of sales, after Thomson Regional Newspapers, whose 10 titles include what are effectively national papers in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast.

But Northcliffe's papers are tightly grouped. It has an even more serious concentration in the south west of England, where it owns all the dailies west of Bristol (in Exeter, Torbay and Plymouth). In addition, its parent, DMGT, owns 20 per cent of West Country, the ITV station, and 19 per cent of Great Western Radio, which owns the local radio stations in Swindon, Bristol and Exeter.

On top of this, it has 40 per cent of Bristol United Press, owner of the big morning and evening titles there – and it

owns the local radio stations in Swindon, Bristol and Exeter. On top of this, it has 40 per cent of Bristol United Press, owner of the big morning and evening titles there – and it

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Carlton and the Big Story

ATTEMPTS BY politicians to interfere in TV current affairs programmes are, unfortunately, a fact of life. The point, however, is that programme editors, to protect their professional integrity, have to resist them.

The Big Story, produced by Twenty Twenty Television for Carlton, came under this pressure recently and deserves praise for its principled stand.

The programme, "Rich Man... Poor Man", (27 Oct.) contrasted the lives of Tory MPs laden with consultancies, with those of low wage earners forced to moon light on second jobs to make ends meet. David Mellor, with his string of consultancies, was an obvious choice. A request to "spend some time with you on an average working day" was declined so a crew doorstepped his Putney house after they were told he was away. They hung around to film him emerging and being whisked away in a limousine.

A phone call by David Mellor to Paul Jackson insisting the footage should not be used, on the grounds it made him look 'shifty and evasive', did the trick. Jackson promised that the offending footage would not be used.

Carlton's Paul Corley, (Controller, Factual Programmes) and Marion Bowman, (Commissioning Editor, Factual Programmes) were sent in to cajole and

groups, and the effects of what are in effect monopolies in their areas are grave.

The MMC has, to its credit, recognised this in the past. For while its powers (under the 1973 Fair Trading Act) have regularly been ignored in cases of takeovers of national papers – notably those of Rupert Murdoch in the 1980s – it has been firm with the local press. In 1989 it blocked the takeover of the Belfast Newsletter, an independent morning paper, by the Thomson group, which owns the only evening and Sunday papers in Northern Ireland.

In 1991 it prevented David Sullivan, the pornographer who owns the Sport papers, buying a big stake in Bristol United Press – though this judgement was based on questions of editorial content rather than market power.

But the final decision rests with government. It was not the MMC that nodded Murdoch through when he bought the Times, Sunday Times and Today, nor the Mirror Group consortium when it bought up the Independent this year, but succes-

istic integrity they refused to be associated with such a blatant surrender to political pressure.

Carlton had to edit out the Mellor sequence and replace it with footage of Mellor in the House of Commons, and the programme was transmitted without the credits for the team who had worked on it.

At a meeting on Tuesday 1 November with Stuart Prebble, Controller of factual programmes at the ITV Network Centre, Carlton admitted that it had been mistaken to insist on the cuts in the programme, and assured the Network Centre that it would not happen again.

Was the promise to Mellor an error of judgement on Paul Jackson's part, revealing his lack of experience of current affairs programme making? Possibly, but it does raise wider questions about Carlton's commitment to current affairs programmes which might upset Conservatives.

In May this year a decision by senior executives shelved Central Television's Cook Report. In the programme the lobbyist Ian Greer made extraordinary claims about his friends and contacts at the heart of Westminster and Whitehall. Both Carlton and Central are part of Michael Green's media group, and he was a well known face in political circles when Margaret Thatcher set about demolishing

sive Secretaries of State, who declined even to refer the takeovers to the Commission.

So it is Michael Heseltine who will decide, and even if he is unable to come to a deal with DMGT, the NEP could still go to other big groups that put in rival bids: EMAP, which owns papers in the south east Midlands, based in Northampton, Kettering and Peterborough, plus a huge stable of magazines; and Midland Independent Newspapers, owners of the Birmingham and Coventry titles.

Neither would be THAT much better than Northcliffe. There ought to be a big campaign to keep the Nottingham papers completely independent – and for a wider pattern of ownership in the local press generally.

Tim Gopsill is editor of the NUJ magazine *The Journalist* and a member of the CPBF National Council. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report, Cm 2693, is available from HMSO for £11.80.

Red Pepper

A FREE VOICE OF THE LEFT

Red Pepper is diverse, democratic and determined. It's becoming essential monthly reading for a wide range of trades unionists and activists. As Harold Pinter put it when we were launched six months ago:

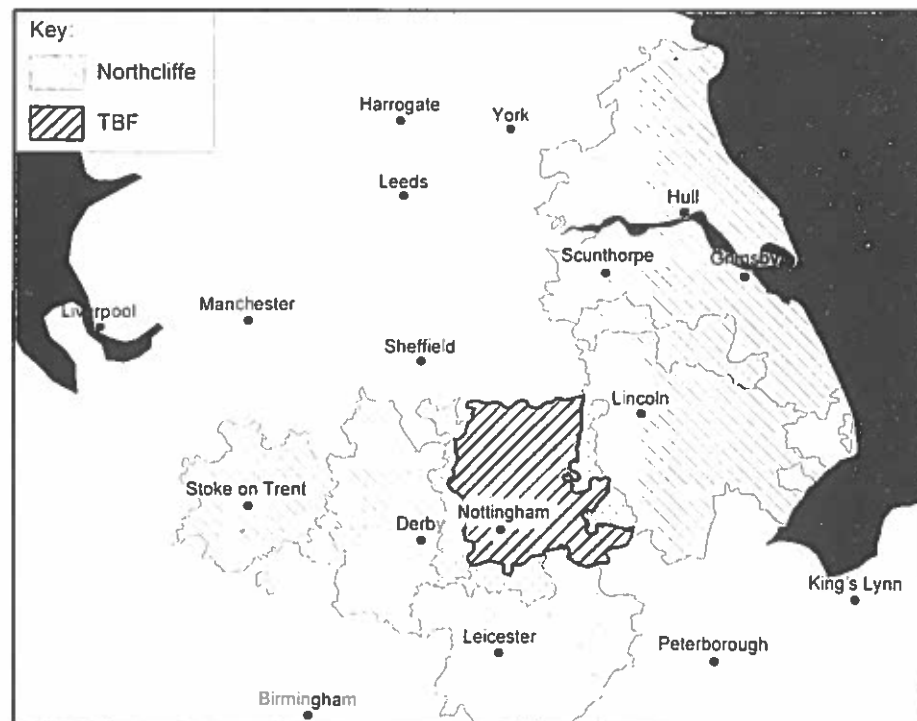
'This country needs a magazine which is truly independent and looks at the real facts without fear. Red Pepper will be it.'

When the bulk of the print and electronic media is increasingly tied up in the hands of big, multinational conglomerates, Red Pepper's free voice and campaigning spirit is becoming more vital. Among key issues of rights and freedoms addressed by important writers in Red Pepper in recent months, there have been: ● Camilla Berens, Paul Foot and other activists on the best way to defeat the Criminal Justice Bill ● Leading barrister Michael Mansfield QC on Labour Leader Tony Blair's poor record on civil liberties and trade union rights ● Noam Chomsky, John Pilger and Carlos Fuentes on how democracy is a casualty in the post-Cold War era ● Betty Friedan, Yvonne Roberts, Susan Watkins and Jane Hill on images of feminism.

And there is more political analysis, hard-hitting debate and grassroots news in forthcoming editions. There has never been a better time to subscribe to Red Pepper.

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Criminal Justice Act

NEW MEDIA RESTRICTIONS

by MIKE HOLDERNESS

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994, is famous for targeting marginal groups: gypsies, squatters, ravers... It's less famous for targeting journalists, but there are a couple of nasty possibilities tucked away among the dozens of clauses.

Firstly, the Act makes it an offence for a person "without lawful authority or reasonable excuse (the proof of which lies with the person) (to) (a) collect or record any information which is of such a nature as is likely to be useful to terrorists... or (b) have in his possession... such information".

Is that my contact book you are talking about, Mr Howard? I have no truck with terrorists, and I'll try as hard to stop them getting hold of my notes as I will to stop you. How, though, am I supposed to prove a "reasonable excuse"? Or, maybe more to the point, how long will I be unemployed while I try?

Is this paranoid? Cast your mind back to July, 1992, when Channel 4 and Box Productions were found in contempt of court, for refusing to name their sources for a programme on alleged collusion between the security services and "Loyalist" paramilitaries.

Then, the Attorney-General went through the rigmarole of obtaining orders to produce information. Now only a search warrant is needed. The prosecution need only show that a document was in a building the accused "habitually used" and the maximum penalty for possession of such a document is 10 years.

Secondly, the "aggravated trespass" provisions of the Act allow a constable in uniform to arrest anyone under reasonable suspicion that they are trespassing on land in the open air, and that they intend intimidating, obstructing or disrupting anyone's "lawful activity" on the land. (Highways are not included.)

That's tough luck for journalists assigned to road protests. But how long will it be before a constable decides that a hack's mere presence at an outdoor arms fair, or a gymkhana with Royals is "intended to disrupt"?

Even huntin' shootin' and fishin' magistrates may find it a bit hard to convict, and journalists would have a fair chance at appeal. But then they'd have missed the story. And then, of course, if a journalist is arrested on either count, a court may draw inferences from their refusal to say anything...

Another sting

DAVID ALTON'S campaign against video nasties, in the wake of the James Bulger killing, bore fruit in another section of the Criminal Justice Act. A report he commissioned by the psychologist Dr Elizabeth Newsom, co-signed with 25 other psychologists and paediatricians, argued that there was a link between child violence and violent films and videos.

In fact the report, which contained no new evidence, was high on moral outrage and thin on argument, but this was sufficient to sustain the moral minority and the majority of the national press. "At last, experts admit: Movie nasties DO kill" proclaimed the Daily Mirror, the most vociferous of Alton's supporters.

The Criminal Justice Act requires the BBFC to follow tougher guidelines, constantly asking whether films and videos might induce criminal and violent behaviour. It lists criminal behaviour, illegal drugs, violent behaviour or incidents, horrific behaviour or incidents and human sexual activity for particular attention.

The result is that another layer of censorship has been introduced in a country in which film and video are more strictly regulated than anywhere else remotely comparable.



INDEX ON CENSORSHIP CENSORED...

THE SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER issue of the re-launched Index on Censorship has a very interesting section, "Media Moguls and Megalomania" which examines the antics of Berlusconi, Murdoch and Turner. Worth looking at.

In August this year the Radio Authority took a dim view of the magazine. It slapped a ban on an advertisement for Index, which campaigns against censorship all over the world. A spokeswoman for the RA explained that the advert fell under rules against issue campaigning. "If Index seeks to influence governments in favour of freedom of expression, then they can't advertise on British radio or television."

Media Monopoly a Human Rights Issue

A CPBF/Liberty report argues that media concentration, official secrecy and obscenity laws curb freedom of expression in the UK

"Censored: freedom of expression and human rights" is one of a series of reports to be submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee. The report highlights:

- inadequate measures to guard against excessive concentration of media ownership. Media concentration reduces the range of editorial perspectives and has implications for the quality of democracy.
- journalists find it difficult to retain their professional integrity and remain within the law because of official secrecy. Problem areas include the 1989 Official Secrets Act; Acts which require journalists to identify sources, including the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the Contempt of Court Act.
- obscenity laws are discriminatory: magistrates and customs officials can confiscate articles which they consider obscene; Section 28 prohibits local authorities from portraying homosexual relationships in as positive light; and the blasphemy laws prohibit artistic portrayals of Christianity which are thought to be disrespectful.

Copies of the report priced at £3.80 (incl p&p) available from CPBF Book Service

Censorship and classification

Richard Woodcock reviews: **Classified! – a Teachers' Guide to Film and Video Censorship and Classification** by Richard Falcon, BFI 1994

DEBATES ABOUT the censorship of film, and more recently video, are a continuous source of controversy in the UK. "Classified" is concerned mainly with film and video censorship, but it takes a brief look at television regulation as well. Its author, Richard Falcon, is a part-time examiner at the British Board of Film Classification; one might therefore expect a biased account of the issues, but in general he maintains a balanced and impartial position throughout the book.

As the title makes clear, this is a book for teachers – in particular for teachers of upper secondary and sixth form students. Ironically, the author's sensitivity to his audience causes him to practice a little self-censorship – the contents of the book and its accompanying videotape are selected "bearing in mind that work on the media deals often with the question of the pupils' identity and relationships with others, which as they are in the process of being formed can be fragile and prone to disruption." Falcon also notes the potential conflict between the teacher's role "in loco parentis" and her need to respect the views of the class.

The book adopts a media studies perspective, looking at the concepts of audi-

ence, institution, representation, and ideology. The style of writing is occasionally rather complex, but the structure and organisation of the book, and the helpful set of case studies and exercises, more than make up for this. While the book's main emphasis is on current, or at least recent, examples, it also provides a useful (and essential) historical perspective. The longest example provided on the videotape is an extract from "The Wild One" (1953). At the

point is that a shift in cultural judgements of acceptability had taken place in the intervening fifteen years. More explicitly, he points out that in 1986, the climate had changed to the extent that the film was passed by the BBFC as "PG" without cuts. Readers who wish to ask why these changes in climate might have taken place will need to look elsewhere – this question isn't really addressed by Falcon.

The fear that impressionable young people might imitate screen violence is not new. It was probably the main justification for the censor's banning of "The Wild One" in 1955. There is still no research that proves a connection between screen violence and real violence, but the debate rages on. This teaching pack recognises the conflicts and compromises that inevitably arise, but Falcon correctly identifies the central role of the viewer in the issue of censorship – in particular the viewer's choice over the use of the on/off switch, of making her views known and of exercising choice in viewing.

Most importantly, though, Falcon recognises the central role of education in the process – it is education which ultimately will help viewers to exercise critically-informed choices about what they wish to see and be seen. It will come as no surprise that the big questions about censorship remain unanswered, but the book will provide a valuable resource to teachers and pupils who wish to move the debate forward.

Classified!

A Teacher's Guide to Film and Video Censorship by Richard Falcon £25.00

Order the book and the video from CPBF Book Service, £27.00 inc. p&p

time, the censor refused to pass the film for general release. The related case study in the book contains a wide range of references to "The Wild One", from the BBFC's own records to an explanation by its director, Laslo Benedek, as to why he made the film. There is also plenty of contextualising material – for instance two reviews of the film – one written in 1955, the other in 1968, a year after the film was finally granted a certificate. Falcon's implicit

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IT'S MONEY THAT MATTERS

Do you want to exploit the new cable, satellite broadcasting and home entertainment revolution? Well, for a modest £816.63 (that's broken down as £695 plus £121.63 VAT) you can attend a two-day conference in early December. The venue is the plush Cumberland Hotel, London.

According to the publicity leaflet, aimed at Senior Executives interested in the challenge, they will be able to:

- Capitalize on new multimedia challenges.
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- Gain and retain a core audience in a fragmenting market.
- Penetrate broadcast markets.
- Finance and plan a successful launch.

High profile speakers from Time Warner's HBO, BSkyB and the cable giant, Nynex Cable Communications will outline the commercial opportunities. But an analysis of the leaflet reveals yawning gaps. Programming is mentioned twice - once as a question, "Will there be a bidding war for quality programming between cable and satellite?" and the other in a session giving advice on "Acquiring and finding programmes within budgetary constraints".

The leaflet conveys a clear message. There's gold to be had in digging up the streets for cable and the information superhighway but, judging from the evidence of this conference's concerns, precious little interest in programme variety and quality. Gerald Kaufman please note.

Where's this spaceship going?



BECTU President, Tony Lennon speaking in Sheffield on the future of the BBC.

SEVENTY PEOPLE turned up at a Sheffield meeting, organised by the CPBF and Sheffield and Rotherham NUJ, to discuss the government's White Paper on the future of the BBC.

Making an impassioned plea for the retention of the licence fee, Sylvia Harvey, Reader in Broadcasting Policy at Sheffield Hallam University, stressed that the funding of the BBC beyond 2001 was far from clear in the White Paper. Referring to this as the government's Space Odyssey option she stressed that the future of the BBC

could be summed up in just nine words: "The licence fee, the licence fee, the licence fee."

Rob Corbett, NUJ Broadcasting Industrial Council, stressed the union wanted "a BBC committed to public service, which is accountable to its consumers and free from government interference."

BECTU President Tony Lennon suggested the BBC was damaging itself by falling victim to fashionable management whims and believing it had to embrace commercialism to survive.

Essential background reading on the BBC

Special offer £11.95 - FREE postage and SAVE £1.00. 'CLOSEDOWN' The BBC and Government

Broadcasting Policy, 1979-92' Tom O'Malley (Pluto Press)

Also: 'Selling the BEEB?' by Tom O'Malley and Jo Treharne (CPBF). Price £3.00 inc p&p.

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