

FREE Press

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1996 MEDIA MANIFESTO

MEDIA REFORM DEBATE BEGINS

IN 1986 the CPBF published and distributed a Media Manifesto. We used this to promote a list of policies for media reform to the public to help influence debate in the run-up to the 1987 Election. Now in 1996 with the prospect of an election within 16 months, we felt it was time to issue a new document. Its aims are to list the range of issues in the area of the mass media that need reform, and to suggest some of the options which can be pursued to achieve that reform. We lay no claim to have definitive answers to the problems we identify. But we do think that there are alternative ways of organising the media and that those alternatives should have a legitimate place in shaping media policy.

Since 1986 the pace of change and transformation of the media has been unprecedented. Channel 5, digital TV, telecommunications and the 'information superhighway' are just some of the new issues which the Manifesto must address. At the same time, levels of media concentration have increased. The Government's 1995 Broadcasting Bill endorses the arguments of the British Media Industry Group for relaxation of the rules of ownership of ITV companies, and gives the green light for large companies to move across media from print to broadcasting. In broadcasting the UK has witnessed the restructuring of the sector away from public service obligations and towards a greater independence on the

Jonathan Hardy and Tom O'Malley explain an important CPBF initiative

market as the main force in regulating activities. Under the cover of talk about choice, commercial cable and satellite services are buying up sporting events which had previously been available to viewers for the price of the licence fee.

The CPBF believes that, while the market has an important role in the provision of media goods and services, there is need both for strong democratic regulation and for public intervention to promote diversity, accountability, quality and choice in the media. We hope that by producing a new Media Manifesto and campaigning around it, we will allow a wider group of people to realise that there are real options available for reform.

A Labour victory at the next election offers the prospect of a new direction in media policy. Our aim is to try to ensure that the new Government's policies are shaped by public interests, not determined by powerful commercial interests. We hope that people will join in the debate and respond to the ideas in the Manifesto. Together we can try to shift debate away from the terms set by the big players in the

media industry and towards one set by people who are interested in creating a diverse, accountable and democratic media.

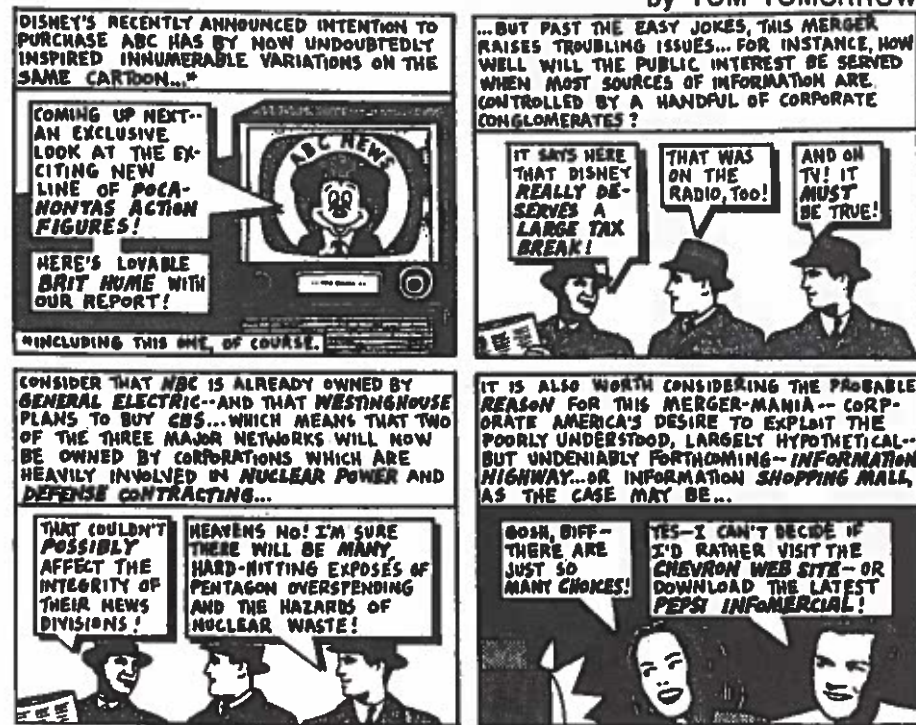
The Manifesto will form part of an ambitious programme of activities leading up to the Election. On Monday 12 February, we will be launching the draft Manifesto to an audience of editors, journalists, MPs, trade unions and partner organisations at our London office. All CPBF members are invited to take part, but please confirm in advance by Friday 9 February. Following further consultation, the Manifesto itself will be produced in April 1996.

On Saturday 18 May we are hosting a major conference in London. Building on the success of our 1995 event, Media versus the People, the conference will address media issues and policy at a European and global as well as UK level and involve international guest speakers. Bringing together trade unions, arts and media groups and all those interested in media reform, the conference is an opportunity to discuss how together we can increase popular support for media democracy and influence politicians and policy makers in this vital period.

All members will receive a copy of the Manifesto and suggestions on how you can help us promote it. We will also keep you regularly informed of activities through Free Press. But, if you want to know more or can help us in any way, please call the office for more details.



by TOM TOMORROW



CORPORATE PRESSURE vs INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

'CAN THE already shaky integrity of television journalism survive the rash of big mergers in the industry?' asks The Economist (25 November 1995) citing two examples of cave-ins due to corporate pressure by USTV networks.

Shortly after Capital Cities/ABC agreed to merge with Walt Disney in July, ABC apologised its way out of a \$10 billion dollar libel law suit, brought by Philip Morris in the wake of a 1994 ABC probe into the tobacco industry. The broadcast, apart from one factual error, was indisputable, but a messy court case would have created problems at a corporate level which Walt Disney wanted settled.

Westinghouse Electric, which has taken over the ailing CBS network, has now got embroiled in another attempt to oil over corporate conflicts of interest. "60 Minutes", CBS's flagship current affairs programme, killed an interview with a former executive of Brown and Williamson Tobacco (B&W) on the grounds it might be sued for breaking the confidentiality agreement with B&W.

Since then the Wall Street Journal has revealed that CBS had already indemnified the former executive against any libel action by the tobacco maker, and the New York Daily News named the executive and printed extracts from the unbroadcast interview. Now B&W is suing the former executive for theft, fraud and breach of contract. The Economist comments pithily, "Westinghouse is about to learn its first lesson about network ownership: stubbing out a controversial story is not as easy as it looks".

ABSENT FACES; ABSENT VOICES

◆ Racist newspaper reporting goes on unchecked by Britain's official watchdog, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), reports The Black Journalist, the Black Members' Council NUJ bulletin. The council wrote to the PCC and discovered that, despite many blatant examples of newspaper racism over the last two years, it has not upheld a single one of the 112 complaints in this category received over that period.

No Black person sits on the PCC, and despite the fact that it has adopted a clause on race similar to the NUJ's in its code of conduct, this has been no more than a paper exercise. "Only fair Black representation on a statutory complaints body with real teeth to impose a proper right of reply and hefty fines against newspapers will help stem the tide of racism," the bulletin argues.

◆ Paul Coleman, co-editor of the Runnymede Bulletin, conducted a detailed analysis of the court reporting of the case of ex-National Front member Peter Thurston, who was jailed for life for the murder of a Black woman, Donna O'Dwyer, when he firebombed a noisy "reggae" party held above his flat.

The survey of 11 national newspapers looked at the slanting of the story towards a "noise rage" angle or a "race angle" in the headlines, the straplines, the opening sentences, the weight and order of text content and in the supporting material. It concludes, "...in broader terms, the survey points to a national press which reflects a society that, at best, remains ill at ease with issues of 'race' and racism and, at worst, consistently denies the reality and misses

the meaning of racial injustice."

The survey appears in the October bulletin which can be obtained from the Runnymede Trust, 11 Princelet Street, London E1 6QH.

◆ Almost one-third of the column inches of national newspapers are filled by regular columnists who are increasingly defining what is and isn't newsworthy, but not one of them is Black. Also out of 4,000 staff on staff or contract journalists on major newspapers fewer than 20 are Black.

◆ The National Union of Journalists Guidelines on Race Reporting have now been produced in an attractive leaflet format. Individual subscribers to Free Press should receive a copy with this issue of the magazine. If you don't, and would like a copy contact Lena Calvert, NUJ, 314 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP.

PRESSWISE TAKES OFF

PRESSWISE is the media awareness project which offers advice and guidance to those who suffer misrepresentation at the hands of press and media.

The January issue of the PressWise Bulletin will contain the first four-page 'case study' about irresponsible journalism, focusing on the tragic case of the Watsons, whose son committed suicide after the press besmirched the reputation of his murdered sister.

PressWise, which runs an advice and support service based on the Right of Reply helpline run by the CPBF some years ago, has a membership scheme open to individuals and organisations. For more details contact PressWise, Unit 2.5, EBC, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE. Tel: 0117 941 5889.

Truth and the media

Stephen Kelly on the Media and the Hillsborough Disaster

IT'S STRANGE how myths evolve. Rumour, lies, misinterpretation, and of course bad journalism. This April marks the seventh anniversary of the tragedy at Hillsborough that cost the lives of 96 football fans. Almost everyone in Liverpool knew someone who died and they still feel a cold shiver at the very mention of the name Hillsborough. It will never go away.

And nor will the memory of some of the events that followed the tragedy, in particular the media coverage. Those lurid, painful photographs splashed insensitively across the front pages the next morning are hard to forget. Pictures that showed loved ones desperately fighting for their very lives. It may have been a powerful image for a newspaper but to those thousands caught up in the disaster it was an image we could all have done without.

After all the brouhaha, apologies and promises that followed the complaints it would be pleasing to suggest that Hillsborough came to represent some

form of watershed, that it mapped out new parameters beyond which the nationals will never again trespass. Well, perhaps editors will think twice before publishing such terrifying images again or before invading the privacy of grieving families. Yet for all that, many of the myths that were created that chaotic weekend, are still being perpetuated around the Isle of Dogs.

No Last Rights, funded by Liverpool City Council and drawn up by the Centre for Studies in Crime and Social Justice at Edge Hill University College, examines in detail the national coverage of the disaster, looking in particular at the promotion of myth in the aftermath. In the hours following the disaster, police spin doctors concocted their own interpretation of events, an interpretation that laid the blame squarely on the victims. It was all to do with drunkenness, hooligans, fans arriving late, and so on.

Seven years on and those myths still

circulate even though Lord Justice Taylor's interim report stated quite categorically that 'the real cause of the Hillsborough disaster was overcrowding ... the main reason for the disaster was the failure of police control.' And although the police have even admitted fault, the myths and suspicions still persist, repeated by the likes of former Thatcher pressman Bernard Ingham, Conservative MP David Evans, and former football manager Brian Clough. It seems that no amount of evidence will ever convince them, their minds forever closed to the truth.

Of course journalists must ask questions even in the most sensitive moments after a disaster. But above all they should pursue their

abused women who had died. There was not one shred of evidence. It was all second-hand inference, some of it originating from an off-the-record briefing with a senior police officer. Thank heavens Kelvin MacKenzie was persuaded to ditch his initial headline 'YOU SCUM'.

That early reporting left a scar and although all judicial inquiries have pointed the finger of blame at the police, and not the fans, the suspicion lingers that drunken Liverpool fans acted like hooligans as they poured into Hillsborough. Myth has become reality, regurgitated by the media, impossible to discern.

Sadly, it is doubtful if even this comprehensive and thorough study will help destroy the myths that still circulate. But at least someone may look seriously at its many recommendations. Later this year a

Granada Television documentary, from Jimmy McGovern, will tackle the issues yet again. Nobody wants to prejudice McGovern, but given his record with Cracker, you have to fear the worst. Granada claims it has a new story to tell. If so, why not a World in Action investigation? Why a drama, with actors, and on location? It smacks of yet another attempt to

squeeze the entertainment value out of Hillsborough.

As Labour Leader Tony Blair snuggles up to Rupert Murdoch, pen at the ready to become a Sun columnist, he might care to reflect on this report and the real damage created by misreporting. Blair says he's a football fan as well; caring and compassionate. Let's just hope he gets to read this report.

◆ Stephen Kelly is the author of Back Page Football. A paperback version of the report No Last Rights is available, price £9.95 inc P&P. Please send cheques, made payable to Liverpool City Council, to The Hillsborough Project, Centre for Studies in Crime and Social Justice, Edge Hill University College, Ormskirk, Lancashire L39 4QP



WINNING WAYS

Here Today...

KELVIN MacKenzie wrote what he impulsively felt to be true in his famous headline on the day after the election: It's the Sun wot won it. He wrote what most journalists also instinctively believe. But most of their editors tried to dismiss the idea that newspapers could have won the election. So did most of the politicians. So have most of the academics.

With the help of the Guardian Research Fellowship I have spent a year at Nuffield College, Oxford, researching this subject and I have come to the conclusion that Kelvin MacKenzie was right from the start. A study of unpublished ICM and MORI polls shows that the great majority of Sun readers are Labour supporters for most of the period between 1990 and 1995. They became Conservative for a brief period between April and September 1992 (visible as a hump on the graph). Then they fell back sharply towards Labour and dipped again when the Sun withdrew its support from Major in January 1994 under the headline 'What fools we were'.

In the three months leading up to the election Sun and Star readers swung 8 per cent to the Conservatives, while Daily Mirror readers swung 0 per cent. In the four week campaign itself Daily Mail readers swung 14 per cent to the Conservatives and Express and Telegraph readers 8 per cent, contradicting the widely held belief that traditionally Conservative newspapers have no influence in elections because they are merely preaching to

Martin Linton on the Tory Tabloids and the 1992 General Election

the converted. Readers of the Daily Mirror and the Guardian swung 0 per cent.

Further evidence comes from readers of Today which switched from supporting the Greens to the Tories to Labour in its short life. The polls show that Today readers followed their newspaper to the left. They displayed a typical Murdoch 'hump' at the last election but after the appointment of a new editor in January 1993, which effectively turned Today into a Labour paper, its readers swung more to the left than those of any other paper.

The most recent polls show that the Conservatives now have a lead of only three points among readers of the Daily Mail, compared with a 60-point lead at the last election. Among readers of the Times, Labour is already ahead. It's difficult to think of any reason why the readers of different newspapers should behave so differently except for the obvious one - that they were influenced by what they read. It's not because they do what they are told. It's because they are told such different 'facts' and presented with such different agendas that it's hardly surprising

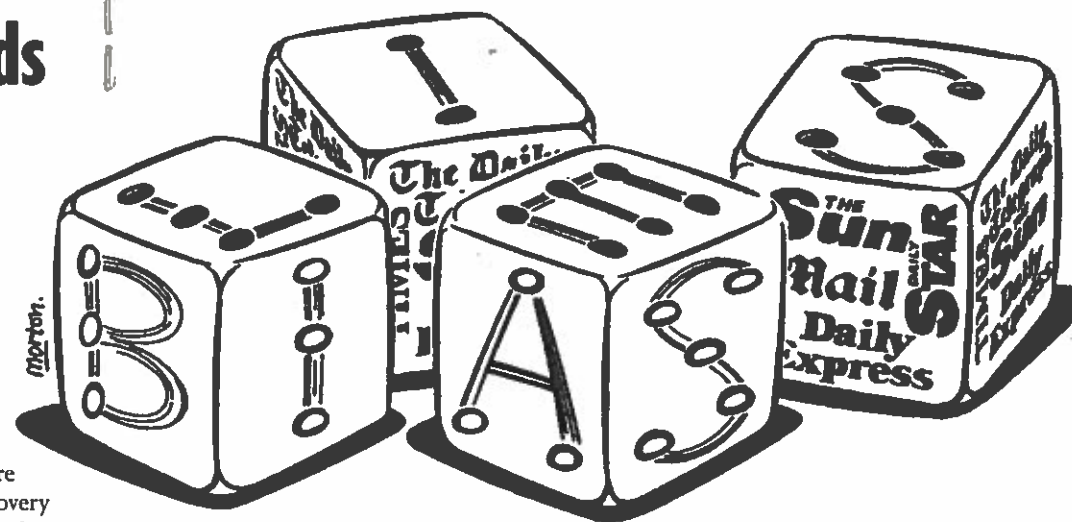
they end up voting differently.

To take a straightforward story from the first week of the election, the retail sales figures, readers of the Express were told sales were up and the recession was over under the headline: 'Britain turns corner as sales surge'. Mail and Sun readers were told sales were up and hopes of a recovery were rising. But Mirror readers, under the cross-head 'slump', were told sales were 'flat' and the recession was still on.

On Labour's taxation plans, Mirror readers were told that 9 out of 10 would be better off, but the Express and the Sun both printed tax tables showing that everyone from car assembly workers and computer operators to crane drivers was worse off. The £17,000 a year crane driver, according to the Sun, would be £960 a year worse off and the £11,000 a year mechanic, according to a tax table in the Express on polling day, would be £921 a year worse off.

Sun readers were also told that 'tens of thousands of bogus asylum seekers' would be let in by Labour with a map showing how many from each country: 2,250 from Zaire; 8,000 from Somalia, etc. They were told that 'planning applications - including loft conversions, home extensions and garages - will have to be approved by gay and lesbian groups if Labour are elected'. They were told Labour would increase VAT on gas and electricity to 17.5 per cent (nice one, that) and that skilled manual workers would be 'hit by massive tax rises under Labour'.

It would be fair enough if Sun and Mirror readers made different political judgements about the same facts. But research tends to show they voted differently because they



read different 'facts'. What is the best way for non-Conservative parties to respond to this situation?

A study of party leaders shows that Harold Wilson, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair have given the most priority to relations with Murdoch. Wilson visited Murdoch three or four times in the first six months after Murdoch relaunched the Sun. Blair is just following in his footsteps by going to Hayman Island. The question is; does he have any real alternative? And if he wins the next election, will there be any other way in which he can tame the tiger?

In Norway, Labour governments have created a system of press subsidies to preserve diversity in the press, a policy which has allowed their own Labour newspapers to survive. So have the Social Democrats in Sweden.

In Australia, the Labor Party learnt the hard way that it needed to win and retain the support of Rupert Murdoch. The former prime minister, Bob Hawke, was accused of abandoning cross-media ownership rules to win Murdoch's support. The present Paul Keating seems to share the same approach. In the boat over to Hayman Island for the NewsCorp conference, he told Tony Blair and his press officer, Alastair Campbell, that: "Newspapers and politicians both overestimate the importance of editorial support, but you should not underestimate the effect of newspaper hostility. It is very hard to win with an entire mass media loaded against you."

A third approach would be through electoral law. The way that the tabloids behave

in elections is legal only because of a clause in the Representation of the People Act which exempts regularly published newspapers from the general rule that no one can spend money campaigning for or against a candidate unless they have the permission of their agent and their costs are declared on the agent's return.

This exemption does not apply to broadcasting and it would not apply to a newspaper published specifically for an election.

In Quebec, whose election law is based on our own, they apply the law more strictly. Newspapers are only free to attack candidates or parties if they do it in their comment column and their comment column remains the same size and in the same position as before the election. Much of what appears in the British tabloids would be ruled to be election expenditure in Quebec.

But the simplest way of dealing with this problem is through another aspect of election rules, the party election broadcast. This is already a legal requirement for broadcasters and it makes prima facie common sense to extend the principle to the press, obliging them to carry party election advertisements, paid for from public funds, during elections. This would give parties a chance to respond to the tabloids' election coverage and might even deter some of their wilder flights of fancy, ensuring that the readers of all newspapers will be exposed to some degree to the same objective facts during the campaign.

♦ Martin Linton works for The Guardian. The seventh annual Guardian Lecture will be published under the title 'Was it the Sun wot won it?' in the New Year. It will be available from Nuffield College, Oxford OX1 1NF.

THE CLOSURE of Today provides an ironic comment on the ten years of the Great Newspaper revolution.

On January 25 1986 Rupert Murdoch gave the world of newspaper publishing the biggest shock in its 270-year history. In one go, without warning, he moved his four national titles - same as now, without Today - from their editorial and production centres around Fleet Street to the new purpose-built print factory at Wapping.

Today was launched in March 1986. This was the paper that was going to prove that cheaply-produced colour publication, with low staffing and no unions, was the future. Pundits predicted a flowering of titles: there would be dozens of nationals, catering for a diverse range of politics and taste.

A 'golden era' was predicted, but what happened? Five thousand printers from the NGA and SOGAT were sacked when Rupert Murdoch in secret negotiations with the leaders of the electricians' union, the EETPU, recruited a strikebreaking workforce for Wapping. News International paid journalists handsomely to go to Wapping; a £2,000 lump sum at the start, and another £2,000 a year rise three months later - together making a 20 per cent



Perceptive or what? How print unions saw Murdoch's gameplan

increase for many of them. But many journalists refused the bribe - more than 100 in all, the 'Wapping Refuseniks'.

A handful of new papers did start up - the Independent, London Daily News, Daily Post, Sunday

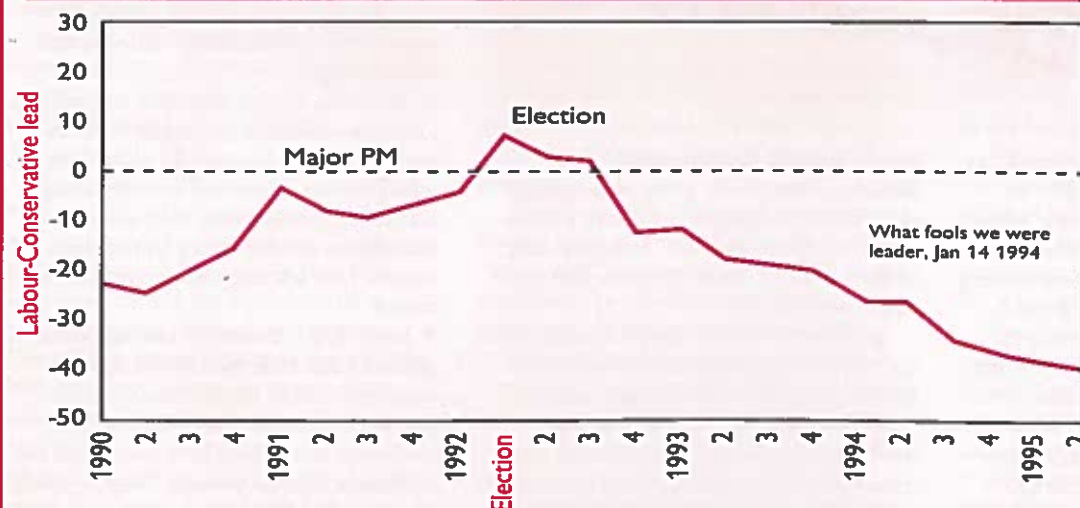
Correspondent, News on Sunday. The Independent alone is still going, and it was largely the talent of the Wapping refuseniks that gave the paper its flavour and early success. But some people predict it won't be around for long.

And if the paper dies, who will be the real killer? Who started the price war, using his enormous resources to finance losses that others cannot bear? Who else but Rupert Murdoch?

The first part of the Wapping 'dream' has meant big money for some - the stars and the executives - but for most on national newspapers salaries have fallen in real terms. And a more diverse media? Dream on.

READERS OF THE SUN

CONSERVATIVE (+) OR LABOUR (-) LEAD IN VOTING INTENTION



Up for grabs

UNSEEMLY haste is driving the Parliamentary timetable for the government's Broadcasting Bill. Published on Friday December 15 just before the Parliamentary recess, the second reading will be 16 January 1996. By the time you read this, and before we have any real opportunity to brief and lobby MPs on the issues which concern us about the Bill, that date will be passed.

One reason given for this all this bustle is that the Bill might disappear if there's a snap general election. Well, we shouldn't weep if that was to be its fate. This is the first piece of media legislation since the flawed 1990 Broadcasting Act, and it continues the process of dismantling the regulated system of public service broadcasting and replacing it with a commercial free-for-all. Indeed it massively accelerates the process.

Take the proposal to abolish the two licence limit for ITV companies, and establish a new ceiling of 15 per cent on TV audience. With such a generous ceiling the whole of the ITV sector could be consolidated into just three groups. Carlton, which has the London weekday and Central franchises, would find it just about possible to take on MAI, which has the Anglian and Meridian TV licences. And the news sent the share prices of the smaller ITV companies – Grampian, Scottish and HTV – soaring, as they become ripe for take-over. Robert MacLennan, LibDem Heritage spokesman is right: "It will further undermine the regional voice of independent TV and impose a distant, homogenised uniformity".

The other elements in the Bill include greater cross-ownership between newspaper groups, TV companies and radio, and abolition of the rule preventing ITV companies, radio and local newspapers owning cable services in areas of geographical overlap. The result will be the growth of bigger mixed media companies, which the government wants to encourage – 'national champions' – to take on the big international media companies.

The media industry's response to the Bill was positive. The Daily Mail editorial, (16/12/95) 'Into a new age' was ecstatic. The Bill "gives television companies and newspaper publishers a new freedom to invest and expand. In future there will be greater cross-ownership. The way has been

Granville Williams analyses the Broadcasting Bill

cleared for this country to take the lead in the global communications revolution". Only the Daily Mirror Comment, 'Sending TV down the tube' (16/12/95) dismissed the proposals as 'blinkered and irrelevant' pointing out the threat from Rupert Murdoch. It argued that people watch television to see good programmes but "he has bought up most major sporting events, bought up first showings of new films and has now bought 3,000 Coronation Street shows from Granada...It is pay TV that could drive the digital age. But unregulated and unlicensed Sky will control it".

Whilst the Mirror and Murdoch's News International are barred from moving into ITV because they both exceed the 20 per cent threshold of total national newspaper circulation Murdoch is the real beneficiary

Fear of Murdoch is not rooted in superstition

of these proposals because the government has backtracked from plans to impose of 10 per cent limit on total share of the media cake. It leaves both groups free to expand their cable and satellite interests, but in this particularly race can

Mirror Group's Live TV and other fledgling interests in new media stand a chance?

As Sky plans to offer digital satellite within a year, and up to 200 channels, enough to plaster sports, children's programmes, films, drama, US sitcoms and pay-per-view boxing programmes across the screen 24 hours a day.

And it will be both an operator and provider for a significant share of total digital terrestrial TV services.

We're accused sometimes of 'demonising' Murdoch. Well, our fears of Murdoch aren't rooted in silly superstition but on the solid financial prediction that in 2005, unless something is done to limit his media interests, he will have colossal power and dominate the UK media.

This Bill avoids, for expedient political reasons, tackling Murdoch. It throws some comforting titbits to feed indigenous UK media minnows, but concerns about the role of media in a democratic society only feature as platitudes. The Bill is a potent boost to vested media power and it has to be challenged even at this late stage.

WITHOUT COMMENT

The very, very sad thing about it is that the BBC haven't lost any of the things they have lost – football, cricket, boxing, golf – because of criticism of their competence or performance.

They have lost them because they have been massively outbid by either Sky or ITV.

Sky can put up their subscriptions at will. ITV can presumably recoup the money they're putting out for Formula 1 by putting up the rates for commercials.

The BBC is limited to the licence fee, and the moment anybody talks of putting up the licence fee there is a national outcry.

The BBC is literally bleeding to death in the sports area.

My heart goes out to them because they are extremely decent, extremely hard-working, massively capable, enormously experienced people to whom sport matters.

They're fighting with both hands tied behind their back because they haven't got the money, and nobody's got the guts to see they get it.

Murray Walker, motor racing commentator, after ITV snatched the rights to broadcast Formula 1 from the BBC for a rumoured £60 million.

Who owns knowledge? Policy for the press

Towards an Information Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

Eds. C M Firestone and J R Schemm. Aspen Institute, Washington DC 1995

THE INTERNET may be buzzing with facts and opinions for all those who can afford access to the information superhighway, but how are you to know if they are accurate, let alone fair?

As governments, corporations, and private individuals build up databanks about everyone they come into contact with, who is supervising the use of that information?

And who owns the knowledge and ideas developed by creative writers, academic researchers and journalists, especially when they become accessible to millions of others who can extract and change original material at a keystroke?

These are some of the problems addressed by this timely volume of essays which focus on a draft bill of rights and responsibilities for 'the information society' devised at an Aspen Institute Conference in Colorado back in 1993.

This is no insular study concerned with just the USA. It has a relevance everywhere, and should be required reading for those who want a Labour Government to mirror Bill Clinton's enthusiasm for cabling everyone up. Fibre optics may encourage 'inter-activity', but they do have blind spots and may not enhance democracy as much as fondly imagine.

Mike Jempson

Studies in the USA reveal that over the last 25 years, concern about privacy issues has shot up from 34 per cent of those surveyed in 1970 to 83 per cent in 1993. As the new communications technologies have expanded, so too has hostility and suspicion towards it. The most wary were the economically deprived or socially vulnerable, but they have now been joined by the highest-paid and best qualified members of US society. And the sceptics come from both ends of the political spectrum. A large swathe of middle America remains fairly unconcerned about the risks of Big Brother, but awareness is growing about the power held by those who control the technology, and own the information.

The draft Bill of Rights and Responsibilities attempts to define issues of control and access, and offers thoughtful challenges to some of the myths that have begun to be manufactured around the notion of 'the information society'.

The value of this philosophical approach to what is a deeply political issue lies in the questions it asks rather than any conclusions that might be inferred. We are left to ponder whether attempting to regulate a fast-changing technology is an appropriate way to counter abuse of its power. Perhaps instead we should be seeking ways to strengthen and codify citizens' rights with the backing of penalties under law.

There is an alternative

CENSORED — The News That Didn't Make the News and Why

Carl Jensen and Project Censored, Four Walls Eight Windows £10.99. Available in the UK through Turnaround Distribution 0171-609 7836.

IT'S A POPULAR game among radical hacks to nominate the biggest stories that don't get into print.

In the USA, a society in which all kinds of dreams are acted out for real, there has been since 1976 an organisation which makes a business out of this: Project Censored, a group of journalists, academics and campaigners which each year picks the Top 25 Censored Stories and puts them in a yearbook.

The stories are drawn from the alternative press. They are catalogued in order, though whether the criterion is the degree of censorship or the importance of the issue is not spelt out.

Top Censored Story of 1994 was the suppression of official studies showing that 240,540 American workers were exposed to such hazardous materials as asbestos, silica and uranium at work. It seems that only 71,180 of them have been informed of the hazard to their lives, leaving 169,270 in the dark.

Number 25 is mad cow disease spreading from the UK to the US.

You can smile at this trainspotter approach to censorship, but the fact is that there is no such body or book in the UK and we could do with one. You have to ask: what would happen to such stories here? The answer is probably, much the same as in the US: they appear in radical alternative publications and sometimes in BBC2 or Channel 4 documentaries or the liberal broadsheets.

Tim Gopsill

JAMES CURRAN has written a sharply focused discussion paper for the IPPR Media and Communication project (that's the one which News International and Pearson, amongst others, have chipped in hefty contributions for). Policy For The Press is a cogent critique of the present drift in UK media policy, with some practical proposals for reform.

"Checks on the exercise of proprietorial power in large press groups need to be introduced through the devolution and spreading of editorial authority," he argues. This would foster internal pluralism within large press groups and encourage different newspapers within the same group to adopt different editorial positions.

"The government's proposals for partial liberalisation of the rules in relation to cross-ownership should be opposed" and "concerted European legislation...offers a way of achieving equitable consistency in the application of monopoly rules".

A Media Enterprise Board (MEB) should be set up "to facilitate the launch of new publications, and to help resource-poor groups to enter the market who are currently excluded".

Legal reform requires a reconstituted Press Complaints Commission, "so that it no longer has rubber teeth". Its authority will have to be underwritten by statute if publishers will not agree to binding self-regulation (as in Sweden) and a reformed PCC should be more genuinely representative, with more money to do its job properly. It should be more concerned with education, training and research, publish an annual audit of the press, and promote professional dialogue within the press industry. Also the autonomy of journalists should be strengthened, with the Code of Conduct drawn up through negotiations between the National Union of Journalists and employers' organisations and all journalists "should have a conscience clause inserted into their contracts, which enables them to act in a way that transgresses this code of conduct, with legal protection for unfair dismissal".

The paper costs £4.95 and is available from IPPR, 30-32 Southampton Row, London WC2E 7RA. TEL 0171 379 9400

NEW EDITION OF BRITAIN'S MEDIA

THE SECOND edition of Britain's Media: How They Are Related will be out in March. Enlarged, with new material which takes the analysis up to December 1995, it's an essential book for anyone wanting to read an alternative analysis to the powerful corporate lobby for lifting cross-media ownership restrictions. The book costs £6.99 (£7.50 inc P&P) ISBN 1 898240 04 3. Put your orders in now.

NEW NORTH WEST MEDIA GUIDE

REACHING OUT is a new media guide produced with full listings for the North West and national media, and lots of other

useful addresses, plus practical tips on using the media to promote your organisation's work and activities. The

booklet costs

£3.50 inc P&P and is available from CPBF North, Kirklees Media Centre, 7 Northumberland Street, Huddersfield HD1 1RL Tel 01484 454184

We've also got some copies of the media guide produced last year for Yorkshire and Humberside at the same price. Orders to the same address.



SECRECY UNDER SCRUTINY

The CPBF has joined forces with Charter 88 and the Democratic Left in the south west to promote the need for freedom of information legislation, one of the key issues on the agenda for the CPBF Media Manifesto.

CPBF National Council member Mike Jempson will be joined on the platform by Bristol University politics lecturer Donald Shell for a joint meeting on 'The Mysteries of British Government'.

A banned TV documentary on the topic will be screened during the meeting at the Create Centre, Smeaton Road, near Bristol's Cumberland Basin at 7.30pm on Wednesday 31 January 1996.

It will be followed by a debate about the role of the press and media in breaking open the secrecy that surrounds so much of the so-called democratic decision-making process.

There has been an upsurge of interest in the CPBF in the South West over recent months, with meetings in Bristol and Cheltenham about ownership and control of the media, and worries about an apparent weakening of Labour Party policy on the issue.

FUND RAISING GOOD AND BAD NEWS

WE'D LIKE to thank the CPBF member (who requests anonymity) for the £500 donation to the fund raising appeal. Also

the Scottish TUC has just affiliated to the CPBF. We're still a long way short of our fund raising target of £25,000, and unfortunately we heard just before Christmas that a bid to the Rowntree Reform Trust towards our work around the Media Manifesto was unsuccessful. However, as you will see from this issue of Free Press we intend to press ahead with our plans and have booked the TUC Centre for a conference on Saturday, May 18, to launch the Media Manifesto. Please help us to raise the money for this.

MEMBERSHIP FORM - CAN YOU HELP US GET NEW MEMBERS?

OUR NEW membership form, designed by Sally Bailey, is now printed. Some of you will have received one with your individual copy of Free Press. One practical way you can help is to encourage individuals and organisations to affiliate to the CPBF so if you need extra copies of the form just contact the National Office.

HELP SHAPE THE MEDIA MANIFESTO

THERE'S an Open Meeting to discuss the topics and policy proposals for our 1996 Media Manifesto (see background article on page 1 in this Free Press) in the Conference Room, 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF on Monday 12 February at 7.00pm. We hope all interested organisations and individuals will come along to suggest ideas.

FREE PRESS is edited for the National Council by Granville Williams. We hope the next issue will contain the text of the Media Manifesto.

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