

'REJOICE!'



MEDIA FREEDOM AND THE FALKLANDS

Susan Greenberg
& Graham Smith

Campaign for Press and
Broadcasting Freedom

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& Graham Smith**

"At a moment when the British Task Force is engaged in operations, it is right for the public to expect its own support for our servicemen to be properly reflected by the media. And they expect their Prime Minister to understand their concern. She has shown that she does, and has rightly reminded us that we are proud in this country to have a free media."

John Biffen, leader of the House of Commons,
Scottish Conservative Party Conference,
Perth, May 14 1982

"News is handled by anybody in politics in a way that rebounds to their advantage."

Sir Frank Cooper, permanent secretary to the
Ministry of Defence, speaking to a Commons
Defence Committee, July 23 1982

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■ The 'luxury' we all need

On April 3 1982 a special Saturday sitting of the British Parliament agreed to send a Task Force of troops and weaponry to a group of tiny islands barely known in Britain, 8,000 miles away, to defend British sovereignty against Argentine troops. The war cost more than 1,000 lives and £3 billion, but the question of sovereignty remains unsolved.



Judah Passow/Network

The war over the Falklands, barely imaginable before it began and at first not taken seriously by many, has now come to dominate British politics at almost every level. It was used as a touchstone by the Government for the image it wished to take to the public in the General Election. In a speech at Cheltenham on July 3 1982, Margaret Thatcher said the Falklands Factor was 'a symbol of the nation that built an empire'.

Get them out NOW

- ★ BRITAIN must go into the Falkland Islands now and throw the invading Argentinians into the sea.
- ★ For make no mistake, the Falklands ARE British, just as much as Antioch, Bournemouth or the White Cliffs of Dover.
- ★ There should be no more delay or talk of the Fleet just being ready to act. The Argentinians ended the talking in an arrogant and insulting way.
- ★ They must be made to pay for that arrogance. Britain is still capable of dealing with jumped-up dictators who need a surgical lesson in how to grip up their crippled countries.
- ★ The Government has told the Argentine to get out. Not enough! Out the invaders MUST go—with or without the help of the United Nations.

Daily Star/
3 April 82

At the centre of the drama the media played a vital role. During the war the Government was on a knife edge. It had to fight a constant battle for public opinion, for at all times failure was a strong possibility and could turn the country against the venture. During the war it was estimated that between a third and a quarter of the population was already against the fighting. Government policy had to be justified and rejustified unless it blew up in Mrs Thatcher's face.

This key role has been acknowledged by the Government and armed forces. The Ministry of Defence has already outlined a plan for accrediting 'official' war correspondents under military control during a 'period of tension'. It has also set up a group to consider censorship 'in times of tension or conflict', and has promised that 'more attention is to be paid to media studies in training courses for officials'. The House of Commons all-party Defence Committee issued a special report on relations between the media and the MoD after hearing weeks of evidence.

None of these actions or findings have had the interests of media freedom at heart. The plan for 'official' correspondents is the Government's way of ensuring that 'only an acceptable view' is disseminated by the media, something which would make a mockery of editorial independence. The conclusions of the Defence Committee have attacked the principles of media independence and professional journalistic ethics.

Protests have been made by some media workers about government news management and the dangerous climate prevailing against 'dissent'. But the big guns of the media have failed to give a lead to these protests. For those concerned with a defence of media freedom, there is still a need to take a sustained look at the implications of the Falklands media experience, to draw our own lessons and conclusions. This pamphlet hopes to begin that process.

In the sections dealing with the practical problems faced by journalists and technicians we aim to outline the forms taken by news management. And since the media also took an active part in self-censorship and in shaping the climate of war coverage, we look at media treatment of events, focussing on three episodes. The Panorama row and the jingo battle between the Sun and Daily Mirror are illustrations of the hysteria induced by the climate of the time.

Defence of media freedom is not an academic exercise made irrelevant by the 'reality' of war. In a democracy war is waged in the name of the public, which must be able to understand means and ends as a basis for its support; the greater the crisis, the greater the need for an independent source of information, the right to question and dissent. We must all try to be clear what these principles mean and make a stand for them now, before too many compromises take the ground from our feet.

Saint Thatcher

On April 3 1982, the day of the emergency Commons debate and a day of 'national humiliation', the Government's survival was arguably in doubt. Within two weeks Mrs Thatcher had succeeded in setting the terms of the political debate. As on other issues, her appeal was pitched in messianic style. The country had to take drastic measures to defend national pride and principles; unreasonable opponents had presented them with no alternative. Mrs

Thatcher warmed to her role, appealing as a Churchillian figure to the loyalties, images and associations of the Second World War. At the Scottish Conservative Party conference in May, she told her audience she preferred dealing with problems of war than the problems of unemployment: 'It's at times like this that politics seem worthwhile.'

Jock Bruce-Gardyne, the Tory MP, pointed to the same pre-occupations albeit more cynically, in a private letter to Samuel Brittan of the Financial Times: 'I don't think the cause matters a tuppenny damn. All that matters is the stomach for the fight.'

But the political climate which brought a bloom to Mrs Thatcher's cheeks also helped to create an ugly, vindictive mood which called criticism of government policy 'treasonable', which used the 'national crisis' to cast opponents in a subversive light.

The problems of media freedom—government secrecy, news management, lack of media independence—have existed for years. But the war illustrated these problems *in extremis* and helped draw attention to worrying trends.

There is always a tendency for governments to try to collapse in the public mind what is good for themselves and what is for the 'national good'.

Under the wartime Thatcher Government this process was taken further, by more complete control over news management, and by fostering harsher penalties for dissent. Lord Carrington, hardly an opponent of the Government, described the ugly treatment meted out to the 'treacherous' Foreign Office when he spoke after the release of the Franks report in January 1983. There were some in Parliament and the press, he said, who actually seemed to believe there was something 'disreputable or even treasonous' in trying to seek agreements with foreign governments: 'The Press was all but unanimous in calling for my resignation—perhaps it would not be putting it too strongly to say they were baying for blood.'

Any expressed desire for a negotiated settlement, any acknowledgement that the Argentinians might have a case to argue, became evidence of 'appeasement'—a word that slipped politics into an historical fault which displaced key circumstantial differences.

The Government and sections of the media spoke of being 'soft' on the Argies in the same language used to attack those accused of being 'soft' on the unions or criminal offenders.

The unofficial declaration of war showed, among other things, what the Government expected from the media, how far that expectation was from even moderate principles of media freedom, and how far the Government would go in limiting that freedom if allowed to do so. Normal demands for media independence became cast as a 'luxury' the country couldn't afford, for reasons of 'operational security', 'morale' or the 'national will'. Media workers, facing tightly controlled news sources, were usually not in a position to judge for themselves. The majority of journalists with the Task Force, and some in Britain, tried very hard to present a balanced account of events. But they were working, especially on the Task Force, under unusual levels of military control.

Mrs Thatcher took an essentially totalitarian approach to the media, who were seen as an instrument for forming public opinion. If they showed tendencies to think otherwise, as the Panorama episode illustrated, her reaction

was to wrap up her policies in the Union Jack. The consequences are worrying. As Raymond Williams commented in June 1982, in an article in the London Review of Books:

'On a neglected problem and an unforeseen crisis (the Government) has been able to set the agenda and the terms of public response and argument. The attempts of...others to express alternatives, to broaden the agenda, come already placed as dissent.'

Tensions with the media led the Government to set up the all-party Commons Defence Committee, which took evidence from key government and defence officials, and from a wide range of media personnel who had participated in coverage of the Falklands war. The evidence illustrates many interesting issues and problems; we have drawn heavily from it in this pamphlet. But the committee's conclusions are disturbing.

The report criticised examples of inefficiency in the Ministry of Defence's handling of relations with the media. It proposed that military rather than civilian officials in the MoD should play a bigger role, and that there should be much tighter central control over information policy to overcome these deficiencies. But on the most controversial issue considered by the committee, that of news management by the Government, the report falls firmly on the side of the MoD. It says:

'There can be sound military reasons for withholding the whole truth from the public domain, for using the media to put out "misinformation", and for believing that particular rumours will rebound to one's own side's advantage. Many principles supposedly regarded as sacred and absolute within the media are applied in a less rigid and categorical way by the public as a whole when it is judging its government's conduct of a war.'

The committee also accuses the media of being 'machievellian' and of giving conflicting and flimsy evidence to back up allegations of news management. Future British governments should not rely on the sense of fairness and objectivity of the world's media, it concludes; they should appreciate the importance of propaganda.

This conclusion is startling on many counts. It does not argue very thoroughly whether news management took place, but justifies it on the blanket grounds of 'operational security'. Yet the evidence within the committee's proceedings suggest that news management went far beyond this aim, as we outline in this pamphlet. The conclusion also fails to examine the 'supposedly sacred and absolute principles of media freedom.'

A comment by Sir Terence Lewin, Chief of Defence staff, is revealing in this context. He says: 'Anything I can do to help me win is fair as far as I'm concerned, and I would have thought that was what the Government and the public and the media would want too, *provided the outcome was the one we were all after*' (our italics). It was, or should have been, the job of the media to raise the question—what are we all after? What should be our ends and our means?

Jim Meacham, defence correspondent of the Economist, anticipated this issue when he testified for the Defence Committee:

'I do not believe that the free press...is an organ of the Government, or should be used by the Government...the problem is that governments of all countries tend to interpret security as synonymous with their own govern-

mental interests...(It isn't) a proper function of the free press to mislead its people into supporting the war which the people...would not support if it knew the true facts.'

The reptile factor

The conclusions of the Defence Committee, and the ugly attacks made on media independence, bring into focus the importance of these principles. The record of the media in defending them, unfortunately, doesn't live up to that imagined by their opponents. Individual journalists and publications have made some efforts, but as a body the British media has shown an ingrained sense of obedience towards authority, a wish not to displease. As Richard Norton-Taylor remarked in the *Guardian*: 'What is remarkable is not the attempts by military commanders to keep secret as much as possible, but the extent to which the media have co-operated with the Ministry.'

There were strong tensions and contradictions between the Government and the media, but these were not always made visible to the public. Papers and broadcasts, for example, did not state that they were censored by the British Government. Since there was a lack of clear opposition to the war from 'conventional' sources such as the leader of the Opposition, the structure of newsgathering, geared to these channels, found it harder to pick up 'alternative' voices coming from other sources.

But the media is not a passive instrument. During the Falklands war sections of the media took an active lead in creating a mood of enthusiastic war-mongering and vindictive attacks on dissidents. In this climate the ground was swept away from the feet of the few publicly visible critics of the war, whose arguments were left with less resonance against the dominant voice. As Anthony Barnett argued in *'Iron Britannia'*: 'It was not public demand for war that carried along reluctant and supposedly more far-sighted politicians. It was, on the contrary, the newspaper owners and MPs, the "political" dons and military bureaucrats, who were the most inflamed by the news.'

Some sectors of the media were aware of the dilemmas posed by the war, but became caught by contradictions. The BBC is a central example. Alistair Milne defended the language used by Peter Snow in *'Newsnight'*, for example, which caused offence by putting some distance between himself and the Government: 'If you start talking about "our troops" and "our ships", then it is natural to speak of "our policy" when you mean the present Government's policy, and then our objectivity would no longer be credible.' A similar point was made in the BBC's testimony to the Defence Committee: 'A powerful argument can be constructed in military terms for the use of the media to confuse the enemy about our intentions. But in public and journalistic terms, the loss of credibility was a very high price to pay...understanding can only be based on the disclosure of truth.'

Despite these public protests the BBC was keen to show the Government that its coverage had emphasised the Government's view of the conflict. In confidential minutes of the weekly News and Current Affairs conference (leaked to the press), George Carey defended the *Panorama* programme by arguing that: 'The introduction...had emphasised that the British cause was utterly right.' On another occasion Andrew Taussig of Current Affairs argued against interviewing relatives of killed soldiers who were willing to talk: 'There

was a danger that, by broadcasting an emotional interview, the BBC would be charged with undermining national will.' How much this contradicts the Corporation's evidence to the Defence Committee, when it wrote that: 'The BBC believes that...a nation strong in its belief in parliamentary democracy needs neither news management nor propaganda to sustain its will.'

By the time the conclusions of the Defence Committee were published, high-level criticism seemed to have evaporated. Interviewed on *The World at One* in December, on the day the report was released, Assistant Director-General Alan Protheroe was asked if the committee's report was 'fair'. He answered that on the evidence he knew to be submitted he found it to be 'a very careful and well-considered report', and that the conclusions and findings were 'extremely heartening'. He did repeat the argument that 'at a time of war, credibility is an asset to the country itself.' But no criticism or protest was made about the committee's cavalier dismissal of journalistic ethics or enthusiasm for 'using the media' and propaganda.

Other sectors were clear from the start that they wanted more media freedom 'in order to win the propaganda war'.

'Morale' has become the giant escape hatch in the 'operational security' argument, used as self-censorship as much as external censorship. News had to be censored or managed, it is said, because the truth might lower the morale of the public or of the fighting men. The public, as we have argued, deserves something better. And the testimony brought back by journalists with the Task Force shows that the men in the armed forces do so as well. In almost all accounts they showed themselves to be more sensitive than the 'patriotic' press to the meaning of war, and to be more rather than less demoralised when coverage failed to reflect the reality they knew. The letters from Lieutenant Tinker published last year also spells out doubts about the war held by loyal men which needed expression despite—perhaps because of—the unreal image of the fighting. Just one example in this pamphlet of self-censorship—the delayed publication of a Sunday Times article on British claims to sovereignty—shows how much this argument is used to limit important debate.

■ Reporting conditions

Conflict between the media and the MoD began with the arbitrary manner in which correspondants were accredited to accompany the Task Force. To begin with the MoD wanted to take only four journalists; the Navy would have preferred a total absence. Editors succeeded in winning 33 places after an intense campaign of pleading and pressure on Number 10. The foreign media, without political leverage, was allowed no correspondents. Accounts by Task Force journalists, most of them called at short notice, of the mad scramble for places describe the 'complete chaos'.

'The Sunday before the *Hermes* sailed there were dozens of hacks in the Holiday Inn in Plymouth, all saying that their editor had just been on to Downing Street and was getting them onto the ship', commented Kim Sabido, the reporter for Independent Radio News (now with ITN) in an interview in *City Limits* on July 16 1982.

The places had to be divided up between the media by the BBC and ITV in broadcasting, and by the Newspaper Proprietors' Association for papers.

Once on board, journalists faced hostility from senior naval officers which created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. Captain Lyn Middleton of HMS *Hermes* briefed his officers to restrict information given over to the ship's company on the 'pipes' because of the press presence. A Lieutenant in charge of helicopter assets told Nicholson: 'You bastards are the lowest priority rating, at the bottom of the list, and that's where you'll remain.'

Journalists and cameramen faced technical difficulties which they felt could have been solved if the political will had been there. For example, they were told they couldn't transmit material from naval ships to Royal Fleet auxiliaries and satellites on the grounds that this would give away the ship's positions. But permission was twice given when the captain wanted 'good news' to reach London quickly.

In *Broadcast magazine*, in July 1982, the problem of cameramen were aired. The low priority given to the needs of the journalists meant that transport and logistical difficulties often restricted what they could shoot. 'Helicopters were in short supply and very heavily worked,' said BBC cameraman Bernard Hesketh. 'It was mostly only due to the pilots ignoring the rules that we got picked up.'

The body bags we never saw

Images of the war were clearly being carefully controlled. MoD officials were highly conscious of the effect of television coverage of Vietnam which is said to have hastened the growth of popular opposition to that war. Alexander Haig warned at the start of the Falklands war that British enthusiasm would soon wane: 'Wait until the body bags start coming home.' The Government was determined that pictures of body bags should not be seen. When a casualty was buried at sea from the quarter-deck of the *Hermes*, the camera team was told to keep away because 'it wouldn't be decent to film it'.

When the HMS *Sheffield* was attacked, Michael Nicholson told the Defence Committee, the television team tried to get a camera aboard a helicopter flying over the boat for three days, and was told it was not possible. 'The facility was given only when Admiral Woodward, who needed to see the *Sheffield*, could not fly there... so the Admiral authorised a helicopter to take cameraman Hesketh... in order that he could transmit the pictures to Woodward over the closed-circuit TV. And then Hesketh was ordered to hand over the video tape to Hammond (MoD PR). That tape was released by MoD UK three weeks later.'

The TV film crew complained bitterly that they were prevented from taking certain shots, and compared this unfavourably with the situation in other wars, where they were 'allowed to shoot first and get it on film, and argue about it later.' Photographs were also selected by the MoD, although this fact was not made public.

Sir Frank Cooper admitted to the Defence Committee that there may have been an ulterior motive behind the technical difficulties: 'If we had had transmission of television throughout, the problems of what could or could not be released would have been very severe indeed.' The effect of the lack of pictures was the creation of unreal and mystifying portrayals in the media.

In the scramble for facilities, some journalists fared better than others. Max Hastings of the London Evening Standard, fared very well. This was no doubt due at least partly to luck and initiative on his part. But he was also helped by having a clear and uncontradictory response to the war which allowed his own objectives and those of the armed forces to dovetail. As he wrote in one famous war dispatch:

'Most of us [journalists] have found great satisfaction in being able to thrust ourselves, for once in our professional lives, wholeheartedly into the service of a cause without bothering much about moral or strategic dilemmas.'

When he was allowed to use ultra-secret Special Air Services facilities to transmit a story publicising the achievements of the SAS, the *Times* claimed that Hastings had received 'preferential treatment' during the Falklands Campaign. This preferential treatment was at first denied and then admitted by Sir Frank Cooper.

Compare this with the problems encountered, for example, by Patrick Bishop:

'On Wednesday June 9 1982 I wrote an article quoting extensively survivors' accounts of the loss of Sir Galahad, which made it clear that the ship was given inadequate protection and that there was anger and bitterness over the incident. I handed it to MoD Press Officer Martin Helm for transmission but when I saw him again five days later, after that week's edition of the



The Standard
15 June 82

paper had been published, he told me that it hadn't been sent. The piece contained 'inaccuracies' that he thought I would want corrected before it went off. There were some mistakes. I wrote that the Galahad and Tristram had been sunk (as was genuinely thought at the time of writing) when in fact they were destroyed but still afloat. The other errors were equally insubstantial or capable of correction. The suppression of the piece was a simple act of censorship because it was felt the article might lower morale. In the event, there was little in the conduct of the war for the British forces to feel ashamed of but if there had been it seems highly likely that nothing would have been allowed to be published about it while hostilities were in progress.'

The behaviour of journalists with the task force was not entirely unblemished, and reflects some of the practices which have brought Fleet Street into disrepute many times before. Kim Sabido, in his interview in *City Limits*, reported that the Sun was, in fact, the most unpopular paper—marines would come up and say, 'You're not from the Sun, are you?' Their headlines 'Gotcha' and 'Wallop' were thought to be in very bad taste.'



He went on... 'There was a certain number of people filing stories as though they had been right in the middle of action and had seen Argentine troops, when in fact they were miles away and on board ship—quite a bit of AJ Makeitup stuff... The story that the troops were very anxious for the World Cup to go ahead was basically concocted by *journalists* on the Canberra, who wanted the World Cup to go ahead...'

'Various people are working on books... two reporters are doing one on the 'funny' side of the Falklands—the 'Untold Story of the Wit and Wisdom of the Falklands Conflict', which Patrick Bishop suggested should be called 'Fuck this for a Game of Soldiers.'



■ 'A 1940 propaganda job'

On the first day of the conflict, April 2, 1982, Ian McDonald—deputy chief public relations officer at the MoD—told BBC and ITN editors that this was to be a 'secret war'. This attitude set the tone for a battle between the media and the Ministry which is described in the evidence to the defence committee.

The MoD defended itself against criticism along several, sometimes contradictory, lines. At first senior MoD spokesmen such as Ian McDonald and Sir Frank Cooper admitted that information from the Ministry was slow,



Chris Davies/Network

Committee argued that this was counter-productive. As the final report of the committee shows, Cooper held sway.

Son of lobby

Andrew Wilson, assistant editor of the Observer and acting defence correspondent during the fighting, has outlined the main tactics used regularly by government departments to lead journalists astray: starvation of information, when 'from time to time crumbs are dropped into the mouths of the hungry media', planting false information from so-called 'reliable sources', offering limited facilities in return for 'good behaviour', the lobby system and 'friendships' with skillful public relations officers—'the subtle, silken thread by which the Press becomes captive.'

Most of these techniques were used during the Falklands conflict. Lord Crowham once said: 'Britain has probably the most secretive administrative system in the whole world.' There is a habitual secrecy among civil servants and politicians who try to say nothing at all, or to say something which cannot be attributed to them.

Journalists are brought up in this atmosphere of deference, often remarked on in surprise by Americans. The MoD briefings held during the war were modelled on the Parliamentary lobby system, which has channelled political information for years. In the absence of other sources journalists lap up the unattributable briefings and disguised sources. As a consequence government opinions are presented through the voices of experts and 'special correspondents'. Leonard Downie Jr., national editor of the Washington Post, wrote in his paper:

'[The lobby] system enables the British Government to manage much of what is reported by the [media] and to escape responsibility for planting information... [Even] in normal times, the British Press accepts a far greater amount of government secrecy and news manipulation than... newsmen would put up with in Washington.'

There were three main layers of MoD censorship during the Falklands war: civilian MoD 'minders' who escorted journalists with the Task Force, the ships' commanding officers or similar military commanders, and a 'longstop' in London or Northwood among the MoD public relations staff.

'Doubtful' stories were checked by at least one senior officer, such as the director of public relations, Rear Admiral William Ash, Secretary to the Defence notice committee, or by John Nott himself, then Defence Secretary. Voice tapes for radio had to obtain MoD clearance, and copy had brackets inserted around words or details considered 'sensitive'. Independent Radio News defence correspondent Paul Maurice told a National Union of Journalists meeting later: 'If we used tapes without clearance—it took hours to clear—there was all hell to pay, and the accusation that "you have cost lives".'

At first there were only general official pronouncements in London delivered by Ian McDonald, who argued that only rock-certain news could be released. Later, under the influence of the new chief of PR, Neville Taylor, defence correspondents were given unattributable briefings. By May 2, the MoD gave in to media pressure and opened an Emergency Press Centre.

A central complaint from journalists was that the MoD was censoring the very fact of its own censorship. Journalists did not always know what had

been changed, or what was being sent back from the Task Force. Their editors saw only the final, censored story, and not the original. But they did not necessarily know that the story had been censored. ITN correspondent Michael Nicholson told the Defence Committee: 'We decided, because of the continuing hassle, that we should prefix our reports "censored"'. But we were told by MoD PR Graham Hammond and the Navy that this wouldn't be allowed. Peter Archer of the Press Association sent a service telex to his London boss saying his reports were censored. The word "censored" was censored.'

Journalists compared this treatment with reports made from Poland under martial law and from Israel, where the fact of censorship is allowed to be made known to the public.

Journalists and cameramen complained that MoD vetting guidelines were muddled, inconsistent and unnecessary, often negating the effort and risks they were taking to report the war. No reference could be made to the weather, the names of ships, and sometimes weapons, units or commanding officers. This led to absurdities. In one article, references to the 'paras' were deleted, but in the same paragraph 'a paratroop captain' was allowed to be quoted. Correspondents had a long interview with a unit commander about the South Georgia landing, but were not allowed to name him. The following day a photograph of him was published by the Sun, issued by the MoD in London. In a report by John Shirley of the Sunday Times, the MoD left untouched a reference to 'thick cover of cloud' and ship activity, but asked the paper to delete references to complaints by guards on the QE2 about the food and the lack of regular exercise, on the grounds that it would be 'very useful' to the enemy.

At Ascension Island, journalists were not allowed to report their presence there, or take film showing the location, on the grounds that it would embarrass American allies who had provided the facility. But the stop over was common knowledge, and well publicised in London and elsewhere.

Often the names of ships, or weapons and their capabilities, censored on the Task Force, were commonly known, or available in reference books.

But much of the criticism from journalists was directed towards the civilian MoD 'minders' who vetted copy prior to its transmission back to Britain. The 'minders' were considered to be 'failed journalists', without enough authority to make on-the-spot decisions or carry any weight within the military structure.

The BBC's Brian Hanrahan told the Defence Committee: 'It seemed as though the concern was to censor what it was *felt* should not be known, rather than details which were genuinely unknown. Much of this was a problem brought about by the restrictions imposed from London.' ITN's Michael Nicholson added: 'These men were not only unqualified but they were unwilling to help. They were afraid: they were looking over their shoulders.'

An example of overcaution came with the blanket censorship of the ceasefire negotiations. London asked the Task Force MoD to prevent any coverage that would jeopardise the negotiations. Martin Helm, the senior PR with the Task Force, admitted later that he misinterpreted the signal by allowing no coverage at all.

There was another mix-up concerning the MoD's attempts to stop the story

of napalm found stored by the Argentinians. The story was promoted by the Army, which felt it would help its cause and mobilise world opinion against the Argentinians. But the MoD said that John Nott felt such publicity might encourage the Argentinians to actually use the stuff. The story was released after some delay. The incident illustrated the sensitivity of MoD minders to political nuances, and the judgements they were making about the *effect* of news items.

Correspondants were also upset when their copy was lost, unaccountably delayed, or held up because it was considered 'sensitive'—only to hear the same story released on the BBC World Service, based on information from London. A request for simultaneous release of bulletins from London and copy from the Task Force, to get round the problem of allowing the MoD in London to be the first with the news, was ignored. Many reporters suspected the minders of pure laziness: '(They) resented arranging satellite feeds before or after supper', complained BBC Radio News reporter Robert Fox.

Changes were often made to copy to alter the 'tone' of the dispatch. When journalists complained, MoD 'minder' Graham Hammond told ITN's Michael Nicholson: 'You must have been told you couldn't report bad news before you left. You knew...you were expected to do a 1940 propaganda job.'

Nicholson told the Defence Committee: 'Brian (Hanrahan) and I both sent back similar reports on the Sir Galahad rescue, and my understanding is Brian's was held up and mine was released. When I enquired why this was, it was said: "Your story ended on an up and his on a down".'

Independant Radio News reporter Kim Sabido told City Limits magazine: 'The tone of pieces was constantly censored. When the marines spat at the black people bringing things on board in Freetown, we were told we couldn't report that...there was a lot about how young the Argentinian soldiers were, but when we tried to report on the ages of our marines—average was 19 and there were some 17-year-olds that NCOs thought were too young—we were told it wasn't a story.'

'When I filed a story about how shocked people were after the sinking of the Sheffield, I was told by one of the minders—the most despicable of men—that there was no shock...when we landed and 20 people were killed I reported that it had been a much bloodier day than was expected and I was told I would have to take that out if I wanted it to get through.'

Home front

Back in London, editors, specialist correspondants and foreign media had to contend with a very unforthcoming MoD. Sir Frank Cooper admitted the 'lesser sin of omission', but omission turned out to be the daily norm. 'McDonald's principal aim seemed to be to withhold as much information as possible... (This) showed the Ministry's inability to grasp the basics of modern publicity', commented Gordon Petrie of the Glasgow Herald.

This led journalists to engage in a great deal of speculation. 'The MoD had control over almost all the information, so that while we could look at it sceptically, about all we could do was ignore it or speculate', Jim Meacham, defence correspondent of the Economist told the Defence Committee. 'During the Falklands Islands war they would not tell me if there were any tanks



"In the latest communique from Buenos Aires, the Chiefs of Staff claim that at St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, the Princess of Wales gave birth to a boy weighing 7lb 14oz. In London, a Ministry of Defence spokesman said they had no knowledge of the incident."

in Germany, or even if there was a Germany.'

London-based media also experienced the refusal of the MoD to confirm or deny information from any other sources, even the press office at Number 10. And as information from Buenos Aires became more and more reliable, this created suspicion. New York Times staff in London were moved to write that in a typical afternoon, 'The MoD spent the afternoon fending off and denying a variety of Argentinian reports, but, by the end of the day, ended up confirming at least some elements of them.' Questions from American journalists often embarrassed the MoD in press briefings, because the American government was making more information available to them than the MoD.

Reporters were told not to release news items 'to save the feelings of next of kin'. But when John Nott said only that 'a type-42 destroyer' had been hit, he was accused of causing more suffering by giving such sparse information.

Off-the-record briefings, in such an atmosphere of scarcity, were crucial. But as the war progressed journalists became increasingly suspicious that they were being used for some form of news management. One such form was the handling of 'good' and 'bad' news. BBC reporter Brian Hanrahan criticised the MoD decision to offset the 'bad news' of the loss of Sir Galahad simultaneously with the 'good news' of the advance to Bluff Cove. A helicopter crash in which 27 men died was released at a time when, according to Brian Hanrahan, 'London thought the attention given to it would be minimal.'

News of the loss of two Sea Harriers, on Thursday May 6—the day of local council elections in the UK—was delayed until after the polls had closed. The BBC told the Defence Committee: 'We were told at about 16.30 to stand by for some bad news—but not as bad as Sheffield. The actual MoD announcement was not given until about 21.10, thus giving currency to the theory that the news was being withheld until after the polls had closed in the local elections.'

The recapture of South Georgia seemed to be another example of news management. Armed with the 'good' news of the British victory, Mrs Thatcher walked out of Number 10 to greet live television cameras. As Michael Cockerell observed in *The Listener* (21 October): 'With Bernard Ingham, her press secretary, and Ian McDonald from the MoD standing discreetly to the side, Mrs Thatcher said: "The Secretary of State for Defence has just come over to give me some very good news, and I think you'd like to hear it at once." Mr Nott then read the statement carefully prepared by a committee... When the reporters tried to ask Mrs Thatcher questions, her now famous response was: "Just rejoice at that news and congratulate our forces and marines. Rejoice!!!"'

Brian Hanrahan commented on this phenomenon: 'Information that a Mirage jet had been shot down was rushed out at great speed. The information that someone (British) had been hit and damage sustained, I do not know how long that took.'

The San Carlos landing was a more serious case of deliberately misleading the media. The day before the landing was announced, defence correspondents were told at an MoD briefing that there was not going to be a D-Day type landing, but that they should expect small raids such as that on Pebble Island.

Jim Meacham was also troubled by the tone of reports of the South Georgia recapture, which led correspondents to believe the operation had been a 'walkover'; in fact, as he learnt later, it was very near to being a complete disaster.

Other examples include the media's 'speculative errors', such as the Superb submarine which had supposedly set sail for the South Atlantic when it was at its base in Scotland; the USSR submarine 'thought to be in South Atlantic waters' (it wasn't), Argentinian soldiers being forced to eat cats and dogs (they weren't) and worst of all, the casualty figure of 750 for the Argentinian air raid at Bluff Cove. It later turned out to be nearer 50, but the MoD allowed the larger estimate to be published with the intention of misleading the Argentinians.

As Paul Foot remarked: '*Dulce et Decorum Est, Pro Patria Mendum*' (It is sweet and beautiful to lie for your country).



Media coverage: own goal!

It is impossible here to make a detailed study of the entire media's Falkland coverage. But we would like to focus on five particularly serious cases when the public may have been misled into thinking the opposite of what really happened. We will also look at an example of self-censorship, the language of war, and the coverage of some of the 'qualities'.

The first example is the sinking of the Argentine destroyer, the General Belgrano. John Nott, the defence secretary, later admitted to the House of Commons that the vessel had been sunk outside the 'exclusion zone' while steaming away from the islands. The commander of the submarine which sank the Belgrano says he was ordered to do so by Downing Street.

The incident is seen by many as the start of the irreversible slide into a full-scale war. There is evidence that the Belgrano did not pose a threat to British forces, and the possibility that the action was taken to deliberately provoke a full-scale war.



The Sun was clearly the worst. GOTCHA! screamed the four-inch headline. Later in the day, as the full horror of the attack penetrated the cast-iron consciences of the Sun executives, the headline was toned down to read: DID 1,200 ARGIES DROWN?

The figure of 1,200 was deliberately exaggerated so that the Sun could follow up with a 'well it's not as bad as we first thought' story later.

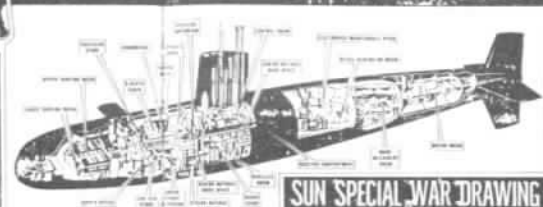
The right-wing tabloids continued to ignore further disclosures about the sinking of the Belgrano uncovered by Labour MP Tam Dalyell's Parliamentary questioning.

BATTLE
FOR
THE
ISLAND

The Sun/4 May 82

Unveiling Britain's super-secret weapon—the deadliest fish in the sea

INSIDE OUR KILLER SUB



SUN SPECIAL WAR DRAWING
BY ROY CASTLE

The 'nuclear
shark' that
strikes from
30 miles away

By CHRISTOPHER BURNETT
The Sun has today unveiled the most powerful and deadly weapon in the world—the British nuclear submarine. This is the first time that the public has seen a detailed drawing of the submarine, which is capable of striking any target in the world from a distance of 30 miles. The submarine is a true nuclear shark, capable of striking any target in the world from a distance of 30 miles. The submarine is a true nuclear shark, capable of striking any target in the world from a distance of 30 miles.

There are four explanations on offer for the failure of the Peruvian peace plan, yet the media reflected only one—that of the Foreign Secretary Francis Pym. He claimed that Britain was prepared to accept the Peruvian proposals, but that Argentinian 'intransigence' led to their rejection. Another view is that offered by former Prime Minister Edward Heath, who said on television that it was *British* intransigence which led to the breakdown of talks. Heath's views received little coverage compared with Pym's. A third explanation is that the sinking of the Belgrano made it impossible for Argentina to accept Peru's proposals, and a fourth is that of Peru herself, who says that any time the talks looked like getting somewhere, Britain escalated the military action.

THE DAILY STAR SAYS

They must
not
die in
vain

STAR COMMENT: PAGE 2

But junta says Britain
must surrender

HARRIERS IN NEW
BLITZ ON AIRPORT

ALIVE!

MARINE
HERO'S
WIFE IN
SHOPLIFT
TORMENT

Hundreds of
Argies saved
from Atlantic

HMS Sheffield was rapidly scuttled after being hit by an Exocet missile. The vessel was then taken in tow by another ship, dragged to a particularly deep part of the ocean, and then deliberately sunk. Why? There have been rumours that the Sheffield was carrying nuclear depth-charges, and that the heat from the Exocet missile had made their casing unstable. She would not have sunk otherwise: an Exocet missile explodes outwards and upwards, and HMS Sheffield had suffered only severe burning, not holing.

The Navy confirmed that she was deliberately sunk 'because she was a menace to shipping'. In the middle of the ocean? In tow? The official story defies belief, which is why rumours about her deadly cargo have persisted.

You would not have guessed by reading the Sun, Star, Mail, Express or Telegraph.

Colonel H Jones may indeed have been a hero at the battle of Goose Green, but the disproportionate casualty rate (only 17 British troops were killed) led to a suggestion from a retired American general that the British troops had indulged in an orgy of blood lust and massacred the Argentinians *after* they had surrendered.

Sabido described the battle for Goose Green as 'a politician's battle, not a soldier's one: we were told both before and after that there was no need to attack, Goose Green could have been isolated.

'But Brigadier Julian Thompson had been called to the satellite phone to talk to a politician—we were told it was Mrs Thatcher but this was not confirmed—and after that the whole emphasis changed and an attack was launched.'

The Goose Green incident raised an interesting point about the way news of the attack was released. When Colonel Jones, the paratroop commander who died, heard his battle plans released in advance on the BBC, he genuinely thought that the journalists responsible should be sued for treason or murder. It took him and his senior officers some time to realise that the news had in fact been leaked by the Ministry of Defence itself. Why?

Brian Hanrahan probably had the right answer in his report to BBC head office on June 29. He guessed that 'political pressures in London' had dictated the leak. In other words, the Ministry needed some news to offset the mayhem which the Argentine airforce was wreaking on the British fleet in San Carlos water. The attack on Goose Green was a long time coming, and the censors were therefore anticipating the attack and the victory, even when leaks of plans jeopardised the British troops themselves. The Ministry of Defence was not splashed across the headlines as a menace to the safety of British troops!

Some journalists wrote with relish that the Argentinian soldiers had left excrement in houses at Goose Green. But as Edward Thompson says: 'Why are they telling us *that*?' He was amused and bemused by the television coverage. 'Quite frankly', he said, 'when there are cluster bombs going off, people don't go outside to shit.'

The 'destruction' of the Port Stanley runway was reported with glee in most of the newspapers

The BBC was not much better. Territorial Army veteran Christopher Wain reported on the 5.50pm news: 'The Vulcans' main target was the runway, which has been cratered with 1,000 pound bombs. Each crater will be roughly

20 feet deep and 30 feet across. It is likely that the runway will have been damaged by about 30 such craters.'

By 7.25pm Mr Wain's confidence had grown. He was able to report: 'Destroying the Port Stanley runway has cut off the Argentine garrison's life support system.' They were dead *already*, without a shot being fired?

On HMS Hermes Brian Hanrahan also spoke about what was happening to the runway in great detail, although he couldn't see it. On May 2 on BBC Newsnight he said: 'There are a number of holes on the runway, some of which indicate a clear line of bombs across the runway (done by the Vulcans) and some which run down the middle of the runway (done by the Harriers).'

There were, in strict truth, a number of craters on the runway. That number was one.

Even though Argentine film was available which showed the heavy Hercules transport planes landing on the runway all through May, it wasn't until after the ceasefire, when the TV crews were allowed to take pictures of it, that the truth was made known.



Steve Benbow/Network

Michael Brunson of ITN, for instance, reported on the 5.45pm news on June 21: 'The first pictures of Port Stanley airfield showed the British bombing apparently had little effect on the runway. There are several damaged aircraft, and a few craters, but all except one are off the runway. The rest of the tarmac seems in good condition.' The cameras couldn't lie, but the Ministry of Defence could, and did.

'We are not in any doubt...'

It is not just the conduct of the war which needed closer scrutiny. There was also a paucity of discussion about fundamentals—the causes and principles of the fighting, the long-term future of the course taken by the Government, or the many contradictions; for example, the accusation 'fascism' hurled at a junta which only a few weeks earlier received comprehensive government support.

In some cases journalism of this kind was actually censored from within, because of the spectre of 'undermining national will'. The delayed publication in the Sunday Times of a story about Britain's claims to sovereignty is one such case.

Sovereignty was the issue on which Britain went to war. On May 4 1982, Francis Pym told the House of Commons:

'The sovereignty question is the heart of the issue and dispute. For years we have been negotiating about the future status of the Islands. We are not in any doubt about our title to the Falkland Islands, and we never have been.'

During the Falklands war Christopher Hird, a journalist on the Sunday Times Insight Team, came across Foreign Office memoranda going back to the earliest history of the Islands, which showed that in the past there had been many doubts about Britain's claim to sovereignty. Within the files, for example, it was written in 1936 by a Foreign Office official: 'Our seizure of the Falkland Islands in 1833 was so arbitrary a procedure as judged by the ideology of the present day it would not prove easy to explain our possession without showing ourselves up as international bandits....' As late as 1968 Britain was not eager to go to the International Court at the Hague to settle the issue because it was not sure of winning.

An outline of the evidence for this story was first presented to the paper in the middle of May. The article did not appear until mid-June, when the war has already ended. Even allowing for a reasonable period to argue for the story and complete research, this sensational information took an unusually long time to reach the public, and only after strong 'lobbying' for its publication.

What fears held the hand of the paper's editor, Frank Giles? He didn't think the story should be published until the fighting had stopped, in case it was 'demoralising' to servicemen and their families.

In international law, Britain has a much stronger claim to sovereignty now than in the past because of length of residence and 'self-determination'. But the evidence was important because it weakened the Government's case that there 'have not *nor have ever been*' doubts about the central issue of the war. On the basis of this supposedly rock-solid British claim, any questioning of the country's course of action was considered 'treachery'. And now Britain's 'unassailable' claim stretches not only into the past, but into the indefinable future as well.

The language of war

'It is important that the attitudes of journalists are re-educated to operational controls', commented a Ministry of Defence official in the Observer on June 13. Most journalists working on coverage of the Falkland Islands crisis did not need re-educating: helicopters were 'downed', ships 'taken out', and

phrases such as 'further loss of life' became commonplace. Sentences such as 'hundreds of people are being killed' *could* have served just as well, and would certainly have been easier to understand, but were not used.

War is, above all else, a male preserve. It should not be surprising that the language in which the crisis was reported was that of men: less than ten per cent of Fleet Street's journalists are women. Fortunately, one of those few is Yvonne Roberts, who in *Time Out* on May 21 1982 wrote:

'Vivacious, auburn-haired Rear Admiral Sandy Woodward, Surbiton's loquacious lovely, had a recruit under his command described as a 'petite brunette'—and it wasn't Prince Andrew. Linda Kitson had been appointed war artist. One of the reasons why she was selected was because she had no emotional ties (not a 'real' woman after all). But even that didn't save her from the fate of every female, bar one, who was caught up in the Falklands fandango.

Linda Kitson, like everybody else in the task force, works—but because she is also female, she is decorated with adjectives. Not only is she a 'petite brunette' (*Daily Mail*), she is also described by the *Guardian*, which claims to know better, as being in possession of 'a small gamin figure'; useful presumably should she need to camouflage herself among the penguins. Over the last few months, the nonsensical claim of bias in the Press towards Argentina has been much discussed, as has jingoism and patriotism; sexism, equally virulent, has escaped notice with hardly a murmur of discontent. It is, after all, one of the perks, one of the essential accessories of war.

You can modify your jingoism, but if you modify your sexism, you take away the reason 'the boys' (as Mrs Thatcher chooses to call them) need to fight. Principles are for politicians, heroes prefer defenceless women and home territory as a justification for killing. At this point in the stage management of the altogether unreal production which the Falklands has become, we run into some technical difficulties. No national threat exists and the majority of women left behind have already proven their independence. The 1980's is not World War II, when females were allowed a crash course in emancipation—until the men came home.

Women *can* cope but the Falklands is part of a long-established male ritual. At the same time, because there is so little immediate factual information, the story desperately needs its daily dose of stereo types: heroes and cardboard cuties from the 1940s and 50s; sweethearts, mothers, fiancées, wives, sisters and cheese-cake pin-ups.

'Lovers' are out: that sounds too much like equal billing. Common-law wives are also unwanted because as far as the navy's concerned they don't exist, at least not in naval accomodation.

So amid the cartoon drawings of Kirk Douglas Action Men catapulting ashore, the newspapers, tabloid and broadsheet, have created one-dimensional women dressed in 'Up Your Junta' T-shirts or treated to free knickers, while their personalities are garotted into lifelessness with a 'garter for the tartars'.

In short, patriotism for women is interpreted as acting as a male appendage. 'Governor's girl to wed', reads one headline. 'My extraordinary son', begins an interview with Madge Woodward. Women have been and are being portrayed as newly-weds, mothers-to-be and, sadly, widows-in-grief.

The *Sunday Times*, too, has gone for the cliché. 'The QE2 is edging away



from the Southampton quay', read one of the captions, 'the women both fearful and proud, wave goodbye.' Judging by the ambivalence some women have expressed towards the Falklands, the caption could equally well have read 'angry and worried'. Or: 'defeated and bemused'. The result of this particular emphasis in war propaganda is that very little has been written about how these same one-dimensional women run families *and* homes *and* jobs. Doreen Bickers, 34, has given a clue. Her husband is with the Task Force, she looks after six children and works in a factory. 'I hardly have time to worry', she said honestly, although it's not the stuff of which Sun headlines are written, 'but I just want him back in one piece.'

Again, very little has been said about how these women reacted to the recently announced pay rises for the forces—10p for an 18-year-old, a couple of pounds more for those slightly older. Or what rights they have or what conditions they live in when the men are away or if they never come back. We prefer instead to treat them as ciphers.

The same distortion also means the emotions of the *men* left behind have been almost totally ignored. Where were the pictures of fathers, sons, brothers and—come to that—lovers waving goodbye?

The only novel aspect in this otherwise traditional display of sexism has been the treatment accorded Mrs Thatcher. After a three-year wait, her final elevation to manhood has been completed. In charge of the final operation was General Galtieri and a team of media surgeons headed by Paul Johnson, who has become the Godfrey Wynn of the Thatcherites.

In a Daily Mail article, Johnson movingly explained the burden of Mrs T at her 'lonely desk' (did she share the desk prior to the Falklands?). 'Mrs Thatcher', he wrote, 'is facing the greatest test of courage...which can befall a man, let alone a woman.' All is well, however: the article was headed: '*Still* the best man in the Cabinet.'

In one sense (as a result of the Falklands), normal service has been resumed as far as Mrs T is concerned; men are Men, women are *family* women and she is unique. The occasional voice of truth *has* broken through—such as Mrs Bickers, or the pilot who admitted after his first 'kill' he felt sick, or the lieutenant-commander who praised his wife at home ('who has a household to run')—but their image has been smudged and overpowered just at a time when a sense of proportion says we need them most.

Chauvinism is inevitably the putty of the war machine. It holds it together—and it makes good copy. That doesn't mean it has to be something we accept. But we have—by our silence.'

Quality Street

The 'quality Press' avoided the worst excesses of the media's coverage of the crisis, but without being mean-spirited we should not become complacent about its virtues. The Financial Times was quick to denounce the fighting—pointing out that British investments would be put at risk. But as a letter to the Guardian pointed out, the quality papers were as vulnerable to MoD manipulation as the rest of the media, despite their sometimes sterling attempts to avoid it. Looking at the Guardian and the Daily Telegraph as two examples, we see how they begin in their different ways to ask questions about the unfolding of the crisis, but these questions become submerg-

ed in the flood of events, information and emotion that follows.

In the case of the Guardian, this was a mixture of liberal disbelief and unpreparedness. The reader of the Telegraph emerges from its pages with an entirely different view of the world. The Telegraph achieved a feeling of quiet, reasoned, seamless support of government policies which came from the security of knowing which side it was on. Even criticism of the Government came in tones which made all its actions 'understandable'. The Telegraph spoke with the familiar, respectful tone of voice which one would expect from a family member. This showed in a more personal projection of government figures and personalities: Lord Carrington was said to be 'depressed at the outcome of negotiations'; 'Mrs Thatcher is furious that the Government has been caught out on defence which is supposed to be a keystone of Conservative policy...'

There was more emphasis on the 'Britishness' of the Falkland Islands: 'the unflappable figure of Air Admiral Brian Frow, Director-General of the Falkland Islands Office, who maintained an admirable sang-froid as tension mounted...'

The overall voice of the Guardian, however, was so cautious and so varied that it left the reader with no definite sense of the fighting. Clearly the Guardian wouldn't campaign in the tabloid manner, and would argue that a multiplicity of voices showed true press freedom, since the warmongers were pressing for only one 'patriotic' voice. One letter writer expressed it thus: 'Your continued equivocation over the Falklands conflict leads me to cancel my former newspaper and subscribe to the Guardian instead.'

When editorials equivocated from day to day, making roundabout comments about the risk of war and the need for a lasting 'solution', the letter writers of the Guardian became the more interesting part of the paper, arguing cogently on a whole range of complex issues: self-determination, sovereignty, government hypocrisy and the long-term implications.

The Guardian was the first newspaper to warn of the Argentinian invasion on February 25. For a long time it was incredible that the invasion would

Tough line for negotiations with Britain

Falklands raid hint by Argentine army

By John Rennie

As Britain and Argentina prepare for a new round of talks on the future of the Falkland Islands some army generals in Buenos Aires have hinted that they are ready to take military action to press their claim.

The talks, requested by Argentina, will take place in New York tomorrow and Saturday when their deputy Foreign Minister, Enrique Ros, and Mr Richard Luce, Minister of State at the Foreign Office will meet. This will be the first round of negotiations since the new military Government under General Leopoldo Galtieri took power last December.

According to an article published in the newspaper La Prensa the new Administration is committed to a hard line on the dispute. Colonel...

signs of the Government will be for the best... the circumstances and bearing in mind not only our knowledge of the past, but also our vision of the future.

Other sources within the military have also tended to confirm that at least some senior officers are prepared to consider military action. The Government is unpopular because of its economic policies and its refusal to make concessions to Opposition parties. On this argument, the invasion of the 'Malvinas', as the islands are called by Argentina, would rally patriotic sentiment for the regime.

The generals in question are reported to believe that an operation to take over islands with a population of 1,800 people, scattered in farming communities, would be logistically simple. It would certainly

ported to have said privately that the international response to an invasion would not necessarily be an insurmountable obstacle.

Jeremy Morgan adds from Buenos Aires: In the latest sign of Argentina's continuing economic crisis, military spending is reportedly to be cut this year by \$500 million in the first such reduction in more than a decade. Unofficial estimates suggest that the armed forces, which are thought to have taken about 30 per cent of total state funds in recent years, will lower their 1982 budget to four billion dollars.

This would compare with a record 4.5 billion in 1981, when the deficit on total State spending rose by an unprecedented 60 per cent in real terms.

The cut is in line with a 10 per cent reduction being

eventually lead to the expensive and emotional conflict that it eventually did.

It is quite possible that the Guardian did, infact, save us all from going mad during the Falkland Islands crisis—but it would be wrong to expect anything less.



■ Dare call it journalism?

With the sole exception of the Daily Mirror, which maintained a sober approach to the events of April, May and June 1982, Fleet Street's 'popular' tabloid newspapers went in search of something better than bingo to boost their circulations. They found it: jingo.

Steve Bell



As Peter Fiddick wrote in the Guardian on May 20: 'Fleet Street has given the clearest demonstration of the enduring truth of the phrase "Tory Press". The Sun, Star, Express and Mail came out waving flags, if not guns, the moment the crisis started. 'Doubters and dissenters', said Fiddick, 'in politics and in the rest of the press, have been subjected to smears that might seem actionable.'

Fiddick was referring to an editorial leader in the Sun on May 7 entitled: DARE CALL IT TREASON.

'There are,' the Sun said, 'traitors in our midst.' The Sun was not looking for spies—it was gunning for journalists! And unwittingly the Sun had given the game away. By claiming the mantle of 'The paper that supports our boys', it staked its image and its circulation on being the paper most likely to demand war—because war was good for business.

The Sun's leading article was remarkable because it succeeded in shocking even the most cynical of Fleet Street's journalists:

'What is it but treason to talk, as Peter Snow talked, questioning whether the Government's version of sea battles was to be believed? What is it but

treason for the Guardian to print a cartoon showing a British seaman clinging to a raft above the caption: "The price of sovereignty has been increased—official?"



The price of sovereignty has been increased—official

The most significant 'traitor' was, of course, the Daily Mirror, with whom the Sun has been locked in a bingo war for several months.

'What is it but treason for this timorous, whining publication to plead day after day for appeasing the Argentine dictators... We are truly sorry for Daily Mirror readers... they are buying a newspaper which again and again demonstrates that it has no faith in its country and no respect for her people.'

The Mirror hit back the next day in a full-page leading article: THE HARLOT OF FLEET STREET.

'The Sun, a coarse and demented newspaper... has long been a tawdry newspaper. But since the Falklands crisis began it has fallen from the gutter to the sewer.... From behind the safety of its typewriters it has called for battle to commence to satisfy its bloodlust. The Sun today is to journalism what Dr Goebbels was to truth...'

The Sun, in fact, was following a theme set some weeks earlier by the supposedly pro-Labour Daily Star.

On April 15 the Star's front page screamed: WHOSE SIDE ARE THEY ON? Referring to the handful of Labour MPs who opposed sending the Task Force, the Star said: 'Call them what you will, they are no friends of this country of freedom or of their own party. Let them not forget, they are able to speak their minds because Britain is free—not ruled by a vicious dictator.'



They may well have been free to speak their minds, but their views would not go reported without distortion and biased comment in the Star.

On May 22 the paper went over the top without any regard for truth or decency: THIS EVIL ENEMY AT HOME, screamed the front page. 'The Task Force is facing more evil enemies... this time at home. They are the odious group of Labour MPs who, in effect, voted for Galtieri... led by power-mad Tony Benn... they have discovered a way of making political capital out of human life.'

Politicians have always made political capital out of human life. What the Star did not say was that along with other newspapers, it was making financial capital out of human life.

A week before the General Belgrano and HMS Sheffield were sunk, the Star's splash headline was: 'UP AND AT 'EM—78 per cent say go on and take the Falklands!' Three weeks earlier the Star leader had demanded: 'Britain must throw the invading Argentines into the sea' because... 'the Falklands ARE British, just as much as Aintree racecourse.'

In fact, from April 3 onwards, the Star and Sun seemed to compete with each other for the title of best warmonger. The Sun's reporter aboard HMS Invincible, Tony Snow, asked readers 'at home' to sponsor a missile. The photograph of a missile with the words 'Up yours Galtieri' scrawled over it—'from the readers of the Sun'—reportedly sickened troops with the Task Force. They knew better than anyone else what missiles are for. They are for killing people, not for selling newspapers.

From the moment the Argentine government decided to invade the Falklands most of Fleet Street demanded nothing less than all-out war. Argentinians were labelled 'Argies' and readers were invited to submit their favourite



'Argie' jokes.

As Tom Baistow wrote in the *Guardian* on May 10: 'Twenty-five years ago, during Suez, when Britain was the invader, four British newspapers showed what real editorial courage is. The *Guardian*, the *Observer*, the *News Chronicle* and the *Mirror* opposed Eden's disastrous adventure in the teeth of the same jingoistic hysteria whipped up by the right-wing Press—each at considerable loss of readers, and fatally in the case of the *Chronicle*.' Ten days later Fiddick wrote in the same paper:

'It also needs to be recorded that this intensity of patriotism, or what the writers perceive as patriotism, is not reflected in the responses of the third party: the British people at large. Sales of the "action" line Fleet Street dailies (*Sun*, *Star*, *Express*, *Mail*, *Telegraph*—about 11 million readers) outnumber those which are in some degree more cautious (*Mirror*, *Guardian*, *Times*, *Financial Times*—about 4½ million readers) by virtually three to one. Mrs Thatcher, who takes evident comfort from the activists, has opinion polls in her favour, but by nothing like that margin.'

Nevertheless, Baistow and many others despaired: 'If truth is the first casualty of war, the second in this unhappy conflict has been the last remnant of editorial integrity in the tabloids' frenetic battle for circulation. It is a sad irony that in the name of Press freedom the papers most British people read should take such liberties with journalistic ethics.'

The *Sun*, finally, did own up. On January 21 1983 it boasted on its front page that it was still Britain's biggest selling newspaper, with more than four million daily sales. Meanwhile, crowed the *Sun*, the *Daily Mirror*—'The paper that didn't support our boys in the Falklands'—was continuing to lose sales, although circulation figures have recovered since the war. It looks as if we get the media we deserve.

Heathnote



Which side of Fleet Street are you on?

■ Broadcasting: 'You cannot use us'

On Monday May 10 1982, the BBC broadcast a Panorama programme entitled: 'Can we avoid war?' It caused one of the biggest political rows ever seen between politicians and television.

The Government's attack on the programme makers was breathtaking, and highlighted the unreal atmosphere produced by the war. The row followed a Newsnight programme on May 2, in which Peter Snow had used phrases like 'unless the British are deceiving us' and 'the only losses the British admitted' when discussing conflicting claims about the progress of the war.

Soon afterwards, Tory MP John Page, a former secretary of the Conservatives' Broadcasting committee, complained in the House of Commons: 'I am worried that BBC television newsreaders are giving equal credence to the Ministry of Defence reports and the Argentine reports,' he said. This was, he said, 'almost treasonable', and he questioned whether the BBC 'is giving confidence to our friends overseas and support and encouragement to our servicemen and their families.'

Mrs Thatcher joined in. She said many people were concerned that the case for 'our British forces was not put over fully and effectively...I understand there are times when...we and the Argentinians are almost being treated as equal...if this is so, it causes offence, and causes emotion among many people.'

The BBC sent a letter to Mr Page from its Director General, Sir Ian Trethowan. He said Mr Page failed to appreciate the role of the BBC—and all other media—at such a time. The BBC, he said, could not be neutral between Britain and an aggressor, 'but one of the things which distinguishes a democracy like Britain from a dictatorship like Argentina is that our people wish to be told the truth, and can be told it, no matter how unpleasant it may be.'

By the time the Panorama programme went out, the government campaign to 'get the BBC' was well under way. HMS Sheffield had been sunk four days earlier, and reliable evidence suggested that Mrs Thatcher was nearly hysterical.

Until then, it looked as if the war could be won without any casualties.

On Monday Francis Pym called the BBC's coverage 'disreputable', and called on his supporters to write to the BBC to complain. After the programme

Sally Oppenheim called it 'an odious and subversive travesty'. The Panorama presenter, Robert Kee, took the unusual step of dissociating himself from the programme's content and resigning from the BBC. In a letter to the Times, he said the programme had been 'poor objective journalism'.

Panorama journalist Michael Cockerell says that later that week BBC chiefs Alistair Milne and George Howard were 'savaged' by Tory backbenchers. The Sun used Mrs Thatcher's speech to make its attack on the Daily Mirror, the Guardian and Peter Snow, which concluded: 'A British citizen is either on his country's side—or he is an enemy.'

Reaction from abroad was bemused. Harold Jackson wrote in the Sunday Times that the row over the BBC's handling of the crisis was 'reported by American television in much the same way that it might have reported the tribal rites of Borneo headhunters—as a weird quirk. Sir Bernard Braine stunned American viewers with a vigorous complaint that the BBC had treacherously carried accounts from both sides.'

What had the Panorama programme done that provoked such controversy? The presentation of 'dissident' opinion in the programme was by no means extreme. And an opinion poll commissioned by the BBC that week showed that 81 per cent of the population thought the corporation had 'acted responsibly'.

Defence chief attacks radio programme for 'inaccurate' Sea Wolf story, but Biffen defends free speech and reporting

BBC the target again as media war flares up

By Michael White, *Parliamentary Correspondent*
THE CONTINUING row over media coverage of the Falklands crisis has been kept alive by the Minister for Defence Procurement, Charles Hill, who said in the House of Commons that the BBC's coverage of the conflict was 'inaccurate'.

Mr Hill said the BBC's coverage of the conflict was 'inaccurate' because it had 'not been able to provide a balanced picture of the conflict'.

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BBC chief hits back as controversy on reporting grows

By Robert Kennedy, *North London and TV Correspondent*
The Broadcasting Corporation has hit back at the growing controversy over the BBC's coverage of the Falklands crisis when he defended the corporation's impartiality in the House of Commons.

Mr Kennedy said the BBC's coverage of the conflict was 'impartial' and 'balanced'.

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BBC defends coverage of fighting

By Paul Brown
THE BBC has defended its coverage of the Falklands crisis, saying it was 'impartial' and 'balanced'.

BBC man keeps calm under fire

By Ian Hunt
PETER COOKE, the BBC's director of news, has defended the corporation's coverage of the Falklands crisis.

Tory war anger finds a target

By John Lanchester
The Conservative Party has found a target for its anger over the Falklands crisis.

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The heart of the controversy centred on the 26-minute report by Michael Cockerell in which he interviewed four MPs; two non-leftist Labour MPs and two Conservative MPs, who expressed dissenting opinions about the origins and the conduct of the war.

Cockerell also suggested there were more than those two Tory MPs who held critical views of the government's policy by quoting un-named sources. This opened the question of dissent on the Tory backbenches, and a rift between the government and the military chiefs over the sending of the Task Force. Patriotic images at the beginning of the programme, criticised by some but intended as ironic by the programme makers, may have incensed some Conservatives.

'Our great sin was to include Conservative MPs', says Cockerell. 'Mrs Thatcher could have totally dismissed the programme if we had shown dissent from only Labour MPs. But elected representatives are supposed to be allowed to dissent from government policy. Mrs Thatcher would have been on much firmer ground if the programme itself had mounted an attack on government policy.'

In fact, even this *report* of dissent was limited by being sandwiched between a firm statement of the Government's position and a live studio interview with Conservative Party chairman Cecil Parkinson, a member of the War Cabinet. Parkinson was in a strategic position in the programme to reply to all the charges made by his critics. The others were put on the spot by Cockerell's questions in a way that Parkinson was not. For example, Sir Anthony Meyer was asked: 'What would you say to those people who suggest you are really a defeatist?' Parkinson was not asked by Robert Kee if he was a warmonger.

Kee alleged that Cockerell departed from standard practises in his use of un-named sources. The use of such sources, however, is not unknown in current affairs TV production, and the Panorama staff felt badly let down by Kee's attack.

At the end of that hectic week, television journalists at the Lime Grove branch of the NUJ sent a letter to the BBC supporting Panorama's editor George Carey, saying that journalists believed it was their duty to report all shades of opinion.

The most the programme had done was to give four Members of Parliament air time to question government policy—and even then, in a highly qualified context. If this is deemed outrageous, what are the implications for the range of opinions which are considered acceptable on television?

The nature of the attack on the BBC resembled earlier controversies concerning coverage of Northern Ireland, when a Panorama editor was actually sacked (and later reinstated) because of the political fuss made about unscreened film of an IRA operation at Carrickmore.

Many people thought later that after the row about 'Can we avoid war?', the BBC's coverage of the crisis became more pro-government. A 'war series' called Task Force South followed almost immediately. Another series, the Parachute Regiment, started in February 1983.

Some have argued that since the BBC has now been attacked from the right as well as more frequent left-wing critics, this was proof of its neutrality. But this position uses the spurious logic that two opposing views automatically

cancel each other out.

To learn from such an incident, in the words of one Panorama journalist: 'We must recognise that governments will always want to use the media to influence and mislead with the most powerful means of influence there is. We should recognise that there is a constant clash of interests between journalists and the Government. We have to be able to tell them: You cannot use us.'



Mike Abrahams/Network

■ Conclusion

Media coverage of the Falklands war was not essentially any different to anything else. It was often awful, perverse, sensational, inaccurate, distorted and served the political needs of the people who own and control the media... so what else is new?

The Government's manipulation of the media during the war was cruder and more obvious than at other times, and this may have alerted some for the first time that what was perceived as 'news' was somehow different from 'truth'.

This pamphlet has shown that Britain does not have a free media. We have shown that the media failed to defend its supposed role (the watchdog of a democratic society) for a variety of reasons. It failed because it was deliberately misled by the government. It failed because it was accidentally misled by the government. It failed because 'minders' refused to forward reporters' stories. It failed because reporters sometimes failed.

Most of all, though, the media failed because the media chooses not to succeed. The reason for this lies, mainly, in the ownership and control of the media: most UK mass circulation newspapers are owned by only seven multinational companies and wealthy families. It also lies in the blinkered, unthinking self-censorship of many of the people who work in the media.

This is seen in some of the conclusions reached by senior media chiefs themselves in their attempts to defend themselves against the criticism they have received over the Falklands war. Many of them say they would like to see 'closer relationships' with the Government in general and the Ministry of Defence in particular. This, they say, would help eliminate 'misunderstandings'. If the relationship between government and media were any closer, it would be practically impossible to tell the two apart. So, to coin a phrase, what is to be done?

The Structure of the Industry

The labour movement in Britain does not have even one national daily newspaper which is not tied to sectarian interests. The TUC, Labour Party and the Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom have all called for such a newspaper, several times, but it seems as far away today as ever. Another

suggestion has been for more local radical newspapers which are easier to finance.

The problem is that they lack the *national* political clout of a newspaper like the *Sun* which has daily sales of more than four million. Community radio stations also present some challenge to the BBC/IBA monopoly but support for their development is still at a relatively low level within the labour movement. The need to challenge the monopoly ownership and control of the media, and campaign for genuine diversification of the industry, has never been greater.

Journalists

Journalists respond to pressure the same as everyone else. Most belong to the National Union of Journalists and are therefore supposed to adhere to a Code of Professional and Ethical Conduct. Most, certainly most of those in Fleet Street, routinely ignore it. But the rules of the NUJ are such that any member who is 'found guilty' of ignoring the Code faces disciplinary action—possibly expulsion from the union. And in some cases that could mean losing his or her job.

While it may be just a dream to think that one day every viciously reactionary journalist will lose his or her job as a result of being expelled from the NUJ, the propaganda value of pursuing complaints against them can only serve to the good.



Judah Passow/Network

Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

The Campaign was formed after the 1979 'Winter of Discontent' which saw a media campaign of vilification against workers of unparalleled ferocity. These are the campaign's aims:

- To challenge the myth that only private ownership of the newspaper industry provides genuine freedom, diversity or access, and to generate public debate on alternative forms of democratic ownership and control.
- To carry out research into alternatives, including ownership by independent trusts or co-operatives, which would guarantee freedom from either state control or domination by major business conglomerates.
- To encourage the creation of alternative newspapers of all kinds including a newspaper or newspapers sympathetic to the labour movement.
- To encourage the development of industrial democracy in the newspaper, broadcasting and television industries.
- Campaign on the general principles of the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on the Press, including proposals for a National Printing Corporation to provide a competitive public sector in the industry and a launch fund to assist new publications.
- Campaign for a reformed and reconstituted Press Council to promote basic standards of fairness and access to the Press on behalf of the public. The right of reply is fundamental to redressing the imbalance in Press bias.
- Campaign for a reduction in legal restrictions on freedom of publication and increased access to information through a Freedom of Information Bill and reform of the Official Secrets Act and similar restrictive legislation.
- Campaign for the legal right of access for publications to the distribution system, and a guaranteed right of display.

This is the National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct:

- A journalist has a duty to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards.
- 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.
- A journalist shall strive to ensure that the information he/she disseminates is fair and accurate, avoids the expression of comment and conjecture as established fact and falsification by distortion, selection or misrepresentation.
- A journalist shall rectify promptly any harmful inaccuracies, ensure that correction and apologies receive due prominence and afford the right of reply to persons criticised when the issue is of sufficient importance.
- A journalist shall obtain information, photographs and illustrations only by the over-riding considerations of the public interest. The journalist is entitled to exercise a personal conscientious objection to the use of such means.
- Subject to over-riding considerations of the public interest, a journalist shall do nothing which entails intrusion into private grief and distress.
- A journalist shall protect confidential sources of information.
- A journalist shall not accept bribes nor shall he/she allow other in-

ducements to influence the performance of his/her professional duties.

- A journalist shall not lend him/herself to the distortion or suppression of the truth because of advertising or other considerations.
- A journalist shall neither originate nor process material which encourages discrimination on grounds of race, colour, creed, gender or sexual orientation.
- A journalist shall not take advantage of information gained in the course of his/her duties, before the information is public knowledge.
- A journalist shall not by way of statement, voice or appearance endorse by advertisement any commercial product or service save for the promotion of his/her own work or of the medium by which he/she is employed.

Join the Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom, 9 Poland Street, London W1. 01-437 2795.





MEDIA FREEDOM AND THE FALKLANDS 'REJOICE'

Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom



'The final political decision rests with the people. And the people, so that they may make up their minds, must be given the facts, even in wartime, or perhaps especially in wartime.'

Paul Scott Mower, editor of the Chicago Daily News, during the Second World War.

During the Falklands war the British Government was fighting another battle - for public opinion - and the media were in the front line. With government policy wrapped up in the Union Jack, independent judgement became evidence of 'treason'. But although some tried to resist, the media as a whole didn't put up much of a fight.

This pamphlet argues that we need a widely based defence of media independence. It reminds us of the dangers of allowing the Government to manage the media - especially in wartime.