

**From:** <inkchair@pro-net.co.uk>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 30, 2002 5:50 PM  
**Subject:** INK submission to broadcast news enquiry

Dear INK Member,

Currently I am lobbying for greater diversity of views in the broadcast media with a view to getting INK members and our ideas into the mainstream. I hope that INK can co-operate with some or all of the following on these issues: Green Party, Socialist Alliance, Liberal Democrats, Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, Voice of the Viewer and Listener, National Union of Journalist.

This email contains the proposed submission to the ITC enquiry into news broadcasting. It needs to reach Ian Hargreaves, ex-editor of the Independent very soon. There is little time to get feedback from INK members or the other potential partners. I have slipped in a couple of let-outs e.g. that INK members might not all agree with everything here. Please let me have comments and corrections asap.

Ian Henshall

## **SUBMISSION FROM INK TO THE HARGREAVES INVESTIGATION INTO BROADCAST NEWS, COMMISSIONED BY THE ITC**

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INK is the umbrella organisation for the alternative press in the UK. High profile members include New Internationalist, The Big Issue, the Ecologist, and Red Pepper, along with around another 60 titles. The combined readership is over 2 million.

*Disclaimer: this submission has been written by Ian Henshall the Chair of INK at fairly short notice. INK is a young organisation and has not developed a body of policy yet. Therefore it cannot be assumed that each and every INK member agrees with every detail in this paper.*

### **A. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

There are many aspects to broadcast news: intrusion into individual private lives, dumbing down, scheduling and so on. This submission concentrates on the quality of reporting of political, social and lifestyle news.

In recent decades new media (e.g. channel five, the internet) have brought a huge overall increase in broadcast news and current affairs programming, even if less is on prime time. However this has led only to more repetition of a relatively small selection of news items and no change in the rigid centrist ideology which broadcasters impose on viewers in the name of balance. The public has reacted to this very obvious central control by losing interest in news and politics, as happened in Eastern Europe under communism. There is a need for structural and cultural reform.

This submission lists seven key areas of failure. It goes on to propose reforms. The effect of these reforms will be:

- to clarify the definition of balance so that it permits rather than excludes political diversity, and
- to protect journalists and editors from interference by managers, politicians and powerful lobbyists, instead making them subject to control by a professional body on the lines of the Law Society or the General Medical Council

## **B. THE CURRENT FAILURES**

### **1. BALANCE TRANSFORMED INTO CENTRAL CONTROL.**

The requirement for balance is the main legal constraint on broadcasters. It has been transformed by editorial policymakers into a triple travesty. Disregarding logic and evidence, they assume that all opinion falls within a simple left-right spectrum. Then they assume that the way to practice balance is to take a fixed position at the centre of this supposed spectrum. Worse, they choose this centre point with reference to the make-up of the Parliament of the day, assuming that because Parliament should reflect public opinion it does.

An equally valid spectrum to left vs. right is centre vs. the periphery. This is probably regarded by the public as more relevant, and translates in practice as London vs. the provinces, big farmers vs. small farmers, the poor vs. the rich. From this perspective the balance requirement is flagrantly flouted on broadcast news which systematically promotes the centre against the periphery. This culture of centrism has led to the flourishing of a type of journalist who has an aptitude for reporting briefings and retaining facts, but is blind to any analysis of facts which does not fit the centrist mould.

### **2. POLITICAL PLURALISM SUPRESSED.**

In the last twenty-five years there has been an increase in diversity in the UK and pluralism has rightly become the official creed of much of the establishment. While cultural diversity in the media has been promoted with some success, the parallel obligation to reflect political diversity has been wholly neglected. Indeed there is a suspicion that the pursuit of cultural diversity has been used as a distraction for the more important obligation of the news media to reflect political diversity.

### **3. BROADCASTERS ENTANGLED IN THE CORPORATE STATE.**

The broadcast news media have allowed themselves to become entangled with other centres of power - government, corporations, press barons and well-funded lobby groups, which liberal economist JK Galbraith has christened the Corporate State. This entanglement has many forms - the reliance on official press releases and failure to seek out alternative opinions or check facts, privileged access to unsourced inside information and unattributable meetings held in secret, and prospects of promotion or better paid PR jobs for individuals who co-operate with the agenda of broadcast managers or lobbyists.

To revisit the famous dictum of Randolph Hearst (news is what someone does not want you to print - the rest is advertising), current broadcast news is an almost unmitigated stream of advertising for the various branches of the corporate state, relayed with credulity by reporters and editors who seem to be in a permanent state of amnesia regarding the track record of lies and misinformation of their sources.

### **4. PRESS BARONS HAVE AN UNDUE INFLUENCE.**

Broadcasters have become particularly entangled in the print media, a cartel dominated by offshore millionaires with rigid political agendas, indifferent or opposed to public opinion in the UK. Broadcasters follow the slanted agenda set by editors in the print media and there is a revolving door of personnel between the two industries.

### **5. CONSERVATIVE CULTURE.**

In spite of the presence of women and ethnic reporters, the culture of the broadcast news media is dominated by a minority subculture of British society: well-paid conservative white middle-aged men. This culture is prone to power-worship, pre-occupied by blame and violence, seems to enjoy wars, tolerates smoking and excessive drinking while condemning other drugs, admires America while regarding the UN with contempt, and is oblivious to those viewers who do not share its own conservative values.

### **6. ABUSE OF NEW MEDIA.**

In the past, broadcasters blamed their failings on lack of airtime preventing them from going into detail or airing minority opinions. As a result of new media (e.g. teletext, channel five, broadcasters own web sites) the total news coverage in the broadcast media has vastly increased. However there has been no increase in political diversity and, astonishingly, no increase in detail, with the same often controversial and sometimes false facts and interpretations repeated again and again. This is strong evidence of a systematic problem at the heart of editorial policy-making.

## C. THE SOLUTIONS

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the current system is a top down hierarchy which functions, not to inform the public, but to filter out information and suppress perspectives that the Westminster elite is not comfortable with. It is undeniable that a culture change is required.

Many INK members would like to see a complete dismantling of the current system. We are reluctant to see more regulation. However, open regulation is preferable to the current system of absolute control by an unaccountable and secretive cabal of managers and senior editors. In view of the travesty that the broadcast news media have become, we regard the following proposals as by far the lesser of two evils. The proposed system should result in more rather than less freedom for both broadcast managers and the many journalists and editors with integrity, whose motivation is to inform the public without fear or favour.

1. INK calls for reforms which would reinvent the concept of balance in a pluralistic society, free journalists from political interference by managers, impose basic professional ethics on journalists and make editorial policy transparent.

In a hospital, managers do not make clinical decisions, neither should they make editorial decisions in the broadcast media. Such decisions should be a professional matter made by editors and regulated by an independent professional quasi-judicial authority similar to the *Law Society* or the *General Medical Council*. This reform would stop politicians and corporate lobbyists subverting management as they do currently, and separate issues of corporate governance from editorial decision-making. It would allow the legal requirement for balance to be made transparent, specific and enforceable. It should be welcomed by managers and journalists alike.

2. INK calls for balance to be clarified and codified in sufficient detail to be enforceable by quasi-judicial means. Balance would be policed by a quasi-judicial body operating in public. In particular balance should mean what most of the public probably think it already means:

- (i) editorial positions should be taken and the news agenda set with reference to public opinion rather than powerful politicians at Westminster, corporate bosses or foreign millionaires who happen to own newspapers.
- (ii) because it is impossible to reflect the range of public opinion in any one broadcast, each broadcast channel would be obliged to take a range of editorial positions in different programmes with the balance criteria applied overall, rather than the same minority centrist position in all their broadcasts
- (iii) the assumption should be scrapped that the make-up of Parliament, still less the party leadership positions on matters of policy, should be taken to reflect public opinion. Pending more research, the British Social Attitudes Survey would be a better source of accurate data on public attitudes

3. INK calls for the establishment of a Professional Standards Body with jurisdiction over all broadcast editors and journalists to enforce a basic code of standards and perhaps the newly codified balance obligation. The basic journalistic code would include for instance the obligation to correct errors of fact with equal prominence, not to take bribes or substantial freebies, to use the same criteria to evaluate the credibility of all sources. On a parallel with other professional bodies, this body would mainly be composed of journalists. It would have teeth and bring within its jurisdiction any manager found to undermine professional journalistic values.

4. INK calls for all editorial policy decisions and guidelines to be made public. This would undercut the privileged access to this information which corporate lobbyists currently enjoy.

#### **D. SOME CASE HISTORIES.**

1. Recently ITN reacted to the news that most of their viewers did not now Israel was in illegal occupation of the West Bank with the reported comment: we are not in the business of giving history lessons. This is unbelievable arrogance: firstly ITN was a major news medium throughout the initial West Bank occupation and ever since, secondly broadcasters are only too willing to repeat facts which are in no sense news when it suits them or their cronies. For instance the recent 'Black Rod affair', a campaign run by the Daily Mail was so convoluted that broadcasters were repeatedly rerunning old information.
2. During the NATO bombing of Serbia broadcasters relayed uncritically and repeatedly night after night the assertions of Blair and Cooke that 100,000 people or more were being murdered by Serb forces. The true figure was less than a tenth of this, and there was never more than the hearsay evidence of desperate refugees to support the claims. No source outside the corporate state would ever be treated with respect in the future after perpetrating such a gross deception on the media and the public.
3. There appears to be a systematic censorship in the UK broadcast media of any suggestion that the official Bush/Blair story of 9/11 might not be true. This is in spite of a mountain of well-sourced evidence indicating that the US government had detailed prior knowledge of the attacks and chose not to prevent them. Because broadcasters refuse to use their extra broadcast time to relay detailed news, this prior knowledge is glossed over and false statements are still being made that Bush had only vague warnings. 9/11 victims' families in the UK have been denied the information that there is a major lawsuit in the US on their behalf with many already signed up, alleging criminal complicity by the Bush regime.
4. Broadcasters routinely repeat opinions from the national press implying that they are somehow an expression of public opinion. They also imply that information which they take from the national press is true. In fact the national press lobbies furiously to ensure that they are wholly unregulated and therefore, subject only to the libel laws, have the right to lie at whim. The record confirms this. This system of repeating reports from the national press is in violation of the existing balance requirement.
5. Extremism in the national press is treated quite differently from extremism that is perceived to come from the left or anarchists. For instance the Murdoch and Black press empires have regularly run articles that are an incitement to war crimes and terrorism in recent months. Black is promoting the expulsion of all Palestinians from the West Bank under the code word transfer. Murdoch has promoted the views of a religious extremist in the US who advocates the murder of foreign Moslem leaders and the forcible conversion of Moslems to Christianity. If this criminal incitement was coming from the left broadcasters would more likely call in the police than continue to treat the perpetrators as legitimate sources of information or opinion.

*From Ian Henshall, chair INK.*

*INK is the umbrella trade organisation for the UK alternative press. Comment is written in a strictly personal capacity. To get future newsletters, or be removed email to [inkchair@pro-net.co.uk](mailto:inkchair@pro-net.co.uk). For an archive go to [www.coffee.uk.com/crisis](http://www.coffee.uk.com/crisis). For INK administration contact [steve@inkadmin.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:steve@inkadmin.fsnet.co.uk).*

## GENERAL SOURCES ON THE CRISIS

<https://wsws.org/> World Socialist Web Site. 4th International. Unlike the Left in the UK, they are accusing Bush of criminal complicity in 911.

<http://www.whatreallyhappened.com> Radical dissenters from 11 September on Middlebrow reporting, conspiratorial. More people visit this site than Newsweek.com

<http://www.truthout.com> Mainstream Democrats. Like me, they started with an open mind and have been forced to the conclusion that the official story of 911 is not true.

<http://www.fromthewilderness.com> Mike Ruppert, legendary ex-cop, has exposed Bush prior knowledge of 911 and analysed insider dealing. A big target of Bush junta supporters

<http://www.medialens.org> UK-based site organises email campaigns against particularly gross betrayals of journalistic ethics.

<http://www.apfn.org/apfn/WTC.htm> American Patriot Friends Network. These are right wing libertarians with many sources in the US establishment and armed forces. They believe 911 was a coup by the Bush Crime Family.

[resist@best.com](mailto:resist@best.com) Radical Times. Essential. This is a weekly newsletter made up of high quality articles from a range of dissenting sources mostly on the Left.

[eastman@bentonrea.com](mailto:eastman@bentonrea.com) Dick Eastman. Essential if you want your mind expanded. US dissident, one-off obsessive genius, Gandhian social conservative, believes 911 was a set-up and has lots of evidence to back it up.

[konformist-owner@yahoogroups.com](mailto:konformist-owner@yahoogroups.com) The Konformist. Essential. They relay stuff from a very wide variety of sources.

[bulletin@9-11peace.org](mailto:bulletin@9-11peace.org) 9-11 Peace org. More conventional peace activists. Weekly.

[spynews-digest@yahoogroups.com](mailto:spynews-digest@yahoogroups.com) Mario Profaco. This is like having AP in your sitting room. Don't even think of getting his full service.

[Gush-Shalom-subscribe@topica.com](mailto:Gush-Shalom-subscribe@topica.com) Gush Shalom. Essential if you have an interest in Middle East. They are an anti-Zionist Israeli peace group.

[Emperors1000@aol.com](mailto:Emperors1000@aol.com) Emperor's clothes. They have raised some of the most coherent objections to the official 9-11 story.

<http://www.onlinejournal.com> On Line Journal. Alternative news site with superb barnstorming editorials from Larry Chin. Another site that has slowly come to acknowledge Bush complicity in 911

<http://globalresearch.ca/>. Has exposed the oil connection in Afghanistan and the Bin Laden/Bush links.

*These are the sites with photographic evidence on the Pentagon attack*

<http://www.bosankoe.btinternet.co.uk/>

he has analysed the Pentagon's own footage

[http://www.asile.org/citoyens/numero13/pentagone/erreurs\\_en.htm](http://www.asile.org/citoyens/numero13/pentagone/erreurs_en.htm)

this French site has had millions of visitors

[http://hamilton.indymedia.org:8081/front.php3?article\\_id=1786&group=webcast](http://hamilton.indymedia.org:8081/front.php3?article_id=1786&group=webcast)

This site analyses and debunks eyewitness reports of the Pentagon crash