THE BRITISH MEDIA AND IRELAND

Truth: the first casualty

70p

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Contents

Hear nothing

See nothing

Speak nothing

If you don't know what is happening in Northern Ireland, you must have been watching British television, listening to British radio and reading the British press

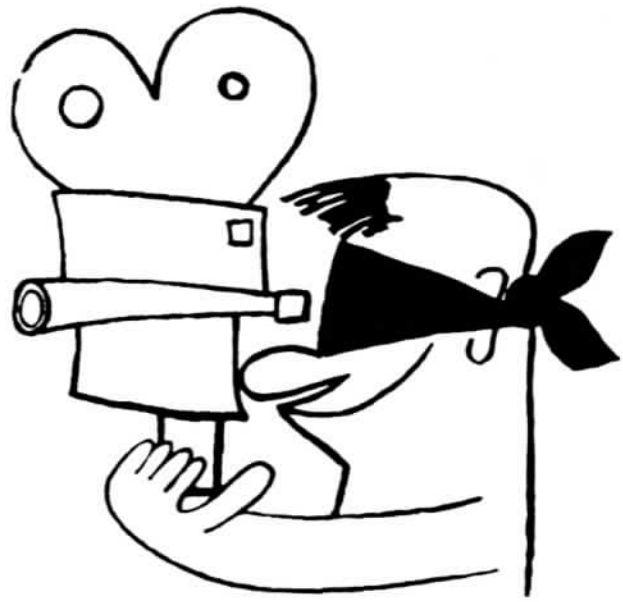
Design by Adrian Yeeles

"We have a responsibility... to provide a rationally based and balanced service of news which will enable adult people to make basic judgements about public policy in their capacity as voting citizens of a democracy... We have to add to this basic supply of news a service of contextual comment which will give understanding as well as information... The moral responsibility of the broadcaster here is not simply to keep the ring open for all opinion, but to see that everybody has a chance to appear in it."

Sir Charles Curran, former BBC Director-General, in a speech to the Edinburgh Broadcasting Conference, 1971

"A journalist shall at all times defend the principle of the freedom of the press and other media in relation to the collection of information and the expression of comment and criticism. He/she shall strive to eliminate distortion, news suppression and censorship."

National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct, Clause 2



'WE'RE BEING REPRESSED'

In the aftermath of the introduction of internment in 1971, official pressures on the media became so intense that 200 leading journalists and broadcasters decided to meet at the ICA in London to consider what to do. The Irish Times printed this report of the meeting:

'It's got to the stage where we're being repressed,' was how Jonathan Dimbleby of the BBC's 'World at One' programme put it. Editors, he said, were now so worried about pressures from above that they tended to approach a story not with the aim of discovering the truth, but in a manner that would ensure that they didn't get into trouble. Shooting incidents, for instance, were covered merely as events, and little attempt was made to uncover the reasons, if any, that lay behind them.

Following *The Sunday Times* disclosures about 'ill-treatment' of detainees, BBC men, Dimbleby said, had been given permission to interview internees, but they were not allowed to interview witnesses such as doctors or priests who might have had evidence which would have corroborated internees' allegations. He also pointed out that the BBC's editor of current affairs had to listen to every item on Northern Ireland before it was broadcast, on the specific instructions of the Director-General.

ITV communicators had their problems too. The Granada TV men, who had had their programme on the IRA banned without its even having been seen, pointed out the significance of the recent attempts of Ulster Television to influence the ITA. UTV's managing director, 'Brum' Henderson, was, they pointed out, the brother of Bill Henderson, a public relations officer to the Unionist party and managing director of the *Newsletter* and had, therefore, a 'natural anxiety' about allowing certain programmes to be shown on UTV. UTV had indeed, 'opted out' of several programmes on Northern Ireland which had been networked throughout the rest of Britain.

In a passionate speech Keith Kyle of the BBC's '24 Hours' was scathing about current BBC policy on Northern Ireland, which, he said, could be paraphrased as 'Programmes as a whole must vindicate the BBC's detestation of terrorism'. And to those who claimed that a policy of censorship should be imposed in 'the national interest', Kyle retorted that 'there is no higher national interest than avoiding self-deception on Northern Ireland.'

Another important point about censorship, according to John O'Callaghan of the *Guardian*, was that if, as seemed quite possible, the Republican movement was defeated, then censorship would be seen by the Government as an important instrument in that defeat and, therefore, a powerful argument for an increase in its use in Britain.

The mood of the meeting was summed up in the 'declaration of intent' suggested by Roy Bull of the *Scotsman* which read: 'We deplore the intensification of censorship on TV, radio and the press coverage of events in Northern Ireland and pledge ourselves to oppose it.'

Irish Times 24.11.71

"Those who have access, anywhere, at any time, to our media, should be pressing to ensure that in those media Northern Ireland is put in context, the events there are explained, the possible future analysed. Otherwise we will continue to deny the British public the kind of information it needs on which to form a judgement about the most important political issue that any government has had to face."

Jonathan Dimbleby, Thames Television reporter, speaking at the inaugural public meeting of the Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland, March 13 1977

WAR REPORTING

"The first casualty when war comes is the truth."
U.S Senator Hiram Johnson, 1917

A nation's understanding of any conflict its Government has become involved with is inevitably determined in the first instance by the information received from newspapers, radio and television.

These news outlets form the basic working material also for the historian, and the importance or at least the significance of the individual's reporting of a conflict soon emerges as crucial to the widespread conception of the rights and wrongs, the methods of the conflict in question.

The case of Northern Ireland is no exception. A general consensus between Parliament and the news media in Britain during the first 45 years or so of the statelet's existence kept a discreet veil over its festering problems. It was not until the sight of Northern Irish policemen savagely attacking an apprently peaceful civil rights march in 1968 burst onto the British television screen that most people realised at all there was something rotten in the state.

Since then, the whole apparatus of the means of communication has been brought to bear upon Northern Ireland, and yet the British people as a whole still seem far from a full perception of the way things are there, and responsibility for this must lie with those who have sought to explain and report.

The reasons why information reaches the British people in the way it does are manifold and with a long history.

Since the earliest war journalism — that of an Irish-born correspondent with the London Times, William Howard Russell, who followed the Crimean War from 1854-1856 — a whole string of factors have intervened between the original reporter and the final presentation of news. It took virtually until the U.S. war in Vietnam for the news media to play a separate and often contradictory role from the aims of the country involved in the war.

Most people are agreed that a major war can never be so poorly and deceptively reported again as the First World War, and newspaper readers of the time can be forgiven for holding erroneous views of the Soviet uprising of 1917-1919, the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, and the Second World War until the Soviet-Nazi pact was smashed and a new ally gained — during the same period a British newspaper even portrayed Pearl Harbour as an American victory for the purpose of home morale.[1]

A long and stormy tradition has gone into the British reporting of Northern Ireland. An incident from the early stages in the 1950s of the Cyprus revolt is recorded graphically. An American reporter accosted a British intelligence officer:

"'What sort of a dump is this where the so-called information officer doubles as Press Censor and won't say why he killed my cable because he doesn't have to?"

'The Captain regarded him with hauteur. *"It's a British colony," he replied, "And there's a war on, you know."* "[2]

Again if British newspapers were to be relied on, scarcely anybody would know that over 200 members of the Special Air Services regiment were involved in action against left guerillas in the Persian Gulf state of Oman.

Fred Halliday describes this process at work: 'The single most important advantage enjoyed by Britain was the simple fact that so little was heard about the Oman war, and most of what was heard was purveyed by journalists close to the official position.'

Describing how a London public relations firm was hired to handle the Oman Sultan's affairs, and how in 1975 the Foreign Office seconded a high-ranking official to the Oman ministry of information — a man said to be 'an expert in psychological war' — Halliday wrote, 'No journalist covered the war till 1970 but then the policy of silence gave way to one of restriction and selected information.'

He noted further that the British Government 'news management' was helped by 'the historically-generated disposition of British journalists to accept what they are told, not necessarily out of any dishonesty, but because they share the same ideological universe as their informants. The same tendency has been seen in Northern Ireland.'[3]

Indeed it has. Journalists based in Northern Ireland have to live there and often cannot afford to be too greatly at variance with those official sources providing most of their basic information. The convenience value of the information-providing far outweighs the value of checking everything. Newsdesks back in London or wherever identify their interests with the government's, and the individual journalist soon gets to know what will and what will not appear from his copy in his final report.

The British experience is both different and the same as all other war reporting. It

A still from a newsreel purporting to show a Red Cross tent and medical team under Boer fire. British audiences were not told that the filming was actually done on London's Hampstead Heath

too has been shaped by 'news management' or 'news creation' by officialdom, and by censorship imposed by government, editors, or correspondents themselves.

In relation to Ireland, as elsewhere, attitudes to history are moulded by what is read in wartime, and too often what is written, said and read bears too little resemblance to the reality.

1. *The First Casualty*, Philip Knightley, Quartet 1978. This is the best exposition of war reporting, but although it was published in 1975 it has scarcely a word to say about 'the first casualty' in the war that has been going on in Northern Ireland from 1969. The book is therefore incomplete and suffers from the disregard of its own doorstep. It can only be hoped that the omission is not a symptom of what Knightley so thoroughly documents in his critical book. It is otherwise a strange and highly pertinent omission.
2. *Legacy of Strife*, Charles Foley, Penguin 1964.
3. *Mercenaries: Counter Insurgency in the Gulf*, Fred Halliday, Spokesman 1977.

Boers

If the British are ever heroic and duty bound, the Boers are portrayed as complete villains. A film of a bombing of a Red Cross tent, which has survived, seeks to promote the idea of the Boer atrocity. This very authentic looking "fake" shows a tent pitched on the veld, the Red Cross flag fluttering prominently to the left of the screen. A hurled bomb lands right outside the tent but fails to go off. A second bomb reaches the mark and goes off, underscoring the Boer treachery by intimating that it was no accident. Wounded and Red Cross nurses stagger out of the tent in disarray.

Elizabeth Gottle Strebel, **Sight and Sound,** *Winter 1976-7*

Korea

James Cameron and the photographer Bert Hardy were in Korea for the Picture Post. They witnessed and photographed the brutality of the South Korean authorities towards political prisoners:

"They are roped and manacled. They are compelled to crouch in the classic Oriental attitude of subjection in pools of garbage. They clamber, the lowest common denominator of personal degradation, into trucks with the numb air of men going to their death. Many of them are."

Cameron protested to United Nations officials and was told, "We wish you would try to do something about it, we can't." So Cameron wrote an article, which was illustrated by Hardy's photographs. To balance the picture he included a description of an American POW being guyed through the streets of Pyongyang, a false nose fastened to his face, a swastika on his arm, the Stars and Stripes trailing in the dust.

The Picture Post's editor, Tom Hopkinson, spent some weeks checking Cameron's evidence and consulting him on a presentation of the article that would be moderate and calm, yet irrefutable.

The issue was actually on the presses when the proprietor of the magazine, Edward Hulton (later Sir Edward Hulton), decided that the article would give "aid and comfort to the enemy" and instructed Hopkinson to withdraw it. Hopkinson said he could not accept Hulton's argument and refused to do so. Hulton then sacked him.

Napalm

Rene Cutforth witnessed the American use of saturation bombing and napalm in Korea. Napalm was a new weapon, and Cutforth felt that his listeners should know exactly what it did.

He described the lazy fall of the cannister, the roaring flame of impact, and the rush of heat so intense that, even though he was some distance away, he felt as if his eyebrows had been singed.

'Then over this scene of silent desolation crept a reassuring smell that immediately took me back to Sunday dinners in Britain — the smell of roast pork, for that's what a napalmed human being smells like.'

There was a longer than usual interval after he sent this despatch before Cutforth had an acknowledgement from the BBC. 'When it arrived, it was in the form of a cable so long that it must have cost the BBC about £75 to send. It began: 'This is to explain why we cannot use your M59 (message).' Then there were several hundred words of explanation which made not the slightest case for killing the story. It was a moment of some disillusionment for me.'

from **The First Casualty** *by Phillip Knightley* **(Quartet Books, London 1978)**

Vietnam

Philip Jones Griffiths, one of the few photographers to concentrate on portraying what the war did to Vietnamese civilians, had great difficulty in finding an outlet for his work in the United States. "I was told time after time that my photographs were too harrowing for the American market." When, eventually, a book of his photographs, **Vietnam Inc.**, was published in the United States, the South Vietnamese government banned his return to Saigon.

Philip Knightley, **The First Casualty**

False

'There are certain facts and stories from Korea that editors and publishers have printed which were pure fabrication... Many of us who sent the stories knew they were false, but we had to write them because they were official releases from responsible military headquarters and were released for publication even though the people responsible knew they were untrue.'

Robert C. Miller of United Press quoted in Philip Knightley, **The First Casualty**

Algeria

The torture issue became a major one with the publication, in 1958, of Henri Alleg's book **La Question**. Alleg, the editor of **Alger Républicain**, who was arrested and tortured by paratroopers, described his experiences in a manuscript smuggled out of prison. Published by Les Editions de Minuit, the book sold 60,000 copies in two weeks, before it was seized by the police — the first time a book had been banned in France for political reasons since the eighteenth century.

Philip Knightley, **The First Casualty**

Pax Britannica

From 1968-1970 the media were all on our side. Television and the press showed the civil rights marchers to be idealistic, lively, intelligent young people fighting against blatant discrimination and injustice. The RUC and B Specials were clearly seen as thugs and bully boys. The Unionists and Orangemen as quaint and faintly sinister relics of the past. Newsmen had a great time being shown round barricades, taken to illegal radio stations and photographing Bernadette Devlin — I wonder have any of the more experienced media people here today the grace to blush when they think back? Anyway, all that had to change. It had to change with the advent of the British troops and the collapse of the Unionists.

The British media has *never* told — or been allowed to tell — the truth about its troops' activities. The attitude that 'our boys' cannot be seen to do any wrong has prevailed during some of the most unpleasant and squalid actions that Britain, allegedly in search of Pax Britannica, has undertaken. From the concentration camps for the Boers, the murders of the Black and Tans — Government sanctioned, let it be said — to Amritsar, to the savage attempt to exterminate the Kenyan people, to Hola camp, to atrocities in Aden and now back to Ireland with Bloody Sunday and torture and H Blocks it is the same story. Virtually total press censorship.

You are allowed to applaud Soviet dissidents or the signatories of Charter '77 or the victims of Pinochet, but try to print a factual account of what is going on in the H Blocks of Long Kesh camp and you have no chance of getting heard. And, let it be said, with a few honourable exceptions, few bother to try.

From a speech by Belfast author John McGuffin to the Theatre Writers Union conference on censorship, London 28.1.79.

THE SHOW THAT BROKE THE SILENCE

On 28 August 1976 at 10.10 p.m. BBC2 screened a talk-in about television's record over 25 years. Chaired by David Frost, the show was entitled *What do you think of it so far?*

This programme, and in particular Jonathan Dimbleby's assertion that a high-level cover-up of Irish news was being operated, broke the five-year public silence on the question of media coverage of Ireland and sparked off a spiral of events and debate that is still continuing.

Elkan Allan wrote in that day's Sunday Times, 'the taping of *What do you think of it so far?* burst into life half way through. One of the talk-in panel was Fred Friendly, who, when head of America's CBS News, made the decision to screen a sensational newsreel from Vietnam of a GI setting a village alight. He had this footage screened again for the talk-in — leading to an agitated discussion about the BBC's coverage of Northern Ireland.'

The public responded with a massive 800 letters — an unprecedented response to a late night BBC2 programme. The letters overwhelmingly supported the strong criticisms that had been made of television's Irish coverage.

These are extracts from *What do you think of it so far?*:

Fred Friendly: In the Korean war, as in World War Two, the reporter, whether for print or broadcast, was on his country's side. In those wars, we had censorship. We were against Hitler, we were against the North Koreans. We had it wrapped up with the United Nations, and we were partisan. The best of our journalists were partisan. In the Vietnam war, for the first four or five years, we felt the same way... In the middle of the Vietnam war, we began to try to be, if not impartial, as objective as we could be.

In 1965, Morley Safer, a Canadian-trained journalist who worked for us, sent in a piece of film from Vietnam. I made the decision with my colleagues to put it on the air — it was the most difficult decision I ever made. I love my country. Let me say that the decision to put out that scene of an American marine with a Zippo lighter burning a hut was a 50-year decision for me. Lyndon Johnson called up our company and said: 'Don't you believe in your country?' I do, but I believe in our profession.

That broadcast and hundreds like it by NBC, ABC and other companies eventually brought the Vietnam war into America's living-rooms night after night after night — in Idaho, in California, in Nebraska.

I think that, as much as anything, that kind of reporting on television caused Lyndon Johnson not to run for president in 1968.

I don't think it will ever be the same again... I think it is going to be very difficult — and I'm not sure this is right — for a president of our country to take his nation to war ever again, unless we are invaded. And I think television has made that difference, whether we like that or not.

Jonathan Dimbleby: I think it is true that that superb report by Morley Safer, which was very honest, very outspoken, had nothing to do with impartiality and nothing to do with neutrality. He was approaching as close as he could to an objective assessment, but had a human, subjective response to what he saw. Reporters can be quite powerful, so long as they try to break away from the restraints that are imposed on them, supposedly in the name of objectivity, usually in the name, I think, of the status quo...

The problem with television is to open up the freedom of reporters to report as nearly honestly as they can. They may be wrong — that does not, to my mind, matter as much as giving them the right to say what they think is the truth, and to allow a lot more other people to do it as well....

I do not want to go into detail about Northern Ireland, but the fact is there has not been on British television since 1968 a serious, detailed account of the history of Northern Ireland. And that it because it is very delicate, politically sensitive issue which is very difficult to do adequately on television, and therefore the job has been baulked.

It should not be baulked, and the reason why it is baulked is because of the political institutions, BBC, IBA, British Government, British Opposition, who don't wish us to know too much too well about Northern Ireland.

David Frost: Do you think that is true, David Attenborough?

David Attenborough: I can certainly recall one enormous programme, *The Question of Ulster.*

Jonathan Dimbleby: That wasn't a history of Northern Ireland, it was a forum of all the different points of view, carefully organised into three minutes for him, three minutes for him, and three minutes for him.

Elkan Allan: One of the things we pride ourselves on, and that is balance, is one of the most dangerous and terrible that affects our television. It seems to me that, over the years, we are getting more and more balanced, to the point where we are just sitting on the top of a fulcrum of television programmes and not committing ourselves at all...

If they had had a balanced programme about Vietnam, Morley Safer would have had to be followed by someone who said, 'Ah yes, but look what the North are doing.' And that kind of cancelling out is the death of television, and the death of public discussion.

David Frost: It would have been fair to show the overall picture, wouldn't it?

Elkan Allan: But then all you get is an absolute castration of what Morley Safer and Fred Friendly and everyone else was trying to say: 'Hey, America, we are doing things — do you know what we are doing? Do you know what *we* are doing? Do you know what human beings are doing in your name? Now, it doesn't matter what *they* are doing, because we know they are devils and villains, because that is said every night, every hour on the hour. But us, *we* are devils and villains too.'

It may be that we are devils and villains in Northern Ireland, but we would never know that. We were certainly devils and villains in India, when we were fighting, and in South Africa, which we are now beginning to be permitted to know. But are we devils and villains in Northern Ireland? We wouldn't know.

Fred Friendly: Well, we did the other side, too. We stayed with the story for weeks... The more we stayed with the story and talked with the generals, the worse it got. And that is what is good about journalism, that you are holding up a mirror as honestly as you can. I agree that you cannot do it the same night. If we had had somebody on saying, 'That's not true,' or 'Look at what *they* do,' that would have cancelled the other out.

I am a great believer in the BBC. I think it is the best broadcasting system in the world. But I do have to say that, when David Attenborough has to point to a broadcast of — how many years ago, two, three or four? — and you cannot point to another broadcast of that scope and meaning done about a problem that is tearing your society apart, I do think that something has happened in this country in the last five years, the politicisation, perhaps, of the BBC.

There are so many good broadcast

journalists in the BBC capable of explaining the Irish war. I don't mean making up anybody's mind, just explaining it.

My fear is that there is some kind of a hierarchy that has been set up in which the very highest membership, from the BBC directorate — maybe even the board of directors, has to approve anything done about that war. If I had had to ask the board of directors of the Columbia Broadcasting System, could I run that piece of film, it never would have been on the air.

John Mackintosh M.P.: In the first place, I think the answer to Fred Friendly's question — why are there not big feature films on Northern Ireland? — is because the British public are bored to death with Northern Ireland. They want to shut it out from their minds... I suggest that it is because of the audience and the atmosphere in your country and the fact that your own army was conscripted and fighting in Vietnam, that you were able to do these kinds of programmes. You did not only create a mood, you were responding to a mood. Now, the mood on Northern Ireland is different. I know of no political prohibition on programmes..

Anna Raeburn: It seems to me to be totally ridiculous to argue one programme against one programme. The strength of the point that Mr. Friendly made is that the Vietnam war was on television screens every night, all the time, over and over. That they stuck with the story, the particular example that he gave.

If the British public, with respect sir, are sick of the stand on Northern Ireland, it is because the news coverage of it is boring, repetitious, and non-informational and it goes out night after night and it is designed as a cop out. There has been only one major programme that I know of. There has never been another one polarised in another direction. And that is because we are too damned scared to consider what we are doing there.

John Mackintosh M.P.: Because it is a boring, repetitious series of murders which are going on night after night, that's why.

Let's get this thing straight. I go to Northern Ireland to look at this problem regularly. I used to go every three months and then every six months and I've stopped going now because honestly I cannot get any further with the problem and — doesn't the public feel this? — I've sort of switched off myself.

Jonathan Dimbleby: That's an absurd thing to say. That a senior politician of Mr. Mackintosh's ability can actually say that murder is boring, it is horrid, and people do not want to see it, therefore we should indulge people and not let them see it.

Chris Dunkley: I just wonder whether it could be possible that lack of coverage, the lack of any kind of discussion of the IRA has resulted in a continuation of the murders.

Why do people make political demonstrations? So that people will come and look at them. So that cameras will be pointed at them. If you continue to ignore what is happening in Northern Ireland and just say, 'Oh well, another six murders,' and don't ask anybody why, and don't ask the people who did it why, then presumably they will go on until someone over there decides on another method. But that has not happened. Should we not investigate it at least?

'The coverage of Ireland has been so distorted in this country that if I am going to be forced to contribute to that distortion, I may as well not go. It seems obvious to me that if there is a war going on, there are two sides and you speak to both sides. It always used to grieve me in Vietnam that I couldn't get up the other end to see what was going on. And Ulster stories are so linked up with jingoistic nonsense that all the Irish are the enemy and all the IRA are the enemy."

John Pilger interviewed in Time Out, 29 Sept - 5 Oct 1978

Joan Bakewell: It seems to me that the reporting of news from Northern Ireland is just the latest bombing, the latest explosion. And what Jonathan Dimbleby is asking for is a continual updating of the entire story. We all lose our familiarity simply because of the mounting numbers of murders. What we need continually is a revision, a new look, a fresh look constantly revised at the historical context. That is sadly lacking.

Jonathan Dimbleby: Also, the IBA plays the same part. Both organisations — I don't know whether Mr. Friendly knows — have taken a voluntary decision, interpreting the law in a certain way, that we shall not hear from what we call the enemy, making exactly his point about Vietnam. We do not hear from the enemy which is the IRA.

David Frost: At that point we must move on...

Voice: Forgive me for butting in, but isn't it the answer to Mr. Mackintosh that this programme has caught fire on this boring subject?

Laughter from the audience

John Mackintosh M.P.: The only point I have to make about this is that there is an underlying assumption in the kind of investigative work that Jonathan Dimbleby does that there is a rational, good case on the other side. And I think the problem with giving the IRA coverage is that it is harder and harder for rational people to understand that case and present it. Now maybe you want to present its irrationality—but I think there is a limit to what you can do about that.

Voice: What's irrational about the IRA?

Jonathan Dimbleby: I want to report its case. It doesn't make an assumption about there being a rational case. I want to be able, and I want other reporters to be able, to report that case, that is all.

The above extracts are taken from a tape-recording of the programme and from a partial transcript printed in the Listener, 9.9.76.

A DEAFENING SILENCE

In the final programme of BBC2's The Age of Uncertainty Edward Heath complained that "Television takes the view that if it can get a secret interview with the IRA in the backstreets of Belfast, it will do that."

In context this was not a particularly surprising remark since the subject was the co-existence of national security and the freedom of the Press. The surprise was that Mr Heath seemed to be implying that such interviews were a commonplace; he talked casually of journalists being blindfolded and taken to secret meetings as though this were happening all the time, and as though viewers had come to expect them as a regular item in the news.

Yet looking back over eight years as a television critic, years which happen to have coincided with Ireland's troubles, I can recall just one interview of this sort with the IRA and two others with masked representatives of other extremist organisations which might, if one stretched the point, be said to fall into the same category. There may have been others but not, surely, more than one a year on average.

The fact is that for a long time now broadcasters in both ITV and BBC have known that the weight of opinion from Westminster and Whitehall opposing such interviews (weight which can, apparently, be brought to bear all too easily on broadcasting executives) is so great that there is little point ever in attempting anything in this field.

For the last six years anyone working for the BBC has had to refer all the way up to the director-general for permission before even seeking an interview with the IRA, a requirement which is, in itself, clear discouragement.

In ITV the suppression of Kenneth Griffith's ATV programme *Hang Out Your Brightest Colours* about the life and death of the 1920 "Free State" leader, Michael Collins, and the banning of Granada's *World in Action* programme "South of The Border' ensured that any enthusiasm to study the Irish situation from all sides — south as well as north, historical as well as contemporary, right as well as left — would tend to atrophy.

Instead viewers have watched as television has contained its Irish coverage more and more tightly within a catalogue of bomb blasts, casualty figures, and laundry lists of sectarian murders, punctuated by the occasional very special programme — so occasional and so special that they are nearly all memorable, though *Children in Crossfire* stands out even more than the others.

And now, if you suggest to a broadcasting executive that perhaps television has been evading its duty in Northern Ireland, his standard response is to claim that the British public is tired of Ireland and its troubles, wants to see the boys brought home, and is sick of hearing about the place from television: all this pronounced with a straight face as though television's own timorous retreat into the stark repetitiveness of the laundry list system has had nothing to do with inducing such weariness in the public.

The exception to television's general rule that the problem of providing proper, continuous Northern Irish coverage should be solved by simply ignoring it, is London Weekend Television's *Weekend World*. In addition to devoting the main part of occasional programmes to Northern Ireland, they employ Mary Holland, a specialist in the area, who is often to be found saying something sensible on the subject or conducting a pertinent interview with someone you would be unlikely to find elsewhere on British television.

However, since this all takes place at the dead hour of noon on Sunday it can have little effect as the public, by and large, do not watch.

So, given that *Weekend World* is the exception that proves the rule, why is it that politicians — as with Edward Heath over IRA interviews, as with Roy Mason or Airey Neave over Keith Kyle's recent *Tonight* interview make such an outcry about a few

piecemeal Northern Ireland programmes that are made?

The first answer, surely, is that they do it precisely because the programmes are so rare; were they not unusual, nobody would bother to bring them to the attention of politicians who, it seems, do often have to have individual programmes brought to their attention (frequently after the event, on video-cassettes) because — as they are keen to point out when it suits them — they have so few opportunities to watch television at times when everyone else watches. Perhaps they come to believe that such rare programmes are standard fare.

The second answer is that having failed, whether blamelessly or not, to find a political solution to the Irish problem, and seeing this proved almost nightly in the bomb and murder lists, politicians turn with relief to anything which will serve as a scapegoat in place of themselves. Any programme outside (or even inside) the news which is not effectively propaganda for the state must, it seems, run the risk of being cast in this role of scapegoat.

Hence the harking back to the rare and isolated IRA interviews; hence the attempts to lay the blame for the killing of a policeman on *Tonight*, although there was, of course, never any need for a television programme to serve as an excuse for any of the IRA attacks between 1956 and 1962 — not to mention the thousand killings of soldiers, policemen and civilians by one group or another in the five years after the 1969 riots.

During an Ulster TV programme in January called *Faces of Violence* (which came to my notice not, of course, because it was broadcast in England, but because UTV were kind enough to send a transcript) Tony Spencer suggested: "One of the big difficulties the English have in looking at Irish society, including Northern Ireland, is that they look at it in terms of their own culture. If you are going to understand the problem you have got to look at it through the cultures of Ireland, and I believe you have got to go back not just two centuries, but 15."

Lectures on fifth-century Ireland would not light up the ratings, but with recent Irish history being so much more complicated than English there is a need for something more frequent and much more imaginative than a triennial blockbuster talk-in on *The Question of Ulster* if television is to help viewers to understand rather than just register shock.

The danger is that when you express a desire to understand, you run the risk of being labelled "sympathiser"; if you want to understand the Easter Rising and the Fenians, you must be an IRA sympathiser, and if you want to understand the Orange lodges and the annual march of the Apprentice Boys you must be a UVF sympathiser.

What we have to ensure is that we do not lose, either by accepting this absurd argument or by default, the right to look at a problem from all angles. We, electors and viewers, situated between politicians and broadcasters, are watching the skirmishes in what could become a guerilla war over freedom of speech.

Nobody is trying to deny us the right to hear television relaying the message of the state. Freedom of speech means the right to hear the other messages, too. For broadcasters it must mean the right to do precisely what Airey Neave, Opposition Spokesman on Northern Ireland, is so ready to sneer at: to "elevate themselves above the struggles."

In other words not to stand on one side or the other, but to stand just high enough to offer a clear view all round. At present Mr. Neave has nothing to worry about. It is not happening.

from Financial Times 6.4.77.

THE BANNING OF MICHAEL COLLINS

I'm a Welsh Protestant Brit. But as I studied Irish history I became acutely embarrassed about being a Welsh Protestant Brit.

About 15 years ago I evolved a style of documentary film-making, which was to take an episode from history. If I am concerned about some contemporary problem I then look into history for a story that will illustrate and illuminate that problem.

But I also assumed that I was protected because it *was* history, because I wasn't saying what *I* think in 1978-79 — I was saying what had happened 50 or 100 years ago.

When I had the opportunity to make a film of my own choosing I said I would make a film about Ireland, and it was accepted by Lord Grade's company ATV.

Now I chose to make a film about Michael Collins. And what I wanted to do was very simple. I thought that if I take one Irish patriot's life from his birth to his death... I would tell about this child, and from what he learned from his schoolteacher, from his mother and father, and from what he observed, I would tell why he became what he became — which was the most formidable activist that Ireland has ever produced and more than anyone else achieved what is today the Republic.

And I would end it with his death in 1922. I would not say one word after his death in 1922. Even at that time I was not stupid about the dangers.

And that's precisely what I did. And I thought, I am totally protected by history. I have invented no dialogue. It was quote...unquote, statistics, facts.

But of course I always knew that history was lethal.

And the result of that film was that I am not allowed to see it myself today. I conceived it, I researched it, I wrote it, and it is locked in a safe.

Incidentally, I have been involved in censorship myself, I have been a party to censorship. I sued my boss, today's Lord Grade. I sued him on two grounds. One was ethical and moral, and the second was that my contract had been broken.

The ethical and moral grounds were because the Independent Broadcasting Authority had gone to Lord Grade who was then Sir Lew Grade and asked him *privately* if he would not offer that programme to the IBA, so that they would not be seen to be guilty of political censorship. And Lord Grade agreed.

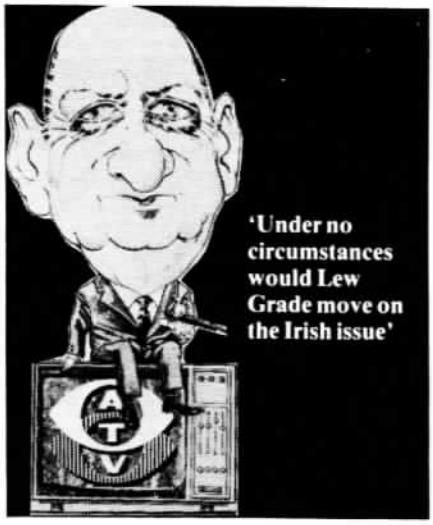
The villains of the piece were the IBA. But all I could do was to sue the man who did it.

I was told by Lord Grade that he admired me for standing for my principles, but under no circumstances would he move on the Irish issue.

On the eve of us going into court, the IBA announced — some two or more years later — that they had on that day made the decision. It was now *their* decision that that film should not be used. Because they knew that if I went to the court I would shoot my mouth off and they would be exposed. They also knew that I had the *proof* that they would be exposed.

So the moral and ethical area was cut from under my feet. I was merely left then with the fact that my contract had been broken. And that involved money.

Lord Grade settled out of court on the eve of me going in. And his lawyers made one condition, and that was that I would not speak about this issue for five years. Finally I agreed to be a party to not speaking about it for two years.



'Under no circumstances would Lew Grade move on the Irish issue'

And those two years are just up.

I was conscience-stricken at this time. But what did ease my conscience was that I was already embarking on a film which argued for a United Ireland, and on behalf of Irish republicanism.

To do this was singularly difficult, you can imagine. ATV had lost a lot of money. So I went shrewdly, to HTV, the Welsh division, to the programme controller whose name is Aled Vaughan, because he is the only television controller in Britain who is also a poet. And his directors said, 'You would be very foolish to back Griffith on an Irish film.' But I was given the money to do it.

This time I have made a film called **Curious Journey**. What I have done is to go over to Ireland and interview nine very old people, 80 or 80 plus, seven men and two women.

Two doctors of medicine, one retired general from the Irish army, the head of the biggest music publishing company in Ireland, and one remarkable activist, General Tom Barry — who was the most successful guerilla fighter against the British army of occupation that Ireland has probably ever produced.

And what I have done, to these very old people, pillars of respectability, is to ask them three questions. Because all of those pillars of Irish respectability were activists between 1916 and 1921 against Britain.

'Sir or madam, why did you feel compelled to take action against the British presence all those years ago?'

'Sir or madam, what were you able to do personally for the emancipation of Ireland?'

They told me — it included the use of the gun, and in the case of one woman, Mills bombs.

'Thirdly, where do you hope that all of this suffering and bloodshed will eventually take your ancient Ireland home?'

And they tell me. This is very moving, because every single one of them reminds me how much the Irish people need the Scottish Irish of the north-east, how complementary they are, and how much, says one of them, they do need us.

They remind me also that the greatest and most famous leaders for Irish emancipation from British occupation have been Protestants.

They reel them off: Emmet, Wolfe Tone, Casement, Parnell — all Protestants.

It was called **Curious Journey**, incidentally, because it is the very curious journey of a Welsh Protestant Brit travelling to the island of Ireland in deepest sympathy and support for his Irish Catholic brothers and sisters.

I was told by HTV that it could be one and a quarter hours in length. It has now gone before the Network Committee, who are not unconnected with the IBA, and they have said, 'Well we don't want to refuse this film, so could you consider making it an hour in length.' And then they had stipulated which cuts they would like. *All* the cuts are quotes from Irish history, quotes from Wolfe Tone, Emmet, Gladstone, Parnell and Casement.

I have now agreed to start cutting this film to an hour, but I have said, 'Don't you tell me what's to be cut.'

From a speech by Kenneth Griffith to the Theatre Writers' Union Conference on censorship, London, 28.1.79

THE BBC AND NORTHERN IRELAND

British broadcasting has, in general, failed to give much more than a one-dimensional picture of the current conflict in Northern Ireland. The 'story' from the Province has been pre-eminently about violence, about terror, bombs, and death. In recent years even these staples of news coverage have failed to secure any sustained attention. Broadcast news, and most current affairs coverage, has lacked historical depth, and has failed to give an airing to the roots of the crisis there.

Such an approach is largely shared by the rest of the British media, and contributes to the dominant public view of Northern Ireland's present troubles as largely incomprehensible and irrational.

How has this kind of approach to broadcast news come about? It is certainly not particularly helpful to look for overt acts of censorship by the State. Nor will conspiracy theories be of much assistance. In brief, the State, through its spokespeople has laid down the limits of the permissible, and the broadcasting organisations have responded pre-eminently through a tightening of their editorial controls.

It is especially worth considering what happened in 1971 and 1972 because those were crucial years which have had an enduring impact on the BBC's approach.

In 1971, Christopher Chataway, then Minister accountable to Parliament for broadcasting, made a significant speech. He said that broadcasters were not required to strike an even balance between the IRA and the Stormont government, or between the army and the 'terrorists'. He reminded broadcasters that they stood within the consensus 'of the values and the objectives of the society they are there to serve'. This speech was, in effect, a warning to the BBC that the Corporation could not be impartial in reporting Northern Ireland.

Lord Hill, the BBC's Chairman, replied by assuring Reginald Maudling, then Home Secretary, that 'as between the British Army and the gunmen the BBC is not and cannot be impartial'.

By this time the BBC was already operating a system of special formal controls concerning Northern Ireland which are still in force today. All decisions were then being vetted through the 'reference upwards' system — as they are now. This system means that programme ideas cannot be put into effect by the reporters who think them up. Rather, they are scrutinised in turn by the programme editor, the departmental editor, the Controller Northern Ireland, the news and current affairs supremo, and even, on occasion by the BBC's director-general himself.

The effect of these controls has been inhibiting, and continues to be so. It has resulted in a cautious 'factual' approach to coverage and a wholesale absence of investigative journalism because journalists are unwilling to pursue controversial topics, and tend to engage in self-censorship.

Early on, therefore, the BBC had accommodated itself to the demands of the state: the system of internal controls meant that the Corporation could be accused of editorial toughness, but not of outright censorship — an important difference.

However, it is important to realise that the Corporation is not in any sense just a transmission belt for government policy. It has its own institutional needs, pre-eminent among which is the maintenance of its credibility as an 'independent' national institution.

But in late 1971, the BBC's legitimacy came under serious challenge when the government came perilously close to open censorship, backing away only at the last minute.

This occurred over a programme called *The Question of Ulster* in which the BBC wanted to present a range of relevant views on the Northern Ireland crisis. The framework of the programme was to be a quasi-judicial 'hearing' presided over by Lord Devlin. Maudling and Brian Faulkner tried to veto the programme by refusing to participate, and BBC executives have testified that a ministerial ban was quite narrowly avoided. The BBC persisted and the programme was transmitted.

For the BBC this refusal to knuckle under has had great symbolic importance. The Corporation has presented its resistance over *The Question of Ulster* as typical of its independence. In fact this view is misleading because it obscures the long-term effect of tighter internal controls — namely, anodyne coverage. It is true that the BBC has subsequently endured governmental displeasure over, for example, its insistence on reporting a particular case of police brutality in 1977. But such incidents are rare. They suffice to support the view that the BBC is actually fully independent, whereas it is actually very constrained. There is room for manoeuvre, and for occasional acts of defiance, but the Corporation has to tread carefully.

Over the years, the BBC has evolved what might be called a 'public order' broadcasting policy on Northern Ireland. This consists of three important elements. First, there is general support for the British Army and the RUC and their role in law-enforcement in the Province. Second, there is a negative evaluation of extremism and terrorism, and of the IRA in particular, which is presented as the principal enemy. Lastly, there is a view of the need for 'responsible' coverage of the Troubles, which requires especial sensitivity to criticisms of the supposedly inflammatory effects of broadcasting (a view continually pushed by Roy Mason).

'Responsibility' of this kind, with its awareness of the public image of the state and its in-built fear of criticism, is, when coupled with the dead hand of tighter editorial control, enough to ensure that the BBC stays within safe limits.

Yet the fact that British broadcasting is *not* censored by the State, and that broadcasting policy is developed by broadcasters themselves, does mean that tensions persist. This came out clearly in 1977 when Richard Francis, now the BBC's Director, News and Current Affairs, caused some controversy by arguing that given the confusion in official viewpoints it was best for the BBC to try and function as a 'fourth estate'. However, his argument for a greater autonomy still operated within Hill's acceptance of non-impartiality.

A major difference between the BBC and commercial broadcasting is the way the Corporation's unitary editorial system has allowed less obtrusive methods of control. The IBA's federal structure, by contrast, has meant that the Authority has been seen to intervene decisively on several occasions, when programmes have been banned.

It has been easier to argue that this kind of intervention has constituted censorship, although it has generally been publicly sold quite successfully as 'responsible' action.

There is little reason, at present, to suppose that the BBC or the IBA will become more autonomous, or, alternatively, that the State will need to crack down harder on the broadcasters — provided that they stay within their present limits.

Philip Schlesinger is the author of 'Putting "reality" together — BBC News' (Constable 1978)

TAKING UP THE GAUNTLET

At the end of May 1978 BBC director Colin Thomas resigned in protest at censorship of two programmes on Ireland which he had helped to make. In November 1978 *Film and TV Technician*, the journal of the ACTT (the film technicians' union), printed an article by Colin Thomas in which he explained the background to his resignation. This is an extract from his statement:

To put it all into context, I have to go back to a programme called *What do you think of it so far?*, a programme presented by David Frost that looked back at twenty five years of television. In that programme Jonathan Dimbleby sharply criticised the failure of both BBC and ITV to raise the key issues in the Northern Ireland conflict and won a lot of support from the audience.

I felt stung by what had been said and subsequently pressed for a chance to take up the gauntlet that had been thrown down.

What was eventually agreed was not what I wanted but was, I felt, better than nothing. There would be a seven part series on Ireland called *The Irish Way* and I would direct two of them. The style would be based on previous series — *The Italian Way* and *The Yugoslav Way* — for which I had also directed: a look at the place and its people rather than a piece of economic and historical analysis, more gentle documentary than hard current affairs.

There were two other directors and an executive producer who also directs but I was to shoot first in the village of Ballintoy on the north coast of Northern Ireland.

Filming went well, but when I came back to Bristol I argued that it was important that we also filmed in a major Northern city; that if we stuck to pretty little places like Ballintoy and Rostrevor (the setting for the other Northern Ireland film in the series) we could be accused of having ducked out of the real conflict in the North.

The others involved agreed and in April of this year I returned as one of the three directors covering a week in the life of the city of Derry — *A City on the Border*. There were the usual compromises which I had become used to after 16 years in the BBC, but I went home reasonably satisfied that there was an interesting and important film in the huge pile of film cans that would follow us back to Bristol.

A month later I watched the rough cut and my heart sank. It did express vividly the bitterness created in Derry by years of gerrymandering and unemployment (now over 20% and nearer 40% on some Catholic estates). It did help to provide some sort of context for the atrocities that have been committed and it did suggest that continually rising unemployment in Britain could create a similar situation in an English city.

But the role of the British Army went unquestioned. Here, as so often on British television in the past, was an army calm, patient and neutral — and just who was it they were fighting?

The film material on the army was extremely well shot but once again there was not a hint that for many in the city — by no means confined to the Provisionals — Northern Ireland is a colonial situation and the British Army an army of occupation.

And it was not the fault of the film editor. I myself had failed to put on film examples of Army oppression that I had learned of during my stay there: the beating up of Catholics *and* Protestants by soldiers coming to an end of their tour of duty; the ruthless searches of Catholic homes; more than £1000 of apparently malicious damage done to a Catholic community centre at which I had filmed.

The next day I went to a General Council meeting. In conversations with friends there I attempted to do what I had so often done in the past — claim the small victories and disown the substantial defeat.

That evening I decided that enough was enough. I could see myself in another sixteen years still having those conversations, still attempting to claim the occasional principled stand but less able to work out where the BBC ended and I began. I wrote a first draft of my letter of resignation.

What happened in the next fortnight simply confirmed my decision. I learnt that, although the protests that I and my fellow directors had made had produced some changes in the Derry film, two other sections that I regarded as very important had been cut.

In one a contributor to a debate on capital punishment argued that whilst it would deal with the civilian who shot the soldier, what about the soldier who shot the civilian? Apparently that went in order to bring the programme down to time.

In the other a mother put flowers on the tombstone of her son which bore the words **'Murdered by British Paratroopers on Bloody Sunday'**. That went on the instructions of the Controller BBC1.

At about the same time I learnt that the programme I had directed in Ballintoy had been seen by the Controller and Head of Programmes Northern Ireland and that they had decided that the programme would not be transmitted without substantial changes in both content and commentary.

I refused to make them and sent off my letter of resignation.

Whatever you say, say nothing

I'm writing just after an encounter
with an English journalist in search of 'views
on the Irish thing'. I'm back in winter
quarters where bad news is no longer news,

where media men are stringers, sniff and point
where zoom lenses and uhers and coiled leads
litter the hotels. The times are out of joint
but I incline as much to rosary beads

as to the jottings and analyses
of leader-writers or newspapermen
who've scribbled down the long campaign from gas
and protest to gelignite and sten,

who proved upon their pulses 'escalate',
'backlash' and 'crack down', 'the Provisional wing',
'polarisation' and 'long-standing hate',
yet I live here, I live here too, I sing

expertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours
on the high wires of first wireless reports,
sucking the false tastes, the stony flavours
of those sanctioned, old elaborate retorts:

'oh, it's disgraceful, surely, I agree,'
'Where's it going to end?' 'It's getting worse,'
'They're murderers,' 'Internment, understandably,'
The 'voice of sanity' is getting hoarse.

Seamus Heaney

A PLAY FOR TODAY

An interview with Roland Joffe, director of 'The Legion Hall Bombing', by Mairéde Thomas

A slot became available for a play which would be produced by Margaret Matheson. She said, 'I've got something about Northern Ireland', and I said, 'Great, I've been trying to do something about Northern Ireland for years. I've got one or two quite good stories lined up but takers are few and far between.'

The problem manifests itself as.. *Well it's a wonderful story, but we can't really do it...* or, *Well it's not really my cup of tea.* What people like is something fairly fantastic or fairly light hearted, but what people don't like is when it gets to the nub.

Anyway I took the newspaper about Willie Gallagher and the transcript of the trial home and browsed through it for about two days. It seemed to be an extremely good thing to do, I liked the idea of using something that was about a state mechanism to look at a state mechanism, and I liked the idea of turning it on itself.

Margaret was quite keen on doing it, and Caryl was keen from a very early stage. The problem then became — how do we do it? Also we wanted to be very clear about what we were doing with the play — that's a thing we discussed a lot, what was the intention of the play. We felt one thing it should ask is what's a terrorist war, what's a terrorist, and how does the law make these distinctions.

I think it would have been cheap if we had said the intention of the play was simply to release Willie Gallagher and I said this to Brendan Gallagher who was one of the connections which brought it up in the first place. Hopefully it would be a by-product that Willie's position would be made better by the play having been done, but one also had to bear in mind that if it became a Save Willie Gallagher Campaign, it would probably have made his treatment worse. When I talked to Brendan about it I said, 'If you agree to us using your son's story then you must understand that for us — i.e. the production crew — the intention of the piece is to explain to the people in England how a Diplock Court functions, ergo what the role of the courts is in terms of the state apparatus, which most people in England are unaware of', and Brendan agreed to that.

Once Jimmy Cellan-Jones (BBC Head of Plays) knew that we were doing a play about Northern Ireland, he felt it was his duty to 'discuss' it with current affairs people and possibly the Programme Controller — I'm not quite sure who was at that meeting — and also BBC Northern Ireland, in which he took a sounding as to whether we should do it or not.

Now as I got the report back, Dick Francis from Current Affairs said he thought it was an extremely good idea and should be done, but what they would do is to put it out as a current affairs programme. I dug my heels in and said that it was called *Play For Today* and would stay *Play For Today*. I wanted it to stay in a play slot because it carried a different kind of weight as opposed to current affairs reconstruction and secondly I wanted to carry the fight forward for plays being about current affairs.

I couldn't see why if it happened to be about something topical that it had to be a current affairs programme. If it was in a current affairs slot one had no real control over what was going to happen to it. They could have not put it out, they could have cut it about, they could have changed the slot it was going into, not only that, but there is an enormous difference between current affairs censorship and play censorship and that's to do with the way our culture has grown.

Artists have been allowed a fair amount of freedom though most of them haven't been into the political arena: the ideas of free speech and art go very importantly hand in hand, in fact it's a liberty and we should fight for it. So a play is a lot more sacrosanct: it's not as safe to interfere with the writer's right, as to say well this journalist did this but we have decided not to put it out.

All our discussions were through Jimmy because we were never given any other option. The BBC works on this reference upwards system so that he would go away and have a discussion and then come back and tell me what had gone on, which doesn't make for very amicable negotiations, and puts Jimmy in a very awkward position. He wasn't sure about doing something on Northern Ireland and I think in quite a proper way was worried about the effect of it.

Then of course there was the whole thing about bringing in the BBC in Northern Ireland — apart from the fact that they are practically under seige, you have to go through a locked door and a spy hole to get in. I think Jimmy would say that out of courtesy he had to refer to BBC Northern Ireland and I would agree with that. Where I would maybe stick my heels in after hearing all the evidence, is to say that finally one man has to take the decision.

Anyway then we got into the situation where I was told to stick exactly to the transcript, which was our intention anyway, though I improvised a lot during rehearsal, but that was to try and get the kind of performances I wanted, and it gave everybody a chance to discuss the issues in the play.

We took a lot of advice from the C.I.D. and people like that. I had a meeting with the ex-Home Secretary of Stormont at my instigation because I wanted to see what his feelings were towards it, and I also wanted to know what Protestant opinion was about it and how they would respond. He used the argument that I was meddling in something that I didn't understand, and if I wanted to have a clean conscience then I ought to drop it because if people lost their faith in the law, and law was just beginning to get a reputation for fairness, where would they go next? My

Actor Raymond Campbell played the part of Willie Gallagher in The Legion Hall Bombing. He told us:

I fully support Roland Joffé and Caryl Churchill in their protests about censorship of The Legion Hall Bombing. I think it's very important that a play like that should be shown in its entirety.

The showing of the play was postponed for six months. It was supposed to be shown a week after we finished filming in February and it had been timed to coincide with a discussion on the Tonight programme. The whole thing was dropped and it wasn't put on till six months later. Funnily enough I think more people watched it because of the publicity.

I don't think the public would have known that the accused — who was not named in the play — was Willie Gallagher if it hadn't been for the whole furore that was caused because of his father coming over to see the film and being arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

counter to that was wouldn't they maybe feel that it was all a lot fairer if it was open. I mean what kind of thing can be fair if you can't discuss it?

The next major step after discussing the trial transcript was that I was told that the head of Drama and the Controller of Northern Ireland were coming to watch the studio, was that all right. I said, 'no', because of the way we were working I didn't want anybody who wasn't part of the production, but I was prepared to ask why. I was told that it was because of the actors' accents, I wasn't Northern Irish and maybe they would have problems with their accents, and that was why the Controller of Northern Ireland was coming in, but I don't actually think he's Northern Irish. Most of the actors are, and those who were not weren't going to use Northern Ireland accents anyway, so I disallowed that.

One reason we had detailed discussions was because we were aware that Northern Ireland is not a popular subject and that there would be very strong pressure against us doing it and for that reason we simply called it *Willie*.

We didn't publicly announce that we were using the trial transcript, until we got advice from the BBC lawyers about whether we could be stopped from using it. We were given a veiled threat by a fairly eminent ex-Northern Irish lawyer, an ex-member of the Stormont government, that he would get us for contempt of court, but in fact there isn't any contempt of court, unless the case was pending an appeal. The transcripts are available, solicitors have a copy, though there's an unspoken rule that you don't pass them on.

We had the full transcript, and of course there were problems about what you cut out, which is why I went to great lengths to make it clear that there had been stuff cut out. I changed all the names because Northern Ireland is so small. If you name names you are inviting people to go round knocking them off, even though a lot of people already know who is involved. Then I was told that I would have to use real names but I refused point blank. What I did was to take out all the names altogether. If there hadn't been all that fuss most people over here and even some in Ireland wouldn't have known who it was about.

I do mean it when I say that I was very worried about doing something about Northern Ireland, because I'm not there and the last thing I want to do is to exacerbate the situation. We were threatened once or twice by both sides who said, 'If you do this how will you feel if somebody gets killed?' The pressure tended to be more from the right than left, but it depended where you were. One had to be very careful and again I'm very pleased about the way it was received in the North.

One of the great advantages of *The Legion Hall Bombing* was that it was specific. In other words what one wasn't saying was all British justice is crummy. That's very unsophisticated: I think there are a lot of places in the world where justice is much more apparently crummy.

What you needed to say was, 'This is how the courts are operating: if they are able to operate in this way what does this tell us about the role of the courts vis-a-vis the state?' It doesn't give people a blind slogan, it actually says to them you've got to think about what does the law mean.

The other huge advantage was that if you wanted to help people, as we did with a Northern Ireland situation, work towards a kind of clarification of their positon, what you often have to do is to find ways of making a contradiction work. So you have to sus out what kind of contradictory state people live in.

Most people believe that there is something very special about British Justice. One wouldn't destroy the idea of justice because that's going to be equally important in every society, but you can actually use that very want to make people reassess what's actually happened.

That was the second advantage of doing *The Legion Hall Bombing*, in that I knew that I could do that absolutely fairly. We were in a much stronger position because we were using a transcript, so that I would be armed against those people who would try to destroy it, or try to escape it by saying it's left wing, it's unfair.

The *Daily Express* leader the day afterwards was very interesting, and if you can get the *Daily Express* to say that if there's a British justice this is dreadful, it's a real gain in public consciousness. It actually wakes people up to the fact that what's going on in Ireland is unhealthy if the *Daily Express* is caught in that contradiction, because they are the main mobilisers of the idea that there is some supreme British justice.

Another thing is that often we (the programme makers) have the feeling that we can accomplish everything. I was always very struck by something that Marx said about Art, and I classify what I do as Art, however journalistic it may be. He said that he didn't think it was the object of Art to write political solutions, he thought it was probably the object of Art to ask the right questions, and if the obsession with the truth — and that's his words — was clear enough, you couldn't but help write a good socialist play.

It doesn't work the other way round, if you start from a sine qua non that says I'm going to write a socialist play, it doesn't actually mean that you get there. In fact what you often end up with is a kind of muddled, and in the end totally unmarxist perception of what's happening.

I think Legion Hall Bombing **in the end, provided a lot of guide lines. It was very useful in Northern Ireland, it helped to solidify opinion very clearly. It's interesting that no violence grew out of it and that for me suggests that people weren't made to be frustrated by it. But there was a one-day strike in Strabane and Roy Mason got hell in his constituency party after the transmission.**

A protest outside BBC TV Centre in London against the censorship of 'The Legion Hall Bombing', 22 August 1978

Photo: Mark Rusher/IFL

WHY CAN'T WE BROADCAST THE TRUTH?

Recently, the BBC radio programme *You The Jury* debated whether the public was being told the truth about Northern Ireland. The verdict, by a 2:1 majority, was no. A Tory MP who took part in the debate complained to *The Times* that the vote had been rigged — much to the embarassment of the BBC official who had fobbed the MP off with this false excuse. As a current affairs television producer, I can only heave a sign of relief that at least the public knows television coverage of Northern Ireland cannot be trusted. Certainly, in ITV, producers are slowly coming to the conclusion that the most honest response to censorship of programmes about Northern Ireland is simply to stop making any.

For decades before the 'troubles' recommenced in 1968, there was a deafening silence on British television about the situation in Northern Ireland (with the exception of one isolated film on ITV). BBC official policy was to transmit nothing which might undermine the constitutional status quo. 'Gerrymandering' was a word which had to be explained to an ITN reporter in 1968.

Small wonder, then, that the British audience should have been ill-informed in 1968: but ten years later, why is the almost universal reaction of viewers to the subject of Northern Ireland one of baffled indifference? After all, the conflict in Ulster is one of the most important issues in British politics.

In part, the problem is to do with the way television goes about its business. All subjects are reduced to 2 minutes in the news, or 30 minutes in a current affairs programme. Almost no historical context is offered, yet Northern Ireland is an issue which, more than any other, is utterly determined by history.

That being said, what remains beyond dispute is that programmes about Northern Ireland are censored: banned, postponed, cut, never made. To question the basis of British policy in Northern Ireland is increasingly equated with treachery, with undermining the security forces, with endangering lives, with encouraging rebels. Tory MPs hint ever more openly that the broadcasters must mend their ways if they care for their contracts or licence fees. Ministers talk about news 'blackouts' as far as Northern Ireland is concerned. And, inevitably, the broadcasters respond.

What makes the process of censorship difficult to pin down is that it is not a direct product of political dictation, but the indirect result of a much deeper-rooted phenomenon — a self-censorship which stems from a profound misconception of the role of the broadcasting institutions.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (which licences the ITV companies) and the BBC were both created by Westminster. Inevitably — even proudly — they uphold the values of Westminster. The very concepts which dominate public-service broadcasting are those of consensus politics: 'balance', 'objectivity', 'impartiality'.

But the BBC is quick to say (and the IBA echoes) that it is 'not impartial between the Army and the gunman' — which, if it means anything, implies that the BBC invokes special values to report Northern Ireland. Indeed, given that the BBC regards Northern Ireland as properly part of the United Kingdom, its reporting of the central constitutional issue between Ireland and Britain is inevitably partial.

This failure to recognise that we are part of a shifting historical process is easier to comprehend when we look back at Palestine, Kenya, or Cyprus, where no doubt (if they had been able to operate comparably) the broadcasters would have been under pressure not to talk to the Irgun, or Mau Mau, or Eoka, just as they are now pressured not to talk to the IRA.

And what lies at the root of this pressure is the instinctive reflection of Westminster opinion by the broadcasting institutions. We forget now that the BBC once banned an interview with Ian Smith at the moment of UDI, because he was then characterised by most MPs as a 'rebel'. Today, that consensus has broken down: so the broadcasters freely interview Mr. Smith, even though legally he is no less of a rebel now than he was 13 years ago.

Going back further, in 1956 the Eden government pressurised the BBC not to allow Gaitskell to criticise the Suez operation, on the grounds that troops were in action — precisely the grounds used now to pressurise the broadcasters over Northern Ireland.

The BBC resisted in 1956, because Westminster was divided. But in Westminster today, the overwhelming mass of MP's endorse the basis of British policy in Northern Ireland — for the most part, by simply absenting themselves from debates. And the BBC and IBA are wary of challenging Westminster's blinkered view.

Ironically, as Westminster talks less about Northern Ireland, broadcast journalists have become more aware of the deeper political issues, and have sought to report these, rather than the ebb and flow of violence. That is why rows between the broadcasting authorities and the journalists seem to have flared recently. The authorities blandly say: 'there are more important public concerns than the need to report', at just the moment when the journalists realise how urgent the need to report is.

The authorities are wrong: their duty is not to Westminster, but beyond, to the public at large, who are entitled to be informed, even if this embarrasses the politicians. Unfortunately, there is no prospect of any change in the cosy relationship between the broadcasting institutions and their creators.

We smile now at Lord Reith's syllogistic defence of the BBC's unswerving support for Baldwin in the General Strike: 'the BBC is for the people... the government is for the people... so the BBC must be for the government'.

But, 50 years later, Lord Annan's Committee tells us: 'the broadcasters are operating within a system of parliamentary democracy, and must share its assumptions.' Is there that much difference? And do we smile, or nod wisely? And are we surprised if Northern Ireland is misreported?

But what are the programmes that are banned? And how else is information filtered?

There is a major difference between the BBCand ITV in structure, which is reflected in the way censorship takes place: the BBC is an organic whole, ITV is divided by design.

In the BBC, all authority flows from the lay Board of Governors, and its professional counterpart, the Board of Management. So, although every BBC producer is theoretically encouraged to use his own judgement in reporting, in practice he is expected to 'refer up' any difficult decision. As a result, policy from on high is implemented without every having to be explicitly promulgated. A producer instinctively avoids conflict with his superiors. Sensitive subjects (like Northern Ireland) are avoided. A safe line is pursued.

There are naturally exceptions. From time to time, a producer will take hold of a story. His seniors will, after careful thought and some delay, support him. Eventually, the entire weight of the Corporation will be put behind the item, and the BBC's 'independence' will be

invoked in the event of Ministerial displeasure. Which is why BBC executives are always miffed at suggestions that their coverage of Northern Ireland is censored.

But when a producer (as happened recently) rejects the view of his seniors in the reference-up process — where he wants to keep in sequences that they want to cut out — then, of course, the BBC is simply exercising editorial responsibility. The producer resigns: and his successor's willingness to stick his neck out reduces correspondingly.

In ITV, programmes about Northern Ireland, banned shelved, or chopped, include a report on Republicanism, a film about Michael Collins, an analysis of allegations of police brutality, an item on IRA fund-raising, and assessment of the strength of the Provisionals, and an account of the Queen's visit to Belfast.

The reason why examples of censorship are easier to find in ITV is that the IBA decides what can be transmitted, but the television companies actually make the programmes — so conflicts of judgement cannot so easily be absorbed within the system.

But, in essence, the criteria used by both broadcasting institutions to judge what can be said are identical, even though from time to time their interpretation of those criteria may differ — with the result that the BBC broadcasts something the IBA has forbidden, or vice versa.

What the public knows nothing about at all is the most sophisticated process of self-censorship. That is when the 'brave' producer carefully stakes out the ground he thinks worth defending against institutional assault: and thereby concedes all the ground which is never put in contention, and so is defined as untenable. By playing the game, the producer endorses the rules.

So — when one examines the actual rows — the issues fought over seem so narrow, somehow trivial. Even discussion of what can be discussed takes on an unreal air. Producers retreat into sterile debates with censors, which the public understands even less than the conflict in Northern Ireland itself.

In the end, the public is left bewildered and ignorant, knowing only that they do not know — which at least is something — and increasingly blaming the Irish themselves, North and South, for irrational and incomprehensible behaviour.

We worry about sex-and-violence on television. We worry about the materialism and passivity that ever-lengthening viewing hours induce. But do we ever ask why it is that television's one redeeming feature — its capacity to inform a huge audience about the outside world — has failed with regard to Northern Ireland?

Ironically, to draw attention to this is to invite being regarded as somehow cranky and unreliable. Why do we make such a fuss? Are we secret Provos? Again, the process achieves its subtle effect. Television producers have to make a living, after all.

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David Elstein is a Thames Television producer, and a former producer of 'This Week'.

ANTI-IRISH JOKES

Did you hear the one about the Irishman? Every day he put on a new pair of socks and by Saturday he couldn't get his wellies on. This idiotic joke appeared in Episode 2 of *Life begins at Forty* — a popular, but dismal, and, as you can gather from the standard of the humour, a feeble Situation Comedy.

The leading characters weren't just stereotypes so much as ciphers, and it was left to the actors to flesh the characters out as best they could with their own personalities. So the audience got the asexual, silly-ass Englishman which has become Derek Nimmo's trademark, and an embarrassed and broody wife from Rosemary Leach.

These leads were in turn surrounded by the most blatant stereotypes, but I'll only concern myself with the standard cloth-capped Irish labourer drinking his pint of Guinness and overhearing the wellie joke. The extraordinary thing was that he had nothing to do with the situation and it seemed to me that he was there in a desperate attempt to keep the jokes rolling along.

Fortunately this Irish stereotype was only in one episode that I saw. *Robin's Nest* has a similar Irish character whose motivation for humour is his stupidity and ignorance; unfortunately he appears with gruesome regularity.

On ATV's Gala celebrating 50 years of Women's suffrage two women newsreaders, who should have known better, had the following exchange:
'The surgeons in Dublin Hospital have gone on strike. They're refusing to wear their wellies in the operating theatre. The reason is, they say, they make their hands sweat.' Not only was this joke ludicrous it was also insulting. Dublin University Hospital is world renowned for the standard of its medical teaching.

I will pass over that 'Professional Irishman' Dave Allen, who I personally feel should have his jaws wired together, and *Me Mammy* with its stereotype Irish mother who surrounded herself with religious artefacts, and her bachelor son who was desperate for her approval so he could get married. It's in the past now even though the horror of it lingers on in the memory.

It's depressing to recognise the cliché Irish types. When will Situation Comedy show a sense of responsibility and begin to treat the Irish honestly? They are continually presented as ignorant, gormless, lazy, dirty, and stupid and they are invariably the stalwarts of the menial jobs and always in contrast to their socially and intellectually superior English middle-class counterparts.

There is an active war on in Ireland, and there has been for more than ten years. But it's all right in Situation Comedy and if you are to believe the Light Entertainment Departments, the tragedy is taken out of it all because they are presented as Stereotypes who can't get their wellies on, let alone a bomb together.

This ridicule serves no other purpose but to harden attitudes. The Irish have always been the brunt of the English jokesters and the Irish really resent this continual slanging. Ethnic jokes about stereotypes are all very well as long, of course, as you're not part of the group they're at the expense of.

This media exploitation of the comic possibilities of the Irish is consistent with the exploitation that the British have been indulging in for God knows how long. Television should look beyond the cheap laughs and its own insularity to the larger issues, for the irony is, that the reality is quite different. Television should consider these 'funny' characters in the light of what is happening in Northern Ireland in 1978. The horror of that situation wipes the smile off anyone's face.

It's commonly acknowledged that laughter is an emotional release, a form of blood-letting. But whose blood? The answer is on the news, when we're allowed to see it that is. Sometimes it can take the sting out of a situation, but I don't believe it does when it's at the expense of the Irish. The English continue to be indifferent and I've yet to see any evidence of its effect, except of course as an adverse one.

This consistently one-sided approach is a further continuation of what is, in the end, prejudice, which we all quite rightly condemn when it is applied to other ethnic groups who make up the population of the UK. Well, it's time it included the Irish as well.

The IBA and the BBC don't want us to have the facts, but they have no objection to us having the stereotypic fiction.

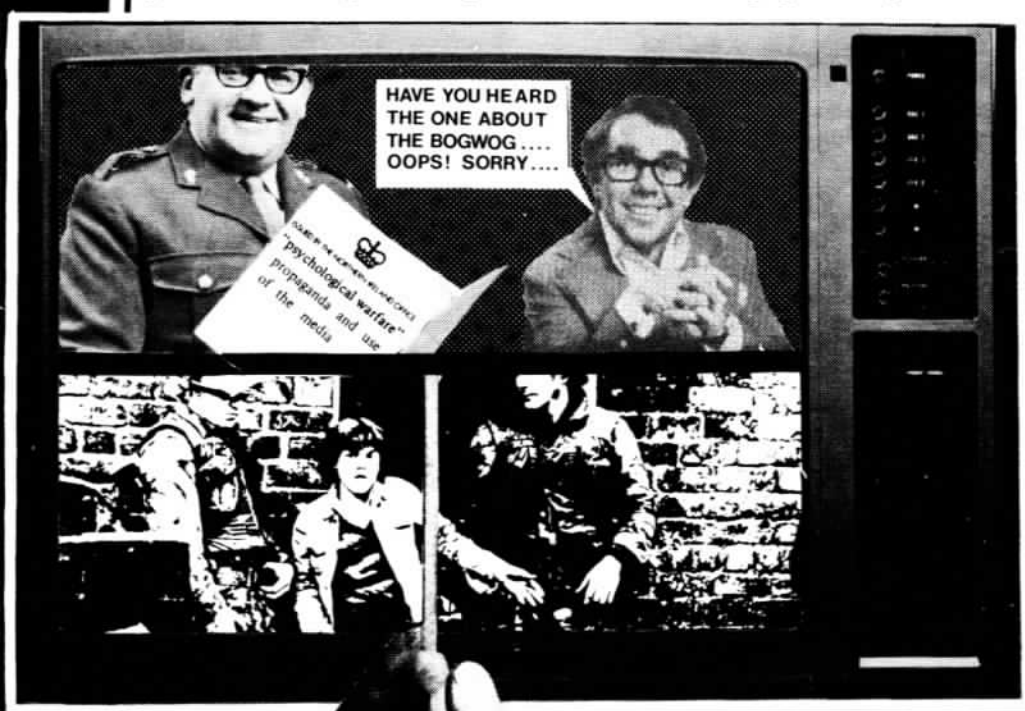
This speech was delivered at the Edinburgh TV Festival, August 1978. Andrew Brown was the producer of 'Rock Follies' and 'Edward and Mrs. Simpson'.

The Irish Post, *paper of the Irish community in Britain, carries a continuing correspondence on anti-Irish jokes. This is an extract from a letter printed in August 1977:*

It is well documented that on successive occasions when the Irish people sought to resist British rule, the anti-Irish joke emerged in Britain.

The current bout of joke propaganda concentrates on the Irishman as 'thick'. The jokes began with the emergence of the Northern Ireland situation in 1969 and received their biggest promotion on the 'Comedians' television series. As always in the past, the jokes help the British Government's line in Northern Ireland — sustaining the story that the war there is a religious one between people who are 'thick' and who haven't any logical reason for behaving as they do. The troops are presented as heroically keeping the peace.

So when people take a stand against these jokes, I applaud.
Diarmuid Breanach



Paul Madden

BANNED, CENSORED AND DELAYED

A chronology of some TV programmes dealing with Northern Ireland

1970

July **PANORAMA** *BBC*
The programme contained some 'vox pop' interviews with the relatives of six people killed in Belfast, including 'a widow crying out for vengeance for her dead husband, shot by terrorists' (according to Anthony Smith, in the article Television Coverage of Northern Ireland, *Index*, vol. 1 no. 2, 1972). Whilst it was transmitted to mainland Britain, BBC Northern Ireland 'opted out', on the grounds that the programme was inflammatory, and could lead to further bloodshed. This was the first such 'opting out'. In the period when Hugh Carlton Greene was Director-General, it was decreed that as far as possible the content of the BBC's programmes should be identical in Britain and Northern Ireland. Technically however the Controller of BBC Northern Ireland could insist on being told details of every programme project dealing with Ireland, North and South. The effect of the BBC's policy to make its networked programmes on the 'Troubles' acceptable in Northern Ireland was inevitably to inhibit coverage.

1971

February **24 HOURS** *BBC*
A film about the Ulster Unionist Party's increasing disenchantment with Major Chichester-Clark, Prime-Minister of Northern Ireland. Condemnation of Chichester-Clark, and the extent of sympathies with Ian Paisley were both shown to be widespread in party meetings which were filmed. The programme indicated the possibility of Chichester-Clark's resignation. The BBC Northern Ireland Controller, Waldo Maguire, wanted 'moderate' opinion represented. The addition of an interview with a 'moderate' confirming the programme's findings did not overcome objections. When the predicted resignation took place, the programme became superfluous, and was never shown.

September **24 HOURS** *BBC*
The weekly meeting of the News and Current Affairs groups in the BBC was told that 24 HOURS wanted to do an 'in-depth' programme about the IRA. According to the minutes of the meeting, revealed in *Private Eye* (No. 258, 5 Nov. 1971), the Managing Director, External broadcasting, thought as follows: 'Even if such an interview (of an IRA man) was carried out by someone capable of correcting incorrect statements, he was doubtful about the extent to which the views represented by the interviewer could be expected to be as emotionally as well as intellectually penetrating as those of the interviewee.' The Chief Assistant to the Director-General, John Crawley, agreed, 'Such a programme setting out the roots of the IRA would not be acceptable.'

October **(NO TITLE)** *BBC*
The BBC filmed the proceedings of the Assembly of the Northern Irish People, which had been set up by the SDLP and the Nationalist Party as an alternative to the Stormont Parliament. The intention behind the assembly was to offer a non-violent forum on the issues of Northern Ireland. The SDLP refused to take seats at Stormont, because of the introduction of internment by the Unionist Government. The footage was never shown, possibly because it was deemed 'unbalanced' (*Sunday Times*, 2 Jan. 1972), 'yet the SDLP is the most important vehicle of non-violent Catholic opinion.'

November **WORLD IN ACTION — SOUTH OF THE BORDER** *Granada*
Granada wanted to do a programme to show how the 'Troubles' in the North were building up political pressures in Southern Ireland. Granada had already had some brushes with the ITA (which became the IBA when radio was added to its brief) on account of its investigative series WORLD IN ACTION. Additionally the ITA had been scrutinising both WORLD IN ACTION and THIS WEEK (Thames), in order to pass them fit for screening in Northern Ireland, since 1969. Only two earlier WORLD IN ACTIONs on Northern Ireland of a number made had been carried by the local station Ulster Television, despite the ITA's own ruling that the series was mandatory, i.e. all ITV companies were obliged to screen it. ITA staff were therefore consulted, when Granada began filming for the programme. The starting point was provided by the October Sinn Fein Convention in Dublin, at which Sean MacStiofain (Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA) and Rory O'Brady (President of Provisional Sinn Fein) both spoke. To balance this footage space was to be given to interviews with Dublin politicians, who were hostile to the IRA: However the Authority (comprising lay members, and the body, set up by the Television Act, to regulate ITV) decided that the programme was unsuitable for transmission — although it was still in the form of rushes, and no member of the Authority viewed them, and despite the ITA's own staff supporting the programme. Reportedly Brum Henderson, Managing Director of Ulster TV, had previously 'informed the ITA that the showing of such a programme anywhere in the UK would be deplorable in that it would simply give publicity to IRA extremists' (Anthony Smith, *Index*, ibidem). Lord Aylestone, Chairman of the ITA, apparently felt it was 'aiding and abetting the enemy'. On its own initiative Granada went ahead and completed the programme. This time the ITA did see the programme, but confirmed the ban on transmission, deciding that it lacked balance. No members of the Dublin, London, or Belfast governments took part, but in any event the Dublin government refused to share programmes with the IRA. Criticism of the IRA was provided by Opposition members at Dublin, namely Conor Cruise O'Brien, and Garret Fitzgerald. There was some speculation that the real reason behind the ITA's banning was not the IRA's participation, but Garret Fitzgerald's assertion within the film that the British Army's tactics in Northern Ireland had contributed to the deterioration of the political situation, a trap planned by the Provisionals. A precedent was thus established for the ITA to interfere editorially in the content of programmes. Increasingly too, contrary to previous practice, the ITA were becoming cautious that ITV programmes about Northern Ireland should be passed fit for screening on the entire network, including Ulster TV (compare the BBC).

November **24 HOURS** *BBC*
The BBC had filmed a number of statements by ex-internees about their treatment at the hands of the (British) Army during detention. Interviewees included Patrick Shivers (who later successfully claimed damages from the Northern Ireland Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Defence), and Tony Rosato (a case mentioned by the *Sunday Times*, 17 Oct., the first English newspaper to carry allegations of torture, although the Irish press had printed reports since August, when internment commenced). Despite the mounting evidence in the press, the BBC delayed screening the films until after the publication of the report of the Committee of Inquiry headed by Sir Edmund Compton, the Northern Ireland Ombudsman (announced on 31 August). The films were balanced by a discussion between Conservative M.P. Antony Buck, and Roy Hattersley, the former Minister of Defence in the Labour Government that had sent British troops to Northern Ireland.

1972

January **THE QUESTION OF ULSTER** *BBC*
In November 1971 Conservative backbenchers had vociferously attacked TV coverage of events in Northern Ireland, particularly the BBC's. Both Lord Hill, Chairman of the BBC's Board of Governors, and Lord Aylestone, Chairman of the ITA, had been summoned on separate occasions to meet with Reginald Maudling, Conservative Government Home Secretary (and technically responsible for broadcasting) to discuss complaints. It was in this climate that the

news leaked out that the BBC were preparing a 'tribunal' (a deliberately perjorative term employed by the BBC's critics) on the problems of Northern Ireland. Lord Hill and Charles Curran (BBC Director General) met Maudling on 13th December in order to persuade him of the programme's value. The intention of the programme was to draw out the different views of the Northern Ireland situation 'from a wide spectrum of Irish views'. The views of the Government and Opposition were to be pre-recorded, and other participants would give their views 'live'. Maudling refused Government co-operation point-blank, on the grounds that seven of the eight Irish participants were known to be opposed to internment, and that the BBC should not set itself up as a Court of Inquiry. Brian Faulkner, Northern Ireland Prime-Minister, phoned Hill and Curran directly to ask the BBC to abandon the programme. It seemed as if the BBC would succumb to pressure and postpone the so-called 'trial by television' in order to re-think the format, since crucially no member of the Stormont Government would take part. As news of the postponement broke, an anonymous document circulated within the BBC claiming that programme-makers were 'meeting increasing pressure to hold back or censor news and current affairs items from Northern Ireland.... Pressure comes from Heads of departments in BBC Northern Ireland and England, who now openly act as censors'. However the programme was saved by the willingness of Ulster Unionist MP at Westminster, Jack Maginnis, to appear, and the BBC pressed ahead with its intended transmission on 5th January. In an open letter to Lord Hill on the day of transmission Maudling wrote 'I believe that this programme in the form in which it has been devised, can do no good, and could do serious harm'. Previously Robin Day had withdrawn because he considered the programme unbalanced, Ludovic Kennedy took his place as chairman. Lord Devlin, who appeared on condition that internment *wasn't* discussed, headed the panel of inquiry, which included Lord Caradon and Sir John Foster. The Labour Opposition's views were represented by a specially pre-recorded statement from Harold Wilson. In order to present Conservative Government and Unionist Government views, a pre-Christmas interview with Maudling, and an extract from a speech by Faulkner was used. 'Live' contributions came from Bernadette Devlin, Gerry Fitt, Jack Maginnis, and Ian Paisley amongst others. Lord Caradon summed up by saying 'We may have been dull, but I don't think we have been dangerous', a view generally shared by the press the next day. Milton Schulman wrote (*Evening Standard*, 6 Jan. 1972) 'The idea that Lord Hill and Charles Curran and the present set of BBC governors would deliberately be parties to any telly event that might inadvertently inflame or exacerbate the unrest in Ulster is as ludicrous as the prospect of the Archbishop of Canterbury insisting that Anglican services be held in strip-tease clubs. Under its present hierarchy, the BBC has relentlessly pursued a cautious, timorous *neutered* approach to politics and current affairs'. When subsequent talks between Maudling and the SDLP failed to take place, Maudling blamed the programme for having encouraged the SDLP to harden their attitudes.

February **THIS WEEK — AFTERMATH OF BLOODY SUNDAY** *Thames*
(also titled **BLOODY SUNDAY — TWO SIDES OF THE STORY**)
Thames had been preparing a programme to piece together the story of the shootings of 13 civilians by British paratroopers in Derry on 30th January, interviewing witnesses who had been on the streets, and soldiers, when a judicial inquiry was announced, headed by Lord Widgery. Technically anything which anticipated the tribunal's findings could be in contempt, as the Press Office at 10 Downing Street were quick to warn both press and television, seeking a blanket ban on coverage. The IBA were consulted, and Thames's lawyers, who felt the risk should not be taken, despite the fact that there was no precedent for prosecution. Indeed the lawyers apparently thought that the very selection of evidence presented by editing the filmed interviews could in itself be prejudicial. Thames eventually compromised by showing a complete unedited role (400ft. of 16mm) of a filmed interview with a 'neutral' eyewitness, a Welsh ex-warrant officer, who lived in the immediate area of the shootings. This was balanced by a complete roll of accounts by Scottish Paratrooper NCOs of the 1st Paratroop Battalion. Although the latter contradicted one another, more damaging material was left out in the 20 or so rolls shot by two crews that were not used, including interviews with Catholic Bogsiders. The programme was transmitted on 3rd February. Later a Paratroop Lieutenant admitted to the Widgery Tribunal that his statement in the televised programme that he had seen a gunman was a lie.

October **CARSON COUNTRY (Play for Today)** *BBC*
The BBC finally transmitted Dominic Behan's play about 'the origin of the Stormont state' on 23rd October, having postponed it from May 'to avoid provoking possible trouble during the marching season' (*Evening Standard*, 11 May 1972). David Attenborough, controller of TV programmes, and Waldo Maguire, BBC Controller, Northern Ireland had both viewed the play, and apparently, despite liking what they saw, decided 'the wise course would be to wait for a less awkward time before screening it'.

October **THE FOLK SINGER (Armchair Theatre)** *Thames*
The IBA asked to view this play by Dominic Behan before its proposed transmission on 7th November. The plot concerned a folk-singer from Liverpool, who plays in Belfast, and shocked by what he finds, tries ineffectually to heal divisions. Thames chose to screen the play, even after permission had been granted, at 10.30pm, instead of Armchair Theatre's usual 9 o'clock slot. Behan is reported to have said, 'For God's sake, let's get the subject aired — even through drama. Too many things are swept under the carpet.' (*Daily Express*, 6 October 1972).

November **A SENSE OF LOSS**
The extent of the BBC's involvement in this Marcel Ophuls film is unclear, although it was probably limited to some financial assistance, in the wake of their screening of Ophul's THE SORROW AND THE PITY which was subsequently much acclaimed. Shot over six weeks in December 1971, and January 1972, the film consisted of interviews with Protestants, Catholics, politicians, and some soldiers, combined with TV news clips of bombings and violence. The deaths of four individuals formed the central focus of the film, which Ophuls described as 'an old, middle-aged, humanistic, social-democratic attempt to give people an idea that life after all is not that cheap'. The BBC refused to transmit the completed film on the grounds that it was 'too pro-Irish' (*Sunday Times*, 5 Nov. 1972). Undoubtedly the fact that the film gave expression to a wide range of opinion from the Catholic minority (excluding the IRA) influenced the BBC's decision. Since the tightening of editorial control over the BBC's current affairs programmes, interviews with Catholics had become rare, since they were automatically equated supporters of the IRA.

1973

February **HANG OUT YOUR BRIGHTEST COLOURS: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MICHAEL COLLINS** *ATV*
ATV commissioned Kenneth Griffith to make a historical film in the vivid story-telling style he had successfully adopted in his BBC film on Cecil Rhodes. He chose as his subject IRA leader Michael Collins, who was part of the Irish delegation which signed the Treaty with Britain, creating the Irish Free State and the partition of Ireland, and who was subsequently killed in the Irish Civil War in 1922. The film freely castigated Lloyd George, the British Prime-Minister, for the Partition of Ireland, Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Eamon de Valera, President of Sinn Fein. A three man committee of the IBA viewed the film, and called for a detailed script, but apparently made no further comment. Sir Lew Grade, ATV's Managing Director, then began investigating the film, the first interest he'd shown, although a shooting script had been available since before location filming in Ireland in May 1972. Grade banned the documentary — 'In view of the delicate political and military situation in Northern Ireland, I have decided that this is not the time for such a film to be shown in the UK, and accordingly this company is not offering it for transmission'. An IBA spokesman insisted, 'At no point have we asked for its withdrawal. Sir Lew Grade made the decision on his own initiative' (*Sunday Times*, 4 Feb. 1973), although the part played by the IBA in the decision was revealed later, when Griffith took out a legal action against Grade. ATV were reported as saying that 'the film would be shown when the Ulster situation improved' (*Times*, 5 February 1973). It has never been shown, and any viewing has to be authorised by the present Managing Director of ATV, Lord Windlesham (former Northern Ireland Minister of State in the Conservative Government).

1974

November **NEWSPEAK** *Bristol Channel (Cable Television station)*
The Home Office through its Broadcasting Department had inherited the regulation of the five cable television experiments, e.g. outline programme schedules had to be submitted to the department at least two weeks in advance. Newspeak was a local news magazine programme. On 29 November the programme had started, when a ban came through from the Home Office on an interview with Adrian Gallagher, the South-West organiser of Clan na hEireann (the equivalent of Official Sinn Fein). Gallagher was to discuss the Birmingham bombings. In the House of Commons the Prevention of Terrorism Act was being passed, which made the IRA an illegal organisation, but not Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA. Since the passing of the Act, Roy Jenkins, the Home Secretary declared in the House of Commons that TV interviews with the IRA would be 'wholly inappropriate'.

1975

May **THIS WEEK — HANDS ACROSS THE SEA** *Thames*
Thames planned to transmit an investigation into the raising of funds for the IRA in America on 1st May to coincide with the elections for the Northern Ireland Convention. The IBA refused to allow the programme to be transmitted on the grounds that 'the subject matter could have an unfortunate impact on opinions and emotions' in Northern Ireland, despite the fact that the programme was to be shown at 8.30pm, half-an-hour after the polls had closed. The Thames ACTT union shop were rumoured to be contemplating blacking the substitute programme. A caption however was displayed before the screening of the substitute, stating that the original had been postponed at the request of the IBA, and would be shown a week later, which it subsequently was.

1976

March **ARTICLE 5** *BBC*
A play commissioned by the BBC from Brian Phelan about three mercenaries/torturers, who are hired through an agency by an English businessman to protect his interests in an unspecified country. The nature of their work was brought home to the businessman by the torturing of his secretary. The play's title came from the relevant section of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states 'No-one shall be subjected to torture, or cruel inhuman treatment, or punishment.' It was written with the assistance of Amnesty International, and was recorded in January 1975. Aubrey Singer, then Controller of BBC2, for whose channel it was intended, having viewed the play in May/June 1975 said that 'it would not be allowed to be shown.' The play's director, producer, and Phelan later that year met Christopher Morahan, the BBC's Head of Plays. 'It was put to me that if we made certain alterations, it would be more acceptable,' said Phelan (*Guardian*, 5 May 1976). In March 1976 Singer wrote Phelan a letter saying 'The play would have caused such offence to viewers that its impact would have been dulled and its message negated.' The message of the play was anti the use of torture. Northern Ireland was referred to once in the play in passing, as an illustration of the use of torture by governments. Shaun Sutton, BBC Head of Drama, at the Symposium on Broadcasting at Manchester in February 1977 dismissed the work as a 'bad play'. The ICA staged the play in May 1976, as did the Project Theatre in Dublin in October 1976.

October **THE SCOTTISH CONNECTION** *BBC Scotland*
A local documentary, not primarily intended for networking, which traced the cultural and political links between the respective Catholic and Protestant factions in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The BBC Northern Ireland Controller insisted that an interview with a Provisional IRA man be dropped. As was usual with IRA interviews it was referred upward to Director-General Charles Curran, who confirmed the dropping of the interview. When the documentary was transmitted on 23rd October, a subsequent statement to be appended was omitted, which read 'We cannot show an interview with a spokesman from the Provisional IRA. The BBC's policy is not to interview them. Members of the UDA are, however, not subject to this restriction.' The programme went out in the same cut form on the network on 5 February 1977. The UDA, unlike the IRA, is not an illegal organisation in Britain. Interviews with UDA members were broadcast by the BBC at the discretion of the Director-General or a programme controller. The *UK Press Gazette* (25 October 1976) in the week that the programme was transmitted in Scotland reported that Alistair Hetherington, BBC Scotland Controller, in a speech had deplored 'the sanitisation' of TV news on Northern Ireland as the 'worst unreality' on television.

1977

February **EIGHTEEN MONTHS TO BALCOMBE ST.** *London Weekend*
A drama-documentary reconstruction of the events leading up to the six-day siege at Balcombe St. Shane Connaughton, the writer, asked for his name to be withdrawn from the credits. He explained 'I wanted to explain why the bombers were there. But the English are not interested. They just don't want to know. I thought the programme could achieve some good — especially since Irish news is so heavily censored in England' (*Irish Post*, 26 Feb. 1977). As Richard Last wrote, 'Far from "glamourising" the IRA, as some feared when the project was announced, London Weekend's EIGHTEEN MONTHS TO BALCOMBE ST (ITV) presented the London bombers as archetypal thick Micks, leading lives in which violence provided the only relief from stupefying boredom' (*Daily Telegraph*, 22 Feb. 1977), or Philip Purser, 'The first impression, I suppose, was of the sheer incompetence of the four terrorists, worthy contenders all, for starring roles in Thick Irish jokes' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 27 Feb. 1977).

March **TONIGHT — INTERVIEW WITH BERNARD O'CONNOR** *BBC*
Keith Kyle interviewed an Enniskillen Catholic schoolmaster, Bernard O'Connor, who alleged he'd been ill-treated by the RUC at Castlereagh Holding Centre. The production team ran exhaustive checks on his story, obtaining for example, his family doctor's medical report, and a similar account (on film) from a production controller of a local firm, arrested at the same time. In a letter to the *Guardian* (31 March) Kyle wrote 'Before the (BBC) governors decided... that TONIGHT was correct in transmitting the interview they had asked for and received a detailed memorandum in which I described every stage of the preparation and production of the interview, and the motives that determined every important decision that I made.' The programme was transmitted a week later than scheduled on 2nd March. The RUC had been invited to comment within the programme, but had refused, because they were still conducting their own internal inquiry. TONIGHT invited the RUC Chief Constable to appear, when the inquiry was completed. When a RUC constable was killed by the IRA 9 days after the programme was shown, Alan Wright Chairman of the Ulster Police Federation said, 'There can be little doubt in anyone's mind that the BBC had returned a guilty verdict against the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The sentence — a cowardly bullet in the back — has now been carried out by the Provisional IRA.' The *Daily Express* ran the story under the headline 'Murder by TV' (15 March 1977). On air Sir Charles Curran defended the BBC decision to transmit the interview by saying, 'I cannot believe that the IRA needed the TONIGHT programme in order to find an excuse.' Questioned about the possible insensitivity of the decision he replied, 'Remember my background is Irish. The background of my news and current affairs chief editor (Desmond Taylor) is Northern Irish. My childhood was lived in the light of stories of policemen of the Royal Irish Constabulary being shot in the back, and my family was an army family in Southern Ireland. How can I be unconscious of the enormous threat to civil security?'

MAN ALIVE — A STREET IN BELFAST *BBC* (also known as **SHORT STRAND**)
A film about Short Strand, a small Catholic enclave in an overwhelmingly Protestant area of Belfast. It focussed on the daily lives of three Catholic families. Erik Durschmidt, a freelance film-maker, who had covered the Northern Ireland situation for some considerable time, shot the original footage for the film in 1975, and returned in 1977. The film was commissioned for the MAN ALIVE slot, but has never been shown. 'The BBC claimed that possibly unbeknown to Durschmidt two of the three families were prominent IRA activists (which was) not made clear in the film (and was therefore) misleading' (*Edinburgh International TV Festival brochure* 1978, p. 54). Since Durschmidt himself in the commentary pointed out that a husband of one of the women featured in the film was a member of

the IRA, killed in a shoot-out with the British Army in 1971, the BBC claim must be counted dubious.

August **THIS WEEK — IN FRIENDSHIP AND FORGIVENESS** *Thames*
The programme was made on the occasion of the Queen's Jubilee visit to Northern Ireland (10th and 11th August). It was intended to counter the pervasive media picture of a trouble spot now at peace, an impression fostered by for example ITN's 5.45 News presented direct from a Belfast public building's rooftop during the visit. The programme was banned 2 minutes before transmission on 17th August. After some small alterations it was finally transmitted on 26th-27th August at a variety of times in the various ITV regions. (see Peter Taylor, *Reporting Northern Ireland*).

September **THIS WEEK — LIFE BEHIND THE WIRE** *Thames*
The programme Thames originally intended to make, at the time of the Jubilee visit, on prison conditions in Northern Ireland and the claims by prisoners for special category status. As was normal practice, the programme was submitted to the IBA who had no objections, and it was transmitted on 22nd September. The Secretary of the Northern Ireland Prison Officers' Association, who was interviewed in the film, was killed by the Provisional IRA 10 days later, and the programme was blamed. (see Peter Taylor, ibidem).

October **THIS WEEK — INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT** *Thames*
An investigation into the alleged ill-treatment of suspects by the RUC at Castlereagh. The RUC refused co-operation, and it seemed as if the programme would have to be dropped, since the IBA desired the programme to be balanced. The RUC were offered alternative methods of presentation of their case, and chose to provide a (5 minute) editorial statement to camera by the Chief Constable. Reluctantly Thames accepted, and a precedent had been set for public bodies to be represented in programmes that were critical of them, a growing trend. The programme was transmitted on 27th October. (see Peter Taylor, ibidem).

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February **THE ORANGE, THE GREEN, AND THE RED, WHITE, AND BLUE** *Thames*
David Elstein (editor of THIS WEEK) and Peter Taylor (THIS WEEK reporter) offered to Thames a project on Ireland, and British involvement, intended to give some historical perspective. The project was in three parts and was to mix documentary with dramatised episodes from Ireland's past. Thames turned the project down, possibly because the management were acutely aware of tackling a subject likely to bring them into conflict with the IBA, during the period when the IBA was renewing the contracts of ITV companies. Elstein offered it to the BBC, who also turned it down.

May **WEEKEND WORLD** *London Weekend*
A programme assessing the current strength of the Provisional IRA. As David Cox, the editor of WEEKEND WORLD, stated in LOOK HERE (transmitted 8th July), 'After we had started filming, there was a full meeting of the IBA authority, and at the end of that afternoon we got a phone call telling us that the whole programme had to be scrapped because the authority felt that a programme about the Provisional IRA wasn't appropriate at that time.' The production team still went ahead (although dropping a film of IRA training sessions and a mooted interview with IRA leader David O'Connell on 'editorial grounds'). The authority again banned the newly completed film since 'it didn't give a complete picture of the affairs of Northern Ireland as a whole'. Lady Plowden (Chairman of the Authority) eventually decided to allow the programme to be transmitted on 21st May, 3 weeks after its original planned transmission.

May **THE CITY ON THE BORDER** and **THE IRISH WAY — A BRIDGE OF SORTS** *BBC*
THE CITY ON THE BORDER was intended as a preface to the 7 part series THE IRISH WAY, and concentrated on daily life in Derry in the April week, including aspects of the British Army's presence. Colin Thomas (a BBC director of 16 years' standing and one of the film's 3 directors) had already had some doubts about the way the film had turned out, when he learnt that 2 sequences were to be cut out. The programme was transmitted in its cut form on 31st May. One of the two films Thomas had directed in THE IRISH WAY series, A BRIDGE OF SORTS, had in the meantime been referred to BBC Northern Ireland, who had decided that the film and commentary had to be substantially changed before it could be transmitted. Thomas refused to make the changes and resigned. The film was transmitted with changes under a new title A ROCK IN THE ROAD. (see extracts from Colin Thomas, *Blowing my Cover*).

June **THIS WEEK — THE AMNESTY REPORT** *Thames*
Thames planned to transmit on 8th June a programme about the Amnesty report on the ill-treatment of suspects by the RUC, which had already been widely leaked. It was to be a mixture of filmed reports and studio discussion. The IBA banned the programme. Subsequently the local ACTT union shop blacked the screening of a substitute programme, perhaps the first real case of industrial action being taken in the broadcasting industry against a programme ban. Jeremy Isaacs, Director of Programmes at Thames, allowed the BBC's NATIONWIDE to show extracts from the shot film on 9th June. (see Peter Taylor, ibidem).

August **SPEARHEAD — JACKAL** *Southern*
A 7-part drama series about an Army battalion, two episodes of which were set, although not location-filmed, in Northern Ireland. According to Simon Theobalds, Southern TV's Chief Press Officer (and ex-major in the Green Jackets) whose idea the series was, 'I wanted to do for the Army what WARSHIP did for the Navy.' The 4th episode concerned the battalion's emergency call to go to Northern Ireland to reinforce the policing of a rally in a small town. A crowd of children stoned a battalion patrol. Later they find a 14 year old boy with a live round, possibly ammunition for a sniper, whom they interrogate. Ulster TV, despite having screened the 1st episode of the series, also set in Northern Ireland and about a hunt for a bomber, refused to screen the 4th episode. The network transmission date, 8th August, coincided with the anniversary of the introduction of internment in 1971. This was the first time a drama series, as opposed to a current affairs programme, had been dropped by Ulster TV. Theobalds apparently said of the series that 'great care had been taken to steer clear of Irish politics, and there is no reference to the IRA.'

August **THE LEGION HALL BOMBING (Play for Today)** *BBC*
A play based on the trial transcripts of the case of Willie Gallagher, sentenced to 12 years gaol for bombing the British Legion Hall in Strabane in 1976. The play showed the operation of the Diplock Court system, and was scheduled for transmission on 23rd February, and was repeatedly postponed. The BBC insisted that the original voice-over commentary introducing the play should be changed, since it 'editorialised'. This had been written, along with an epilogue, to lead into a discussion programme that was to follow the play. This discussion was dropped.

The BBC amended for instance, 'They (the Diplock committee) therefore recommended a different kind of trial for political offences, which was adopted under the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act 1973. There is no jury. The judge sits alone. And the rules of evidence have been altered so that a confession is allowed as evidence even if it was obtained by threats of force.' The altered version read, 'The Diplock Commission recommended a modified form of trial for terrorist offences which was adopted under an Act of Parliament passed in Westminster in 1973. Under this Act a Judge may admit as evidence a confession obtained under intense interrogation. There is no Jury. The judge sits alone.' The play's epilogue was completely cut: 'The Diplock Courts were set up to make it easier to get convictions, and they have been successful. Recent research at Queen's University, Belfast, shows that the rate of acquittals in these courts has dropped steadily each year. If courts can accept signed statements put forward by the police with no corroborative evidence and reject the evidence of a defence witness without explanation it is reasonable to ask whether it is worth while for the defence to put a case at all. The courts have a tradition of independence but at the same time they carry out the will of Parliament. In peaceful times the role of the courts is generally accepted. In times of stress their role may change.' The Society for Defence of Literature and the Arts accused the BBC of a 'new and sinister form of Orwellian censorship; the perversion of art to serve the purpose of political orthodoxy.' The play was eventually transmitted in its amended form, and with the credits of the director, Roland Joffé, and the writer, Caryl Churchill removed (at their own request) on 22nd August at the late time of 10.25. Play for Today was usually transmitted at 9.25. (see the interview with Roland Joffé).

REPORTING NORTHERN IRELAND

This article first appeared in Index on Censorship, Vol. 7, No. 6, London 1978.

Since writing the following 'Index' article in July last year, much of the dust raised by the series of clashes between broadcasters, their institutions and government, has settled. The issues, however, remain unresolved. The atmosphere may be clearer but the climate has undoubtedly changed.

Now to continue to investigate sensitive areas like the H Blocks, requires a degree of political footwork that would have been unthinkable over a year ago before the outbreak of hostilities between the media and their masters began in the summer of 1977. Programme makers and programme vetters now proceed with a caution born of the events documented in 'Index'; the broadcasters of necessity to ensure the transmission of their material despite the compromises that now may entail; the censors anxious to avoid a repetition of the Amnesty fiasco where the banning of a programme not only drew greater attention to its content but threw into sharp relief the restrictions inherent in reporting Northern Ireland.

No other domestic or foreign political issue is beset with the pressures that journalists face when they attempt to report, analyse and place in perspective the most pressing political issue on their doorstep. Returning from Rhodesia recently with a report that challenged some of the perspectives of the war there, I ran into none of the problems that have attended my reporting of Ireland nor did I expect to. Rhodesia remains far away. Ireland is too close to home.
Peter Taylor

Writing in this journal six years ago, Anthony Smith warned that the solidification of relationships and the delineation of tensions which the Irish question had imposed on the institutions of broadcasting were likely to develop in the next decade. His words were prophetic. Whereas few can have been surprised at the gradual unfolding of these relationships as the Irish conflict steadfastly defied resolution and journalists persisted in asking nagging questions — albeit too few and too seldom — the sudden acceleration of the process in the past year has alarmed all parties, not least the journalists whose work is under attack.

Nowhere, in the British context, has the relationship between state, broadcasting institutions and programme makers been more sensitive and uneasy than in matters concerning Northern Ireland. Conflict arises whenever broadcast journalism challenges the prevalent ideology embodied in government policy and reflected in the broadcasting institutions it has established.

In principle, the broadcasting authorities should stand between the media and the state as benevolent umpires, charged with the task of defending each against the excesses of the other, guardians of the public interest, upholders of a broadcasting service alleged to be the finest in the world. In practice, where Northern Ireland is concerned, they have become committed to a perspective of the conflict which identifies the public interest increasingly with the government interest.

To question the government's ideology is to court trouble. The deeper the crisis and the more controversial the methods used to meet it, the greater the strain on the institutions of broadcasting forced to choose between the journalist's insistence on the public's right to know everything and the government's preference for it not to know too much.

The Irish question hangs over British politics like an angry and stubborn cloud that refuses to go away, despite the insistence of successive generations of British politicians that the cloud is just passing.

The cloud has been there for 400 years. The words of British politicians from Robert Earl of Essex, servant of Elizabeth the First, to Roy Mason, servant of Elizabeth the Second, echo down the centuries voicing frustration with and issuing warnings to the Irish that have changed little over four centuries. The shadow of the current ten-year cloud under which we stand is no longer and darker than its predecessors. Northern Ireland is different, not because there is no consensus but because the nature of the consensus that exists makes any informed discussion of the problem difficult, if not increasingly impossible.

The official consensus runs something like this: Northern Ireland is a state in conflict because Catholics and Protestants refuse to live together despite the efforts of successive British governments to encourage them to do so: we (the British), at considerable cost to the Exchequer and our soldiers, have done all that is humanly possible to find a political solution within the existing structures of the Northern Irish state: now the two communities must come up with a political solution they are prepared to work and accept themselves: the terrorists, in particular the Provisional IRA, are gangsters and thugs: they are the cause, not the symptom of the problem.

This is, of course, a British mainland perspective. Others see it differently. When Jack Lynch, the Irish Prime Minister, suggested that Britain should withdraw from the North and encourage the reunification of the country, Westminster — and much of Fleet Street — was outraged at his impertinence in suggesting such a solution to a 'British domestic problem'.

To challenge these cosy assumptions about the conflict — deliberately fostered by those in high places either because they are convenient or because they believe them—is to run the risk of being branded at best a terrorist dupe, at worst a terrorist sympathiser. Journalists and politicians rash enough to dissent have felt the lash of tongues from both sides of the House of Commons and been called 'unreliable'.

Yet some of us working there as journalists have come to believe that the conflict is political and not religious: that its origins lie in the conquest of Ireland by England and the subsequent establishment of a Protestant colony in Ulster to keep the province secure for the Crown; that the immediate conflict stems from the partition of the country 50 years ago, an artificial division designed to be only temporary, engineered by the British to guarantee Protestant supremacy in the remaining six counties of Ulster; that the Provisional IRA may lay claim to the mantle of the 'terrorists' who drove the British out of the 26 counties in 1919-20 in a campaign every bit as bloody and unpleasant as the IRA's current offensive to drive the British from the remaining six counties; and lastly (and currently most sensitive of all) that not all the RUC's policemen are wonderful.

Why has the issue come to a head over the past twelve months? The last great battle was fought by the BBC in late 1971 over 'A Question of Ulster', which the Corporation succeeded in transmitting despite enormous pressure from the Unionist government at Stormont

and the Tory government at Westminster. The marathon programme was notable more for the fact of its transmission than its content. It was hailed as a victory for the Corporation's independence, but as Philip Schlesinger has pointed out, it was a success story amidst general defeat, for had the BBC not resisted the political pressures, it would have undermined its own legitimacy and public confidence in the institution.

In the years that followed, Northern Ireland was gradually relegated to the second halves of the news bulletins and the inside columns of the newspapers. Ulster ceased to be a story. When the media did return to the subject, coverage continued to be guided by the numbing principles outlined by Philip Elliot in his UNESCO report, that the story should be simple, involving 'both lack of explanation and historical perspective'; of human interest, involving 'a concentration on the particular detail of incidents and the personal characteristics of those involved which results in a continual procession of unique, inexplicable events'; and lastly, a reflection of the official version of events to consolidate the 'production of a common image'.

But there were occasional squalls in spite of the media's generally low profile. In 1976 the IBA banned a 'This Week' investigation into IRA fund raising in America before a foot of film had been shot, not because the subject matter was particularly contentious but because the 'timing' was felt to be wrong. The film was transmitted a week later, but it was a warning shot.

Meanwhile, Merlyn Rees, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland until the summer of 1976, negotiated the ending of internment and a cease-fire, his patience and persistence winning the respect of the public — even some Provos with whom he was brave enough to negotiate — and the goodwill of journalists. We felt that he was trying. His successor, however, Roy Mason, was a man hewn from rougher rock. His acquaintance with Ireland had begun as Minister of Defence (a position unlikely to encourage perspectives when the Army was faced with its closest and most pressing security problem since the war). For him the problem was one of security and the present, not politics and the past: results were what he wanted, not history lessons or the niceties of media philosophy as expressed by the BBC's then Controller of Northern Ireland Dick Francis in 1977:

The experience in Northern Ireland where communities and governments are in conflict, but not in a state of emergency or a state of war, suggests a greater need than ever for the media to function as the Fourth Estate, distinct from the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. But if the functions are to remain separate, it must be left to the media themselves to take the decisions, within the limits of responsibility, as to what to publish, when and how.

Under Mason, journalists were more than ever courted as allies in the war, not recorders of it. After only a few months in office the new Secretary of State is reported to have made his position brutally clear to Sir Michael Swann, Chairman of the BBC, at a private dinner at Belfast's Culloden Hotel, where he accused the BBC of showing disloyalty, supporting the rebels and purveying enemy propaganda. He is also said to have remarked that if the Northern Ireland Office had been in control of BBC policy, the IRA would have been defeated. Sir Michael later referred to this encounter as 'the second battle of Culloden'. Mr. Mason shares the text-book view expressed by the Army's senior counter-insurgency expert, Brigadier Frank Kitson:

The countering of the enemy's propaganda and putting across of the government's point of view, can be achieved either by direct action, as for example the provision of leaflets, or the setting up of an official wireless or television network, or by trying to inform and influence the existing news media (*my emphasis*).

But Kitson adds a warning: 'The real difficulty lies in the political price which a democratic country pays in order to influence the ways in which its people think.'

The BBC was first in the firing line. Despite pressure from the RUC and the government, in March 1977 the BBC's 'Tonight' programme transmitted Keith Kyle's interview with Bernard O'Connor, an Enniskillen schoolmaster who alleged ill-treatment by the RUC's plainclothes interrogators at Castlereagh detention centre.

If Northern Ireland is the most sensitive issue in British broadcasting, interrogation techniques are its most sensitive spot.

Although under severe attack from Roy Mason and his unnatural but strongest ally in the House of Commons, the Conservative spokesman on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave, who accused the BBC of assisting terrorist recruitment and undermining the police, the BBC stood firm. In a letter to the *Times* (22.3.77), the Chairman, Sir Michael Swann (no doubt with Culloden in mind) wrote:

The BBC has a responsibility to make available to the whole UK audience as truthful a picture as it can of the state of affairs in Northern Ireland.

Whilst the BBC was having its showdown with Roy Mason, at the beginning of 1977, ITV's 'This Week' was having the odd desultory clash with the IBA and the Northern Ireland Office: the IBA did not like a Provisional Sinn Fein spokesman calling for 'one last push' to get the British out, delivered at the end of a film about the fifth anniversary of Bloody Sunday. The sound was subsequently taken down and the 'offensive' sentiments lost in crowd noises and commentary.

Because the structures of ITV are vaguer and less rigid than the BBC's heirarchical pyramid, where decisions are constantly referred upwards, its programme makers have traditionally been more protected against political interference from above. Until recent years and the growing political imperatives that the Northern Irish conflict has placed upon it, the IBA was cautious in wielding its power over news and current affairs.

But the Authority, now more powerful and confident with every decision it takes, increasingly tends to arrogate to itself the functions of judge, jury and executioner. If the programme companies, powerful and influential bodies in their own right, disagree with the Authority's decision, there is no redress. Television journalism is increasingly hampered by restrictions that Fleet Street does not have and would never tolerate. *The Sunday Times* may decide to publish and be damned — Thames Television cannot. It is the IBA that takes that decision for it.

The Authority has always had an impressive panoply of weapons to hand in the form of wide-ranging statutes which give it the power to stop programmes that offend 'good taste and decency', are likely to 'incite to crime and disorder' or are 'offensive to public feeling'. But most awesome of all is Section 4 1 (f) of the 1973 Broadcasting Act, which makes it incumbent on the Authority to see that 'due impartiality is preserved in matters of political controversy or *matters relating to current public policy*' (my emphasis.)

As always, the interpretation and use of these statutes is a personal matter that depends on the predilections of the person at the top. In recent years the tone and style of the Authority has been set by its Chairman, Lady Plowden, who is believed not to favour or encourage investigative television reporting. Add to this a general public antipathy towards Northern Ireland and it is not surprising that the Authority tends to err on the side of caution when faced with controversy.

Nor is the Authority, despite its protestations, immune from political pressure. In the end, when the interests of state and the interests of journalism

conflict, the odds are that the former will triumph, particularly when the latter may be challenging the ideology which the Authority itself, by its structure, is bound to reflect. There is no statute in the Broadcasting Act that says that the interests of the state must be paramount. There is no need for one. Nor are the pressures from government on the Authority — or from the Authority on its contracting companies — overt: there are no official memoranda saying 'Thou shalt not...', rather letters 'regretting that...' and suggesting 'wouldn't it be better if...'.

When it comes to Northern Ireland the pressure is constant. It consists of not just the standard letters of protest from government and opposition to the IBA and the offending contracting company, but personal meetings between the Chairman of the Authority and the Secretary of State and Chief Constable of the RUC.

These discussions are confidential, but their results gradually filter down through the broadcasting structures suggesting that more 'responsible'' coverage would be welcome (there is little talk of censorship. Government and broadcasting authorities are usually far too adept and experienced to fall into that trap); that 'This Week' might 'lay off' Northern Ireland for a while, or that 'another reporter' might cover it.

And the pressures on the contracting companies are also formidable: in a couple of years' time the IBA has the power to renew or withdraw their lucrative licences; the second channel, much desired and lobbied for by ITV, is a gift for government to grant or withold. ITV is in the end beholden to both institutions; it takes courage to challenge them. Small wonder then that controversial coverage of Northern Ireland is tolerated rather than encouraged.

The problems that 'This Week' has faced in the past year illustrate the difficulties confronting journalists attempting to report Northern Ireland as fully and freely as they would a conflict less close to home.

The trouble started with 'In Friendship and Forgiveness' (August 1977), an alternative diary of the Queen's visit to Northern Ireland, her last engagement in Jubilee year. The world's press flocked to Belfast as never before even at the height of the 'war' in 1972, admittedly more as prosepctive vultures at the feast, awaiting the Provisionals' much-vaunted promise to 'make it a visit to remember', than as recorders of Her Majesty's progress through carefully chosen parts of her troublesome province. ITV's cameras covered the events live. ITN's senior newscaster declared from the Belfast rooftops that he could almost feel 'the peace in the air'. For Roy Mason the Royal visit represented a proconsular triumph which the world was there to record. The Provisionals' threats proved empty: they were humiliated if not defeated.

Television brilliantly orchestrated the Royal progress as it had throughout the Jubilee year, but nowhere had its orchestration carried such political overtones which, however lost they might have been on its audience, were certainly not overlooked by the government officials who encouraged it. As a propaganda exercise its success was complete: it presented a picture of a province almost pacified, with grateful and loyal subjects from both sections of the community taking the Queen and her message to their hearts.

The reality was different. More than anything, the Royal visit highlighted the political divisions of the province: to Protestants it represented a victory for their tradition which they felt had been under attack for so long, whilst for many Catholics Her Majesty came as the head of a state they refused to recognise.

Such was the context in which 'This Week' placed its report, filming events that went largely unnoticed and unreported by the army of visiting pressmen — the funerals of a young IRA volunteer shot dead by the army whilst allegedly throwing a petrol bomb and a young soldier shot dead by the Provisionals in retaliation; a Provisional IRA road block in Ballymurphy; a Republican rally in the Falls Road; the Apprentice Boys parade in Derry and an earlier sectarian sing-song; Loyalist street celebrations in the Shankhill; and a four-hour riot — which *was* widely reported. This potent mixture was intercut with scenes of the Royal progress and interviews with proponents of the two conflicting traditions, John Hume and John Taylor, who placed the visit in its current and historical perspective.

The programme, scheduled for transmission a week after the visit, was banned by the IBA. (All 'This Week' programmes on Ireland have to be submitted for the Authority's approval prior to transmission, which is rarely the case with other sensitive issues that 'This Week' covers.) The IBA took exception to a section at the beginning of the film in which Andreas O'Callaghan, a Sinn Feinner from Dublin, stirred the crowd at the Falls Road rally with these words:

While there is a British Army of occupation on our streets, any Irishman who has it within his means, meaning any Irishman who can get his hands on a gun or weapon; he has the duty not to keep that gun in cold storage or even less to use that gun against the people who are fighting the British Army, let them get out and fight the British Army themselves...As long as there's one British soldier in any part of Ireland, there will always be people who will struggle, there will always be people who will resist.

These words could have been reported by any newspaper journalist but not, apparently, on television. Seeking refuge in Statute 4 (1) of the 1973 Broadcasting Act, the IBA deemed it likely that these words might constitute 'an incitement to crime' or 'lead to disorder'. Thames were advised to seek legal advice. Thames' counsel concluded:

In the context of the programme and having regard to the careful way in which it is presented, I think it is unlikely that the excerpt could have any such effect. Having expressed my own opinion I do recognise that in a matter of judgement of this sort, it might be legitimately felt that the film with O'Callaghan's voice reproduced could have such an effect.

Significantly he added:

All things are possible, *but the section requires the Authority to consider what is* likely.

He also pointed out that Section 4 (1)b of the Act requires a news feature to be 'presented with due accuracy and impartiality'.

Accordingly, to play safe and to get the programme on the air, we decided to drop O'Callaghan's words and replace them with my neutered paraphrase in reported speech:

Andreas O'Callaghan went on to urge Irishmen to carry on the fight against British soldiers in Northern Ireland using whatever weapons they could lay their hands on. It was an open call to arms.

Counsel felt that we were now in the clear. The IBA decided that we were not. Two minutes before transmission a phone call came from the Authority ordering Thames not to show the programme. A previous film I had made on 'Drinking and Driving' was put on in its place.

But the O'Callaghan speech was not the only section of the programme that worried the IBA. They were anxious about the Provisional IRA road block in Ballymurphy, which they suspected we had set up. We had not. My commentary made the position clear:

Whilst the Queen was being welcomed at Hillsborough, the Provisional IRA mounted a road block in the Ballymurphy estate a few miles away. We were told earlier in the day that a snub to the Queen was planned. This was it — more propaganda than military exercise. Perhaps for our benefit, perhaps as a morale booster for their

supporters. The checkpoint lasted five brief minutes. But it happened — within half a mile of an army post round the corner, out of sight.

Nevertheless the Authority remained worried that we might be in breach of the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions (Amendment) Act 1975 by 'aiding and abetting the offence of wearing a mask or hood in a public place'. Thames' counsel implied that this was nonsense.

Finally, the IBA expressed concern over my final lines of commentary delivered over film of the soldier's funeral in his Yorkshire mining village:

The events of that week drew to a close not on the streets of Belfast, but in the lanes of a Yorkshire mining village. There the Army buried Private Lewis Harrison, the two-hundred-and-seventieth British soldier to die in Northern Ireland. For his family, the funeral was a bitter end to the Queen's Jubilee visit. It marked for them as only such grief can, the historical truth that lies behind the bewildering complexities of Ulster. Private Harrison died not because the Queen visited Ulster, but because the power she represents remains in that part of Ireland.

It was the last sentence that caused the agony. The IBA argued that it presented an 'incomplete' picture of the problem, there being no mention of religion, of Catholics and Protestants and the Army keeping them from each other. I argued that to amend the sentence as the Authority requested was a distortion of the essence of my report. After much discussion, my words were allowed to stand.

'In Friendship and Forgiveness' was finally transmitted two weeks after the visit, trickling out over the ITVnetwork in slots that ranged from Friday teatime and Sunday lunchtime to nearly midnight on Ulster Television. By then the visit was history, the impact and topicality of the film lost. Significantly, the film finally shown was not materially different from the version banned two minutes before transmission.

Was there collusion with government to prevent a mass audience seeing a different version of 'reality' presented at peak time, whilst memories of the event were still fresh? What damage would this perspective have done to the cosmetic presentation so carefully served up by the media? One can only guess. One Northern Ireland Office official I spoke to afterwards said he thought the film 'stank'.

We had not planned 'In Friendship and Forgiveness' in advance. We had gone to Belfast to prepare a programme that examined conditions in the prisons and the issue of Special Category Status. When we saw the unreported impact of the Royal visit, we changed tack. We then returned to complete the prisons film we had started, 'Life Behind the Wire'. The programme, which included film secretly shot by the UDA inside the compounds of the Maze prison, showing prisoners parading openly in paramilitary uniform unchallenged by prison officers, highlighted the conflict between the government's insistence that the prisoners were common criminals lacking political motivation, and the inmates' view of themselves as political prisoners. Again, the programme was designed to examine the political nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The politicians did not like it. (During the research period, the Northern Ireland Office suggested I make a profile of Roy Mason's first year in office). The prisons, they repeated, were not an issue. They prefer to dictate the 'issues' themselves. Airey Neave called for 'the most immediate action to stop the flow of Irish terrorist propaganda through the British news media'. He protested to the IBA about the 'myth that the terrorists in Northern Ireland are heroic and honourable soldiers'. Interestingly, Unionist politicians attacked not 'This Week', but the government for tolerating such a situation in a British gaol. For their own political reasons, they welcomed our taking the lid off Long Kesh, which Harry West, their leader, referred to as a 'terrorist Sandhurst'. The government preferred the lid to be kept on. No one questioned the accuracy of the picture we presented.

We submitted the film to the IBA. They had no objections, although one of their officials remarked that the political perspective of the film disturbed him. The real outcry came over two weeks after the programme had been transmitted, when the Provisional IRA shot dead Desmond Irvine, the Secretary of the Northern Ireland Prison Officers' Association, whose remarkable interview was the backbone of the film.

Prison Officer Irvine agreed to the interview after long discussions with his colleagues, and decided to do it openly, fully aware of the risks he was taking. The Northern Ireland Office did not wish him to be interviewed. Political critics of the programme, and of 'This Week's' previous coverage, did not hesitate to lay responsibility for his death at our door, despite the public declaration by the Association that they did not blame the programme for P.O. Irvine's death. Nor was Desmond Irvine displeased with the film or his own contribution to it. A few days before his death, he wrote to me saying:

I found the programme to be an accurate description of life at the Maze. Congratulations have poured in from many sources, including many messages from Great Britain. Your superb handling of a very delicate topic and the manner in which it was presented resulted in praise from staff and prisoners. Thank you for all your help.

His death, however unconnected it may have been with the programme, placed another weapon in the hands of 'This Week' critics and those who wished to curb or prevent coverage of sensitive corners of Northern Ireland policy and practice. Moral pressure could now be applied even more forcefully not only to the programme makers, but to those to whom they were answerable. 'Putting lives at risk' and 'responsible reporting' took on a new dimension.

These arguments 'were widely used to try and stop 'This Week' from making and transmitting its next film, 'Inhuman and Degrading Treatment', an investigation into allegations of ill-treatment by the RUC at Castlereagh interrogation centre.

It proved to be the most delicate issue that 'This Week' has tackled in Northern Ireland, highly sensitive because it questioned the interrogation techniques that were the cornerstone of the government's security policy.

The undoubted successes that Roy Mason claimed in putting the 'terrorists behind bars' were in 80 per cent of cases the direct result of statements elicited — in theory voluntarily — in police custody, on which a suspect could be convicted in the absence of further evidence. For several months in 1977 there had been growing disquiet initally amongst Catholics, eventually amongst Protestants too, concerning the manner in which these statements were being obtained. The allegations of ill-treatment were persistently dismissed by government and RUC as terrorist propaganda, the last cries of defeated and discredited organisations.

During our numerous visits to Belfast the allegations grew stronger and more widespread. We had off-the-record discussions with senior figures in the legal field, who expressed growing anxiety at the way in which they believed some confessions were being obtained. They felt that our investigating the issue, within the context of the crisis and the special legal framework designed to cope with it, would be neither irresponsible nor untimely.

We examined 10 cases of alleged ill-treatment in the programme. Each case had strong corroborative medical evidence. We asked the RUC for a

background briefing and assistance, acutely aware of the dangers of being taken for a ride by the paramilitary organisations whose causes were undoubtedly helped by the propaganda generated by the issue. After lengthy discussions, the RUC refused all cooperation. There were to be no facilities nor, more significantly, any interview with the Chief Constable. The Northern Ireland Office, washing their hands of the problem by saying it was 'one for the RUC', were quick to remind me of the death of Desmond Irvine.

We pressed ahead. Six days before transmission, we sent a detailed telex to the RUC — without whom the IBA thought the programme incomplete — listing the cases and medical evidence and outlining a script of the programme. Three days later, word came back that there was still to be no interview. No doubt the various hot lines buzzed. The day before transmission, the Chief Constable offered not an interview but an RUC editorial statement to camera. This compromise was unwelcome to the programme makers, but in the end we were forced to accept it. No statement — no programme. The institutions had triumphed again.

A few hours before the programme was due to go out, the chief constable put his men on 'red alert', publicly declaring that his policemen were being put at risk by a television programme. Nothing happened. The Chief Constable, who invited Lady Plowden to lunch at his Belfast Headquarters, complained to the IBA that the programme was 'seriously lacking in balance'. (Whose fault was that?) The Northern Ireland Office issued an unprecedented personal attack on the reporter who had 'produced three programmes in quick succession which have concentrated on presenting the blackest possible picture of events in Northern Ireland', pointing out that 'after the last programme a prison officer was murdered'. Roy Mason accused the programme of being 'riddled with unsubstantiated conclusions' and being 'irresponsible and insensitive'. (Privately, senior legal figures welcomed the programme. They believed it to be accurate and welcome.) Letters of 'stern and strict' complaint were dispatched to the IBA and Thames Television, accusing 'This Week' of 'consistently knocking the security forces in Northern Ireland'.

A showdown was in the air. It came eight months later — a period in which 'This Week's' producer David Elstein was told to 'lay off Northern Ireland' — in the form of the Amnesty Report.

Amnesty International had sent a mission to Belfast to examine the allegations of ill-treatment a week after 'This Week's' Castlereagh investigation. The government and RUC announced their intention to give the delegates every assistance, whilst refusing to discuss individual cases. Amnesty was given the facilities 'This Week' was denied. Few could argue that their report would be unbalanced or one-sided. In the event, the Amnesty Report was a devastating document. 'Maltreatment,' it concluded, 'has taken place with sufficient frequency to warrant a public enquiry to investigate it.'

The Report was widely leaked ten days before publication. National newspapers reported its contents and the BBC's 'Tonight' programme quoted extensively from it. In the light of the leaks, 'This Week' planned a programme to discuss the Report through interviews with the usual Northern Ireland cross-section of people — mainly politicians — each of whom had read a copy of the report with which we had provided them. Over half the interviewees were well known for their staunch support of the RUC.

The IBA banned the programme. There was no appeal. The decision was clear-cut. By chance, the 11 members who had constituted the Authority had met that morning and reached a decision, it was argued, which it was impossible to countermand. On what legal grounds the decision was made was not, and still has not been, made clear. The Authority declared that it would be premature to discuss a report 'until it is public, thereby giving those involved and the general public a chance to study it in detail'. As Enoch Powell commented when told on his arrival at the studio that the programme had been banned: 'If we did not talk about what was premature, we would not talk about very much!'

There was no invocation of sections of the Broadcasting Act, as in the case of 'Friendship and Forgiveness'; no discussion of amendments or compromises that might make it more acceptable as in 'Inhuman and Degrading Treatment'. The fact that the government had issued a ten-page reply to an unpublished report a matter of hours before the planned transmission of the programme, cut no ice with the Authority. The ban was an act of political censorship pure and simple: the pressures which had mounted over the past year at last had the desired effect. The IBA proved unable, perhaps unwilling, to resist them.

Not surprisingly, government and the Authority denied political interference. Few believed them. Anthony Smith's prophesy had been fulfilled four years ahead of its time: the institutional relationships between the broadcasting authorities and the state were now firmly cemented.

ITV technicians blacked the screen in protest, a screen that was nevertheless loyally watched by 20 per cent of the London audience! Thames Television publicly attacked the IBA's decision, and Jeremy Isaacs, the Programme Controller, granted BBC 'Nationwide's' request to transmit sections of the banned programme. Fleet Street rushed to Thames' defence. The *Sunday Times* (11.6.78) described the IBA as 'one of the biggest menaces to free communication now at work in this country' and stated: 'Over Northern Ireland a new wave of political pressure is making itself felt.' *The Economist* (17.6.78) accused the IBA of 'an act of violence on free speech'. *The Listener* (15.6.78) said the Authority should treat the programme companies and the viewers 'as adults'. Even the *Sunday Telegraph* (11.6.78) admitted that ' "This Week's" record in Northern Ireland is pretty deplorable, so is the IBA's recourse to banning the other night's edition'.

In an apologia in the *Sunday Times* a week later, Sir Brian Young, Director General of the IBA, limped to the defence of his Authority.
He wrote:
Journalists have some clear imperatives. Their profession drives them to be first with the story or the perceptive comment; to expose what someone wants to conceal; to gain the reader's attention often by describing feet of clay rather than hearts of oak; and to influence the world, they hope, by campaigning for what they believe in. Fair enough... But they are not absolute virtues, as journalists sometimes seem to claim. They may conflict with fairness, with an individual's rights, even with truth and the public good... I would ask viewers to respect what real players do; but to respect also the men and women who blow the whistle.

What could have been more concerned with individual rights, the truth and the public good than the programme that 'This Week' had planned? When the Authority blew the whistle on the Amnesty Report, they were clearly using a set of unwritten rules one side did not recognise.

The post mortem continues. The repercussions for the broadcasters have yet to be felt. The years ahead may be even more difficult. No British government is likely to be more tolerant of open reporting of Northern Ireland or less concerned about the politics of information. Events of the past year have made it clearer than ever that in reporting Northern Ireland the independence of broadcasting, as well as lives, is at stake.

Peter Taylor is a Thames Television reporter.

CENSORSHIP AND THE NORTH OF IRELAND

The one means of redress left to people in the north of Ireland is publicity. There has never been in the past ten years proper machinery for the hearings of complaints regarding the violations of human rights — murder by security forces, torture and brutality in interrogation centres, imprisonment without trial, excessive punishments in prisons. It is quite clear that the sanction for these violations came from the British Government itself. It therefore used the law and counter-terrorism as part of its war effort. In short, people with a grievance were asking the very people responsible for the violations of law against them to hear their complaints and grant justice.

The British Government therefore exercised great pressure at home and abroad to distort the truth, their simple case being that they were honest peacemakers caught in the middle of a savage war between Catholics and Protestants.

On the unjust killings of civilians they always got their story to the media — they were fired at first, the civilian was carrying a weapon, pointing a weapon, etc. The British media accepted the Army spokesmen — as did Radio Eireann often. THE BIG LIE was one of the most hurtful things to people who suffered and knew the truth. The British Army version was what the people in charge of the British media *wanted* themselves; so they would not seek out the truth.

Father Denis Faul and I tried to break through on this many times: we had to resort to writing our own pamphlets — on the murders of Leo Norney, Peter Cleary, Majella O'Hare, Brian Stewart, for example. We are at present writing a pamphlet on the 11 men killed by the SAS in the past year. Which of the media has undertaken that? They are guilty by their silence and omission — these are the big sins of the British media.

We are convinced that a D notice was served on the British papers at the time of internment and the torture of the Hooded Men in August 1971. *The Sunday Times* was given statements on the cases of the Hooded Men *weeks* before they printed it. John Whale then got the scoop of the year — and was honoured as journalist of the year — although this information was available weeks before it was printed.

On the question of torture and brutality one could only break through occasionally in the British media (nothing compared to the immense time and orchestration of media for the Peace People). Again one had to resort to one's own pamphlets — **The Hooded Men, British Army and Special Branch RUC Brutalities, The Castlereagh File, The Black and Blue Book.**

Catholic papers like *The Tablet* and *The Catholic Herald* would print little or nothing. *The Tablet* refused information from me, even though I got a letter of recommendation. *The Belfast Telegraph* also refused copy on torture.

The first time the BBC TV approached Father Denis Faul was six years after the troubles had started — and then for a programme on abortion. He asked them where they were for the last six years.

The same is true now on prison conditions. The British media still accept Mason's lie that the punishments in H Block are self-inflicted (as they accepted that torture was self-inflicted despite Strasbourg and the Amnesty Reports). So we resort to our own publications on the prisons — **Whitelaw's Tribunals, The Flames of Long Kesh, The Iniquity of Internment, H Block.**

In short only occasionally and at a late stage do the media take an interest in the serious problems of violations of human rights in the north of Ireland. On the rare occasion they do act it is of infinite value — example Keith Kyle's programme on Bernard O'Connor, ITV's *A Question of Torture*, and the recent Nationwide programme on H Block.

Truth is a pillar of peace. The media have failed us utterly over ten years.

This statement was written for the Theatre Writers' Union conference on censorship in London on 28 January 1979.

The Northern Ireland Office and the media

When Andrew Stephen, an experienced reporter on Northern Ireland, switched from the Observer to the Sunday Telegraph, one of his new editors was telephoned by a senior official at the Northern Ireland Office and invited to lunch.

The journalist, said the official, was considered 'irresponsible' by those who had been trying 'to keep the peace in Northern Ireland', and what he wrote was 'not helpful' in circumstances where lives were at stake. He was 'misguided' and perhaps should be put on other stories.

Three years ago, a Foreign Office official seconded to the Northern Ireland Office in Belfast chaired a seminar for Belfast editors and reporters. They were asked not to state in future the religion of the (mostly Catholic) victims of sectarian assassinations.

It suited the NIO strategists at the time for such killings to be presented as part of a mindless campaign of random violence conducted by the enemies of the state.

The police in Northern Ireland supported the NIO's view, and as they are the main source of news about killings there, very few newspapers now carry this relevant detail.

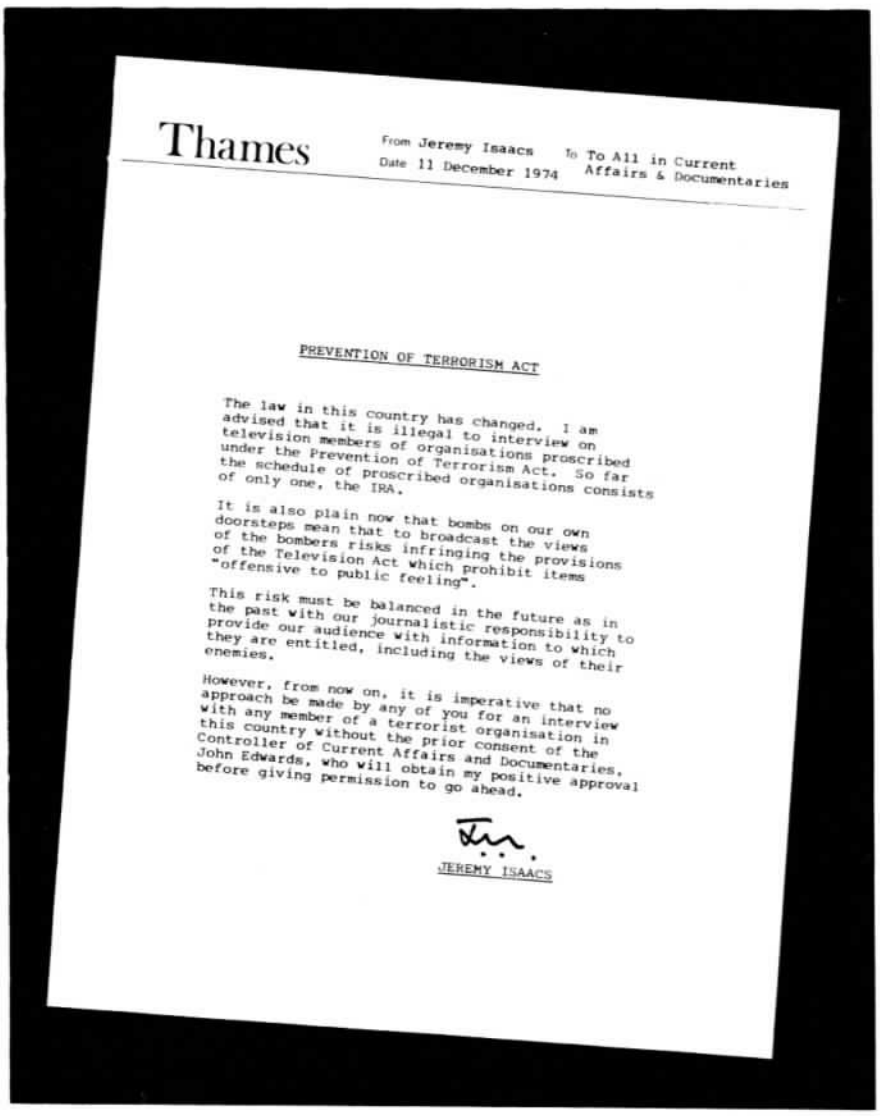
Another example of successful NIO manipulation came with the publication of the 1976 European Commission report concluding that Britain had been guilty of torture in Northern Ireland.

The day before the report was to be published, Merlyn Rees, then Northern Ireland secretary, and his officials, called several newspaper and TV editors into his Whitehall offices for drinks and a chat about what was likely to come out in the report.

As a result almost every British newspaper carried identical editorial leaders on the day of the report's publication — leaders which diverted attention away from the guilty verdict and instead suggested that the Irish Government was wrong for raising the issue in the first place.

The *Daily Express* headlined the story, **REES LASHES DUBLIN OVER TORTURE REPORT**, the *Times*, **ANGRY REES ATTACK AS DUBLIN CHARGE OF TORTURE IS UPHELD:** the *Daily Telegraph*, **REES ANGRY AS EIRE PRESSES TORTURE ISSUE**, the *Sun*, **TORTURE TURMOIL, BRITAIN LASHES BACK OVER THE GUILTY VERDICT**, the *Financial Times*, **IRISH PERSISTANCE ANGERS UK**, the *Mirror*, **REES IN STORM OVER TORTURE.**

Just as the NIO wished, such headlines gave the impression not that Britain was in the dock, but that Ireland was the guilty party. (see the *Leveller*, June 1978, and Geoffrey Bell in the *Journalist* October 1976).



Thames

From Jeremy Isaacs
Date 11 December 1974

To To All in Current Affairs & Documentaries

PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT

The law in this country has changed. I am advised that it is illegal to interview on television members of organisations proscribed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. So far the schedule of proscribed organisations consists of only one, the IRA.

It is also plain now that bombs on our own doorsteps mean that to broadcast the views of the bombers risks infringing the provisions of the Television Act which prohibit items "offensive to public feeling".

This risk must be balanced in the future as in the past with our journalistic responsibility to provide our audience with information to which they are entitled, including the views of their enemies.

However, from now on, it is imperative that no approach be made by any of you for an interview with any member of a terrorist organisation in this country without the prior consent of the Controller of Current Affairs and Documentaries, John Edwards, who will obtain my positive approval before giving permission to go ahead.

JEREMY ISAACS

Pulped — 'A Society on the Run'

In 1973 Penguin Books published *A Society on the Run: A Psychology of Northern Ireland.* **Written by Rona M. Fields, an American social psychologist, the book was the result of two years of research in Northern Ireland and included a strong condemnation of British interrogation methods.**

As a result of what Rona Fields calls 'a massive effort on the part of the governments involved to suppress my findings', *A Society on the Run* **was first censored, then withdrawn from the British market — and 10,000 copies were shredded.**

In 1977 an expanded version of Rona Fields' research, *Society Under Siege*, was published in the United States by Temple University Press.

Pulped — 'Observer' supplement

During the summer of 1978, Mary Holland was commissioned to write a feature for the *Observer* colour supplement to mark the tenth anniversary of the unrest in Derry. The supplement, published separately and well in advance of the main newspaper, arrived on editor-in-chief Conor Cruise O'Brien's desk.

The article, 'Mary of Derry, and Ten Years of Troubles', immediately excited his attention, and — despite the fact that the magazine with the article featured on the cover had already been printed — he demanded extensive changes. The article described the changes in Derry through the eyes of a Mary Nelis whom the writer had first met in 1968 — apparently among the changes in the text was the imposition of the phrase 'Mary Nelis claims' in front of the sentence: 'She is not involved with either wing of the IRA.'

Mary Holland heard of the development and attempted to find out the extent of the changes, but was apparently met with a wall of silence. The magazine was pulped at untold cost and the new article, with O'Brien-inspired changes but without Mary Holland's approval, eventually appeared. (*see Hibernia 30.11.78*)

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TELEVISION IMAGES OF I

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The City on the Border — the missing shot

A woman walks through [a Derry] cemetery.... clutching a bunch of daffodils, the film cuts cleanly and logically to a close-up of her laying the flowers on a grave. [see left frame]. The voice-over commentary informs us that the cemetery is in a now 'strongly' Catholic area, containing Republican memorials, and adds for good and balanced measure that 78 civilians, and 65 army and police had been killed since the start of the Troubles. Perceptibly the film jump cuts (and the

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....shots from TONIGHT transmitted 15.2.77, a report on the IRA, which Airey Neave, the Conservative Party spokesperson on Northern Ireland, described as 'a Party Political Broadcast on behalf of the IRA'. The commentary over these shots of Bloody Sunday said, '...for a further two and a half years the Official IRA continued their own campaign, but much of it was completely bungled. In January 1972 British Paratroopers shot dead 13 unarmed civilians during a civil rights march in Londonderry. In retaliation the Official IRA bombed the Paras' Aldershot headquarters. The explosion killed five women canteen workers, a gardener and a Catholic padre.' The significance of the images is they show that British troops can 'bungle' things too! This message is undermined by the commentary which personalises those victims of IRA violence, but not those victims of British Army violence. A more balanced commentary might have differentiated the occupations of those killed on Bloody Sunday. However this information was nowhere available in the media, and in a milieu of media reporters feeding off media reports, no one took the trouble to find out.

RELAND: TWO EXAMPLES

soundtrack blips) to a panoramic view of the Irish countryside through which a car cruises [see right frame], and we are told traffic is light at the border checkpoints..... Crucially the cut sequence... reveals the camera tilting up to the gravestone with its accusatory legend 'murdered by British troops on Bloody Sunday'. Any specific explanation therefore of a regular ritual observed by a mother attending the grave of a teenage son is suppressed. Anonymity guarantees the anodyne....
From The Listener, 8 June 1978

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ECHOES OF THE PRESENT

The Victorian press and Ireland

'The cry is now for strong measures. Such is the language which is now held by the English journals, which, in their habitual ignorance and presumption, undertake to supply remedies for a social condition, with whose disturbing elements they are utterly unaquainted. They argue from facts of their own creation, and presuppose a state of things to give colour to their absurdities.'

Freeman's Journal 30 January 1843

England's largest newspapers, wrote Belgian essayist Gustave de Molinari in 1880, 'allow no occasion to escape them of treating the Irish as an inferior race — as a kind of white negroes — and a glance at Punch is sufficient to show the difference they establish between the plump and robust personification of John Bull and the wretched figure of lean and bony Pat.'[1]

By the nineteenth century the native Irish had long since been dispossessed of their land by English and Scottish settlers. Their religious and civil rights had been denied. They were racked by repeated famines and evicted from their holdings by rapacious landlords. They were not surprisingly rebellious.

But the major British papers of the period saw no connection between British rule and Irish poverty and violence. Instead they argued that the Irish condition was the fault of the Irish themselves and resulted from moral failings inherent in the Celtic character.

A contributor to **Fraser's Magazine**, popular with the English middle classes, declared in March 1847,

'The English people are naturally industrious — they prefer a life of honest labour to one of idleness... Now of all the Celtic tribes, famous everywhere for their indolence and fickleness as the Celts everywhere are, the Irish are admitted to be the most idle and the most fickle. They will not work if they can exist without it.'

The **Times** asked in the same year, 'What is an Englishman made for but for work? What is an Irishman made for but to sit at his cabin door, read O'Connell's speeches and abuse the English?' (Times 26 Jan 1847).

Supposed criminal tendencies in the Celtic character were used to explain away successive Irish rebellions — the rising of the United Irishmen in 1798, the peasant unrest in the first part of the nineteenth century, the Fenian rising of 1867 and the Land War of 1879-81.

A small minority of English people, including some working-class radicals in the Midlands and a few prominent intellectuals such as the economists George Poulett Scrope and John Stuart Mill, put forward a different view.

John Stuart Mill pointed out that under the existing system of land tenure the peasant had nothing to gain from hard work. 'If he were industrious or prudent, nobody but his landlord would gain; if he is lazy or intemperate, it is at his landlord's expense.'[2]

And in 1834 Scrope urged the government to limit landlords' powers, arguing,

'It is impossible... to have any doubt as to the real cause of the insurrectionary spirit and agrarian outrages of the Irish peasantry. They are the struggles of an oppressed starving people for existence!'[3]

But in the 1840s only three major newspapers — the **Morning Chronicle**, the **Westminster Review** and the radical **Northern Star** — shared this perspective. The rest all argued that Irish violence was due to the natural criminality of the Celt.

On 13 October 1846 the **Times** put forward this analysis:

'An Irishman commits a murder as a Malay runs a-muck. In certain circumstances it is expected of him, and he would be thought a mean and spiritless wretch if he demurred at it. It is only unfortunate that these circumstances are so indefinite. The conditions under which a Malay draws his krise for

'The Fenian Pest'. Britannia stamps on rebellion and protects Hibernia from the Fenians in this cartoon by Tenniel ('Punch', 3 March 1866)

'Time's Waxworks'. In 1881 the rebellious Irish join other British 'imperial problems' in Father Time's waxworks collection (Tenniel, 'Punch', 31 December 1881)

the last rush... are pretty well known by those conversant with the native character... But it is impossible to catalogue the offences which amongst Irishmen entail sudden murder or secret assassination.'

The press discovered yet another side to the Irish character in order to denigrate the non-violent movement for the Repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland. This movement was highly popular, attracting as many as half a million people to its meetings.

The Repeal leader Daniel O'Connell was described in one **Times** article in 1836 as 'scum condensed of Irish bog' and 'a greedy self-serving Satan' (Times 16 June 1836).

And on 24 January 1843 the **Times** has this to say about the Irish people and their support for Repeal,

'A people of acute sensibilities and lively passions, more quick in feeling wrongs than rational in explaining or temperate in addressing them... such is the people whose virtues and whose vices... O'Connell has so fiendishly exploited.'

Coercion, it was widely argued, was the answer to repeal: establish 'tranquillity' first, then reform could follow. The press greeted Government's repressive measures against the Repealers with delight.

The British presupposed that the Irish were inferior in a number of ways to themselves. This inferiority was manifested in Irish poverty and violence. The cure was a further dose of colonial methods.

This is how the **Times** argued in 1846 for a coercive response to the Repealers:

'The great obstacle to tranquillity in Ireland is the national character — the character of the masses, of the middle classes, of the senators of Ireland... When Ireland acts according to the principles of civilised man, then she can be ruled by the laws of civilised man.' (Times 30 March 1846)

So the destitution and rebelliousness of the Irish, which British rule had brought about, were used to justify the continuation of British rule. Colonialism produced its own justification.

Jean-Paul Sartre described the process thus, 'Terror and exploitation dehumanise, and the exploiter authorises himself with that dehumanisation to carry his exploitation further.'[4]

The Irish were not the only people to be regarded by Victorian Britons as inferior. All the imperial subjects were seen in this light: as, in Kipling's words, 'half devil and half child.'

Richard Ned Lebow, who studied colonial attitudes in his book **White Britain and Black Ireland**, points out,

'...with almost monotonous regularity colonial natives have been described as indolent and complacent, cowardly but brazenly rash, violent, uncivilised and incapable of hard work. On the more complimentary side, they have been characterised as hospitable, good-natured, possessing a natural talent for song and dance and frequently as curious but incapable of a prolonged span of attention. In short, the image of simple creatures in need of paternal domination emerged very clearly.'[5]

Following Sartre and Albert Memmi, Lebow suggests that the stereotype of the inferior native allows the colonising nation to apply harsher standards of justice than would be applied at home with a clear conscience. It provides a way out of the liberal dilemma: how to reconcile principles with what you see as political necessity.

In earlier days the subject peoples were not even regarded as inferior humans — instead they were seen as animals or as races born to be slaves.

In the sixteenth century a great debate took place in Spain over whether American Indians were in fact human beings. Most conquistadors argued that despite their human form, the Indians were really animals — a view which justified treating them as beasts of burden.

A similar outlook enabled Cromwell and the Pilgrim Fathers to retain a clear conscience as they exterminated, respectively, the indigenous Irish and American peoples.

Victorian cartoonists appropriated the image of the 'inferior and uncivilised' Irish and translated it into powerfully propagandistic images.

At the time of the French Revolution in 1789, rioters, radicals and rebels of all nationalities were drawn with sub-human features, and often with pig-like noses, to suggest that they were part of the primitive 'swinish' mob. And when the United Irishmen rose in 1798 they were immediately caricatured as brutish peasants with snub noses and bulging jaws.

In the 1840s brutish caricatures became increasingly identified with Irish people. The Irish were by now a favourite butt for cartoonists. Thousands of destitute Irish immigrants were pouring into England and Scotland. The Repeal movement had started, and the end of the decade was to see the Young Ireland movement attempt to launch an armed uprising.

Daniel O'Connell was portrayed as Frankenstein — a theme that was to recur — conjuring up a monstrous Irish peasant with horns like the Devil. In 1848 **Punch** repeatedly caricatured John Mitchel, the outstanding Young Ireland leader, as a vicious monkey.

The rise of the revolutionary Fenian movement in the 1860s, dedicated to liberating Ireland through force of arms and to returning the land to the people, sparked off anti-Irish hysteria in England and Scotland. The Glasgow Herald even produced a special report entitled, 'A night among the Fenians and other wild animals.'[6]

The Fenian campaign of raids on police stations in Ireland and bombings in Britain coincided with a major debate among British scientists about the origins of mankind: are humans descended from Adam and Eve, or do

'Setting Down in Malice'. An Irish cartoonist, possibly John O'Hea, mocks the efforts of English artists to depict the Irish as monsters ('Pat', 22 January 1881)

they share an ancestor with the ape?

Many Victorians took comfort from the idea that other races, such as blacks and Irish, were lower on the evolutionary ladder than themselves.

Apes were then believed to be vicious creatures — so it was easy to explain away Irish violence as resulting from Irish affinity with apes.

Cartoonists and satirists were not slow to utilise the scientists' ideas, and when the first gorilla arrived in London Zoo in 1860 they had the material to hand.

They were quick to caricature the Fenians as ape-like monsters threatening British civilisation. As Lewis P. Curtis puts it in his study of Victorian caricature, **Apes and Angels**, famous illustrators like John Tenniel who drew for **Punch**, 'leaned heavily on the traditional theme of Beauty (Hibernia or Erin) being rescued from the clutches of the Beast (Fenianism) by a handsome Prince or St. George (Law and Order)."

On 18 March 1862 **Punch** published this barbed satire:

'A creature manifestly between the gorilla and the negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool by adventurous explorers. It comes from Ireland, whence it has contrived to migrate; it belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages: the lowest species of Irish Yahoo. When conversing with its kind it talks a sort of gibberish. It is, moreover, a climbing animal, and may sometimes be seen ascending a ladder laden with a hod of bricks.

The Irish Yahoo generally confines itself within the limits of its own colony, except when it goes out of them to get its living. Sometimes, however, it sallies forth in states of excitement, and attacks civilised human beings that have provoked its fury.'

When the Land War started in 1879 cartoonists made the Irish even more monstrous and brutish than before. A spate of evictions — 2,100 families were evicted in the year 1880 alone — led to increasingly bitter agrarian warfare. The cartoonists responded by portraying the Land League's supporters with ape-like faces, huge mouths and sharp fangs to convey that they had not a shred of humanity.

And as the constitutional agitation of the Irish Home Rule Party in Parliament became more militant, Parnell and his supporters too were depicted as ape-like creatures.

As the debate about the origin of species became less controversial, so did the gorilla-Celt begin to fade from the cartoons. The Irish, however, did not. And when the War of Independence started in 1919 the cartoonists displayed their feelings for the rebels by returning to the image of the pig.

Needless to say, the Irish did not see themselves as their British masters saw them. In the satirical magazines read by Ireland's middle and upper classes from 1870 to 1914 it was the Irish — and especially the Home Rulers — who

Kenya

'What is the point of Government leaders publicly stigmatising these people as "wild beasts" whenever they seek by arms some change in rule? Is it contrary to the law of nations to use force against an unpopular government?

'I have been forced to the conclusion that, in order to justify the morally difficult position of using violence against "trust peoples" the Government has branded them as sub-human.'

Peter Benenson, Introduction to **Gangrene**, *Calder, London, 1959*

'The Irish Frankenstein' by Matt Morgan ('The Tomahawk', 18 December 1869)

appeared as handsome, honest and even angelic.

Irish cartoonists did not systematically set out to portray the British as apes. But they knew how to make John Bull and his minions — Orangemen, policemen and officials — look cruel.

Serious political cartoonists such as John O'Hea, an advocate of Home Rule, contrasted the honest Irishman Pat with unscrupulous British politicians and showed how cruelly Irish landlords — supported by the Tory government — oppressed their tenants.

Irish cartoonists also delighted in mocking British stereotypes of the Irish, and poked fun at their efforts to turn Paddy into a monster.

Today

Today the press still fosters the belief that the current conflict in Ireland is due to the inherent irrationality of the Irish — their illogical religious passions, their proneness to violence.

It follows from this view that only the presence of the more 'rational' Briton prevents the situation degenerating even further.

In an article in the **Times** on 23 September 1977 — later the subject of a complaint to the Commission for Racial Equality — Bernard Levin invoked the Victorian image of the Irish.

'There they go still,' he wrote, 'the Irish "pathriots" (sic), with minds locked and barred, mouths gaping wide to extrude the very last morsel of folly, and consumed with a wild terror that sense may one day prevail.'

Levin was reacting to widespread calls in Ireland for British withdrawal and he was backing up Conor Cruise O'Brien — who had lost his seat in the June election. Levin considered that O'Brien, who supports the link with Britain, was the only sane Irishman. If Ireland were towed into the sea and sunk, said Levin, the British Government would 'send a helicopter to take Senator O'Brien off at the last minute.'

There are echoes of Victorian days, too, in the view that coercion is a legitimate response to Irish 'irrationality'.

'What do we want at Christmas?' asked the **Daily Express** on Christmas Eve in 1977. 'What do we want for Northern Ireland, that wretched, God-stricken back alley of Europe where they shoot people's kneecaps.

'As a matter of fact, yes — there *are* prospects for Ulster. She has easily the best, toughest, least tractable and most effective Secretary of State ever in Roy Mason...'

Such attitudes are reflected — and reinforced — at a popular level by the pervasive anti-Irish joke, which plays a comparable role to the Victorian cartoons.

Such jokes, which portray the target group as 'thick', are common wherever there is tension — or a relationship perceived as one of superiority and inferiority — between two groups of people. Indeed the same stories reappear in Australian anti-Pom jokes, American anti-Polish jokes, Glaswegian jokes about 'teuchters' (country bumpkins) and Dublin jokes about Kerrymen.

The rash of anti-Irish jokes has developed since the upsurge in the conflict in 1969 and has had enormous assistance from television. Virtually no TV comedy show is complete without them. Mike Yarwood, the Two Ronnies, Marti Caine, Dick Emery, Jim Davidson, Spike Milligan, Galton and Speight's Tea Ladies and so on all have their quota.

Irish people in Britain fail to find the jokes funny. Indeed, they are so angered by them that for some time the **Irish Post** 'The Voice of the Irish Community in Britain', has carried a heated correspondence on the subject. And in 1977 Terry Wogan won the Post's 'Irish Person of the Year' award largely on the strength of his public opposition to anti-Irish jokes.

When English people suggest that Irish people are lacking in a sense of humour if they fail to laugh at the jokes — 'everyone should be able to laugh at themselves' — Irish people respond with jokes that English people are reluctant to try out on their friends, and which TV comics ignore.

'Heard the one about the two Englishmen who were trying to have a go at an Irishman in a pub? One of them goes up to the Irishman and says, "Did you know the Pope's a bastard?" The Irishman takes no notice, just goes on drinking. Then the other Englishman goes up to him and says, "Hey Paddy! The Pope's an Englishman!" "I know," says the Irishman, "your mate just told me." '

Irish people recognise that anti-Irish jokes inflame popular prejudice against them and feed on the concept — carefully nurtured by the government and the media — that the current war is due to Irish bloody-mindedness.

For their part Irish people see the war as caused by history not psychology. If anything they see the British as stupid, with their chauvinist narrow-mindedness. 'Heard the one about the Englishman with the inferiority complex? He though he was the same as everybody else.'

For English people, ill-informed or mis-informed about the continuing war in Ireland, anti-Irish jokes provide a way of laughing off a situation which they find frustrating and fail to understand. And anti-Irish jokes also provide a kind of misplaced reassurance that John Bull, after all, knows best.

This article is particularly indebted to two books: *White Britain and Black Ireland* by Richard Ned Lebow (Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1976) and *Apes and Angels* by Lewis P. Curtis Jr. (David and Charles, 1971).

1. Quoted in Curtis op. cit., 1
2. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy* (Boston 1848) Vol. II, 283.
3. George Poulett Thomason Scrope, *How is Ireland to be Governed* (London 1834), 20-21.
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, Introduction to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Souvenir Press, London 1974), xxvi.
5. Lebow op. cit., 104.
6. Quoted in Curtis op. cit., 98.
7. Curtis op. cit., 37.

'GUARDIAN' MAN QUITS IN PROTEST

from the 'Irish Press', 5 February 1972

A REPORTER with the Guardian newspaper resigned on Thursday night because of the paper's policy on Northern Ireland. After his resignation, reporter John O'Callaghan referred to the 'no surrender policy of the English papers on the North'.

He added: 'The watershed was, of course, Sunday's shootings and my private feeling that if two of three of the British papers had examined, with the kind of sceptical regard they ought, the behaviour of the British army, it's just possible they would not have embarked on an adventure like Sunday's.'

O'Callaghan, who is 37, and single, handed in his resignation on Thursday night after spending the past month in Derry, Belfast and Dublin, investigating the situation.

'I was just checking.' he said, 'and I found that the Catholic minority have had a far worse battering than ever appears in any English papers.'

With 11 years behind him, Mr O'Callaghan was the most experienced man in the Guardian's London office, where he was based. He was one of the journalists who objected last September to the paper's attitude towards internment and towards the Compton Report. Last night he spoke of his disillusionment.

'The Guardian had a tradition of opposition towards any kind of State or institutional violence,' he said. 'If even the Guardian is behind the army, they feel that nobody is looking or going to question them at all.

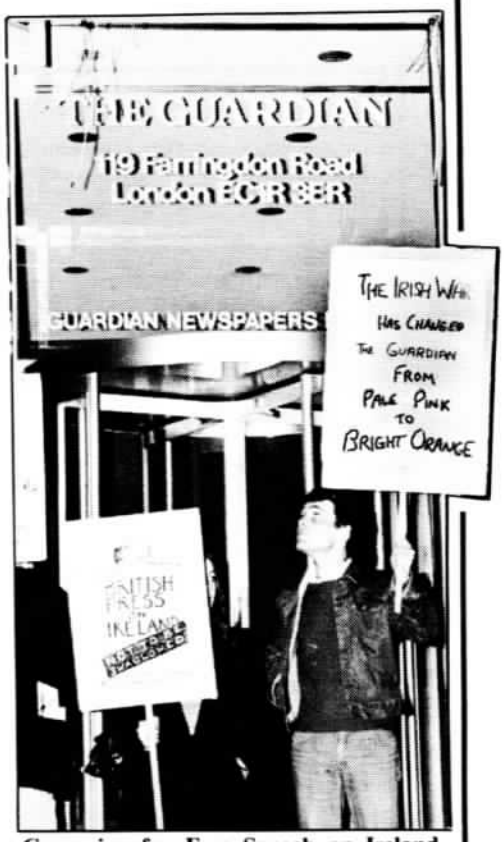
'The army, in a situation like Northern Ireland, is responsible to nobody. It's not responsible in the courts or anywhere. The newspapers or the television is the only answer the people have against it stepping out of line, as it has done on a number of occasions,' he said.

He continued: 'The army is taking the line that the IRA must be beaten and internment must continue and heavy interrogation methods must be used to beat the IRA, but nobody is putting any brakes on at all'.

Referring again to his personal dilemma as a reporter, Mr O'Callaghan said: 'The papers in Britain bear some of the responsibility for what happened on Sunday — I am not surprised about the Telegraph, that's its business — but I think the Guardian should have been more vigilant in monitoring the behaviour of the troops.

'Even if you discount what half the population of Northern Ireland say, you still have a terrible indictment of the army and a terrible litany of horrors'.

He summed up his position: 'After Sunday I felt I had to exert what little influence I had — and it's very little — so here I am without a job'.



Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland supporters outside the 'Guardian's' London offices during a poster parade against newspaper bias, 9 March 1977
Photo: Andrew Wiard/Report

Give Ireland back to the Irish

This song was released in 1972 and was banned by the BBC for its political content. Despite the resulting loss of publicity, 'Give Ireland Back to the Irish' nevertheless reached number 16 in the British charts, and number 1 in the Irish and Spanish charts.

"Before I did this song, I always used to think, God, John's crackers, doing all these political songs. I understand he feels really deeply, you know. So do I. I hate all that Nixon bit, all that Ireland bit, and oppression anywhere. I think our generation do hate that and wish it could be changed, but up until the crucial time when the paratroopers went in and killed a few people, a bit like Kent State, the moment when it is actually there on the doorstep, I always used to think it's still cool not to say anything about it, because it's not going to sell anyway and no one's going to be interested.

So I tried it. It was Number One in Ireland and, funnily enough, it was Number One in Spain of all places. I don't think Franco could have understood."

Paul McCartney

Chorus:
Give Ireland back to the Irish,
Don't make them have to take it away.
Give Ireland back to the Irish,
Make Ireland Irish today.

Great Britain you are tremendous, nobody knows like me,
But really what are you doing in the land across the sea?
Tell me, how would you like it if on your way to work
You were stopped by Irish soldiers,
Would you lie down, do nothing?
Would you give in, who can say?

Great Britain and all the people say that people must be free,
And meanwhile back in Ireland there's a man who looks like me;
And he dreams of God and country and he's feeling really bad,
And he's sitting in a prison
Say, should he lie down, do nothin'?
Should he give in or go mad?

THE ARMY, THE PRESS AND THE BOMBING OF McGURK'S BAR

On Saturday 4th December 1971 McGurk's Bar, a Catholic pub in North Queen Street, Belfast, was blown up by a bomb. 15 people were killed. Over five and a half years later, on 1st August 1977, Robert James Campbell, a 42-year-old loyalist from Ligoniel, was charged with the 15 murders. Convicted in 1978, he was given 15 life sentences and a recommended sentence of at least 25 years.

The evidence at the time pointed to loyalist responsibility. But the Army, anxious to use the incident for its own propaganda purposes, cooked up a story that it was an IRA 'own-goal'.

The press was strongly affected by the Army's story. At best, the papers' reports suggested that who had done the bombing was a complete mystery. At worst, they pointed clearly to the IRA.

The flavour of the Army press conference given after the bombing is best conveyed by *Times* reporter John Cartres, who devoted his entire story to it.

Under the headline **'Blast that killed 15 may have been IRA error'**, he wrote:

'Police and Army intelligence officers believe that Ulster's worst outrage, the killing of 15 people, including two children and three women, in an explosion in a Belfast bar last night (sic) was caused by an IRA plan that went wrong...

'The theory assembled in the security forces intelligence circles is that a large IRA operation was planned for last night involving a bomb attack on a police station or an Army headquarters in the North Queen Street district of the city. An ambush of troops who would have had to move into the district would have followed.

'Word had been passed to several people in the Catholic community to 'keep out of North Queen Street' last night. This got back to the security forces, who were alerted...

'The Army's theory is that the bomb in McGurk's bar was 'in transit', that it had been left there, probably without the knowledge of any of the people who were killed or injured, by a 'carrier' for another person to pick up, and that the second person was unable to keep his rendezvous because of the security operation.

'The only other theories open are that it was indeed a Protestant bomb, or that the IRA Provisionals deliberately killed their own people to provoke open rioting again.

'Neither of these theories, it is felt, stands up.'

Times 16.12.71.

In order to pin the blame on the IRA, the Army had to discredit two pieces of evidence that pointed strongly to loyalist responsibility.

First, a young paper seller said he had seen a car stop outside the pub, and a man getting out of it and planting the bomb.

Second, the bombing was followed by an anonymous phone call claiming that the 'Empire Loyalists' had done it.

The Army got round the paper seller's evidence by manufacturing contrary 'evidence'. RUC (or Royal Army Ordnance Corps, depending on your paper) specialists 'confirmed', as the *Guardian* put it, 'that the device had exploded inside the bar, and not outside as had been thought earlier.'

The Army responded to the loyalist claim by saying they were 'suspicious' of the call, but would not rule it out 'as being a double-bluff by Republican extemists.'

In addition, the army provided 'proof' for the theory that the IRA did it by inventing a complex story — loyally reproduced by Chartres — about an IRA plan to bomb a target in the North Queen Street district.

The press went to town on the bombing in a manner calculated to cause the maximum confusion in the public mind and to imply that if anyone did it, it was the IRA.

'WHO DID IT?' cried the *Sun's* front page headline. 'Security forces have no clue to the mad bombers. Could it have been an accident? Was the bomb left there to change hands, destined to bring havoc somewhere else in Fear City?'

A centre page headline rubbed home the message: **'WAS IT MURDER BY MISTAKE?'**

The *Mail's* headline pursued the same theme with **'Riddle of who planted the bomb that killed 15 in McGurk's Bar.'** Despite the fact that the *Mail's* coverage included a lengthy interview with the young boy who said he had seen the bomb being planted, the *Mail* refrained from openly pinning the blame on loyalists.

The *Mirror* concentrated on a long description of the bombing under the headline **'MASSACRE AT McGURK'S BAR'**. The report could be described as accurate by default — it mentioned IRA denials, it did not cover the Army's theories, but neither did it directly blame the loyalists.

The *Telegraph*, as might be expected, repeated the Army's statements in a somewhat curious report which started with an Army denial that the bomb had been planted by British intelligence agents.

The *Daily Express* led off with the 'Empire Loyalists' phone call — but devoted the remainder of its article to the Army theories and omitted to mention the paper-seller's eyewitness account.

It was left to the *Guardian* to draw out the implications of the bombing and state that 'Protestant militants' were the most likely culprits.

Simon Winchester started by mentioning that locals were 'convinced that Protestant extremists were responsible for the outrage' and went on to mention the paper-seller's account and the Loyalist phone call.

But the effect was muted by the neutral headline, **'Belfast sorrow turns to anger'**, and by the fact that the bulk of the article was concerned with the Army's theories.

So only the dedicated reader would follow the piece through and arrive at his conclusion that the bombing was unlikely to have been done by the IRA, accidentally or otherwise, and that Protestant militants 'have a reason for committing such an outrage'.

In his reporting of this incident John Chartres of the *Times* had proved himself the Army PR man's dream, and Simon Winchester was the reverse. But by introducing their cooked-up theory about IRA involvement the Army had set the tone for all the reporting, even Winchester's. For 'quality' journalists cannot afford not to give serious consideration to the views of the authorities.

Philip Elliott

INFORMATION, PROPAGANDA AND THE BRITISH ARMY

No organisation likes to appear inefficient and yet a certain insoucient amateurism has always been an important part of the British Army's self-image. This is particularly apparent in its policy towards information and propaganda. As it is beneath the dignity of an officer and a gentleman to make a fuss on his own behalf, it is only to be expected that the other side will score all the propaganda points. It has become one of the defining characteristics of the British enemy, in cold wars as well as hot, that they should be good at that sort of thing.

In Northern Ireland this has taken the form of crediting the Provisional IRA with a skill and competence for propaganda which would not be allowed to other aspects of its operations. If they are clever propagandists it just goes to show: a) that they are rightly identified as the enemy — they don't know the British way of going about things; b) that anything they or anyone remotely connected with them says cannot be trusted; c) that the army is right to be careful about the information it makes available itself for fear that devious minds on the other side will find a way of turning it to their advantage.

The result is both a propaganda victory — to discredit the enemy — and a propaganda policy — to keep it quiet. It is the strength of this tradition which seems to explain what is otherwise a puzzling feature of army practice. In spite of the experience it has built up in fighting a series of rearguard actions in various colonial locations since the Second World War, the army has continually had to relearn the lessons of each of those experiences as it has become involved in a new conflict. Each time it has rediscovered that it is involved in a battle not for lives and territory but 'hearts and minds', to use Sir Robert Thompson's Malayan phrase; each time it has learnt that silence is not sufficient evidence of honourable intentions — actions like Operation Motorman or the Falls Road Curfew speak louder than words — and each time it has painfully reconstructed the machinery necessary to win such a battle.

The reconstruction is painful first because it goes against the grain to accept that it is necessary at all — the natural reaction, as expressed vigorously by Roy Mason when he became Secretary of State, is give us some peace and we'll finish the war; second, because effecctive propaganda involves time, effort, coordination and centralisation, and third because propaganda is more of an art than a science.

There is always the risk that mistakes will be made which can only be seen as mistakes with the benefit of hindsight. A simple ground rule such as that summarised by a senior Information Officer in the question 'is it good or bad for the army?' begs a host of further questions about who is making the assessment and what criteria will they use? Standard rubrics of traditional warfare, as for example 'the only good German is a dead German', cannot be trusted in a conflict in which a dead Irishman may well turn out to have been a good Irishman. The basic distinction between good and bad — ours and theirs — is missing in a conflict when they cannot be reliably separated from another larger group — the innocent.

This is one reason why it is plausible to argue that the other side starts with a propaganda advantage. It also underlines the importance of intelligence in operations of this sort and suggests why it too may turn out to be a double-edged weapon. Given the problems of sorting guilty from innocent, complicated by the fact that there have often been uglies (Ulster loyalists) as well as baddies (IRA) making trouble and that even the baddies divide into different groups, sinister politically-motivated baddies (IRA officials, IRSP, etc.), politically-naive, physical-force baddies (IRA

Photo: Newsline

A picket of the Independent Broadcasting Authority on 18 July 1978 when ITV began showing the 'Spearhead' series. The protestors were drawing attention to the fact that while the IBA has a history of banning programmes that question British policy in Ireland, it was prepared to sanction a series that was sympathetic to the Army (for further details see Chronology)

Provisionals) intelligence makes use of quite trivial and indirect evidence to label the enemies. This may be spectacularly successful as in the recognition of the Irish connections of an active service unit in England but it is a blunt instrument, one which makes every Irish person a potential suspect and one which is liable to cause smouldering resentment if not a major scandal when it is institutionalised as in the current Prevention of Terrorism legislation.

This act with its provisions allowing some citizens to be excluded from England by the Secretary of State simply on the basis of suspicion and place of birth, without a right of appeal against the grounds for suspicion and with other channels of publicity denied, brings us back to the basic British information policy, secrecy. Sections of the British press and broadcasting can be faulted for the purposive myopia which they have adopted in looking at Northern Ireland, but the problems faced by those journalists who have succeeded in fanning the embers into major or even minor scandals show that it would be unfair to lay the blame entirely at the door of the media.

For one thing, the variety of sources and opinions built into the democratic system through parliament and the parties has been lacking in a conflict which has been treated overtly as a matter of bipartisan agreement. Journalistic activity has increased at times when the agreement has been under strain largely because sources close to the Army in the Conservative Party felt the time was opportune to press for a more active security policy. To get the authorisation necessary to license an accusation or opinion in public, journalists have increasingly had to rely on institutions outside the British nation state, the European Court of Human Rights and similar supra-national bodies.

Issues raised in this way are licensed in the sense that responsible bodies can be shown to be taking them seriously. In earlier stages of the conflict issues were raised before similar bodies set up by the British state, commissions and committees of various shapes and sizes. The process of widgery in which these engaged to delay and obfuscate the issues demonstrated further the way journalism, to be effective, needs allies within the state apparatus, and these are only forthcoming if there are internal conflicts of interest.

For issues to be taken seriously in public, to be licensed as important by some authoritative body, requires evidence about the facts of the case. Whether or not such evidence can be found, given the fact that oppositional

sources are *prima facie* discredited, depends on the extent to which official sources speak with one voice. This brings us back to the second lesson which the British army has continually had to relearn painfully. Information-giving has been a despised activity, irrelevant to the essential business of soldiering and unlikely to count to the credit of an aspiring officer in his military career.

It has taken the army time to develop its own system of press and information officers distributed at all levels of command and to co-ordinate its information activities with those of other 'official sources', the police and the Northern Ireland office. Even now there is room for doubt that a 5 day course in 'basic PR skills' for serving officers detached to act as Unit Press Officers will change the habits of a career, especially as Press Liaison still appears to be a low status activity. Confronted with the name and rank of the Chief Information Officer at the British Army's Lisburn HQ, the soldiers on the gate denied all knowledge of the individual and his department and were only slightly less sceptical when shown a letter inviting me to meet him. Inside the officer has a direct line with the commander in chief N.I. and the operations room upstairs but the question remains how much traffic it carries and in which direction.

Nevertheless, in so far as such measures of training, coordination and control are effective, they have the effect of cutting out two of the journalist's greatest assets; first direct access to military sources who are not authorised spokesmen and who may want to depart from the official line in pursuit of some end of their own connected with the internal politics of army careers, resources and unit pride or the external politics of army interests in preference to those of other official agencies; second the clue from conflicting official accounts that something is not quite right with any of them and further investigation may be worthwhile.

The bigger threat which is clearly visible over the horizon is that new information technologies and computerised control may yet eliminate the all-too-human tradition of the British army referred to above. In some future version of 'The Navy Lark' the voice which answers a call to 'British Intelligence' may not be Jon Pertwee's dim-witted bureaucrat but an electronic voice computerised to hear all, see all and say one thing.

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The press as executioner
THE CASE OF MARGARET McKEARNEY

When Cornelius McHugh told ITV that he was worried about his personal safety after the press had advertised him as 'Bald Eagle — IRA bomber', he was expressing justifiable fears.

For in 1975 the press dubbed Margaret McKearney 'Britain's most wanted woman terrorist', and the result was that two of her relatives fell victim to loyalist assassins.

At the end of August 1975 several bombs had exploded in London. Late on the night of Thursday 4th September Scotland Yard released a statement through the Press Association. A photograph accompanied the statement, which described Margaret McKearney as 'the most dangerous and active woman terrorist operating here,' and launched a nationwide appeal for information.

The press swallowed the bait. The next morning the national papers convicted Margaret McKearney in inch-high letters on their front pages.

'SHE IS BRITAIN'S MOST WANTED WOMAN TERRORIST', cried the *Daily Mail*. The *Mirror* and the *Telegraph* called her **'TERROR GIRL'**, and the *Sun* went one better with **'DEATH COURIER'**.

'THE MOST EVIL GIRL IN BRITAIN', announced the *Express* and continued, 'Her Irish eyes may be smiling but her trade is fear and death... Consider this female of the species... But keep well clear. For Margaret McKearney is certainly more deadly than the male.'

The *Times* and the *Guardian* which also carried the story on their front pages, were the only papers to attribute the story to the police in their headlines.

The same evening, September 5th, ITN carried a five minute film on the story. The content suggested that they had been fully briefed by Scotland Yard on Margaret McKearney's movements, for cameras were present at the McKearney home in Moy, County Tyrone, at the address in Dublin where Mrs. McKearney said her daughter was staying, and at the home of leading Republican Daithi O'Connell.

The media were undeterred by the fact that there was no evidence to support the police allegations.

The Dublin-based daily, the *Irish Press*, pointed out in an editorial, 'Some of the statements contained in Scotland Yard's list of reasons for wanting to interview the girl are so unfounded that our Special Branch were able, through their own surveillance, to dismiss them as utter rubbish because she was in Ireland at times when the "Yard" alleged she was committing crimes in England.'

The *Sun* went on to draw another innocent person into the net. On 11th September pages 1 and 2 of the *Sun* carried photographs purporting to be of Margaret McKearney. Nearly a year later, on 16th August 1976, the *Sun* published a tiny apology.

This stated that a complaint had been received from Miss Goretti Amanda Kennedy of Co. Dublin that the photos were in fact of her, and that the *Sun* wished 'to make it plain that before we received her complaint we had no knowledge of Miss Kennedy and we had no intention of referring to her.'

A major row blew up in Ireland especially over the implication that the Yard's photo of Margaret McKearney might have been taken by a British agent operating south of the border. The Irish Government sent a complaint to the Foreign Office over Scotland Yard's handling of the affair. The McKearney family started proceedings against the media for defamation.

It soon became evident that there was more to the Yard's action than the mere pursuit of terrorists.

Steve Chibnall in his book *Law-and-Order News* (Tavistock 1977) considers that the McKearney case is 'the most striking example' of 'the direct exploitation of the media for the purposes of control agency propaganda.'

Commentators at the time agreed that the Yard's launching of the McKearney appeal had been approved 'at the highest political level in Whitehall.'

Some thought the purpose was to divert criticism from the Northern Ireland Office which was under pressure from Unionists and the military over its 'weak' security policy (*Guardian* 9.9.75).

Others — and Steve Chibnall supports this view — thought that the McKearney appeal was 'calculated to put pressure on the Irish government... when it became clear that McKearney was living openly in Eire, it functioned as a means of pressurizing the Dail to pass the bill designed to expedite extradition between Britain and Eire.'

Whichever of these theories is true — and both may be — the only concrete result was that two innocent people lost their lives.

Two days after the media gave Margaret McKearney the full treatment the McKearney family were given protection by the Irish police and army after a threat from the UVF "to get your family — each and every one of you."

The UVF were to make good their threat. On 23rd October 1975 a man and a woman were found shot dead in a lonely roadside farm bungalow near Moy, County Tyrone. They were relatives of Margaret McKearney and lived in the same district as her family.

The ultimate responsibility for their deaths must lie with the police, the politicians and the media.


OPERATION SANTA
BALD EAGLE AND THE WHITE OPEL
...BOMBS EXPLODED OVER FIVE ENGLISH CITIES...
AND THE FOLLOWING DAY...
MY NAME IS MORLEY. CONSTABLE EDWARD MORLEY, AS IT WERE, AND I'M A HERO
peace and love to all
British
IT ALL STARTED BACK IN '78 - DECEMBER 17, '78, TO BE PRECISE. I LIKE MY STORIES...ER... REPORTS, TO BE ACCURATE. THAT DAY, ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE -
LONDON!
BANG
BANG
THE NEXT DAY, THE MEDIA HAD A FIELD DAY.
THE Sun
FIND BALD EAGLE!
THE DAILY MAIL
'A HUGE HUNT WAS ON LAST NIGHT FOR A FANATICAL IRISHMAN BELIEVED TO BE MASTER-MINDING THE XMAS TERROR BOMB BLITZ ON ENGLISH CITIES...'
and...
'BALD EAGLE IS A PROVO BOMB EXPERT, WHO HAS VANISHED FROM BELFAST...'
HE GAINED HIS NAME FROM HIS BALD HEAD WHICH HE INVARIABLY DISGUISES WITH DIFFERENT WIGS. HIS REAL NAME...
CORNELIUS McHUGH (WHICH ONE IS HE?)
THIS WAS IT! OPERATION SANTA!
THIS IS MY BIG CHANCE
SUPERMAN
MORLEY
I DECIDED TO COME IN AT THIS POINT.
I WAS DOING MY ROUND IN AND AROUND FARNHAM AS IT WERE - WHEN...
white opel
BALD EAGLE!
I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO. IT WAS ALL IN THE LINE OF DUTY. I WENT AFTER THE WHITE OPEL. FAST.
ME
BUT- SUDDENLY...
BANG BANG. (THEY FIRED.) I DUCKED AND BRAKED!
AND LATER...
I'M WORRIED FOR MY SAFETY.
THE WHITE OPEL WAS FOUND IN IRELAND. IT HAD LEFT ENGLAND ON NOV. 24, THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE BOMBINGS.
MEANWHILE, BACK IN BELFAST, IRELAND AT THE McHUGH HOUSEHOLD...
I'M OFF TO THE EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE AS USUAL
AND BACK IN FARNHAM, SURREY...
SHOTS?? WHAT SHOTS?
YOU'RE SUSPENDED
BUT I WAS ONLY DOING MY DUTY
CR.

THE PRESS AND THE PEACE PEOPLE

The phenomenon of the peace people has been described by one reporter as 'a staggering example of news creation'. The bubble has long since burst. If some British people are disappointed with the peace people's failure to get results, the responsibility must lie with the media. For the sheer volume of coverage and its uncritical nature built up hopes that could never be fulfilled.

In 1977 Richard Francis, then BBC Controller for Northern Ireland, said that in the first three months of the peace movement's existence, its leaders had been interviewed eighteen times by Northern Ireland BBC. But in the whole year from October 1975 to 1976 there were only eighteen interviews with leaders of paramilitary groups.

Francis commented, 'Maybe we have been guilty of underrepresenting the forces which have had the most profound effect on everyday life in the province.'[1]

The peace movement started after the three Maguire children died on August 10th 1976. They were killed by a car which was out of control because British soldiers had shot dead the driver, IRA member Danny Lennon.

From the first, the media saw only what they wanted to see. While it was arguably irresponsible for the Army to start shooting when there were pedestrians in the vicinity, this side of the incident was quickly forgotten.

'The three little Maguire children were killed when a gunman's getaway car crashed into them,' wrote Will Ellsworth-Jones in the *Sunday Times* (5.9.76). A *Sunday Times* leader writer stated, 'Three small children were run over and killed by a stolen car in which Provisional IRA men were trying to escape after shooting at soldiers' (15.8.76).

Mairead Corrigan was described in convenient shorthand as 'the aunt of the three Maguire children who were killed by a gunman's car in August' (*Daily Mirror* 16.9.76) and as 'an aunt of the three Maguire children who were killed 11 days ago when an IRA man's car crashed into them' (*Observer* 22.8.76). The *News of the World* captioned a photo of weeping women, 'Faces of tragedy at the funeral of the three children killed by an IRA getaway car' (15.8.76).

Peace movement rally attendances were exaggerated with gay abandon. Fionnuala O'Connor wrote in the *Irish Times*, 'Having heard a visiting BBC man argue fiercely one night that anyone less than enthusiastic about the peace women must be a Provo, it was no surprise to hear him next day reckon at 40,000 at a rally on Derry's Craigavon Bridge. The next bulletin halved the estimate. Most other reports put the crowd below 17,000.'

The press meets the Peace People at their London rally in Trafalgar Square on 2

On the day of their London demonstration on Saturday November 27th the midday edition of the *Evening News* provided a spectacular example of wishful thinking.

On the streets before the marchers even began to assemble, the massive front-page headline read, **'The Great Peace Guard'**, and Bernard Josephs' article ran, 'Fifty thousand Ulster peace campaigners were ready to march in London today...'

The next day the estimates came down a bit — though the presentation, with glamorous photos of the leading actors —was still ecstatic. **'20,000 turn out for peace,'** announced the *Sunday Times.* The *Observer* and the *Sunday Express* had 15,000. It was left to the Irish *Sunday Press* to provide the more realistic figure of 'over 10,000.'

Reporters came under pressure from their editors to flatter the peace people, and many were not too happy about it.

Sarah Nelson, who researched British press reporting of Northern Ireland for the Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research, writes,

'...reporters often felt uneasy or resentful about the way the issue was handled, and the demands which were made on them. Several claimed their papers had fiddled the figures and exaggerated rally attendances. Some came into conflict with editorial staff. Two 'pop' press journalists had specific reports rejected because they were not effusive enough. A 'quality' press reporter with a low opinion of the Peace Movement and its potential was determined to write nothing at all on the subject. The issue was resolved without acrimony by the features editor sending another reporter to do the job.'[2]

The peace movement had the blessing not only of editors but of the British Government. In September 1976, three weeks after becoming Northern Ireland Secretary, Roy Mason told a press conference at Stormont that the Provisional IRA was 'reeling.' The number one factor causing this reversal was, he said,

Photo: Andrew Wiard/Report

n 27 November 1976

'the mass movement for peace indicated by public demonstrations in Ireland and Britain.'

Mason's approval, plus the fact that the peace people were seen by many as essentially an anti-IRA movement which ignored army violence, guaranteed the erosion of support among the people of the Catholic ghettos.

Scepticism had begun to set in just four days after the death of the Maguire children. On 14th August 12-year-old Majella O'Hare was killed by a paratrooper's bullet while on her way to confession in South Armagh.

The peace people failed to attend the 2,000 strong protest march that followed her death. And Catholic anger was increased by the fact that Majella's death received very little press coverage compared with the deaths of the Maguire children. And what coverage there was repeated the lies put out by army press officers.

Thus the *Sunday Express* reported that Majella 'was hit by a ricochet from a gunbattle between terrorists and paratroopers' (15.8.76). The *Sunday Times* said she 'was killed in crossfire between a gunman and soldiers.' Andrew Stephen in the *Observer* repeated the statement, but was honest enough to attribute it to the army: 'The Army said later that the girl was caught in crossfire after gunmen had opened up on a foot patrol.'

The tightrope walked by the peace people finally snapped when 13-year-old Brian Stewart was shot in the face by a plastic bullet in the Turf Lodge area of Belfast on October 4th. He died on October 10th.

Press coverage was minimal and again influenced by a series of army press statements. Brian Stewart's mother Kathleen was angered by the way the army initially described Brian as an unfortunate victim, and later as a 'leading stone-thrower.' She was bitter, too, that the peace people had not sent the customary mass card after his death. She had attended some of the early peace marches — but never again.

When Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams arrived unannounced at a meeting in Turf Lodge called to protest at Brian's death, they were attacked by women enraged at their 'low profile' on army violence.

The press did not respond to the incident by analysing the politics of the peace people. 'Instead,' as Eamonn McCann noted in the *Sunday World* (17.10.76), 'the Turf Lodge incident was automatically interpreted as just another example of the thuggery of Republicans and the admirable forbearance of the peace people in face of it.'

Thus John Hicks of the *Daily Mirror* reported on October 12th, under the melodramatic headline, **'We would die for peace,'**

'The two battered leaders of Ulster's peace movement clasped hands in a solemn pact yesterday.

'Undeterred by a beating from a mob, they swore to battle on for peace... even at the cost of their lives.

'Mrs. Williams said they were prepared to face even greater violence — and she was not afraid to die.'

Some papers even alleged that the Provisional IRA had staged the violence — despite the fact that Betty Williams said she thought that the men who took them to safety might have been mobilised by the Provisionals.

The Turf Lodge incident was to bring out the contradictions that had been present in the peace people's stance from the beginning, but which had been ignored by the media.

They had attempted to win back lost ground by attending the Turf Lodge meeting, but too late for the people of the Catholic areas.

At the same time their attendance at the meeting — and their subsequent statement that army activity in areas like Turf Lodge was provocative and drove people into sympathy with the Provisional IRA — horrified their Loyalist supporters.

The peace people tried to mollify the Loyalists by insisting that they did support the security forces, merely deploring their 'occasional' breaches of the law.

But the damage was done. They could not have it both ways. From this point on their popularity rose only overseas, and doubts began — occasionally — to surface in the quality press.

On January 2nd the following year Andrew Stephen noted in the *Observer*, 'It is a telling paradox that both the movement and its leaders receive more recognition the further they are away from the Northern Ireland ghettos, where they are viewed with increasing cynicism if not downright detestation.'

The tale of the British media's love affair with the peace people was to have a telling sequel.

When they had held their London rally in Trafalgar Square in November 1976 — with the ban on the use of the Square for Irish demonstration purposes temporarily discarded — the occasion was billed in the highest terms, its attendance figures shamelessly exaggerated and its impact everywhere evident in the British news media.

Yet when Mairead Corrigan came to the Westminster House of Commons on 9th November 1978, just two years later, the press attendance was four Irish journalists, one Soviet newsman, and one agency reporter. Not a word appeared in the British newspapers the day after, and no pictures either.

Why was this so? The Commons conference was hosted by the National Council for Civil Liberties, and had two MPs present. Respectability was in the air, and not the least hint of untoward Republicanism was in evidence.

Mairead Corrigan's message this time was to oppose the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act and the policies Roy Mason was pursuing under that Act. She even stated that the Army/RUC action in trying to close down the organ of Provisional Sinn Fein in Belfast, *Republican News*, was an affront to the notion of a free press and should have been loudly opposed by those British newspapers who laid claim to such lofty ideals.

In short, Mairead Corrigan was not saying what the British news media had come to expect her to say. She was saying unpopular things. Her words would serve no political purpose this time for the British Government.

Notes:

1. Speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, reported in the *Listener*, 3.3.77.
2. Reporting Ulster in the British Press: the Example of the Peace Movement, *Fortnight*, August 1977.

THE BRITISH ARMY AND THE MEDIA

Early in 1977 ex-Major Richard Stannard was hired to oversee Ian Smith's propaganda campaign against the Zimbabwe liberation forces. Stannard was head of the British Army's press and propaganda operation in Belfast from 1973-75. The Guardian commented on 5 February 1977, 'Mr. Stannard's experience in Northern Ireland will give the Smith regime a significant boost in the propaganda battle.'

The theory

The government must 'promote its own cause and undermine that of the enemy by disseminating its view of the situation, and this involves a carefully planned and coordinated campaign of what for want of a better word must regrettably be called psychological operations.

'Under certain circumstances... persuasion will become more important in comparison with armed offensive action... In terms of preparation, the effect of this is to enhance the priority which should now be given to teaching officers the methods of carrying out large scale persuasion, and to providing the Psychological Operations specialists and units which will be required.'

Brigadier Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations,* Faber 1971, 71, 199

'... the propaganda battle has not only got to be won within the country in which the insurgency is taking place, but also in other places throughout the world where governments or individuals are in a position to give moral or material support to the enemy... the mechanics of the business... involves the provision of people to monitor the enemy's propaganda and prepare and disseminate material required for countering it and putting across the government's point of view. It can be achieved either by direct action, as for example by the provision of leaflets, or the setting-up of an official wireless or television network, or by trying to inform and influence the existing news media.'

General Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five,* Faber, 1977, 286-7

The *Army Land Operations Manual, Volume III: Counter-Revolutionary Operations* states that 'the press properly handled is one of the government's strongest weapons'. Media psyops include 'speeches by leading personalities, news commentaries, interviews and even... such things as drama, musical or religious programmes.'

Although strict censorship is thought counter-productive, *ALOM* points out that 'the government obviously cannot allow the publication of subversive propaganda'.

The Technology of Political Control, Carol Ackroyd et al., Penguin 1977, 106

Press Officers

In 1976 the Army had more than 40 press officers operating in Northern Ireland, with a back-up staff of over 100 The RUC had a full-time team of 12 press officers, and the Government employed 20 Belfast-based people, specifically briefed to deal with the press.

Andrew Stephen reported in the *Observer* of 29 February 1976, 'Nowhere is the importance of dealing with journalists in Northern Ireland stressed more than among Army officers... Each is given a buff-coloured restricted document entitled *Manual of Public Relations.* One paragraph of this Army press officers' bible is headed 'Establishing Rapport,' and says that reporters and photographers 'should always be treated as guests of officer status' and 'hospitality should be offered to them on suitable occasions.'

'The sad experience for most British journalists once they start working in Northern Ireland is that the word of the authorities cannot automatically be relied upon.'

In his book *The Point of No Return* (Deutsch 1975) Robert Fisk notes:

'The Army employed a complex system of press officers at headquarters, brigade and unit level in Northern Ireland. Ostensibly, their job was to give factual information on events to newspapermen but several were employed in a slightly more sophisticated capacity, being expected to 'leak' information, sometimes true and sometimes false, which might assist the Army's struggle in Ulster. During the Protestant strike (May 1974), the Army's spokesmen proved somewhat less helpful than usual and on at least two days were instructed not to give interviews.'

Guardian journalist Simon Hoggart wrote in *New Society* (11.10.73), 'Most journalists working in Northern Ireland are almost completely dependent on this (army) information service (and the smaller one run by the police), simply because there is no other source for news of day-to-day violence. This means that the army has the immense advantage of getting in the first word, and it is left up to the integrity of the journalist to check that word one. Some do, some don't. Most only check when there is time or the incident looks like becoming controversial and a few hardly bother at all. When the British press prints an account of an incident as if it were an established fact, and it is clear that the reporter himself is not on the spot, it is a 99 per cent certainty that it is the army's version that is being given.'

Philip Schlesinger noted in his book *Putting 'reality' together,* 'The reporting of Northern Ireland is a form of war reporting, and in such a context it is not surprising that there has been a considerable effort by parties to the conflict to secure propaganda victories. To report on matters adverse to the army is particularly difficult for the broadcast media given their relationship to the state.

'Desmond Taylor has recently specified the BBC's view of the army's version of events in the output: "I certainly feel that the Army, as the lawful and useful arm of the state, must be given a right to speak its voice and version of things to the people of the state through the public broadcasting system."

'One television sub described it thus: "I've always assumed the official line is we put the army's version first and then any other." A radio news organiser observed: "You don't always have time to check out the army's account, especially when an incident has occurred in border areas. After all, it is the British army, and we are on their side." '

Hoggart gives a number of examples of how the army treats unsympathetic reporters. He relates what happened when Robert Fisk, then the *Times* correspondent in Northern Ireland, refused to accept the army's interpretation of a confidential document he had got hold of.

'In the row that followed, the civilian head of army PR, Peter Broderick, described Fisk as "a hostile reporter" in a message sent to the Times office. Fisk may or may not have been mistaken, but he is not "hostile", and the implication behind the use of the word is serious. It suggests that since everything the army says is true, anyone who doesn't happen to accept it is a conscious enemy.

'This attitude reaches its height with army officers who believe that reporters should never say "the army states" or

"troops claim" since this implies they might be mistaken.'

Hoggart concludes, '*On balance... the PR operation remains a considerable success. Hardly a word is breathed against the army in the popular papers or on radio and television in Britain. If criticism is made, it is invariably in the mouths of others, and always hedged with a full account of the army's position — however sceptical the reporter himself (sic) might be.*'

Press statements

MAJELLA O'HARE

Majella O'Hare, 12 years old, was walking with a group of friends to her local chapel near Whitecross in South Armagh when, a few minutes before noon on 14th August 1976 two bullets penetrated her back and ripped through her stomach. She was dead by the time she reached hospital.

The army attempted to blame the IRA for her death. Some weeks later, on 26th September, the *Sunday Times* summarised the army's press statements:

'At first the army said Majella was hit when a gunman opened fire on the patrol. Then it said the patrol had shot back at a gunman and Majella was caught in the crossfire.

'The police, however, are now certain that Majella was hit by two bullets from a machinegun fired by a soldier of the Third Parachute Regiment. The police have no evidence that any other shots were fired.'

That in this case the army's lies were exposed by the press was due primarily to the embarassing situation which Seamus Mallon of the SDLP had found himself in.

On the strength of the army's statements, Mallon had publicly blamed the Provisional IRA for Majella's death. He was outraged when he found he had been misled, and promptly issued a statement charging the army 'with issuing false statements to the police, the media and to him.'

BRIAN STEWART

Brian Stewart, 13 years old, was standing with some friends in a street in Turf Lodge, West Belfast on Monday 4th October 1976 when soldiers opened up with plastic bullets. One of these smashed Brian's skull. He died a few days later on October 10th.

Once again the army tried to deflect the blame by issuing press statements which gave a fictional account of events. Fionnuala O'Connor of the *Irish Times* described what they said:

'The first Army statement said two patrols had been attacked by stone-throwing youths, at first a few, then a crowd of about 400, and had fired 'a number of baton rounds' to extricate themselves. 'Unfortunately, one baton round hit a thirteen-year-old boy' said the spokesman.

'Yesterday the unfortunate boy became a leading stone-thrower according to the officer commanding the regiment involved. Not an impressive change in story. In the meantime local people maintained that there had been no crowd and no riot and that the boy had been standing at the corner with a few friends when the soldiers began firing. They admitted that people gathered angrily after that.'

JOHN BOYLE

John Boyle, 16 years old, was shot dead by the SAS in a cemetery in Dunloy, Co. Antrim, on the morning of 11 July 1978.

The Army immediately released a press statement announcing that a patrol had challenged three men seen armed and carrying bombs, and that one of the 'terrorists' ran off when challenged and was shot and wounded.

That evening the Army released a second press statement. This time they said that John Boyle had lifted an Armalite from an arms cache in the graveyard, and when he was challenged he swung round in a firing position and was then shot.

The Army had changed their story to accommodate the following facts: the previous day John Boyle had discovered the arms cache in the graveyard. He had told his father about it, and his father told the RUC. On 11 July John had gone back to the graveyard to see if the arms had been removed.

But the Army was still lying. The pathologist's report showed that John was definitely shot from behind. Further, the RUC's forensic report showed that John's fingerprints were not on any of the guns in the arms cache.

The RUC's report was leaked to the press and on 26 January 1979 the Attorney General directed that charges be brought against the SAS men involved.

Black propaganda

In *The Point of No Return* Robert Fisk states, 'The Army ran its own "black propaganda" operations, forging posters and documents and leaking sometimes untruthful information to journalists about politicians or extremist leaders whom they disliked.'

Training for psychological operations has taken place for at least ten years at the Joint Warfare Establishment at Old Sarum. Some 262 civilian agents, including policemen, and 1,858 army officers had undergone the course by October 1972 (*Leveller* June 1978). *Time Out* has reported that 'In 1974, civil servants joined the courses, provoking a storm when this was discovered by the Irish Times a year ago. 22 civil servants, only three of whom work for the Ministry of Defence, have had the JWE training' (TO 14-20 October 1977).

In the *Sunday Times* of 13 March 1977 reporter David Blundy exposed a number of such 'black propaganda' or 'dirty tricks' operations. He described how paratroopers had set off explosions which would be blamed on the IRA, how ammunition had been planted on suspects, how plain clothes soldiers had used non-standard weaponry to shoot at civilians and how other soldiers had been caught with 'black hoods with eye holes' (implying that they had been involved in 'sectarian assassinations').

Blundy also told how the army had attempted to sabotage the Northern Ireland Office dialogue with the Provisionals by leaking a fake intelligence summary which gave ammunition to Paisley to attack the NIO as 'soft', and how Merlyn Rees had been led to believe that four guard dogs had been burned to death by internees after the burning of Long Kesh — prompting him to make a powerful speech condemning this 'sadistic' — and fictional — atrocity.

Blundy went on to tell how a committee consisting of representatives from the Northern Ireland Office, the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary met towards the end of 1974 to consider, among other things, ways of discrediting politicians judged hostile to Government policy. In the same year the army attempted to use 'black propaganda' against loyalist politicians William Craig and Ian Paisley.

THE 'DAILY EXPRESS' AND THE £200 MILLION SWINDLE

There was an outcry among the Irish community in Britain after a front-page article in the *Daily Express* on 28th October 1976.

The *Express* alleged that a secret survey by the Department of Health and Social Security established that Irish people were to the fore in a £200 million social security fiddle and that millions of pounds were going to the IRA.

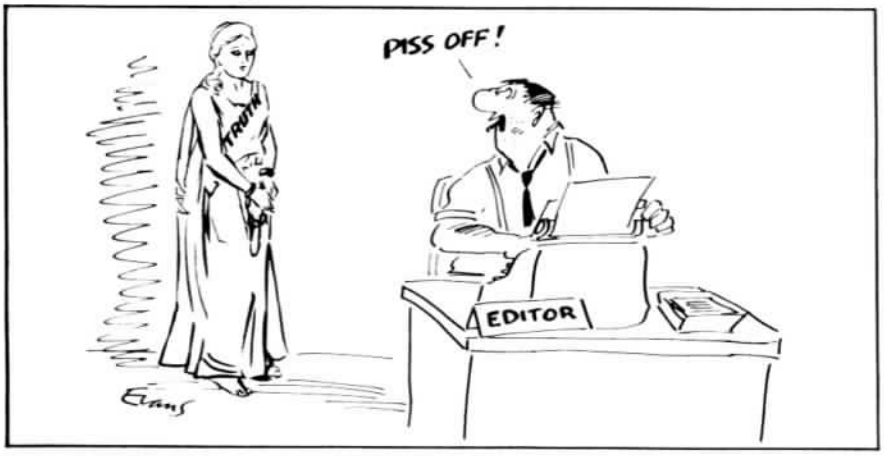
A committee of leading members of the Irish community was set up to pursue the allegations. They met Stanley Orme, Minister of State for the DHSS.

Stanley Orme, as the *Irish Post* reported on 26th February 1977, 'categorically stated that the survey on which the Daily Express based its article was a myth.

'His department had carried out no such survey.

'He furthermore stated that all evidence available to his department indicated that Irish people in Britain were no more a burden on the social security than any other section of the community.

'The Minister subsequently provided the three-man committee with his denial in writing.'



The committee then lodged a formal complaint against the *Express* with the Press Council. The editor of the *Express* told the Press Council that he stood over the story. The reporter, Alan Cochrane, denied there was any untruth in the story and that it was calculated to incite hatred. No apology was offered.

The Press Council ruled against the *Express* and said, 'It was a somewhat inflammatory news story and the *Daily Express* should have published the denial which followed it or produced some substantiation of the allegations. The complaint is upheld.'

The Press Council has no 'teeth' and relies on the sanction that major newspapers will report its decisions. The press was not noticeably anxious to report this particular case. The damage cannot be said to have been undone.

The man from the 'Daily Mail'

Ireland is a very funny place, sir,
It's a strange and a troubled land
And the Irish are a bloody funny race, sir,
Every girl's in the Cumann na mBan,
Every doggy has a tri-coloured ribbon
Tied firmly to his tail
And it wouldn't be surprising if there'd be another rising
Said the man from the Daily Mail.

First verse from an Irish street song

The Europa Syndrome

'I thought the old joke about visiting journalists to Belfast never leaving the Europa Hotel had worn a bit thin. But no, there it was in the flesh, or nearly, on the 9.00am news broadcast on 10th August by London Broadcasting Corporation. The newscaster sent listeners over to Belfast and reporter Peter Sharp for an "on the spot report from the trouble-torn city". Sharp's opening deserves to be framed: "As I look from the seventh floor bedroom of the Europa Hotel towards the Springfield Road..." '

Hibernia 19.8.77

THE BIAS OF THE MEDIA

If you depend on the commercial media for coverage on Northern Ireland you may be interested in the following guidelines which are used by many of the large dailies in putting the news together.

What is the question under survey to be known as?
The Irish Question.
In making this question meaningful to our many readers, what spectre may be referred to without fear of contradiction?
The spectre of religious hatred.
What part of this spectre's anatomy shall be singled out for special treatment?
Its ugly head.
In our second paragraph, may we again mention religious hatred?
We may not.
What then may we substitute?
Sectarian strife.
To whom may this strife be ascribed?
To Extremist Elements on Both Sides.
On whom may we call to sit down at the Negotiating Table oh lord on whom may we call?
On the moderates. (Who else you great twit?)
Of what nature is the vision with which we may legitimately expect said moderates to act?
Statesmanlike.
What reductive adjective may we use in referring to the lack of civil rights in N. Ireland?
Alleged lack of same.
May we, by the same token, refer to the N. Ireland government as the alleged government?
We certainly may not, by the same or any other token. (Remember who your readers are, they don't want to hear any of the Fenian muck.)
What may we refer to the British troops in Ireland as trying to do?
Keep the peace.
Of what nature is the bath that might be expected in Ireland were it not for the good old British Tommy?
A bloodbath.
Name several other characteristics (salient) and facts (basic, underlying) to be taken into consideration:
(a) alcohol (suggested format, 'The unfortunate Irish propensity for...')
(b) volatile Celtic exuberance (see files, French Canada, for sugg. format.)
(c) protestant fears (sugg. form. 'spokesmen voiced concern over...')

This quiz first appeared in the December 1969 issue of the Canadian magazine, Last Post.

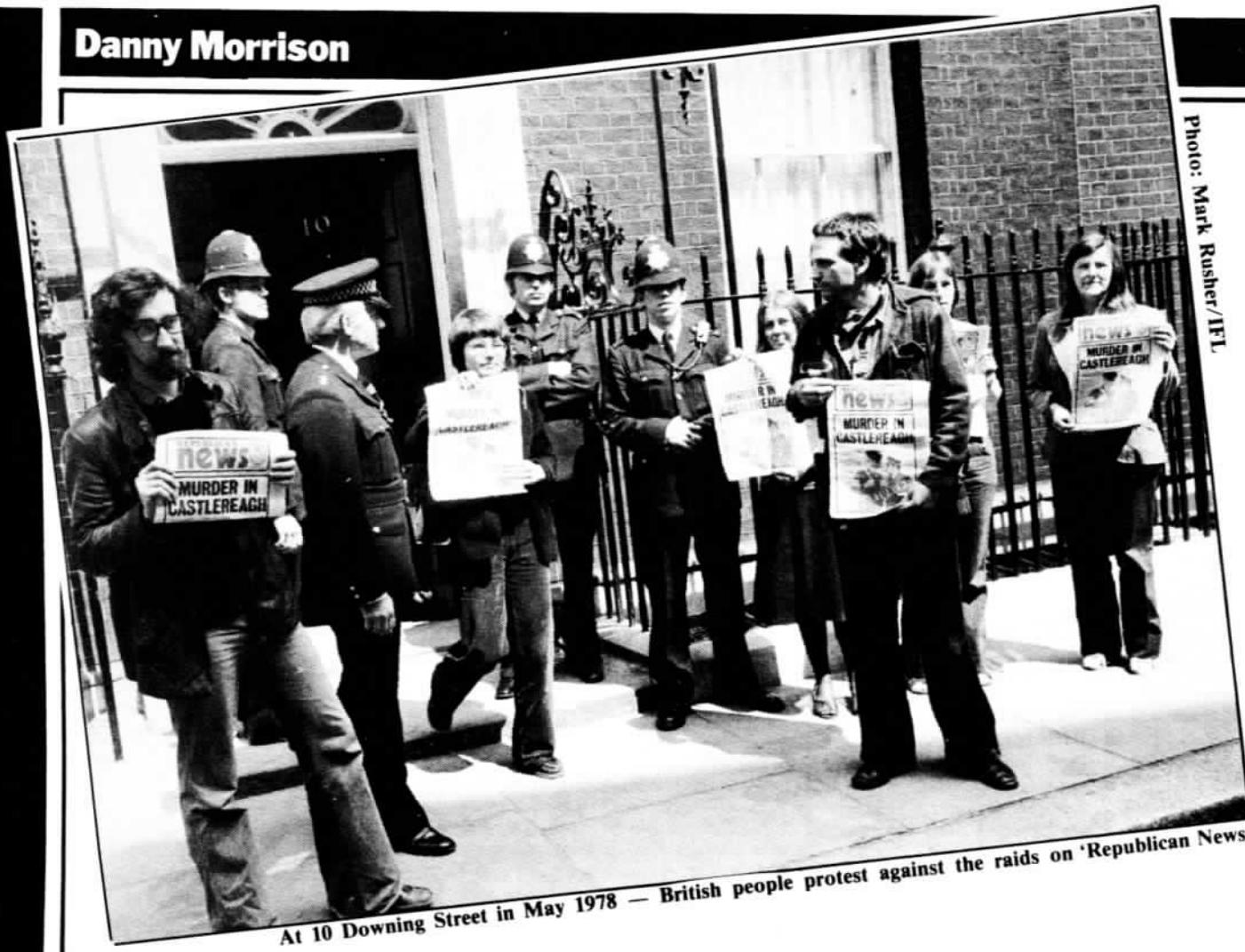


Photo: Mark Rusher/IFL

At 10 Downing Street in May 1978 — British people protest against the raids on 'Republican News'

CENSORSHIP AT SOURCE
The raids on 'Republican News'

This statement by Danny Morrison, editor of Republican News, **was read to the Theatre Writers' Union conference on 'The Extent of Censorship' in London on 28 January 1979.**

In the early hours of Thursday 15th December 1977 hundreds of armed RUC men raided the homes of members of Belfast Sinn Fein, and a number of Advice Centres, seized all the party's documents and suppressed that week's edition of the REPUBLICAN NEWS.

They physically suppressed the paper by arresting the printer, Mr. Gary Kennedy, a member of the pro-British Social Democratic Labour Party, and by seizing the make-ups and plates at his factory in Lurgan. Included in the widescale arrests were the entire officer board of Belfast Sinn Fein, a **Republican News** distributor, and an office worker Mrs. Mary Kennedy. The business manager, Tom Hartley, and myself were not at home and so escaped arrest in the first swoops.

The act of censorship was as a result of no single provocation by us but was the result of a deliberate political decision taken at the highest level of the British Administration for reasons linked to suppressing the overall struggle of the nationally dispossessed people in the Six Counties ('Northern Ireland'), and linked also to the Gardiner Report of 1975, the underlying current of which was 'criminalisation' of captured Irish Republicans — *making 'criminal'* the active pursuit of Irish re-unification.

The biggest blow **Republican News** experienced at that time was the theft by 'the Law' of the photo-library, collected over a period of six years, and the confiscation of £5,000 worth of vital office equipment including typewriters, cameras, film-processing equipment and photo-copying machines. In the raid the British Army had accompanied the RUC police on their burglary and here the telex was thrown out of the upstairs window into the back of an Army truck. Fortunately for us the telex was GPO property and the Brits had made an embarrassingly expensive mistake!

A few days later everyone was released without being charged, but all the property was impounded. In the interim period those of us at large had managed to bring out a single page paper and so the continuity of production had remained unbroken — our first moral victory.

Two weeks later British soldiers raided the office and arrested myself and another member of Sinn Fein. We were taken to Castlereagh Interrogation Centre, the subject of questioning being solely my political writings against the British occupation of my country. A few days later I was released.

In the first week of 1978 the office was raided again and Tom Hartley was taken to Castlereagh, and released two days later. between then and the 27th April we experienced weekly 'visits', 'head-counts' and 'identity' checks, which rendered almost impossible any political work. And, of course, the office was kept under observation by a special camera

unit on top of North Howard Street Army Post.

Our drivers travelling to the Lurgan press were often stopped and delayed. Young newspaper sellers were often stopped and had the papers taken off them in the streets by soldiers. And incoming and outgoing mail was kept under observation, with us notoriously never receiving some articles, and with subscribers often never receiving the paper.

The Brits had other methods of preventing the immediate release of Sinn Fein statements in response to political developments. Prior to elections or shortly subsequent to a British Army assassination the telephone and telex line into 170 Falls Road would be cut, either technically or physically (often crudely by night-prowling soldiers with wirecutters).

In a repeat raid the next attack came on Thursday (note the day) the 27th April 1978. The RUC raided homes, made arrests and swooped on our offices, and on the Lurgan Press. Out of all the people arrested and interrogated for seven days those eventually charged (most with IRA membership and/or 'conspiracy to pervert the course of public justice') were: the entire officer board of Belfast Sinn Fein, advice centre workers, Danny Devenney (sub-editor), Bobby Lavery (distribution), Tom Hartley (manager), Alain Frilet (French citizen, freelance photographic journalist for **Liberation**) and Gary Kennedy of the SDLP.

After this raid the diminished staff of **Republican News** immediately went underground. Within three days we had a four page paper out and within the month our normal 12-page paper. We were on the run and we fell back on the physical support of Republican sympathisers, and edited the paper from different districts in Belfast.

In September I was captured by the British Army and jailed; but a great victory was the uninterrupted appearance of the paper on the streets of the occupied north.

Eventually we were all released on bail, which was a temporary setback to the political, military and judicial suppression of Sinn Fein and the **Republican News.**

WHY?

Why did the British Government take these actions?

Under 'Offences Against Public Security and Public Order' (Emergency Provisions Act 1978) the British Secretary of State for the north of Ireland could have banned the paper at the stroke of his pen. But coming eight weeks after Vorster's suppression of the Black Consciousness Movement and its journals, which the British Government was to the fore in criticising, a similar act in Ireland would have exposed their hypocrisy. Besides, their policy in Ireland was to 'criminalise' any *real* opposition, rather than revert to former policies of proscription and internment.

It is interesting to note the deceit and hypocrisy of Roy Mason, who in a letter, answered queries made by Eric Heffer MP. Mason wrote:—

'The arrests on 27 April were made as a result of prolonged and detailed investigation by the police into suspected conspiracy between certain members of Provisional Sinn Fein and the illegal Provisional Irish Republican Army... I can assure you that it was not the purpose to harass a legal organisation, suppress a journal or interfere in any way with freedom of expression in the Province... It is right that newspapers would be able to continue to add their voices to the debate over Northern Ireland's future...'

In December 1978 French journalists' trade unions held a press conference to condemn the arrest of Alain Frilet by British troops in Belfast in April. Alain Frilet is the Belfast correspondent of the Paris daily *Liberation* and of the Sipepresse picture agency, and is the only permanent French correspondent in the north of Ireland.

The Union Nationale des Syndicats de Journalists — which groups together France's four main journalists' unions — said that 'journalists are not police informers and their sources of information must be protected'. They also attacked the pressures to which M. Frilet had been subjected by the authorities.

On 21 February 1979 the charges of conspiracy and IRA membership against 21 people held during raids on Republican News and Sinn Fein advice centres in Belfast were withdrawn by the Crown for lack of evidence.

It was not the purpose to suppress a journal! Both major raids of December and April were timed (Thursdays) to coincide with the morning we went to press and thus cause the maximum disruptive effect. The charging of Kennedy and Lavery are illustrative of the determination to smash the mechanics of the paper's production and distribution. For the commercial enterprise of printing a radical paper Kennedy ended up in jail, with his business left almost in ruins. The Brits knew that this guaranteed that no printer inside the Six Counties would take on **Republican News**. And for merely delivering the paper to Derry City and County Donegal Bobby Lavery (an ex-British soldier) also lost his freedom for a time, and if convicted on the conspiracy offence could face a dozen years in jail.

The British Government is notoriously sensitive to exposure on Ireland, outside of Ireland. They cannot afford that the true story of their brutal apparatus in Ireland be told — for who would then support British terror, murder and repression? Liberal sections of the British media have detailed their experiences of being 'leaned-on'. But we were being wiped out for censorship reasons and also to stagnate Republican political development.

It was, and remains the task of **Republican News** to voice the opposition's side of things — how the oppressed were being treated, and how they resisted (which, without apology, includes how the IRA conducts the armed struggle). Our existence, our articulation of a legitimate point of view, however unpopular with British imperialism, couldn't be tolerated. By showing that the British Army were wholly engrossed in attacking the nationalist population we were exploding the myth that they were on a 'peace-keeping duty, keeping two religion communities apart'.

The 'criminalisation' of Republicanism has been resisted from the word 'go'. 'Criminalisation' has involved depriving captured and imprisoned activists of *political prisoner status* in the H-Blocks, which their comrades in the Cages of Long Kesh still enjoy. As part of their 'criminal' theme the British Government has attempted to force the men into 'criminal' uniforms. The men have resisted and have been forced to spend the last two-and-a-half years in naked, solitary confinement, have been regularly beaten, and have been compulsorily shaved and sheared — barbaric treatment unparallelled throughout the world.

We now know that the British Government, working on inaccurate intelligence reports in 1977 believed that they had the IRA defeated and that the final nail in the coffin of Republicanism would be the elimination (under the 'criminal'/conspiracy pretence) of the Sinn Fein party and the Republican Press, thus the fierce, concerted and continued attacks on both in this last 18 months.

One hundred years ago an Irish political prisoner, O'Donovan Rossa, summed up the Republican position on suffering under British imperialist rule. It is one to which we adhere, and one which we intend to pursue come what may.

'I am not complaining of the penalties which my masters inflict on me — it is my job to suffer — but I insist and I have the right to inform the world of the treatment to which I am being subjected.'

Danny Morrison is now the editor of the newly merged paper An Phoblacht/Republican News, available from 44 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

CENSORED!!!

CORMAC NERVEWRECK FREE SPEECH

Cormac, cartoonist for 'Republican News', comments on the December and April raids ('Republican News' 24 Dec 1977 and 6 May 1978)

John Arden & Margaretta D'Arcy

CENSORSHIP AND CULTURAL CONSENSUS

Two quotes from an article about government-sponsored terrorism (*The Guardian*, 3 January 1978):

1. 'The Iraquis are alleged to have been behind the assassination...last year, of Said Hammami, the London representative of the PLO.'

2. 'The British are said to have been involved in skulduggery in Oman and there are constant claims by Irish extremists about the operations of our military intelligence units and the SAS in unexplained deaths.'

Note that whereas the Iraquis — and other governments named in the article — have specific victims attributed to them, and the allegations against them are unattributed (i.e. *The Guardian* quite as much as anyone is making the allegations, including those about the British when the location is as far away as Oman), the only claims made against the British spooks in Ireland emanate from 'extremists'...

Ireland as always is an exception — murders by 'security' forces there *may* be: but no-one save these extremists has the nerve to sound off about them...

As the SAS skulduggery has been well publicised in such moderate journals as *The Irish Times*, one is compelled to the conclusion that to even the liberal British *all* of the Irish are, or have been, or could probably become, extremists, and are thus best left at arm's length, or maybe just joked about.

Now can we call this 'censorship'? It is certainly *suggestio falsi* combined with *suppressio veri* resulting in the confusion and muffling of significant information: but how far is it conscious, let alone dictated by official policy? Of course there is much genuine censorship on Irish matters, imposed from on high and rampant in such institutions as the BBC: but over the whole field of the communications media - including the 'imaginative arts' with which we are particularly concerned here — the censor's employment has more often than not been rendered unnecessary by the general cultural consensus of British Imperial tradition, extending backwards in time at least to the days of Edmund Spenser.

Spenser (1552-1599) was not only a great and influential poet at the very flowering of the English Renaissance, but also as a colonial administrator in Ireland was an advocate of judicious genocide in the interests of law-and-order and the peace-keeping role of the forces of the crown. He clearly regarded the Irish as extremists in every way — even their sufferings and starvation appeared to him excessive — and in the end they burnt his castle and perhaps one of his babies. Who can say they did wrong? For what other resource was left to them in the face of such a wall of educated and civilised incomprehension? And yet, in the twentieth century, the Everyman Dictionary of English Literature describes his *View of Ireland*, where his vicious policies are set forth, as 'a work of shrewd observation and practical statesmanship'.

The tradition is deep in the bone of Britain: if the Irish defend themselves against the rule of their domineering neighbours they are criminals: if they endure it they are second-class Britons to be praised only for the virtue of attempting to emulate their controllers. They do indeed look like Britons and can speak the same language — although they do not always seem to mean quite the same things by it.

Their individuality as a people might be better appreciated if they were black or if they dwelt in the tents of Oman. In such case British socialists and libertarians could hold their cause in respect even when it is forwarded by the bomb and the gun.

As it is, the implications of the Irish rejection of what is incorrectly described as *mainland culture* seem too painful for hard analysis. The Provisional IRA, for instance, may be given support by the British left only so long as it is *critical* support. Anything less equivocal would do fine for the Iranians: but then the Iranians do not run like a tattered thread through the whole fabric of English literature, blurring the clear pattern, imposing an embarrassing series of debts, arousing inexplicable guilt.

One could safely write a play about the resistance to the Shah of Iran, and provided it were a competent piece of work its assumptions need pose no problem even in the 'bourgeois' theatre, and would surely be welcomed unreservedly among the so-called 'socialist collectives' and their Arts Council backers.

But Ireland, as always, is the exception. Over the past ten years we have (both jointly and separately) written in Ireland and had produced in Britain some dozen plays, all of them handling what we think of as 'The British troubles'.* We have experienced forms of censorship or attempted interference with every play, most of it not even aware of its own nature. There have been several varieties:

Regular censorship

1. Refusal by authority, for reasons of public policy, to allow certain subject matter to be handled. E.g. the BBC dropped a commission for a radio-play (1971) when we offered them the theme of James Connolly. This, they said, could 'inflame passions in Northern Ireland'.

2. The *editing* of scripts accepted for production. This is often presented as purely aesthetic or administrative rather than political. E.g. passages from a play about Lord Nelson were omitted by the BBC (and also by the Nottingham Playhouse, on the instructions of the Edinburgh Festival Committee) because of 'undue length and lack of relevance' (1969-70). The passages compared Nelson's suppression of a popular revolt in Naples to the atrocities of 1798 in Ireland.

Indirect censorship and induced self-censorship

1. Refusal by managements to accept work for overtly administrative reasons. Covert fear of the theme is hard to prove but one need be no paranoiac to suspect it. E.g. the National Theatre, having requested the text of our *Non-Stop Connolly Cycle*, refused it because so vast a work would 'throw out all their schedules'. They have since, however, presented several large-scale works of a similar structure. (1976).

2. Unwillingness by left-wing companies to incur hostility from chauvinist pockets in allegedly left-wing circles. E.g. 7/84 Company found our *Ballygombeen Bequest* (1972) unsuitable for certain trade-union venues because organisers there feared 'sectarian divisions' among their audiences.

3. The influence of Irish theatre-workers in Britain. If these people are numbered among those mentioned above who 'attempt to emulate their controllers' in order to keep themselves in employment in Britain, they can put forward all manner of reasons against strong anti-imperialist content in a play. Their ethnic characteristics go far to convince British managements of their integrity and representative validity. E.g. actors in our *Vandaleur's Folly* (1978) tried hard to have speeches amended which could be taken as 'a plea for support for the Provos'. C.f. the respect accorded Conor Cruise O'Brien all through the left-liberal sections of British (and American) intelligentsia.

4. Actors under pressure from the difficult economic situation become unwilling to extend their professional responsibilities beyond the mere presentation of the text: thus the theme of the play remains entirely within dramatic convention, not necessarily the original intent of the authors. E.g. *Vandaleur's Folly* actors ceased to display UTOM posters and literature at the theatre entrances. This damaged, not the play itself, but the immediate contemporary impact of the production of the play, and turned political art into artwork about politics.

5. Companies under pressure from threats of civil lawsuits avoid publicly contentious issues in case they are subject to private contention. E.g. *The Ballygombeen Bequest* was immediately taken off the boards by the 7/84 Company (1972) when the *authors* were sued for libel, (although the offending programme note which was the cause of the trouble had been written by the *acting-company*). This suit was eventually settled

out of court, but it took five ruinously expensive years. The authors were not helped by the apparent repudiation of them by the acting-company: and a united front between company and authors could have attained a similar settlement at the very start, without the authors being finally landed with all the bills. The subsidy-system exerts a most cautionary influence here. 7/84, despite their dissociation from the writers' entanglement, suffered some difficulty afterwards from the Arts Council.

6. Unofficial black-listing of writers who choose to explore the Irish theme from a posture of commitment to Irish separatism. E.g. it was 'conveyed' to our agent that the London subsidised theatres and the BBC would not look at joint Arden/D'Arcy work. D'Arcy — an Irish citizen — was assumed to be the political-activist in the partnership, and — as Martin Esslin of the BBC put it — only *genuine Arden work* was thought to be acceptable.

7. Avoidance by reviewers of the real meaning of plays. This has a cumulative (oh what's the use of trying...?) effect on writers. E.g. Arden's radio-play *Pearl* (1978), heavily-analysed and highly-praised for almost everything in it, *except* for that part of the plot (in fact the main part) that dealt with rebellion and sectarianism in Ireland. Also the almost total absence of critical comment on the 'terrorist' element in *Vandaleur's Folly*, though the 'socialist co-operative' parts of the story were conscientiously examined.

Let us be clear what this means. There is at present no significant body of opinion in Britain prepared to state openly that all Ireland should be freed *as a matter of immediacy* from imperial domination.

Usually the argument goes that of course the Northern Irish must control their own destiny, but not at the expense of the Unionist majority, or at least not at the expense of the working-class members of the Unionist majority, or at least not at the expense of the trade-unionists among the working-class members of the Unionist majority, or at least not at the expense of the socialist elements among the trade-unionists among the working-class members of the Unionist majority...

This is technically known as Walkerism, and is, viewed historically, sad rubbish. As an argument in the mouths of British socialists it covers a heap of old imperialism with a pretence of democracy like custard poured over manure.

It is truly amazing how many apparently educated and (within their own walks of life) moderately influential British persons do not even yet realise how the Unionist *minority* throughout Ireland converted themselves by the threat of violence into a factitious and whingeing *majority* within the boundaries of their bogus statelet over fifty years ago, and have continued ever since to invoke British traditions (of liberty and free conscience) for no other purpose than to perpetuate their sectarian dominance.

They were originally (in the 17th century) a colonial garrison: and they have never changed their attitude. The tradition they invoke is the one that inspired Spenser, when he took time off from his Vergil to look round at the desolation of Cork.

It has no more to do with liberty than Sir Francis Drake had to do with Free Trade. But of course the traditional history books tell nearly all of our school-age children that Sir Francis Drake and Free Trade were as huddled together as Corydon and Phyllis underneath the one sheepskin... So where on earth do we go? Drake and Spenser were honest Protestants: Oliver Cromwell was an honest Protestant and commenced the English Revolution and the beginnings of the British left tradition: and Oliver Cromwell was the first general whose systematic reduction of Irish resistance produced some degree of permanence for imperial authority.

Atavistic no-popery and cultural-racial superiority control, from the sub-conscious, the dealings of British with Irish at practically every level of political approach.

The Army General Staff and the right-wing of the Conservative-and-Unionist Party in fact have a clear run (indeed the active collaboration of three-quarters of the left) to keep their wishes honoured throughout the population. The Dublin Government to a greater or less extent (according to which party is in power there) will support them out of fear for its own equilibrium. Culturally the Arts Councils of both nations reflect the consensus of their respective political establishments.

In recent years there has been increasing connection between the Arts Councils — Dublin, being newer, has sought advice on effective patronage from its elder brother in London: and the Northern Irish Arts Council is a creature of the *status quo* (i.e. the arts will flourish in Ulster in direct proportion to the decline of 'terrorism', terrorism will decline in direct proportion to the growth of public support for the security forces: and the security forces wear the crown of Britain on their cap-badges).

Throughout both nations (we mean Britain and Ireland: *not* the 26 Counties and the 6 Counties) the effective opposition to the *status quo* has become more and more narrowly identified with the Provisional IRA.

The Provisional IRA have very much the same image to the world in general as the Irishmen Shakespeare wrote about —

"rough rug-headed kerns
Which live like venom where no venom else
But only they have privilege to live..."

And yet, what is this 'venom', if we look at it correctly? It is a culture and a tradition derived from hundreds of years of unremitting hostility, apparently to British culture and tradition, but in fact only to that British culture and tradition that persists in maintaining itself — for any sort of reason — within the boundaries of Ireland.

Until this is understood it is not possible for the British to define how much of the interference with information and opinion they experience on the subject is really imposed by their ruling class, and how much of it is self-imposed. The writers and intellectuals have for generations connived at their own gags.

We must not neglect the warning recently given by the analysis of the *Daily Mirror* readers' poll concerning withdrawal from Ireland. A majority of readers were in favour: yes indeed: but those opposed were shown to be 'the more educated section of opinion'.

It is therefore no longer a question of the informed vanguard of revolutionary opinion leading and educating the masses. The alleged vanguard has first to inform itself, and educate itself out of a seductive morass of congenital prejudice and superstition.

If having done so, it discovers that its political goals in regard to Ireland are more or less identical with those of the Provos, (which we believe must be the case) it will then have to come to terms with the alien tradition of the rug-headed kerns, fanatical papists, and "murderers-with-no-mandate" that for the last ten years it has striven so hard to evade.

Sectarian Violence in the long term may after all prove to 'have history on its side', just as did Drake and his *Violent Sectarianism* in 1558 vis-a-vis the power of Spain, and God's Englishmen will have to cope with it... Ireland must be the first and continual priority of the British left before any other social or political change can effectively be made in Britain.

**'British Troubles': these are the troubles the British have found themselves in as a result of their presence in Ireland. We who live and work in Ireland do not regard such upheavals as growing automatically out of the native soil. The dragon-teeth in the old story that engendered armed men were put into the furrows by an armed man from overseas.*

SHAMROCKS YES, SLOGANS NO

The censorship of the war in Northern Ireland has touched the visual arts very little until recently; partly because the visual arts with their current tradition of 'ivory towerism' have touched Northern Ireland very little until recently.

Contrary to the myth being spread by media to the effect that the visual arts flourished magnificently in the 60s, and the 70s have produced little, the 70s and particularly the last four years have seen a strong and vital progressive movement which has begun to approach reality through a number of areas directly related to social and political questions.

I have been involved with Northern Ireland as a professional visual artist on three main occasions and on all three occasions have had what I can only call very suspect incidents whose upshot was to blunt the edge of the visual statements I tried to make about the situation. I hesitate to call them censorship through lack of concrete proof although the effect was to censor the work.

The first was in 1972 when I was asked to do an article for an art magazine. The cover of the magazine was a detail from a print I had made for sale for a civil liberties organisation.

This detail was from a photograph of a Republican wall painting consisting of a giant green shamrock and Republican slogans. I had spent a long time in the pouring rain in a Belfast street off the Falls Road, trying to get the slogans and the shamrock together with a human figure to give some scale.

The cover of the magazine however had missed off the slogans and reproduced only the shamrock. When I protested at my photo being chopped in such a way I was told that for aesthetic effect the political slogans had been left off.

The second time I went to Northern Ireland was in 1974-75 at the invitation of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions (Northern Committee) in order to produce an exhibition about an aspect of Northern Ireland.

I naturally chose the current situation and attempted through photographs, documents and video tapes to concentrate on the realities and point towards a progressive analysis.

A major focus of the exhibition was the events of Bloody Sunday and the repression of the Catholic minority.

Although in each of my previous exhibitions I've given numerous interviews to press, radio and TV I'd only been censored once before, that was when I gave an interview to a Cumbrian newspaper about an exhibition I did on a strike in West Cumberland in Brennans Thermometer factory. The owner of the factory was a close associate of the chairperson of the newspaper in question and the reporter told me candidly that he wouldn't be able to get the interview printed because I supported the strikers.

However that was the only trouble I'd had previously and I gave several radio and TV interviews about the Northern Ireland show while it was in Belfast and subsequently in London and Nottingham.

Leading officials of the Irish trade union movement were also interviewed about the exhibition. Only one of the interviews I did was broadcast — by Ulster Television, and none of the trades unionists' interviews were shown.

The crux of the interviews revolved round the fact that if I was critical of the British government's policy in Northern Ireland then I must support terrorism. When I eventually replied that I didn't support indiscriminate civilian bombing whether it was carried out by the IRA or Winston Churchill there was a significant silence but no interview broadcast.

This is I think one of the main aspects of censorship in the area, that it leads people to think only in slogans — the spaces between slogans are thus left unfilled, unexplained.

My most recent involvement with Northern Ireland was the 'Art for Society' exhibition held first of all at the Whitechapel Gallery in London and subsequently intended for the Ulster Museum, Belfast. Only comparatively few works in the show were about Northern Ireland and only two works on Northern Ireland were by English artists.

My painting was very large — about 16 foot long by 7 foot high and was about the erosion of civil liberties as a result of the situation in Northern Ireland. Material relating to Bloody Sunday was juxtaposed to material from the Liddle Towers inquest and the Steve Biko affair as well as comments on Castlereagh RUC.

On the day the exhibition opened there was a march in Belfast because another boy had been found the previous night, hanged in Castlereagh RUC station.

The writing about this piece in the 'quality' press dismissed me as an apologist for violence. When the exhibition reached Belfast the Ulster Museum guards looked at this painting and refused to handle it and they selected three or four others they didn't like either (one called 'Rape' by Margaret Harrison was banned for no good reason that we know except for the title).

At one point both the trustees and the guards said that the banned work was political and the Museum's staff was apolitical — which didn't explain for me why the guards had a large photograph of the local UDA leader in their staff room or why Ian Paisley turned up before most people knew that any work was banned.

After a series of events involving Ministers, questions in the House, letters to newspapers, the banned works were shown in the Arts Council Gallery, Belfast.

But the impact of the show — now split into two parts with one section in a cramped gallery — was much reduced and the Belfast Festival (to show that the arts are alive and well in Northern Ireland) was almost over, reducing further the audience.

These brief personal experiences indicate I hope that the visual arts do face similar problems to other cultural areas and the most difficult thing is to pin the action down and say, 'This is where the censorship is in this discipline.' Because one has to be vigilant against self-censorship when official organisations like the Arts Council are involved.

I saw a piece of graffiti recently — someone had written, *'Socialism is the only solution,'* and beside it someone had written, *'What's the problem?'*

This is the function of censorship — to obscure the problem, and the function of the arts is in my view to render reality visible.

While I agree with the sentiments expressed on the poster for this conference, namely that censorship creeps up on us unnoticed, I don't agree with the implication that it 'just grows'. Censorship is the result of positive actions and must be met by positive opposition.

On the painting banned by the trustees of the Ulster Museum was a passage from that revolutionary socialist poet, Shelley, who fought for Home Rule in the early part of the nineteenth century in Ireland.

In his address to the Irish People, dated 1812, he wrote, *'The discussion of any subject is a right that you have brought into the world with your heart and tongue. Resign your heart's blood before you part with this inestimable privilege of man.'*

from Conrad Atkinson's statement to the Theatre Writers' Union conference on censorship, London 28.1.79

THE NUJ AND THE REPORTING OF IRISH AFFAIRS

The NUJ has always prided itself on being a 'non-political' union. In its early years, it had agonised internal debates over whether or not it should affiliate to the TUC and was in and out of that organisation several times before the matter was finally (one hopes) settled in 1940.

Even now, in this year of grace 1979, affiliation to the Labour Party by the Union would be regarded by a majority of its leadership as an ultra-radical and divisive step and would probably be heavily defeated in a ballot of its members.

Arising out of this abstentionist position, the Union has, until recently, consistently fudged and evaded the related questions of its Irish membership and media censorship of the reporting of Irish affairs.

The NUJ covers journalists in both parts of Ireland. It has a rival in the very small (under 100) Guild of Irish Journalists but the Guild has no recognition or bargaining rights anywhere in Ireland. The unthinking imperialist attitudes of the British towards the Irish are inevitably reflected in the position of Irish journalists in the NUJ.

Though Ireland has produced 3 NUJ Presidents in recent years (one a Northern Irishman resident in the Republic and another from the Republic but living in the North!) its trade union problems have created boredom and indifference, by and large, among its British colleagues. In Northern Ireland itself, informed observers say that, at branch meetings, Protestants and Catholics almost invariably sit at opposite ends of the room and very rarely fraternise afterwards.

But, in the last two years, things have started to change, at least among some sectors of the Union's membership. At the 1977 annual conference, there was a motion on Ireland from the Book Branch, by common consent the most radical of the Union's 189 branches. This called for NUJ support for the 'troops out' position and endeavoured to link this position with a move to oppose the Prevention of Terrorism Act. At the same conference, there was also a motion from the Magazine Branch calling for a Union inquiry into the reporting of Irish affairs in the media.

These two motions caused absolute pandemonium in an already shambolic and badly-run conference. While delegates from Dublin enthusiastically supported both motions, and delegates from Belfast highlighted the sectarian split in their branch by speaking both for and against the motions, Ken Morgan, the then General Secretary of the NUJ, faithfully put forward the Union's 'non-political' line by claiming that such motions were 'divisive and dangerous'.

Fake 1975 card

Fake 1977 card

These fake press cards, used by soldiers posing as photographers in Northern Ireland, were reproduced in the 'Sunday Times' on 31 July 1977

He was backed up by Bob Rodwell, an English journalist resident in Belfast, who immediately contradicted himself by making an hysterical attack on Provisional Sinn Fein, supporting Government censorship and suppression of it. Book Branch delegates felt that they were lucky not to be lynched, so intense was the hostility to their motion.

Nevertheless, the Magazine Branch resolution calling for an inquiry into reporting of Irish affairs was carried. The Union's National Executive Council duly set up a committee to conduct this inquiry but, despite my efforts to galvanise it into action (though not myself a member of it) by arranging showings of TV programmes about Ireland for its members, it never actually produced anything.

In 1978, the Book Branch tried again to raise the question of Ireland at the annual conference, this time far more successfully. It proposed the following motion: 'This ADM (Annual Delegate Meeting) notes the continuous failure of the media to provide an objective picture of the war in Northern Ireland. ADM therefore calls for an end to all censorship, suppression and distortion in this coverage, so that the background to the war and the views of all sides may be analysed and understood.'

The whole attitude and atmosphere of the conference was entirely different to the year before. Some realisation of what had been happening in Ireland in their name had somehow percolated through to the majority of the delegates and they were consequently far more receptive to argument.

Delegates from Dublin and Belfast took opposite sides on the motion, inevitably, but in a manner remarkably free of personal rancour. The resolution was passed overwhelmingly and became official NUJ policy (despite the protests of the Belfast delegates that 'there is no war in Northern Ireland').

The resolution was significant in that, for the first time, the NUJ had taken an overtly political attitude (albeit expressed in a comparatively narrow spectrum) to events in Northern Ireland. Its official line is essentially the same as the Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland's.

There has, however, been little subsequent effort to implement the terms of the resolution by, for example, setting up monitoring machinery of the press and the media: though it's fair to say that the studiously vague formulation of the resolution has not exactly helped matters in this direction.

In December 1978, the Union's NEC voted very narrowly to accept an invitation to hold the NUJ's 1980 annual conference in Portrush, N. Ireland. Arguments were put against it to the effect that the NUJ, by doing so, was accepting the status quo in N. Ireland and was exposing itself to the indignity and irony of having its deliberations 'protected' by the presence of the British Army. But to no avail.

The 12-11 vote in favour of acceptance produced some bizarre political alignments on the Executive. The 12 included the 2 NEC members for both parts of Ireland, most of the centrist element on the NEC plus those members of the left influenced by the Tribunites and the Communist Party. Those against were members of the far left and the far right (worried by the safety and financial, rather than the political, aspects) with a sprinkling of centrists.

So despite its 'non-political' line, the NUJ has been forced by events and circumstances to take an attitude to N. Ireland. The conflicting decisions show a vagueness, a confusion and a lack of clarity on the subject among both leaders and rank-and-file members of the Union — but there is plenty of scope for the Campaign and other bodies to play an educational role on Ireland in a very significant media union.

Jonathan Hammond is a member of the NUJ Executive, and is writing in a personal capacity.

BRITISH SOLDIERS ON IRISH STREETS

Philip Jones Griffiths took these pictures in Northern Ireland for *Life*. It was the first time he had been there since the present 'emergency' started in 1968. He wandered around for a few days, using his eyes, juxtaposing the combat-clad soldiers with the normality of the shoppers and other passers by. They are street pictures. They do not pretend to be a definitive political thesis on what is happening in Northern Ireland, but the photographer's clear eye can often tell you more than the circumlocutions of the political correspondent. Working for *Life*, or any of the well-known American magazines or newspapers, was a help, because people like the IRA trusted the American Press. Unfortunately, we are accustomed to pictures of British troops on Irish streets. The pictures become more frightening if you think of them being taken in Birmingham or Bradford. *Life* hired Philip Jones Griffiths because they liked his work. Even so, they only used one or two pictures from his extensive take.

It is difficult to work as a photo-journalist in Northern Ireland. The British military (the 'army' is always the IRA in local usage) is suspicious. Officers are trained to present a smooth, intelligent, acceptable image. They well know that a picture of a soldier hitting someone with a baton can dent not only a skull but Whitehall's carefully nurtured fantasy of 'peace-keeper'. After Philip Jones Griffiths photographed the boy standing on the rifle his camera was opened and the film partly fogged. The battle in Northern Ireland is one of intelligence and psychological warfare.

This two pronged offensive is ably assisted by making the conflict in Northern Ireland 'boring'. The best weapon in any propaganda campaign is not biased information, but ignorance. No one gets excited about something that they do not know is happening. For many reasons, with a few notable exceptions, Northern Ireland has been very badly reported in the British Press.

Philip Jones Griffiths has said: 'There are no great issues which are treated seriously by picture journalism today. The whole idea is to trivialise everything, to make it as colourful as possible in order to get the advertising.'

'I can remember a picture editor who said: "Look can you go and photograph this guy, we need it for this bit of the page", and I would say: "O.K.! What are we saying about him?" and they would say "Don't argue. Just go and take a picture of him." '

'I would say: "No. Is he a good guy or a bad guy? Are we screwing him?" They would say: "We just want a picture of him." I'd reply: "You can get that from AP or from some picture library. I'm going there because I want to say something about the guy. I want to contribute." That has been my approach.'

Camerawork No. 9, March 1978

The British pressure groups in this society which are most powerful — political and economic — create the environment in which the broadcasting institutions decide what their point of departure, what their point of balance is. And broadcasting journalists are affected by it. It is not easy for broadcasting journalists to step outside that central point of balance: to do so is to take a massive step, and there are enormous, insidious pressures, psychological pressures, which make it difficult for them to do that.

I suppose the most extreme and obvious example of this is Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is reported outside Britain as a colonial problem. History has told us, and tells us, and will tell us, that Northern Ireland is our last colonial issue. Now if we were to regard Northern Ireland as a colonial matter, rather than simply as a matter of restoring order and bringing peace to a divided community, we would look at the Northern Ireland problem, at the role of the army and at the role of the British state through very, very different eyes. And we would understand, I believe, very much more about what's happening in Northern Ireland, which would help us understand very much more what the alternatives are.

My fear, my belief is, that when our successors in thirty or forty years time look back on the coverage of events in South Africa, of events in Northern Ireland, by the British media, they will look back with the same kind of dismay that we now look back on the way the cinema covered events in the thirties in Germany. And that is a very, very sad fact.

Jonathan Dimbleby, Before Hindsight, BBC2, 11.2.78

Photomontage: Peter Kennard

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Question time in Ireland

1. If the Devil had used all his ingenuity to damn Ireland, could he have invented a more devastating trinity than the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and the English Houses of Parliament?

2. Why is it possible to withdraw from India, Kenya and Aden — but impossible to withdraw from Ireland?

3. Did Jesus say: Blessed are the poor, for they shall tear each other's throats out? Blessed are the rich, for they shall watch the tearing out of the throats and shall place bets upon the outcome?

4. What's wrong with torture in a good cause so long as it's not reported on television?

5. What is the answer to the English question?

Adrian Mitchell

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"I've always assumed the official line is we put the army's version first and then any other." BBC TV News sub-editor

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