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The television policies of the British Labour Party 1951-2000.

Des Freedman

School of Media, Arts and Design

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**THE TELEVISION POLICIES OF THE
BRITISH LABOUR PARTY: 1951-2000**

DES FREEDMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis provides an extended analysis of the television policies of the British Labour Party from 1951 up to the present day. It examines the evolution of Labour's television policy and focuses on the social, political and economic contexts in which policies were developed, the party forums in which policies were discussed and the consequences of these policies for British television as a whole. It evaluates the contrasting contributions to television policy made by the parliamentary leadership, the Labour left, the trade unions, and intellectuals sympathetic to the party.

Although the Conservatives have been widely acknowledged to be responsible for the majority of innovations in British television, the thesis refutes the view that this is due to any lack of interest in television policy inside the Labour Party. Drawing on extensive archive material and interviews with key participants, it argues that the Labour Party has intervened in all the main debates concerning British broadcasting and has produced a wide range of proposals for the reform, modernisation and consolidation of television structures in the UK.

The thesis examines the party's response to the development of commercial television in the 1950s and to the Pilkington Report in the early 1960s. It assesses the impact on television policy of the Labour governments in the 1960s and highlights the contribution of left-wing demands for television reform in the 1970s. The thesis then considers the government's response to the Annan Report at the end of the 1970s and analyses how the party responded to the Conservative government's reform of television in the following decade. The thesis concludes with an evaluation of the role of television in the emergence of New Labour and provides a critique of the current Labour government's record concerning television developments.

The thesis suggests that divisions between rival interests in the Labour Party have undermined the possibility of a unified television policy. The result of these divisions has been that the leadership has marginalised innovative proposals for

reform in favour of policies that have safeguarded the existing structures of and power relations in television.

Declaration and acknowledgements

All parts of this thesis are my own work. Earlier versions of sections of the thesis have been or are to be published in *Contemporary Politics* (Freedman, 1998), *Media History* (Freedman, 1999), *Contemporary British History* (Freedman, forthcoming [a]) and *Media, Culture and Society* (Freedman, forthcoming [b]).

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Chapter One: Introduction

Aims of the Thesis

The current New Labour government has been extremely active in the field of communications policy. It has embraced the possibilities of digital and broadband technologies for use by business, education, government and consumers and is currently preparing legislation to modernise the UK's regulatory framework to adapt to and facilitate the convergence of broadcasting, IT and telecommunications. This activity appears to stand in stark contrast to the Labour Party's former indifference or hostility towards innovations in the field of electronic media. With the exception of the Open University, the party has not been *directly* associated with any of the major developments in communications – the launch of ITV, BBC2 and Channels Four and Five, the development of commercial radio and the go-ahead for cable, satellite and digital systems – which have all occurred under Conservative administrations.

This is partly due to the fact that the Conservatives have been in government for 35 of the last 50 years but it has also been argued that Labour has traditionally been less interested in transforming the institutions of the British media. Back in 1968, a *Guardian* editorial reflected on the lack of debate on communications policy at Labour's annual conference: 'The subject [of communications] is one on which the Government has no ideas and the party only wishful thoughts' (*Guardian*, 1968). The trade unionist and future Labour MP, Denis MacShane, wrote in 1987 that, although the party did by now have resolutions routinely passed at conference, 'the Labour Party still has no agreed policy on the media' (MacShane, 1987: 218). In James Curran and Jean Seaton's influential history of UK media, Curran argues that Labour's instinct is 'to slap a preservation order on the broadcasting system as it now is even on the eve of digital TV. In this sense, it is more conservative with a small "c" than the Conservative Party' (in Curran and Seaton, 1997: 355).

While these quotes are, of course, highly selective, they nevertheless express a widely-held conception that Labour has tended to defend the *status quo* when it comes to communications policy. Labour supporters have provided a number of

explanations for their party's apparent lack of innovative or proactive policy on the media. Mulgan and Worpole attribute it to the economism of its trade union supporters and argue that 'Labour Party puritanism has failed to understand exactly how liberating...some patterns of consumer spending [on media] have been (Mulgan and Worpole, 1986: 12). MacShane (1987: 226) blames the influence of Labour-supporting media trade unionists who have consistently prioritised defence of their pay and conditions above programmes for broadcasting reform. Collins and Murroni can find just two official Labour policy statements on the media and explain this in terms of the party's traditional hostility to private ownership and competition which they argue is 'fundamentally flawed' (Collins and Murroni, 1995: 5).

As my thesis will demonstrate, these arguments seriously underestimate the amount of discussion on the media that has taken place at all levels of the Labour Party. Instead of bemoaning the lack of attention that the party has paid to communications policy, this thesis seeks to highlight and to analyse the wide-ranging debates that *have* occurred and the numerous policies that *have* been developed in the last fifty years. What interests me is not the absence of debate about media policy among Labour supporters but the way in which the many debates on this subject have connected to wider questions about the political aims and objectives of the Labour Party. Communications has never been the most important area of interest for Labour (or indeed Conservative) policymakers but it has illuminated many of the tensions - between left and right, between consolidationists and revisionists, between traditionalists and modernisers and between Old and New Labour - that have proved to be so decisive in the fortunes of the Labour Party.

The object of this study is not 'mass media' or 'mass communications' policy as a whole but television policy in particular. The omission of press policy from my study should in no way imply that it lacked importance for the Labour Party. The role of the press has absorbed the minds of party leaders and ordinary members for many years, from concerns about monopolisation and bias to proposals for a sympathetic or in-house daily newspaper. Labour governments have initiated two Royal Commissions on the Press and the need for press reform has long been

discussed at party conference.¹ I focus, however, on broadcasting because it is increasingly seen as the most dominant cultural institution and on television, as opposed to radio, because the two media have traditionally operated under different policy dynamics with television assuming a much more visible place in public policy debates over the last fifty years. My research starts in the early 1950s with the debates over the introduction of commercial television and the beginnings of a mass television audience in the UK.

While there is a rich body of literature on broadcasting policy in the UK (see pp. 24-28 for more detailed discussion of this literature), there is very little that deals specifically with the impact of political parties on television policy. Academic literature in this area tends to deal either with the relationship between parties and the directly political communications *process*² or with a conception of television policy in which party political actors are simply one feature of the general policy environment.³ While these studies seek to provide an admirably holistic view of the development of television in the UK, they are clearly not written with the singular purpose of identifying the dynamics of specific political actors in their approach to television policy. The one book that does seek to do this is Peter Goodwin's *Television under the Tories* (1998) which maps out the direction of the Conservative government's approach to television policy as part of a more general concern with the project of Thatcherism. My thesis attempts to perform a similar conceptual task: to evaluate the Labour Party's approach to television policymaking through reflecting on the project of 'Labourism' over the last fifty years. My study differs from Goodwin's in that it covers a far longer historical period and one in which the party was in opposition for a majority of the time.

¹ See, for example, Curran (ed.) (1978), O'Malley (1997) and Baistow (1985) for critiques of and proposals for press reform from within the labour movement.

² Texts on party political communications in the UK include Hennessy, Walker and Cockerell (1985), Cockerell (1989) and Scammell (1995).

³ See, for example, Briggs (1979 and 1995), Sendall (1982, 1983), Potter (1989, 1990), Curran and Seaton (1997) and Crissell (1998) for histories of UK broadcasting or Wilson (1961), Shulman (1973), Humphreys (1996), O'Malley (1992) and Barnett and Curry (1994) for analyses of specific periods of television history.

My interest in combining an analysis of the development of television policy with one of the Labour Party stems from my background in the broadcasting industry and my former role as a media trade unionist and is connected to my current role as a media academic and an active socialist. The thesis is intended to highlight (at least for me) both the possibilities of imaginative, socialist approaches to television policy that have been proposed by sections of the Labour Party and the ultimate undoing and neutralisation of these approaches. My aim, as a socialist outside the Labour Party, is not at all to pour scorn on the attempts by socialists inside the party to reform and democratise television along socialist lines, but to begin to explain why these valiant attempts have met with such resistance and, in the end, with such little success in implementing socialist policies for television.

My research aims, therefore, include the following broad questions as well as ones that are more specific to the individual chapters and which are listed below in the brief reviews of each chapter.

- To what extent has the Labour Party pursued a coherent and consistent approach to television policy since 1951?
- What are the differences between Labour policies discussed and proposed in government and those discussed and proposed in opposition?
- In what ways have Labour's television policies differed from those of the Conservatives?
- To what extent has communications policy been used as a means of 'rebranding' and 'repositioning' the party since 1951?
- Which constituencies of interest (i.e. trade unions, parliamentary leadership, intellectuals) have been most influential on the development of the party's television policies?
- To what extent have Labour's television policies been conditioned by the party's relationship with media entrepreneurs?
- To what extent has the Labour Party acted as a vehicle for the reform of broadcasting structures?

Overview of the Thesis

1951-1964 (Chapter Two)

The period between 1951 and 1964 was one of unprecedented economic growth and social change characterised by full employment, a 30% increase in real wages and the emergence of a consumer revolution. According to one commentator, ‘the nation was better housed, better educated and better cared for in old age’ (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1970: 55). The nation was also spending more: expenditure on items such as cars, holidays, television sets, washing-machines and foreign holidays rocketed as the post-war boom allowed workers to shrug off the restrictions of the war years.

These conditions presented an enormous challenge to the Labour Party and led to the deepening of programmatic splits over issues such as nationalisation and defence spending. Attempts were made to provide an intellectual justification for the need to adopt a new orientation towards its supporters. An influential group of ‘revisionists’ argued that, in particular, Labour’s traditional role as the political expression of the British working class needed to be rethought to reflect the structural changes affecting the whole of British society. Another group on the left of the party insisted that Labour’s links with the organised working-class movement and policies of public ownership should be defended and consolidated. The consequence of these high-profile disagreements was that the ‘main characteristics of the 1950s for the Labour Party were public dissension among its leaders and a decline of its popularity with the electorate’ (Pelling and Reid, 1996: 97).

This chapter examines Labour’s television policy during its years in opposition in order to illuminate these conflicts and examines the extent to which television was one of the developments that the party was forced to address in order to reposition itself in terms of the electorate. The discussions which took place in the run-up to the establishment of commercial television in 1955, the debates concerning a third television channel and the reactions to the Pilkington Report on the future of broadcasting all provide rich evidence of the tensions between different Labourist approaches in the 1950s and early 1960s. This chapter analyses not simply the

official position of the party but also evaluates the contributions made by other elements of Labour's constituency, for example, the trade unions, the Labour left, sympathetic intellectuals and influential individual supporters.

1964-1970 (Chapter Three)

By the time of the general election in October 1964, television was accessible to more than 90% of British households (Shulman, 1973: 25) and was beginning to exert a powerful influence on British politics. Full employment and rising wages had brought both increased access to consumer goods and the confidence to question established attitudes. In particular, the emerging economic independence of young workers had led to a reluctance to accept the expectations or lifestyles of an older generation schooled in war and austerity. Together with a re-examination of Britain's political and economic role in the world, previously hegemonic ideas concerning the family, religion, opportunity and sexuality were consistently challenged. Television helped to service this development: advertising provided the shop-window of the consumer revolution while programmes like *That Was The Week That Was* (TW3) and *Z-Cars* expressed what the broadcasting historian Asa Briggs calls 'the desire to subject every kind of institution to fierce critical scrutiny' (Briggs, 1995: 429) that was typical of the period.

However, contemporary historians attribute a more decisive role to television than as a mere mirror of social change. Harold Wilson's biographer, Ben Pimlott, argues that because of its novelty and monopoly on audiences, 'television became the crucible of the permissive revolution, and of the wider cultural and political shift that accompanied it' (Pimlott, 1993: 268). Christopher Booker, a writer for TW3, describes how television was decisive in fomenting a collective 'vitality-fantasy' which reached its apotheosis in the mid-1960s (Booker, 1992: 79). Robert Hewison, in his study of *Art and Society in the Sixties*, quotes approvingly the views of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart in relation to the 'synthetic culture' of the commercialized mass media and suggests that television had an important part to play 'in masking economic reality with pleasurable fantasy' (Hewison, 1988: xiv).

No government, therefore, could ignore the impact of television, particularly if, as Hewison suggests, it might help to deflect attention away from more pressing economic questions. Indeed the newly elected Labour government was immediately engaged with the consequences of ‘economic reality’ in the shape of a balance of payments crisis and stagnating productivity. Harold Wilson had come to power on a ‘modernizing’ ticket, determined to sweep away the remnants of the Edwardian establishment who he believed were responsible for Britain’s declining stature in the world and its stagnating economic performance. He championed a new kind of meritocracy, where skilled and committed technicians would purposefully guide Britain towards economic growth and social justice. As Wilson himself wrote, the brief for the government was ‘not confined to the measures necessary to modernize industry or to expand and humanize our social services; in a far wider sense it was seen in the transformation of many of Britain’s political and social institutions’ (Wilson, 1974: 18).

This chapter sets out to evaluate the ways in which the policies and institutions of British television *were* transformed by Labour rule. Can it be said that Labour helped to foster change and to modernize British television in the 1960s? In what way was television policy affected by both Wilson’s desire for indicative planning and the declining economic conditions? The chapter therefore assesses the positions adopted by contrasting figures both inside and outside the Cabinet in relation to the key events concerning television at the time, for example the future of the licence fee and the structure of ITV, the creation of the Open University, the party’s attitude towards advertising and its relationship to broadcasting personnel.

‘Revisionist’ historians seeking to re-evaluate Wilson’s record in a more favourable light have complained of a selective and prejudiced approach to the 1964-1970 governments. Coopey, Fielding and Tiratsoo (1993: 5) argue that ‘[w]hole areas of study which might have contradicted the generally damning conclusions [on the Wilson governments] have been ignored. For example, very little has been written of the ‘low’ politics of the period.’ The chapter will therefore also seek to partially redress the balance and to incorporate the ‘low’ politics of television policy into the wider framework of Labour’s second post-war period in office.

After the turmoil of the 1960s with its continuous scuffles between government and BBC over the licence fee, the problems with the new ITV franchises and the increased politicisation of broadcasting, the promise of a new decade reassured some senior broadcasters. Grace Wyndham Goldie, then the BBC's head of current affairs, wrote of a 'new and welcome stability' (Goldie, 1977: 308) in British television in 1970 which put to rest any fears that broadcasting could be undermined either by rampant commercialism or government intervention. Colourisation was now providing the BBC with an expanding source of revenue while ITV was proving to be a creative and responsible competitor. Britain, she asserted, 'had achieved a television system which embraced two vigorous bodies, each offering a wide diversity of programmes which fulfilled different needs but which complemented each other' (ibid.). For Goldie, the public service tradition of television was in rude health.

Tony Benn, a former broadcasting minister in Harold Wilson's government, adopted a rather different attitude. Writing in a Fabian pamphlet published in September 1970, three months after the Conservatives had won the general election, Benn reflected about the importance of public channels of communication in expressing a diverse range of opinions and aspirations. He condemned the lack of opportunity for the vast majority of the population to contribute to the 'new talking shops of the mass media' and compared this exclusion to the lack of the franchise for most citizens in the 19th century. 'The democratisation and accountability of the mass media', he predicted, 'will be a major issue for the Seventies and the debates on it are now beginning' (Benn, 1988: 515).

This chapter will reflect on the growing mood for reform from the left of the labour movement and analyse the party's first systematic media policy, the left-wing *The People and the Media*, as well as the party's attitude towards the 1977 Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting. To what extent was the Annan Report a victory for those who wished to open up broadcasting structures? What were the motivations of the Labour government in agreeing to an inquiry and how did the committee negotiate between the radical demands of the left and the more

conservative submissions of the political and broadcasting establishment? The chapter also poses a more general question about the utility of the public inquiry as a means of media reform.

1979-1992 (Chapter Five)

The 1980s, just as much as the 1950s, was a 'lost' decade for the Labour Party. Resoundingly defeated in May 1979 by a Conservative Party led by Margaret Thatcher, Labour was to spend the next eighteen years in opposition in a process of organisational and ideological transformation. The reason for this was the rise of a new political-economic paradigm, neo-liberalism, which superseded the corporatist and Keynesian strategies on which Labour had depended since the 1940s. Privatisation, deregulation and fiscal liberalisation were the preferred strategies of a Tory government which was committed to the free market as the key instrument of attaining economic growth and personal freedom.

According to James Curran and Jean Seaton, '[t]he 1980s were the 'me' decade. Political, economic and social revival was supposed to be led by the individual's pursuit of self-interest. Nowhere was this principle in public life more dominant than in thinking about the media' (1997: 319). In particular, the Tories attempted to reshape the structure and culture of British television by injecting commercial principles throughout what was, until that point, a highly regulated and relatively stable broadcasting system. Between 1979 and 1992, the Tories embarked on an ambitious programme of television development, overseeing the creation of a new terrestrial channel, introducing new cable and satellite technologies, considering the future of how to finance the BBC and changing the way in which ITV franchises were awarded. The outcome of this programme included the launch of Channel Four in 1982, the 1984 Cable and Broadcasting Act, the Peacock Committee of 1985-6 and the 1990 Broadcasting Act.

Such an active policy approach to broadcasting involved not only substantial legislation but also a lively debate about some basic questions affecting British television. However, unlike the 1970s, the agenda was set not by the left, with its concern about democratisation and accountability, but by the rising group of neo-

liberals around the Conservative government wishing to ‘open up’ broadcasting to market forces and to ‘liberate’ television from bureaucratic regulation. However, the chapter focuses less on the extent to which the Tories were able to realise their aims than on how Labour managed to respond to these changing circumstances and formulate a television policy in the light of the technological and structural upheavals inside British broadcasting in the 1980s. The chapter examines the extent to which Labour was able to offer both a coherent response to the radical market arguments in broadcasting and effective opposition to government activities in these different periods. To what extent did the party simply react to Tory policy initiatives in the field or was it able to offer up creative ideas of its own in relation to new developments in broadcasting? Finally, although it is bound to be speculative, we will consider what kind of difference Labour might have made to British television had it been in power at the time.

1992-2000 (Chapter Six)

The Conservatives won the 1992 general election but enjoyed a remarkably brief honeymoon. The events of ‘Black Wednesday’ in September of that year, when the government spent a third of its reserves buying sterling, increased interest rates twice in one day and was finally forced to withdraw from the European exchange rate mechanism, destroyed the Tories’ fiscal credibility. For most of its period in office John Major’s government, damaged by frequent allegations of sleaze and unable to tackle the funding crisis in transport, health and education, ‘appeared to be under siege’ (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997: 1). This opened up great opportunities for a Labour Party which had undertaken a significant amount of organisational and ideological reform under the leadership of Neil Kinnock in the late 1980s and early 1990s and had moved towards an accommodation with market forces in an attempt to shed its left-wing reputation. Led by John Smith from 1992 and then by Tony Blair two years later, a further process of political re-orientation took place culminating in the emergence of ‘New Labour’ and then the landslide victory in the election of May 1997.

Media and communications strategies were central to New Labour’s project of modernisation. The belief that it was the behaviour of the Tory-supporting tabloid

press which had cost Labour the 1992 election led party strategists to attempt to neutralise the impact of the press while the growing use of news management techniques and political marketing necessitated a sophisticated grasp of media routines and skills by the party. Yet whilst most commentators concentrated on Labour's political communications regime – the influence of its spin doctors, advertising campaigns and Tony Blair's press secretary, Alastair Campbell – the party was also engaged in a substantial rethink of its communications *policies*. In the run-up to the 1997 election, New Labour seized on issues such as media ownership, new communications technology and the economic value of the film and television industries as a crucial means of identifying the party with modernisation and, in particular, economic liberalisation. In part this was in recognition of the increased political and economic impact of media flows at the end of the 20th century, which any electoral organisation would have considered. But New Labour appeared to highlight media-related issues as a way of actually defining itself as a party that laid great store on the importance of professional presentation, cutting-edge creativity and a modern image.

This focus on the media continued after the election. Franklin (1999) has criticised Labour's obsession with massaging the news, its centralisation of the government's information and communications services, its creation of a strategic communications unit in Downing Street and the appointment of dozens of special advisers who have further blurred the boundary between matters of presentation and policy. According to the *Guardian*, No 10 Downing Street now employs 149 people, including 25 members of staff whose sole responsibility is to monitor and answer press enquiries, 24 hours a day (Hencke, 2000). Yet the government has also been very active in the field of media policy, encouraging the take-up of digital services, pondering the future of the BBC licence fee and media ownership rules, contemplating changes to the regulatory structure of the media and telecommunications industries and stimulating exports of UK television and film. The government has produced a series of consultation papers on the communications industries and is now preparing for primary legislation in the parliamentary session of 2001/2.

In this situation, the chapter considers whether James Curran's formulation (see p. 6), that the Labour Party is more conservative than the Conservatives when it comes to

broadcasting policy, is still appropriate when talking about New Labour. This chapter will examine the pace and direction of Labour's approach to television since 1992 in the light of its ideological reliance on theories of globalisation, the 'Third Way' and the knowledge economy. To what extent has New Labour pursued a more innovative or proactive policy towards television than Labour's previous incarnations? Who have been the winners and losers in the evolution of a distinct New Labour television policy and to what extent has this policy broken from 'Old Labour' attitudes towards the regulation of television?

Methodology

'Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past', wrote George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 1982: 31). While current political priorities are bound to influence the sorts of questions asked about the past, the ability to learn lessons from historical events and to draw continuities between different historical periods allows the historian to interrogate the present and to attempt to shape the future. Such an objective is as relevant to media history as it is to military and constitutional history. This means that my thesis shares the methodological problems common to many historical studies in terms of the questions posed, the status of sources used and the validity of propositions identified. In his classic account of historiography, E. H. Carr further notes the issue of the subjectivity of historical interpretation that 'when we take up a work of history, our first concern should not be with the facts which it contains, but with the historian who wrote it' (Carr, 1990: 22).

In addition to these general issues concerning all historiography, there are some problems associated with the writing of *media* history. Firstly, because the institutions of mass media and broadcasting are relatively recent, there is therefore a more condensed historical sweep than with many other areas of historical study. The fifth volume of the official history of ITV, for example, is described by its author as occupying a space somewhere between 'history' and 'journalism' because of the

contemporary nature of its subject matter.⁴ Secondly, the qualities of immediacy and obsolescence that are often attached to the media makes them an uneasy object of historical study. While wars and elections are fought to establish power structures for the future, the media are produced and consumed in the here-and-now. As Dahl (1994: 552) puts it, ‘although endlessly present as ubiquitous realities, they seem to resist historical exploration by their sheer and monotonous insistence on dealing mainly with contemporary moments – *today’s* news, the situation *now...*’ (emphasis in original).

I want to deal first with the question of subjectivity and bias. Having established my credentials as a socialist outside the Labour Party, I have no wish to deny that the overall objectives of my research (concerning the nature of ‘Labourism’) are influenced by my political stance. Here I follow Eric Hobsbawm’s distinction between ‘legitimate partisanship’ (Hobsbawm, 1998: 175) and unquestioning advocacy. While the former relies on a sense of commitment to a set of principles, the latter seeks to reach a predetermined conclusion irrespective of the evidence gathered. According to Hobsbawm, every scholar ‘must entertain the possibility of allowing himself to be publicly persuaded by contrary argument or evidence’ (ibid.: 174). Indeed, I started my research with the distinct impression that the Labour Party had never seriously tackled the subject of television policy and that further research would uncover the reasons for this clear absence. Instead, I have since discovered that the party has had no lack of television policies and that the more pressing research questions concerned how these policies were developed and what fate they met.

Hobsbawm further argues (ibid.: 175-185) that there are three valid reasons for embracing a partisan approach to historical scholarship. Firstly, because some areas of study are more likely to be ignored by ‘mainstream’ historians, for example the history of the British labour movement, the historian who is sympathetic to the particular ‘cause’ may be performing a valuable task in opening up the topic to

⁴ ‘Written too close to the events it relates to allow of a true historical perspective, but more authoritative than the journalism contemporaneous with those events, this book should indeed be read as ‘an account’ of the key developments, issues and incidents that took place within Independent Television between 1981 and 1992 (Bonner and Aston, 1998: xii).

historical debate. In the case of television policy, demands for democratisation and reform were overwhelmingly associated with the left from the early 1960s until the rise of New Labour so that an historian of the left is well placed to analyse these debates. Secondly, Hobsbawm comments that, just as the most celebrated medical scientists had a commitment to preventing illness and disease, there is no reason to believe that the political commitment of many social scientists and historians necessarily undermines the quality of their scholarship. Finally, Hobsbawm asserts that a partisan approach to scholarship may help to undermine the modern trend towards intellectual compartmentalisation and ‘the self-insulation of the academy’ (ibid.: 185). Here, it is vital to assert that media history is unapologetically part of the terrain of contemporary history but that it is also interdisciplinary and relies, as I do in this thesis, on the work of economists, political scientists, sociologists and political historians.

This leads me on to the question of the status of my evidence and my sources and the way in which they are presented. E. P. Thompson’s formulation that the historian’s task consists of ‘the close interrogation of texts and contexts’ (Thompson, 1993: 431) helpfully emphasises the relationship between source material and the environments in which that material is generated. In each chapter, I frame the analysis of Labour’s television policy with a brief consideration of the key political, economic or social conflicts of the particular period. It would be extremely short-sighted to consider Labour’s approach to television in the 1950’s without a discussion of revisionism and the ‘embourgeoisement’ thesis. It would also paint an incomplete picture to examine the 1960’s without acknowledging the importance of the balance of payments crisis, the 1970s without tackling the general political shift to the left or the 1980s and 1990s without focusing on the increasing hegemony of pro-market arguments inside the Labour leadership.

All historians have to be selective and I have had to carefully consider which television-related issues to prioritise in each chapter. Some choices are simply down to common sense. For example, while I concentrate on Labour’s attitude to the licence fee in the 1960s and the 1990s, I do not do so in the 1950s or 1980s for the reason that Labour was not in government at the time and therefore was less interested in and equipped to influence that debate. At other times, my decision is

not so straightforward. Labour's relationship to ITV is clearly a very important story but I focus on it more explicitly in the 1950s and 1960s as it highlights the dynamics of party policy more visibly in those decades than in later ones. The thesis, therefore, is not a clear example of narrative history but one structured thematically as well as chronologically. The impact of revisionism, the conflict between left and right, the party's relationship to the trade unions and to commercial forces, the tension between innovation and preservation and the difference between pragmatism and idealism are all themes that underpin the thesis as a whole. My choice of television-related issues, therefore, depends more on their ability to connect with and illuminate these debates than the amount of column inches written or parliamentary questions asked at the time.

Indeed if it was press coverage alone that determined my choice of issues, television *policy* would be way down the list as compared to debates around programme content and standards. However, just as I have decided not to include the whole area of political communications, from election broadcasts to public information campaigns, the subject of Labour's attitude to controversies around bias, swearing and nudity is also largely excluded. Sometimes, as in the case of Harold Wilson and latterly in the creation of New Labour, I have touched on these issues as they directly impact on television policy itself. More often than not, as for example with Labour's reaction to Mary Whitehouse's campaign against 'immoral' behaviour on television in the 1970s, I have ignored them as I believe that they are outside the scope of my thesis and less relevant to expressing the tensions and priorities of 'Labourism'.

My thesis may be thematic as well as chronological but it is nevertheless heavily dependent on the traditional sources of information for historians. Much of my data comes from key institutional sources such as Cabinet records in the Public Records Office, the minutes of Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC), transcripts of the annual conferences of the Labour Party and the trade unions, the BBC's written archives and from Hansard for the records of parliamentary debates. I have also relied on the official documents of the many public inquiries, broadcasting bills and the green and white papers that have emerged over the last fifty years. Like any contemporary historian, I have not had access to government records of the last thirty years nor have I been granted access to either the minutes of the Parliamentary

Labour Party or the shadow Cabinet. I did, however, gain access to the personal papers of Morgan Philips, Labour's general secretary in the 1950s, that included many previously unpublished documents about the party's attitude to ITV and a third channel. Collected together, these documents provide a substantial part of the primary evidence of the existence of the many examples of Labour policy for British television.

One important issue is that these sources tend to reveal the outcomes rather than the discussions that led to these outcomes. For example, the minutes of Labour's NEC and Home Policy Committee (HPC) record only basic summaries of often lengthy and complex debates. Notes of the meetings of the party's study groups and sub-committees on television are slightly more detailed but are still weighted towards recording the action to be taken and the documents to be tabled rather than the intricacies of the arguments that may have occurred during these meetings. I have attempted, therefore, to supplement and contextualise these sources with the views and analysis of the main participants gathered from my own interviews and from their own published accounts.

Broadcasting is relatively well catered for in terms of the memoirs and biographies of senior broadcasters, from Lord Hill and Hugh Greene to Alasdair Milne and Jeremy Isaacs, as well as those of the leading Labour politicians of the time. Similarly, the diaries of Richard Crossman and Barbara Castle have helped to illuminate the debates in Labour Cabinet meetings in the 1960s and 1970s. Of course any broadcasting historian, and particularly one interested in the Labour Party, will be indebted to the diaries of the former postmaster general and media reformer Tony Benn, who started recording his activities in 1940. None of these various texts necessarily constitute unimpeachable sources of information. Firstly, there is a significant difference between the contemporary recording of events in a diary format and the recollection of events some years later when putting together memoirs. This problem is accentuated with the memoirs of politicians for whom broadcasting was rarely a central area of interest and who would have had a range of other portfolios of more immediate importance. Secondly, even with diaries, where the problem of memory is not so acute, both broadcasters and politicians are often involved in conflicts that are certain to shape the way in which they record their

experiences. Given that diaries and memoirs are, therefore, likely to be partisan and incomplete historical sources, I have attempted to use them as expressions of the contrasting political and ideological positions adopted in relation to the formulation of television policy.

Newspapers provide a further source of information about the policy process and one on which I draw heavily, especially in the period of New Labour. Ministers and spokespeople have become increasingly happy to brief specialist journalists about forthcoming policies and proposals. As long as television policymaking remains one of the less visible elements of public policy, these short journalistic contributions will continue to provide an invaluable resource for researchers, although subject to the same qualifications concerning their truthfulness raised in the previous paragraph. I have also taken advantage of both specialist television journals, like *Television Today* and *Broadcast*, as well as political magazines from *Socialist Commentary* and *Tribune* to the *New Statesman* and the in-house journals of the media unions. I have also used those political journals that have adopted media and culture as a central area of concern, including *New Left Review*, *New Socialist* and *Marxism Today*.

Another source of information is the two dozen interviews I conducted with a range of Labour MPs, civil servants, intellectuals, activists and regulators. Here I faced problems that will be familiar to many historians and researchers. I have no interview material for the 1950s chapter because the key players, like Christopher Mayhew and George Darling, are no longer alive and because those who are still alive indicated to me that they had no memory of events that were, after all, not that important to them even at the time. This was the case with most of the events covered in this thesis, apart from those in the last few years, and is particularly accentuated when interviewing politicians who may have held a broadcasting brief for only a few years before moving on to a different portfolio. Such is the turnover of roles for modern politicians that the recollections of Mark Fisher and Robin Corbett about broadcasting issues in the 1980s are almost as limited as those of Tony Benn's and Ted Short's about the 1960s.

My interviews with civil servants active in the policy field today also contributed less to the thesis than I had originally expected. I feel that any original comments were

undermined not by lack of memory on their part but by their determination not to add to the public statements previously made by government ministers. The interviews that I believe to have been the most useful and which helped to contextualise the party documents and official papers were those of the media activists and intellectuals who have been engaged with media reform for a number of years. James Curran, Nicholas Garnham, Tom O'Malley, Anthony Smith and Philip Whitehead, while not necessarily detailed about dates and places, were all able to reflect on the achievements and problems of Labour's television policies in a way that demonstrates their actual engagement with, and not simply formal attachment to, television reform. Finally, while my requests for interviews with media trade union leaders were rejected, their thoughts on television policy are easily accessible from the records of their union conferences and the pages of union journals.

In summary, this thesis reflects many of the problems associated with both narrative and thematic histories. In relying on the traditional sources and structures of narrative history – the chronological ordering of official documents, political memoirs and elite interviews – the thesis may be accused of taking these political actors at their word and fitting them into a packaged and orderly view of history. Additionally, as the thesis provides an analysis of contemporary events that will be further clarified through the passing of time and the releasing of documents, it may be argued that it is too impressionistic to uncover any underlying patterns in the formation of policy and the development of television. I would argue, however, that the thesis attempts to draw on the strengths of both narrative political history and a critical media history in searching for continuities and differences in the formulation of Labour's television policy across different historical periods. Eric Hobsbawm suggests that 'the event, the individual, even the recapture of some way of thinking of the past, are not ends in themselves, but the means of illuminating some wider question, which goes far beyond the particular story and its characters' (Hobsbawm, 1998: 248). In focusing on the history of Labour's television policies over the last fifty years, that is precisely my aim: to generalise about the efficacy of Labour as a vehicle for radical change.

The academic context

Two relatively distinct sets of literature influenced this thesis: material on broadcasting history produced in the field of mass communications and media studies and material on the history and ideology of the Labour Party from within political science. The key problem I faced was that while the role of political parties is rarely discussed in media history literature, the field of television policy is almost entirely absent from Labour Party histories and studies. My thesis, therefore, attempts to re-insert both political agency into the history of UK broadcasting policy and a focus on television structures and institutions into a critique of the Labour Party.

Starting with the media studies literature, I believe that it is revealing that, out of the dozens of accounts of the development of British broadcasting, the role of political parties has been so little analysed. This is partly a product of the idea that the media in Britain operate at arm's length from the state. The ideology of a 'free press' has developed alongside the regulation of broadcasting through semi-autonomous agencies, for example the BBC Board of Governors or the Independent Television Commission. While television in other European countries like France and Italy remained part of government departments for many years, the independent nature of British broadcasting has often appeared to preclude the need for close attention to the activities of specific political parties. A further reason is that when academics have examined the relationship between television and politics, this has been done almost exclusively in the field of political communications: how prime ministers have used television for political ends and how parties have devised media strategies to win elections. The rise of Tony Blair and New Labour has accentuated this trend.⁵

The consequence of this is that, in many broadcasting histories, political parties are given brief walk-on roles that are usually peripheral as compared to the parts played by broadcasters themselves. For example, there are no references to either Conservative or Labour parties in the index to Andrew Crissell's 280-page *An*

⁵ As well as the books listed in footnote two on page 8, see McNair (1999) and Riddell (1998) or, for a more journalistic account of New Labour's relationship with spin doctors, Jones (1999).

Introductory History of British Broadcasting (Crissell, 1997). Tony Benn, a former postmaster general and influential figure on the development of British television, receives one mention (and that only in the bibliography). Institutional players and technological factors are seen as far more important than politicians to the extent that Crissell totally excludes both Tories and Labour from his brief consideration of the Pilkington Report (ibid.: 108-114) and mentions Labour only in passing when discussing the Annan Committee (ibid.: 191-195). John Whale (1977) makes occasional reference to political parties when summarising the history of the British press and broadcasting but then neglects them in the section on the state which he defines as ‘the whole apparatus of Government’ (ibid.: 114). Whale conceives government here as an abstract body preoccupied with administrative responsibilities, not as the embodiment of particular political principles and ideological frameworks, and argues that the relationship between government and the media is marked by perennial tension as well as necessary linkages. While this is certainly true, what Whale omits from his analysis is that *different* government may do *different* things and have *different* sorts of relationships with journalists and broadcasters when faced with the same circumstances.

This raises a general problem about the way in which political parties are represented in broadcasting histories – as governments or oppositions but rarely as distinct political forces. This is the case even in those texts where political parties make frequent appearances, as in the histories of commercial television (Sendall [1982 and 1983], Potter [1989 and 1990], Bonner [1998]) and in Asa Briggs’ histories of British broadcasting (for our purposes Briggs [1979 and 1995]). For example, Sendall reduces the Labour Party’s role in the debates surrounding the breaking of the BBC’s monopoly and the introduction of commercial television in the 1950s essentially to one of the parliamentary opposition. Most of the references to Labour concern its behaviour in the passage of the legislation (Sendall, 1982: 36-55): its attempt to wreck the bill, the moving of its own amendments and the party’s reaction to government amendments.

Briggs is similarly interested in the parliamentary manoeuvrings of political parties in their roles as ‘government’ or ‘opposition’, although he shows far more sensitivity than Sendall to the social and political forces that condition their behaviour in

parliament. For example, Briggs reproduces a party leaflet attacking the immorality of commercial television, refers to poll results of Labour voters on the subject and notes the impact of speeches by Labour leaders on the break-up of the monopoly as a prelude to assessing the role of the opposition during the passage of the 1954 bill (Briggs, 1979: 896-898). Nevertheless, Briggs largely measures the impact of political parties in the area of broadcasting policy by their behaviour in parliament above all. In my analysis of Labour's policy towards commercial television, however, I attempt to show how these parliamentary arguments were simply one element of a much more complex ideological discussion within the party about its attitude towards morality, commercial forces, and US culture. To make a full evaluation of the Labour Party's television policies, I would submit that the researcher needs to move well beyond parliament to the many forums in which policy is developed - in the trade unions, in the left of the party, among party intellectuals - and to examine the general economic and social climate in which the party operates at any one time.

This is the approach adopted by Jean Seaton in her analysis of broadcasting in *Power without Responsibility*, particularly in the section on how the theorising of the decline of working-class culture by Labour supporters influenced the eventual publication of the Pilkington Report (in Curran and Seaton, 1997: 173-176). However, as Seaton's focus is on the development of broadcasting as a whole and not on the impact of one political party, it is clearly of only partial use to this thesis. Indeed, while many studies of broadcasting comment on the role of the Labour Party at particular times (and I draw on these very helpful studies in my analysis of specific periods), few are prepared to generalise *across* periods about Labour's impact on broadcasting policy.

The exceptions to this are therefore especially valuable. James Curran, as I have already noted (see p. 6), has pointed out the enduring conservatism towards broadcasting policy that exists at the centre of the Labour Party. However, he also notes the libertarian ideas on the left of the party that are 'more closely aligned, in practice, to those of the libertarian new right than to paternalists on their own side' (ibid.: 370). Taking up this idea that traditional political divisions of left and right do not necessarily fit the map of broadcasting politics, I reflect on the convergence between socialists and neo-liberals in the debates on independent production in the

mid-1980s (see p. 195). A second example is Colin Seymour-Ure's analysis of the fragmented nature of media policymaking (Seymour-Ure, 1991: 203-218). Although he highlights technological and institutional factors and the difficulties of having a single 'media policy' given rival technologies, he nevertheless makes an important point about the potential impact of different *parties* in government.

A Labour government of the mid-1950s would not have introduced ITV; nor would Channel 4 have taken exactly the same shape under a Labour government in the 1980s. But Labour did not attempt to reconstruct the ITV system when it had the chance in the 1960s and 1970s...nor did the Conservatives give the third TV channel to ITV in 1962. (ibid.: 207).

Apart from these exceptions, the majority of the literature on UK broadcasting policy either marginalises the role of political parties or treats them as abstract representatives of 'government' or 'opposition', engaged in the parliamentary battles associated with those two positions. The texts that do highlight the activities of Labour and Conservative parties either deal with media policy in general or deal with one fairly limited historical period: the early 1950s (Wilson, 1960), the 1960s (Shulman, 1973) or the late 1980s and early 1990s (Barnett and Curry, 1994). The one text that most closely resembles this thesis in its emphasis on television policy in particular, the role of a single political party and the conjuncture of these two across a significant time period is Peter Goodwin's *Television under the Tories* (Goodwin, 1998). In contrast to analyses of the most recent example of Conservative rule that date either from 1979 to 1992 ('Thatcherism') or from 1992 to 1997 ('Majorism'), Goodwin is keen to examine the contribution made by the government across both periods and to look for continuities between the approaches of the two prime ministers.

Additionally, Goodwin seeks to analyse the extent to which there was a coherent 'plan' to reform broadcasting along market lines in conjunction with the neo-liberal ideology that underpinned the administrations of both Thatcher and Major. While Goodwin finds little evidence of an overarching strategy to transform the institutions and structures of British television, he nevertheless argues that UK television policy was guided, not simply by technological imperatives, but by the ideological positions

adopted by the government. The Conservatives may have not been consistent in their approach to broadcasting, but they made a difference in terms of commercialising the UK television environment. According to Goodwin,

one conclusion is inescapable. *Government policy counted*. Different policies would have produced substantially different outcomes. UK television in 1997 was by no means a result of technological or economic inevitability. For good or ill, its actual shape was to a very large extent the result of the vagaries of Tory policy over the previous eighteen years. (ibid.: 173).

My thesis, somewhat presumptuously, aims to assess the ‘vagaries’ of Labour Party policy in the field of television, not over eighteen, but nearly fifty years, in order to evaluate the extent to which party political agency does indeed matter.

This leads me to the second set of texts that have provided the intellectual framework for this thesis: the political science literature on the Labour Party. Firstly, it is worth making the point that television policy is almost entirely absent from studies of the party. Historical surveys like Brand (1974), Davies (1996), Jones (1996), Pelling and Reid (1996) and Wright and Carter (1997) all neglect to mention Labour’s achievements in the field of television policy. This does not necessarily point to a dismal record in this area as much as a belief that television policy is simply not as important as issues concerning defence, the economy, housing, social security, education, health and so on.⁶ The only time television does appear in the literature is with reference to Wilson’s relationship with the BBC (see Davies [1996: 301-302]) or the emphasis on media strategies in the formation of New Labour (see Anderson and Mann [1997: 41-45]), in other words regarding political communications and not communications policy.

Yet while television policy is clearly lower on the list of electoral priorities than the NHS, it can nevertheless express some of the tensions in and dynamics of the party’s political orientation. For example, Steven Fielding partially attributes Labour’s

⁶ The same goes for the Conservatives as well. According to Goodwin, “[h]ow to organise television” was never even a marginal feature of British election campaigns in the 70s, 80s, or 90s’ (Goodwin, 1998: 6). The only exception to this concerns the introduction of commercial television

electoral decline in the 1950s to its inability to relate to the new consumer culture, of which television played a key role. The party's 'hostility to changes after 1951, such as the rise of supermarkets, the creation of commercial television and the development of youth culture, betrayed a moralism which rejected the realities of working-class affluence' (Fielding, 1997: 22). This statement is taken from Fielding's introduction to a collection of Labour Party documents on socialism and society since 1951. Given that the collection excludes all references to foreign affairs and concentrates on domestic matters only, one might have expected some discussion of the party's attitude to the rise of commercial television in the 1950s. Instead, there are statements about a whole range of issues, from party democracy and internal divisions, to nationalisation, moral corruption, party campaigning techniques and the role of women. Commercial television, a subject that exercised the minds of many Labour supporters at the time, is ignored as a subject in its own right.⁷ My thesis does not seek to argue that television policy ought to be seen as a priority area, but that it does provide a way into the debates, for example about revisionism in the 1950s and pragmatism in the 1960s, which took place within the party.

So the first problem is that there is no substantial account of television policy in any studies of the Labour Party. A related issue is that, out of the hundreds of academic books on the party, there are very few examples of historically-rooted analyses of *specific* areas of party policy. What there is tends to be limited to both a short timescale, most frequently the assessment of one government, and to a narrow list of policy areas, most notably foreign affairs, the economy and social policy. For example, while Andrew Williams' *Labour and Russia* (Williams, 1989) examines the attitude of the party to the Soviet Union between 1924 and 1934, John Naylor's *Labour's International Policy* (Naylor, 1969) focuses on the 1930s alone. Studies of economic and social policy also rarely go beyond the confines of one brief period, witness Robert Skidelsky's *Politicians and the slump, 1929-1931* (Skidelsky, 1967),

which was a genuine political issue in the run-up to the 1955 election (see Wilson [1960] and chapter two of this thesis).

⁷ Actually, there are three references to commercial television submerged in the text. First, as an example of the moral corruption of the Tories (ibid.: 39); second, of the Gaitskellite argument that television had changed the lives and expectations of millions of people (ibid.: 54); and finally as part

Wilfred Beckerman's *The Labour Government's Economic Record, 1964-70* (Beckerman, [ed.], 1970), Martin Holmes' *The Labour Government, 1974-79* (Holmes, 1985) and *Labour and Inequality* (Townsend and Bosanquet [eds.] 1972), an analysis of the social policy of the Wilson governments between 1964 and 1970.

While these texts are not able to offer a comparative analysis of Labour across different periods, there are nevertheless two themes that re-occur. Firstly, there is an emphasis in these policy studies on the debilitating impact of internal party conflicts between left and right. Naylor, for example, blames Labour's poor grasp of foreign affairs in the 1930s on the rebellion of the left in response to the National Government and a poor relationship between the national executive and the parliamentary party. 'A factionalized, uncertain leadership and a distrustful membership together constituted a party of divided domestic counsel in the period immediately following the political rout of 1931' (Naylor, 1969: 45). In a very different context, that of a left critique of the Wilson government's education policy, Dennis Marsden writes that the 'major lesson of the historical review of Labour's performance is that we cannot talk about Labour's educational policies because the Party is not unified and has never had an agreed policy' (Marsden, 1972: 138). My thesis draws on this recurrence of a division between left and right and examines its impact on the development of a coherent 'television policy' or whether there have been, in fact, several overlapping and competing television policies.

The second theme is the importance of external factors on Labour Party policy, most notably the impact of the state of the economy on Labour's ability to carry out reforms. Harold Wilson's own assessment of the economic record of the 1964-70 government stressed 'the economic restraints on our ability to carry through the social revolution to which we were committed at the speed we would have wished' (Wilson, 1974: 18). In a difficult situation, 'we achieved far more than most would have expected' (ibid.). Martin Holmes makes a similar judgement on the 1974-79 government that, in the context of what he calls 'economic reality' (Holmes, 1985: 174), i.e. rising inflation and the pressure from the IMF for public expenditure cuts,

of a discussion of how to attract the votes of women electors for whom television now signified some sort of status (ibid.: 62).

the record of that government was far from the disaster the left claimed it to be. The policy consequence of Labour's vulnerability to extraneous influences means that attention is deflected away from consideration of its ideological commitment to reform towards one of finding the most appropriate and *pragmatic* political stance. Pragmatism both in terms of developing policy and in terms of governing is a key theme that underpins the party's approach to television policy over the years.

New Labour in Power: Precedents and prospects (Brivati and Bale [eds], 1997) is a significant exception to the highly periodised nature of most academic analysis of Labour Party policy. Written in response to the victory of New Labour in 1997, the collection reflects on the development of economic, social, constitutional, trade union and defence policies throughout the last century. Vernon Bogdanor and John Young, in their analyses of constitutional reform and foreign affairs respectively, both point to continuities in the party's approach to these areas over the years and, in particular, the many points of agreement with the Conservatives. 'Labour in power', according to Young (in *ibid.*: 138), 'has been far less ready to adopt radical policies abroad and, indeed, a consensus on the general lines of foreign and defence policy has generally been the rule for the front benches of the major parties.'

Nick Ellison traces the evolution of Labour's social policy in the post-war era and emphasises the impact of divisions in the party, not so much on stunting the development of coherent policy as on undermining electoral success. The uniting of the party behind Wilson and the slogan of the 'scientific revolution' in 1964 paved the way for victory in the election but did little for the creation of an innovative social policy. On the other hand,

severe disagreements throughout the 1950s amongst 'Tribunites', centre left 'planners', Keynesian socialists and ethical socialists about the relative importance of different aspects of democratic socialist strategy, and particularly the salience of public ownership as a distinctively socialist economic programme, not only prevented the Party from developing an agreed programme, but forced a persistent return to the one common factor shared by each of these positions – the continuing belief in state-sponsored welfare spending...(Ellison in *ibid.*: 38).

In other words, one of the consequences of political splits between left and right in the party was the tendency to fall back on areas of common ground. Internal divisions, therefore, need not always result in civil war but in compromise – a feature that I argue was present in the Labour government's attitude towards the demand of radical left reformers in the 1970s, particularly concerning the Annan Committee.

A further contribution made by the book is to *qualify* the whole project of comparative historical analysis. In his chapter on Labour's economic policy, Jim Tomlinson argues that comparisons between the 1970s and the late 1990s are irrelevant given that today there is no inflationary boom, no incomes policy and that it is the market right and not the Keynesian left that is dominant (Tomlinson in *ibid.*: 12). Instead, Tomlinson contrasts the economic situation under Blair with that of the particular situation of Harold Wilson in 1964. Both governments share a concern with increasing productivity and competitiveness while both have inherited economies that are overheating and generating balance of payments problems (*ibid.*: 13). Tomlinson's conclusion (that the health of the macro-economic environment is decisive for Labour today) and his premise (that meaningful historical comparisons need to reflect broadly similar situations) are both relevant to my thesis. I have already discussed how the analysis of Labour's television policy needs to acknowledge the macro-economic climate in the particular period. It is also important to bear in mind that television policy does not develop in a linear and predictable way with easy comparisons to be made between all periods, irrespective of changing economic, cultural and technological contexts.

However, one weakness of *New Labour in Power* is revealed by its title: it deals only with Labour in government and not in opposition. Not surprisingly, academic literature on specific areas of policy deals only with Labour in office while my thesis aims to analyse the party's approach to television across three periods in office and three in opposition. This requires an understanding of the party's organisational structure and of where power lies in the party as well as a grasp of the ideas which provide the foundation for Labour's distinctive political programme across different periods of government and opposition.

The Labour Party was founded in 1900 by trade union leaders seeking independent representation in parliament yet the party has always been a ‘broad church’ involving, for example, Marxists and anti-communists, trade union militants and their employers, atheists and Christians.⁸ Pelling and Reid argue (1996: 4-5) that the party’s launch was

not so much a birth as a marriage: not the emergence of something fundamentally new, but rather an alliance between trade unions with a longstanding involvement in radical politics and the more recently formed ethical socialists, with the possibility of more participation by state socialists in the future.

According to Geoffrey Foote, the glue that holds the party together and which distinguishes it from either Marxist or conservative parties and ideologies is the notion of ‘Labourism’.⁹

The diverse factions which have constituted the Labour Party since its birth have somehow been able to find a common factor to keep them together for all the fury and frustration of their debates, and this unifying force cannot be simply reduced to one of mere tactical alliances. (Foote: 1997: 6)

Foote sees this as an ideology rooted in the relationship between the party and the unions and notes five main features of Labourism (ibid.: 8-12). Firstly, that labour itself is denied a proper and fair share of the wealth it creates and that, secondly and consequently there is the need for the re-distribution of wealth. Thirdly, Labourism is defined by its opposition not to private capital but to bad capitalists. Fourthly, Labourism recognises the demand for the political self-organisation of workers while fifthly it is marked by its loyalty to the nation state. Although Labour leaders have reduced the role of the unions in party affairs in recent years, the definition remains relevant in its expression of the underlying beliefs of Labour supporters.

⁸ It is worth noting that the Labour Party is both an alliance itself but also the key political organisation at the centre of a larger network of groups and individuals, including the trade unions, co-operative and socialist societies, intellectuals, and socialists from outside the Labour Party, that makes up the ‘labour movement’, a term I refer to frequently in my thesis.

The definition also helps to clarify the *contradictory* instincts of the party, for example in its attitude to commercial forces and its relationship to parliament. By drawing on this understanding of Labourism, my thesis seeks to highlight a number of tensions that are present in the party's debates on television policy: that of parliamentary activity versus extra-parliamentary activity; pragmatism versus idealism; managing capitalism versus transforming capitalism; the party as an establishment insider versus its position as an outsider; and finally the tension between the leadership and the grass-roots.

This latter conflict lies at the heart of the classic work on the power relations of the two main political parties in Britain, Robert McKenzie's *British Political Parties* (McKenzie, 1967). McKenzie focuses on intra-party organisation and analyses, in particular, the relationship between the parliamentary members and those of the wider organisation. He identifies one basic similarity in structure, if not in political outlook, between Labour and Conservative parties. 'Each is an autonomous entity which throws up its own leaders and acknowledges its ultimate responsibility only to the electorate...neither party in Parliament allows itself to be directed or controlled by its mass organization' (ibid.: 386). This contradicts the notion, endorsed by the party itself, that the sovereign decision-making body of the Labour Party is the annual conference with the NEC, whose members are selected from across the party, as the locus of power in between conferences. Instead, McKenzie argues that the parliamentary party (PLP) operates as a rival power base to conference and refuses, again and again, to be bound by conference decisions that it feels to be electorally unpopular. While the PLP appears to be more democratic in opposition, 'in office the PLP has conformed to the traditional practices of the other great parliamentary parties to a striking degree (ibid.: 412).

McKenzie further argues that, to the extent that the NEC and conference are key decision-making bodies, the PLP is usually able to influence their decisions, either through dominating NEC membership or speeches at conference and relying on the trade union block vote where necessary. More often than not, ordinary party

⁹ Tony Blair's definition of Labourism focuses on values: 'A fair deal; concern for those who are poor, unemployed or lacking opportunity' tolerance; and duty to others – these are great British values' (Blair, 1997: 7).

members are reluctant to attack the Labour leader who is seen as a 'prime minister-in-waiting' and therefore entitled to retain a degree of power. For McKenzie, this is both essential and welcome for a modern political party and he concludes that it is 'abundantly clear that the real centre of day-to-day policy-making within the Labour Party is to be found in the deliberations of the Parliamentary Committee and of the PLP' (ibid.: 526). While the NEC can act as a forum of dissent and debate, as it did with Bevanism in the 1950s, power is held centrally with ordinary members assuming importance only when canvassing during elections or raising money for the party. The result of this, as Fielding (1997: 9) notes, is that 'there have always been, in effect, two parties. One has been organised at Westminster and formed the opposition or government of the day; the other has been based in the country at large.'

Lewis Minkin's important work on *The Labour Party Conference* (Minkin, 1980), seeks not so much to deny the existence of two distinct parties but to re-negotiate the relationship between the two. McKenzie's book, first published in 1955, was written before the experience of the Wilson governments and the sight of regular rebellions against the party leadership in annual conference and against the government in parliament. Challenging the idea that the parliamentary leadership was almost autonomous in its ability to make decisions, Minkin suggests a far more diffuse pattern of power relations within the party. He attributes this to the particular make-up of the Labour Party, based as it is on the democratic influence of the unions and the role of the NEC and annual conference in checking the leadership. He argues that McKenzie's model

not only understated the structural and procedural limitations on the power of the parliamentary leadership but underestimated the capacity of the extra-parliamentary Party to reassert itself, particularly when the trade unions reacted adversely to the failures of a Labour government (ibid.: xii).

Far from the unions simply ceding power to the party leadership, Minkin claims that extra-parliamentary forces have 'always produced a contrapuntal element into the process of policy-making' (ibid.: 12).

For Minkin, the fluidity and conflict at the heart of Labour policy-making has led to various challenges to the leadership. He gives the example of the successful opposition to Hugh Gaitskell's attempt to scrap Clause IV in the late 1950s and points to the stand-off in policy in 1967 when, although the NEC 'proved unable to impose its will upon the Government then conversely Government Ministers proved unable to stifle or colonize the process of policy-making to their satisfaction' (ibid.: 53). Far from romanticising the possibilities of conference democracy, Minkin's argument is that Labour institutions like the annual conference and the NEC are symbolic of party members' desire for a participatory and egalitarian form of politics. Policy within the Labour Party is developed, according to this model, with purely electoral considerations on the one hand and with a democratic instinct on the other.

Both McKenzie's and Minkin's formulations of power relations within the Labour Party have been very useful for my assessment of Labour's media policies. Their theories force the researcher to examine both the impact of the unions' role in the party and the relationship between the leadership and the grass roots, and to conceptualise policy-making not as a linear process but as one fraught with competing electoral and ideological considerations. Clearly, the two studies also need to be approached in the light of more recent developments around the rise of New Labour in terms of the reduction of the influence of the unions on the party and the increasing centralisation of the party's organisational structures. However I contend that the questions posed by McKenzie and Minkin remain very relevant to the attempts to understand the development of policy in a party that contains so many contradictions and conflicts. As one American academic concluded, studying the party through the eyes of an outsider:

The Labour party is a party of change, but it is deeply concerned with the preservation of what is good; it is idealistic in its approach to both domestic and foreign affairs, but it is eminently practical and pragmatic in its methods; it stresses internationalism without being anti-national; it is a party of the middle way in spite of an extremist wing; it is socialist, but it does not forget the individual (Brand, 1974: 1-2).

These are the contradictions that shape the party's activities in general and, as I will attempt to illustrate, that have conditioned the development of Labour's television policies in the last fifty years.

Chapter Two: 1951-1964

Labour in Opposition: 1951-1955

The Labour Party entered a long period of opposition that was marked by growing internal division. Labour leaders like Clement Attlee and Herbert Morrison were determined to downplay the importance of public ownership and ‘attempted to throw off their commitments to further nationalisation as gracefully as they were able’ (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1970: 72). This reflected Morrison’s belief that the political and social reforms of the 1945 Labour government ‘had finally given the working-class movement an equal status in society. The time to recognise that the demand for social justice had burst beyond the narrow divides of any class or section of the community had come’ (Foote, 1997: 199). The call for further nationalisation would simply be a barrier to the urgent task of repositioning Labour as a national, and not a class, party and undermine its embracing of a mixed economy and social and political consensus.

These views were nourished and developed by writers organised around the journal *Socialist Commentary* in the late 1940s. Drawn from the right of the party and influenced by Labour figures like Evan Durban and Douglas Jay, the journal presented an early example of ‘revisionist’ ideas which came to fruition in the booming economic conditions of the 1950s. One of the first influential pieces of revisionist writing was the Labour MP Anthony Crosland’s contribution to *New Fabian Essays*, a compilation of articles published in 1952 to provoke debate about Labour’s ideological mission and political strategy. Crosland argued that increases in national and personal income had confounded the Marxist prediction of economic crisis and that we had entered a new kind of ‘pluralist’ society in which ‘[i]ndividual property rights no longer constitute the essential basis of economic and social power.’ Furthermore, as pure laissez-faire capitalism is challenged by state intervention and political and economic power is diffused, the rise of a technical and professional state has fragmented the existing class structure (Crosland, 1952: 38-42).

The consequence for Crosland was that Labour's socialism should no longer concern itself with questions of redistribution along class lines but with equality and common interest. In place of extending welfare, nationalisation and planning, Crosland called for psychological battles to increase participation and belonging in society, for example, more consultation in industry, more worker representation on boards and agreements requiring companies to act responsibly to their workers and communities.

Although this redefinition of socialism resembled that of Herbert Morrison's deliberately vague statement in 1951 that socialism 'means the assertion of social responsibility for matters which are properly of social concern' (quoted in Foot, 1973: 238), Crosland intended it as an attack on the conservatism of the Labour leadership. The new 'pluralist society' required an urgent reconsideration of Labour's approach to questions of profit, public ownership, equality and the role of the state. 'The revisionists', according to Geoffrey Foote, 'were in revolt against Corporate Socialism and wished to release the radical energies locked up in the Labour Party by an outmoded class outlook' (Foote, 1997: 205). In the figure of Hugh Gaitskell, later to become Labour leader, the revisionists were to have a crucial influence on the party for the rest of its years in opposition.

From the left of the party, another group of MPs and activists were in revolt against the conservatism of the leaders and sought to protect the existing links of the party with the working-class movement and social ownership. The 'Bevanites', as those around Nye Bevan (the minister of health in the 1945 government) were dubbed by the press, provided the most serious and public opposition to the Labour leadership in the 1950s. Bevan attacked the boards of nationalised industries and called for an extension of the principle of industrial democracy. However, while the Bevanites sought a more favourable role for public ownership than that envisaged by either Morrison and the Labour leadership or the growing number of revisionists, they were wedded to parliamentary methods and focused, above all, on internal party reform. 'This was a movement of the ranks to take hold of its executive bodies and organisations to effect a return to radical policies' (Jenkins, 1979: 265).

The Bevanites were backed by the *Tribune* newspaper and commanded substantial influence in the constituency Labour parties as well as the trade unions. Their

influence peaked at Labour's 1952 conference when Bevanite candidates won six out of the seven constituency seats on the National Executive Committee, removing key right-wingers from the NEC. At the same conference, the left won a resolution for extending the range of industries to be nationalised, although one may assume that the leadership had little inclination to act on the motion. Throughout the early 1950s, the Bevanites were presented as an organised opposition to the leadership, blocking all attempts to 'modernise' the party and mobilising the power of the grassroots to defend social ownership.

The reality is somewhat more complex. Resistance took place in the parliamentary arena and rarely spilled over into extra-parliamentary action. Furthermore, the clearest disagreements occurred over foreign and defence issues, particularly over German rearmament and relations with America. Ben Pimlott (1980: 174) argues that it is 'hard to see fundamental differences between the two sides: Bevan and Crosland shared many opinions. Most of the conflicts were not of principle but of degree...' Bogdanor concurs that while Bevanism was a reaction to the consensual policies of the leadership, 'the revolt never became an articulate one. Policy differences on domestic issues were never clearly stated' (Bogdanor, 1970: 83).

Labour failed to shrug off its ideological and organisational problems by the time it lost the 1955 general election. The party was simply not equipped to deal with unexpectedly favourable economic conditions. Throughout those early years of opposition, the party demonstrated a range of conflicting attitudes towards the USA, towards public ownership and private profit, towards state intervention and the free market and, in particular, towards the role of a socialist party in the post-war boom. There was consensus on the need for a mixed economy but the right of the party urged that the ties with the organised working class be loosened while the left argued to maintain these links. Bogdanor attributes Labour's 'years of wilderness' to the contradictions of the party's different constituencies:

The Left failed to make a coherent and relevant case for nationalisation. The Revisionists failed to wean the party away from its traditional commitments. And those whose primary concern was to make the Labour Party an efficient and radical governing party failed to alter its doctrinal nature (ibid.: 113).

The result was a programme that failed to inspire any constituency. According to Stephen Haseler, ‘the lack of adventure in Labour’s proposals was stultifying the Party and frustrating its true radicals on the Right as well as on the Left’ (Haseler, 1969: 56). All these positions and problems were played out in Labour’s approaches to the debates on the introduction of commercial television to which we now turn.

Labour and the Battle for Commercial Television

Such was the consensus between Labour and Conservatives in the 1950s that, according to Pinto-Duschinsky, ‘[t]here was no major issue, from 1951 onwards, which produced a fundamental cleavage between the official policy of the Labour Party and that of the Conservatives’ (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1970: 71). The example of the introduction of commercial television is a clear exception to this.

The one million TV sets in use in 1951 were tuned into a single BBC channel. This monopoly was deemed unacceptable by a minority in the ruling Conservative Party who set about ‘liberating’ British broadcasting through the introduction of competition into television. The broadcasting historian Asa Briggs confirms that ‘social change became associated, in consequence, between 1951 and 1955...with the Conservative Party’s policy of “setting the people free”’ (Briggs, 1979: 428). Despite an initial reluctance to sanction sponsored or advertising-funded television, most Tory MPs were even more reluctant to sustain a broadcasting monopoly and backed the introduction of a commercial television service in 1955.

The Conservatives were able to break the BBC’s television monopoly and introduce commercial television for a number of reasons. H. H. Wilson’s *Pressure Group* (1961) argues that ITV was the product of a well-organised business lobby to unleash commercial forces inside broadcasting. Whale (1977) claims that commercial television provided a convenient battleground for a group of Tory MPs desperate to undermine the monopoly principle in British industry and to extend the free market. Seaton (in Curran and Seaton, 1997: 163) suggests that Winston Churchill was simply not prepared to defend the BBC, having harboured a grudge against the organisation since the 1926 General Strike. Briggs, however, emphasises the

compromises made during the passage of the legislation and notes how the eventual structure of commercial television was closely modelled on the BBC in terms of the role of governors and a public service remit. He criticises Wilson for undervaluing the parliamentary manoeuvrings with ‘their many interesting undercurrents and the ultimate compromises on many points which ensured that even after the end of the BBC’s monopoly Britain would still retain within a dual system provision for a single basic approach to the regulation and control of broadcasting’ (Briggs, 1979: 933).

The Labour Party was a key part of the broad movement, including religious figures, leading Tories, university vice-chancellors, newspaper editors and Lord Reith, the founder of the BBC, which set out to oppose and compromise commercial television. Labour MPs suggested an all-party conference on broadcasting, argued for a free vote in the legislation and tabled dozens of amendments – all of which were ignored by the Tories. Wilson’s account of Labour’s involvement, however, stresses the futility of its opposition, as

it is conceivable that nothing done by either the [previous 1945-1951] Labour Government or the proponents of public service broadcasting could have done more than delay the aspirations of those working within the Conservative coalition who consider broadcasting to be primarily a commercial instrument (Wilson, 1961: 208).

Such a simple story fails to do justice to the myriad of positions held, principles argued and compromises negotiated by those around the Labour Party concerning the breaking of the monopoly. Television was not one of the key questions facing the party at the time but the events nevertheless reveal much about the priorities of and tensions between different elements of the party as it attempted to relate to the new economic developments and changing expectations of the early 1950s.

Firstly, it is worth noting that Labour leaders of the time considered television policy in general to be less important than either press policy or political broadcasting.

Tony Benn complained in 1953 that the NEC was ‘hardly concerned with broadcasting in between elections’ (Benn, 1953: 8). According to one biographer, Nye Bevan ‘loathed television, believing that it turned politicians into ‘pure salesmen

– like American politicians’, and had never taken the trouble to master its techniques’ (Campbell, 1987: 358) while Clement Attlee ‘took very little interest in the media’ (Harris, 1982: 519).

This analysis gives a rather false impression of the then Labour leadership’s ignorance about media matters given that Attlee and Morrison launched both the 1949 Royal Commission on the Press and the 1951 Beveridge Report on Broadcasting. Yet it was press policy above all which captured the attention of the party. Irritated by the fierce criticisms of Conservative-supporting newspapers and worried about the future of a radical press, the 1945 Labour government became increasingly preoccupied with press reform. Tom O’Malley argues that ‘Morrison, Attlee, other Ministers and the wider Labour movement were therefore critically aware of the problems posed for Labour by the press and this awareness underlay their willingness to initiate the inquiry in 1946’ (O’Malley, 1997: 140-41).¹⁰ At the height of debates over the introduction of commercial television, Labour leaders were still paying particular attention to the importance of newspapers. In 1954, the future Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell tried to persuade Cecil King, proprietor of the *Daily Mirror*, to set up a new right-wing Labour newspaper to counter the influence of *Tribune* and the *New Statesman* in the Labour movement (Shaw, 1988: 47).

The leadership was also interested in taking advantage of new developments in broadcasting for electoral purposes and moved quickly to draw up a policy over political broadcasting and the production of election broadcasts. In May 1950, Morrison set up an unofficial and confidential ‘Technical Committee on Broadcasting’, involving ex-journalists like Tony Benn and George Darling, to advise on scripts and to prepare Labour leaders for broadcasting appearances.¹¹ In 1953, Tony Benn prepared a report for the NEC recommending the creation of a ‘Joint Broadcasting Committee’ to maximise the potential of television appearances by Labour politicians. Benn argued that the party ‘should recognize the increased

¹⁰ O’Malley points out that Labour had a long record of critical interventions concerning the partisanship and monopolistic tendencies of the British press which preceded its decision to set up the 1949 Royal Commission on the Press.

¹¹ According to Benn, the ‘sub-committee had no official existence whatsoever, and derived its status entirely from the fact that its recommendations went to Herbert Morrison...In view of the peculiar way in which it had been established, it operated almost in secret...’ (Benn, 1953: 2).

importance of broadcasting and Television and should seek to improve and extend existing techniques' (Benn, 1953: 14). This emphasis on political broadcasting as opposed to broadcasting policy was reflected in the weight attached to the former and the almost total exclusion of the latter in NEC meetings. The *only* time the NEC discussed its attitude towards commercial television between 1951 and 1955 was in September 1954 when it was forced to consider whether a resolution on the subject could go forward to annual conference. The NEC voted 13-9 to accept the resolution which criticised the Conservatives for introducing commercial television without a mandate from the British public and supported restoring broadcasting to public control with an additional channel. When it reached conference, the resolution was remitted and not commented upon further. The introduction of commercial television was thus never debated by a Labour conference.

However the NEC had previously discussed policy when approving the party's evidence to the Beveridge Committee on Broadcasting which the Labour government had set up in 1949 to make recommendations on the future of the BBC. Labour's evidence was largely uncritical of the BBC and praised its 'tradition of fair comment and the presentation of all opinions on controversial subjects' (Labour Party, 1950: 1). It expressed a clear opposition to 'sponsored radio' as being desired only by advertisers, suggested a degree of regional decentralisation for radio and opposed a separate corporation for television. This conflicted with the advice supplied to the NEC by George Darling MP who warned that, given the experience of the BBC, 'a single-monopoly tends to become hide-bound, to work to rigid formulae, stifling initiative and accepting mediocrity as an easy substitute for enterprise' (Darling, 1950: 6). Labour's evidence did complain, however, of an 'anti-Labour bias' in news programmes 'as a matter of course' (Labour Party, 1950: 5) and proposed that the BBC deal with this by broadening the field of recruitment to allow for the inclusion of more working-class viewpoints. Substantial reform, it felt, was unnecessary.

Tribune also came to the aid of the BBC. The BBC, it argued, was nothing like major private manufacturing monopolies and cartels where restrictive practices ought to be broken up. 'It is not an irresponsible dictatorship. Its affairs are under constant scrutiny in the press, and are supervised by public servants: that fabled despot, the D-

G, is not a free agent, but is responsible to the Governors' (Bain, 1951: 9). What is needed, argued *Tribune*, 'is a really effective devolution of London control' (ibid.) and increased accountability and democracy in the organisation. Both George Darling and Tony Benn suggested internal restructuring to iron out the problems arising from monopoly. Darling proposed four separate broadcasting corporations, 'efficiently manageable units' (HoC Debates, 19 July 1951: col. 210) but saw no need for an overall change in broadcasting policy. Benn's idea to set up four separate boards of management to deal with the 'legitimate objections' (ibid.: col. 1530) to monopoly held by Tory MPs was even praised, though subsequently ignored, by Ness Edwards, the Labour postmaster general (PMG).

Labour's discussions on broadcasting policy in the early 1950s were therefore characterised both by a growing concern with the existence of an organisation which held a monopoly of the airwaves but also by a firm defence of that institution. The key problems were identified as administrative and organisational, how to fix what Darling called an 'overgrown machine' (ibid.: col. 210). There was little discussion about the political role of the BBC such as the make-up of its governors, its attitude towards the trade union movement, its interpretation of 'cultural unity' and, apart from occasional complaints to the general secretary, the extent of its impartiality.

Beveridge himself expressed harsh criticisms of the BBC's 'Londonization' and elitism but nevertheless recommended the renewal of the BBC's licence as the most favourable option. Labour was voted out of office before it could pass the legislation allowing the Conservatives to seize the opportunity for 'reform' and produce a White Paper in May 1952 that included one clause relating to commercial television. It was from this time that the battle started and the features of Labour's opposition to ITV emerged.

The key opponent of commercial television was the National Television Council (NTC), established by the Labour MP Christopher Mayhew in June 1953. This was a cross-party campaign whose organising committee included an impressive array of Lords, Reverends, entertainment entrepreneurs, two Viscounts and a trade union leader, all united in defence of public service broadcasting. The combined forces of the representatives of entertainment workers and employers, religious and secular

bodies, government and opposition made for a high-profile campaign but one in which there were very fragile common interests. Leading figures from Prince Littler Productions and Associated British Pictures Corporation, both of which were active in the early years of ITV, were involved in the NTC. Trade union concerns about the impact of commercial television on film technicians' jobs coincided with worries about the moral health of the nation.

The NTC argued that commercial television would not be in the 'national' interest. It avoided all criticisms of the BBC and conducted its campaign around the issues of protecting standards and values. A commercial network was being sought by a minority of 'interested parties' in Parliament and, furthermore, was not even desired by the general public. The NTC's pamphlet, *Britain Unites Against Commercial TV*, highlighted a recent Gallup Poll which showed that 'if the B.B.C. were permitted to provide alternative TV Programmes only ONE IN FIVE British people would want Commercial TV' (NTC, 1953). Mayhew was particularly concerned not by the commercialisation of television *per se*, but by the increasing 'Americanisation' of culture which commercial television would institutionalise. The scale of the American market, he argued, was such that not only would British networks be flooded by vulgar US imports but that British commercial programmes would be tailored for export to the American market. 'The danger of this is obvious, not only to our television standards, but to our whole national culture and way of life' (Mayhew, 1953).

Labour's public and parliamentary campaign against commercial television echoed many of these strands. Anti-Americanism, an important source of division inside the Labour Party at the time, was virulent. Labour MP Charles Hobson argued that the legislation for ITV 'absolutely stinks of Americanism and American business methods...hon. Gentlemen will realise that their attitude was entirely wrong for British political standards' (HoC Debates, 25 March 1954: col. 1484). Mayhew claimed that the legislation was a trojan horse for American business practices and

warned that ‘we all still underestimate the menace of the impact of Americanism which will come through this Bill’ (HoC Debates, 22 June 1954: col. 336).¹²

Labour’s central office issued a series of leaflets in 1953 in opposition to commercial television which followed a twin-track approach of defending national cultural standards and attacking the commercialisation of broadcasting. ‘Not Fit For Children’ screamed the headline of the first and claimed that ‘[t]his latest proposal is a menace to all our home standards and to the impressionable young minds of our children’. It criticised the ‘Conservative TV (too vulgar) policy’ and appealed to ‘KEEP OUR TV AND RADIO STANDARDS’ (Labour Party 1953a). The next pamphlet called the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Coventry as witnesses to the effects of commercial television and promised that ‘[w]e will resolutely oppose the introduction of commercial TV. This service which is bound to exercise a growing influence on our national life must serve values and purposes which the nation approves – not those which advertising agencies force upon us’ (Labour Party, 1953b).

Labour’s exhortation to defend the British way of life was matched by a warning that commercial television would unleash market forces and lower programme quality. The Tory proposal ‘means that Big Business will be able to move right into your house to sell their products. The standard of programmes will slump when the commercialisers get busy on the TV screen’ (ibid.). For one Labour MP, Malcolm MacPherson, this was a secondary concern. ‘When people talk about the lowering of standards, what really matters is not primarily the standard of the programmes but the standard of our national life which will undoubtedly become debased if we increase the number of avenues by which money power can affect it’ (HoC Debates, 11 June 1952: col. 260). The TUC adopted a similar anti-commercial approach and issued a statement opposing ‘Sponsored Television’: ‘The potential influence of television on the lives of the people...requires that in the public interest programmes should be controlled by a public authority which can give due weight to considerations of a non-commercial nature’ (TUC, 1953: 175).

¹² This reflected the anti-Americanism, prevalent on the left but particularly inside the Communist Party, that fuelled the campaign against US horror comics at the same time (see Barker, 1984: 21-27).

Both the TUC and Labour's official opposition to commercial television was marked by a firm defence of the status quo. According to H.H. Wilson this was no different to the position in 1946 when 'most of the critical opinion of the BBC seemed to centre in the ranks of the Labour Party, though the Party Leaders were then, as later, its staunch, unquestioning defenders' (Wilson, 1961; 42). Nevertheless, Labour leaders made important points that the Conservatives' plans were driven by the naked self-interest of the commercial lobby and that a public monopoly was to be merely supplanted by a private monopoly. In December 1953, Morrison and other Labour MPs proposed an all-party conference on the future of broadcasting that was brushed aside by the Tories. Labour tabled a series of amendments that were all rejected by the Government and then attempted, unsuccessfully, to block the legislation.

If the Labour Party was opposed to the commercialisation of broadcasting, what was it actually in favour of? Labour leaders displayed a very ambivalent attitude towards change. If the BBC's services 'are probably the best to be found anywhere in the world' as Morrison had argued in 1952 (HoC Debates, 11 June 1952: col. 234), then why bother to change the system? Indeed, although Morrison praised both the achievements of the BBC and the possibilities of television in general, he also argued that 'we must remember about television that we can have too much of it' (ibid.: col. 242). Too many hours of television viewing, he continued, would put people off reading books and restrict their education. When Morrison came to admit, fairly reluctantly, that a second channel was inevitable, he insisted that the 'most economical and most public-spirited way of promoting competition and viewers' choice' (HoC Debates, 14 December 1953: col. 76) would be to hand it over to the BBC as it was already running a 'responsible public service' (ibid.).

Labour leaders were desperately keen to be seen to be distancing themselves from the general principle of monopolies (see ibid.: col. 66), except in the specific case of the BBC. Anxious to appeal to the increasingly consumerist habits of workers, they were equally concerned to condemn the Tories as the stooges of American capital and champion Labour as the guardian of reliable British values. Labour's official

policy simultaneously lined it up with the voice of the ‘establishment’ and failed to articulate its supporters’ desire for increased choice after years of austerity.

The temperature was raised by Attlee's promise at a miners’ rally in June 1953 that if the Tories ‘handed over television to private enterprise’ then Labour would ‘have to alter it when we get back to power’ (quoted in Briggs, 1979: 897). This threat, repeated by Gordon Walker and Morrison during 1954, had the effect, according to Briggs, of polarising the issue along party lines. This position was also criticised by some on the left of the party who were unhappy with the trap the leadership was creating for itself. The *New Statesman* identified two problems with Labour’s continuing hostility to commercial television. Firstly, the promise to repeal the legislation would most probably be an empty threat because several polls demonstrated commercial television’s likely popularity.¹³ Furthermore, ‘Labour leaders may get led into an obscurantist and restrictive approach towards television in general. Nothing could be more deadly to the Party’s chances of making an impact on the “unpolitical” voter’ (*New Statesman and Nation*, 1954: 680).

The left of the party had already begun to show some inclination to change the broadcasting status quo. For example, the *New Statesman* displayed an early interest in the question of the structures of television. In 1952, an article advocated the creation of a series of local television stations accountable to elected Councillors which would ‘help refurbish the rich local cultural patterns of this country’. These competitive public local stations would provide an alternative to the BBC and safeguard against ‘monopoly, bureaucracy and over-centralisation’ (*New Statesman and Nation*, 1952: 396). A more detailed plan for broadcasting reform was suggested by the Bevanite *Tribune* newspaper with the following headline: BREAK UP THE BBC – BUT NO MR. MUGGS (in relation to the notorious chimpanzee who entertained American viewers in the commercial breaks during coverage of the Coronation). *Tribune* moved away from its earlier defence of the BBC and attacked opponents of commercial television for pretending that ‘the present public monopoly is perfect’ and for abandoning ‘the idea of any competition in television or radio

¹³ See Briggs (1979: 898 and 924) for poll evidence that substantial numbers of Labour supporters would welcome commercial programmes.

services' (*Tribune*, 1953). It proposed an increase in the license fee to pay for new television services (as people would otherwise have to pay for advertisements in the commercial system), the creation of separate public corporations for television and the devolution of the BBC into independent regional corporations. 'This is the way', the newspaper argued, 'to remove the evils of monopoly without placing television and radio at the mercy of commercial interests' (ibid.).

The revisionist *Socialist Commentary* immediately hit back at these suggestions and attacked *Tribune* for complicating the job of the Labour leadership, presumably for associating Labour with a tax increase. It urged a policy of pragmatism: 'It is attractive to ponder on the possibility of two or more corporations competing with equal resources and equal access to performers and public. The problem is one of finance' (*Socialist Commentary*, 1953: 287).

The call for pragmatism was echoed in the unions. The Labour-affiliated Association of Cinematograph and Allied Technicians (ACT) declared its 'unalterable opposition to the introduction of commercial television' but then faced two motions at its 1954 Conference recommending the adoption of 'a more realistic attitude toward Commercial Television. If the Bill before the House is passed, which seems inevitable, then the A.C.T. should do everything in its power to ensure that A.C.T. technicians be employed' (ACT, 1954: 15). The BBC Staff Association (ABS), which was not affiliated to Labour, opted for an even more flexible line. Firstly, it condemned the government's decision and declared in 1954 that 'it will in the national interest take every step in its power to maintain the existing high quality of broadcasting with a view to counteracting any deterioration of standards which may follow intrusion of the profit motive' (ABS, 1954: 206). When the subject reappeared the following year the NEC decided that, 'while in no way relaxing our vigilance in regard to service standards, it would be inconsistent with our role as the representative of staff in commercial broadcasting undertakings to give any further publicity to this resolution' (ABS, 1955: 63).

Given that ITV would soon become a reality, the fourteen unions in the entertainment industry collectively called for a quota of British material to be no less than 80%. This resolution was remitted at the 1954 TUC Conference on the basis

that the Television Bill was not law but the broadcasting unions received an assurance from the General Council that '[w]e are anxious that this new commercial television system shall reflect, as the Bill originally said it should, programmes which are predominantly British in tone and style' (TUC, 1954: 457/8).

It was not only the unions who had conflicting interests over commercial television. Sidney Bernstein, the Chairman of Granada Theatres and a long-term Labour supporter, was personally opposed to commercial television but wrote to Morrison in 1953 informing him that Granada had already applied for a licence.

This does not indicate any change of feelings about commercial or sponsored television; I still think the country would be better off without it. However, if there is to be commercial television in this country, we think we should be in, and this may very well be useful one day (quoted in Moorhead, 1984: 215).

Eric Fletcher, the Labour MP for Islington and a vice-president of Associated British Pictures Corporation (ABPC), was involved with Mayhew's NTC and, according to H.H. Wilson, offered ABPC's services in the campaign (Wilson, 1961: 154). However, Fletcher also went along with the enthusiasm for commercial television shown by his shareholders and described his dilemma. Despite opposing the Bill,

as a member of the Board I co-operated with the decision of the majority that an application should be made for a Television contract. Thereafter, I took a great interest in the activities of the new company, ABC Television...and I became Deputy-Chairman (Fletcher, 1986: 177).

Cecil King, the proprietor of the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror* had always been in favour of commercial television. Not surprisingly, the Conservative postmaster-general wrote to him in 1954 inviting him to apply for a licence. King declined because 'fantastic restrictions had been introduced...which hacked the original TV Bill to shreds' (quoted in Sendall, 1982: 72). He made it clear that he was simply biding his time: 'I was in favour of commercial television from the start as the only way of putting some life into BBC television. I told my people we would come in after the second bankruptcy as I foresaw a large expenditure before any possible return' (ibid.). True to his word, in 1956 King stepped in with £750,000 to help

ATV's finances and Hugh Cudlipp, the *Mirror*'s editor, joined the board of ATV. According to Sendall, '[t]here was indeed no opposition to the *Mirror* joining ATV: *not from any quarter*' (ibid.: 191 – emphasis added).

So despite the official position of the Labour Party and the TUC of complete opposition to commercial television, by early 1956 Labour supporters were playing key roles in three of the four ITV companies. This was not as surprising as it seems because, privately, not all Labour MPs were hostile to the idea of ITV. Indeed David Hardman, a former parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Education in the 1945 government, associated himself with the Popular Television Association, the lobby group *in favour of* ITV. Richard Crossman, the editor of *New Fabian Essays* and a leading Bevanite, declared that, although he was against the government's plans to set up a 'mixed' broadcasting system, 'I do not feel as passionately as most of the Party against the principle of sponsoring'. He further proposed that the government retain the BBC's monopoly but also allow two hours of sponsored programmes every evening (Crossman, 1981: 109). More importantly, Hugh Gaitskell, the shadow chancellor and future leader of the Labour Party, was never convinced by the opposition to commercial television. His biographer, drawing on unpublished comments from Gaitskell's diary, confirms that:

As a politician he knew that independent television was popular, and he would never join the Establishment's cultural crusade against it. As early as 1953 he told Crossman, who had asked if the next Labour government would reverse the newly proposed policy: 'No, and anyway, it's a pity we didn't encourage the BBC to lease out time to commercial companies' (Williams, 1979: 390).

Gaitskell does not figure in any of the public debates or statements concerning television, but his views about the need for Labour to relate to the changing expectations of the 1950s were clear. In a post-1955 election analysis in *Socialist Commentary* which prefigured many of the debates of the rest of the decade, he emphasised the importance of connecting the party to the desire for material advancement:

No doubt it has been stimulated by the end of post-war austerity, TV, new gadgets like refrigerators and washing machines, the glossy

magazines with their special appeal to women, and even the flood of new cars on the home markets. Call it if you like a growing Americanization of outlook. I believe it's there and it's no good moaning about it... We must talk in terms that appeal to the ordinary citizen' (Gaitskell, 1955: 205).

Labour's opposition to commercial television, therefore, was far from united and consistent. The party demonstrated a tactical flexibility in its attitudes towards the Television Bill that demonstrated a commitment more to electoral success than the defence of firm principles. Pressed in 1952 by the Tories on whether Labour would repeal the legislation, the former PMG Ness Edwards asserted that 'when we are returned to power our position will be completely reserved. This Government do not determine what the next Government are going to do' (HoC Debates: 11 June 1952, col. 322). After Attlee's rather rash promise in 1953 to scrap commercial television, Morrison argued the following year in Parliament that Labour's position was highly contingent on the specific circumstances of the time.

I must make it clear that the whole of this scheme is highly objectionable, and there is already substantial evidence that it may prove to be unworkable. In that case we shall certainly not scrap the safeguards, but must reserve the right to modify or, indeed, abandon the entire scheme, and this may well include the complete elimination of the proposals for advertising (HoC Debates, 22 June 1954: col. 1473).

The position was finally thrashed out in January 1955 when a short-lived 'Joint Committee on the Future of TV' was convened to sort out a party policy on television for the impending general election. The group included representatives from all sides of the party, from Tom Driberg on the Bevanite left to the Gaitskellite Patrick Gordon Walker. The minutes indicate a stormy meeting in which Morrison suggested 'an unconditional declaration' against advertising while another member proposed that the new Independent Television Authority be 'kept in existence and allowed to prepare its own programmes' with all advertising restricted to one hour each day (Labour Party 1955). It was agreed that 'although expensive, two programmes [channels] were needed' and that the BBC was best placed to deliver both, although there was no consensus on whether to increase the license fee.

Finally, a resolution was agreed that ‘the Labour Party should declare itself opposed to advertising on TV, and in favour of the public service principle’ (ibid.). This important statement laid the basis for the party’s eventual manifesto declaration that ‘[t]elevision is a growing influence for good or ill. Labour will establish an alternative public television service, free from advertising’ (quoted in Craig, 1975: 206). Commitments to repeal the legislation, to abolish the Independent Television Authority or to revoke the licenses of commercial television companies were all, however, noticeably absent.

Opposition to the Conservatives’ plans for commercial television was not completely in vain. The NTC’s high-profile campaign certainly helped to block the worst excesses of sponsored television and its ‘influence was important in the eventual creation of a public authority to own the transmitting facilities and licence the programme companies’ (Wilson, 1961: 179). It is also likely that, although no Labour amendments were accepted by the government, its constant pressure was effective in securing the inclusion of various restrictions on commercial activities in the final legislation (see ibid.: 201-205). However, it is far from proven that it was vigorous parliamentary opposition which limited the total victory of free marketeers inside the Tory Party. There was a cross-party consensus that, given the importance of broadcasting, there would have to be some form of regulation. According to Bernard Sendall, the historian of commercial television,

...since, as all parties to the debates seemed to accept, television broadcasting was a uniquely powerful means of influencing minds, then any person or persons granted the privilege of using that power should, in the public interest, be made subject to proper restraints. Thus in the debates that followed, Government spokesmen repeatedly asserted a willingness – provided the two prerequisites of competition and advertising finance, stayed untouched – to consider, possibly to adopt, any reasonable measures to dissipate whatever grounds or justification there might be for the fears of the Bill’s opponents’ (Sendall, 1982: 34).

In the end, Labour’s resistance to the introduction of commercial television was undermined by a combination of factors. Television policy was not a central concern for the leadership and, given the likely popularity of commercial television amongst

Labour supporters (see Wilson, 1961: 179), it was not prepared to antagonise its electorate. Labour leaders were firm defenders of the broadcasting status quo and, as Wilson argued, ‘never fully comprehended the stakes involved in maintaining public service broadcasting’ (ibid.: 206) seen by many as patronising and distant. Labour’s opposition was further compromised by the inclusion in or association with the party of those who were set to gain financially from commercial television. Having accepted the principle of a mixed economy, sections of the leadership reserved their criticism not for the pursuit of profit but for the spreading of ‘foreign’ values and the domination of US capital; others welcomed ‘Americanisation’ and urged the party to embrace the consumer revolution.

The left, also wedded to the idea of a mixed economy, intervened only occasionally in the debates as its real interest lay elsewhere in foreign and defence issues. Apart from the *Tribune* article already discussed, the closest the Bevanites came to tackling popular culture was Ian Mikardo’s pamphlet on the Royal Commission on Betting and Gaming, *It’s a Mug’s Game* (Mikardo, 1988: 122). The ground was left clear, therefore, for the growing revisionist wing of the Labour Party to articulate an approach to culture in general, and television in particular, that sought to connect with rising expectations and living standards in the 1950s. Attlee’s defeat in the general election of May 1955, the launch of commercial television in September of that year and the election of Hugh Gaitskell as leader of the Labour Party in December 1955 provided the conditions that allowed this approach to evolve.

Revisionism and ‘The Age of Participation’

In March 1955, T. R. Fyvel wrote an article for the revisionist journal *Socialist Commentary* which analysed the changing nature of British society and claimed that Britain had entered ‘The Age of Participation’. In a buoyant economy,

there is to-day an ever growing middle section of the population which can – and does – participate in the material good life of to-day which is based on the possession of cars, motor-cycles, radio and television sets, on super-cinemas, chain stores and organised holidays, on the Pools, the dogs, the mass circulation magazine, and the rest (Fyvel, 1955: 70).

He went on to argue that the Labour Party needed to recognise that this was a more dynamic and efficient form of capitalism where simply pledging to defend living standards would not be enough to appeal to the average voter. Labour's task was not to transform capitalism but to 'humanise' it, to increase access to the wonderful opportunities of the new classless, consumer society. The key to unlocking electoral success was to champion equality of opportunity and to distance the party from 'vague' economic questions such as the defence of living standards.

This analysis was amplified in Anthony Crosland's 'bible' of revisionism, *The Future of Socialism*, published in 1956. Crosland developed the arguments from his contribution to *New Fabian Essays* into a fully-fledged statement that 'capitalism' was no longer an adequate way of describing British society in the 1950s and that the Labour Party would have to redefine its socialism to meet this change. It was an approach that provided an important intellectual justification for the Labour leadership's determination to reposition the party away from the trade unions and towards cross-class organisation.

Crosland argued that British industry had become more specialised and complex in the previous decade and that the domination by entrepreneurial owners was being challenged by the rise of salaried managers. Companies were more likely to reinvest profits and not to turn to 'outside' capital to finance expansion. Indeed profits were no longer the sole point of business as latter-day industrialists also sought the respect of their peers, intellectual prestige and a civic reputation, none of which could be guaranteed by capital alone. This did not mean, according to Crosland, that 'the profit-motive has disappeared' but that it was universal:

It is a mistake to think that profit, in the sense of a surplus over cost, has any special or unique connection with capitalism. On the contrary, it must be the rationale of business activity in any society, whether capitalist or socialist, which is growing and dynamic' (Crosland, 1980: 16).

With the decline of 'traditional capitalist ruthlessness' in pursuit of profit, Crosland believed that private industry, to use Fyvel's term, 'is at last becoming humanised' (ibid.: 18). All the features of capitalism which Marx had identified in the previous

century had been superseded: laissez-faire had given way to state intervention, managerialism had replaced entrepreneurialism, 'the distribution of personal income has become significantly more equal' (ibid.: 31), private property had lost its ideological allure and, finally, class struggle was no longer in evidence. Given 'The Growing Irrelevance of the Ownership of the Means of Production' (ibid.: 35), as one chapter was headed, it was no surprise to learn that in answer to the question, 'Is this still Capitalism', Crosland responded with a firm 'No' (ibid.: 42).

While the theorising of the decline of entrepreneurialism and aggressive profiteering is especially curious when applied to the cash-rich experience of commercial television in the subsequent years, Crosland's account of the withering away of capitalism had an immediate impact. He helped to write the party's *Industry and Society* document, passed at the 1957 annual conference, which signalled a further attack on Labour's commitment to public ownership. As Keith Laybourn argues, *Industry and Society* was a key component of Gaitskell's belief that 'the Labour Party needed to focus upon the needs of a working class which was being imbued with middle-class values' (Laybourn, 1988: 155). Crosland therefore attempted to sketch out a strategy through which Labour could relate to this historic shift and realign itself as the party of social equality and not social ownership.

There are two aspects of this strategy which are particularly relevant to the political status of television and culture in the late 1950s. Firstly, Crosland argued that it was essential to raise the level of average income because

the higher the level of average income, the more equal is the visible pattern of consumption, and the stronger the *subjective* feeling of equal living standards...the richer a country grows, the more equal the distribution of these particular forms of consumption becomes, almost regardless of the distribution of total income (Crosland, 1980: 208 – my italics).

Crosland's evidence of this was the polarisation of wealth in developing countries in contrast to the more egalitarian situation in the USA with a much higher average income. In any case, given the context of a rapidly expanding British economy, this was a less than controversial plan. Indeed, Crosland argued that inequality was

bound to fall in the 'modern mass-production economy' (ibid.: 211) because as long as there is a limit to the consumption of the rich, the poor will be able to close the gap. What is more revealing is the emphasis on the *perception* of equal living standards and the call for increased consumerism, as opposed to any material redistribution of wealth. However, this plan required the correct sort of consumption if there was to be an 'atmosphere of greater equality' (ibid.: 215). The problem in Britain, according to Crosland, was that increased consumption usually centred on 'low-status' goods peculiar to working-class interests, like magazines, cinema tickets, tabloid newspapers, alcohol and tobacco. What was needed, therefore, was for ordinary people to shift their expenditure onto 'high-status' goods like television sets and car ownership. 'There are clear political implications here for the Labour Party, which would be ill-advised to continue making a largely proletarian class appeal when a majority of the population is gradually attaining a middle-class standard of life, and distinct symptoms even of a middle-class psychology' (ibid.: 216).

The second task for Labour in the pursuit of social equality, according to Crosland, was to campaign over moral and cultural issues like sexuality, censorship and divorce in order to 'diminish existing restrictions on personal freedom' (ibid.: 354). This also required a break from Labour's previous economic and puritanical attitudes and to 'turn our attention increasingly to other, and in the long run more important spheres...' (ibid.: 353). In a celebrated passage, Crosland explained that this meant that:

We need not only higher exports and old-age pensions, but more open-air cafes, brighter and gayer streets at night, later closing-hours for public houses, more local repertory theatres, better and more hospitable hoteliers and restaurateurs, brighter and cleaner eating houses, more riverside cafes...and so on *ad infinitum*' (ibid.: 355).

While it is easy to criticise Crosland's idealism and necessary to point out that the adoption of such ideas did nothing to rescue Labour in the 1959 General Election, it was at least an attempt to come to terms with changing circumstances. The Bevanite left, on the other hand, offered little organisational or intellectual challenge to revisionist ideas in the period between 1955 and 1959. Bevan's incorporation into

the leadership and a desire for unity in the party marginalised critics of revisionism. Pimlott talks of the ‘persistent philistinism’ (Pimlott, 1980: 185) that has always prevented the Labour left from contributing to future policy while Cliff and Gluckstein attribute its weakness to an ideological failure.

While the revisionists wandered around the new post-capitalist Wonderland, the Bevanites, like the doormouse at the Mad Hatter’s tea party, kept their eyes tight shut. They tried simply to deny the boom would last, saying that mass unemployment was only just around the corner. But facts are stubborn things (Cliff and Gluckstein, 1988: 262).

The facts were that, despite a few hiccups, the boom was continuing and the Tories once again benefited from rising living standards in the 1959 ‘You’ve Never Had It So Good’ election. The reaction to defeat was swift as the right argued that Labour was being severely compromised by its continuing association with working-class interests while the left argued the party had shifted too far away from nationalisation and socialism. According to Ralph Miliband, both were wrong: ‘By 1959, Labour’s image was much too blurred to give either defeat or victory so precise a political or ideological meaning’ (Miliband, 1961: 344). Nevertheless, the revisionists felt they were vindicated by the publication in 1960 of *Must Labour Lose?* (Abrams and Rose, 1960), a short book which set out to examine Labour’s role in the age of ‘embourgeoisement’. According to *Socialist Commentary*’s Rita Hinden, Labour was destined to keep losing as long as it was perceived as being based on a class that was shrinking, and continued to identify with unpopular notions of solidarity and nationalisation (in *ibid.*: 119). In reality, the survey on which the book was based found ‘no homogeneous blanket attitude towards public ownership’ (*ibid.*: 31) and provided no evidence that material advancement corresponded to voting Conservative. The sample of 724 people revealed that ‘at least half the working class acquired durable consumer goods on at least as lavish a scale as their neighbours – but continued to vote Labour’ (*ibid.*: 42).

The rash of ‘affluent worker’ studies in the early 1960s that spoke of increased political apathy and a weak, functional attachment to Labour proved not that the working class had disappeared as a social force but that Labour had failed to link

material expectations to a programme of structural reform. As one commentator wrote:

Developments since 1950 have had the effect, not of decomposing the class or making it selfish or into 'a poor copy of its betters, but of allowing working people greater access to the opportunities and goods produced by an expanding economy (Cronin, 1984: 11).

The result was a less instinctive loyalty to the Labour Party but hardly a sign of middle-class consciousness.

The most trenchant criticism of the revisionists was provided by a group with only indirect links to the Labour Party. The New Left grew out of the dissatisfaction with both Stalinism and Bevanism and was composed of former members of the Communist Party, individuals from the Labour left, peace campaigners and radical students. It sought to keep alive a genuinely radical anti-capitalist tradition and to build a democratic culture in opposition to the intellectual stagnation of the Bevanites and Stalinists. Focusing on the anti-nuclear struggle of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the New Left made its impact with a 100,000 strong demonstration in Easter 1960 and the adoption of a unilateralist position at that year's Labour Party conference (albeit one that was reversed the following year).

In the pages of the new journals, *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*, activists and commentators stressed the importance of collective struggle and democratic organisation to change both economic and cultural circumstances. E. P. Thompson's account of the New Left railed against the intellectual conformity of the Labour Party and argued that 'the Fabian prescription of a competitive Equality of Opportunity is giving way, among socialists, before the re-discovery of William Morris' vision of a Society of Equals' (Thompson, 1959: 10). For Thompson, cultural questions were not secondary to what the Bevanite left called 'bread-and-butter' issues but were intrinsic to debates on political power. While echoing the concerns of the revisionists to engage with questions of consumption, the New Left had different solutions: 'it become ever more clear that the fight to control and break-up the mass media, and to preserve and extend the minority media, is as central in political significance as, for example, the fight against the Taxes on

Knowledge in the 1830s' (ibid.: 11). Aware that the revisionists were attempting to monopolise debates on the consumer society, the New Left sought to win back for the left the idea of a democratic culture.

In doing so, the New Left was influenced by two critics of the effects of the commercialisation of culture on working-class life. Richard Hoggart argued in *The Uses of Literacy*, first published in 1957, that the new cultural forms of popular music, sensationalist magazines and American television were usurping traditional working-class values. 'Everything has gone vicarious: this is puff-pastry literature, with nothing inside the pastry, the ceaseless exploitation of a hollow brightness' (Hoggart, 1960: 191). Hoggart and then Raymond Williams in *The Long Revolution* (1961) counterposed the vision of an organic common culture which celebrated working-class life and institutions to the inauthentic commercial mass culture of contemporary Britain. Hoggart and Williams, according to Dennis Dworkin (1997: 98), 'were two of the most important influences on New Left efforts at reframing socialist priorities, and they were instrumental in establishing the parameters of the debate on working-class culture.' Their ideas were to be particularly important for socialists involved in the debates around television in the early 1960s.

Although the New Left engaged in some of the sharpest, public critiques of revisionism and certainly helped to galvanise the peace movement, its impact on Labour policy is far from clear-cut. According to Foote (1997: 288), the New Left always had an 'ambiguous' attitude towards Labour, both attacking it for accommodation to capitalism and then looking to parliamentary change and seeking the support of the party. Despite the New Left's many critiques of revisionism and the lack of internal democracy,

it stopped short of abandoning the Labour Party. It never doubted that Labour was the party of British working people or that it was indispensable to a socialist transformation. In short, New Left activists saw themselves as being both inside and outside the Labour Party, a position that evoked scepticism from both the radical left and committed Labour veterans (Dworkin, 1997:61/2).

In the end, it was neither the traditional Labour left nor the New ‘cultural’ Left which weakened the grip of revisionism but a very old-fashioned phenomenon: the return of economic crisis. The slowing down of economic growth meant that ‘[r]evisionism took a new form. Hope of bright cafes, fashions and murals evaporated, along with major social reform and redistribution of wealth and income’ (Cliff and Gluckstein, 1988: 279). Nevertheless, Croslandite revisionism provided the main backdrop for Labour’s television policy from 1955 until the election of Harold Wilson and a new Labour government in 1964.

The Third Channel, ITV Profits and the Pilkington Report

Once the 1955 election had passed and commercial television had started, Labour showed little inclination to discuss television policy. Preoccupied with the Suez crisis and the return of Nye Bevan to the fold, it was once again the question of political broadcasting which took centre-stage. Live broadcasts about the Suez situation by both Prime Minister Eden and an Opposition reply by Gaitskell in November 1956 preceded the trial suspension of the Fourteen-Day Rule the following month.

However, in November 1957, stimulated by rumours that the government was soon to decide on the status of a third channel, the Labour Party Public Information Group met to consider the party’s attitude towards television. Tony Benn had, in that same month, advocated the creation of a competitive broadcasting system consisting of two public radio corporations and two public television corporations (including the ITA), all allowed to carry advertising (see ABS, 1957: 261). Benn opened the discussion at the meeting and noted that ‘[t]he reception was fairly frosty. Mayhew who followed, wants to nationalise the commercial programme companies. He is a little better than Scholefield Allen [Labour MP for Crewe], who does not even have a television set’ (Benn, 1994a: 253).

Seven months later in July 1958, convinced that the Tories were about to decide on the future of the ‘Third Programme’, Labour’s Home Policy Committee (HPC) set up a sub-committee on television and radio to advise on broadcasting policy. The sub-committee, which included Tom Driberg, Patrick Gordon Walker, George Brown

and Richard Crossman, agreed that if an election statement was required on the subject it should state that: 'The Labour Party is in favour of maintaining competition in the field of television' (Labour Party, 1958a). The committee further decided to prepare papers on the short-term and long-term problems of broadcasting. Four months later the committee reconvened with a paper that addressed two issues concerning television: the technical arguments for moving to 625 lines of transmission and the nature of the Third Programme.

Curiously, after years of uncritically defending the BBC, 'the case today for giving the Third Programme to the B.B.C. is far less plain' (Labour Party, 1958b: 5). The paper sketched out three objections to the BBC running a new network. Firstly, ITV was more popular and 'if popularity is the test – and it cannot be dismissed as of no consequence – the BBC's claim is weak' (ibid.). Secondly, competition had been good for television in general and the BBC in particular: 'the I.T.A. has in three years blown away much of the stuffiness, timidity and paternalism that characterised British broadcasting' (ibid.: 5/6). Finally, the BBC was short of money and would require an increase in the licence fee if it was to operate a new channel.

With the exception of eternal worries about a rise in the licence fee, these were very new arguments for the Labour leadership. It had never before *publicly* accused the BBC of either being stuffy, timid or paternalistic and it had certainly not claimed that popularity was the key test of public service in the debates in the early fifties. The document went on to argue that 'the most powerful claimant to the Third Programme is the I.T.A.' (ibid.: 6) because its programmes were more popular, it would introduce more competition into broadcasting and, crucially, it had no financial problems. Although there were some concerns with programme quality and origin and media concentration, 'the reality [of commercial television] has been far less awful than was anticipated. I.T.A. has played its cards with skill' (ibid.: 8). The key problem for sanctioning a second commercial network was that 'we have not yet had any experience of *competitive commercial television*' (ibid.: 9 – emphasis in original) and that, if it was allowed, 'the Queensbury Rules of the past three years may quickly be abandoned' (ibid.).

Perhaps such a positive assessment of the first years of commercial television was to be expected given the political realignment taking place in the Labour Party and the undoubted popularity of the service. But the party was also reluctant to identify itself too closely with a system which, after all, was characterised by Roy Thomson's comment in 1957 that controlling an ITV franchise was 'just like having a licence to print your own money' (quoted in Sendall, 1982: 150). Instead the sub-committee proposed a new independent, competitive public service organisation: 'The Third Programme should aim to entertain and inform a wide public. Like the B.B.C. its output would include programmes of minority appeal, but it would not generally, let alone exclusively, cater for high-brow or specialist groups' (Labour Party, 1959b: 3). The network would differ from commercial television 'in that the new corporation would have the obligation to plan its own programmes' and would differ from the BBC 'in that its revenues would come in part from advertising' and in part from licence revenue (Labour Party, 1958b: 10). It appeared that the committee was aiming to please a range of different constituencies as viewers would have more choice, advertisers would have more outlets, broadcasters would have an expanding and competitive system and government would not have to risk unpopularity by increasing the licence fee. The paper promised that, if the principle was accepted, a more complete financial account of the new channel would be prepared.

A new independent television corporation was both a convenient compromise for Labour and yet also an intriguing proposition which prefigured the discussions some fifteen years later concerning an Open Broadcasting Authority running a fourth television channel. The film and ITV technicians' union, the ACTT, broadly supported the sub-committee's plan for a more diverse channel and advocated a 'Television Foundation', the same phrase used by Anthony Smith thirteen years later in his call for a National Television Foundation. This was to be based on a 'new, independent, lively and modern approach which will command the respect of the viewers both for its integrity and its awareness of contemporary thought and issues' (ACTT, 1959: 57). In fact there was a fairly broad consensus that, in order to increase programme diversity, neither the ITA nor the BBC should be given a new channel. Mayhew (1959), Greenwood (1959), *Tribune* (1962) and Crosland (1962a) all supported the idea while Richard Hoggart (1958: 36), although certain that commercial television should not get another channel, was not sure if the BBC could

rise to the challenge. In a substantial poll before the 1959 General Election, the ACTT polled candidates about whether they supported the idea of a new public corporation to run the third channel. Of Labour candidates who were elected, 79% were in favour with only 2% against; of those who were not elected, 94% were in favour with none against (Elvin, 1959: 180). The demand for a new channel independent of both the BBC and ITV was evidently popular inside the Labour Party.

The television sub-committee met again in February 1959 to consider a paper outlining the financial plans for the Third Programme. The original proposal had suggested that the new corporation would be funded both by licence and advertising revenue. Accordingly, the paper argued that the new channel could be launched with the money returned to the Treasury from the excise on television licences as well as the Treasury deduction of 12.5% from the licence fee itself. This would total around £16m in 1961 (compared to some £31m for the BBC as a whole) of which some £2m could be given to the BBC in order to finance its extension of broadcasting hours, leaving £14m for the new channel. This would be supplemented by revenue from commercial television and the key question for the Committee was ‘how to obtain money from the programme companies’ (Labour Party, 1959a: 3).

Two methods were considered: either a special tax on the ITV companies’ profits or an increase in the rents charged by the ITA. The former suggestion ‘appears to be justified because the programme companies are, to a large extent, monopolies, and are therefore making monopoly profits’ (ibid.). However the paper then presented four arguments against this proposal. Firstly, ‘[a]s all taxes are unpopular, the programme companies might well be able to wage a powerful campaign against it’ (ibid.). Next, it might be seen as unfair to introduce this kind of windfall levy against only one type of monopoly profit. Thirdly, ‘it would be difficult to explain the nature of monopoly profits to the electorate... What, the television companies might ask, is freer than air?’ (ibid.) Finally, and perhaps most coherently, the Inland Revenue ‘would find it difficult to distinguish television profits from those the programme companies make elsewhere’ (ibid.).

The committee’s reluctance to impose a tax of ITV profits was justified by the electorate’s apparent inability to understand why the ITV companies were starting to

make vast amounts of money. The committee's decision, however, also revealed the party leadership's lack of commitment to intervene in private business matters and a desire not attack private profits *per se*. The document provides no detail as to why the population would be so baffled by the need to introduce a special tax on entrepreneurs with very lucrative monopolies on advertising, nor why legislation could not be introduced to force the ITV companies to be more transparent in their accounting practices. Perhaps it was the case that as Labour leaders were busy theorising the decline of entrepreneurial capitalism and the emergence of a new consensual relationship between the state and private business, this was a problem that simply could not be allowed to exist.

The paper rejected the imposition of a special tax and opted for the second suggestion: an increase in the rents charged by the ITA that would amount to about £5m a year. The increase, however, would not be able to take place until 1964 when the contracts were due to be renewed. The paper asserted that the total sum available from the Treasury and commercial television, some £20m, would be more than enough to finance the Third Programme. Having treated the ITV companies so gently throughout, the paper then concluded with some extremely judicious language: '[t]he section which discusses the method by which money can be obtained from the programme companies *assumes that it is decided to retain them* when the I.T.A.'s charter comes up for renewal' (ibid.: 4 – emphasis added). At the same time as expressing reservations about placing a special tax on monopoly profits for fear that its supporters would not understand why, Labour also reserved the right to revoke ITV licences at the first available opportunity. Of course it is not clear whether the phrase 'to retain them' applies to specific programme companies or the system in general, but it is noteworthy that Labour, despite its recent conversion to commercial television, was at least formally keeping its options open.

The committee accepted the paper and, in the knowledge that an election was due that year, prepared two statements. One was a detailed outline of Labour's proposals for the Third Programme in response to any government policy on the matter; the second was a more general account of party policy on television for use in the 1959 election campaign. This confirmed that the 'Labour Party is in favour of maintaining competition in the field of television', promised to enforce the safeguards on ITV

more stringently, looked forward to a 'further expansion of television services' and publicly stated that the 'Labour Party believes that the Third Programme should go neither to I.T.A. nor to the B.B.C. but to a new, independent and non-commercial organisation' (Labour Party, 1959b: 3). These pledges found their way into Labour's 1959 election manifesto which repeated the party's promise not to abolish commercial television and recognised the strong case for giving the third television channel to a new public corporation (see Craig, 1975: 226).

In March 1959, one month after Labour's decision not to impose a special tax on the programme companies, the question of ITV's profits became a public scandal. 'Why should you pay to make these men rich?' screamed the *Sunday Express*, pointing out that 'never before in British history, not even in the railway mania of last century, have profits been made so fast as they have from the commercial TV boom (Harris, 1959). Even a Conservative-supporting newspaper like the *Express* (albeit one with no financial stakes in ITV) suggested forcing the ITV companies to contribute £2 towards every television licence, a 'tax' of £16m in 1959. Robert Fraser, the ITA's director general was hauled before the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons and forced to explain how £6 out of every £10 of income was kept as profit by the programme companies. By 1960, Fraser was arguing that 'public opinion would come to regard such profit levels as insupportable' and suggested some form of 'discriminatory taxation of television programme companies' (quoted in Sendall, 1982: 298). Given the widespread criticism of ITV avarice, the £5m increase on ITV rents that the Labour sub-committee had recommended to take place in 1964 pales into insignificance with the £21.5m that the companies actually paid as a result of Tory-inspired legislation. Labour's commitment to the broadcasting status quo and its desire not to antagonise ITV viewers undermined any attempts to tackle the question of ITV profits.

Discussions about the Third Programme and ITV finances became more urgent when the Conservative government set up the Pilkington Committee in July 1960 to report on the future of broadcasting. Meeting in November 1960, Labour's Home Policy Committee claimed that with an inquiry 'now in being, it seems likely that the struggle for the third television service and for commercial sound radio will warm up' (Labour Party, 1960). The party was simultaneously engaged in producing its

policy statement for 1961 and a 3000-word draft had emerged in November that appeared to share the New Left's criticisms of the commercialisation of the mass media. One passage, leaked to the *New Left Review* (1961b: 9) argued that where 'money is king there is little room for any other values...Commercial television is primarily an organ for selling, and public service broadcasting is starved of resources.' The second draft, produced in March 1961, included the sub-committee's proposal for an independent third channel and a further attack on commercial forces in the media. 'If we want a wide choice of programmes and papers, if we want entertainment and information for their own sake rather than as a by-product of commercial advertising, then the community must be ready to act to get them' (ibid.: 10).

When the draft was discussed at a full meeting of the HPC in May, its chairman, Harold Wilson initiated a discussion which concluded that the draft was too long, that 'it ought to be written more as propaganda and less like an election manifesto' and that '[c]ertain of the priorities were wrong' (Labour Party, 1961a: para. 168). The committee agreed to focus on only four areas – the economy, education, social services and land – and to publish the statement as *Signposts for the Sixties* (Labour Party, 1961b) for that year's party conference. The result, according to the *New Left Review*, 'was inevitable. In the final version...nothing at all is left of the cultural and libertarian ideas so reminiscent of dozens of New Left articles and discussions' (*New Left Review*, 1961b: 10). All references to the need to challenge media monopolies, to the dangers of advertising and to proposals for a new independent television channel were dropped as the party leadership de-prioritised media issues that had been increasingly highlighted by the radical left. In the end, despite the activities of the sub-committee on television and its proposals for a third channel, the party failed to make a formal submission to the Pilkington Committee.¹⁴

The Pilkington Report was published in June 1962 and, according to Jean Seaton,

¹⁴ Four Labour MPs (Ness Edwards, Christopher Mayhew, Woodrow Wyatt and Denis Howell) made brief individual submissions to the committee, although only Mayhew endorsed the idea of a new public service corporation for the third channel (see Pilkington, 1962b: 1138).

was the product of two contemporary concerns: that the working class was being absorbed into the middle class, and that working-class culture was decaying because of the industrialization of leisure...The committee had been asked to review the development of television. In fact they did much more, producing a report which judged the nation's culture (in Curran and Seaton, 1997: 175).

Influenced by the presence of Richard Hoggart, the Pilkington Committee reserved its venom for the effects of advertising and the obsession with popular entertainment which it felt was demeaning British cultural life. Using language similar to that in Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, the report argued that '[p]rogrammes which exemplified emotional tawdriness and mental timidity helped to cheapen both emotional and intellectual values. Plays or serials might not deal with real human problems, but present a candy-floss world' (Pilkington, 1962a: para. 101). The consumer culture represented by commercial television may have been popular but it failed to embody the breadth and depth of public life distinctive of 'good' broadcasting. Additionally, the advertisements on ITV were creating 'false needs' at the same time as the majority of its programmes were failing to meet the 'real' cultural and educational needs of viewers. The committee, therefore, recommended root-and-branch reform of commercial television, proposing that the ITA plan programming and sell advertising, leaving the ITV companies the job of simply making the programmes. The committee was much more sympathetic to the BBC and, although critical of the creeping triviality of its output, backed the corporation's bid to manage the Third Programme (ibid.: 287-298).

Labour's reaction to the Pilkington Report demonstrated all the tensions and differences that underlay the party's attitude to television. Labour was, frankly, split over the issue, as observed by the BBC's political correspondent Hardiman Scott: 'the Party was about equally divided between those who broadly accepted the whole of Pilkington and those who did not' (quoted in Briggs, 1995: 302). On the left, *Tribune* gushed that the 'strength of the Report lies in its brilliant diagnosis of the diseases of television and in the picture it paints of the medium in perfect health' (Craigie, 1962) but disagreed with two of the recommendations. Giving the ITA more power and the BBC another channel would 'achieve the very opposite of what is intended' (ibid.) of extending the range of voices, subjects and debates on

television. Instead, *Tribune* suggested granting individual ITV companies ‘fixed incomes but autonomy in matters of taste’ (ibid.) and supported the case for a new independent public corporation for the Third Programme.

The Labour Party and TUC conferences both passed motions welcoming the Pilkington Report. The TUC resolution urged the government to ‘adopt its recommendations which are designed to ensure that these most potent social, moral and cultural influences are used to bring enrichment and a high quality service to ordinary people rather than to further commercial interests’ (TUC, 1962: 438). The Labour resolution supported Pilkington’s proposals for the restructuring of commercial television and for the third channel to be awarded to the BBC (Labour Party, 1962: 147), rather than endorsing the party sub-committee’s argument that a new public corporation was needed. Fred Mulley, speaking for the NEC, argued that the report was a ‘slap in the face to the Tory Government, to the kind of society they are endeavouring to build up, one in which profit is preferred to people’ (ibid.: 150). However when he then insisted that ‘we are not against ‘Coronation Street’ or any of that kind of programme. We are not, in principle, against the advertisements used on the present Independent Television Service’, he was greeted with cries of ‘shame’ from conference delegates (ibid.).

The divisions had already come out in parliament. Patrick Gordon Walker called the Pilkington Report ‘a document of great social and political importance’ and then defended ITV for having produced some genuinely good popular entertainment’, concluding that ‘I.T.V. is here now. For good or ill, it is part of our national life’ (HoC Debates, 31 July 1962: cols. 435-7). Woodrow Wyatt called for curbs in ITV profits but argued against the restructuring of commercial television ‘because, by and large, it has given the people much of what they want’ (ibid.: col. 504). W. R. Williams, summing up the debate for the opposition, paid tribute to the work of the committee but concluded that cross-party consensus was more necessary than any particular vision of broadcasting.

...we have now left behind the old battle on the question of commercial television v. the B.B.C or some other form of corporation, that this House may decide that, in the national interest and in order to get the maximum benefit for our people out of this powerful medium, we should be able to

bridge some – I do not say all - of the differences between us so that we can concentrate on ends which seem to be common to both sides of the House (ibid.: cols. 526/7).

Behind the scenes, such a gentlemanly approach was not always in evidence. Crossman, an influential member of the shadow Cabinet, held the private view that Pilkington's desire to restructure ITV 'can be only of academic interest; and the Labour Party would be very silly to commit itself to endorsing it' (quoted in Robinson, 1962). As one letter from a Labour supporter in *Socialist Commentary* put it: 'My fear is that the Labour Party may become so closely identified with the Report that people come to feel that the Party, too is trying to 'get at' them through TV reform. And that could hurt us a lot at the next election' (Cooney, 1962). The key critic of the Pilkington Report was the party leader Hugh Gaitskell who refused to be associated with press allegations that Pilkington - and by implication Labour - would scrap popular programmes. Richard Hoggart recalls that:

Hugh Gaitskell said immediately after the Report appeared that we were unduly anti-Commercial TV. It was after all the favoured channel of 'the people'. I responded on TV that this was a mistaken and patronising view. A day or two later Crossman asked me to lunch. At least, *he* wanted to argue about the Report. He produced an ineffable snob phrase about the 'common man'. As he came in to our lunch at his house in Smith Square or nearby he was fresh from a Shadow Cabinet. He said: 'Gaitskell asked me to kick your arse' (Hoggart, 1998).

Hoggart also recalls that he was 'not surprised but sorry' that the Labour leadership was reluctant to endorse the report. 'Funny how most of them – Gaitskell, Crossman, Crosland – were ex-public school and Oxbridge types. Nervous patronage pretending to be honest Joe'ery' (ibid.).

So when the Conservatives rejected Pilkington's proposals to restructure ITV and instead introduced a levy on advertising revenue, the Labour Party showed no inclination to depart from a bipartisan approach. During the passage of the 1963 Television Act, some Labour speakers appeared to be *more* concerned about the financial health of the programme companies than their Tory counterparts. Although fully behind the Conservative PMG Reginald Bevins' desire to stop excessive

profits, Ness Edwards, the former Labour PMG, expressed concern that the proposed levy on advertising revenue would force the ITV companies to cut back on programme spending. 'We want good commercial television but, if we are to have it, the means of providing it must be there. I do not object to successful commercial television,' he argued, 'but I do object to bankrupt commercial television' (HoC Debates, 25 February 1963: col. 953).

Ness Edwards' focus on the financial viability of the commercial television system was mirrored, in particular, by the behaviour of the ACTT. The Labour-affiliated television union agreed with Pilkington's analysis of the problems of commercial television but was less keen on the committee's recommendation to restructure the network. It was concerned that the report's proposals would undermine investment in commercial television and therefore threaten the jobs of its members (see ACTT, 1962). ACTT general secretary, George Elvin, tried unsuccessfully at both Labour and TUC conferences to amend the motions on Pilkington so that they pressed, not for the implementation of the report's recommendations, but simply for the recognition of the ACTT inside the BBC (see TUC, 1962: 441-443 and Labour Party, 1962: 148-149). This was then followed by a campaign by all the television unions to oppose the 1963 bill on the basis that the proposed levy on advertising would hurt ITV revenue and risk workers' jobs. The unions may well have been right to stress that a tax on ITV profits would be more effective and less likely to lead to budget cuts than a levy on advertising. However, the sectional nature of their campaign made it less appealing to those Labour MPs who, in the end, lined up behind the Conservative PMG to introduce the levy against the wishes of a few backbench Tories and television trade unionists (see Sendall, 1983: 190-201).

Labour also supported the government's decision, following the Pilkington Committee's recommendation, to authorise the BBC to run the third channel. Labour's public position, as outlined in its 1959 election manifesto, was still in favour of a new independent public corporation, a 'third way' in broadcasting. In February 1962, the *Times* reported that Labour leaders had 'come down emphatically in favour of any third television service being provided by the B.B.C. or a new public authority' (*Times*, 1962). By the time of the parliamentary debate on the Pilkington Report, W. R. Williams in his summing up for Labour asserted that 'I am 100 per

cent in favour of the B.B.C. getting a third channel. I do not equivocate about this' (HoC Debates, 31 July 1962: col. 531).

While there were sound economic and political reasons for the BBC to run a 'complementary' channel, Labour never provided an explanation of why it dropped its plan for a new corporation. Perhaps it was because the proposal had acquired a radical tinge as some of the evidence to the Pilkington Committee made clear. For example, the New Left, in its submission to the committee, embraced the idea of a new organisation which would cater for 'other voices, other faces, other interests, other interpretations of "entertainment", other approaches to "seriousness", other aspects of our community life' (*New Left Review*, 1961a: 47). It proposed a publicly owned and democratically structured network that would take advantage of new sources of talent in the universities, local councils, drama groups and community bodies which were then 'too small or too unorthodox to catch the official eye of the BBC, too uncommercial to purchase time on ITV' (ibid.: 48). This was an argument which a Labour government would have to return to in the discussions surrounding proposals for the fourth channel which took place in the 1970s. In the early 1960s, however, the idea was ahead of its time and quietly dropped.

Perhaps the most interesting reactions to the Pilkington Report from Labour supporters were to be found not in parliament or in the Labour headquarters but in the pages of the Labour and radical press. Here, debates on television were closely connected to those in the Labour movement about the party's ability to reach the 'affluent worker'. An opening shot was fired by Anthony Crosland in *Socialist Commentary* immediately following the publication of the report. He argued that the main weakness of the report was that it exaggerated the impact of television on society and ignored the growing amount of American academic research which demonstrated that television was more peripheral to people's lives than Pilkington and his colleagues allowed for. If real proof was not required by the committee then 'should we not, by analogy, ban or control the popular press, the cinema, the Communist Party, public houses, all teenage culture, coloured immigrants, homosexuality, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*?' (Crosland, 1962a: 6)

Next, Crosland attacked the committee for denying the existence of a free choice of programmes and ignoring the wishes of ordinary viewers who watched commercial television in droves. This, he argued, was typical of ‘all the worst patronizing and anti-libertarian instincts of the Left’ (ibid.: 6). There *was* a case for intervention: not on the question of ‘free choice’ but to ensure that all tastes were catered for, including minority ones which were less economically viable. In treating television programmes as ‘public goods’, it was the case that the public might not call for minority programmes in advance but would welcome them once they had actually experienced them. He supported further restraints on ITV and the creation of another non-commercial television channel and concluded that the committee’s recommendations were generally sound ‘but for largely the wrong reasons’ (ibid.: 5). The key problem for Crosland was that the report disapproved of the habits of the mass audience.

The patronising and school-prefect attitude to popular culture can be found in an extreme form in the Pilkington Report, which showed no interest in the opinions of ordinary viewers and listeners (any more than in those of sociologists) and indeed was imbued throughout with a condescending horror at the idea that people might actually like to watch trivial programmes (Crosland, 1962b: 10)¹⁵.

Crosland’s rebuttal of the idea of working-class audiences passively reacting to the skilful inducements of advertisers to purchase things they did not ‘need’, was then developed in a further article on the mass media in November 1962, which was personally endorsed by Gaitskell (Williams, 1979: 875). He started by rejecting both the optimists who believed that television could be free of commercial values and the pessimists who believed it was responsible for delinquency and the atomisation of society. While the right was contemptuous of the ‘mass-ness’ of the media, the left blamed the decreasing militancy of workers on the influence of popular films and television programmes. There was no conspiracy according to Crosland; the aspiration for consumer goods was not due to the evils of advertising but ‘represents

¹⁵ Later criticisms of the report’s underlying snobbery reinforce Crosland’s comments. Jean Seaton observed that ‘Pilkington seemed perilously close to despising what was popular and entertaining, and approving only that which was rigorous and demanding’ (in Curran and Seaton, 1997: 179)

a basic human desire for choice, leisure, comfort, privacy, and a more spacious family life' (Crosland, 1962b: 4).

Returning to the issue of choice, he insisted that workers do freely choose to watch quiz shows and listen to commercial radio, despite what some intellectuals may want them to do. The real problem was that minority tastes were neglected by market forces, not simply by virtue of being commercial, but because commercial television 'cannot sell different programmes at different prices in different markets' (ibid.: 9). It is not possible to charge more for opera with a limited audience than it is for soap opera with a mass audience. Crosland's lack of awareness of the strategy of differential advertising rates was countered by his prescience that one solution to the problem would be pay-television, although the barrier to this, he argued, was that it was driven only by films and sports programmes.

Crosland also attacked the efforts of various New Left intellectuals to 'foster from above a specifically Left-wing or "working-class" culture' (ibid.: 10) as being as pernicious as attempts to impose high culture on the masses. In order to undermine the authoritarian cultural approach of the left, Crosland called for a strategy of expanding choice: 'Our aim should be the maximum degree of cultural pluralism and availability of different aesthetic goods' (ibid.: 11). He therefore proposed two further non-commercial television channels: the first a general channel 'but deliberately biased towards minority, regional, cultural, and experimental programmes' (ibid.: 13), the second a specialist educational channel. According to Crosland, this 'would significantly increase the range and variety of choice without in any way denying the democratic right either of private citizens to communicate or of the majority to receive whatever entertainment or diversion it prefers' (ibid.).

New Left critics adopted a very different perspective on the relationship between broadcasting and democracy. Roy Shaw, a tutor with the Workers' Educational Association which had submitted evidence to the Pilkington Committee, penned an article for *New Left Review* in which he criticised the mainstream press and politicians for wilfully misunderstanding the committee's arguments and supported Pilkington's attacks on commercial television. The report, he argued, did not condemn all entertainment programmes for their triviality but took issue with the

growing tendency to trivialise subject matter in programmes which cut across all genres and channels, but in particular in ITV's light entertainment because of the financial pressure to maximise audiences. Furthermore, far from the report imposing its own tastes on the masses, it challenged the very notion that programme-makers could claim to know what the public wants simply by winning a mass audience. Given opinion polls which suggested that more people thought BBC was doing a better job than ITV but that, proportionately, more viewers watched ITV, Shaw claimed that 'the paradox is in the public mind, rather than in the Pilkington evidence or conclusions' (Shaw, 1962: 6). Reflecting New Left concern with the impact of the economic concentration of the media and the commodification of public life, Shaw argued that:

Pilkington is resented because of its disturbing demand for a new conception of social responsibility in the field of culture. It is a call to give people wider opportunities for self-development, instead of giving them what is "patronisingly and arrogantly" judged fit for their present condition. It challenges the fixed cultural stratification of our society – the rich man in his Glyndbourne and the poor man at his quiz show, and to each man his predetermined and unchangeable taste (ibid.: 8).

The task facing socialists, according to Raymond Williams in a Fabian pamphlet the following year, was to fight for increased public control of the media and to shake off the usual associations of this objective with bureaucracy and censorship. Decisions about communications were decisions about what kind of society was needed. Either you can have a communications service run by 'rich men' in the pursuit of profit or, if it is to be a true democracy, television and the press must 'be held in trust by the society for use by the people directly concerned in their production' (Williams, 1963: 14). This was an urgent task for the Labour Party and Williams suggested setting up a working party of historians, economists, critics, media professionals and sociologists to give immediate attention to this issue.

At one level the two sets of arguments are miles apart: the former reflecting the populism of the Labour revisionists, the latter the urgency for change of the New Left. However, both attach great importance to cultural stratification, the constitutive role of culture and to the rights and opportunities of the consumer. The

ideas of the revisionists, determined to relate to the consumerist aspirations of 'affluent' workers, coincided with those of the New Left who saw in culture and media an opportunity to break free of the economism of Marxism. Revisionist socialism strove to line workers' pockets with enough money to satisfy their supposed consumerist desires and in turn deliver social equality; the New Left sought to mobilise the cultural concerns of a new generation in a quite different way, towards subversive and creative political action. Whilst the two had completely different origins and outcomes, both sets of views attempted to encourage the party as a whole to adopt a more sympathetic and proactive stance towards culture and communications.

Conclusion

Labour's approach towards television throughout its years in opposition in the 1950s foundered on the contradiction between its different constituencies. In attempting to reconcile anti-commercial sentiments with a defence of the mixed economy, Labour was bound to be an inconsistent champion of democratic reform. The party contained both ITV bosses and passionate critics of commercial television, supporters of private property and defenders of nationalisation, those who were frightened of television and those who saw it as the pathway to a whole new world. Party supporters expressed a range of competing visions of the media and some imaginative plans for reform that prefigured later developments like Channel Four. In the end, the leadership settled on a defensive position that satisfied neither revisionists nor New Left activists.

This was a strategy designed to maximise party unity, popular appeal and electoral possibilities. Confidential committees on television policy were established before each election and dropped almost immediately afterwards, contributing to an *ad hoc* style of policymaking on this issue. Throughout the period, the adoption of principled positions co-existed with a tactical flexibility based on electoral requirements. By 1963, with a weakening Conservative administration, opposition members were in a confident and co-operative mood during the passage of the television bill. 'Under the pragmatic leadership of Harold Wilson they were not going to fritter away their appeal to floating voters by a display of doctrinaire

attitudes towards a popular television service' (Sendall, 1983: 177). A decade of revisionism and, in particular, thirteen years of opposition had convinced Labour MPs that, perhaps, commercial television was not such a bad thing after all.

Chapter Three: 1964-1970

The Wilson governments in context

The Labour government inherited substantial economic problems from the Conservatives when it came into office in 1964. Although British capitalism had expanded massively in the post-war boom, the rate of expansion had started to slow by the early 1960s putting Britain in a weaker position in relation to its international rivals. One assessment is that ‘although the economy seemed to be fairly healthy, the true position in fact was more delicate than the bare figures suggested’ (Woodward, 1993: 73). Clive Ponting puts it more bluntly: ‘Low investment, wages rising faster than productivity growth and the handicap of a large number of declining industries (and an over-valued pound) lay at the root of Britain’s economic problems’ (Ponting, 1989: 393). In other words, structural economic difficulties were to blame for smaller GDP growth than in other advanced western countries, a declining rate of profit and an increasing rate of inflation.

Harold Wilson’s solution was to embrace economic planning so that Labour’s 1964 election manifesto promised a national plan that would defeat the Tories’ ‘stop-go economic policy’ (Labour Party, 1964: 6). For Andrew Shonfield, whose 1965 book *Modern Capitalism* celebrated the productive benefits of indicative planning, it was ‘central to Labour Party thinking that a government of the Left should assume full responsibility for the task of national planning’ (Shonfield, 1969: 154). Wilson promised to set up new ministries of economic affairs and technology and to revitalise the National Economic Development Corporation, set up by the Conservatives in 1962.

According to Ben Pimlott (1993: 272), ‘Wilson called for a sensible, gradualist social revolution. The instrument of that revolution was to be the centralized planning of science and technology.’ The soon-to-be prime minister expressed this vision most famously in his speech, ‘Labour’s plan for science’, at the 1963 party conference. He argued that the choice was not *whether* but *how* to relate to technological advance:

It is the choice between the blind imposition of technological advance, with all that means in terms of unemployment, and the conscious, planned, purposive use of scientific progress to provide undreamed of living standards and the possibility of leisure ultimately on an unbelievable scale (Wilson, 1963: 3).

Wilson then went on to include developments in communications as part of this technological programme, calling for a 'University of the Air' (ibid.: 4) and arguing that it is 'very nice that we should be putting so much research into colour television' (ibid.: 6).

The speech has been read both as rhetoric and as evidence of Wilson's commitment to innovation and planning. Booker (1992: 213) treats it as a brilliant piece of public relations, designed to smooth over the ideological differences inside the Labour Party which had proved so disruptive to the party throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Pimlott, on the other hand, argues that the speech genuinely struck a chord with the audience (and beyond) and represented an 'extremist' position in advocating 'government intervention in almost every aspect of the nation's economic life' (Pimlott, 1993: 305). Tony Benn states that Wilson was deliberately misunderstood: 'What he said was that in the white heat of the technological revolution, we will all be burned up with unemployment unless we plan it. He wasn't saying I'll put on a white coat and get a welding machine and modernise the economy' (Benn, 1997).

Both approaches contain an element of truth. Of course Wilson was eager to associate the Labour Party with the dividends of technological growth and increased leisure time; he was also profoundly serious about replacing a laissez-faire approach to technology with a more purposeful one. Paul Foot argues that what was missing from the speech, however, was an indication of how the technological revolution could be realised without treading on the toes of big business. To implement Wilson's proposals meant 'a new range of taxes and levies upon industry, considerable state representation on boards of directors and, in many cases, wholesale nationalization. Not once in his speech did Wilson indicate the extent to which his Government would interfere with industry' (Foot, 1968a: 153). According to Foot, the speech was therefore not a simple public relations exercise (although it

worked magnificently as one) but an example of Labour's reformist belief that 'there is nothing wrong with the machine as such. What is wrong is the driver...[Wilson's] aim was not to scrap the machine for another one, but to steer it round the obstacles in its path' (ibid).

Was this approach a break from Gaitskellite and Croslandite revisionism? Dick Crossman, a key Cabinet member in the Wilson governments, argued that it was: 'Wilson had provided the revision of Socialism and its application to modern times which Gaitskell and Crosland had tried and completely failed to do' (Crossman, 1981: 1026). Wilson's redefinition of socialism, that Labour's radical social objectives needed to be underpinned by planned and sustained economic growth, won acclaim from all sides of the party in the run-up to the 1964 election. The vision of a revitalised capitalism encouraged the right while talk of trade union partnership helped to win support for an incomes policy at the 1963 Labour conference.

Foot (1997: 231) argues that Wilson's intervention into state direction of the economy signified a return to corporatism rather than revisionism, with the conscious application of Keynesian techniques to stimulate the economy. Others highlight the continuities between the policies of Gaitskell and Wilson. Pimlott writes that the 'new Leader's early objective was to present himself, both for public and for party consumption, as a sensible politician who would maintain existing Labour policies, yet who had a radical cutting edge' (Pimlott, 1993: 263). Alan Warde stresses the similarities between revisionism and corporatism under Wilson, that his socialism of 1964 'had no use for the concept of class, was indifferent to the question of property ownership, and did not foresee a structural transformation' (Warde, 1982: 112). In response to Labour left claims at the time that 'revisionism was not on the agenda', Paul Foot responded that:

In fact, of course, revisionism had in no sense, and not for a single moment, left the agenda, Gaitskell's policy on the Bomb had triumphed and the party's policy on economic affairs was still based on the ultra-revisionist *Industry and Society*. In more ways than one the policy of the Party, as opposed to the electoral rhetoric of its leaders, had swung, if anything, Rightwards since 1959 (Foot, 1968b: 19).

What had changed, it may be argued, was that Labour's revisionist objectives, those stressed by Crosland in *The Future of Socialism* concerning social legislation, were intimately linked to the successful resolution of Britain's economic problems.

Without a clear sign of industrial growth and an end to stop-go cycles, there could be no talk of serious social reform nor of a sustained attack on inequality and privilege.

The government, therefore, attached itself to a policy of 'pragmatism': virtually anything could be justified if it could be proved to be in the national economic interest. Wages, prices, public services and electoral promises were all subordinated to the priority of restoring growth to the British economy. Pragmatism itself became the dominant theoretical position associated with the Wilson governments in that, for David Walker, it was an understandable 'empirical response to events serving the immediate end of political equilibrium maintenance' (Walker, 1989: 189). Warde argues that this was a key part of Wilson's 'brokerage politics', his attempt to 'adjudicate between competing interests and find a workable compromise' (Warde, 1982: 102). This is a vision of Wilson's pragmatism as a necessary balancing-act between the forces of the Labour left and right, the unions and big business and between domestic pressures and international requirements. On the other hand, Edward Short, who was close to Wilson throughout the period, simply argues that electoral pressure was paramount: 'It was a very pragmatic government as Labour always had the problem of how to stay in office' (Short, 1998).

Winning office and then retaining it was a central concern of Wilson's government as its economic plans ran onto the rocks immediately after the 1964 election.

Whereas for most of the 1950s Britain's trade with the rest of the world had led to a trade surplus, a Conservative-engineered pre-election boom led to a balance of payments deficit of £800m in 1964 (Wilson, 1974: 27). The Labour government was under pressure within days of taking office to make cuts in public expenditure and lower sterling to a rate which would make exports more competitive. Although Wilson triumphed in his first battle with the bankers (and went ahead with a budget which abolished prescription charges and raised pensions and welfare benefits), he persevered with a policy of protecting the pound at all costs. Shortly after winning the 1966 election with an increased majority, the Labour government introduced a massive deflationary package and a statutory incomes policy to support the pound.

With the economy still very fragile, Wilson held out until November 1967 when devaluation of the pound was quickly followed by a savage cuts package of over £700m which included the re-introduction of prescription charges and the postponement of the raising of the school-leaving age. Further deflationary packages were imposed for the next two years together with the ultimately unsuccessful attack on union rights, *In Place of Strife*, all of which caused enormous upheavals and disappointment inside the party. 'For many in the Party, the Labour Government of 1966 to 1970 had been a failure. It had revoked its mandate commitments, ignored Conference decisions and carried through policies which ran counter to some of the basic principles of the Party' (Minkin, 1980: 330).

Opinion on Labour's economic legacy is divided. Recent accounts paint a favourable picture of Labour's economic record, particularly when considering rates of growth and productivity figures of later anti-interventionist governments (see Woodward, 1993, Pimlott, 1993 and Walker, 1989). On the other hand, Michael Stewart, an economic adviser to the government, wrote at the time of the 'failure of the central themes of Labour's declared policy – the commitment to maintain full employment, to curb rising prices, and above all to secure a faster rate of economic growth...Here failure was massive' (quoted in Walker, 1989: 206). Unemployment increased by 60% between 1964 and 1970, inflation nearly doubled in the same period while the key statistic of economic growth remained rooted at 2%, half of what the national plan had anticipated and much lower than its international rivals. Indeed while exports increased even more than predicted in the plan, they still fell as a share of the world market, from 16% at the start of the decade to 11% in 1970 (Ponting, 1989: 392-394).

There is, however, more agreement about Labour's record in the social sphere where liberalization of laws concerning abortion, homosexuality, divorce and censorship were passed in spite of the economic problems. Commentators are eager to praise this part of Wilson's legacy, talking of 'notable successes in the field of social reform' (Wright and Carter, 1997: 115) and the 'impressive' achievements in social improvement (Pelling and Reid, 1996: 133). Even Ponting notes that 'the government's record [in social reform] is all the more commendable since it was achieved in the face of an awful economic legacy' (Ponting, 1989: 392). To what

extent did the Wilson governments demonstrate this commitment in their attempts to modernise and reform British television?

The road ahead: television issues in 1964

By 1964, the outgoing Conservative administration had presided over a number of decisions affecting television. In response to the Pilkington Committee's recommendations, Reginald Bevins, the postmaster general, had launched BBC2, imposed a levy on advertising revenue on the ITV companies and extended the charters of both BBC and ITA by twelve years. The Tories felt confident enough to include a separate paragraph on broadcasting in their manifesto for the 1964 election which boasted that 'we introduced ITV, authorised BBC-2, and have licensed experiments in pay-as-you-view TV by wire. We wish to extend the range of choice still further' (Craig, 1975: 41), particularly through proposals for a second commercial television channel and local sound broadcasting.

The Labour Party's election manifesto, however, made no mention at all of broadcasting's role in the 'New Britain' that was to be built in the ongoing technological revolution, lacking even a reference to the University of the Air that Wilson had highlighted in his 'science' speech in 1963. This was not due to ignorance of the policy challenges in the sphere of broadcasting that faced Labour. Tony Benn, the newly appointed PMG, notes in his diary that he was immediately 'confronted with important decisions over television broadcasting' (Benn, 1988a: 165), notably the BBC licence fee, the question of a fourth channel, pay television and the introduction of colour. Neither was it because of a lack of interest by senior party members who had already had top-level discussions with broadcasters in the run-up to the election. For example, MPs Roy Mason and George Darling (both of whom were soon to be ministers of state in the Board of Trade) met with the BBC secretary Charles Curran in July 1964 to discuss a wide range of broadcasting-related issues. The meeting revealed the Labour frontbench's unhappiness with the request for an increase in the licence fee and its reluctance to endorse a fourth channel for education (Curran, 1964). It seems more likely that Labour's public reticence to discuss television simply reflected the divisions which had surfaced in party discussions at the time of the Pilkington Committee (see previous chapter) and which

remained unresolved, over criticisms of ITV and a defence of non-commercial television.

Wilson, as we shall see, was particularly sensitive to the increasing influence of television and sought to use Benn's professional knowledge for electoral advantage and industrial benefits. 'A mark of Wilson's seriousness about television', argues Pimlott (1993: 270), 'was the introduction of Anthony Wedgwood Benn, a former television producer, into the inner circle.' Benn, according to Briggs, 'was a young politician, who had hitherto made the most of the Labour Party's appeal to youth' (Briggs, 1995: 515) and who shared Wilson's desire to take advantage of technological developments to stimulate the British economy. His brief at the Post Office included not only broadcasting but also telecommunications, satellites and information technology. Decisions about television, he decided, had to be seen in the wider context of Britain's relative economic weakness and the imperative to modernize. In early 1965 he admitted that: 'Defence, colour television, Concorde, rocket development – these are all issues raising economic considerations that reveal this country's basic inability to stay in the big league. We just can't afford it' (Benn, 1988a: 204).

This approach, of considering television development in relation to the needs of the economy, was clearly evident to those in the broadcasting industry. During discussions in November 1964 about the introduction of colour, BBC director general Hugh Greene came up with the following ploy.

The PMG was inclined to wonder whether colour might not be an unnecessary luxury. We therefore based our argument in favour of colour on exports and the development and modernisation of the electronic [sic] industry...I am sure that this will be a better horse to ride with the present Government than the value of colour programmes in themselves. (Greene, 1964)

Greene guessed right. Despite Benn's continuing reservations with the project, the introduction of colour in July 1967 was the culmination of a significant commercial lobbying exercise and international competition (see Briggs, 1995: 848-863).

Benn's stubborn refusal to ignore harsh economic facts led him to an early and gloomy appraisal of the finances of the BBC. The departing Conservative administration had left behind not only a substantial balance of payments deficit but had also saddled the BBC with a rising debt in its preparations for BBC2. PMG Bevens told the cabinet in 1962 that 'most of his colleagues on the Ministerial Committee [on Broadcasting] shared his view that any increase in licence fee before 1965 was "politically unrealistic"' because of electoral pressure and so left the licence fee at £4 (see *ibid.*: 306). In the context of competition from pirate radio and government reluctance to increase the licence fee, Benn wrote in January 1965 that:

I can see ourselves moving steadily towards the starvation of the BBC through a failure to raise the licence fee and ultimately capitulation in favour of commercial sound broadcasting. That is unless we permit the expansion of broadcasting on the basis of public service with advertising revenue to finance it (Benn, 1988a: 212).

There was certainly no love lost between Benn and the BBC¹⁶ and one of Benn's main concerns as PMG was to create a space in which a genuine public service broadcasting could emerge, even if this meant a challenge to existing structures. Briggs writes that Benn was the only PMG who, 'while believing strongly in public service broadcasting, did not identify public service broadcasting with the BBC' (Briggs, 1995: 517), a definition he carried with him well after his years at the Post Office.

Benn was not the only Labour member to have reservations about the BBC. During the discussions about a possible third television channel, Labour's policy committee had recommended the creation of a new public service body, independent of both ITV and BBC (see p. 64). Although Labour had reversed its position after the Pilkington Report had suggested a 'BBC-2', the party still had an uneasy relationship with a BBC in the throes of the 'Greene revolution', the director general's attempt to modernise the Corporation and to compete more effectively with ITV. In opposition Labour had benefited from the BBC's new-found dynamism as the latter sought to shrug off its stuffy image. A programme like the notorious *TW3* was 'anti-

pomposity, anti-sanctimony, anti-snob and – blatantly – anti-Conservative’ (Pimlott, 1993: 269). The problem was that it was only a fine line between being anti-Conservative and being anti-government, *any* government. Now that the Labour Party was in office, there was little reason to expect that it would receive an easy ride nor that its authority would be naturally respected by the BBC. Labour’s ambiguous attitude to the BBC was to be a key factor in television policy during the 1960s.

The other key area, ignored by Benn in his ‘to-do’ list, concerned the future of ITV. Although the Labour Party had now officially accepted the place of commercial television alongside the BBC, it would still be expected to do something to curb the tremendous profits which were being made despite the introduction of the advertising levy in 1963. Surely in Wilson’s ‘New Britain’ where, according to the manifesto, ‘we must ensure that a sufficient part of the new wealth created goes to meet urgent and now neglected human needs’ (Labour Party, 1964: 8), there would be some plans to tackle the profits of commercial television and its neglect of minority audiences? The television critic Milton Shulman expressed this most forcefully:

The country had witnessed a major financial scandal in which, through a Government monopoly, a few men had received returns on their investments out of all proportions to either the capital they had risked or the contributions they were making to the nation. A Socialist Government would presumably have been shocked and sickened by this spectacle (Shulman, 1973: 23).

Yet the government was silent on the issue. This might have been due to the fact that Wilson’s favourite programme was ITV’s *Coronation Street* (see Pimlott, 1993: 267) or that senior Labour politicians had by now recognised the influence of ITV. David Haworth, in an article for *Socialist Commentary* in 1965, attempted to provide an explanation for the lack of progress in government reform of television.

I think part of the answer is that the Labour Party has never recovered from the memory of its opposition to the establishment of commercial television. As soon as the second channel became a fact, Labour found that its most enthusiastic audience was to be found among its own

¹⁶ Benn described the BBC as ‘wildly right wing’ and Lord Normanbrook, its Chairman, as ‘a real old Establishment figure and not at all knowledgeable on broadcasting’ (Benn, 1988: 183).

supporters. After that the Party found singular difficulty in allowing its considerations on broadcasting to mature in any very coherent form (Haworth, 1965: 32).

The renewal of the franchises in 1967 and the debates over the size of the advertising levy at the end of the decade forced Labour to once again address the question of commercial television. Before then, in the increasingly difficult economic climate, the government had to make some firm decisions about other major areas of television policy.

Harold Wilson and television

‘There is little doubt that the character and philosophy of British broadcasting as it enters the 70s has been moulded by the will and activities of Harold Wilson’ wrote the TV critic Milton Shulman in 1973 (Shulman, 1973: 26). Wilson, it is claimed, played a decisive role in the development of Labour’s television policy in the 1960s. He was an excellent television performer who, having read Theodore White’s *The Making of the President*, appreciated the importance of the new mass medium and was keen to improve the professionalism of Labour’s broadcasts. Additionally, Wilson ‘planned to use the airwaves as a major instrument of government. He would make regular broadcasts to explain his policies direct to the people’ (Cockerell, 1989: 113). This would allow Wilson to communicate with voters without the troublesome mediation of the Fleet Street press who Wilson perceived rightly as generally anti-Labour.

The strategy, however, counted on the compliance of the broadcasting establishment at precisely the time when the BBC, in particular, was expanding its political coverage and was keen to demonstrate its independence. The skirmishes between Wilson and the BBC started almost immediately after the election when, in January 1965, Wilson was refused a ministerial broadcast without opposition right-of-reply (ibid: 115) and continued unabated. The prime minister complained regularly both about the number of left-wingers and government critics allowed by the BBC to speak on government policy and about systematic bias in BBC current affairs

programmes¹⁷. The result was that ‘Wilson was to see British television as an instrument of conspiracy against the Labour Party, and especially against himself’ (Pimlott, 1993: 269).

The problem was that while Labour had gained from *TW3*’s satirical portrait of the Tories in 1963, Wilson and Labour supporters had no wish to become the object of parody now that the party was in government. Wilson’s antagonism towards the BBC was initially accepted by his fellow ministers and supported even by Labour’s grassroots. One resolution from the Isle of Wight Constituency Labour Party in January 1966 noted that ‘whilst appreciating the need for satire in TV programmes, we have noticed an increase in political satire on the BBC TV programmes prejudicial to the Socialist point of view’ (Labour Party NEC, 1966). Wilson may have had a point about BBC bias but his sensitivity appeared to be more focused on preventing open criticism of government policies as economic problems started to open up fissures amongst Labour supporters. By the end of the decade, Wilson’s hostility to the BBC had started to disturb even his close colleagues. Crossman noted in 1969 that Wilson ‘is obsessed with the B.B.C., and this and his obsession with leaks are his most outstanding weaknesses as a leader’ (Crossman, 1977: 387/8). ‘Throughout his career’, echoes Pimlott, ‘Wilson suffered from a dangerous inability to let a matter drop’ (Pimlott, 1993: 445).

Wilson had an entirely different attitude towards ITV and spoke of the ‘absolutely scrupulous impartiality’ of the ITA under the chairmanship of the former Conservative PMG, Charles Hill (quoted in Cockerell, 1989: 125). One of Wilson’s biographers writes that ‘Wilson preferred ITV from the first. It had sympathetic company bosses, such as Sidney Bernstein at Granada...[and] was widely perceived as the popular and therefore more working-class station’ (Morgan, 1992: 332). ITV’s populism complemented Wilson’s pragmatism and the prime minister was happy to do deals with commercial television at the expense of the BBC. In one celebrated incident on the morning after his 1966 election victory, Wilson refused to do a live interview with the BBC from a specially rigged train on the basis that he

¹⁷ See for example Briggs (1995: 546-558), Cockerell (1989: 113-151), Goldie (1977: 282-293) and Shulman (1973: 25-54) for more detailed accounts of the stormy relationship between Wilson and the BBC.

had not been given any warning but was happy to accommodate ITN. This somewhat contradicts the notes of a conversation the previous day between Wilson and a senior BBC journalist, Stanley Hyland, where Wilson is quoted as saying that 'I still haven't made up my mind about the train' (Edwards, 1966).

Clearly, Wilson's attitude towards television structures was influenced by the state of his personal relations with broadcasters and journalists. Does this mean that policy was being made not on the basis of public debate but of private passions? Michael Cockerell's view is that Wilson attempted to punish the BBC for its critical stance towards Labour, particularly in his unwillingness to sanction a licence fee increase. When Greene made this public in 1966, 'Wilson was enraged. He gave his backing to a Wedgwood Benn plan to reform the BBC by introducing some commercials and hiving off parts of radio' (Cockerell, 1989: 134). Benn then 'went to see Harold who has confused the whole thing in his mind with his current dislike of the bias in BBC programmes' (Benn, 1988a: 387). However, as we shall see, this was not the plan that the government accepted, partly because Wilson himself had a more contradictory approach to the BBC than one of pure, unbridled antagonism.

Despite his comfortable relationship with commercial television bosses and his concerns about BBC bias, Wilson was fundamentally reluctant to undermine the public structure of the BBC. In a meeting between Greene and Derek Mitchell, Wilson's private secretary, immediately after the 1964 election, Mitchell reassured the DG about Labour's plans. 'I said I thought that they [the BBC] should not worry unduly. A Labour Government was bound, other thing being equal, to be sympathetic to the B.B.C. as a nationalised corporation' (Mitchell, 1964). In the middle of heated negotiations about the licence fee, Crossman noted that Wilson 'has a conventional respect for the B.B.C. as a public corporation and won't allow advertising...His main aim is to stay in office' (Crossman, 1976: 160). Wilson's commitment to pragmatism and corporatism partially softened his desire to discipline the BBC although, of course, other things were not equal and Wilson increasingly lost patience with the Corporation during the 1960s. As Philip Ziegler, Wilson's sympathetic biographer, puts it: 'The remarkable thing is not that Wilson eventually fell out with the BBC but that it took so long for him to do so' (Ziegler, 1993: 203).

One of Wilson's most controversial acts was his decision in 1967, after consultation with PMG Edward Short but not the cabinet, to appoint Charles Hill of the ITA to be the chairman of the BBC. Given his intimate association with both commercial television and the Conservatives, 'it was obvious, not least to Wilson himself, that the choice he was making would not appeal to many people inside the Labour Party' (Briggs, 1995: 599), a reaction which made little impact on the prime minister. Increasingly irritated by what he perceived as the BBC's partisanship, Wilson, according to Cockerell, selected Hill for three reasons: 'to control the exuberance and restrict the freedom of programme makers', to 'humiliate the BBC's senior executives' and finally to 'force Hugh Greene to resign' (Cockerell, 1989: 135). Short disagrees with any suggestion that it was a political decision.

The press took the view that we were getting our own back at the BBC but it wasn't that at all. I think the BBC needed somebody like him – they were stodgy, they stood on their dignity about things... There wasn't a political relationship... Hill was an intelligent, cultured man. He wasn't just anybody, a great publicist, the Radio Doctor. He was never very political (Short, 1998).

This is a slightly disingenuous description of a man who was a Conservative minister for broadcasting when commercial television was first introduced in 1955 and who, according to Wilson himself, 'has already cleaned up I.T.V. and [will] do the same to B.B.C. now I'm appointing him chairman' (quoted in Crossman, 1976: 442/3).

The key point is that Wilson took a keen interest in television and assumed a leadership role when it came to government policy in the field. In January 1965 he set up the ministerial committee on broadcasting to oversee television development (see Mitchell, 1965b), and then took over the chair in October 1966 (Briggs, 1995: 563n) in order to head off opposition to his plans. He met regularly with leading figures from the television world, kept a very close watch on television output and attempted to impose his will on television policy, even when he was not sure exactly where he stood. One historian has written that '[i]f Wilson believed in anything, he certainly believed in the influence of the media. And he was determined to exploit this to his own advantage' (Childs, 1997: 111). Accusations still abound that Wilson's interest in television, like a true modern-day premier, reflected an obsession

with presentation more than policy and that his pragmatism suffused any firm principles.¹⁸ However, as we shall now attempt to illustrate, Wilson's approach to television policy, while rarely consistent, was nevertheless connected to one firm objective: to modernise and invigorate British economic and political institutions through the guidance of a Labour government. When BBC television programmes criticised this project, the entire Corporation risked the wrath of the premier; when leading figures from ITV identified themselves with Wilson, all of commercial television looked set to gain. Labour's approach to television in the 1960s was, therefore, caught between a partial desire for institutional reform and Wilson's pragmatic solutions to a declining economic situation.

Preparing for the future: paying for the BBC

Three months into a Labour government, letters were fired off between the Post Office and Number 10. Was it true, Derek Mitchell in Wilson's office wanted to know, that Benn would 'be asking the BBC to reconsider its whole structure and policy' in response to its request for more money? (Mitchell, 1965a). Benn's department replied that Benn had been 'linking this in his mind with other major broadcasting decisions that have to be reached, believing that the Government will want to look at the whole picture' (Tilling, 1965). Wilson reacted by setting up a ministerial committee on broadcasting, chaired by Herbert Bowden, Lord President of the Council, with the home secretary, the chief whip, the attorney-general, the financial secretary to the Treasury and ministers including Benn, Crossman, Jennie Lee and George Darling. The committee had a wide-ranging but crucial brief: to consider the allocation of a fourth channel, the future of the licence fee, the launch of a 'University of the Air', the possibility of local radio broadcasting and the question of television standards. In short, it was convened to plan the future of British broadcasting.

¹⁸ While Ponting argues that Wilson's administration lacked a 'clear intellectual and theoretical structure to help it define long-term goals and provide a justification for its actions' (Ponting, 1989: 400), Pimlott argues exactly the opposite: that 'it would be more appropriate to criticize Wilson for sticking to his ideas too rigidly than for not having any' (Pimlott, 1993: 273).

There was an immediate need for a decision about the BBC licence fee as the Corporation had been forced into debt to cope with the start-up of BBC2. Benn made it immediately clear that any increase was contingent on the general economic situation. Benn told Greene and Lord Normanbrook, the BBC's chairman, at a meeting in March 1965 that 'difficulties were being raised by the Department for Economic Affairs because of the reaction on incomes policy'. In the event that money could not be found, the PMG suggested that the BBC attempt to reduce revenue lost through licence fee evasion (Normanbrook, 1965). Wilson was even more uncompromising and placed the status of BBC2, less than a year old, in jeopardy. In response to Post Office figures that BBC2 was responsible for a large proportion of the BBC's deficit, Wilson replied that 'I do not see why we need to increase licence fees to pay for a programme that no one wants to see – and many can't see even if they wanted to' (Wilson, 1965b). During the discussions that followed the Pilkington Report in 1962, Labour had officially supported the award of a second channel to the BBC; now, in a harsher economic climate, Wilson was less willing to back what he saw as an elitist venture.¹⁹ Less than two weeks later, however, Wilson was persuaded to agree to an additional £1 on the licence fee as an urgent measure to stem the BBC's deficit. Rather than risk unpopularity in the run-up to an election, Wilson preferred to hide the rise among the general tax increases on personal consumption in the April 1965 budget.²⁰ His caution was perhaps unnecessary given that the BBC in this period produced some of their most popular *and* challenging programmes like *Till Death Us Do Part*, *Steptoe and Son*, *Up the Junction*, *Cathy Come Home* and the *Wars of the Roses* series.

Negotiations on BBC finances over the next eighteen months highlight many of the divisions inside the Labour Party regarding its relationship to commercial forces, electoralism and pragmatism. Following more pressure on the pound that summer, the Cabinet introduced a further deflationary package in July causing Crossman to

¹⁹ He was not alone in thinking this. Benn acknowledged at the time that 'there may be a case for taking BBC2 away from the BBC' (Benn, 1988: 239) while, according to Tam Dalywell MP, to 'save money, and the embarrassment of a Labour Government having to put up the licence, Dick [Crossman] wants to do away with BBC2' (quoted in *ibid*: 310/11).

²⁰ This is not something unique to Labour. The Conservatives had held similar discussions in 1962 when discussing whether to increase the licence fee and provide the BBC with added revenue to finance BBC2. PMG Bevin told the Cabinet that 'most of his colleagues on the Ministerial

remark that '[t]his was the most violent, primitive, stupid form of 'stop-go' ever thought of' (Crossman, 1975: 268/9). Discussions on television policy seemed to be following the same cycle with short-term decisions taking precedent over long-term strategic thinking. By the autumn of 1965, the government 'could look forward to a stable pound in the run-up to the election' (Ponting, 1989: 83), a situation which encouraged ministers to find a solution to the issue of BBC finances. At a meeting of the ministerial committee in November 1965, three ways of meeting the BBC's financial needs were proposed: an increased licence fee, a grant from government or an injection of advertising. In the current economic circumstances, the first two were ruled out of order and so the committee opted for the latter. Benn argued that this was a 'tremendous success and if it goes through Cabinet, as I think it will, it will be the beginning of the reshaping of British broadcasting under public service conditions with some mixed revenue' (Benn, 1988a: 353). The committee then gave the green light for Benn to work on a white paper incorporating the proposal.

Benn was convinced that allowing the BBC to carry a limited amount of advertising on its Light Programme (in radio) would both kill off the challenge of the illegal pirate radio stations and allow for reform of British broadcasting with local programmes and a national popular music station. Faced with the dilemma of the need to expand broadcasting at a time of public expenditure cuts, Benn felt there was no option other than attracting private finance. In May 1965, frustrated by the slow progress at the Post Office, he wrote in his diary about the 'central problem of socialist practice' in relation to innovation:

The real drive for improvement comes from those concerned to make private profit. If, therefore, you deny these people the right of extending private enterprise into new fields, you have to develop some sort of alternative. You have to have some body which wants to develop public enterprise but our present Civil Service is not interested in growth. It is geared to care and maintenance (Benn, 1988a: 264).

Short of a more radical solution and still politically attached to Wilson's programme, Benn's alternative was an entirely 'pragmatic' one: to turn to private investment and

Committee [on Broadcasting] shared his view that any increase in licence fee before 1965 was "politically unrealistic" (Briggs, 1995: 306).

advertising despite his personal hostility towards the cash-rich ITV sector and his party's traditional antagonism towards market forces.

He immediately faced a challenge on three fronts: the conservatism of the civil service, resistance to advertising from within the party and, above all, an impending election. There was, however, no lack of debate between Labour MPs in the various broadcasting committees. In the Cabinet on February 15, 1966, those in favour of advertising included Crossman, Barbara Castle, Bowden and, according to Benn, Harold Wilson himself (ibid: 388) with a majority hostile to the plan. However, as 'no other additional source of finance was available; and in the light of the responsible attitude which the independent television companies had displayed', the Cabinet agreed that there were grounds for believing that limited advertising might be politically acceptable (Cabinet minutes, 1966a). This was a rather surprising admission that, not only had the ITV companies been behaving 'responsibly' but that the BBC's finances should be related to the behaviour of its commercial counterparts.

The following day at a meeting of the backbench communications group of Labour MPs, the Parliamentary Labour Party's occasional forum for discussing broadcasting issues, there was another split with two MPs arguing that 'the BBC should take advertising so that the public sector would not be starved of resources' (ibid: 389). The conclusion to the meeting is most interesting: 'there was a majority in favour of some advertising solution if it could be done properly but it was agreed that we shouldn't publish a White Paper at all' (ibid: 390). Although Benn had actually prepared a draft, the main task for the government was to avoid a damaging row in the run-up to the March election, even if this meant suppressing existing policy proposals. The, by now, urgent need to make some firm decisions on broadcasting was sacrificed for short-term electoral success. Crossman, despite supporting Benn's proposals in Cabinet, wrote two days afterwards that 'clearly, this is something we shall have to put under the mat until after the election' (Crossman, 1975: 459). On March 2, Wilson met Benn to brief him on the next day's broadcasting debate in the commons and told him that he should 'certainly not suggest that the Cabinet were in any way moving towards acceptance of advertising revenue on the Light Programme' (Wilson, 1966).

In any case, a tentative solution to the crisis of the licence fee had been reached.

Wilson called in the DG to Downing Street and

made it clear that it was not at all in his mind to eliminate the possibility of increases in the licence fee for all time. On the other hand, the Government was not willing to accept anything in the nature of an automatic obligation to increase the licence fee to meet the rising costs of broadcasting. He said that this was particularly difficult at a time when the Government was trying to hold down public expenditure (Greene, 1966).

Wilson suggested that the BBC make some efficiency savings by moving some operations out of London and by reducing licence fee evasion. Greene, somewhat surprisingly, accepted that the BBC would have to manage without an increase until 1968 as long as the government did not extend broadcasting hours. Benn's reaction to the news was that this 'provided the Cabinet with an excuse for killing my proposals' and that another 'of my projects has been lost as a result of the Election' (Benn, 1988a: 394). The situation appeared to be resolved.

The White Paper and advertising

Benn's White Paper did not appear before the 1966 election and, despite the title of Labour's manifesto, *Time for Decision*, little had been decided about the general future of broadcasting. Apart from a reference to the planned expansion of higher education through a 'University of the Air', the manifesto ignored the entire question of broadcasting unlike the Conservatives who, following a well-worn theme, promised to 'provide more choice and competition in broadcasting' (Craig, 1975, 76). Having substantially increased its majority at the polls, the government immediately ran into difficulties. The seamen's strike in May 1966, opposed by the government in an effort to protect its incomes policy, compounded pressure on the pound. In July, Wilson chose to opt for a £500m deflationary package which included a six-month wage and price freeze as well as significant rises in indirect taxes. Both the parliamentary party and Labour supporters outside Parliament, who had been reluctant to criticise the government when it had only a slender majority, were now more vocal in their opposition to Wilson's policies. Backbench rebellions

became more frequent, there were regular demonstrations against rising unemployment by trade unionists and the left-wing national executive committee was increasingly impatient with the government's handling of the economic situation. According to Lewis Minkin, 'it was prepared now, for the first time in Party history, to be publicly identified with critics and criticism of Labour Government policy' (Minkin, 1980: 300).

Following Frank Cousins' resignation from the Cabinet over its handling of the seamen's strike, Benn was moved to the Ministry of Technology and his place was filled by Edward Short. Assessment of Benn's reign as PMG has been generally poor, that he 'managed to make no major decision about television during his term of office' (Shulman, 1973: 39). His biographers emphasise that Benn was continually constrained by internal opposition and electoral demands. Explaining the 'impression of indecision', Robert Jenkins writes that '[w]hat emerges from Benn's actions and pronouncements on broadcasting is not so much personal indecision as government inaction, stemming from the contradiction between the Government's acceptance of its public responsibility for broadcasting and its fear of direct intervention' (Jenkins, 1980: 108). Jad Adams argues that Benn got 'an undeserved reputation for indecisiveness' as regards television because the real reason for the lack of action was government unwillingness to increase the licence fee near an election (Adams, 1992: 258). In fact, Benn did not give up in his attempts to reform broadcasting through the introduction of mixed revenue into the system and fought for the creation of a new public radio corporation, playing popular music, mainly financed by advertising.²¹

This was enough to rouse the anger of those, particularly on the left, who until now had been fairly silent about the government's lack of decisions about broadcasting. Firstly, in May 1966 a committee was set up by the Home Policy Committee of the NEC to specifically look at the increasing power of advertising in the mass

²¹ The creation of a new radio corporation hinged on what to do with the pirate radio stations. While hostile to the entrepreneurial attitudes and unlawfulness of the pirates, most Labour MPs also recognised their increasing popularity and were therefore unwilling to ban the pirates just before a general election. By the time that legislation banning the pirates was introduced in July 1966, Labour MPs were pressing for a 'sweetener', some sort of new, legal popular music channel to replace the pirates (see Briggs, 1995: 562).

communications industries. While the first draft did not appear for another year, it was clear that any immediate increase in advertising would face a strong challenge from the Labour left. Secondly, *Tribune* carried a lively debate about 'The Future of Broadcasting' which, although concentrating on radio, highlighted the attitudes of those in the Labour Party towards advertising in general. Hugh Jenkins, chair of the backbench communications group, supported Benn's proposals and argued that if advertising was good enough for *Tribune* it should be good enough for a new public corporation. In reply to Raymond Williams' plea not to hand over 'yet another major means of communication into private and irresponsible control' through its dependence on advertising (Williams, 1966), Jenkins simply applied Harold Wilson's theory of corporatism. 'Of course, advertising in the acquisitive society is often as pernicious as many other things in the market economy. That is a very good reason that the state should get itself in a position to control a section of it' (Jenkins, 1966b).

Debate continued in the Cabinet and ministerial committee throughout the autumn with, at one point, Benn's proposals seeming likely to be accepted (see Crossman, 1976: 71). However, by December, after a fierce lobbying campaign by the left, advertising was rejected as an option and the White Paper, finally published in December, handed over the new popular music station to the BBC. *Tribune* argued this represented 'a considerable success for the anti-commercial forces in our society' (*Tribune*, 1966) while, according to Crossman, Harold Wilson 'had scored a complete triumph over his modernizing adversaries' (ibid: 154) in fending off advertising on the BBC. Wilson's role was clearly vital. Always the pragmatist, he had adopted an open mind towards advertising in the early part of the year in order to put pressure on the BBC and force it to do without a licence fee increase. If he was asking workers to tighten their belts to help the country through a crisis, why should the BBC be exempt from this? The White Paper warned that 'at a time when none may be content to rest upon present standards of efficiency and financial performance, good though they may be, the Government have thought it right to expect of the B.B.C. that they should set themselves even more exacting financial objectives' (White Paper, 1966: para.11).

Once Wilson had forced the BBC to introduce efficiency savings, he was more able to reveal his 'true' corporatist colours. Crossman described Wilson at the time as 'a very conventional traditionalist' (Crossman, 1976: 71). Advertising, he wrote later, 'has always been opposed by Harold, the Methodist...on the grounds that it's immoral to permit a virtuous organisation such as the BBC to be in any way related to commercial profit' (Crossman, 1977: 84).²² Wilson's modernising instincts combined the need to cut back on public expenditure together with the defence of a fine and upstanding British institution, even one which had antagonised him as much as the BBC.

The Open University and the fourth channel

Just as the post-war Attlee government is remembered for its founding of the National Health Service, the single greatest achievement of the Wilson governments in the 1960s is often reckoned to be the creation of the Open University (see for example Watkins, 1997). Pimlott describes it as 'a brilliantly original and highly ambitious institution which took the ideals of social equality and equality of opportunity more seriously than any other part of the British education system' (Pimlott, 1993: 515). While the OU was undoubtedly a massive step forward in the expansion of higher education, it is less clear whether it was a major example of broadcasting reform. Indeed the creation of a 'University of the Air' dominated by television was severely compromised by its birth at a time of financial cutbacks and rationalisation. By the time it started, the Open University was structured far more by educational principles than by a desire to transform the institutions of television.

According to Stephen Lambert, had the Conservatives won the 1964 election, they would have extended commercial television by allocating the fourth channel to the ITA (Lambert, 1982: 17). The Labour Party, on the other hand, was hostile to this idea and was more interested in using an additional channel for educational purposes; indeed for most of the Cabinet, the idea of a fourth channel was intimately tied to a University of the Air. This reflected the debates in the party in the late 1950s and

²² Wilson, as ever, maintained a tactical approach to the subject. Having passed over advertising at that time, Wilson specifically insisted that the 'White Paper should also avoid any indication that advertising had been rejected in principle as a source of finance' (Cabinet minutes, 1996b).

early 1960s which had seen the consensus in favour of a new public corporation run independently of both BBC and ITA. Briggs notes that Labour's interest in educational broadcasting dates from 1962 with the setting up of Lord Taylor's study group on higher education which recommended a 'University of the Air' (Briggs, 1995: 491n).

Wilson embraced this idea enthusiastically as an example of the planned use of new technology for scientific gain. The 'University of the Air' was to be a meritocratic institution, symptomatic of the 'new Britain'. In February 1965, he asked the education secretary to prepare a paper on the OU for the ministerial committee on broadcasting. In hand-written notes on the report, Wilson came up with three proposals. Firstly, that the ITA be given control of the University of the Air; secondly that the BBC and ITA run it together with the assistance of two universities; and thirdly 'for the BBC to run it exclusively, advertising extensively on late-night programmes and use the profits to subsidise licence revenue' (Wilson, 1965a).

Benn described Wilson's first option as an 'appalling solution' (Benn, 1988a: 236) but nevertheless met informally with Lew Grade, the chairman of ATV, to discuss a public/private partnership for a fourth channel. 'It would be better than giving it to the BBC, though not as good as setting up another public corporation which would be a public service and inspiration, but would be allowed to take advertising' (ibid: 239). Neither Benn nor Grade felt able to develop this proposal further but it is nevertheless another example of the model that Channel Four was eventually based on nearly twenty years later. Backbench MP Hugh Jenkins was thinking on the same lines: he wanted to see a new public corporation, answerable to the Ministry of Education but partially financed by advertising, which would transmit University of the Air programmes as well as pay-per-view programmes. 'I see no other means of getting the Fourth TV Channel going' he wrote in the ACTT's journal (Jenkins, 1966a).

In the event, initiative for the project came not from the postmaster general but from the arts minister, Jennie Lee. In March 1965 Wilson transferred Lee into the Department of Education and Science to hurry the plans along. Lee was a dynamic

and enthusiastic ambassador for the project but immediately anticipated financial difficulties. 'I am convinced', she wrote to the prime minister in August, a month after the government's most recent deflationary package, 'that if you want the Open University, you can have it but only you can break through the problems raised by costs and channels' (Lee, 1965). Lee lobbied hard in the ministerial committee for a fourth channel and seemed to be making some headway. Wilson wanted material for his speech at the 10th anniversary dinner of the ITA in September and agreed with Bowden that 'it should be possible for some indication to be given of the Government's firm intention to establish a fourth channel largely devoted to educational broadcasts' (Mitchell, 1965c).

Over the next few months, civil servants and ministers became increasingly nervous about the expenditure involved in setting up a fourth channel. At the same time that Wilson was pressing Lee to get her White Paper out in time for the election, the ministerial committee decided that her preferred suggestion was no longer financially viable. 'The industry will simply not support a fourth television channel which the University of the Air could use during peak hours' wrote the chief secretary to the Treasury, adding that it would cost about £40m to set up the channel. The solution was to use spare evening hours on BBC2 (Diamond, 1966). Lee wrote to Wilson the same day raging against this plan: 'I consider that to revert to a half-baked scheme, using an hour or two on B.B.C. 2 would completely undermine the whole purpose and spirit of a University of the Air' (Lee, 1966a). Four days later, on February 7, Lee wrote to Bowden and made it clear that using residual hours from other channels would not be enough. 'The fourth network is indispensable' she insisted and went on to challenge the chief secretary's 'inflated' figures, suggesting that the cost would be nearer £17m. She concluded by saying that 'I am wholly convinced that unless we are prepared to establish a genuine open university, based on the fourth network, we shall expose ourselves to the charges of gimmickry' (Lee, 1966b).

Cabinet met the following day to discuss the project where Lee continued to argue that a fourth channel was required. She was, however, firmly in the minority: 'Concern was expressed...at the demand which the fourth television network and the University of the Air would make upon resources' (Cabinet minutes, 1966c). With Lee's proposals soundly defeated, Wilson concluded the discussion by promising to

examine both the costs of a new network and the possibility of using spare hours on BBC2. He asked Lee to ensure that the revised White Paper should 'be confined to the educational aspects of the University and should omit references to finance and the fourth network' (ibid.). Although Benn wrote in his diary that this 'must have been a terrible set-back for Jennie' (Benn, 1988a: 385), Lee herself appeared to be quite cheerful the following day. She wrote to Wilson's solicitor Arnold Goodman, who was helping with the financial discussions surrounding the OU, that she now considered the use of BBC2 between 6 and 9pm to be 'the ideal solution' (Lee, 1966c) and was ready to amend the White Paper. The next draft, three days later, dropped any references to finance and the possibility of a fourth channel for the OU was never discussed again.²³

At one level, this is an excellent piece of *realpolitik* as Lee had now managed to convince the Cabinet of the need for the OU and won a place for it in the election manifesto. This is very much the standard reading of the situation. Briggs argues that Lee 'was sufficiently assured that the new university would be brought into existence that she was prepared to compromise on the introduction of a separate fourth channel' (Briggs, 1995: 498). Patricia Hollis, a Labour life peer who has written a recent biography of Lee, presents it as a victory for skilful negotiation. 'Had Jennie persisted in demanding the fourth channel, she would have sunk the entire project. Cabinet hostility to its cost was too great. Not even Wilson could have delivered it. She capitulated' (Hollis, 1997: 317).

Perhaps Hollis is right and that even a project so precious to Wilson as the OU would have been sacrificed to help balance the books. Certainly, it is true that Lee's persistence meant that civil service and establishment opposition to the project was eventually swept away. The more important point, however, is that the cost of between £17m and £40m for the OU was insignificant compared to the £300m cost of maintaining Polaris at that time (Ponting, 1989: 88). A pragmatic approach meant that, given that modernisation was an expensive business, some areas of policy had

²³ This is yet another example of a compromised solution which is not peculiar to a Labour government. During the passage of the 1963 Television Act, backbench Tories insisted that PMG Bevens commit himself to introducing a second commercial channel by 1965. They dropped their

to be higher up the pecking order than others. A consequence of the February decision, therefore, was the scaling down of the importance of television for the University. 'The major change from Wilson's original vision' wrote the OU's first director of studies in arts, 'was the realization that it was not possible for the University to rely solely or even primarily on broadcasting...Broadcasting would have a significant role in association with other means of instruction' (Ferguson, 1975: 15). While the Open University is a notable example of educational reform, its status as a key development in the history of broadcasting is less certain.

With the proposed decision to move the OU to BBC2, Benn simply avoided any reference to the possibility of a fourth channel in the broadcasting debate in March 1966. The increasingly difficult economic situation throughout the summer and autumn of that year ensured that the Cabinet would not change its decision and preoccupied the minds of those who might have otherwise have criticised the government for inaction. When the White Paper eventually declared in December that 'the Government do not consider that another television service can be afforded a high place in the order of national priorities' (White Paper, 1966: para.17) and delayed any decision for at least three years, there was little fuss.

After over two years in office, Labour had at last published a statement on the future of television. According to Labour's rather breathless conference report on broadcasting, 1966 had been a 'year of modernisation, development and expansion on all fronts, as befits a science-based industry in the throes of a technological revolution' (Labour Party, 1966: 102/3). True, colour on 625 PAL was definitely on its way, but decisions on modernising BBC finances, developing a fourth channel and expanding broadcasting hours had all been put on hold. The problem was that Wilson's technological revolution had coincided with a prolonged period of economic turbulence that meant that the Labour government's priority was survival rather than innovation. 'Instead of seeking to set the agenda for debate, seize the initiative and push through a clear programme, it seemed content to tackle issues as and when they arose' (Ponting, 1989: 173). Despite the appearance of the White

claims when Bevin promised that the fourth channel would be launched as soon as financial circumstances allowed (see Lambert, 1982: 17).

Paper at the end of 1966, there was, therefore, little evidence of a strategic and co-ordinated plan for television reform.

Labour, the ITV franchises and the levy

Apart from its refusal to hand over a second channel to the ITA, commercial television had little reason so far to worry about life under a Labour government. Wilson attended the tenth anniversary dinner of the ITA in September 1965 and publicly praised the achievements of commercial television. Relations between Brompton Road and Downing Street were uniformly friendly with even Tony Benn privately admitting that he was fond of the ITA chairman, Charles Hill (Benn, 1988a: 321). More importantly, while an ITV franchise was no longer a 'licence to print money', it was certainly an invitation to spend money. In the first ten years of operations, ITV bosses had embarked on an £80m programme of diversification snapping up 'sports stadiums, television-rental shops, property companies, optical firms, publishing houses, sweet shops, hotels, agencies and a host of other businesses' (Shulman, 1973: 23). Television, in the minds of many ITV entrepreneurs, was a business that required accountability to both audiences *and* shareholders.

The introduction of the levy on advertising revenue by the Conservatives in 1963 had proved to be only a slight inconvenience. 'The programme companies had learned to live with the additional burden of discriminatory taxation' writes the official historian of commercial television, 'and – despite their earlier cries of doom and gloom – they had continued to prosper' (Sendall, 1983: 335). Annual profits of the ITV companies between 1964 and 1968 averaged £18.3m, a profit rate of 50% as against the average of 13% in industry generally (see *ibid*: 319 and 370). Harold Wilson was more than happy to see this example of dynamic accumulation, particularly because his Exchequer was reaping the rewards, some £40m going back into government funds in 1966 alone (Donne, 1967).

In a climate in which the prime minister was calling for pay restraint and belt-tightening, it was the trade unions who provided some of the most vocal criticism of ITV's greed. At the 1965 TUC conference, Alan Sapper from the Television and

Screenwriters' Guild attacked the use of ITV profits for diversification together with the deteriorating quality of programmes. At the following year's conference, Sapper called on the government to 'ensure that the major proportion of television company's [sic] profits are used for the benefits of British television (Sapper, 1966: 485). The ACTT seconded the resolution and criticised the ITV companies for making vast profits and then withholding them from television production.²⁴ The issue was not debated, however, by Labour conferences.

In December 1966, Hill invited applications for the fifteen commercial television franchises, now due for renewal. Any worries in the British economy caused by July's deflationary package failed to deter entrepreneurs enthusiastic about the possibility of earning easy returns of investment. 'The frenzied scramble that followed', according to Shulman, 'was a genteel British version of such other financial stampedes as the gold rush in Alaska, the uranium panic in Canada, and the nickel dash in Australia' (Shulman, 1973: 56). While the majority of the applicants were leading figures from the world of business and banking, individuals and institutions close to Labour including Arnold Goodman, Sidney Bernstein and the *New Statesman* were in the queue.²⁵

The government made no attempt to interfere with the decisions of the ITA as Wilson had full confidence in Hill's ability. Those on the left were not so optimistic. *Tribune* complained that 'so long as profit is the main concern of the promoters we are unlikely to get a better commercial television service. The ITA could help by insisting that a fixed percentage of the profits be ploughed back into the industry' (*Tribune*, 1967a). When the franchises were announced two weeks later, *Tribune*, unlike the majority of Fleet Street who were generally 'pleased by Lord Hill's new look for commercial TV' (Shulman, 1973: 62), criticised the arbitrary and unaccountable process of dishing out television monopolies, particularly to politicians (*Tribune*, 1967b). The *New Statesman*, not surprisingly given its

²⁴ The motion was remitted after the General Council asked for more time to consider precisely where the money should go. No further action was taken because of the franchise renewals the following year.

²⁵ Alan Sapper had previously called on the TUC to support a trades union channel as 'it is really imperative that this one-eyed serpent is constructively tamed' (Sapper, 1965: 517) but this had been firmly rejected by the General Council.

participation in the process, was less outraged but still deplored ‘the general spectacle of a scramble for bids’ (*New Statesman*, 1967). Crossman, meanwhile, declared that this was ‘an extraordinary part of our so-called free enterprise – the feudal deal in T.V. franchises which has been given to I.T.A...I wish our Labour Government had done something about it, but we didn’t’ (Crossman, 76: 377).

Indeed, the PMG vigorously defended the deal in parliament shortly afterwards. To those who called for transparency in the allocation of franchises, Edward Short replied that secrecy was needed to fend off the prying eyes of the media who would inevitably take sides. ‘The consequence of open adjudication, therefore, would seem to be the exclusion of the Press from the programme companies’ (HoC Debates, 28 June 1967: col. 449). Given the growing dangers of media concentration and the high levels of press investment in ITV at the time, this would seem to be a worthwhile suggestion. Short, however, welcomed the fact that the press now had financial interests in more television franchises than before because this provided for an additional source of income which would only add to the security and diversity of the British press (*ibid*: col. 453). He was supported by the backbench Labour MP Christopher Rowland who attempted to divert attention away from criticisms of the commercial motives of ITV: ‘I strongly take the view that the question of profits is not the most important point to watch. Throughout broadcasting, the most important thing is the programmes and their quality and standard’ (*ibid.*: col. 434). He then went on to defend the right of MPs to be chairmen of ITV companies and congratulated the ITA on its ‘shake-up’ of commercial television.

Labour had, in practice, accommodated to the commercial television companies while the left was busy either attempting to buy its way into ITV or calling on the ITA, and not the government, to insist that profits be re-invested back into programmes. Yet, just weeks after the new franchises were awarded, the NEC’s advertising sub-committee (see pp. 96/7) produced its first draft report which proved to be extremely critical of ITV. Recognising the crucial influence that advertising revenue exerted on television, the committee stuck by the findings of the 1962 Pilkington Committee that the needs of advertising clashed with the public’s right to choose from a diverse range of quality programmes. The report finished by stating that:

We do not believe that the passage of time has done anything to soften the force of this hard criticism [of commercial television in the Pilkington Report]. Nor does the I.T.V. auction of licences to print money which we have recently witnessed encourage us to believe that the implication of the Pilkington Report was ever squarely faced. We still think that a greater degree of public control and public accountability is necessary in commercial television (Labour Party NEC, 1967: 23).

While the government had missed the opportunity to reform commercial television by taking advertising sales away from the ITV companies, restricting cross-media ownership or introducing some transparency into the franchise process, the NEC's anti-commercial beliefs now came to the fore. This was just one of the differences that emerged between the NEC and the government in the period after 1966 (see Minkin, 1980: 298-300).

Devaluation of the pound in November 1967 and the subsequent cuts in public expenditure threw the Wilson government into disarray. Divisions in the cabinet echoed massive dissension in Labour's grass roots. Time and again, the government turned on its own supporters to pay the price of economic crisis, implementing incomes policies and spending cuts. The theme of betrayal was taken up not just in the pages of *Tribune* but even in a series of leader articles in the *Times* in June 1968 by an anonymous civil servant. On one occasion, 'C' used the example of commercial television to illustrate Labour's failure to sustain the hopes of its supporters and its retreat from substantial reform. It is worth quoting at length.

As an example [of Wilson's pragmatism] the Government's attitude (or rather lack of attitude) to commercial television which the Labour Party had persistently attacked in opposition, is not inapposite. Nothing epitomized more ostentatiously the candy-floss society, nothing else, to pile Pelion on Ossa, had been such a Thrasonic demonstration of crude capitalism. Yet no change was made in the way the franchises were allotted and the consequent fortunes distributed according to the whim of the I.T.A. No one denies that the profits made out of commercial television were a national scandal which should have undermined the position of the Macmillan Government more seriously than the Profumo affair. What is beyond comprehension is that the same procedure should have been allowed to repeat itself under a Labour Government without a murmur ('C', 1968).

By 1969, the tide was starting to turn against the commercial companies: advertising revenue was declining because of economic uncertainty while one of the new franchise companies, London Weekend Television, was on the brink of collapse after financial mismanagement. Most disastrously for the ITV employers, the government, desperate for revenue to prop up the economy, increased the advertising levy by £3m in the April budget. The chancellor, Roy Jenkins, could no longer justify ITV's huge rates of return and argued that '[i]n my view the community should have a bigger share in the value of these publicly created concessions' (HoC Debates, 15 April 1969: col. 1014).

This announcement was met with cries of horror from the ITV companies who warned of impending bankruptcy with a fall in profits from £15m in the mid-1960s to some £3-5m in 1969. Veteran opponents of ITV like Christopher Mayhew and Milton Shulman urged the public not to feel any pity while even the *Economist* warned not 'to exaggerate that crisis. ITV is not on the verge of utter financial collapse' (*Economist*, 1969). The Labour-supporting *New Statesman*, however, adopted a more pragmatic approach. 'It is hard to weep for a bonanza industry which could once weigh itself in diamonds. But the balancing-up process is swinging too heavily the other way: if you rock the boat hard and often enough, it will capsize (Hunt, 1969: 725). Although commercial television had not been rocked hard or often by Labour, ITV bosses organised a high-profile lobby to rescue their ailing craft. Former Labour minister, Lord Aylestone, complained that the levy was too high, while figures like Peter Cadbury of Westward threatened that he 'would not apply for a licence again in 1974 if current problems continued. The levy is nothing but confiscation' (quoted in Moreton, 1970).

Private Eye replied in an article called 'Con The Nation Street' that not enough confiscation had taken place. It pointed out that Westward's profits had consistently risen as had its dividends to shareholders and that the enormous profits of ITV over the years had never been invested back into quality programmes. It concluded that:

In the last three years the Chancellor has taken some £1,800m from the taxpayers. In this situation, it was hardly surprising that he should seek

to take an extra £3m from the rising revenue of some of the most profitable monopolies in the country. The result was a great chorus of rich men's protest, massive cuts in all forms of productive television, a lowering of already rock-bottom television standards, creation of widespread unemployment in the film industry, threats of total closure of TV stations, and perhaps more relevantly, a discreet reminder that this is the year in which a General Election will be fought, like none other, on the "television image" of the protagonists (Private Eye, 1970).

The predictions were entirely correct. Several months later, John Stonehouse, the new minister of posts and telecommunications, refunded not only the £3m cut the previous year but handed back an additional £3m to the ITV companies.²⁶ In reply to an outraged Mayhew, Stonehouse, said that '[w]e are not giving a handout. We are taking less from the programme contractors than we announced we would take a year ago. That is not a handout. It is simply adjusting the amount we take from them' (HoC Debates, 23 March 1970: col. 1144). The decision to come to the rescue of the ITV companies had not been discussed in Cabinet or in the strategic economic policy group, where financial planning was supposed to be concentrated: 'The deal was fixed between the Chancellor and Stonehouse' (Crossman, 1977: 863). Even George Elvin, president of the ACTT whose members were directly affected by the temporarily troubled state of ITV's finances and who had therefore been reluctant to endorse a higher levy, criticised the government for not tying the levy cut to a requirement to invest more in production (*TV Today*, 1970).

After all of Wilson's exhortations to workers to share in the nation's drive to economise and make sacrifices, it was perhaps to be expected that such an act of charity to television's top entrepreneurs should coincide with an impending election. Stuart Hood, the former controller of BBC Television and prominent left-wing commentator on broadcasting issues, argues that the concession to commercial television could be 'explained in part by the fact that Labour voters watch ITV and in part by the close links between the Wilson circle and show business interests' (Hood, 1987: 76). The gradual upturn in the fortunes of the ITV companies in the following years further proved that there was no need for generosity on the part of the

²⁶ Headlines the following day (March 17, 1970) ran 'ITV Firms Given Levy Lifesaver' (*Sun*), '£6m Boost for the Needy TV Men' (*Evening News*) and 'TV shares soar as Whitehall steps down on levy' (*Daily Express*).

chancellor. It is, nevertheless, a revealing lesson that it 'took a Labour government to feel pity for the contractors' (ibid) and to ensure their continuing profitability.

A mood for change

Not all the issues dealt with in the 1966 White Paper had been resolved by the late 1960s. In particular, the problem of BBC finances remained high on the broadcasting agenda. Having promised the BBC a further licence increase in 1968, the government seemed anxious to postpone a decision. At the beginning of the year, Greene wrote to his chairman, Charles Hill, that the PMG's attitude to the £1 rise 'which was formerly positive seems, for unknown reasons, to have become negative.' Answering his own question, he continued that '[o]ne wonders whether he has changed his mind or whether he has run into great difficulties on Cabinet level' (Greene, 1968). It was more likely that Wilson, gripped by the economic traumas of the time, was simply not prepared to sanction an increase. Philip Ziegler, quoting Wilson's private papers, notes that it was almost like a medical condition. On March 19, 1968, Wilson declared that he was 'allergic to any increase in BBC revenue' and that the Corporation should make itself more efficient (quoted in Ziegler, 1993: 269).

With the BBC's situation increasingly desperate, Cabinet discussed the matter again in May. As Crossman sighed to his diary: 'Up to the P.M.'s room to discuss the B.B.C. licence fee, which we've already been discussing for two years [actually nearer four years]...The P.M. chose to indulge in one of his tirades [against the BBC]' and went on to compare the good old days of ITV under Hill to the bias of today's BBC (Crossman, 1977: 84). And yet, despite his vocal opposition to raising the licence fee, Wilson was eventually persuaded to agree to the increase which was finally introduced in January 1969, one year late. The same situation re-occurred the following year when Wilson only agreed to a further rise as long as it was postponed until after the next election.

Labour was much more supportive of public service broadcasting when it came to the matter of pay television. The previous Conservative government had licensed some pay-per-view experiments that Labour had allowed to continue. Despite fierce

lobbying by Lords Mountbatten and Brabourne and some prevarication by PMGs Short and Stonehouse, the NEC's Home Affairs Committee decided in October 1968 to reject any extension to Pay TV Ltd.'s licence. It argued that pay television was likely to hegemonise live sporting events and that 'if Pay-TV made a success of their venture it would be necessary to license other commercial companies to provide a pay service, and that commercial considerations not subject to the restraints imposed on the BBC and ITV might thus predominate over considerations of public service' (Nunn, 1968). This decisive course of action was in stark contrast to Wilson's intervention in the matter. Having heard the HPC's rejection of pay television, Lord Moutbatten phoned Downing Street in a fury.

Lord Moutbatten said that he had discussed this question with the Prime Minister at Lord Thompson's lunch on Thursday, October 17 [eight days before]. The Prime Minister had given him to understand on that occasion that he had no need to worry. From this he had gathered that the question had been settled favourably. He was wondering who was in fact in charge of the Government (Halls, 1968).

This was, of, course, a question that was starting to gain some currency. Who was in charge of broadcasting policy? Was there a strategic plan or was government policy in the field of television designed to cope with crisis management? To what extent was policy led by Wilson's whims or party principles? With both the BBC and ITV under increased financial pressure, with debates on advertising still running under the surface, with no decision about the future of a fourth channel and with a growing lack of trust in the broadcasting authorities, there was an urgent need for a co-ordinated strategy for the broadcasting industry.

The possibility of a systematic overhaul of broadcasting was originally raised by PMG Edward Short in his statement on the ITV franchise allocations in June 1967. Noting that the charters of both the ITA and the BBC were due to be renewed in 1976, he argued that 'nine years from now, an opportunity will arise for a fundamental review of the whole system'. In the short term, he hoped that 'in the spring of 1969, a long, cool look will begin at the whole system of broadcasting in this country' (HoC Debates, 28 June 1967: col. 456). Before then, however, there

were plenty of opportunities to criticise the current arrangements. Commenting on the disappointing opening week of the new ITV regime, the *New Statesman* called for urgent government action to think of ways of making television a ‘genuinely independent public service’. ‘Whatever may have been done for the arts’ went the cover story, ‘the record on broadcasting suggests that the difficulties of interfering to increase independence have been too much for Downing Street’s thinking’ (*New Statesman*, 1968).

The temperature was raised by two speeches in October 1968 calling for broadcasting reform by Benn and Crossman. Benn addressed some thirty people in his local constituency on the theme of ‘Broadcasting in a Participatory Democracy’. While his words were taken to be a public attack on the BBC in particular, Benn was calling for a wider re-structuring of the airwaves.

Broadcasting is too important to be left to the broadcasters, and somehow we must find some new way of using radio and television to allow us to talk to each other. We’ve got to fight all over again the same battles that we fought centuries ago to get rid of the licence to print and the same battles to establish representative broadcasting in place of the benevolent paternalism by the constitutional monarchs who reside in the palatial Broadcasting House (quoted in Jenkins, 1980: 144).

Jenkins claims that the speech was part of a build-up for a resolution demanding media reform at the 1968 Labour conference, although no such motion was ever put. Crossman’s speech, on the other hand, was far more moderate simply demanding ‘a new atmosphere between the B.B.C, the Independent Television companies and ourselves’ (Crossman, 1977: 229). While Crossman’s speech was praised by Hugh Greene and Hugh Cudlipp of the *Daily Mirror*, Benn’s was attacked by Wilson who, according to Benn, ‘wrote me a memo saying ‘gurus should be confined to Wolverhampton’ trying to muddle me up with [Enoch] Powell. I wrote him a reply signed “the guru of Millbank Tower”’ (Benn, 1997).

Benn’s calls for deep-rooted broadcasting reform tapped into a mood of wider political radicalisation. The student revolt and general strike in France in May 1968 together with growing protests against the Vietnam War had led to a critical concern with the political role of television (see, for example, Fisera, 1978, 305-7). In

Britain, this connected to the revival of New Left ideas and the centrality of culture as a political battleground. Perry Anderson had outlined the specific demands of the New Left in relation to television in 1964: full implementation of the Pilkington proposals, 'the fullest freedom for producers to create and the fullest free availability of works for the community to experience' (Anderson, 1964: 27). Now, in the more militant atmosphere of the late 1960s where a space had developed for challenging the status quo, arguments for fundamental reform of broadcasting began to circulate more widely.

Hugh Jenkins, the chairman of the PLP's communications group, laid out his plans for reform in the pages of the ACTT's journal in July 1969. Firstly he called for reform of the mass media as a whole and not in parts. He attacked the undemocratic pattern of ownership of the press and recommended that, while BBC TV remain unchanged, the ITA should take over responsibility for selling advertising from the ITV companies so that the franchise holders would simply provide programmes for the authority. The opposition to advertising of some Labour Party members was, in his opinion, pointless: advertising 'is like fire. It can be used to comfort and inform or it can destroy and debauch. Socialists should know that what counts is ownership' (Jenkins, 1969: 16). As long as advertising is controlled by the state, Jenkins reckoned, socialists should have no reason to worry.

This was almost immediately contradicted by the publication the following month of an NEC statement, *Labour's Social Strategy*, (Labour Party, 1969) which challenged the growing advertising-led commodification of the cultural industries. Thinking along the same lines as the advertising committee (which had yet to publish its final report), the statement condemned the increasing grip of commercial forces on the mass media and argued that any proposals to introduce advertising in the BBC should be 'vigorously opposed'. In a direct challenge to Wilson's antipathy to licence fee increases, it then recommended that 'further finance should be sought through broadcasting licences or through general taxation.' Finally, depressed by the impact of advertising on ITV, it called for a 're-examination of the control and operation of Independent Television' (ibid.: 102).

Further to the left, Stuart Hall questioned the entire framework of British broadcasting in an article for the *New Statesman* in July 1969. He advised readers to reject the ‘narrow framework’ of the usual debates about broadcasting which accepted predetermined notions of what was possible and what was not. Challenging the myth of choice in British television, he argued that it was a mistake to ‘see the alternatives as confined to either bureaucratic, administratively top-heavy, executive-oriented, paternalist broadcasting organised in a monolithic unit; or robber-baron, advertising-conscious, programme-starved, profit-oriented contracting companies’. The key was to ‘transcend this set of alternatives’ (Hall, 1969: 69). His analysis confronted the pragmatism of Labour policy which tied innovation to current financial priorities, but Hall offered no practical solution as to how these aims could be realised.

The following month an editorial in *Socialist Commentary*, traditionally the house organ of revisionism, criticised the increasing concentration of media into fewer hands and urged the government to increase the licence fee in order to save public service broadcasting. ‘This time of financial stringency may not be an easy moment for the Government to embark on bold courses, but if it ever needed the courage of its convictions regarding the virtues of public enterprise here is the time and place. Timidity now would be unforgivable’ (*Socialist Commentary*, 1969: 5). The government’s answer was indeed bold: it had bailed out the commercial companies, delayed a £1 licence increase for nearly two years and now promised in its next election manifesto ‘to establish a high-powered Committee of Enquiry to report on The Future of Broadcasting’ (Craig, 1975: 363), which was eventually to become the Annan Committee. There was no room in the manifesto for a commitment to reform ITV or to find additional finance for the BBC.

Why did the Labour government suggest, at that particular time, a full investigation into the structures of British broadcasting? Partly, following the events of 1968, it was a response to the left-wing critique of the lack of accountability in broadcasting and of key institutions in general. Yet it was also due to some fierce lobbying by programme makers who were increasingly alienated by the state of the broadcasting duopoly and who launched a pressure group at the end of 1969 called the 76 Group,

named after the year in which both the ITA licence and the BBC Charter were due to run out. According to Stephen Lambert,

their aim was to urge the Government to appoint a Royal Commission to review the structure, finance and organisation of broadcasting. They believed that there was a general crisis in the industry and that two recent controversial events – the publication of the BBC's plans for *Broadcasting in the Seventies* and the LWT debacle – were symptomatic of this crisis (Lambert, 1982: 39).

Broadcasting into the Seventies outlined the BBC's controversial plans to rationalise its radio output by replacing the Home, Light and Third Services with Radio 1, 2, 3 and 4 in an effort to free up resources for local radio and undermine demands for commercial local radio. The 76 Group argued that the changes were explicitly concerned with efficiency savings and attacked the new 'managerialism' in the BBC which meant that 'everyone who has worked for BBC-TV over the last five years will have first-hand evidence of an atmosphere in which programme standards have increasingly suffered in the race for ratings' (quoted in *ibid.*: 41). In March 1970, the 76 Group placed an advertisement in the *Guardian* with the headline, 'Crisis in Television and Radio – A Royal Commission Now!' The text criticised both 'the subservience of programmes to profits' in ITV and the BBC's response to financial problems as one that favoured 'business rather than programme values'. The call for a Royal Commission 'to review the structure, finance and organisation of broadcasting' (76 Group, 1970) was signed by a long list of broadcasting luminaries, including Jim Allen, Humphrey Burton, Stuart Hood, Dennis Potter, Milton Shulman and Philip Whitehead, as well as two Labour MPs, Douglas Houghton and James Dickens, and one Liberal MP, Richard Wainright.

Pressure for an inquiry was starting to worry senior broadcasting figures. 'What had begun as a revolt against changes in radio generally' wrote the BBC chairman, 'was developing into a fundamental attack on the whole system, BBC and ITV alike' (Hill, 1974b: 138). Grace Wyndham Goldie, head of television talks at the BBC, was even more alarmed. Such an inquiry 'could put the whole of British broadcasting into a melting pot and recommend to Parliament something quite

different from anything resembling the kind of British broadcasting which so far had existed' (Goldie, 1977: 304). Except that it did not. In reality, a Royal Commission must have seemed to the government like an excellent short-term strategy to head off any immediate decisions about broadcasting.

The reformers got their way when on December 3, 1969 the minister of posts and telecommunications, Stonehouse, raised the possibility of a full inquiry during a parliamentary debate. In May 1970, after five months of intensive campaigning, Stonehouse announced the creation of a public inquiry under the chair of Lord Annan, who had sat on the advisory committee of the Open University some years earlier. Crossman, once again, was puzzled when he heard the news in Cabinet. 'I asked why colleagues weren't consulted and Harold said some colleagues were. Here is another instance of a major decision being privately taken by Harold and a few others' (Crossman, 1977: 921).

The irony is that Wilson himself had initially opposed the idea, even though he is now generally credited with pushing it through. The new BBC director general, Charles Curran, recalled that Wilson 'did not favour the setting up of a further Committee of Inquiry and had not been pleased when the Minister [Stonehouse] had mentioned this prospect in the course of the debate [on December 3]'. Wilson favoured resolution of urgent matters by the existing broadcasting authorities and 'thought that to set up a Committee of Inquiry was simply to inject an amateur body in an area where professional knowledge was essential' (Curran, 1970). This was classic Wilson: what was needed was a body of scientists and experts who would take a purposeful look at the situation and not be put off by any ideological differences. What persuaded Wilson to change his mind is unclear. Perhaps Stonehouse convinced him that any changes 'could be made more acceptable to the public if they were made as a result of recommendations by an independent committee rather than as the result of an internal Government review' (quoted in Hill, 1970). Perhaps Wilson thought that the threat of a full review would be a useful lever to have during the course of the 1970 election. In any case, Wilson lost the election and Heath, anxious to avoid any negative publicity for commercial sound broadcasting, immediately cancelled the inquiry.

How productive was it that the energies of the reformers were channelled into the demand for a public inquiry and not into more concrete or immediate plans for action? Royal Commissions are not the natural battlegrounds of those who wish to see significant or structural change, even if there *was* a real need for a full debate on how to increase accountability and transparency in the structures of British broadcasting. Royal Commissions may uncover useful facts and contribute to a pressure for change, but they are unlikely to be the cause of the sort of transformation so dreaded by Hill and Goldie. However, some on the left were prepared to go further than asking for constitutional reform. In 1969, a number of radical media workers founded the Free Communications Group (FCG) and published their manifesto as *The Open Secret*. They called for ‘a radical contestation’ of media ownership, content and organisations by ‘all the workers in the industry’, whatever their craft, grade or age. ‘The whole debate about what free communications can be has never really taken place. It has been surrendered to Royal Commissions and pieties about nationalisation’ (FCG, 1969: 4). It was a call to action that stood in opposition to the whole course of Wilson’s governments in the 1960s but one that was to find a fuller resonance in the debates on the media in the following decade.

Conclusion

What had almost six years of Labour government achieved for British television? Wilson had come to power on the back of popular enthusiasm for technological innovation and the modernisation of Britain’s political and social institutions. Both Wilson and Benn had wanted television to be associated with these objectives and to play its part in an industrial and cultural revolution. In 1964, satirical shows were mocking the Tories for being obsolete while, within two years of Labour being in office, programmes like *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home* demonstrated how television could play an important progressive role in public life.

By the end of the decade, some critics were claiming that innovation had turned into stagnation, boldness into caution, idealism into pragmatism. Milton Shulman (1973: 103) noted evidence of a ‘creeping conformity, a growing reluctance to cause trouble, a greater emphasis on light entertainment and sport.’ Christopher Booker,

the former writer on *TW3*, later described the prevailing mood as ‘one at least of confusion and disillusionment, if not of considerable gloom’ (Booker, 1992: 303).

The atmosphere of apparently limitless novelty in which television in the late Fifties and early Sixties established itself as such a dominant force in the social and political life of the nation, had dwindled by the end of the decade into a kind of general resigned acceptance of the predominant triviality (ibid: 308).

For Stuart Hall, the reason for the decline of the ‘satire era’ was simply that ‘Harold Wilson is too serious a matter for satire’ (Hall, 1969: 69).

Whilst such a picture exaggerates both the creativity of an earlier ‘golden age’ and the bleakness of the picture in 1970, it is certainly true that government policy under Wilson did little to actively promote an atmosphere of confidence and experimentation. That British television did not go backwards was due more to the impact of producers, directors and scriptwriters attempting to relate to the profound political and social changes of the 1960s than to creative government steering of broadcasting. Tony Benn argues that the period was one in which *all* reforms had to be fought for in very difficult circumstances. People who wanted reform ‘were struggling against a hostile press, a prime minister who began by being very radical and then very conservative, against a Treasury who hated your guts, against the right wing of the Labour Party who thought the whole thing was totally wrong – the early modernisers – so it wasn’t exactly easy’ (Benn, 1997). However, in some areas, there *was* real evidence of social reform with the liberalisation of laws concerning abortion, homosexuality, divorce and censorship. Why did this not extend to television?

Partly, this was due to the fact that television *policy*, as opposed to output, was still not seen as central by many in the Labour Party. Housing, unemployment, health and education were all seen as important areas in which government *ought* to legislate. Television, on the other hand, was an area of private enjoyment in which Labour, still scarred from its initial opposition to the now successful ITV system, was reluctant to intervene.

Another explanation for Labour's failure to transform broadcasting in the 1960s lies with the contradictory role of Harold Wilson himself. On the one hand, Wilson sought to punish the BBC for its frequent criticisms of his government by blocking licence fee increases and supporting Benn's plan to introduce advertising on the BBC. At the same time, he was reluctant to allow advertising on the BBC in order to protect its status as a public corporation and to highlight the value of corporatism and was always persuaded, after some argument, to agree to licence fee increases. Wilson was extremely sensitive to the growing political importance of television and therefore infuriated by individual instances of BBC behaviour but he was simultaneously protective of the Corporation's cultural heritage. In practice, despite his animosity towards a range of programmes and journalists, Wilson demonstrated a very inconsistent commitment to reform the BBC and to modernise the institutions of broadcasting. However, as Paul Foot noted in 1968,

To place the responsibility for the collapse of the reformist policies of the Labour Party solely on the shoulders of Harold Wilson is frivolously to dabble in personalities... Wilson's 'mistakes' – that is errors of judgement brought on in his personal case by an obsession with public relations, a coterie of mediocrities, paralysing indecision and personal sentimentality – have only been marginal in dictating the course of events during this period (Foot, 1968a: 333).

More important than Wilson's personal shortcomings is the fact that television policy is necessarily developed in specific economic and political contexts. In the 1960s broadcasting was affected by the declining state of Britain's finances and the government's response of a programme of public spending cuts. Labour's main contribution to the modernisation of the BBC in the 1960s consisted of a relentless financial squeeze that made it very difficult for the Corporation either to expand or to prepare a long-term strategy. Wilson's government recognised that real reform of British television would eat up precious resources. According to former PMG Edward Short (1998), 'there was no real intention of changing it [television]. I don't think we could have done it without a great upheaval and finding some way of paying for alternative channels.' Faced with contradictory pressures from different constituencies in the party, the result of Wilson's approach was both an economy and a television policy that mirrored the 'stop-go' cycles of the early 1960s. Bound by

an economic and political consensus that put profitability and efficiency at the heart of all decision-making, the legacy of the 1960s Labour governments' approach to British television appears to be one of hesitation rather than modernisation and of pragmatism rather than transformation.

Chapter Four: 1970-1979

Demands for Reform

Calls for fundamental reform of British television found some resonance inside the Labour Party at the start of the 1970s – the speeches by then cabinet members Benn and Richard Crossman in 1968, attacking the lack of accountability and creeping trivialisation of television respectively, were still relatively fresh. However the mood for reform was far more urgently expressed outside of parliamentary bodies, particularly by those groups motivated by the radical possibilities of the struggles of 1968. While conservative groups like Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association urged reform to 'clean up' television, the main critics of the existing structures of broadcasting came from the left. This 'reflected the growth since the early 60s of trade union militancy, a shift in the political mood to the left, new visions of gender and ethnic oppression, more forceful social and cultural liberalism and suspicion of a class- or Establishment-based state' (Goodwin, 1998: 18). More accountability in decision-making, more diverse representations of minority groups, a less antagonistic portrayal of trade unionists and socialists were all 'New Left' demands that emerged at the start of the decade. By the early 1970s, the fact that some of the most popular programmes included *Dad's Army*, *Colditz* and *The Onedin Line* – what Briggs calls 'the appeal to history' (Briggs, 1995: 946) – simply fuelled the desire for more contemporary and relevant output.

One of the most militant groups that combined the desire for a new social order with a programme of media reform was the Free Communications Group. The FCG devoted itself to opening up public debate on key questions concerning the media – for example, ownership, workers' control and editorial coverage – from the perspective of workers in the media industries themselves. The FCG 'believes that newspaper, television and radio should be under the control of all the people who produce them' (FCG, 1969: 1). Co-ordinated by a steering committee composed of journalists and broadcasters²⁷, the group organised a series of public meetings (one of

²⁷ The Steering Committee of Neal Ascherson, Alexander Cockburn, Gus Macdonald and Bruce Page supported an elected council of 24 members.

which was addressed by Tony Benn) which received extensive publicity and within a year had recruited 700 members and earned a considerable degree of influence in broadcasting debates.

The FCG challenged the lack of transparency in broadcasting decision-making by publishing the controversial (and hitherto secret) 1967 franchise submissions of London Weekend Television and Harlech, together with proposals by journalists across Europe for increased control over the editorial process. It helped to organise a ‘teach-in’ of rank-and-file BBC workers in 1970 and published the ensuing discussions about democratic control over programme content and organisational structures under the headline of ‘They Farted in the Cathedral – or how 35 BBC employees asked for democracy in the Corporation’ (FCG, 1970: 21). Briggs confirms that the FCG ‘had a footing inside the BBC’ and that its activities helped to stimulate debates even amongst the Governors about increased participation and accountability (Briggs, 1995: 795). By its fifth issue, the *Open Secret* was claiming that the group can ‘lay a fair claim to have initiated the debate that is now agitating almost all quarters of the communications industry’ (FCG, 1970: 1).

These debates, vigorously pursued by ordinary broadcasting workers, had permeated through to the official trade union movement by the early part of the decade. The Association of Broadcasting Staff, which represented staff at the BBC, successfully proposed a motion at the 1971 TUC conference calling for a committee to study television coverage of the trade union movement (TUC, 1971: 591). The ACTT, launched its own commission examining alternative structures for television and carried a resolution at its 1971 conference calling for the nationalisation of the film industry without compensation and under workers’ control.

Demands for radical media reform, therefore, were starting to be articulated in the early part of the 1970s, particularly by media workers and activists engaged in extra-parliamentary movements. Their concerns were not simply confined to legislative questions about the status of the BBC Charter or the ITA but dealt with fundamental questions of accountability, ownership, content and control of broadcasting. In a period in which the post-war consensus was cracking under the challenge of industrial militancy, economic decline and political struggle, broadcasting’s role as a

unifying cultural force was less assured. Echoing this concern, *Socialist Commentary*'s first editorial of the 1970s warned that the 'road to disaster lies in the break-up of the social cement which has long been so valuable an element in British society' and urged a 'higher degree of social co-operation than we are at present able to achieve' in order to combat increasing insecurity (*Socialist Commentary*, 1970: 3). How would Labour answer this challenge of seeking to transform British television to meet the needs of a less consensual and increasingly highly politically charged social order?

The rise of the left inside the Labour Party, 1970-74

The incoming Conservative government was greeted with a wave of militancy. The Industrial Relations Bill of December 1970 banned the closed shop and unofficial strikes, introduced secret ballots, a register of unions and a sixty-day 'cooling-off' period before strike action could be taken. Massive demonstrations and protest strikes greeted the proposals and brought more and more workers into political action. In June 1971, workers at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS) were sacked and responded later that summer by occupying the yards, winning solidarity from workers across the country. In July 1972, the TUC called a one-day general strike in response to the imprisonment of five London dockers for breaking the industrial relations law. The dockers were freed. In both 1972 and 1974, miners went on strike for higher pay, in the latter instance contributing to the downfall of the Heath government.

24 million working days were lost through strikes in 1972, the highest since 1926, the year of the General Strike (Pelling, 1996: 145). This huge increase in working-class militancy spread from economic matters of pay and conditions to more political questions of workers' control as some workers, according to Royden Harrison, 'began to exhibit an ominous concern with the conditions of *distribution* as well as production' (Harrison, 1978: 1).

Union militancy was supplemented by the rise of the women's movement and gay liberation together with the increasing influence of grassroots movements and the revolutionary left. Initiatives for change, therefore, were more likely to come from

outside the Labour Party itself so that while large numbers of Labour members were involved in the various activities, they were not organised as party members but as trade unionists, socialists or feminists. Even those activists who were attempting to influence official party policies acknowledged the 'intellectual lethargy' of the leadership of the Labour movement. In their 1972 book on the 'new unionism', Ken Coates and Tony Topham argued that

it is fair to say that the bulk of creative socialist thinking and writing goes on either outside the Labour Party or in its underground. Writers like E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Perry Anderson and Ralph Miliband [leading New Left figures] are scarcely less outsiders in the present climate than such maverick Fabians as John Hughes or Peter Townsend. No one in the higher councils of the Party takes any notice of what the latter say (Coates and Topham, 1972: 185).

However, even if the Labour Party leadership was not in the forefront of developing this militancy, the party was not immune from its effects and swung massively to the left in the opening years of the decade. Successive Labour conferences passed resolutions extending public ownership, adopting unilateral disarmament and condemned the party leadership's decision not to implement the more radical conference decisions. This shift was reflected in the unions where 'the most powerful men in the movement were now both left-wingers' (Pelling and Reid, 1996: 132): Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon, leaders of the TGWU and AEU respectively. By 1973, even the right-wing shadow chancellor Denis Healey promised, in the heat of conference, that the party's aim was 'to bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families' (Healey, 1973: 128).

The most high-profile left-wing Labour MP was Tony Benn, party chairman in 1971, who associated himself with the UCS occupation and the jailed dockers and spoke of the urgent need for increased participation in political and industrial decision-making. According to Philip Whitehead's history of the 1970s, the Labour Party was energised by Benn as its chairman: 'A hundred sub-committees bloomed in the

exercise 'Participation 72'²⁸ and the chairman was everywhere, encouraging here, prompting there' (Whitehead, 1985: 119). Benn's involvement in grass-roots political activities and his support for industrial democracy was to be crucial in later initiating Labour's media reform programme.

This was the context in which the National Executive Committee drew up the document that was to become, for Pelling and Reid (1996: 146), the most left-wing policy statement in the party's history, *Labour's Programme 1973* (Labour Party, 1973c). The document proposed a strategy based on an expanded public sector, an interventionist National Enterprise Board co-ordinating economic activity, compulsory planning agreements involving government, employers and workers and foreign exchange controls to protect sterling. Embracing the language of industrial democracy and participation, the document promised action in a whole series of policy areas from prices, pensions and income distribution, to industrial relations, full employment and communications. Labour's aim, in the words of the programme, was 'no less than a new social order' (quoted in Hatfield, 1978: 174).

The adoption of this programme, later known as the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES), was motivated both by the militancy of the period but also by the debates which had followed Labour's defeat in 1970. While the traditional Labour revisionists like Crosland and Roy Jenkins called for a renewed commitment to social justice and egalitarianism (see Foote, 1997: 236) to compensate for Wilson's indecision and failure, another group of Labour theorists called for a much more decisive form of economic planning. Writers and activists like Ken Coates, Michael Barratt Brown and Stuart Holland, organised around the Institute for Workers' Control, were influenced by the New Left emphasis on participation and democratisation and argued for strong state intervention into the private, not just the public, sector (see Holland, 1975). However, whereas the original New Left was 'highly suspicious of Labour as a parliamentary party hostile to extra-parliamentary

²⁸ 'Participation 72' was the Benn-inspired attempt to involve ordinary party members in prioritising issues to be addressed. Some 2000 questionnaires were distributed to party branches with 600 returned. Nearly 50% of responses indicated that social and economic policy were 'very important' while other areas marked out for future discussion included food policy, international affairs and EEC membership. The findings were later ignored by the leadership in any case. (See Hatfield, 1978: 72-75).

activity, the new Labour left saw no reason why parliamentary *and* extra-parliamentary activity could not go together hand in hand' (Foote, 1997: 306/7). Labour was to be the vehicle for radical economic change.

The Labour left presented the adoption of the programme as an important victory, despite Wilson's reluctance to implement the measures. For one supporter, Labour 'now had a sophisticated and radical economic programme, and an aroused militant working class ready to follow its lead' (Hodgson, 1981: 91). It was in this atmosphere, of an increasing attachment to concepts of industrial democracy, participation and planning, that a commitment to television reform at last began to be seriously debated inside the Labour Party.

Television Issues in the early 1970s

Labour and the BBC

The stormy relationship between the Labour Party and the BBC that had developed in the 1960s continued into the following decade. Wilson's highly personal vendetta against what he saw as systematic anti-Labour bias by the Corporation remained at an intense level. His controversial appointment of Lord Hill as chairman in 1967 appeared to have made little difference to the BBC's coverage and he held the Corporation partially responsible for Labour's defeat in the 1970 election (see Briggs, 1995: 880). Immediately afterwards, one senior BBC figure reported that 'Wilson is extremely bitter about the BBC, so bitter that he wishes in the future that Labour Party Political Broadcasts should be done by Granada Television' (Grist, 1970).

The situation was inflamed the following year by the broadcast of a programme in the *24 Hours* documentary strand about Labour's fall from power. *Yesterday's Men* dealt with the consequences of losing power and took its title from Labour's portrayal of its Conservative opponents in the run-up to the 1970 election. According to Anthony Smith, it provoked 'the biggest and most furious row that a television programme in the English language has ever provoked' (Smith, 1972: 820). While the programme was intended to be a fresh examination of the mixed

fortunes of the political class, it appeared to Wilson and the Labour Party to be a simple hatchet job. Tony Benn described the programme as a ‘complete send-up’ and claimed that the producers had ‘knifed Harold as hard as they could’ (Benn, 1988b: 350). Outraged by the provocative questioning about his personal finances, the satirical incidental music and the trivial tone of the whole programme, Wilson asked his solicitor Arnold Goodman to seek an injunction against the BBC. Whilst this was not successful, the huge uproar which followed the programme forced the governors to issue a partial apology and led to a more cautious approach to current affairs output. ‘For a long time afterwards,’ wrote Ben Pimlott, ‘television pulled its punches when dealing with politicians. ‘Better be safe than imaginative’ became the bitter motto’ (Pimlott, 1993: 578).

Partly because of the consequences of *Yesterday’s Men* and partly because Labour was now in opposition and therefore only a secondary media target, Wilson’s high-profile campaign against the BBC declined in the following years. Nineteen months after the BBC apologised to Wilson, he met Sir Michael Swann, the new BBC chairman, for lunch. ‘Mr. Wilson started by saying he had had no serious causes for complaint in the last eighteen months, and that he felt the BBC had been making strenuous efforts to be fair’. As distinct from his earlier accusation of systematic bias, Wilson argued that ‘alleged unfairnesses’ were due not to ‘malice or political partisanship’ but to ‘political inexperience’ (Swann, 1973). Just as trade unionists and the left inside the Labour Party were starting to agitate around demands for balanced broadcasting coverage, Wilson and the Labour leadership were now making conciliatory noises to the BBC.

Labour and ITV

The Free Communications Group’s publication of LWT’s franchise submission highlighted the lack of transparency in the awarding of licences as well as the failure of some ITV broadcasters to stick to their promises. Meanwhile, the question of excess ITV profits had not disappeared. The short-lived downturn in advertising revenue of 1970-1 had turned around by 1972 so that, once again, the ITV system was awash with money. Profits increased by 40% for Thames TV, 46% for Scottish TV, 50% for Granada and Westward while Border doubled and Anglia tripled their

rates of return (*Campaign*, 1972). This was no doubt helped by the Conservative government's cut in the exchequer levy in February 1971. Yet, while Labour had done precisely the same thing the previous year, this time its MPs were extremely critical. 'Disgraceful' shouted Labour MPs in Parliament when the cut was announced while the shadow telecommunications minister, Ivor Richard, called the move 'extraordinarily regressive' (Hoc Debates, 15 February 1971: col. 1212).

One of the last acts of the Labour government in 1970 had been to set up a Prices and Incomes Board report to examine the costs and revenue of commercial television. When it reported at the end of the year it made a number of recommendations about how to restore profitability but also drew attention, according to Caroline Heller, to 'the problem of what level of profit is socially acceptable in the interest of stability' (Heller, 1970: 12). This was pursued by an even more extensive investigation in 1971-2 into commercial television undertaken by the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries, chaired by left-wing Labour MP Russell Kerr. While one historian described the report as 'Pilkingtonian in flavour', excessively aggressive towards ITV and therefore counter-productive (Potter, 1989: 64), the committee made it clear what had changed since the 1960s.

There has been a shift of emphasis from considering the broadcasting media solely in terms of the programmes they produce to one in which the BBC and the [Independent Broadcasting] Authority are seen as powerful institutions in their own right, whose style of decision-making and action profoundly affects the community. It is this view which has led to the demand for public accountability and for increased public participation and access (House of Commons, 1972: para. 145).

The committee was extremely critical of the current system and proposed a number of changes, including stronger regulation, more experimentation and education in programming, more opportunities for the smaller ITV companies and the reduction of pressure for high ratings. No wonder that, according to Anthony Smith (1974: 222), 'the document pleased the more radical wing of the broadcasting world.'

The report clearly echoed the concerns of the broadcasting unions, the Free Communications Group and the growing left inside the Labour Party about the need for industrial democracy, a qualification of the over-riding drive for profits and an

interest in alternative structures. Indeed, Kerr himself in a letter to the *Times*, made it clear that the system itself was up for grabs. ‘Do you need, for example, an IBA at all? Do we wish to continue with a system whereby roughly half of the nation’s TV is controlled by a handful of companies making very substantial profits indeed? Are these “ground rules” for the operation of this most powerful of all media divinely ordained and immutable?’ (Kerr, 1972) Thus while the relationship between the Labour leadership and individual ITV employers continued to be a close one, the commercial television system as a whole was increasingly subject to critical investigation by the Labour movement.

Labour and the Fourth Channel

The allocation of a fourth channel was a central issue to all those interested in television policy in the early 1970s. Since the previous Labour government had postponed a decision because of its economic difficulties, the Conservatives were now threatening to hand it over to ITV. When the ITA published proposals for an ITV2 in December 1971, opponents of commercial television swung into action to prevent a precious national resource being handed over to private entrepreneurs. Research produced by Caroline Heller for the ACTT union showed that there was a weak economic rationale for an advertising-led ITV2 in the light of the Tory introduction of local commercial radio (ACTT, 1971). The Free Communications Group expressed its concern that advertising revenue would be diverted from upmarket newspapers and ‘if it is the quality press which will suffer most, do we really want a fourth channel?’ (FCG, 1971: 36). Similarly, the *New Statesman* declared its total opposition to a commercial fourth channel because of the ‘parlous state of the British press, which cannot sustain the loss of further millions of advertising revenue’ (*New Statesman*, 1971: 878).

Opposition to an ITV2 cemented around the cross-party TV4 campaign that was backed by the FCG, Mary Whitehouse’s NVLA, various unions and sympathetic Labour MPs like John Golding, Philip Whitehead and Hugh Jenkins. The latter group tabled an early day motion which argued that ‘the fourth television channel should not be allocated to the present independent television contractors’ and won the support of about a hundred MPs (Lambert, 1982: 45). According to Labour MP

Ivor Richard, the opposition were ‘firmly and definitely opposed to the allocation of the fourth channel to I.T.V. at this stage’ (HoC Debates, 15 December 1971: col. 557).²⁹

What vision of the fourth channel was the opposition in favour of? One important contribution to the debate was Anthony Smith’s vision of an electronic publishing house in the form of a National Television Foundation (NTF). Endorsed by the ABS union, Smith’s plan was to provide a ‘right to broadcast’ to a range of social groups so that the NTF ‘would then play a kind of impresario role, merely by allocating resources to some, but fitting producers, writers, technicians, to others who arrived only with an idea, a grievance, a cause’ (Smith, 1976: 296). Despite a lack of detail about how to fund such an operation, the model fitted with contemporary concerns to open up broadcasting to new voices on a more decentralised basis than existing broadcasting institutions and was to prove extremely influential in later discussions about the fourth channel. Others argued for an education-based channel or for a network of local community stations while one piece of academic research found that 63% of the public simply did not think that there should be a fourth channel (Halloran, 1977).

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the other suggestion from the Labour movement at the time was to do nothing. Philip Whitehead MP, while welcoming the spirit of the NTF model, criticised the financial problems associated with the plan and argued that ‘the best thing we can do about that fourth button on the set is not to press it. Not for anyone’ (Whitehead, 1972: 3). The ACTT, deeply concerned about the impact of a fourth channel on employment prospects in the industry, also decided that postponement was the best option. It would be ‘improper to commit the Union to any particular scheme without opportunity for detailed analysis and comparison of the benefits offered to workers in the industry’ (ACTT, 1973: 29). In the early 1970s, therefore, the Labour Party was far more united about what it did *not* want than what it did want from a fourth channel.

²⁹ We may assume that the opposition was not entirely united about this. Only three years previously, the Labour minister of posts and telecommunications, John Stonehouse, told a broadcasting symposium that he supported a fourth channel going to ITV because ‘it could provide an excellent

Labour and a public inquiry

The issue that galvanised all of those around the Labour Party who were interested in broadcasting policy was the demand for a public inquiry into broadcasting. Almost every decision that had any connection to television was linked to the need for a full and open debate on the future of broadcasting. Since the Conservatives had scrapped Labour's plan for such a committee back in 1970, the clamour for an inquiry from Labour quarters was now even more deafening. The problem for Labour was that having introduced local commercial radio (as promised in its manifesto), the new Conservative government was not keen to enter into a protracted debate on the role of broadcasting in a climate in which the left was setting the intellectual agenda.

Labour seized every opportunity to raise the issue. The Early Day Motion rejecting an ITV2 in December 1971 tied the future of the fourth channel to a public inquiry as, for Philip Whitehead, all the possible alternatives for a new channel 'ought to be sifted through the fine mesh of a public inquiry' (HoC Debates, 15 December 1971: col. 532). The Labour chairman of the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries, Russell Kerr, argued that his concerns about the IBA were tied to the 'urgent need for a wide-ranging enquiry' (Kerr, 1972). The Free Communications Group, the TV-4 campaign and the ACTT all pressed for an inquiry while the 1971 TUC conference called for a 'process of public enquiry into the ownership and control of the mass media' (TUC, 1971: 591). When in March 1973 the Conservatives announced the extension of both the BBC Charter and Independent Television Act from 1976 to 1981, 'the Labour Party immediately declared that if it returned to power it would not be bound by it' (Briggs, 1995: 888) without an inquiry. MPs kept up the pressure on the Conservatives so that by October 1973, Philip Whitehead was promising that:

I shall do everything I can to persuade the Labour Party not merely to oppose the coming legislation to extend the Charter and the Act in 1981, but to pledge that one of the first acts in government should be to announce that wide-ranging inquiry... We must not have a repetition of

opportunity for existing and new independent companies to experiment even more with adventurous programmes' (Stonehouse, 1970: 6).

the abandonment of Pilkington once Labour came to office in 1964 (Whitehead, 1973: 488).

Why was there such a consensus about the need for an inquiry? Anthony Smith argues that 'there was need then and there is now. If you're trying to find independent institutions within the public sector to run everything but particularly a cultural enterprise, the periodic inquiry is an essential form of public accountability' (Smith, 1999). Nicholas Garnham, an influential supporter of an inquiry at the time, wrote later of the 'liberal belief in an inquiry for its own sake as a way of letting the people into the debate on the future of British broadcasting' (Garnham, 1980: 47). Calls for an inquiry in the early 1970s fitted Benn and the left's demands for increased accountability in the television industry while it provided opponents of Benn inside the Labour Party with the opportunity to take the heat out of the situation. The need for a comprehensive review of broadcasting was one that all sections of the party could agree on.

The Labour Party study group on the media and *The People and the Media* (TPATM)

It was, however, the left inside the party who provided the backbone of Labour's first systematic broadcasting policy. In April 1972, the Home Policy Committee of the NEC under the supervision of Tony Benn invited about 40 members of the Labour movement to a meeting on 'communications' to discuss many of the issues raised above and to establish a study group on the media. Noting that it was not yet clear whether the government would launch an inquiry, the introductory document suggests that it was nevertheless time the party began to 'clarify its view on future policy' and sketch out some of the key areas for debate. These included relations between the media and politicians, questions of bias, finance and ownership, the role of advertising³⁰ and the issues of access to, 'worker participation' in and 'alternative

³⁰ In February 1972, the party had finally published its Green Paper on Advertising which contained seven paragraphs on television. It repeated the Pilkington Report's criticism of ITV's relentless search for maximum ratings and argued that 'commercial television can best be understood as an adjunct of the industrial system, rather than as a service of broadcasting with the responsibilities that entails' (Labour Party, 1972c: 49).

structures' for the media. Heavily influenced by left-wing critiques of commercialism and media concentration, the document argues that what is needed is a 'thorough examination of the alternatives *across the board*, and the development of a comprehensive policy as to future structure' (Labour Party, 1972a: 6 – emphasis added).

Labour MPs invited included James Callaghan, Ian Mikardo and Tom Driberg from the NEC together with a dozen other MPs, among them Crossman, Mayhew, Whitehead, Stonehouse and Kaufman, as well as representatives from media unions. The largest single group was listed as 'others': intellectuals, academics and industry people who had contributed to the recent media debates. This group included Neal Ascherson and Gus MacDonald from the FCG Steering Committee, Hilda Himmelweit from the LSE and James Curran from the Polytechnic of Central London, and New Left figures like Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall (Labour Party, 1972b). Although neither Williams nor Hall attended any of the meetings, the fact that they were invited onto an official Labour Party committee at all demonstrates the influence of the left in party discussions of media reform.

The study group drew explicitly on ideological critiques of the media influenced by Marxism so much so that the original document contained a lengthy quote from Hall on the need to transcend the existing set of broadcasting alternatives. Hall had recently written another article on 'The Limitations of Broadcasting' (Hall, 1972) which spoke of a 'crisis' in broadcasting because of the breakdown of consensus politics. 'Regulated conflict between the mass parties has been 'transcended': first by the emergence of extra-Parliamentary opposition politics; second by a return to more open forms of class conflict' (ibid.: 328). According to Hall, this was putting severe strain on mass media that had traditionally operated by legitimising a very narrow conception of assumptions that broadly reflected the interests of a ruling elite. 'Impartiality', he wrote, 'often leads the broadcaster into the impasse of a false symmetry of issues. It also gives him a built-in interest in compromise, in conflict-resolution' (ibid.: 329), usually along parliamentary lines. But when the conflicts are too open, the divisions between classes too exposed, as in the period of the early 1970s, broadcasting's function becomes more problematic. In this situation, Hall

concluded, broadcasting 'becomes the terrain of societal and class conflicts at the ideological level' (ibid.).

While Hall did not make his physical presence felt on the study group, another theorist with a similar ideological critique came to play a decisive role in drawing up Labour policy. Nicholas Garnham was the head of communications at the Polytechnic of Central London and had been active in ACTT debates about democratising the media. In *Structures of Television*, first published in 1973, he launched a savage critique of the existing broadcasting arrangements. The duopoly for Garnham was a

system in which two powerful institutions responsible not to the public but to the real, though hidden, pressures of the power elite, big business and the cultural establishment, manipulate the public in the interest of that power elite and socialise the individual broadcaster so that he collaborates in this process almost unconsciously (Garnham, 1980: 16).

Garnham attacked the myth of the independence of broadcasters and contrasted it with the real interventionist role of the state in determining the level of the licence fee or the levy or coverage of political matters. Instead of hiding the political control structures of the media, Garnham argued to make them transparent through an ongoing democratisation of media organisations. Television should be restructured into regional, independent non-profitmaking corporations where day to day control is in the 'hands of a works committee elected by all the workers' and where longer-term decisions are made by boards elected by both workers and local people (ibid.: 45).

Another significant influence on the study group was Caroline Heller who had drafted the ACTT's Television Commission report. This too proposed the social ownership of mass communications and highlighted the urgent need for open access to financial information, increased democracy in decision-making, security of employment in the industry, the centralised collection of advertising revenue, the abolition of spot advertising and the decentralisation of production units in broadcasting. It concluded that the ACTT looks forward to a 'system which will not only facilitate and encourage programme makers in their efforts to inform and

interpret society but also a system which thinks of broadcasting as a means by which society can hold a dialogue with itself' (ACTT, 1973: 28).

While the voices of Garnham and Heller were clearly heard on the study group, there were also conflicting points of view. Christopher Mayhew perhaps best represented the other extreme, telling Benn that the study group's proposals were 'disgusting, woolly, Marxist stuff' (Benn, 1990a: 98) and eventually resigning from the Labour Party to join the Liberals. In between were individuals like Anthony Smith and Philip Whitehead who wanted to see serious reform but were very sceptical of what they saw as Benn's unrealistic and undesirable plans to nationalise the media. The debate between the 'radicals' and 'reformists' was a vigorous one. During the period of the study group, Garnham wrote to the *Guardian* championing the need for total structural reform of broadcasting and condemning Smith's idea of a National Television Foundation proposal as 'tinkering at the edges' and therefore 'diversionary'. 'It is like building a small village in which to eke out a living at the mercy of the feudal barons, rather than laying siege to their fortresses' (Garnham, 1973). Smith replied the following day, accusing Garnham of 'revolutionary inertia' and of underestimating the importance that a different model of television, which might be introduced after a full-scale broadcasting inquiry, might make to the overall broadcasting system (Smith, 1973). However, while there were different political positions played out in the study group, the group as a whole was perceived as firmly belonging to the left. According to Garnham, the issue of media reform was then 'seen as a platform by the left of the party and that it was no accident that Benn was chairing it' (Garnham 1997).

The first meeting took place on May 17, 1972 in the House of Commons, lasted nearly three hours and was attended by 23 people. It was resolved to reject a general formulation of media policy in favour of 'separate and detailed studies of the different aspects' of the media. Individual reports would therefore be prepared for the whole group which would 'act in a general advisory role' but would still be able to comment on or amend the proposals. The next question was whether to concentrate on the press or broadcasting.

Some felt that broadcasting should have first priority for study in view of the opportunity for changing the structure that 1976 presented; on the other hand, it was argued that the majority of trade unionists saw the Press as the major problem – partly because of the extent of anti-Union bias shown over the Industrial Relations issue (Labour Party, 1972d: 2).

Whilst this issue was not resolved there and then, the view of both Philip Whitehead (1999) and James Curran is that it was clearly ‘the press that was the leading edge in terms of the evolution of [Labour Party] media policy. It was concern about the press that led to *The People and the Media* rather than about broadcasting’ (Curran, 1997). It was later agreed that press and broadcasting would be examined at alternate meetings and that the proposals as a whole would be published as a Green Paper by the end of year. However the group did not meet again until seven months later, in January 1973, where it was ‘hoped that some recommendations would be able to be included in the revised “Labour’s Programme for Britain” [*Labour’s Programme 1973*] which would need to be completed by April.’ (Labour Party, 1973a: 1-2).

The first meeting that dealt exclusively with broadcasting was held on February 8 1973 and heard several papers including one presented by Alf George of the Post Office Engineering Union, who argued for a national publicly-owned broadband cable system. ‘There was general agreement that the development of cable should be under public control and that a publicly-controlled transmission system should be a fundamental plan of Labour policy’ (Labour Party, 1973b: 3). Caroline Heller presented the ACTT Television Commission report while Roger Graef spoke of the need for a Communications Council ‘to act as a forum for debate across the whole field of the media’ (ibid.: 2). The main discussion concentrated on funding and, in particular, the difficult issue of the licence fee. The ‘radicals’ argued that the licence fee should be abolished as it was ‘regressive, difficult to increase and, by having the BBC as its sole recipient, equated an increase in the fee with an increase in BBC power’. Others like Anthony Smith insisted that the licence fee provided a ‘measure of independence’ (ibid.: 3) and that most alternatives would lead to increased state control and bureaucracy. Nevertheless, the meeting did discuss alternative methods of funding, most of which involved direct government revenue to the broadcasters, but reached no agreement.

The next meeting on broadcasting took place after the initial draft of *Labour's Programme* had been prepared. This policy statement, seen as a declaration of intent by the left, contained one page on 'Communications', drawn up after consultation with the study group, and acknowledged the danger of 'market distortions' on freedom of expression in the media. It mentioned the activities of the study group but added that 'more work will be necessary before we are in a position to propose any definite solutions to the problems in this complex field' (Labour Party, 1973c: 88). However, it did confirm some firm principles on which party policy on the media would be based – industrial democracy, public ownership and accountability – and, in the spirit of the times, insisted on the need for a 'full-ranging inquiry into the future of broadcasting' (ibid.). As vague as these comments were, it was already clear that the study group was firmly aligned with Tony Benn's way of thinking rather than the more conservative approach, embraced by Wilson and the majority of the shadow Cabinet, of generally leaving broadcasting institutions alone.

A meeting between Wilson, Labour's broadcasting spokesperson John Grant and the BBC chairman, Sir Michael Swann, reveals some of the differences of opinion. The Labour leader insisted that the party 'really didn't have any firm ideas and were trying to evolve a policy...they were implacably opposed to the fourth channel going to IBA and would rescind this when they got into power. They were also firmly opposed to advertising on the BBC, except possibly paid-for Government advertising' (Swann, 1973). When Swann raised the topical issue of public accountability,

Wilson was vague but Grant came out firmly for a broadcasting council. I went over our arguments, i.e. that a council without power would only be yet another critical voice, while a council with power would undermine the Governors. Grant said this was "swimming against the tide", but after a good deal of argument, Mr. Wilson was, I felt fairly sure, firmly on my side. Indeed, discussion about the authority of the Governors, the D.G. and senior staff seemed to cheer him up no end (ibid.).

Of course, Swann may have misinterpreted Wilson's thoughts on the issue, but it would hardly be surprising had Wilson supported the authority of the BBC governors

and the broadcasting establishment against left-wing proposals for full accountability, as the lesser of two evils.

The issue of a single publicly accountable body to govern the entire media dominated the discussion of the fifth meeting of the study group. While the group agreed on a series of eight objectives including the domination of public service values above commercial considerations, tighter regulation of advertising, democratic control over and wider access to the media, the issue of an executive commission controlling press and broadcasting was far more controversial. Tony Benn notes in his diary that such a body 'was broadly accepted and indeed widely welcomed' (Benn, 1990a: 31) while the minutes of the meeting actually state that 'opinions were divided about a ninth point which was a proposal for a commission with executive powers to be set up' (Labour Party, 1973d: 3). The 'radicals' led by Benn extolled the virtues of a commission that would be able to act strategically across the media, respond to short-term problems, 'focus debate on issues in terms of priorities, and provide a body for unions and other groups go to' (ibid.). According to Whitehead, 'this was Tony Benn in his Gosplan mood, that there was some sort of enormous orchestra and that this would be the conductor which would do everything' (Whitehead, 1999). The 'moderates' were reluctant to endorse a body that they saw as dangerously politicised and centralising and instead endorsed the importance of devolving power. Smith, for example, recalls arguing in the study group that 'you've got the right questions but you need a pluralising answer, that you need more institutions, not fewer' (Smith, 1999).

Whilst this debate was left open, the meeting nevertheless resolved to draft a Green Paper in the next few months. Four weeks later this decision was reversed. The HPC meeting on June 10, 1973 considered the draft report and agreed to publish it as a discussion paper and not a Green Paper as the party had already published too many of them on various other subjects. The profile of the study group suffered another reverse when Labour's election manifesto in February 1974 excluded all mention of broadcasting, omitting even the party's support for a public inquiry. Despite the discussions on television policy taking place inside and outside the Labour Party, only the Conservative manifesto acknowledged television and pledged

to ‘bring forward proposals for the allocation of a fourth TV channel when economic circumstances permit’ (Craig, 1975: 389).

The final draft was presented to the study group on April 3, 1974, over a month after Labour had won the general election. The broadcasting section was written by Nicholas Garnham and Caroline Heller and amended by committee in the light ‘of the fact that the report now had a rather different relationship to a possible enquiry into broadcasting’ (Labour Party, 1974a), an event confirmed by the home secretary’s announcement the following week that such an inquiry would now take place. With pressure to complete and publish the report, the group met again at the end of the month and agreed to accept Heller’s redraft on broadcasting. The document, eventually called *The People and the Media (TPATM)*, was published in July 1974, no longer a Green Paper but a ‘discussion paper’ designed both to ‘stimulate thought outside the stricter confines of the Labour Movement’ and to ‘assist [members of the inquiry] in their deliberations’ (Labour Party, 1974b).

The document opens with an expression of concern about the current state of the media. Economic concentration, the domination of the profit motive, the absence of accountability in decision-making, the lack of diversity of content, and the influence of government secrecy are all constraints on a genuinely free media. It repeats the call for de-centralisation and industrial democracy:

As for the dangers of governmental control, there seems little doubt to us that alternative structures of broadcasting, based on smaller units and more open decision-making...would provide a far more effective safeguard for freedom of communications than is provided by these supposedly well-intentioned, anonymous and unaccountable guardians. Our aim must be to devise a framework for the media that avoids the twin dangers of government and commercial control (Labour Party, 1974c: 7).

It then lists eight objectives that need to underpin any democratic policy for the mass media, including a commitment to public service, public ownership and public funding, the diversification and decentralisation of media outlets and the broadening of access to media systems and authorities (ibid.: 8).

Two points are worth stressing about the document as a whole. Firstly, it is evident that press reform and not broadcasting is the driving force behind *TPATM* with nearly eighteen pages devoted to the former and only five to the latter. *Tribune*, the house magazine of the Labour left, greeted the report with the headline ‘Don’t just save the press – change it’ and completely ignored all the recommendations about television in its hurry to assess the impact on the press (Clements, 1974: 9).

Secondly, the ideas of the ‘radicals’ permeate *TPATM* far more than the ‘moderates’, to the extent that Anthony Smith is not even a signatory to the document. There is no mention at all of the spirited debates outside the party about the fate of the fourth channel, a sure sign that the views of Garnham and the ACTT Television Commission of a reluctance to endorse expansion at any cost had triumphed over Smith’s plan for a National Television Foundation. Defence of the licence fee as the ‘least worst option’ had also been unsuccessful as *TPATM* proposed to phase it out. ‘Broadcasting services should not be subjected to severe instability of advertising revenues, but neither should they be shielded from economic realities and the need to order national priorities’. The solution, partially in the spirit of the Pilkington Report, was to centralise both the collection of advertising revenue and Exchequer grant (*ibid.*: 15). Finally, the debate over broadcasting authorities was also settled in favour of the ‘radicals’ as *TPATM* proposed a Communications Council to review the operations of all media and a Public Broadcasting Commission (PBC), replacing both BBC and IBA boards, which would be the overall administrative and funding agency for television and radio

Two television corporations would supersede the BBC and ITV networks and would each run one national and one regional channel while ‘[p]rogramme-making itself would be carried out by a wide variety of dispersed *programme units* reflecting the creative talent of all parts of the UK’ (*ibid.*: 14). These developments would be supplemented by the creation of a national publicly-owned cable network, Freedom of Information legislation and the abolition of both the Official Secrets Act and local commercial radio.³¹

³¹ Proposals for the press adopted the same principles and included the establishment of an Advertising Revenue Board to collect and redistribute advertising revenue, a subsidy to launch new

The report met with a hostile response, particularly from the broadcasting establishment. Lord Hill thundered in the *Listener* against the ‘acts of vandalism’ proposed by *TPATM* and ‘the authors’ doctrinal urge to weaken the broadcasting organisations in the interests of what they call “real internal democracy” (Hill, 1974a: 66-67). ‘Was it significant,’ Grace Wyndham Goldie astutely asked, ‘that in the Labour Party’s broadcasting plans there was so little mention of Parliament or the need to maintain Parliament’s ultimate responsibility for broadcasting?’ (Goldie, 1977: 327). Lord Annan continued this line of thinking later when he wrote of calls for internal democracy that ‘to claim that the authorities should be largely comprised of members elected by, and answerable to, outside bodies because these bodies alone can discern the public interest, is really an attack upon the power of the minister and Parliament’ (Annan, 1977a: 25). Of course this was precisely the political point behind the document: to express a more militant understanding of democracy which involved new sorts of extra-parliamentary structures and a wider range of voices taking part in the democratic process.

Commentators in the broadsheet press were not quite as dismissive as those in the upper echelons of broadcasting. An editorial in the *Times* sympathised with the desire to tackle the future of media but argued that the proposals, if implemented, would lead to increased state intervention and further instability in the industries. It added that ‘it is dangerous to seek improvement by pulling down existing institutions with a tradition behind them’ (*Times*, 1974). The *Guardian* took the debates rather more seriously and only criticised *TPATM* for excluding film, publishing and the theatre from the report and for not having enough input from the press and broadcasting fields (*Guardian*, 1974). *Broadcast*, the industry magazine, attacked the proposals as unrealistic and unable to deal with concrete questions of financing television, although the main problem lay elsewhere, with the intellectual fallacies of the argument. ‘It is so strongly based on doctrinaire views about “internal democracy” and concepts of accountability that nobody has bothered to question those beliefs objectively’ (*Broadcast*, 1974: 4).

Even those involved in the study group expressed reservations. Eric Moonman, a Labour MP on the group, argued later that they had ‘ducked intellectual issues in favour of platitudes’ (HoC Debates, 23 May 1977: col. 1060) while Philip Whitehead signed *TPATM*

with some misgivings about one part of it which was the idea of an overarching broadcasting authority that could control everything. I didn’t write a minority report because I felt strongly that the ideas in the document were sufficiently good and radical that one could carry one single proposal that I thought then was unworkable (Whitehead, 1999).

Anthony Smith is even more critical and argues that *TPATM*

was a vengeful plan. It wasn’t a plan produced from a position of total detachment on the part of people thinking what would be best for this medium. It was produced by a group of people who felt that the system was against them and wanted a structure that would make it fair for them...Also they were concerned primarily with the political role of television and not with its entertainment and cultural role. As a former professional in the medium, I realised that news and current affairs is a by-product of television and that the real role of television is to enthrall, to entertain and to compensate for hours of drudgery at work (Smith, 1999).

How valid were these criticisms? Firstly, Smith’s objection to the report’s lack of objectivity ignores the fact that the report was influenced by an ideological analysis of how ‘objectivity’ itself is naturalised through the limited agendas of the media – that the media ‘are confining themselves to the narrow middle ground of what their controllers consider acceptable and uncontroversial’ (Labour Party, 1974c: 6). A greater variety of programme sources, it was argued, would lead to the nurturing of creativity and a proliferation of views within the system. So while there may well have been a perception on the part of the left that the ‘system was against them’, *TPATM* sought to add to the diversity of voices available and not to wipe out those offending ones. Secondly, the report marginalises popular entertainment not simply because of perceptions of its low status, but because innovative and minority-interest programmes are the more likely to suffer in pure ratings-led television. *TPATM*,

therefore, did not prescribe what sort of programmes and genres should be produced but it did seek to protect those areas of programming threatened by the logic of market-led broadcasting.

Thirdly, while the majority of the broadcasting establishment savaged *TPATM* for centralising and politicising broadcasting, the stated intention of the document was merely to extend the accountability of the mechanisms of decision-making beyond traditional political appointees. Instead of BBC governors or IBA board members appointed by the relevant secretary of state, the PBC would have a membership 'made up of elected representatives from the broadcasting organisations and local government, plus members of parliament, in equal proportions, with the addition of nominees from important national organisations' (ibid: 14). Far from placing broadcasting under the control of the Labour Party NEC, *TPATM* dared to challenge the accepted convention of supreme parliamentary control, reflecting the dominant political current at the time of grass roots-led democratisation and participation. Fourthly, the idea that the proposals had been drawn up in a hurry and without any professional input ignores the fact that no political party up to that time had held ten lengthy meetings, produced a number of discussion documents and consulted with a wide range of politicians, technology experts, broadcasters and academics on the issue of broadcasting. Whilst *TPATM* was not 'objective' or indeed popular, it nevertheless contained a coherent set of proposals informed by a genuine consultative process and was intended to stimulate further discussion about television policy.

A more valid criticism of the document is its lack of detail about sources of revenue to replace the licence fee and the precise structure of the new television corporations. However, since it was endlessly repeated afterwards that *TPATM* was a discussion document and not a blueprint, this is an understandable omission. Perhaps the most serious accusation is that the document was a naïve attempt at democratic reform and that the proposals would never have been implemented by a Labour government. Whitehead recalls that the 'word going out from anybody who on the industrial/financial side, apart from Tony [Benn], was that this was unrealistic and you should not take it too seriously' (Whitehead, 1999). Smith is adamant that these were 'not implementable proposals in the real world of politics. In power they would

have been confronted by all the commercial interests, all the other industrial interests which lie behind broadcasting.’ (Smith, 1999).

At one level, Smith is correct to point out that if Labour failed to confront these interests *TPATM* would indeed be a utopian dream and as Labour was extremely unlikely, in practice, to antagonise such a powerful range of forces, the document was more hot air than practical politics. But it is also the case that *any* proposal for radical reform is likely to be attacked by establishment politicians and press as being unrealistic, poorly conceived and dangerous. This is particularly the case when such reform involves the abolition of media institutions like the BBC and ITV and which threatens the position of other media bodies in both press and broadcasting. A sympathetic hearing from these ‘opinion-formers’ is unlikely. The point is that these proposals were conceived as part of a generalised political challenge to market structures and traditional social democratic government and reflected a growing mood inside the country to press for alternative social and political structures. With hindsight, it is easy to write off *TPATM* as misguided and hopeless; at the time, as Stephen Lambert argues, ‘structural reform was in the air’ (Lambert, 1982: 57).

TPATM faced its first test with the Cabinet during the discussions of the party’s manifesto for the October 1974 election which Wilson called in order to secure a larger majority than the one achieved in February of that year. Given that Labour finally had something approaching a media policy and that the government had announced the formation of a public inquiry into broadcasting, surely the inclusion of a paragraph or two on broadcasting would be appropriate. Indeed, a joint meeting of the Cabinet and the NEC in June discussed a draft manifesto that contained several paragraphs on ‘communications and the media’. Drawing attention to the forthcoming inquiry and the study group report on the media, the manifesto promised that Labour would ‘ensure that a new and more open structure is built for the media’. The only concrete pledge was phrased as follows:

We believe that the TV licence is a form of repressive and unfair taxation. We shall, therefore:

- (i) Abolish at an early date, the payment of the licence for such needy sectors of our community as pensioners, the disabled and single-parent families.

(ii) Phase out these payment [sic] altogether as soon as economic circumstances permit (Labour Party, 1974d: 36).

Despite the puzzling wording of this promise, its inclusion in the manifesto was a clear victory for the 'radicals' on the study group. However, after a summer in which 'Wilson and his advisers were embarked upon a careful exercise: mellowing the manifesto,' (Whitehead, 1985: 129) the entire section about communications was withdrawn when the manifesto eventually appeared three months later. Perhaps, television policy was simply not important enough to justify inclusion in the manifesto or perhaps the proposals were found to be too left-wing for the party leadership. In the year in which the Labour Party had spent longer than ever discussing television policy and in which the party's first systematic statement on the mass media had been produced, neither manifesto in 1974 included a single mention of what the party planned to do with television. Now that the party was back in government, would *TPATM* form the basis of legislative action or would its more radical findings disappear under the strain of political office?

The impact of the 1974-1979 government

Speaking to the Labour conference in opposition in 1973, Denis Healey had promised a savage attack on the wealth and privilege of the rich. The following year, speaking to the Confederation of British Industry, Healey as chancellor declared that Labour wanted 'a private sector which is vigorous, alert, imaginative – and profitable' (quoted in *Socialist Commentary*, 1974: 1). Having entered office just as a world economic recession was developing, Healey and the Labour government needed all the friends they could get. By October 1974, inflation was up to 17% with wage increases running up to 22% (Whitehead, 1989: 246). As both unemployment and the balance of payments deficit increased, the demands for deflation grew stronger from the employers while the left found it increasingly difficult to win support for its programme of import controls and state-directed investment. 'To the right of the Labour Party,' as one critic put it, 'the 'alternative strategy' was neither an alternative nor a strategy' (Holmes, 1987: 96). Far from leading an offensive against capital, Tony Benn found himself increasingly isolated in a government that

claimed it was forced to take desperate measures to protect the economy. Benn's defeat in the referendum on Common Market membership in March 1975 only added to his marginalisation in cabinet.

Instead of the anticipated expansion of the public sector, the left found itself confronted with repeated cuts in public spending throughout 1975 and 1976. By autumn 1976, with sterling in steep decline, the chancellor negotiated a rescue package with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in return for £2.5 billion worth of cuts over two years. When the new prime minister, James Callaghan, told the 1976 Labour conference that the old Keynesian method of increasing public spending as a solution to economic crisis was no longer an option, the period of Labour revisionism – of equality founded on economic growth - was firmly at an end. Union leaders who had previously called for social planning in industry now called for a 'social contract' between workers and the government which involved holding down wages to help the country through its difficulties. Nationalisation was now less about taking control of the 'commanding heights' than about bailing out unprofitable firms. According to one government adviser, the National Enterprise Board, the cornerstone of the left's economic strategy, 'became a convenient casualty ward for firms the Government wished to rescue from bankruptcy' (Donoghue, 1987: 149).

While more recent writers like Martin Holmes (1987) argue that the government had little choice but to deflate and pass on the cuts, there was huge bitterness at the time from inside and outside the Labour Party. One supporter of the left complained that the IMF measures did little to halt economic decline but marked the end of any hint of progressive government. 'From the defeat of the Labour government by the IMF in December 1976 to its electoral defeat in May 1979 there is little else but a sordid and wearying tale of a government without any coherent strategy or policy, except to struggle for its own survival' (Hodgson, 1981: 114). Backbench revolts became increasingly familiar – between 1974 and 1979 there were 309 divisions with Labour MPs voting against their government compared to 109 between 1966 and 1970 (Norton, 1980: 428). Annual conferences regularly voted against the executive while, perhaps most seriously, union members started to resist the pay norms until, in

1979, following the ‘winter of discontent’, Callaghan’s government was defeated by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservatives.

In contrast to the grand plans for modernisation and innovation of the Labour government of the 1960s, the 1974-1979 government made fewer promises. Both governments were confronted by serious economic difficulties and both were forced to capitulate to public spending cuts and an abandonment of reform programmes. But, as Philip Whitehead notes about the later period, there was a ‘growth of pessimism about future prospects [which] left its mark on the government. Times of contraction do not produce an enthusiasm for radical experiment’ (Whitehead, 1989: 254-5). According to Roy Jenkins, while his main aim as home secretary in the 1960s had been ‘the opening of windows of freedom and innovation’, in his second term between 1974 and 1976, ‘I saw my primary task as the maintenance of the proper authority of the state’ (Jenkins, 1991: 376). The commitment to progressive legislation which had seen the introduction of a Health and Safety at Work Act, the Employment Protection Act and the repeal of the Tory anti-union laws by 1975, petered out under the strain of maintaining office and keeping the economy afloat. The dream of the Croslandite revisionists for progressive social reform underpinned by economic growth turned into the opposite. By 1976, there had been a ‘sea-change’ in British politics: ‘[p]ermissiveness, collectivism and social reform, it was thought, had produced a crisis of authority. Governments were at best weak, at worst corrupt. Subversives lurked everywhere. The terrorist was at the gates’ (Whitehead, 1985: 202). It was at this time that the public inquiry into the future of broadcasting, desired for so long by Labour supporters, was launched.

Labour and the Annan Committee

One of the first acts of the incoming Labour government in March 1974 was to abolish the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and to place broadcasting policy under the remit of Roy Jenkins in the Home Office and technical matters in the Department of Trade and Industry. Neither Wilson nor Jenkins make any reference to this shift in their memoirs although Garnham is convinced that the purpose of the move was ‘to make sure that Benn was not the minister in charge of broadcasting’ (Garnham, 1997), despite his credentials for the job. One month later,

Jenkins announced the establishment of a committee to examine the future of broadcasting to be chaired by Lord Annan. Given the narrow majority of the government and the pressure of far more urgent matters, for example the state of the economy and Britain's membership of the EEC, it is curious that it acted so quickly to revive the committee.

This may be explained in part in terms of practical necessity. With the BBC charter and IBA legislation due to expire in 1976, some firm decisions were needed about broadcasting and the development of new technologies. The government therefore extended the lives of both broadcasting bodies until 1979 when the committee would have reported on its deliberations. Anthony Smith argues that a decision on the fourth channel was getting to be a priority by 1974 and that the government 'could see that industrially it was quite important. Setting up a new channel meant that there was a lot of industrial potential in manufacturing and they wanted to help British manufacturing' (Smith, 1999).

Given that deliberations about the industrial benefits of broadcasting were largely absent from the ensuing discussions, a more persuasive argument is that reviving the committee was an easy way of exacting revenge on the Conservatives who had scrapped the Annan Committee upon winning the 1970 election. Annan himself agrees that it was 'a tit-for-tat. You know 'you've slapped us down and now we're bloody well going to do it'. I don't know that Wilson was all that involved but Roy [Jenkins] certainly was and was extremely helpful and supportive' (Annan, 1999). Philip Whitehead concurs that

one of the ways of wiping the Tory slate clean was to bring Annan back. But I think the main influence behind the scenes in 1974 was quite a complicated interplay of forces. There was a strong push among academics for, at the very least, a re-examination of what we wanted from an ITV2...and you can't underestimate Roy Jenkins. He had been a radical Home Secretary but now he didn't want to be Home Secretary again and didn't want to go through that tour of picking up on particular issues but here he had a ready-made issue (Whitehead, 1999)

As Whitehead suggests, academics were starting to take up broadcasting issues and to establish media research centres across Britain. Stuart Hall had been in charge of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University since 1968 while the Polytechnic of Central London hosted Free Communications Group seminars and housed Garnham himself. The universities of Leeds and Leicester had set up communications research institutes in the 1960s and Cardiff launched a research centre in 1977 at the same time as the Open University started its course in mass communications and society. In 1973, academics committed to media reform and an official inquiry came together in the Standing Conference on Broadcasting (ScoB) and conducted a series of lively interventions into the debate. Billed as the ‘alternative Annan’, ScoB was an influential pressure group and consisted both of academics involved in the Labour Party study group, like Garnham, Smith and Curran, as well as other leading figures in the field: Stuart Hall, Jay Blumler, Tom Burns, James Halloran, Hilda Himmelweit, Stuart Hood, Denis McQuail, Colin Seymour-Ure and Raymond Williams.

Another academic research unit of particular interest to the Labour movement was the Glasgow University Media Group, founded in 1974, which published *Bad News* (GUMG, 1976), an account of the way in which the mass media systematically distorted coverage of trade unions. This reflected a growing concern in the trade union movement itself about media bias so that in 1976 the authors of *Bad News* were invited down to London to address the TUC General Council. The 1975 TUC conference had already passed a motion arguing that ‘[b]iased and hysterical coverage’ of unions ‘is too important an area to be left to the activities of media managers’ (TUC, 1975: 553) while two years later the TUC agreed to set up a Media Working Group to monitor the ‘reporting and presentation of the trade union movement in the press and in broadcasting’ (TUC, 1977: 375).

The mid-1970s, therefore, were marked by a high level of intellectual and political pressure in the Labour movement highlighting the need for media reform. It was in this climate that the Labour government set up both the Annan Committee and a Royal Commission on the Press to examine questions of press control and monopoly. However, as much as these inquiries were concessions to the left, they could also be seen as fitting the needs of the right. James Curran argues that the ‘concern of the

Labour leadership has always been to have a good press and having a radical press policy was counter-productive in their eyes. Indeed what the Labour leadership did was to kick the issue into touch, quite consciously by setting up a Royal Commission' (Curran, 1997). The same case could be made for broadcasting. 'Wilson's strategy,' according to Garnham, 'was first to move broadcasting into the Home Office and get it away from Benn and then secondly set up Annan which meant that the whole thing was under wraps for three or four years. They didn't have to make any decisions – it became a non-political question' (Garnham, 1997). Wilson aimed to take media reform out of the hands of impatient broadcasting workers and activists and into the more trusted hands of Lord Annan and his committee.

'Politics' was still an issue when it came to the membership of the inquiry team. Breaking the unwritten rule that 'nobody who has expressed any strong views on a subject should ever be on a committee' (Annan, 1999), Jenkins insisted that this political ally, Philip Whitehead, should be on the Annan committee. Whitehead had not simply expressed strong views on broadcasting but had actually been a signatory to *The People and the Media* and appeared to be a card-carrying member of pro-BBC and IBA abolition camp. Whitehead recounts how the deal was done.

Annan's real terror was of politicians. Roy Jenkins got me on and overruled him on this. They were old mates and Jenkins said 'I know this man and he's all right and you can have a right-wing broadcaster and a right-wing politician' and he put both of those on. So I was neutralised by having Sir Marcus Worsley [MP] and Anthony Jay...and it left me with fewer natural allies – Hilda Himmelweit was really the only other person who had been in the Labour Party strand (Whitehead, 1999).

This was despite the inclusion of two trade unionists, one of whom, John Pollock, was the former chairman of the Scottish Labour Party but who had no recorded ideas on broadcasting. The other, Tom Jackson, the general secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers and a former BBC governor, was a significant rebuff to those inside the Labour movement who wanted a more vocal opponent of the duopoly. So despite the massive contributions the left had made to media debates, Jeremy Potter is right to argue that 'the membership of the committee reflected the moderate

Labour leadership's desire for reform, not the revolutionary zeal of those behind *The People and the Media* and SCOB' (Potter, 1989: 241).

The most significant absence from the committee was Anthony Smith, then a research fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford and a member of both SCoB and the Labour Party study group. His model of a National Television Foundation was one of the few coherent proposals for a fourth channel and Smith himself was an influential figure in broadcasting debates. Indeed, until quite a late stage, Smith was on the list and certainly was not blocked by Annan who was in favour of his presence on the committee (Annan, 1999). According to Smith, 'the civil servant in charge of broadcasting at that time came to see me about being on the committee and was surprised that the night before the announcement, the thing came back from Downing Street with this name scratched out' (Smith, 1999). Having argued with Wilson over the latter's support for the Stalinist regime of Husak in Czechoslovakia against the democratic opposition, 'the next time Wilson saw my name on a piece of paper he crossed it out' (ibid.). Politics, despite Garnham's comment, was not totally absent from the inquiry.

Once the government had organised the membership of the committee, the next challenge was to prepare Labour's submission. A draft document, closely based on the findings of the study group, was produced after consultation with Whitehead and presented to the Home Policy Committee in April 1975. Shirley Williams 'complained that the document did not explain who exactly the broadcasting authorities should be accountable to' (Adeney, 1975) and asked for time to make some amendments. The revised document was then endorsed by the NEC itself the following month and sent to the committee. Williams' revisions were minor³² and the Labour Party's formal submission consisted entirely of suggestions taken from *TPATM*. It recommended the abolition of the licence fee and the replacement of the BBC and IBA by a Public Broadcasting Commission backed up by a

³² The second paragraph originally read: 'At present broadcasting seems to be characterised by closed and almost autocratic institutions – and, too, by a marked resistance to wider public involvement in its decision-making processes'. Williams changed this to: 'Although it is conducted within a broad framework of public accountability, broadcasting in Britain today is controlled by closed and almost autocratic institutions; and it is characterised by a market [sic] resistance to wider public involvement in its decision making process' (Labour Party, 1975a: 1).

Communications Council, exactly as in *TPATM*. The only difference in wording was a strengthening of the commitment to accountability. A new paragraph was inserted which stated that:

We are particularly concerned to ensure that the PBS is truly independent of government – as independent of government as the BBC and IBA are now, and preferably more so. We are in no way suggesting that the balance of power between government and broadcasting organisations needs to be tipped in favour of the former. We would strongly argue the reverse (Labour Party, 1975a: 4).

Did the submission represent *official* Labour Party policy on broadcasting? Whilst Wilson was not prepared to make any manifesto commitments along the lines of *TPATM*, he was less disturbed by the thought of these proposals being one small part of many contributions to a wide-ranging inquiry on which a Labour government would later legislate. The status of *TPATM* was clarified by a letter to the *Times* by John Grant, Labour's broadcasting spokesperson, who insisted that *TPATM*

is a discussion document. It commits neither the party nor the individuals who sign it, although they were in broad agreement with its general approach and felt it could usefully stimulate much further thought about this important subject. *It is, of course, in no sense Government policy which is to await the findings of the Royal Commission on the Press and the Annan Broadcasting Committee* which were set up after the working party had completed most of its work (Grant, 1975 – emphasis added).

In a clear example of the gap between party and government, the Labour Government's media policy was not the one proposed by the party's study group but one to be agreed following the recommendations of the public inquiry. Several months after Labour's submission was delivered to the Annan Committee, the 1975 party conference passed a resolution that firmly welcomed the publication of *TPATM* although both the motion and the debate concentrated exclusively on the state of the newspaper industry and ignored the study group's proposals for broadcasting reform. The ideas contained in *TPATM* therefore remained in limbo: acknowledged by annual conference as providing the basis of the party's media policy but seen by the leadership as a mere discussion document.

Labour's submission was complemented by that of the Standing Conference on Broadcasting who argued that 'the BBC and IBA do not have a privileged place in society; they act as stewards of a public service. Whether they remain or whether alternative structures are set up to replace them, a reappraisal of the present system seems to us inevitable' (quoted in *Broadcast*, 1975a). SCoB called for centralised collection of advertising revenue, an emphasis on accountability and the creation of a National Broadcasting Policy Council to advise on policy and a National Broadcasting Commission to take over executive control. Such was the standing of what were fairly radical ideas that the committee gave over two whole days to considering SCoB's proposals after which, interestingly, SCoB organised a press conference at which Lord Annan was present. 'When asked why he was there, Lord Annan replied that SCoB's submissions contained "some very interesting proposals"...The unstated implication was that Lord Annan welcomed such thinking from an allegedly non-aligned group' (*Broadcast*, 1975b). The TUC departed from the lines of *TPATM* and SCoB, rejecting the need for alternative structures and, together with some of the teaching unions, called for the fourth channel to be handed over to educational broadcasting, with some Welsh language programming. 'In this respect for the present structure of the broadcasting organisations,' wrote the *Guardian*, 'the TUC takes a markedly more conservative line' (*Guardian*, 1975) than the Labour Party.

Whilst this is not the place for a detailed analysis of the Annan Report³³, it is nevertheless important to stress how seriously the committee took the more radical submissions, particularly those from the left and the labour movement. As Peter Goodwin argues, 'it is testament to their influence on the climate of broadcasting debate in the second half of the 70s that, even where it rebuffed them, the [left] critics largely set the agenda of the Annan Committee' (Goodwin, 1998: 21). In some ways, the whole premise of the report, finally published in March 1977, was based on the need, not simply for modernisation or renewal, but for the democratisation of broadcasting. 'It has been put to us,' the report stated towards the

³³ See, for example, Potter (1989: 243-260) and Garnham (1980: 47-57) for contrasting critiques of the report.

beginning, 'that broadcasting should be "opened up"' (Annan, 1977b: 16). The duopoly, according to the committee, was proving to be a straitjacket on creativity and audiences so that 'major changes should take place in the structure of broadcasting if good programmes are to continue to be made for audiences who will be more varied, fragmented and perhaps better educated' (ibid.: 28). In a direct acknowledgement of the left critique of the narrowness of the broadcasting agenda, the report argued that contemporary culture 'is now multi-racial and pluralist: that is to say, people adhere to different views of the nature and purpose of life and expect their own views to be exposed in some form or other. The structure of broadcasting must reflect this variety' (ibid.: 30).

In the section on accountability, the report referred to Caroline Heller and SCoB and quoted *TPATM*'s assertion that 'broadcasting in Britain today is controlled by closed and almost autocratic institutions' (ibid.: 32) as representative of much of the evidence presented to the committee. It acknowledged the strength of feeling for a single broadcasting authority and devoted four pages to a consideration of Labour and SCoB's proposals for an executive broadcasting commission. The report confronted left-wing demands for greater trade union representation on broadcasting authorities and stated, apparently unambiguously, that 'management in broadcasting organisations must accept the principle of industrial democracy and be prepared to make radically new arrangements' (ibid.: 428-9).³⁴

The report noted the increasing competition for audiences between ITV and the BBC that could harm public service commitments and insisted that ratings-building must not be the prime objective for the BBC: instead 'it should be to provide interesting and entertaining programmes which will amuse and enrich the experience of large numbers of people' (ibid.: 94). It further criticised the 'rigidity' of programme production structures and called for smaller production units to overcome the 'bureaucratic fog which is said to envelop the upper slopes of the BBC' (ibid.: 106). Recognising the 'institutional malaise' of creative staff at the BBC, the report went

³⁴ Annan's reference to industrial democracy echoed the outcome of a public inquiry set up by Wilson in 1975 to consider workers' participation in industry. The Bullock Report was published only two months before the Annan Report in January 1977 and recommended that employees in large

on to condemn the ‘overmanning’ not at the grass-roots but at the highest levels where it ‘seemed to us that there were far too many executives’ (ibid.: 428). Decentralisation, regionalisation and flexibility were to be the BBC’s buzzwords for delivering a public service.

In terms of commercial television, the Annan Committee continued to ask the questions favoured by the left. ‘Do the Companies make excessive profits?’ it pondered and concluded that ‘[w]e *all* think the risks for the ITV companies have been exaggerated and some of us think the rack of the levy should be stretched tauter’ (ibid.: 182 – emphasis added). Given that the cries of the ITV companies about financial insecurity and near-collapse had led to levy cuts by both Labour and Conservative governments in recent years, this was an important admission. The committee firmly backed the use of the levy to restrain profits while a minority proposed to stop individual ITV companies from using their revenue to diversify into other fields. All agreed that ITV should not be handed the fourth channel. The report was particularly fierce when it came to the question of cable television. It proposed that the Post Office should be responsible for establishing a public broadband cable network and tore into pay television describing it as a ‘ravenous parasite [which] lived off those who produced television and films’ (ibid.: 220). Privately-financed pay television experiments would not extend choice but would eat up precious programming resources, hegemonise live sporting events and generally undermine the universal reach of public service broadcasting.

In many areas, therefore, the report addressed the concerns of the left and acknowledged the demands for reform. The skill of the Annan Committee report, however, is that it embraced the need for change without undermining the basic authority of the existing broadcasting organisations and structures. Having recognised the left’s critique, the report, in the main, rejected their proposals. An executive broadcasting commission was ruled out on the grounds that it ‘would sooner or later lead to one body of people being in a position to impose their views

companies should be able to elect their representatives onto company boards. Benn (1990b: 11-12) discusses how the report was received in the cabinet.

on the whole of broadcasting output' (ibid.: 35), precisely the situation that had led the reformers to press for a single, democratically accountable broadcasting body.

Workers' representation on governing bodies was also turned down on the basis of the distinction between industrial democracy, where workers have a say in the running of a company, and public accountability, which operates above and beyond the interests of specific social groups. Whilst there might be room for industrial democracy in broadcasting, argued the committee, this could not extend to matters of content: 'We are unanimous in our view that the unions should not be entitled to influence editorial decisions. Who determines what shall be said or transmitted, or who shall be asked to appear on television and radio programmes, is ultimately a matter for the Authorities and management to decide' (ibid.: 429). Union involvement could extend as far as consultation over shift patterns, but any idea of opening up the editorial process to broadcasting workers was firmly resisted by the committee.

TPATM's proposals to abolish the BBC and IBA were, not surprisingly, rejected. The report left the BBC virtually unchanged, supported the continuation of the licence fee and even praised the improvements in ITV's programming although it reflected that '[w]hether the ITV companies give the country the service it deserves in view of the profits which they make is a debate to which there is no end' (ibid.: 148). In light of this endless debate, the committee also rejected the proposals by SCoB, Labour and the ACTT for the centralised selling of advertising and highlighted the companies' 'incentive to maximise revenue' (ibid.: 164) when selling their own advertising. The key demands of the left for structural reform were therefore confronted but turned down.

So what were the 'major changes' that the committee acknowledged were necessary to implement? Far from increasing the accountability of BBC governors, the committee suggested reducing their number from twelve to nine; instead of restructuring the ITV system, the committee suggested re-naming it. The duopoly was not 'ended' as promised but simply modified with the creation of other broadcasting bodies: a Public Enquiry Board to oversee occasional public hearings, a Broadcasting Complaints Commission and a Local Broadcasting Authority for local radio and

cable. The repeated demands for increased accountability and democracy in broadcasting were reduced to a recommendation that the existing authorities should ‘hold public meetings from time to time in different parts of the country and should more openly seek the views of the public about the conduct of the services for which they are responsible’ (ibid.: 475). The relations of power at the heart of British television were very much left in place.

The Annan Committee did, however, propose one substantial change: the launch of an Open Broadcasting Authority (OBA) to run the fourth channel. As we have seen, the official Labour Party submission was silent on this issue while most of the labour movement was more united on what it did not want (an ITV-2), than on what it did (generally, an educational channel). Some, like SCoB, argued that a fourth channel was not a priority in the current economic circumstances and that any decision should be postponed. However, heavily influenced by Anthony Smith, who had participated in but who had not signed up to Labour’s *TPATM*, and his vision of a National Television Foundation, the committee agreed on a new authority to oversee an approach to scheduling and programming that would relate to the demand for diversity and difference in television.

We do not see the fourth channel merely as an addition to the plurality of outlets, but as a force for plurality in a deeper sense. Not only could it be a nursery for new forms and new methods of presenting ideas, it could also open the door to a new kind of broadcast publishing (ibid.: 235).

The OBA would commission programmes from a range of producers, including the ITV companies, the Open University and, most importantly for the champions of diversity, independent producers. Mixed sources of programming would be complemented by a mixed revenue base of sponsorship, block advertising, subscriptions and government grants. Furthermore, the OBA would act as a publisher, not a broadcaster, and therefore need not be responsible for ensuring balance in individual programmes but across its schedule as a whole. Such a structure would allow for the transmission of opinions not normally sanctioned by the other channels and therefore appeared to be at the heart of the committee’s stated

aim to ‘open up’ broadcasting. This was complemented by the report’s support for a fourth channel in Wales broadcasting in the Welsh language.

The committee’s concession to the radical demands for democratisation and access was countered by its insistence that the channel should not associate itself with any one political position and that ‘if it allowed its service to be taken over by political extremists, it would soon lose its remit from Parliament...In general, we recommend the [Open Broadcasting] Authority should have the maximum freedom which *Parliament is prepared to allow*’ (ibid.: 236 – emphasis added). Annan was determined that while new voices were to be heard, including those which expressed the breakdown of consensus, they must be organised according to the terms of the existing political consensus. The pressure for an expanded broadcasting sphere that arose in part from the extra-parliamentary struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s was to be accommodated in a new channel whose parameters of acceptability would have to complement those of parliament.

The Annan Report was, therefore, a model of compromise: urging evolutionary proposals to marginalise more revolutionary ones, embracing change while preserving existing structures and encouraging new voices while retaining the former gatekeepers. According to Annan himself, ‘the report was not a crusading one unlike Pilkington. This one was “look, steady as she goes, one great venture – Channel Four – is enough, and there is nothing very much more that we ought to be doing at the moment”’ (Annan, 1999). However, just as Richard Hoggart was seen as the intellectual spirit behind the Pilkington Committee, it was the Labour MP Phillip Whitehead who best articulated the mood of the Annan Committee. Whilst there was little unanimity among its members (as evidenced by the number of notes of dissent), Whitehead’s crusade for pluralism helped to focus the committee’s work around a number of limited structural reforms. Having moved away from his earlier identification with a single broadcasting authority, Whitehead was for Annan the ‘hero of our report [who] won the heart of the majority of our Committee with his notion of realising diversity and flexibility by increasing the number of authorities’ (Annan, 1981: 17). From a different perspective, Jeremy Potter, the historian of commercial television, acknowledges Whitehead’s ‘clear-mindedness and eloquence’

but attacks his 'dominance of the committee's thinking' (Potter, 1989: 255) which led to a hostility towards ITV and concessions to public service.

Whitehead himself was rather more cautious about the report. Far from boasting that the committee's proposals were set to revolutionise broadcasting, he argued in parliament that the report 'is not a prescription for instant action or an attempt to say that certain things are terribly wrong now and must be changed overnight...It is, rather, an attempt to say that innovations must be made during the next ten to fifteen years and that they must take account of the way in which broadcasting has already developed' (HoC Debates, 23 May 1977: col. 1070). Despite the fact that the report firmly rejected the Labour Party's unofficial media policy, most Labour MPs welcomed the committee's findings. Eric Moonman, a signatory to *TPATM*, praised both the proposal for the fourth channel and the report's conclusion that 'competition between the BBC and ITV has not benefited the public (ibid.: cols. 1062/3). The reaction of home secretary Merlyn Rees was even more revealing: 'What impressed me most about the report...is what the Committee did not recommend. It did not recommend any fundamental change in the constitutional arrangements for broadcasting in this country' (ibid.: col. 1019). Annan's decisive backing of the existing framework of British broadcasting was a relief for those in the government who had little appetite for implementing radical broadcasting reforms. The re-emergence of a consensus about broadcasting policy was confirmed by the warm responses to Annan of Willie Whitelaw, the shadow home secretary, and the TUC respectively.

The main source of opposition to the report lay not with its general approach to increasing diversity but in the details of the plans for funding the fourth channel. Lacking an economist on the committee, Annan's vision of an OBA was criticised in different quarters, including Austin Mitchell on Labour's backbenches, Willie Whitelaw (who favoured the fourth channel going to the IBA) and the ACTT technicians' union. According to the latter, reliance on sponsorship and block advertising had proved unstable in other countries while a 'laissez-faire' system for buying in programming was a dangerous precedent (ACTT, 1977a: 12). Reflecting the views of its permanently-employed ITV technicians, the ACTT's submission to the government tore into the plan for lacking any 'convincing proposals for a

guaranteed and adequate source of income for the OBA, which would not undermine the revenue of ITV' (ACTT, 1977b: 1) and pledged its support for an ITV-2 instead.

When freelancers in the union attacked this position, Alan Sapper insisted that he could understand how members would find it difficult to accept the policy. 'In some senses ITV2 is ideological anathema: commercialism not public service broadcasting. But the actual interests of our actual membership in ITV are at stake' (Sapper, 1977: 16). Sapper's argument reflects the contradictions of the ACTT's approach to broadcasting reform. As Stephen Lambert notes (1982: 75), although 'prone to examining radical rhetoric, the ACTT is, in practice, a passionately conservative union with regard to maintaining and improving its members' conditions of employment.' Having campaigned *politically* throughout the 1970s for a structural transformation of the television industry based on its own commission's report, the ACTT, *as a union*, was immediately prepared to put sectional interests before political principles. Just as the ACTT was reluctant to endorse Pilkington's call for the restructuring of ITV in the early 1960s, the union once again demonstrated a corporatist concern with the financial health of the industry above an interest in seeing a political transformation of television.

Opposition to specific details of the Annan Report while simultaneously welcoming its general approach helped Labour to distance itself from the more radical proposals suggested by SCoB and the Labour Party Study Group. Garnham, writing three years after the report, argued that this was precisely what Wilson had in mind when setting up the committee.

Annan, like all such Committees of Inquiry, was expressly designed to lance the boil of radical discontent (and in particular to head off proposals for radical reform from within the Labour Party itself) by allowing all voices to express themselves in evidence to the Committee, there to be nullified, because by their nature unstructured and unfocussed, by the 'on the one hand and on the other' of committee compromise (Garnham, 1980: 47).

Labour had pursued a similar path in terms of press policy. With *TPATM's* press proposals backed by party conference, the creation of a Royal Commission on the Press was evidence of the seriousness of Labour's intentions but also a useful way of

postponing any immediate decisions. James Curran, who actually drew up the terms of reference, recalls that when the Commission had completed its work in 1977, 'I had lunch with a senior civil servant and he said nothing will come of the report. I asked why and he said there was no political will behind it. He said that it would be in the inter-departmental committee where the findings would get lost and it turned out he was exactly right' (Curran, 1997). Proposals for a change in monopoly law and ownership rules were quietly dropped.

The Annan Report was therefore both a full-blooded engagement with and a firm rejection of the critique of the broadcasting duopoly developed by socialist intellectuals and activists in the Free Communications Group, media unions, SCoB and the Labour Party study group. It recognised the need for change but only so long as its proposals, in the words of the report, 'would help to take the heat out of a number of controversies which rage today' (Annan, 1977b: 241). 'It was a genuine attempt to evolve the structures of broadcasting', as Anthony Smith puts it, yet its principal achievement 'was to confirm the idea of the broadcasting authority' (Smith, 1999). Perhaps this contradiction helps to explain some very different interpretations of the report. Jean Seaton argues that Annan abandoned the tradition of universal public service and replaced it with a 'free market-place in which balance could be achieved through the competition of [a] multiplicity of independent voices' (Curran and Seaton, 1997: 303). Peter Goodwin (1998: 96n) challenges this reading and asserts that, according to Annan, pluralism and diversity could *only* be delivered through public service structures. In a sense both are right. The report saw no role for an uninhibited private sector, downplayed competition between ITV and BBC as a force for creativity and championed the role of public service. On the other hand, it noted social fragmentation and called for a higher degree of pluralism and public responsibility to be ushered in through competing voices, partly mediated through independent, private production companies.

In conclusion, while the Annan Report was not official Labour Party policy, *it may as well have been*. Firstly, it focused the principles of access, accountability and diversity, all of which underlay Labour's policy debates at the time, into a neat compromise package. Secondly, it largely satisfied both Labour radicals with promise of an OBA and Labour moderates with appeals to the preservation of public

service broadcasting and structural stability. Finally, it aimed not to antagonise its ideological foes too much: 'ITV received the report with more relief than dismay. It was not the threatened end of the world as they knew it' (Potter, 1989: 251) and, indeed, the report even left the door open to the increased commercial exploitation of broadcasting with its commitment to independent production.

From Annan Committee to White Paper

During the parliamentary debate on Annan in May 1977, the Labour home secretary, Merlyn Rees, claimed that he intended to implement proposals based on the report in the lifetime of the present government. However, he also made it clear that he had reservations about two aspects of the OBA: the uncertainty of its revenue base and the relaxation of the requirement to produce 'impartial' programmes. These criticisms were mirrored by civil servants in the Home Office but also by the Treasury which was anxious about backing a new public project at a time of great economic instability. According to Phillip Whitehead, 'the Treasury feared that there would be a financial shortfall and that we would end up bailing out another public service. Merlyn Rees was just a desperately cautious person and wasn't going to do anything within the Home Office if he could avoid it' (Whitehead, 1999). Instead, Rees passed on the bulk of the responsibility for drawing up a White Paper to his minister of state, Lord Harris. 'Together with the Home Office civil servants,' notes Lambert, 'Harris...favoured an extension of the existing ITV network' and indeed he went on to become the chairman of Westward Television (Lambert, 1982: 78) as well as leaving the Labour Party to join the Social Democrats. This was not an auspicious development for supporters of Annan, anxious to see the spirit of the committee embodied in future legislation.

The first rumours emanating from the Home Office suggested that a possible way forward lay in postponing the fourth channel until the economy picked up.

Unwilling to antagonise the left by scrapping the OBA in favour of IBA control and unable to convince the Treasury that this was the right time to use public funds for broadcasting, the government was accused of stalling on a decision 'at least until the restoration of an upbeat economy' (*Variety*, 1977). However, *Variety's* assertion that any hopes held by ITV of winning a second channel were tied to a Conservative

election victory proved premature. In January 1978, a leak of Harris' draft White Paper confirmed that the Home Office had decided to defer a fourth channel for three years and then hand it over to the IBA, not the OBA. Both Annan and Whitehead still admit to being surprised at the Home Office's decision. Whitehead confesses to being 'amazed that senior Labour Party people were going around parroting the words of Sir Brian Young and the IBA' (Whitehead, 1999) while Annan claims that 'I don't know what the pressures on him [Rees] were or why he wanted this. It was absolutely against the whole tenor of our report' (Annan, 1999). At the time Annan supporters were even more horrified. The industry magazine *Campaign* carried the dramatic headline, 'Labour MPs fight for OBA' and quoted Whitehead raging that 'we are all people who have thought a lot about broadcasting reform and we are angry at these stories coming out of the Home Office' (*Campaign*, 1978). *Broadcast* argued that the government had decided not to expand television services and that this had 'long been the assumption of the more pessimistic of the industry's observers, who could not see a Government faced with an election and still surrounded by economic problems devoting too much time, or money, to broadcasting' (*Broadcast*, 1978a).

The battle reached the highest levels as Rees failed to win over the Cabinet to the proposals and indeed produced one of prime minister Callaghan's few decisions on broadcasting. Heavily lobbied by Whitehead, former arts minister Hugh Jenkins, Tony Benn and others, Callaghan agreed to set up and chair a new Cabinet sub-committee on broadcasting to make recommendations on the White Paper.³⁵ In particular, Callaghan asked Bernard Donoghue and David Lipsey from his Downing Street research staff to prepare a paper on the fourth channel that eventually favoured the OBA. By May 1978, the tide had turned and, to the relief of the reformers, the OBA had been reinstated and the concerns of the Treasury about increasing public borrowing had been defeated. This was partly due to new figures showing that the cost of a new service would be much lower than previously thought and partly due to persistent campaigning by Whitehead, Anthony Smith and others about the need for

³⁵ The committee was called GEN 114 and contained senior Labour ministers such as Merlyn Rees, Tony Benn (energy), David Owen (foreign secretary), Roy Hattersley (prices), Shirley Williams (education), William Rodgers (transport) and Joel Barnett (Treasury) (Hennessy, 1978). Callaghan

increased diversity. Stephen Lambert argues that the decision may also have had more internal political roots:

Whether Callaghan was persuaded of the need for a new Authority for the fourth channel because of the merits of the argument, or more because it would be a relatively easy concession to the left wing of the Party at a time when such concessions were few and far between, is difficult to determine (Lambert, 1982: 79).

Six months after the cabinet committee was launched and sixteen months after the publication of the Annan Report, Labour's White Paper on broadcasting appeared and it soon became clear that, with the important exception of the OBA and support for a Welsh-language channel, concessions to the left *were* 'few and far between'.

Rees presented the White Paper as reflecting the spirit of the Annan Committee that broadcasting 'should continue to be provided as public services and the responsibility of public authorities. But,' he continued, 'our proposals are also designed to encourage diversity in the range and variety of material available to the public and to enhance the accountability of the broadcasting authorities' (quoted in the *Times*, 1978). Using the popular language of broadcasting reform, the White Paper committed itself to both increased pluralism and the existing structures of BBC and ITV, the licence fee and the levy. However, while in some places the White Paper and the Annan Report were very similar,³⁶ the former also contained a number of important deviations from the latter.

Firstly, in terms of financing the OBA, the White Paper extended the range of revenue sources to include spot advertising and rentals from programme makers selling advertising in their own programmes. Given that the ITV companies were likely to be a major source of OBA programming, this would greatly increase the influence of commercial forces on the channel. Both of these proposals, 'represent a

vetoed the original membership list prepared by the Home Office which *excluded* Benn, Hattersley and Rodgers, the leading proponents of broadcasting reform (Page, 1978).

³⁶ This is particularly true about the purpose of the OBA. For example, Annan: 'A great opportunity would be missed if the fourth channel were seen solely in terms of extending the *present* range of programmes' (Annan, 1977b: 235). White Paper: 'A unique opportunity will be missed if the fourth channel is not used to explore the possibilities of programme which say something new in new ways' (Labour Party, 1978: 9).

critical departure from Annan's thinking and caused a few gulps even among the paper's enthusiastic supporters' (*Broadcast*, 1978b). Secondly, the White Paper also challenged the OBA's editorial independence by insisting that the new authority should ensure that 'due impartiality is preserved in the treatment of controversial matters and that nothing should be broadcast which incites to crime or is offensive to public feeling' (Home Office, 1978: 10). This was a major blow not just to Annan's concept of pluralism but to the radical demands for a challenge to the establishment's control over what was deemed 'controversial' or 'acceptable'. Programmes which adopted a partisan stance on, for example, Northern Ireland, trade unions, anti-racism and, of course, the policies of government were now more likely to be ruled out of order. The White Paper aimed to reinforce the power of public authorities to decide what was offensive and assumed, despite the pages of Annan which talked of the increasing pluralism of social life, that there existed one 'public feeling' and not many. This was a top-down interpretation of diversity that led *Broadcast* to summarise the proposal as a demand for 'NO "committed journalism" on OBA' (*Broadcast*, 1978b).

Any ideas that the White Paper would bend to the demands for increased accountability of the authorities themselves were also crushed. Far from OBA members being drawn from a variety of representative groups, it would be up to the home secretary to appoint members who would need to include people with 'experience in broadcasting and business' (Home Office, 1978: 11). The Home Office would also be kept busy with the proposed creation of three Service Management Boards for the BBC to supervise and co-ordinate its television, radio and external services, ostensibly to improve management control and cut down on bureaucracy. Given that half of the boards' members would be appointed by the home secretary from outside the BBC, this was seen as a highly political attack on the independence of the BBC, too much for even the *News of the World* (1978) to bear.

The idea of peak-time Fourth Channel broadcasts of Moslem madrigals, recipes for curried caviar, and hints for gay joggers is a laugh.

But the proposal in the Government's off-White Paper to intimidate the proud BBC into craven impotence is no laughing matter.

It is malicious. It is sinister. It is appalling.

According to Peter Fiddick of the *Guardian*, the creation of these new supervisory boards was more important for the government than all the other features of the White Paper. He predicted that the proposal would 'be put before Parliament in the coming session even if there is no time for other legislation on the future of broadcasting' (Fiddick, 1978). Additionally, Annan's recommendation to end the duopoly through the creation of more authorities was undermined by the White Paper's scrapping of plans for a Local Broadcasting Authority and a Public Enquiry Board. A relatively toothless Broadcasting Complaints Commission survived as did a vague requirement for the BBC, IBA and OBA to 'conduct public hearings from time to time in different parts of the country to ascertain the views of the public' (Home Office, 1978: 5).

One of the most curious changes from Annan concerned the future of cable television. While *TPATM* had called for a publicly-owned cable network and Annan had suggested locating community cable services within a Local Broadcasting Authority, Labour's White Paper adopted a very different approach. It placed existing cable services under the authority of the commercial regulator, the IBA, and stated that the 'Government is not prepared at this stage to dismiss the possible advantages of pay-TV, or to conclude that the disadvantages which it might hold could not be overcome' (ibid.: 62). Whereas Annan had described pay-TV as a 'ravenous parasite', the White Paper promised to look favourably on new pilot schemes and considered the 'possibility that regulated pay-TV might increase the range and quality of television in this country' (ibid.). This approach was not entirely unforeseen as, in 1975, Labour had allowed advertising on cable and permitted cable systems with extra capacity to carry ITV programmes from other regions. Indeed, a year before the White Paper, Rees himself had attended the annual lunch of the Cable Television Association, the trade body for private cable operators (Hollins, 1984: 45/6).

The White Paper, therefore, was a mixed blessing for the advocates of reform. While it acknowledged the tone of the Annan Report, it sought to increase state intervention

into broadcasting, strengthen the grip of the existing broadcasting authorities and restrict the possibilities of access to and participation in broadcasting. For Anthony Smith,

Where Annan gave us pluralism, the White Paper substitutes triopoly with a dash of state direction. The White Paper gives us an Open Broadcasting Authority, but one that is pretty heavily enmeshed with existing commercial operators; it gives us cable, pay tv and local radio but inside the IBA and the BBC, so that these will grow in the next decades into vast supra-media conglomerates. It gives up public accountability but by way of Home Office appointees (Smith, 1978).

The OBA was the key remaining link back to the ideas of the television reformers and was a significant achievement but, by then, it was not just the property of the left. Although shadow home secretary Willie Whitelaw may have been sceptical of the OBA's financial structure he was nevertheless supportive of its main purpose. With a growing consensus about the need to open up broadcasting, Labour did eventually take a bold decision by backing the OBA. However, those radical policies which had been conceived in the early 1970s out of a desire to see genuinely new structures and new sorts of television had been transformed by the end of the decade into a relatively narrow and cautious plan for the rest of broadcasting. The White Paper was the outcome of a long series of passionate debates for radical reform of broadcasting, twisted through years of public inquiries, cabinet committees, backroom deals and economic crisis.

It was no surprise that the White Paper's proposals had not been implemented by the time the Conservatives, led by Margaret Thatcher, won the general election of May 1979. Labour had lost its parliamentary majority and was relying on Liberal votes to keep it afloat. Broadcasting was neither a central issue for the party leadership nor one that was guaranteed to be uncontroversial. The 1978 Queen's Speech was non-committal about broadcasting while the Commons debate on the White Paper took place at the end of March 1979, by which time Labour had lost a vote of no confidence and was preparing to fight the election. Despite the near irrelevance of the debate, Rees nevertheless promised that 'the Government remain convinced that the fourth television channel should be run by an Open Broadcasting Authority, as proposed in the White Paper, and that the legislation we shall introduce in the new

Parliament will contain provisions to that effect' (HoC Debates, 29 March 1979: col. 681). Labour's election manifesto briefly confirmed this pledge but there was little urgency to press for legislation in the short term. 'While inflation and industrial relations and devolution are matters that demand more or less immediate attention,' wrote one commentator at the time, 'television and radio seem to be going along quite nicely as they are' (*Television Today*, 1979). The Labour leadership's broad satisfaction with the existing state of television meant that it would be another eighteen years before the party had another opportunity to transform broadcasting.

Conclusion

How significant were Labour's achievements in the area of television in the 1970s? Intellectual debate about broadcasting reform was dominated by a left-wing movement energised by the revolts of the late 1960s and early 1970s and anxious to stimulate a broadcasting culture that reflected the breakdown of what it saw as a stifling parliamentary consensus. Figures around the New Left conceptualised broadcasting as a means of democratic exchange and mass publishing instead of the more hierarchical structures represented by the BBC and IBA. In many ways, the Labour Party was peripheral to this movement as campaigning bodies like the Free Communications Group looked to industrial activity and political militancy to press for change. For example, one of the most influential critiques of the existing duopoly was written by Nicholas Garnham in 1973 at the same time as his involvement in the Labour Party study group. *Structures of Television* (Garnham, 1980), however, mentions the Labour Party only once (critically), concentrating instead on broadcasting workers as key agents of change.

However, inasmuch as these debates *were* expressed in parliamentary contexts, it was certainly the Labour Party that articulated them best. The establishment of the party's study group on the media with the involvement of a wide range of politicians, activists and intellectuals, and its publication of *The People and the Media* confirmed the issue of media reform as one belonging to the left of the party. While the suggestion to abolish the BBC and IBA was greeted with horror by the broadcasting establishment and with silence by the Labour leadership, it provides one of the few examples of a strategy for an entirely different vision of broadcasting. The whole

tenor of the Annan Committee borrowed heavily from these debates and placed broadcasting accountability and democracy at the heart of the mainstream political agenda in the latter part of the decade.

Another notable achievement was the creation of an Open Broadcasting Authority which, although never introduced by Labour, owed its roots to debates conducted in the labour movement and which was given respectability by Labour's White Paper in 1978. According to Phillip Whitehead, Labour's contribution to the debate

changed the terms of broadcasting in the area in which it focused. I'm still intensely proud of Channel Four and S4C [Welsh language channel]. We had two things that mattered at a time when we could still do them. The first was to have an open channel that operated as a publishing channel where there were by definition many voices and where the remit was to let minorities be heard. And for S4C, we proved you could run a channel in the other national language and makes a success of that and revive the language in the process (Whitehead, 1999).

These gains need to be offset against the far more substantial reforms proposed by the left of the party which were published and then buried by the leadership. We have argued that the process of a public inquiry and extended executive and parliamentary discussion proved to be an effective way of taking the heat out of more radical demands. But it must also be true that while the Labour left seized upon broadcasting reform, it was never a top priority as compared to issues of industrial relations, economic policy and nationalisation. In 1978, the trade union official and future Labour MP Dennis MacShane sighed that '[s]ince 1970 the Labour Party and TUC have managed to spend a total of three and a half hours on the ownership, control and role of the media at their respective conferences' (MacShane, 1978: 5). In any case, when the labour movement did discuss media policy, it consistently privileged press over television policy, as demonstrated by the reactions to *TPATM*.

A more important reason for the lack of commitment to a radical television policy is that the socialists on the Labour left shared the party with both moderates and right-wingers. Indeed the left itself was divided between those who favoured the abolition of the BBC and IBA and those who wanted more narrow reforms of the broadcasting authorities. Just as Labour's opposition to the introduction of commercial television

in the 1950s was compromised because of these conflicting interests, the party's attitude towards television in the 1970s still had to accommodate the views of both left and right. Instead of a television policy, we may say that Labour had several different policies. Anthony Smith speaks of the 'several coherent' plans that Labour had at the time and argues that the party was 'always very divided because there were those in the party who wanted commercialism – very few – there were others who wanted control, and there were some who were simply bewildered and did not know how to get what they wanted which was a level playing field' (Smith, 1999).

The consequence of having these conflicting positions was to allow the government to strike a 'balance' which neutralised the more radical demands of the left but gave it concessions (some of them important, like the OBA) to keep it on board the Labour project. In times of economic growth, governments are more prepared to consider the expansion of services like television. In times of crisis, like that of 1974 to 1979, the space for a radical re-structuring of television through parliamentary means becomes increasingly limited. Having set the agenda for broadcasting reform at the start of the decade, those radicals who pinned their hopes on Labour's ability to shake up broadcasting and usher in a new age of openness and diversity were sorely disappointed. There were some successes, such as the Open Broadcasting Authority, but at the end of the decade broadcasting was largely controlled by the same authorities and the same voices whose domination had produced the original demands for reform some ten years earlier. 'What is remarkable about the Wilson and Callaghan years,' reflects Phillip Whitehead, 'is that they constitute a virtual holiday from institutional reform of any kind' (Whitehead, 1989: 266). Television appears to be no exception.

Chapter Five: 1979-1992

The Labour Opposition in the Thatcher Years

Just as the disappointments of the 1964-1970 Wilson governments had led to a leftwing shift in the early 1970s, experience of the collapse of the Wilson-Callaghan administration under the pressure of public spending cuts and pay restraint left a bitter taste in the mouths of many Labour supporters. Yet whereas left activists in the earlier period had turned their attention to questions of industrial democracy and involvement in growing social and political struggles, they now 'claimed that defeat [in the 1979 election] was the result of ministers failing to observe party policies as written by annual conference and the NEC' (Kogan & Kogan, 1981: 58). The solution, therefore, was to wage a constitutional battle to change internal party procedures to allow for more grassroots involvement and democracy at all levels of the party. Activists set their targets on achieving compulsory reselection of MPs, a more democratic way of selecting the party leader and forcing the leadership to include conference policies in the party manifesto.

Rising inflation and unemployment together with negative economic growth boosted the opportunities for the left so that it was no surprise that activists won many of their demands at the 1980 Labour conference, including support for unilateralism and withdrawal from the European Community. The victory of Michael Foot over Denis Healey as party leader in November 1980, the success of the constitutional reformers at the special Wembley conference in January 1981 and the near-election of Tony Benn as deputy leader in October 1981 all confirmed the rising influence of the left. Policy-making flourished as over fifty sub-committees, composed of MPs, trade unionists, academics and supporters, were convened by the left-dominated NEC to draw up the radical proposals for *Labour's Programme 1982*, the basis for the following year's manifesto.

The shift to the left produced a sharp reaction inside the party. Four senior party members, including the former home secretary Roy Jenkins, split away from Labour to form the Social Democratic Party in 1981, leading two academics to ask 'can the

Labour Party hold together?’ (Kogan & Kogan, 1981: 148). Others (for example Thorpe, 1997: 214), have since argued that the strength of the left was exaggerated, witness the election of a right-wing majority to the NEC in 1981 and the comfortable victory for Roy Hattersley over the left-wing candidate, Michael Meacher, as deputy leader in 1983. According to this view, the Bennite left always had a fragile grip on power inside the party and, indeed, depended on the unreliable support of sympathetic left-wing trade union general secretaries.

The strength of the left was tested in the 1983 election, which Labour fought on a manifesto famously dubbed by Gerald Kaufman as ‘the longest suicide note in history’ (quoted in Davies, 1996: 389). Once again, Labour historians have claimed that its radical reputation was overstated. Pelling and Reid (1996: 169) describe the 1983 manifesto as ‘an ambiguous document’ while Eric Shaw argues that it was far less left-wing than its 1970s counterparts with fewer commitments to public ownership and calls it a ‘hybrid’ compromise between Bennism and acceptance of a market economy (Shaw, 1994: 13).

Labour’s poor performance in the election, where it only narrowly beat the SDP/Liberal Alliance into second place, demanded that the party reconsider its strategies for change at a national level. Influenced by the idea that local government successes could ‘provide an important test-bed for new socialist ideas, and...become significant arenas in which to mount effective resistance to Conservative governments’ (Seyd, 1987: 140), the left now redirected its attention towards the sizeable number of local authorities controlled by Labour, like London, Liverpool, Sheffield and Manchester. The concept of ‘municipal socialism’ suggested both a shield against Tory policies as well as a chance to launch innovative social and economic programmes appropriate to specific communities. Its key themes were decentralisation of local services and increased opportunities for participation, particularly for minority populations, in the life of the local area. Training schemes, enterprise zones, cultural subsidies and support for co-operatives were among the policies favoured by the municipal left, headed by the Greater London Council (GLC) and its industrial agency the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB).

In response, the Conservative government imposed restrictive upper limits on the amount of money local authorities could raise through the rates. Under the pressure of this 'ratecapping' in 1984-5, the councils conceded defeat one by one and set legal rates. Although there were some limited cultural and economic achievements, significant gains were constrained by the status of local councils as what Goodwin and Duncan call 'small left-wing hillocks of power on a vast capitalist plain' (quoted in Seyd, 1987: 153).

Municipal socialism's ideology of local democracy and community involvement proved to be an influential although short-lived development of left Labour thinking. In an effort to rid Labour nationally of its militant reputation, the recently-elected 'soft left' Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, refused to sanction a confrontation between Labour local authorities and central government. Kinnock had pursued a similar strategy, firstly during the 1984-5 miners' strike when he distanced Labour as far as possible from the views of the miners' leader, Arthur Scargill, and subsequently in his attacks on 'hard left' *Militant* supporters inside the party. Kinnock had won the leadership after the party's disastrous performance in the 1983 election and was determined to drag Labour towards the centre, ditching left-wing commitments and professionalising the party's image and campaigning strategies. Immediately after his election, he scrapped the myriad of NEC study groups and sub-committees which had been a bastion of the left and replaced them with a more centralised structure of joint policy committees, composed of representatives from the PLP, NEC and 'expert' party members. Furthermore, in 1985, a new campaigns and communications directorate was set up with Peter Mandelson as its director. By 1986, Kinnock, with Mandelson's approval, launched the shadow communications agency, whose role was to modernise Labour's PR strategy.

Tudor Jones describes Kinnock's first four years as party leader as a strategy of 'pragmatic adaptation' (1994: 573). Pragmatic both in terms of his policy pronouncements but also because of his cautious approach to changing the party and antagonising the left during the turbulent years of ratecapping and the miners' strike. The adaptation refers to Kinnock's 'growing revisionism in at least one ideologically crucial area: his attitude towards a market-orientated mixed economy' (ibid: 573-4).

From the very beginning, Kinnock attempted to reduce the identification of the Labour Party with nationalisation and hostility towards the market. Quizzed about the theme of his leadership some years later, he replied that his overarching objective was ‘the enlargement of individual liberty...feasible by the involvement of the collective contribution of the community’ (Kinnock, 1984: 547). Combining the individualism of Thatcherism with the collectivism of the Labourist tradition, Kinnock sought to find a new role for the market in this relationship. Interviewed in October 1984, Kinnock claimed that:

The first thing to understand is that we are in a market, it is called the world economy. We will to a great extent make our living by selling in that market and it therefore requires the most efficient organisation of our resources, human and material, in order to satisfy need at home and in order to be effective in that market abroad...What we have to do is to find the system of stimulation and encouragement, the climate of enterprise which is most conducive towards meeting those domestic and international obligations. That means deliberate encouragement for the smaller businesses and co-operatives which are currently developing very rapidly (quoted in Hobsbawm, 1984: 8-9).

Kinnock made these comments in an interview with Eric Hobsbawm in the magazine of the British Communist Party, *Marxism Today*, the main vehicle for a contemporary, if not new, set of ideas concerning the need for ideological reorientation in the working-class movement. According to Hobsbawm (1978), the decline of manual occupations, the rise of the service sector, the fragmentation of class consciousness and the rapid rise in living standards had eroded Labour’s support to such an extent that new alliances and new priorities were urgently required if Labour was to have any significant future.³⁷ *Marxism Today* analysed the phenomenon which it named ‘Thatcherism’ as a virtually unstoppable new sort of consumer capitalism combining economic libertarianism with social populism. The left, it argued, needed to join forces with all anti-Thatcher elements, including the SDP, ‘wet’ Tories and the clergy to form a ‘progressive’ movement against the Conservative government.

³⁷ For empirical evidence against Hobsbawm’s thesis, see Heath, Jowell and Curtice (1985).

The magazine updated the ‘embourgeoisement’ thesis of the earlier revisionists who had argued that Labour had to shed its class image if it was to win power, and insisted that the left needed to relate to the consumerist aspirations of those voters increasingly drawn to Thatcherism. The traditional language and icons of Labourism were less relevant to a population defined by share ownership, foreign holidays and, importantly, cultural consumption. The ideas of *Marxism Today*, particularly in its sympathetic attitude to commercialism and consumerism, certainly provided part of the theoretical backdrop for Labour’s shift towards acceptance of the market. Martin Jacques, the magazine’s editor, wrote later that the ‘Communist Party in the eighties acted like the Labour revisionists of the fifties’ (quoted in Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992: 64) while A.J. Davies argues that Hobsbawm provided ‘intellectual sustenance for the Labour Party’ and that ‘the magazine did have some influence on Neil Kinnock’ (Davies, 1996: 409, 411).

The Labour leadership took defeat in the 1987 election as an opportunity not to re-examine its rightward shift but to accelerate it. Traditional Labour icons were dropped - the red flag, the word ‘comrade’ and red membership cards all disappeared (Davies, *ibid.*: 417-8) - while, following the defeat of industrial struggles like the miners’ strike and the 1986 printers’ strike at Wapping, the leadership attempted to weaken Labour’s links with the trade union movement. Kinnock then announced the launch of an extensive consultation process to ‘modernise’ the party’s image and to consider appropriate policies for the 1990s. For Martin Smith, ‘the Policy Review was an attempt to drop some of Labour’s unpopular policies like nationalization and unilateralism and to appeal to individual consumerism and privatism in order to widen Labour’s support (1992: 15). At one level, this was simply a continuation of previous efforts, following Gaitskell and Wilson in the 1950s and 1960s, to shed the party’s working-class roots and to reposition itself as a national, social democratic party. What was new about Kinnock’s revisionism, however, was the extent to which Labour was ready to embrace the market, as revealed by its 1988 consultation paper *Democratic Socialist Aims and Values*. This stated that, apart from a few areas like health care, education and social services, ‘the operation of the market, where properly regulated, is a generally satisfactory means of determining provision and consumption (Labour Party, 1988: 10), an argument the Conservatives could scarcely have disagreed with. The key difference was that Labour championed the idea of a

publicly regulated ‘social market’ as distinct to the Tories’ idea of an unregulated free market.

Although the mass movement against the poll tax in 1990 and the subsequent resignation of Thatcher herself might have suggested a growing dissatisfaction with Tory policies, Kinnock was determined to proceed with Labour’s courtship of the market. By 1992, any remaining calls for public ownership had been replaced by talk of ‘public control’ (Shaw, 1994: 88) and the need to engage with debates around ‘wealth creation’ rather than traditional concerns about income redistribution. Labour confidently entered the 1992 election, therefore, as a very different party than the one that had lost power in 1979. It had moved away from its old appeals to nationalisation and high taxation, brushed up its image, reduced the influence of the left and the unions, and recruited the services of some of the most talented communications specialists in the country.

Nevertheless, it lost the election. The party leadership blamed the defeat in 1992 on the impact of the anti-Labour press (see p. 224) and a Tory campaign which had successfully managed to portray Labour as a high-spending party. Further internal reform and ideological revision, it appeared, was necessary. Left-wing Labour supporters, on the other hand, argued that concessions to the market had undermined the ability of the party to offer a distinctive alternative to the government. The leadership, claimed two activists, ‘threw away’ the election and its ‘strategy of appeasing the establishment, capping working-class aspirations and taming the membership left Labour vulnerable to the Tories on polling day’ (Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992: 323). Had the leadership gone too far or not far enough in pulling Labour to the right? It is our belief that the development of Labour’s television policy throughout the 1980s was caught up in this tension between those determined to embrace ‘social market’ principles and those committed to defending public ownership – a battle overwhelmingly resolved in favour of the ‘new revisionists’.

1979-1983: The fourth channel, the study group and new technology

The most pressing television-related issue for the incoming Tory government in 1979 was the question of the fourth channel. The Labour government, acting on the

recommendations of the 1977 Annan Report, had thrown its weight behind proposals for an Open Broadcasting Authority to oversee a channel, funded by advertising, grants and sponsorship, that aimed to provide experimentation in broadcasting and to cater to minority audiences. In opposition, William Whitelaw, the Tory shadow home secretary, had backed the remit of the channel but disagreed with the strategy of a new television corporation, instead arguing that the service should be controlled by the IBA, the commercial television regulator. As home secretary, he fleshed out his vision in a speech in September 1979 at the Royal Television Society convention in Cambridge. Far from envisaging a mainstream commercial service, Whitelaw repeated his desire for a distinctive channel with ‘programmes appealing to and, we hope, stimulating tastes and interests not adequately provided for on the existing channels’ (Whitelaw, 1979: 25). ITV companies would fund the channel by selling advertising in their regions, thus removing any threat of commercial rivalry between ITV and the new channel. He made it clear that he saw a significant role for a new generation of independent producers as programme suppliers to the channel but retreated on the principle of a separate Welsh-language service.

Although Whitelaw had decisively rejected Labour’s official position, he appeared to have stuck fairly closely to the spirit of the OBA. Indeed, Labour supporters were at the heart of the Channel Four Group that quickly sprung up to hold the home secretary to his word and to lobby against any idea of an ITV2. The group placed an advertisement in the *Guardian* in October 1979 to press its case that the channel should look to the independent sector for the bulk of its programmes. The ad, however, was far from hostile to Whitelaw:

We, the undersigned, wholeheartedly endorse the spirit of your address. It remains for the Independent Broadcasting Authority to whom responsibility has been given to follow through the Government’s challenge which will demand a radically different approach to broadcasting in this country...The Fourth Television Channel must accord with the Government’s stated view that it should “extend and enhance” the range and quality of British television (Channel Four Group, 1979).

Four Labour MPs were signatories to this statement, including one former broadcasting minister (Tony Benn), one former broadcasting spokesperson (John

Grant) and one former member of the Annan Committee (Philip Whitehead). The advertisement united left-wing academics, broadcasters, trade unionists and filmmakers who had campaigned throughout the 1970s for increased diversity in broadcasting with independent producers and facilities companies who were simply eager to increase their production opportunities.³⁸ The pressure paid off as proposals drawn up by both the IBA and the government in its broadcasting bill placed a heavy emphasis on the need for independent production and programme innovation on the new channel.

Even Merlyn Rees, speaking from the Labour frontbench in parliament, found it hard to firmly reject the government's plans, promising that 'we shall nudge the Government to live up to the remarks of the Home Secretary at Cambridge' (HoC Debates, 18 February 1980: col. 65). The backbencher Shirley Summerskill was far more critical, describing the legislation as a 'compromising hybrid Bill', which will be 'schizophrenically torn between the desire to produce high-quality original programmes and the need to attract advertising revenue with mass audiences' (ibid.: col. 149). She was, however, rather disingenuous when she claimed that '[w]e on the Labour Benches are totally opposed to the Government's proposals for the new channel' (ibid.: col. 148) and simply wrong in arguing that many young writers, producers and directors 'have been strong in lobbying against the proposal in the Bill for a fourth television channel' (ibid.: col. 153).

Just as it had been left-wing arguments that had dominated the debate in the 1970s for a new service to challenge the duopoly, it was Labour supporters who were most clearly identified with the initiative for a fourth channel in 1980. Appointments to the channel over the next year confirmed this. Edmund Dell, a former Labour cabinet minister, was selected as chairman of the Channel Four board with Richard Attenborough, another Labour supporter, as his deputy. The appointment of yet another Labour Party member, Jeremy Isaacs, as the channel's chief executive in September 1980 further undermined the ability of the party to confidently resist

³⁸ Apart from the MPs, signatories included Stuart Hall, Anthony Smith, Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hood, Denis Macshane (a future Labour MP) and Bruce Page as well as The Robert Stigwood Group Ltd., the Filmfair Group of Companies, David Graham (associated with the Institute of Economic Affairs), Molinare Ltd (facilities company) and Picture Palace Productions.

Whitelaw's plans. Indeed the only really effective opposition was posed not by Labour but by the Welsh nationalist Plaid Cymru party whose leader promised to fast until the government backed down on its refusal to allow a Welsh-language channel. Goodwin (1998: 26) argues that the issue 'generated perhaps the only genuinely mass campaign on a television issue during the Thatcher and Major governments, that went beyond the ranks of the broadcasting industry and the political elite'.

So on the first key issue of the decade involving television, there was more consensus than conflict between the two main parties. The left was happy that a commitment to diversity and innovation had been embedded in the remit of the new service while the government was assured that the new channel would not upset the balance of the broadcasting status quo. The Conservatives also had another reason for welcoming the new channel that connected to their wider neo-liberal political programme. According to Stephen Lambert (1982: 89), '[t]he entrepreneurial aspects of independent production were repeatedly emphasised to the Conservative Party during 1979'. He goes on to argue that

It was put to the Conservatives that a fourth channel supplied largely by independent producers would diversify television production in Britain and perhaps, at the same time, break the union's grip on the industry and alleviate the existing hidebound industrial relations. It was a persuasive line of argument to certain elements in the Conservative Party, and helps explain the support that the independent producers received from free marketers such as Keith Joseph's Conservative policy group (ibid.).

While Goodwin (1998: 34) is probably right to insist that it was the left's argument for alternative voices that provided the key rationale for the creation of Channel Four, it is nevertheless surprising that Labour failed to draw attention to this free market agenda at the time. Indeed, when pressed by the Channel Four Group, even ACTT technicians at their 1979 conference welcomed 'the creation of a new organisation under the IBA, which would operate the fourth channel and would draw the majority of its programmes from a variety of British independent production sources other than the existing ITCA [ITV] companies' (ACTT, 1979: 12). Many Labour supporters and media workers, therefore, celebrated the creative potential of the independent producers while the joint activity between left-wing activists and

commercially-orientated television entrepreneurs around the Channel Four Group created a precedent that was to lead to problems later in the decade. James Curran recalls that

the right saw it [independent production] as a way of breaking the trade unions and as a way of incubating business entrepreneurship. The left saw it as a way of introducing excluded voices so we kind of came together and held hands under the table in supporting this initiative which, for good or bad, made an enormous difference to public service broadcasting (Curran, 1999).

The left and the labour movement were, however, interested in much more than the fate of the fourth channel at the turn of the decade. By 1980, the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) had produced two books highlighting the systematic anti-trade union bias in BBC and ITV news (GUMG, 1976, 1980). The TUC's media working group, set up in 1977 under the influence of earlier GUMG research, published a discussion document on the media in September 1980. *Behind the Headlines* noted the growing monopolisation of the media industries and the regular editorial distortion against trade unionists and posed a general question about balance. 'We are not just asking whether the trade union Movement is getting a fair deal from the press, but whether the media as a whole are "doing the job they are paid to do"' (TUC, 1980: 4). In 1981, Tony Benn penned an extensive critique of the fundamentally anti-democratic nature of British press and broadcasting which condemned the ideological conformity of what he called the 'consensus media' and their unremitting hostility to groups and ideas which challenged the 'centre' (Benn, 1981: 102-120). During the debates around *TPATM* in the early 1970s Benn had supported proposals for workers' participation in and alternative structures for the media. A decade on, he now argued more defensively that 'our task is to try to re-establish the right of dissent' in the light of contemporary media which played a similar role to that of the medieval church (ibid.: 110).

It was in this atmosphere that, in May 1980, the Labour Party NEC decided to convene a second study group on the media with the aim of publishing a discussion document. This was one of the many sub-committees launched at that time by the

left-dominated NEC as part of the process of internal democratisation and wider participation in policy formation. Given the publication of the Annan Report and the Royal Commission on the Press together with technological developments around cable and satellite, an update of the policy proposed in the first study group's document, *The People and the Media*, was now necessary. The new study group's terms of reference were:

To propose ways of achieving a more balanced presentation of news and opinion in the media by improving opportunities to publish and broadcast a diversity of views; to consider the implications of new technology and the development of new services such as local radio and the fourth channel; and to examine alternative forms of ownership, organisation and finance of the press and broadcasting services, which would guarantee freedom from both government and commercial ownership (Labour Party, 1980a: 1).

In terms of television in particular, the group was to examine the structure of the BBC, the licence fee, the fourth channel, industrial democracy, new technology and a complaints procedure. Omitted from the NEC's list, however, was any mention of restructuring ITV or of considering the role of advertising as a source of broadcasting finance, although these were confronted in subsequent discussions.

The study group was chaired by NEC member Frank Allaun and included a number of left-wing Labour MPs, like Tony Benn, Eric Heffer, Bob Cryer and Michael Meacher, as well as academics like Nicholas Garnham and James Curran who had served on the first group and who were deeply critical of the existing duopoly.

There was a tendency within the Labour Party at that time of people who came out of the 60s and remembered the BBC as rationing pop music and having an enormous store of resentment against that tradition of public service broadcasting. The second thing was that they remembered the way in which broadcasting had joined with the press in the attacks on trade unions. So we were terribly hostile to the institution of public service broadcasting while being very strongly in favour of public broadcasting. That was the central dilemma at the heart of the period (Curran, 1999).

They were joined on the group by others, including Austin Mitchell MP and a layer of trade union officials (for example Alan Sapper from the ACTT, Ted O'Brien from

print union NATSOPA and Paddy Leach from the ABS) who were more sympathetic to or had vested interests in the present organisation of television.

As in the 1970s, the main emphasis of the 1980s study group concerned press reform. Frank Allaun recalls that ‘the most important matter we discussed and agreed on was the diversification of the press’ (Allaun, 1999) and proposals for an Open Press Authority that would award newspaper franchises (see Allaun, 1988: 87-89). There were, however, a number of noticeable differences between the two study groups. Firstly, while the 1970s study group had been encouraged to examine ‘the alternatives across the board’ (see p.133), the terms of reference eight years later were more narrowly focused on achieving ‘balance’ and examining largely predetermined options for reform. Next, whereas the first study group had met during a time of heightened class struggle and had been deeply influenced by militant and syndicalist ideas, the 80s group coincided with a decline of workers’ confidence and the rise of a left whose power lay largely *inside* the Labour Party and the trade union leadership. Thirdly, while the first group met only ten times in two years, the confidence of the left allowed it to produce a coherent, if unpopular, document at the end of its deliberations, with an impressive range of signatories across the Labour movement. Such was the atmosphere of experimentation that MPs and others were willing to put their names to *TPATM*, if only to stimulate an open discussion about the media. The 80s group, on the other hand, met more than twenty times over three years and never produced a public document in its own name. This was partly because an election intervened before discussions were finished but also due to the irreconcilable internal disagreements about how to reform broadcasting that emerged in the study group.

The group did agree on some issues, for example on the need to develop some sort of mechanism to achieve balanced coverage of the labour movement. One of the first decisions of the study group was to initiate a monitoring exercise of specific radio and television programmes and ‘to report any bias, unfair reporting or choice of subject which might justify a complaint’ (Labour Party, 1980b: 2). By the ninth meeting in May 1981, the group agreed to support a legal right of reply across press and broadcasting as a means of correcting biased reporting against the labour movement. This right to reply was to be enforced by legal tribunals although ‘the

composition of the tribunals - whether those with expertise in the media should be included or specifically excluded and whether they should follow the Industrial Tribunal model – should be finalised later’ (Labour Party, 1981a: 2). The idea that systematic bias against the left could be corrected through statutory remedies was itself a step away from the proposals in *TPATM* to tackle the *causes* of bias through a radical restructuring of the press industry itself (Labour Party, 1974c: 16-33). The policy was, however, warmly welcomed by the NEC which published a statement on the right to reply in March 1982 (Labour Party, 1982c). There was also general agreement in the group on the need for a communications ministry, despite some reservations about its Stalinist connotations. ‘Most members felt, however, that a centralised ministry which would coordinate the separate responsibilities of the Home Office and the Department of Trade was badly needed if the public interest was to be adequately defended’ (Labour Party, 1981b: 2).

While the study group was able to coalesce around constitutional and legal reform of the media, there was a polarisation around issues concerning the financing and structures of television. Radical ideas which took their cue from *The People and the Media* attracted some of the strongest opposition. Nicholas Garnham’s proposal for a National Communications Authority and a National Communications Commission supplemented by regional commissions which would supersede existing regulatory arrangements³⁹, were sharply criticised for involving ‘too great a concentration of power’ (Labour Party, 1981d: 1). Similar proposals in further papers by Garnham, Greg Lanning and Alan Horrox were also opposed for being ‘too centralist and bureaucratic and would result in too great a concentration of powers. It was utopian to believe that they would achieve a more pluralist broadcasting structure’ (Labour Party, 1982a: 1). Demands for a reduction in advertising were described ‘as being out of touch with the realities of the broadcasting industry since a significant cut in advertising would necessitate large sums from the Treasury.’ Furthermore, there was ‘disagreement about whether the introduction of advertising had led to a drop in

³⁹ The NCA would be responsible for the collection and distribution of income from a variety of sources, including advertising and government grants while the NCC would co-ordinate media policy and act as a complaints body. Membership of the various bodies would be on the basis of direct elections. Allaun praises the plan as the most ‘coherent’ put forward to the study group but argues that they were ‘so far-reaching that it is not surprising that not only did they attract opposition within the study group, but they also ran out of time’ (Allaun, 1988: 90).

standards' (Labour Party, 1981c: 1) and a rejection of the left's preferred option of the centralised collection of advertising.

A key critic of these proposals was Paddy Leach of the BBC staff union, the ABS, who 'did not wish to see the break-up of the BBC/IBA set up or the abolition of the licence fee which he felt insulated broadcasting from Government interference' (Labour Party, 1981d: 2). Similarly, Labour MPs Philip Whitehead and Austin Mitchell opted for a strategy of decentralisation within the *existing* broadcasting structure and the creation of separate regulatory bodies for national and local radio, ITV, BBC and cable. '[R]ather than establish a new central body,' argued Whitehead, 'it would be better to develop the best elements of the present system. This would avoid opposition from the trade unions and the public' (Labour Party, 1982b: 1).

On some issues there was barely any discussion. The fourth channel was barely mentioned, presumably because there was little to complain about. The new technologies of cable and satellite were broached only towards the end of the group's life (as we shall discuss later) and there was only a brief attempt to debate industrial democracy in the television industries. Legalistic and constitutional remedies therefore co-existed in the study group with far more radical suggestions for democratising the media. Trade union sectionalism and political pragmatism blunted the edge of attempts to launch a fundamental restructuring of the current broadcasting structures. This impasse certainly undermined the possibility of publishing the discussions in any coherent form and indeed its proposals, as Allaun regretfully notes (1988: 89), were never agreed by the NEC.

Nevertheless, the group was able to contribute to *Labour's Programme 1982*, the party's 280-page blueprint of its policies, based on the work of the dozens of NEC sub-committees and study groups. The four-page section on the media was produced partly from existing policy statements, conference resolutions and advice from the media study group and contained the party's most substantial and left-wing *official* programme of media reform to date. The policy was premised on Benn's notion that the media were failing to live up to their democratic role and borrowed phrases directly from *The People and the Media*. It opens by claiming that 'although we are

led to believe that we live in a free and open society, our [media] system is, in fact, remarkably closed' (Labour Party, 1982d: 211) and goes on to lament the absence of impartiality as 'the process of selection makes objectivity impossible (ibid.: 213). The section is littered with radical critiques of the existing broadcasting system:

We believe that separate radio and television corporations should replace the present very centralised structure of the BBC and Independent Broadcasting Authority...we also suggest that programme making itself should be carried out by a wide variety of dispersed programme units...We believe that it [advertising] should not be used for private profit, as now, but recycled within the system...We believe broadcasting needs a much more secure and diverse financial basis. It should be funded by a long-term grant awarded by parliament (ibid.: 213-4).

There is, however, an important difference between the party's *beliefs* and *suggestions* and its actual policies. Apart from a firm commitment to create an arts ministry and to phase out the licence fee in favour of an exchequer grant, the document contained few concrete promises about television and many vague hints about the future: legislation requiring broadcasting to honour diversity, an alteration of broadcasting's 'monolithic structures', increased public access to programme making, training programmes to challenge sexism and racism and a 'genuinely independent' complaints procedure (ibid.: 213). These were, by now, relatively established themes of left thought concerning broadcasting but the section lacked any firm discussion as to how any of the above was to be achieved. For example, the detailed proposals contained in *TPATM* for a Communications Council and a Public Broadcasting Commission had disappeared as had any discussion as to the nature of the mechanism of recycling advertising revenue within the broadcasting system.

However loosely-worded they may have been, the proposals contained in *Labour's Programme 1982* nevertheless bore the imprint of the left and demonstrated its continuing suspicion of the duopoly and its commitment to tackle British television's lack of impartiality. The few sentences that made it into Labour's election manifesto the following year were more obscure and contained 'strong generalities, but few specific plans' (Allaun, 1988: 90). Gone were the promises to abolish the licence fee or to introduce an arts ministry while references to broadcasting's 'monolithic

structures' had been transformed into a commitment to make broadcasting 'more accountable and representative' and to 'promote a more wide-ranging and genuine pluralism in the media' (quoted in Craig, 1990: 381). By the time the NEC met in November of that year to reconsider the future of the party's policy formation, the media study group was described as non-essential and wound down. This time, unlike in 1974, there were no formal proposals and no published document for the leadership to marginalise.

The short section on cable and satellite in *Labour's Programme 1982* reflected the lack of attention inside the study group to new communication technologies. The document acknowledged the profound impact of the new technologies and made two important commitments: that Labour would place a national cable system under the control of British Telecom and regulate cable and satellite services in the interests of 'diversity and pluralism'. Closing the space which the previous Labour government's 1978 White Paper had opened up for pay television, the document insisted that Labour was opposed to it because 'we believe that all citizens should receive an equal public service regardless of wealth and geographical location' (ibid.: 214). The message seemed to be that while Labour intended to reform the existing duopoly for terrestrial television, it also wanted to bring new cable and satellite systems under the umbrella of precisely that duopoly, or at least the *principles* of that duopoly.

This brief response was hardly surprising. Both *TPATM* and the Annan Report had sidelined technological issues in the 1970s while Labour was now forced to react quickly to the activities of the Tories. From 1980 onwards, the government had initiated several reports and inquiries into the possible industrial benefits of satellite broadcasting and broadband cable networks and appeared enthusiastic to introduce commercial multi-channel television in the short-term.⁴⁰ The response of some Labour policymakers was to cast doubts on the need for expanding broadcasting at all: 'There is no need or indeed demand for extra TV services' wrote Nicholas Garnham (1982: 31). As cable and satellite projects required huge investment, how could the drain on the public purse be justified, particularly during a recession?

⁴⁰ For a full discussion of these developments, see Goodwin (1998: 38-68).

However, Garnham also recognised that ‘the chance to see a wide range of international programming in addition to our present services seems attractive and to resist such developments seems not only Luddite but also parochial and puritanical’ (ibid.: 30). This combination of opposing outright commercialisation but also attempting not to appear hostile to all technological innovation proved to be a regular feature of Labour’s approach to cable and satellite.

The different delivery systems raised different issues for Labour policymakers. While cable could be regulated on a national basis, satellite’s supra-national footprints, according to Garnham (ibid.: 32) ‘present an altogether more difficult problem and a real challenge to the internationalism of the British labour movement.’ Garnham therefore argued for a European solution including a strategy of convincing Labour’s fraternal parties on the continent to co-operate in the regulation of satellite systems in order to create some sort of pan-European public service ‘cultural space’ (ibid.: 30). This was agreed at the media study group and incorporated into the proposals in *Labour’s Programme 1982*. However, there was a clear gap between left and right over the issue as when William Whitelaw announced in March 1982 that the BBC was to be allowed to operate two satellite channels, the thought of a British-led satellite initiative with substantial industrial benefits appealed to several Labour MPs. Shirley Summerskill, replying on behalf of the opposition to the home secretary’s statement, welcomed the proposals ‘because satellite broadcasting will allow the BBC further to inform, educate and entertain millions of viewers, and it will provide increased job opportunities in the television, aerospace and electronics industries’ (HoC Debates, 4 March 1982: col. 415). Former prime minister Harold Wilson was even more effusive and praised the statement ‘as giving British satellite technology and programmes a great boost’ (ibid.: col. 416) and complained only about the exclusion of ITV from the proposals.

Perhaps because of the sizeable delay before the start of any service together with the international dimension to the development, satellite television appeared to be a less urgent question and did not occupy the minds of Labour activists to any major extent. Cable was a different matter. In 1981, the government had created an information technology advisory panel to examine the possibilities of cable and IT while the following year it had set up a committee of inquiry, chaired by Lord Hunt, to

investigate the prospects for cable broadcasting. Both reports recommended the immediate construction of privately-financed broadband cable systems which would provide not only economic advantage to British industry but would also help to liberalise British broadcasting. Acting on this advice, the government initiated legislation and, before this was complete, awarded eleven franchises to the private sector at the end of 1983. Cable, therefore, appeared to present a much more short-term danger Labour requiring an urgent policy response.

Stuart Hood described this in the *New Socialist* as the ‘most immediate threat to public service broadcasting’ (1982: 21) while the ACTT’s Alan Sapper warned the 1983 Labour conference that an unregulated cable system ‘would undermine and destabilise the whole idea of public service broadcasting in this country’ (Sapper, 1983: 208). According to the Labour MP and broadcaster Austin Mitchell, a Tory cable policy would mean ‘wall-to-wall orgasm, constant pornography and potential trivialisation’ (HoC Debates, 2 December 1982: col. 477). The most immediate and detailed response, however, came not from the media study group but from the trade unions and Labour local authorities. In March 1982 the Hunt Committee invited submissions about the future of cable and received responses from a range of unions and political parties including the majority of the media unions, the Post Office Engineering Union (POEU), the TUC, the Liberal Party and the Scottish National Party. Despite an individual document from Garnham, there was no official submission from the Labour Party because the study group had not been able to produce one.

The submission from the POEU, the Labour-affiliated union that organised British Telecom (BT) engineers, welcomed the possibilities of cable but criticised the government’s reliance on the private sector. This approach, it argued, ‘would spread the provision of cable systems on a fitful and partial basis and the end result could be an unnecessary and wasteful duplication of broadcasting and telecommunications networks’ (POEU, 1982). The POEU’s preferred option was to entrust the entire system to BT with its experience of running a national network and its knowledge of the most advanced fibre optic cable systems. Furthermore, programme provision should be kept wholly separate from the operation of the cable system itself. The TUC’s evidence argued along the same lines and emphasised the need for proper

regulation of broadcasting content. Far from loosening regulation, there ought to be 'an extension to cable systems of the obligations placed on other channels concerning content, quality, balance, range of subject matter, taste, decency and suitability for children' (TUC, 1982: 2).

The unions' arguments were fed into both the media study group and the NEC's science and technology study group and certainly influenced the leadership's attitude towards cable. In the Commons debate on the Hunt Report, the shadow home secretary Roy Hattersley supported the idea of a properly regulated national cable system run by British Telecom. The problem was not the technology, he argued, but the policy:

No one on the Opposition Benches has the slightest wish to stand in the path of history. The error of the Luddites was that they wished to smash the new machinery. We want to accept and welcome the existence of the new technology, but to make sure that it works on behalf of the community as a whole and not simply in the interests of a narrow group of speculators (HoC Debates, 2 December 1982: col. 426).

The community referred to was most definitely the *British* community. Hattersley's attack was predicated not on hostility to private capital in general but to foreign capital in particular: it would be *foreign* technology that would undercut the prices of the British cable industry and *foreign* companies which would undermine the quality of British television. A substantial quota of British programmes was needed because if we 'start off with cheap foreign rubbish we shall end up with it' (HoC Debates, 30 June 1983: col. 735). But apart from a demand for British Telecom and British content, Hattersley failed to elaborate on precisely how Labour would finance and operate a national cable network. The media study group continued to grapple with the issue of cable but, by its last meeting in 1983, could only agree that 'the introduction of cable systems is a matter of great importance. The party should, therefore, be well prepared to respond to any proposals in the forthcoming white paper' (Labour Party, 1983: 3). The issue was then passed onto the NEC's Home Policy Committee for further consideration.

A more detailed vision of the democratic use of cable technology emerged out of Labour-controlled local authorities. Cable's potential to wire up *local* communities and to offer interactive services complemented the decentralising and participatory models of municipal socialism. Several of the larger authorities like London, Sheffield and Manchester were attracted by the proposition of a democratically controlled local communications infrastructure. One report published in November 1982 by a new left-wing pressure group, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, advocated precisely such a strategy.

Given that the State has abdicated responsibility at a national level, Labour-controlled local Authorities could take the initiative in formulating an oppositional communications policy, including proposals for democratic control at a regional level of the whole range of activities within the communications sector (CSE Communications Group, 1982: 2).

The report suggested setting up 'industrial consortia' composed of local authorities (which had been excluded by government from cable systems) and private companies to bid for regional franchises to establish an 'alliance between capital and labour' (ibid.: 65) representing the interest of non-commercial needs.⁴¹ One of the key objectives of the left, claimed the report, should be to politicise the debate around cable and challenge the arguments of the free marketeers.

The GLC's Economic Policy Group published its report on *Cabling in London* the following month and repeated many of these arguments. It too recognised the democratic potential of cable if freed from the restrictions of private sector control, rejected the exclusion of local authorities and called for 'other interested parties to build a consortium of public sector and private sector interests to bid for a Londonwide franchise (GLC, 1982: 77). The report identified the rise of an 'information economy' (ibid.: 10) which might, if properly developed, provide real industrial benefits to Londoners. The best way to change the government's mind

⁴¹ This resembled the basis of the French Socialist government's 1982 *Plan Cable*, a giant public programme designed to wire up millions of French homes and provide them with a series of interactive applications. While the state-owned telecommunications operator provided the national infrastructure, public-private partnerships were required to operate local franchises. Ultimately a combination of economic crisis and internal differences between the public and private sector forced the demise of the plan (see Gueherno, 1987: 283).

would be to convince it of the uneconomic nature of its proposals and to produce a more efficient financial model based on the public/private consortium. This was to be achieved through a further public inquiry into cable, the creation of a Communications Sub-Committee and a campaign against the private development of cable (ibid.: 76-77).

Others on the left adopted a different strategy. Instead of bidding for a regional franchise and spending public money on cable systems, the Sheffield TV Group argued that there should be two separate franchises: a commercial channel and a community access channel funded by an annual levy on subscribers. Far from wasting scarce resources on the infrastructure, local authorities should 'play a leading role in establishing independent sound and video workshops' (Sheffield TV Group, 1983: v) which would form the core of community access programming. The report, prepared for the GLC and Sheffield City Council, even prepared a financial strategy outlining the cost of staffing and equipping these independent workshops.

In the end, little came of the debate. Firstly, central government was not persuaded to change its mind on the involvement of local authorities; secondly, the amount of money which even the larger authorities could afford would have had little impact on constructing and maintaining broadband cable systems; finally, the government's own plans for cable were undermined by the failure of the initial broadband franchises. In retrospect, Nicholas Garnham, who was brought in by the GLC to help it develop a cable policy, identifies an idealistic streak at the heart of the municipal socialists' plans.

The argument was that we could develop local policies for making use of the technology. This did come out of the American debate that the technology could be either used for increasing commercial domination or for local participation. The GLC and one or two metropolitan areas were influenced by that thinking and were trying to put up alternative policies for cable. First it was a debate about community access...My line was that most of that stuff about community participation was extremely utopian and unrealistic and was being used as a fig leaf for something quite different which was in fact the introduction of cable...The danger was that there was a kind of utopian, anarchist, pro-technology strand in left thinking – we can set up these things, give a bit of money to local cable companies to do all these local things. My line was wouldn't it be

better to spend the money somewhere else. Why do you want to spend it on cable? (Garnham 1997).

The problem was that the Labour leadership appeared to have no intention of answering this awkward question nor of opposing the development of cable, for fear of being seen as anti-technology and anti-progress. Peter Humphreys' accurate assessment of the cable debate is that 'political opposition [to the Conservatives' plans] was surprisingly mute and overshadowed by opposition to the specific institutional reforms involved in privatisation and deregulation of BT' (Humphreys, 1986: 167). Despite the contributions made by a range of Labour supporters, the official policy was all too often reduced to championing Labour's commitment to BT and repeating the threat that unregulated cable would present to public service television.⁴² By the time that the 1984 Broadcasting Bill was read for the last time in parliament, the Labour frontbench had all but abandoned its opposition. Denis Howell, responding to the home secretary's introduction, could only retort that 'we welcome the Government's principal philosophy which is that we should provide the maximum choice for the people of this country' (1984: col. 839). Despite the views of the left, the Labour Party had succumbed to the soon-to-be irresistible lobby for consumer choice.

1983-1987: Labour and the Peacock debate

Labour's heavy defeat in the 1983 election both demoralised the Labour left and gave extra confidence to the rising generation of neo-liberal theorists. Free market think-tanks like the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute of Economic Affairs increasingly captured the attention of Downing Street while their leading lights scoured the British landscape for institutions and industries to privatise and liberalise. The television industry, it seemed, was a prime candidate. Dominated by a duopoly which had little incentive for competition, fiercely protected by a cumbersome regulatory regime and infested with trade union closed shops, the think-

⁴² Labour's 1983 manifesto followed along precisely these lines. 'The high standards of British public service broadcasting are threatened by Tory plans to introduce cable TV on free-market lines...To

tanks gleefully produced a series of reports urging the radical restructuring of British broadcasting.⁴³ Documents like *Choice by Cable* (1983) and *The Omega File: Communications* (1984) argued that broadcasting needed to be treated like any other commodity, rather than being given special status because of its cultural importance. The reports called for free-market initiatives including the deregulation of broadcast television, the introduction of subscription television, the privatisation of key units of broadcasting and the auctioning of ITV franchises. Tom O'Malley concludes that the 'general thrust of this view was that broadcasting should be more controlled by market forces and that the state should be used to facilitate this' (O'Malley, 1994: 30). The result, according to Peter Goodwin (1998: 69), was that 'Tory television policy radically but unacknowledgely shifted emphasis – away from new channels and new means of delivery, and towards an attempt to reform the established television system.'

Not surprisingly, the BBC was the focus of much of the neo-liberals' strategy, given its position as a publicly-funded, non-commercial institution and its reputation amongst the right for being obsessively bureaucratic and biased in favour of the left. Prime minister Thatcher was particularly open to this view, harbouring a hostility towards the Corporation from its coverage of the 1982 Falklands War almost as great as Harold Wilson's had been in the 1960s. Alasdair Milne, the BBC's director general, described a meeting where Thatcher 'cheerfully accused us of insanity over our reporting of the disembarkation of troops from the QE2 in the Falklands, quoting as a parallel what she described as American television losing the Vietnam War (1988: 123). When the Corporation asked the government for a substantial increase in the licence fee at the end of 1984, it was received less than enthusiastically in Downing Street. In March 1985, the home secretary agreed to a partial increase in the licence fee but also set up a committee of inquiry, chaired by the free-market economist Sir Alan Peacock, to investigate alternatives to the licence fee, particularly advertising and subscription.

avoid wasteful duplication, we will entrust the provision of the national cable system to British Telecom (quoted in Craig, 1990: 382).

⁴³ O'Malley (1994: 13-30) provides a thorough analysis of the output of the various think tanks.

Labour's reaction took a number of forms. The first was a distinct ambivalence by those on the left to jump to the defence of the BBC and an inclination to support other types of broadcasting, notably Channel Four and the model of independent production. James Curran, latterly the editor of the *New Socialist* and a figure associated with the Bennite left, recalls that

The context of where we were at was that Channel Four had been a terrific success and Channel Four wasn't meant to be like Channel Four. Lord Tebbit came out and said it was supposed to be about golf and yachting and gardening and not about gay and lesbian rights. That was how they conceived of it and their project was basically subverted. So flush with the new success of Channel Four, we were trying to think that the more you open new initiatives, [the better] (Curran, 1999).

Three academics writing in the *New Socialist* in the spring of 1983 criticised the Labour leadership for its silence in the light of vicious attacks from the Conservatives on Channel Four programmes which were 'basing themselves to a large extent upon the Left critiques of the media formulated in the 1970s' (Schlesinger et al., 1983: 45). Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole from the GLC's Greater London Enterprise Board went even further, counterposing the creativity of the independent sector to the conservatism of the BBC.

Many of the best and most innovative ideas have come from outside [the BBC]: from the illegal pirates, independents unable to survive the hierarchies of the BBC, from advertising and radical local groups. In the second half of the 1980s it is Channel 4, ostensibly commercial and financed by advertising that is doing most to innovate with new forms of television and a new understanding of what public service can mean (Mulgan and Worpole, 1986a: 60).

In celebrating the cultural achievements of the new channel, left-wing supporters of Channel Four had some unlikely allies. Writing in the *Times* in May 1985, Curran welcomed the Peacock inquiry as 'an opportunity for the left as well as the right to help reform British broadcasting', noted the similarities between the policies of both left and right for the BBC and supported the idea of an independent production quota 'which would breathe new life and diversity into the BBC' (Curran, 1985). While distancing himself from free-market proposals to privatise the Corporation, Curran

declared that he was not hostile to the introduction of limited advertising on the BBC if it did nothing to undermine the advertising revenue of Channel Four and ITV. Noting later that ‘very strange bedfellows got into bed over independent production’, Curran explains that

We’d been shat upon. We were the people who were the hard left, we were the people who were the Bennite bogeys, we were the people who were denied reasonable access... We were deeply indignant at what we saw as the centrist arrogance of public service broadcasting and there were other people who were angry as well. It was as if the left and right were trying to attack the centre (Curran, 1999).

Curran’s support for the independent sector was echoed by the 25% Campaign, a small group of producers lobbying the government for a fixed quota of independently-produced programmes. The group included David Graham, a friend of Peacock and a member of the free-market Institute of Economic Affairs, who arranged one meeting of the campaign in the Institute of Directors (Barnett and Curry, 1994: 59). By mid-1986, the steering committee of the campaign included Philip Whitehead, until recently a Labour MP, and was urgently lobbying ministers for a quota (ibid.: 62-3). By November 1986, it had succeeded when, following the recommendation of the Peacock Committee (see p. 202), the government eventually conceded a quota of 25% of independently-produced material for all channels. According to Barnett and Curry (ibid.: 65), ‘[t]he Thatcherites had won an opportunistic victory with the help of allies among the growing band of independent producers who conveniently gave the attack cultural credibility.’

Another Channel Four supporter was Joe Ashton, Labour MP and *Daily Star* columnist, who declared to his readers that ‘I think Channel 4 is great. I’m a compulsive viewer’. Anticipating some of the economic arguments of the free-market thinkers, although perhaps in a slightly more accessible manner, Ashton argued that

Over the past 10 years, both BBC 1 and ITV have gradually turned television channels into supermarkets. Everything has been packaged into bland, soggy, cornflakes designed to offend nobody... But because

Channel 4 is a small delicatessen, it doesn't mean its goods are rubbish (Ashton, 1983).

Determined to demonstrate his support for commercial television, Ashton introduced a private members bill into the Commons in January 1985 arguing for the BBC to be allowed to take advertising. The bill coincided with the second of three high-profile editorials in the *Times* attacking the BBC's request for more money and demanding that the BBC must eventually take advertising (Goodwin, 1998: 74-75). Ashton argued that the licence fee was both an unacceptable poll tax, the official party line from 1982, but also asserted that if left-wing newspapers took advertising, then why shouldn't broadcasting? (Ashton, 1985) Although this was not a new position (Hugh Jenkins, the chair of Labour's communications group in the 1960s, had argued along the same lines in 1966), the idea of financing broadcasting in a similar way to the press was precisely one embraced by the Thatcherites in the mid-1980s. Despite the defeat of Ashton's bill (by only 159 to 118), the whole debate played into the hands of Tory reformers far more than it helped those determined to democratise broadcasting.

The second influence on Labour's approach to the television debate was that of the 'cultural industries' approach, pioneered by the Greater London Enterprise Board of the GLC. Inspired by the economic success of the Italian region of Communist-controlled Emilio Romagna, based around networks of small co-operatives linking new technologies to older craft skills, GLEB developed its own Cultural Industries Unit. This was partly a reflection of the increasing grip of 'cultural politics' advocated in the pages of *Marxism Today*, but also a strategy to deal with the de-industrialisation of major metropolitan areas, particularly like London. According to Nicholas Garnham,

The argument I put forward was that a major employer in London are media industries, they are growth industries. It's much better to focus on how you can maximise conditions of work employment there rather than trying to bring shipbuilding back or docks or empowering people through video cameras (Garnham, 1997).

GLEB's Mulgan and Worpole wrote that '[a]t least half a million people are employed in some form of cultural production, distribution or infrastructure, and it is one of the few growth sectors of the economy (1986a: 14). The challenge was to devise strategies to direct investment towards socially relevant areas and to increase employment opportunities for the most disadvantaged groups in the hope that this would also allow previously marginalised voices to emerge. GLEB therefore supported a number of independent film and video production and distribution companies to take advantage of the space opened up by Channel Four. Similarly, a levy from the ITV companies allowed the ACTT union to collaborate with Channel Four to franchise eight film workshops to produce material for the channel. A further levy from the film industry supported a substantial training programme for women and ethnic minorities in film production.

The cultural industries approach depended on working with the market to promote both diversity and jobs. Industry levies, grants, cross-subsidies and joint ventures were the preferred mechanisms of supporting innovative new projects. 'The market,' according to Mulgan and Worpole, 'has never been separate from the state...but there can be little doubt that it has provided many people with far more pleasures and entertainments than official, state-sponsored culture' (1986b: 22). Such a statement would have been a welcome tonic for a Labour leadership engaged in undermining the party's opposition to market forces. While the radical politics of some of the cultural industries' ventures may have worried Labour frontbenchers, the *principle* of a public/private partnership and of the creativity of small co-ops was one that Neil Kinnock shared.

In the end, the cultural industries strategy was unable to buck either the market or the government. Before its abolition by the Conservatives, the GLC had managed to allocate a total of just under £1 million to London's film and video sector over four years. Independent film and video workshops, which the GLC had been particularly keen to support, were given *at most* £50,000 each over that period (GLC, 1986: 88). Channel Four's budget for the ACTT-franchised workshops was cut from £875,000 in its first year to £500,000 in the following year. 'Things haven't quite worked out the way they might have' admitted Alan Fountain, the channel's commissioning editor for independent cinema and community programmes (quoted in Comely,

1983: 34). By 1986, one independent producer was complaining that innovative programmes were being 'stifled' because of competition and cuts in the sector. Workshops, she argued, were being 'pressured, by the weight of the economic factors, into working as production houses, churning out as much material as fast as possible to demonstrate their worth to funding bodies' (Butler, 1996: 25).

What both the independent production and cultural industries approached shared was a hostility to large-scale state intervention into broadcasting and the paternalism of the BBC. Tom O'Malley of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom believes that this 'anti-statist position' undermined the effectiveness of the left in opposing Tory attacks on public service broadcasting.

In the 1980s, people who were around the Labour Party and sometimes in it had a very critical attitude towards the BBC and ITV at a time when, they should not have known better, but had they stopped and thought a little harder about the general political context in which policy was developing after 1981, would have been more hesitant about developing an anti-statist position...A lot of people in and around the Labour Party were influenced by two sorts of shifts. One is the general shift to the right in political elites; secondly, by the influence of *Marxism Today*...which by the mid to late 80s had accommodated itself very rapidly with the priorities of new conservatism (O'Malley, 1999).

While there was a need for a critique of the established broadcasters and support for more grass-roots forms of communications, activists could not afford to ignore the changing political context of the mid-1980s where neo-liberal ideas were dominant.

In contrast to the anti-statist position, others in the labour movement simply urged defence of the status quo. Gerald Kaufman, the shadow home secretary, contrasted the shoddy state of Britain's physical infrastructure with the excellent output of its broadcasting. 'The race for commercials, and for ratings to attract the commercials, would drive down the level of BBC programmes' which, he argued, were 'still envied throughout the world' (Kaufman, 1985). Alan Sapper, general secretary of the ACTT, warned of the imminent 'breakdown of Public Service Broadcasting. Thatcher is a privateer, hell-bent on deregulation and she hates broadcasters.' Independent producers, he argued, were 'the Trojan Horse of a deregulating government' (quoted in Blakstad, 1985: 18) that was determined to break union

organisation and destroy public service principles. Responding to Curran's *Times* article in which he had posed the possibility of limited advertising on the BBC, Sapper supported the present arrangements for regulating the BBC and ITV stating that '[i]t is essentially important for us to retain what we have with as little interference as possible' (Sapper, 1985). The ACTT's evidence to the Peacock Committee backed up this line of thinking and defended the present arrangements of not competing for the same source of revenue as allowing 'the UK to develop a resource rich-broadcasting system producing wide ranging and high quality programming' (quoted in *Television Today*, 1985). Similarly, the TUC's submission opposed any talk of sponsorship, subscription or advertising for the BBC and indeed argued that the government 'should be examining ways of entrenching the licence fee as a consistent and equitable source of finance' (quoted in *Financial Times*, 1985).

Labour's official evidence to the Peacock Committee was prepared by Norman Buchan, the party's shadow arts minister. Buchan was deeply committed to raising the profile of cultural politics and indeed wrote the introduction to *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning*, the book on cultural policy written by GLEB's Mulgan and Worpole (1986a). Now, he had to accommodate those concerns about democratising the media with the powerful lobby in the party and the broadcasting unions to preserve the status quo. The submission (Labour Party, 1985), prepared in the summer of 1985, ran to 22 typewritten pages and reflected the influence of both sets of ideas.

The submission opens with qualified support for the duopoly but makes it clear that 'the BBC has never been above reproach. It has often been paternalistic in its outlook and practices, and dominated by a small Oxbridge educated elite based in London' (ibid.: 3). Further on it states that 'the BBC has no monopoly on quality or diversity. Indeed the work of Channel 4 over the last 3 years has shown up just how unadventurous the BBC had become in its attitudes to many issues, often adopting an unjustifiably patronising and protective attitude to its public' (ibid.: 18).

Government initiatives in broadcasting, however, are not about any desire to challenge elitism as much as the wish 'to open up broadcasting as a source of profit for whoever is the highest bidder' (ibid.:3). Nodding in the direction of the media

unions, the document claims that such an objective is likely to lead to substantial redundancies in the major broadcasting organisations. The key, therefore, is to look at the television industry holistically:

British broadcasting operates very much as a system. Commitments to quality and diversity exist as much in ITV and Channel 4 as they do in the BBC. The whole economy of broadcasting is beginning to experience what is likely to prove a prolonged period of rapid change driven by new technologies of diffusion such as cable, the VCR and satellite, and by powerful commercial forces which see broadcasting as a relatively untapped area of profit (ibid.: 4).

Even by examining only one area of broadcasting, that of BBC finance, government plans will still damage the whole ecology of the television system

Moving on to an examination of the licence fee, the submission both supports the *principles* of preserving the independence of the BBC from government interference and of treating broadcasting as a public good, but criticises it for increasingly failing to do so *in practice*. The key argument against the licence fee, however, is that it is a ‘highly regressive form of taxation ...[dating] from an age when television was considered a luxury service’ (ibid.: 6). The document then proposes to ‘restructure’, though not to abolish, the licence fee either by putting a levy on multi-set households and passing on the savings to the poor, or through a government grant. It recognises that the latter idea might compromise the independence of the BBC but notes that ‘the idea that the BBC is independent involves more than a little mythology’ (ibid.: 7) given the range of powers that the state already has in influencing the Corporation. Distance from government might be maintained through a system of rolling finance, over three or five year periods, overseen by an independent review body (ibid.: 8).

The next, longer, section deals with the impact of advertising and quotes research demonstrating that advertising is a more expensive way of financing television than the licence fee. The report then works through the negative effects on other media sectors of the BBC taking advertising. Indeed the report suggests that ‘it would be a salutary exercise for your committee and those submitting evidence to pose the question the other round and to question whether advertising does not already play

too large a role in our society' (ibid.: 16-17). In a particularly teasing paragraph, the submission raises the point that

if it is legitimate to question the licence fee should it not be equally legitimate to question the existing role of advertising as a means of financing broadcasting. For example, *if advertising was replaced by an expanded licence fee* (perhaps moderated by direct taxation) there would be a wide range of immediate benefits...Financing television through advertising...shifts the primary economic relationship to that between advertisers and sellers of media space. Instead of providing programmes for viewers, the main function of broadcasters becomes the sale of an audience to advertisers. Replacing advertising by a more direct form of finance would open the way for new mechanisms of accountability and responsiveness (ibid.: 17 – emphasis added).

The absence of any other initiatives at the time to abolish television advertising suggests that this was a rather rhetorical proposal but it nevertheless indicates Buchan's desire to engage with more radical thinking on broadcasting. The suggestion itself has far more in common with the tone of 1970s discussions around *TPATM* than with the more cautious debates in Allaun's study group. Branching out from the narrow economic remit of the inquiry, the submission lists a number of key issues to be tackled if the BBC is to maintain its public service role. There needs to be increased access for 'unrepresented minorities to make programmes', attention to equal opportunities, far more accountability among the board of governors, the introduction of 'certain basic principles of industrial democracy' and the enshrining of universal access to BBC services in the charter (ibid.: 21-22). In conclusion, the report makes one promise, repeatedly publicised by the press at the time: 'should advertising or sponsorship be introduced into the BBC, a future Labour government would remove it' (ibid.: 22).

Buchan's submission was a thoughtful and challenging addition to the other pieces of evidence from the labour movement. It committed the party to doing nothing but provided an articulate analysis of the economics of broadcasting and identified with both the creativity of the Channel Four model and the responsibility of opposing the further commercialisation of broadcasting. The firm pledge in *Labour's Programme 1982* to phase out the licence fee had now been superseded by a proposal to either

extend the licence fee *or* to replace it with general taxation while advertising was now either to be abolished completely *or* to be kept at its present level.

The Peacock Committee's report was published in July 1986 and probably disappointed Thatcher more than Kinnock as it rejected the introduction of advertising on the BBC and the need for specific controls on content.⁴⁴ While recommending the auctioning of ITV franchises and subscription to replace part of the licence fee in the medium-term, it argued that in the present immature broadcasting market, scrapping the licence fee altogether would damage public service broadcasting, for which it envisaged a continuing role. One decision that might have pleased the Labour left as much as the radical right was the recommendation of a 40% quota for independent production across all channels. In its conception of the incremental development of market forces in broadcasting alongside a public service remit, '[t]his was a free-market strategy with considerable sophistication and intellectual coherence behind it' (Goodwin, 1998: 82). Shadow home secretary Gerald Kaufman, however, was far from impressed. 'The report is a mess' he argued in parliament when the report was released and stormed that 'the proper place for the report is not a pigeon hole, but a wastepaper basket' (HoC Debates, 3 July 1986: col. 1179). Kaufman rejected the committee's proposals one by one – except the plans for an increase in independent production – and even accused the committee for going 'wildly beyond its terms of reference' (ibid.: 1178) even though the official Labour Party submission had accused the remit of being far too narrow. Others were equally disturbed by the committee's vision of a free-market future for broadcasting but more puzzled by the actual recommendations. Norman Buchan noted its 'curious combination of arguing the case for a totally free market in broadcasting and saying it was inevitable in any case' (Buchan, 1986: 13). Roy Lockett for the ACTT described the disastrous impact of its 'curious ragbag of proposals' on 'an effective, economic and resource-rich industry' (Lockett, 1986: 1) but gave no clues as to how broadcasting workers could challenge it.

⁴⁴ For a full analysis of the Peacock Report see Goodwin (1998: 78-92) and O'Malley (1994: 106-117).

The attack continued in the full parliamentary debate on the report later that year. Labour MPs, having decided that its immediate recommendations were not too threatening and that there was little they could do about them, concentrated on Peacock's 'intermediate proposals' and, not for the first time, on the dangers of Americanisation. 'Commercial objectives would reign supreme over a variety of choice,' warned Kaufman, 'and lead to a bland mash of quiz shows, chat shows and soap operas – the kind of thing which prevails in the United States' (HoC Debates, 20 November 1986: cols. 724-5). Buchan's contribution was a lengthy and impassioned attack on neo-liberal arguments, combining a critique of the 'philosophy of the Hayeks, Friedmans, Tebbits and Thatchers of this world' (ibid.: col. 760) with a first-hand account of the deregulated television system in Italy. The debate, he concluded, was about

the type of civilisation that we wish to create. That cannot be left in the hands of the profit-makers, not only because that is the greater immorality, but because they have no vision or concept other than of profit. Indeed, they cannot, because by the nature of the beast, that is all it can do. Freedom will not remain if it is entrusted to the pockets and the purses of the Murdochs, Maxwells and Berlusconis. They will not preserve the quality of broadcasting, ensure the diversity of programmes nor will they seek to eliminate bias by extending genuine access (ibid.: col. 763).

Peacock's recommendations might have opened some possibilities for an effective opposition to the commercialisation of broadcasting. According to Goodwin, the committee's 'anti-censorious liberalism' and its rejection of Thatcher's desire to put advertising on the BBC 'threw Tory television policy into disarray' (Goodwin, 1998: 85). Labour's opposition to the Peacock Report, however, was blunted in two ways. Firstly, Labour was not alone in defending public service principles – a substantial part of the Home Office, Tory 'wets', most of the other political parties and the vast majority of the broadcasting establishment were all committed to preserving the BBC in its current form. Secondly, Labour's attack on the consequences of commercial forces was undermined by the moves at the top of the party to seek some sort of accommodation with the market. A distinct political alternative to both the status

quo and a market-led future was difficult to develop in the context of Labour's increasing revisionism.

Perhaps predictably then, Buchan's eloquent attack on the profit system and the motives of the media moguls only served to highlight the growing divide *inside* the Labour Party between left and right over the question of market forces and the party's commitment to tackle the growing conglomeration and concentration of the media. A month after Buchan made his speech in parliament attacking the 'beast' of commercialism, he had been sacked from his position as shadow arts spokesperson over a seemingly secondary issue. Buchan had long argued that a single arts ministry was necessary to co-ordinate the different branches of arts and cultural activities and that this ministry should have full responsibility for broadcasting. He was fully supported by the left and the media unions who saw it as a key demand for media reform⁴⁵ and as clear evidence, should it be implemented, of Labour's willingness to prioritise media issues. During discussions in January 1987 about the forthcoming election manifesto, Buchan once again raised the issue but was rebuffed by Neil Kinnock who, according to Tony Benn, told Buchan that 'I'll be in charge anyway, and the Home Office must be in control of broadcasting' (quoted in Benn, 1994b: 488). Buchan refused to back down and was sacked.

At a PLP meeting nine days later, the debate resurfaced. It was clear that those on the right of the party, particularly Gerald Kaufman, were less than enthusiastic about the idea of a broadcasting post with Cabinet status while Roy Hattersley was keen not to let go of his 'fiefdom' (O'Malley, 1999). Benn recalls in his diary that Buchan repeated the argument and Kinnock once again asserted his authority. 'He [Kinnock] said Party policy was contained in the 1983 manifesto, and to go back to the policy in 1976 and 1977 was to go back to the Old Testament. "I shall decide who is in the Cabinet and we will have an inquiry into broadcasting"' (Benn, 1994b: 489/90). Actually, the 1983 manifesto was silent on the issue, neither changing nor repeating the pledge made in *Labour's Programme 1982* for a minister of arts with Cabinet rank.

⁴⁵ For example, see Curran (1986: 134), Meacher (in Allaun [1988: 97]), and Mulgan and Worpole (1986: 125).

Mark Fisher, who replaced Buchan as shadow arts spokesperson, provides one interpretation of events.

‘Norrie’ [Buchan] actually won the argument and convinced Neil Kinnock that this is what should happen and he convinced the shadow Cabinet. But having been convinced in the second half of 1986, Kinnock said ‘right, I accept your case, but with an election likely to be some time in the next twelve months, I’m not going make this radical change now. We’ll put it on the backburner’...Norrie unfortunately wouldn’t accept that and, with a short temper, he put himself into a position where felt, quite wrongly, that he had to resign...He should have, like a good trade union negotiator, taken the 70% of the spoils that were on the table and come back for the other 30% after the election (Fisher, 1999).

Others saw the whole event as a sign of Labour backing down from any programme of media reform and as an assertion of Kinnock stamping his authority on the party. Brian Sedgmore commented on the affair at the time that

Policy on broadcasting is not apparently about art, entertainment and communication, but is to be treated on a par with regulations on the opening hours of pubs, parking restrictions and fines for dog shit...In other words Labour intends to maintain the status quo (1987: 39-40).

Tom O’Malley’s reading is that

it was a re-establishment of control type move. One thing was that Norman’s face didn’t fit, too linked to a traditional cultural politics of the Labour movement. It was also a question of asserting control of that area – on the verge of Kinnock’s move to modernisation and following the expulsion of *Militant*. So their response to the politics of the period was to try and tighten control and they may have thought that this whole area was a mess, which of course it was (O’Malley, 1999).

For Labour left-wingers Heffernan and Marqusee, the whole affair suggested that Kinnock was desperate not to antagonise broadcasters before an election. ‘It was his [Kinnock’s] own conviction that anything that could be seen as a challenge to the status quo in media control would provoke the wrath of the establishment’ (1992: 123-4).

The latter reading is borne out by the 1987 manifesto itself. While it promised to introduce an arts ministry it made it plain that the 'Home Office will remain responsible for regulatory and statutory powers in relation to broadcasting' (quoted in Allaun, 1988: 91). The rest of the section simply reaffirmed Labour's defence of the existing broadcasting structures in the light of the Peacock proposals. 'We will protect the independence of the BBC and the independent broadcasting organisations. We reject subscription television for the BBC and the auctioning of ITV franchises' (ibid.). The Labour leadership had put aside all the left's comments on BBC bias, media conglomeration, the distortions of advertising and the need for reform and lined up firmly with the duopoly.

Labour and the 1990 Broadcasting Act

Neil Kinnock reacted to Labour's third consecutive election defeat by stepping up the pace of the party's accommodation to market forces with the launch of the policy review process. The Conservatives celebrated their victory by turning their attention away from the BBC and towards the restructuring of commercial television in particular. In June 1988, a parliamentary select committee examining the future of broadcasting published a report that broadly followed the spirit of the Peacock Committee and proposed 'a tendering competition for the [ITV] franchises based on the ability to meet programme requirements and a bid based on a profit formula' (Home Affairs Committee, 1988: para. 170). While it was hardly surprising that the Tories on the committee were in favour of such a process, the agreement of the four Labour members was perhaps more unprecedented. For Shirley Littler, deputy director of the IBA, this cross-party consensus was particularly important. '[A]s far as I was concerned, the thing that absolutely ended the debate was that it was All-Party report. And if the Labour Party is now saying they didn't like competitive tender, they jolly well went along with that...' (quoted in Bonner, 1998: 370). Goodwin argues that the report demonstrated the general acceptance of the Peacock principles that had permeated both main parties. 'The Labour front bench might appear to continue its opposition to an auction in principle, but thereafter the real – although still fierce – arguments were in practice about the precise mechanism of the auction' (Goodwin, 1998: 91).

The situation was not so clear at the 1988 Labour conference which discussed the media for the first time in four years. Anticipating the forthcoming White Paper on broadcasting, the conference passed a motion condemning the commercialisation of broadcasting, the privatisation of Channel Four and, indeed, the auctioning of the ITV franchises. By this point, the idea that the independents were the cutting-edge of experimentation and innovation had been challenged by the support for an independent production quota at the top level of the Tories. Alan Sapper of the ACTT, proposing the motion, warned that such a quota was simply a cover for allowing foreign interests to take over: ‘it really means that the megalith, multinational areas of America, Australia and Europe will move in under a British or European cover company and take over the job and products of our own people’ (Sapper, 1988: 115). This was a clear reference to Rupert Murdoch whose increasing domination of the British media and anti-union activities had earned him the accolade of being one of Labour’s most hated figures. Hostility to Murdoch was a theme that was to be repeated frequently over the following years.

The White Paper, *Broadcasting in the 90s: Competition, Choice and Quality* (Home Office, 1988) was published by Douglas Hurd’s department on November 7, 1988 and promised a commercial overhaul of substantial parts of British broadcasting with the auctioning of ITV franchises and the creation of a more ‘light-touch’ regulatory structure for commercial television.⁴⁶ The one area that departed significantly from Peacock’s proposals was in the government’s determination to highlight issues of taste and decency through the launch of the Broadcasting Standards Council on a statutory basis. Goodwin argues that there were two responses to the White Paper – one ‘general and apocalyptic’, the other ‘critical...of particular details of the proposals’ – which together ‘were to produce considerable modifications as the White Paper blueprint was translated into statute in the 1990 Broadcasting Act’ (Goodwin, 1998: 100). The question we wish to consider is the extent to which Labour contributed to this process.

Labour’s parliamentary opposition veered between the ‘general and apocalyptic’ and the specific and tactical. What united it was the emphasis on protecting the high

⁴⁶ For details of and responses to the White Paper, see Goodwin (1998: 93-108).

standards of British television. Roy Hattersley, the shadow home secretary, wasted no time in attacking the document ‘as a giant retreat from the concept of public service broadcasting. Its result will be less diversity and lower standards’ (Hoc Debates, 7 November 1988: col. 32). Tony Banks wanted to know ‘how [home secretary] Mr Hurd could expect MPs to take seriously his assurances on preserving standards while he was abolishing the IBA and clearly announcing his intention to move towards privatizing the BBC’ (ibid.: col. 41). Labour’s amendment to the motion on the White Paper argued that the document would ‘discourage a wide variety of programme choice, and generally reduce the high standards and consistent quality of broadcasting in this country’ (HoC Debates, 8 February 1989: col. 1017). The comments by broadcasting spokesperson Robin Corbett that the home secretary simply ‘wants to do a demolition job’ on public service broadcasting (ibid.: col. 1069) emphasised Labour’s belief that government plans were destroying everything that was good about British broadcasting and that Labour would rush to its defence.

Labour speakers demonstrated a particular attachment to the concept of quality. This was, of course, a highly malleable term used by all sides in the debate over the White Paper reforms. Whereas Reithian public service broadcasting depended on the imposition from above of particular sets of ideas, free market reformers argued that it was more important to simply provide audiences with what would be popular. ‘In this scenario, the generation of quality television would not so much be initiated from the ‘top down’ but would be the result of demand from the ‘bottom up’. The emphasis on creative innovation by producers is shifted to an emphasis on a ‘businesslike’ sensitivity to consumers’ (Corner et al., 1994: 14). So while the Tories were anxious to paint the left’s notion of quality in terms of elitist, minority programming, Labour was quick to embrace both ‘high culture’ definitions as well as more populist meanings in order to present itself as a consumer-friendly party. Indeed, Hattersley repeated the word ‘quality’ ten times in his speech on the White Paper and noted that, ‘[a]s “high quality” is a subjective description, I make it clear that I include in it “Bread” as well as “Brideshead Revisited,” and “Coronation Street” no less than “Jewel in the Crown”’ (HoC Debates, 8 February 1989: col. 1018).

Labour's opposition to specific parts of the White Paper focused on the vagueness of the proposals for the ITV franchise auctions, the dangers of conglomeration and possibilities for foreign ownership of commercial television interests and the censorial power of the Broadcasting Standards Council. These disagreements co-existed, however, with a recognition of the need for change, not on the basis of faults with the current television system but only because, 'thanks to technological advance, what we broadcast in the future can be better' (ibid.: cols. 1017-8). Indeed, Labour had little desire to complain about the existing arrangements. According to Hattersley, ITV companies already existed 'as profit-making organisations. Therefore it is right and reasonable for those who run the programme companies to try to make a profit' (ibid.: cols. 1018-9). ITV franchise renewals already involved scrutinising standards, Channel Four was doing nothing wrong and should be left alone and, all in all, 'we believe that British broadcasting is among the best in the world' (ibid.: col. 1027). Labour, nevertheless, was to identify with the need for change because, as a leak of the party's response to the White Paper put it, 'Labour must embrace the enthusiasm for expanding choice in broadcasting' (quoted in *Campaign*, 1989a: 21).

The party's formal response was published in March 1989 and contained few surprises. Perhaps this was because, according to *Television Week*, '[s]ome Labour MPs have argued in private that large parts of the white paper are acceptable...' (Lewis, 1989: 2). It demanded a tightening of the 'standard threshold' for franchise applicants, stricter controls on cross-media ownership and the prevention of non-EU companies to hold a franchise, the maintenance of Channel Four's funding structure and the abolition of the Broadcasting Standards Council. The document also called for 'the creation of franchises authorities which would issue franchises only where the range, content and quality of programmes were guaranteed' (Hughes, 1989: 4), precisely what Hattersley was arguing the IBA was already doing.

These debates were taking place in the final run-up to the publication of the party's two-year old policy review, which appeared as *Meet the challenge, Make the change* (Labour Party, 1989a) in May 1989. The section on the media was part of the group examining 'Democracy for the Individual and the Community', chaired by Hattersley himself. The actual proposals, 'Broadcasting in a free society', repeated the concerns

expressed and promises made in the White Paper response. The licence fee would stay while the Broadcasting Standards Council would go; franchise renewals on the basis of programme range and quality would stay, franchise renewals on the basis of money alone would go. The language, however, most definitely reflected the new terms of the broadcasting debate. Criticisms of media bias and lack of accountability were replaced by a fascination with the, by now, familiar trinity of competition, choice and quality:

Quality and integrity are determined by ownership. The ownership of independent television franchises therefore needs the most careful scrutiny. We are particularly concerned about the cross ownership of newspapers and television and will immediately refer this issue to our strengthened Monopolies and Mergers Commission...We are not only concerned about the reduction in quality, diversity and standards throughout public and independent broadcasting system [sic]. We are equally determined to protect the standard of impartial and independent broadcasting of which we, as a country, are right to be proud (ibid.: 9).

The target of the attack here was clearly not private ownership *per se* but the creation of new private monopolies that would undermine choice and restrict competitive behaviour. Hattersley stressed the real target of the policy when he introduced the ‘Democracy’ policy review proposals at that year’s Labour conference.

In a free society we need a diversity of media ownership. Without it, the whole industry will follow Rupert Murdoch nearer and nearer to the gutter, and will characterised more and more by the concept which the Murdoch empire is built: profit, prejudice and prurience (Hattersley, 1989: 121).

Delegates may have been puzzled by his attack on one man’s right to make profits but not that of the existing ITV companies. They may also have been surprised that while Murdoch was being lambasted inside the conference hall, over at stands 50 and 51 just outside the hall his satellite company, Sky Television, was inviting ‘all conference delegates to stop by its exhibition stand to learn more about its unique range of broadcasting services’ (Labour Party, 1989b: 8).

Not all delegates were impressed with the leadership's policies. Tony Hearn, general secretary of BETA⁴⁷, the union representing BBC workers, criticised the 'lamentably too brief' media proposals in *Meet the Challenge...*

It is alright as far as it goes, but, frankly, it does not go terribly far, and I question whether it fully highlights the crucial political issues of control and access to broadcasting that have got to be seized by this conference if a Labour government is going to be able effectively to implement its programme (Hearn, 1989: 126).

BETA and its sister union, the ACTT, had already initiated a joint campaign in February 1989, the Public Service Broadcasting Campaign (PSBC) which was co-ordinated by Tom O'Malley of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. The campaign's aim was to raise broader political questions than those raised by Labour in parliament, for example of workplace rights, continuity of employment, the role of advertising and sponsorship and general regulatory structures. 'What we did,' according to O'Malley (1999), 'was to channel to a wider political audience within the labour and trade union movement the issues of accountability and quality that were being posed by the post-1986 situation.'

However, the tone of the unions' campaign was far more defensive than their approach to media reform had been in the 1970s, reflecting the political climate and the impact of defeats for media workers at Wapping in 1986 and at TV-am in 1987. The PSBC's pamphlet, *government plans for broadcasting in the 1990's* (ACTT/BETA, 1989/90) was subtitled, 'campaign for choice, standards and quality in television in radio', mirroring the concerns of the official Labour campaign. The focus was very much on lobbying MPs and writing in to local newspapers (see, for example, the 'Action Plan' in *ibid.*), more than attempting to organise industrial action among broadcasting workers in defence of their jobs and conditions. Instead, the campaign opted for an alliance with other progressive groups who wanted to defeat the government's plans. 'We reached out and were part of that general political noise that was created,' argues O'Malley (1999), 'which involved the

⁴⁷ The ABS had merged with entertainment workers in the National Association of Theatrical, Television and Kine Employees (NATTKE) to form BETA in 1984. BETA then merged with the ACTT in 1990 to form BECTU.

Church of England, Oxfam and the trade unions, which also sustained the culture of the Campaign for Quality Television' (CQT).

The CQT had a quite different background. Bankrolled by a £5000 donation by David Plowright, the chairman of Granada Television (Bonner, 1998: 389), the campaign proved to be a highly effective front group for the ITV sector. It mobilised a range of high-profile television personalities, like Rowan Atkinson, Esther Rantzen and Michael Palin together with politicians from both main parties, including shadow arts minister Mark Fisher, who were opposed to various aspects of the White Paper (Davidson, 1992: 17-26). In particular, it concentrated its efforts on resisting a blind auction process and negotiating a 'quality threshold' which ITV franchise applicants would have to meet. There is little doubt that the CQT's activities influenced Labour's broadcasting spokespeople more than the unions' campaign. Robin Corbett, the party's official broadcasting representative recalls that he saw 'a lot of the ITV companies' during the passage of the bill. 'You're not against what they're doing because you've got a lot of constituents watching and liking what they're doing and that's the way I chose to do it' (Corbett, 1999). Fisher (1999) remembers taking advice at the time from 'loyal party members' like Plowright and Denis Forman (both senior executives at Granada TV) and Greg Dyke, chief executive of London Weekend Television, as well as Labour-supporting academics like James Curran and Jean Seaton.

By September 1989, there was some discussion about the fragility of Labour's opposition to the White Paper. Despite growing Tory backbench unease with the impact of government broadcasting plans on programme quality, left-wing MP Michael Meacher argued that 'we are in danger of becoming too reactive and too nervous in putting forward policy. There is a temptation to bend in the wind, to give a little ground in the hope of appeasing the critics. But however much ground you give it is never quite enough' (Meacher, 1989: 9). Following an interview with Hattersley, one journalist described Labour's strategy as a 'timorous reaction to the present government's proposals. New and positive ideas which would set an alternative agenda for the media are absent' (Wohrle, 1989: 21). The one proposal that shook up the debate in the following few months was Labour's threat to reverse the auction of ITV licenses should the party win power before the process was

complete. Should, however, the licences have already been awarded, Labour promised to honour the contracts fully (Mares, 1989: 4). In hindsight, given that there was a six-month gap between the announcement of the licenses and the subsequent election, the promise does not now appear as dramatic as it was at the time.

The bill was published in December 1989 and Labour's team on the committee overseeing its passage was announced the following month. Labour MPs filled eleven out of the thirty-one places and included a number with experience of broadcasting issues. Corbett and Fisher jointly led a team that also included Norman Buchan, Tony Banks (formerly of the ABS), Dianne Abbott (sponsored by the ACTT) and Austin Mitchell (now a Sky Television presenter). According to *Campaign* (1989b: 3), Hattersley had already 'signalled that Labour was prepared to drop its outright opposition to competitive tendering' if changes to the procedure of the tendering process were made. Labour's strategy, therefore, was not to press for the scrapping of the principle of an auction but to soften its impact as far as possible; similarly, if the IBA was to be abolished, then its successor needed to have equally strong regulatory powers. Corbett, summarising his approach, states that '[w]hoever is leading [opposition to a bill] has a choice. You either say, "right, we'll fight for every half-inch of ground, fix bayonets", which we could have done. Or you try a more intelligent approach and try to take some of the television interests with you' (Corbett, 1999).

After two months, David Mellor, the broadcasting minister in charge of the bill, had conceded an 'exceptional circumstances' clause that would allow the regulator to reject the highest bidder for a franchise and to select another on the basis of the higher quality of its offering. By the time the act received royal assent in November 1990, substantial changes had been made which blunted the most severe free-market proposals. Tony Banks commented at the time that 'I have done 14 or 15 bills at committee stage. This was the one in which most movement was achieved' (quoted in Goodwin, 1990: 7). To what extent can this be related to Labour's opposition?

Corbett (1999) argues that 'I think we did better than we could have hoped. We did end up laying down some quality requirements on both the national and regional

news and very diminished but nonetheless public service obligations [on ITV].’ In part, he attributes this to his very close working relationship with Mellor. ‘I’m not saying that there was total agreement. Individually there probably was but he wasn’t acting as an individual...I think that in the circumstances that we did quite well because she [Thatcher] would have tipped it all in the sea’ (ibid.). Mark Fisher, however, remembers it quite differently.

I think that is accepting at face value the line that David Mellor would take, that David would cast himself for a variety of reasons as the defender of broadcasting against the government. I never believed that was the case and I think Mellor knew exactly what he was doing and that any victories won against the forces of Thatcher were actually victories that were going to be won anyway. His attempts to paint Hurd as an arch-Thatcherite home secretary - notwithstanding the White Paper - were not very convincing and I think that both Hurd and Mellor were sufficiently non-Thatcherite to want to defend some things in broadcasting...Mellor was perfectly cordial but he did not attempt to create a joint front with the opposition (Fisher, 1999).

O’Malley (1999) argues that the most effective opposition came from the CQT, the ITV companies and the IBA who were able to ‘bend the ear’ of Home Office ministers who had always been sympathetic to the arguments of the broadcasters. Mellor himself argues that the CQT were particularly influential as ‘they provided the pressure that gave me the ability to tell my elders and betters that change [to the legislation] had to be made...’ (quoted in Bonner, 1998: 419).

Yet whoever’s voice was most influential during the passage of the bill, it remains the case that the government’s main objective of further commercialising British broadcasting was intact. Labour may have provided the backbone of the opposition during the committee stage, but the agenda had already been set by a wide range of groups: backbench Tories, ITV executives, television personalities, broadcasting unions, church groups and perhaps even the broadcasting minister himself. Labour’s weakness was that it had failed to articulate an imaginative and distinctive argument against the free-market vision of broadcasting together with a coherent plan of action for how to defeat it. As an editorial in *Broadcast* put it at the time, ‘Labour’s answer has been to argue for a status quo which, if only because of the changing economic

and technological realities facing the industry, appears to be increasingly untenable' (*Broadcast*, 1989: 6).

Fisher now accepts this accusation but argues that:

The reasons for it are not a lack of political nerve and will, but probably have more trivial roots in the realities of opposition. Whereas the government prepares for a broadcasting bill and has the resources of a small department and civil servants' time, the opposition can't prepare in any detail until they see the bill and you're pretty much swept into it... You've got quite a narrow range of advice and you have to move quite quickly and you tend to react to what the government is saying rather than to set your own agenda and that is in the nature of scrutinising legislation. The government proposes, all you can do is criticise. You have an opportunity to put down new clauses and have symbolic debates on different approaches but on the whole the agenda-setting is done by government (Fisher, 1999).

While this may be true about the complexities of responding to the details of legislation, our argument is that Labour had no shortage of sympathetic academics, trade unionists, broadcasters and ordinary party members who were willing to give advice nor of policy documents in the party's recent past. Curran et al. (1986), MacShane (1987) and Allaun (1988) are just a few examples of discussions of television policy which were circulating in the labour movement at that time.

A more persuasive argument is that the front bench had little inclination to tackle the broadcasting establishment and jeopardise its project of shedding a left-wing image in search of electoral respectability. While Kinnock was certainly bitter at the behaviour of the British press, he reserved no such venom for British television. Asked in 1993 about Labour's relationship with the media during his leadership, he replied that

So far as the telly is concerned it is much healthier [than the press] because the television, both by charter and by culture, does accommodate the requirements of balance. There are some mistakes – but they are human institutions after all. Generally speaking, the mistakes go against us, but then I would say that, wouldn't I? *But it is not enough to be a real source of sustained complaint* (Kinnock, 1994: 552 – emphasis added).

From 1982, when the party had criticised ‘the closed and autocratic institutions’ of broadcasting, Labour had shifted rapidly towards making peace with the broadcasting establishment. This was all the more important given the overwhelming hostility of sections of the press, most notably the Murdoch-owned newspapers, and the efforts of the shadow communications agency to improve the televisual nature of Labour’s campaigning. Once again, Fisher attributes this to *realpolitik*.

Did the party become more, I wouldn’t say friendly, but more understanding of the existing realities? Instead of starting from a blank sheet and saying ‘what sort of broadcasting policy ought an incoming socialist government to have?’, we were asking that, given that we were coming into government and would inherit this configuration of broadcasting, how would we actually handle it? (Fisher, 1999)

The task was left to Fisher himself to draw up a media policy that privileged pragmatic considerations rather than socialist principles in time for the 1992 election. In September 1991, he produced a 32-page document, *Arts and Media: Our Cultural Future* (Labour Party, 1991) which presented a detailed series of commitments about the party’s desire to take advantage of the growing economic importance of the ‘cultural industries’. In terms of television, Labour promised to ‘maintain the licence fee as the main source of the BBC’s income for the foreseeable future’, to abolish the Broadcasting Standards Council, to continue with the present system of funding Channel Four and to introduce a Freedom of Information Act to ‘strengthen editorial independence’ (ibid.: 31-32). It repeated its commitment to a ministry for arts and media, although only with ‘growing [i.e. not full regulatory] responsibilities for broadcasting’ (ibid.: 9) and signalled its desire to tackle the issue of cross-media ownership. This latter point resurfaced in the party’s 1992 manifesto which made no further comments on television policy but stated that it would ‘establish an urgent enquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into the concentration of media ownership’ (Labour Party, 1992: 24). This was to be a subject of great importance in the debates to take place later in the decade, but for now it looked like small consolation for the setbacks the party had suffered at the hands of the free marketeers during the 1980s.

Conclusion

What achievements could Labour point to in its opposition to government policies concerning television broadcasting during the thirteen-year period we have discussed? There was little real resistance to Whitelaw's plans for the fourth channel and the Labour left had been just as enthusiastic as the free-market right in celebrating the rise of the independent production sector. It had failed to dent the government's enthusiasm for the cable and satellite 'revolution', a phenomenon that was undermined far more by inconsistencies in the government's own approach than by a sustained or imaginative challenge from Labour. The party had countered the deregulatory ideas underpinning the launch of the Peacock Committee but were simply part of a broad alliance, including many Tories, who were uneasy about commercialising broadcasting. Indeed O'Malley stresses the internal divisions in government as the key: 'Thatcher was not politically strong enough to force advertising on the BBC. She faced opposition from the Home Office and from her most senior Cabinet colleague, Whitelaw' (O'Malley, 1994: 115-6). Finally, while publicly criticising the philosophy of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, Labour frontbenchers had privately conceded the need for some of the government reforms and had limited themselves to opposing specific details of the legislation. Labour, far from co-ordinating a distinct challenge to the bill was, once more, just part of the general 'noise' against the plans.

O'Malley argues that, given the general success of the Thatcher government in crushing all opposition, there were very limited possibilities of resisting market reforms in broadcasting. 'The sheer weight of the economic and political forces behind the changes made opposition inside and outside the state very difficult' (ibid.: 173). Yet, the debates over the 1988 White Paper took place at precisely the same time as a successful series of strikes by BBC workers while the passage of the 1990 Broadcasting Act coincided with the largest popular mobilisation against the Conservatives in the shape of the anti-poll tax campaign. Indeed, Thatcher resigned as prime minister because of a lack of support from within her own party in exactly the same month as the broadcasting bill became law. It was not that there was any lack of support for a coherent alternative to the free market from the left, but that the

Labour leadership was reluctant to provide one. According to Labour activists Heffernan and Marqusee (1992: 206):

Again and again, Labour conferences have demanded media reform, some minimal tilting of the balance away from the Conservative Party and the employers, but again and again Labour in Parliament has declined to pursue these demands, even when they were begging to be raised, as during the debates on the Broadcasting Bill in 1990.

By 1992, Labour had published a substantial number of policy documents on the media while debates on press and broadcasting, Murdoch and monopolisation, were regular features of party conferences. It was not that Labour did not have a television policy but that its commitment to implement the policy, and increasingly the policy itself, was shaped by the party's acceptance of market forces and its desire not to antagonise the broadcasting establishment. In the 1980s, the left continued to dominate the intellectual discussion within the labour movement concerning television policy, much as it had in the 1970s. The problem was that this took the form of ideas - such as the cultural industries approach and *Marxism Today's* emphasis on communications – which were either unable or unwilling to stop the party's march to the right.

What difference might Labour have made had it been in office in the 1980s? It would probably have set up an Open Broadcasting Authority to run the fourth channel but with a very similar remit to the one imposed on Channel Four and with many of the financial problems predicted back in the original debates. British Telecom would have been entrusted with running a national broadband cable network, although there is no certainty that this would have avoided the problems experienced by the French socialist government's more innovative *Plan Cable* (see p. 190n). While Labour would have been far less influenced by radical right ideas of forcing the BBC to take advertising, such a proposition had already been contemplated by Labour ministers in the 1960s. Furthermore, it is unlikely that, given its past behaviour, Labour would have been any more generous with licence fee revenue or any less interventionist in its dealings with the BBC. Finally, while Labour would not have introduced the ITV auction, there is little reason to believe

that it would not have pressed for a more commercially-minded television system at the end of the decade to complement its wider political shift towards the market. Under pressure from neo-liberal arguments, the Labour leadership pursued a defensive strategy in the 1980s and by 1992 had aligned itself with the view that the commercialisation of television was both desirable and inevitable.

Chapter Six: 1992 – 2000

The Creation of New Labour, 1992-1997

Appointed as Labour leader in July 1992, John Smith consolidated the party's attempt to relocate itself ideologically in the 'centre' and to reduce the influence of the union block vote by introducing 'one member, one vote' for the selection of parliamentary candidates. Yet Smith was reluctant to step up the pace of reform and was soon criticised by some shadow Cabinet members, like Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, who wanted to intensify the process of what they saw as 'modernisation'. Wright and Carter (1997: 169) note the 'rumblings of discontent' that existed by 1993 over both Smith's consensual style of leadership and his gradualist attitude towards fundamental internal change. Tony Blair was then given the chance to implement his drive for root-and-branch reform of the party by John Smith's sudden death in May 1994. New Labour, as Blair's project came to be known at the end of 1994, could be characterised by its emphasis on three features: 'modernisation' of party policies, ideologies and structures; the professionalisation of the party's presentation and campaigning skills; and the neutralisation of the influence of a traditionally anti-Labour mass media.

The call for modernisation was a mantra for the leaders of New Labour. In practice, it resembled less Harold Wilson's tirade in the 1960s on the outdated mentality of those running British boardrooms than Neil Kinnock's attack on the left for being a barrier to electoral success. Indeed, Blair was particularly keen to be identified as a friend of business and to reposition Labour as the party of entrepreneurship and innovation. Blair and his shadow chancellor, Gordon Brown, toured the City convincing chief executives and managing directors that New Labour was no longer the party of high taxes and fiscal irresponsibility, but one that promised low inflation and low levels of public spending. The modernisers decided to prove this by tackling the sacred cow of the Labour left, Clause IV of the constitution that committed the party to 'common ownership of the means of production'. Blair launched a campaign to replace the clause with one in praise of wealth creation rather than distribution which, in the context of an increasingly desperate mood for unity against

the Conservatives, was easily passed at a special conference in April 1995.⁴⁸ The abolition of Clause IV was partly an example of political public relations but it also signified a genuine recognition that, as Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle put it in an early clarification of what New Labour stood for, '[p]rofit was no longer a dirty word - profits are accepted as the motor of private enterprise' (1996: 22).

It was in this context that New Labour's ideological framework developed, applying the Labour right's long-held belief in the notion of 'markets as tools of egalitarian choice' (Freedon, 1999: 44) to the new circumstances of the 1990s. Firstly, New Labour leaders seized on globalisation as the key challenge facing politicians, business leaders and workers around the world. From the outset, the speeches of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were littered with references to the 'modern global economy where capital, raw materials and technology are internationally mobile and tradeable worldwide' (Brown, 1994: 1). For Blair (1996: 118), the 'driving force of economic change today is globalisation. Technology and capital are mobile. Industry is becoming fiercely competitive across national boundaries'. Their definitions of globalisation all emphasised the triumph of free market flows and the mobility of capital: that new centres of production were emerging outside of established centres of manufacturing, that imports and exports were now playing an increased role in the lives of national markets and that economies and societies had become increasingly interdependent. New Labour figures, however, were also keen to conceptualise globalisation in terms of developments concerning communications and culture. Tony Blair argued that globalisation could be best understood as a media-related metaphor.

It is as if someone has pressed the fast-forward button on the video and there is no sign of it stopping. I also believe that the internationalisation of culture has played a significant part. In Tokyo and London, increasingly we are sharing the same rock music, the same designer clothes, the same films and surely, over time, the same attitude and tastes (ibid.: 118/19).

⁴⁸ The new statement of aims supported a 'dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-

The consequences of what New Labour saw as the relentless process of globalisation were two-fold. Firstly, it meant that national governments were almost helpless against global market forces and multinational capital. According to Mandelson and Liddle (1996: 6), 'the new international economy has greatly reduced the ability of any single government to use the traditional levers of economic policy in order to maintain high employment'. To put it more crudely, as did the former lord chancellor, Lord Irvine, 'the global economy makes redistribution impossible' (quoted in Hattersley, 1997). Globalisation provided, therefore, a key justification for cutting public spending, championing 'flexible' work patterns and for not challenging redundancies that could be blamed on multinationals and the 'world market'.⁴⁹ Secondly, it increased the importance of New Labour's call for international competitiveness and for the application of techniques that would increase efficiency on the global stage. One of New Labour's early economic documents argued that 'in an age of constant technological advance...[t]he task is now to restore more industrial companies to the front rank of international innovation, productivity and profit' (Labour Party, 1995a: 3).⁵⁰

Tony Blair's attempt to marry globalisation developments with government action found expression in what Philip Gould calls New Labour's defining idea (Gould, 1998: 255): the stakeholder society. This was launched at a speech given by Blair to business leaders in Singapore in January 1996 where the Labour leader once again talked of the huge changes being brought about by globalisation and the communications revolution but also of the need to engage citizens in adapting to change. Attacking the increase in social exclusion and alienation under the Major government, Blair called for 'a country in which we acknowledge an obligation collectively to ensure each citizen gets a stake in it' (Blair, 1996: 292). This would require reform of the welfare and education system as well as the deployment of new

operation, to produce the wealth the country needs' (quoted in Jones, 1996: 144).

⁴⁹ See, for example, the government's reluctance to intervene over BMW's decision in March 2000 to sell the Rover factory at Longbridge with the loss of thousands of jobs.

⁵⁰ Jim Tomlinson criticises the obsession with international competitiveness and the need to reduce unit labour costs and calls instead for more attention to low levels of domestic investment, poor management skills and a lack of training opportunities. Talking about the service sector in particular, Tomlinson (1997: 18) argues that the issue 'is not that these parts of the economy are not internationally competitive – rather the point is that most of their output is not internationally traded, so competitiveness is not the nub of the issue.'

technologies and partnership strategies between business and the state to provide new opportunities for training and employment.

The problem was that stakeholding was a concept that could mean different things to different audiences, that it was a ‘portmanteau term which can hold a rich diversity of ideological baggage’ (Thompson, 1996: 37). For unions, it suggested more inclusion in boardroom matters and a more sympathetic legal framework for trade union activity than the one that currently existed. For the Labour left, it suggested more investment in public services like health and education and higher levels of public spending. For the Keynesian economist Will Hutton, whose popular book *The State We’re In* (Hutton, 1995) had first developed the concept of stakeholding, it meant an attack on laissez-faire capitalism and the selfish values of the Conservatives. For New Labour, however, it meant an attack on *all* barriers to competitiveness and flexibility – particularly welfare provision and trade union militancy – in exchange for an ill-defined ‘stake’ in an expanding market economy.

Political reorientation was accompanied by the marginalisation of annual conference, traditionally the bastion of Labour activism, the further centralisation of candidate selection with the ability of the national party to impose candidates on local branches and the transformation of the role of the NEC to make it an ‘auxiliary to the parliamentary party, rather than the other way round’ (Panitch and Leys, 1997: 234).

The second task central to the creation of New Labour was the improvement of the party’s presentation and campaigning skills. According to Butler and Kavanagh (1997: 62), ‘Tony Blair was impatient with talk of big ideas...He thought the party had enough policies and should concentrate on projecting them’. With this in mind, Blair resuscitated the communications infrastructure set up in the mid-1980s that John Smith had only recently dismantled. For New Labour, presentational and communication skills were to be not external to policy-making but at its very core. Blair therefore brought into his private office individuals, like Philip Gould, Peter Mandelson, Patricia Hewitt and Alastair Campbell who were particularly versed in political communications and marketing, and sanctioned the creation of a purpose-built campaigns and media centre at Millbank. The effectiveness of Labour’s communications and public relations strategy was seen as decisive, not simply in

terms of electoral success, but in the actual creation and definition of New Labour. For the historian Brian Brivati, the true meaning of New Labour lay in its ability to co-ordinate its campaigning and communicating to build and sustain electoral popularity.

The essence of the real Blair revolution – rooted in the Kinnock years – has been in the transformation of Labour's perception of political competence. (By this I mean the emphasis on the need to control and master the things that a Party, and a Government, can control, most importantly political communication) (Brivati, 1997: 184).

One area in which Kinnock had failed, however, and in which Blair was determined to succeed, was to correct the party's poor relationship with the media and, in particular, with the tabloid newspapers which the previous leader had blamed for the 1992 defeat. Kinnock had claimed that the unrelenting hostility of papers like the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* had made it virtually impossible for Labour's case to be put properly and for the party to win. 'I know it people it's weak to blame the media for everything, but they do determine the environment of politics' (quoted in Linton, 1995: 5). This argument was further put by the soon-to-be Labour MP Martin Linton in a report that provided statistical analysis of the impact of the tabloid press in turning voters away from Labour in 1992. Yet while his argument concentrated on the role played by the tabloid press, Linton, partly influenced by media magnate Silvio Berlusconi's control of Italian television, urged Labour not to take television for granted. 'Television is the most dangerous medium because it has semi-hypnotic qualities and is watched disproportionately by those with little education, low incomes and weak political commitment' (ibid.: 38).

This uncritical conception of media influence was firmly adopted by New Labour who saw it as a priority to court journalists and broadcasters in order to undermine hostility towards Labour. In the words of Robin Corbett, the party's broadcasting spokesperson at the time, 'if you couldn't make friends, at least neutralise opposition' (Corbett, 1999). The principal object of Labour's new-found enthusiasm for media proprietors was Rupert Murdoch, owner of the most bitter anti-Labour newspapers in 1992 and key player in British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB), the

increasingly popular satellite service. The first dinner between Blair and Murdoch took place in August 1994, a month after Blair's leadership victory, marking the start of articles attributed to Blair being published in the *Sun* (McKie, 1997: 117).

Murdoch, however, was equally keen to impress Blair in order to soften Labour's 1992 manifesto commitment (clearly aimed at Murdoch) to launch a monopolies and mergers investigation into media concentration. Murdoch, furthermore, was disillusioned with John Major's administration and was seriously considering switching his support to New Labour.

In July 1995, Blair flew halfway across the world to address the annual conference of senior executives at Murdoch's News Corporation. Blair's speech combined an appeal to 'moral purpose' with a condemnation of the Conservatives' proposals for capping cross-media ownership that would prevent Murdoch from expanding in the UK (Blair, 1996: 203-214). New Labour's courtship of Murdoch paid off when, shortly before the 1997 election, both the *Sun* and the *News of the World* firmly endorsed Labour.

How important was New Labour's systematic and successful courtship of the media between 1994 and 1997? For Tony Blair himself, a positive relationship with editors, owners and broadcasters was both symptomatic of a 'modernised' party and essential for electoral success in what he described as a 'mass-multimedia society' (Blair, 1996: 205). Blair was so struck by the power of the tabloid press and so grateful for its backing in 1997 that, after the election, he sent a letter to *Sun* editor Stuart Higgins thanking him for the paper's 'magnificent' support. 'It really did make the difference' he wrote (quoted in Draper, 1997: 129). Other commentators were less convinced, arguing that there was little need for the Labour Party to appease media moguls as the latter group was lobbying what it already suspected would be the next government (see Goodwin, 1998:145-46) because of the enormous unpopularity of the Conservatives. As a leading group of academics put it after the election:

There is no evidence that the switch of the *Sun* and *News of the World* threw the election to Labour. In fact support for Labour declined slightly in the polls after these tabloids publicly endorsed Tony Blair...Labour

did not win because the *Sun* backed it; rather the *Sun* backed Labour because Labour was going to win (Bartle et al, 1998: xix).

Labour did win and captured 43.2% of the vote next to the Conservatives' 30.7%, a Labour landslide and a Conservative catastrophe. Was this simply due to New Labour's presentational and campaigning skills? 'Labour made a breakthrough in its methods of campaigning before and during the election. But the differences between the parties in using these skills and techniques did not decide the election' conclude Butler and Kavanagh (1997: 252-53) arguing that economic and political factors in the preceding five years were more decisive. Indeed how new *was* 'New Labour'? Anderson and Mann (1997: 386) emphasise the continuities between past and present and argue that 'the making of New Labour has been going on a long time – and New Labour owes a lot more than it cares to admit to the old Labour right of the 1960s and 1970s'. This analysis underplays the real differences between 'Old Labour' and 'New Labour'. New Labour's accommodation with media power, together with its obsession with political communication, its unapologetic embrace of profits and competition, its rejection of traditional Labourist policies and its centralisation of party structures, suggest that a real transformation did occur between 1992 and 1997. To what extent was this mirrored in the party's media policies?

Labour's television policy, 1992-1997

Shortly after his victory in the 1992 general election, John Major removed broadcasting from the Home Office and created a new Department of National Heritage (DNH) with full responsibilities for arts and media. Given that the Parliamentary Labour Party had had heated arguments about precisely this subject in the 1980s and that a commitment to move broadcasting to a new ministry was eventually left out of the 1992 manifesto, this gave Labour one less issue to argue about. The main focus concerning television policy for both main parties soon became clear as, after the drama of the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the ITV auctions, attention shifted back to the future of the BBC. With the Corporation's charter due to expire in 1996, the government published a Green Paper in November 1992 and invited responses by April 1993. The Green Paper had a quite different stance to the

antagonistic positions adopted by the Conservatives in the 1980s when Mrs. Thatcher had raised privatisation and advertising as possible scenarios for the BBC.

By 1992 the government seemed to have no intention of replacing the licence fee as the major source of BBC funding, no intention of getting the BBC to take advertising, no intention of cutting the BBC's two television channels to one...or of breaking up the Corporation (Goodwin, 1998: 124).

Goodwin (ibid.: 125-129) argues that this change of approach was partially in response to the unpopularity of the ITV auctions but also in response to the BBC's own enthusiasm for efficiency savings and commercial operations, particularly in its introduction in 1991 of an internal market. Whatever the reason, the moderate tone of the Green Paper provided Labour with an ideal opportunity to mount a stout defence of the *principles* of public service broadcasting and an attack on the commercialisation of British broadcasting.

The broadcasting brief in the shadow cabinet was then held by Ann Clwyd, a left-winger, who brought in Mike Jempson from the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom to draft the response to the Green Paper. Jempson had helped to organise the media unions' campaign during the 1990 Broadcasting Act (see p. 211) and was a keen opponent of the commercialisation of British broadcasting. Indeed, the submission, *Putting the Citizen at the Centre of British Broadcasting* (Labour Party, 1993) pursued a vehemently anti-commercial line and departed from the general enthusiasm for market principles at the top of the party. The document, published in April 1993, condemned the 'damage of deregulation' and argued that 'deregulation stems from a political decision to stimulate market forces, by commercialising every aspect of public life' (ibid.: 2). Narrow objectives of efficiency and lowering units costs were no guarantee of increased diversity or programme quality and the document criticised the view that 'broadcasting should be guided increasingly by the demands of advertisers and sponsors, with audiences treated as consumers, passive in all but their spending power' (ibid.: 9). For Labour, the viewer was a citizen participating in the broadcasting process and not simply a consumer with a wholly commercial outlook.

The document was unequivocal in its support for the licence fee but criticised the Conservatives' squeeze on funding as they had pegged the licence fee to the level of RPI. Labour's solution to growing political interference in the BBC's finances was to suggest the creation of an independent review board that would recommend suitable increases to the licence fee over a sustained length of time to allow the BBC to plan ahead. Furthermore, showing foresight of the debates that were to occur at the end of the decade over the introduction of digital television, the document suggested the possibility of 'occasional 'one-off' additional levies to fund specific development projects' (ibid.: 22), although it failed to identify any examples of such projects.

The document, however, was also critical of the BBC and recognised that damage had been done to the BBC's public service structures under the Conservatives, noting its poor accounting practices, the politicisation of the appointments system and the unrepresentative nature of the governors. It therefore suggested a number of reforms to increase the institution's accountability. Firstly, in lieu of the charter, an Act of Parliament should formalise the BBC's position in law and should be backed up by a 'covenant' that set out the BBC's obligations to licence-fee payers. Secondly, the board of governors should be replaced by an independent set of trustees with responsibility not for management but for overseeing the BBC's remit. Thirdly, the report called for the creation of a number of representative councils and panels to increase the transparency and accountability of the regulatory structures. A 'Viewers and Listeners Council' should take over the responsibilities of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council; an independent 'Broadcasting Appointments Commission', set up by select committee authority, should assume responsibility for selecting the trustees; finally, an 'Autonomous Broadcasting Council' should be established to represent regional groups and to advise on regional programme issues. In summary, the 'Labour Party is committed to a domestic broadcasting system whose first concern is to viewers and listeners, rather than advertisers and sponsors' (ibid.: 26).

The tone of *Putting the Citizen...* was a far cry from the wide-ranging and impassioned critiques of the duopoly and the BBC that Labour had produced in the 1970s and 1980s. It focused exclusively on the constitutional framework of the BBC and effectively marginalised questions of bias and political diversity. However, the

document was also a clear indication of a mood inside Labour to resist further commercialisation and to halt the extension of the market to all areas of social life, indeed to treat people as ‘citizens’ and not as ‘consumers’. Although Clwyd presented it to the shadow cabinet and recalls that ‘it was well received by the leadership’ (Clwyd, 2000), the document was not circulated to the party conference as originally planned and its proposals were not developed before the government’s White Paper on the BBC appeared the following year.

In September 1993, Clwyd criticised the government’s plans to relax the rules on ITV mergers and called for an extension of the existing moratorium on ITV takeovers. Hostile to any further loosening of cross-media ownership rules, Clwyd, according to the *Guardian*, was determined to renew ‘the party’s attack on Rupert Murdoch, who “must and will be stopped”’ (Culf, 1993). Clwyd never got the chance as she was thrown off the shadow Cabinet the following month and replaced as shadow heritage secretary by the former shadow minister for citizen’s rights and women’s issues, Mo Mowlam. This was a key moment for Labour in the evolution of its market-led television policy. When the ITV moratorium ended in January 1994 (with a flurry of takeovers⁵¹) and the government announced a review of media ownership restrictions, Mowlam ‘who has been pressing for an inquiry into cross-media ownership, said she was pleased. “The emphasis must be on diversity and choice for the consumer”’ (Culf, 1994). By July 1994, the Labour-supporting Lord Hollick, a key backer of Tony Blair and leading ITV businessman, was attacking existing cross-media ownership controls, ‘calling them confused, lacking in clarity and piecemeal’ and calling for a redefinition of what constituted a monopoly (*Broadcast*, 1994). The process of Labour ‘removing the citizen from the centre of British broadcasting’ was underway.

Tom O’Malley from the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom recalls that there was a shift in television policy from precisely this time and that

Mo Mowlam was a pivotal figure in that shift and she was clearly involved in courting, in a political sense, News International. I went to many a meeting where she had that man David Elstein, a lobbyist for

⁵¹ Granada bought London Weekend Television for £600m while Carlton bought Central for £758m.

Sky, and it was in that context that she organised the 21st Century Media conference (O'Malley, 1999)

The conference, *which took place even before Blair had won the leadership contest*, was designed to familiarise media executives with Labour's plans for the industry and was the clearest sign yet of a repositioning away from traditional concerns about media concentration and long-established hostilities between Labour and the media industries. At £230 per head, it was attended by Labour's front bench and by top executives from the British media world, including ITV, BBC and News International, but not by consumer groups, trade unionists or ordinary party members. Peter Goodwin described the conference as

a distinctly new-look Labour gathering. It is sponsored by the Cable Television Association – one of only two organisations which responded to the BBC Green Paper advocating the replacement of the licence fee by subscription. It is organised by Mike Craven – who doubles as paid lobbyist for the [British] Media Industry Group...established last year to get the cross-media ownership rules relaxed (Goodwin, 1994: 18).

For Mike Jempson, who had recently drafted the party's policy on the BBC, the conference came as somewhat of a surprise.

There was talk of a consultative conference to update Labour media policy, and we all rather assumed that conventional Labour allies would be involved, although Mo was making noises about potential sponsors from the commercial sector. Offers of joint sponsorship with the CPBF etc. were ignored. In the event...we ended up with a razzamatazz event at the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre, chaired by Mo, at which Sky/News International thanked a rather uncomfortable Margaret Beckett for allowing them to contribute to Labour Party policy. There was no trade union involvement...The worm had turned, and most of us saw little point in being associated with policies that now apparently favoured greater deregulation especially re ownership and control measures, 'in order that UK media companies could compete freely in the global market'. I have not been approached for advice on broadcasting policy since; I assume commercial lobbyists have literally plugged all the gaps (Jempson, 2000).

Labour's new-found enthusiasm for relaxing cross-media ownership rules was provided with a degree of intellectual rigour by the launch in early 1994 of a high-

profile research project into media regulation at the Labour-supporting think-tank the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR). The programme was backed by Patricia Hewitt, the deputy director of the IPPR, previously Neil Kinnock's press secretary but now part of the unofficial advisory circle around Tony Blair. It was funded by many of the companies who had attended the 21st Century Media conference and who represented the heavyweights of the UK communications sector: BT, the Cable Communication Association, LWT, Pearson, Mercury Communications and News International. In fact, according to one of the project's founders, Richard Collins, News International was the first company to commit to funding on condition that at least two others also backed the work. (R. Collins, 2000). The research aimed at providing a systematic and integrated approach to the communications industries at a time of convergence. For James Purnell, one of the IPPR researchers, now a media policy adviser in Downing Street, the project was based on two key assumptions.

Firstly, that markets weren't necessarily bad things, that there were some things that they were the best tool to deliver. Secondly, we had to adapt to the fact that technology was changing incredibly fast and that whereas policy was based on the idea that you would have a very small number of channels and newspapers, those assumptions were being overturned (Purnell, 2000).

The research, eventually published as *New Media, New Policies* (Collins and Murrone, 1996), strongly criticised the left's unerring hostility to market forces and called for a 'new, radical, synthesis' (ibid.: 10) of neo-liberal and old left approaches, a kind of broadcasting 'third way'.

The book examines a wide range of issues including the provision of universal service in telecommunications, the need for freedom of information, plans to disaggregate the BBC into semi-autonomous units and the reform of a regulatory structure defined by 'feudal muddle, patronage and preferment rather than what is appropriate to a modern state and to a vital sector of the UK economy' (ibid.: 170). The spirit of the IPPR's call to modernisation, however, is best exemplified by the book's discussion on ownership where it seeks to overturn another of the left's assumptions, that media concentration needs to be curbed. Collins and Murrone distinguish between *cross-ownership*, not in itself a problem, and the more

undesirable *concentration of ownership*. They suggest, for example, that seven proprietors, each controlling about 15% of the *total* media market (as measured by audience numbers) would seem to be ‘a reasonable definition of a floor for ownership regulation’ (ibid.: 70) and that the fewer *cross-media* interests a company has, the more share it can have of an individual media field.

By emphasising the unstoppable process of convergence and the need to consider the total media market, the IPPR’s research both implicitly sanctioned the existence of monopolies in specific media fields and explicitly welcomed the development of communications behemoths. ‘Large, concentrated media organizations are not intrinsically undesirable’, conclude Collins and Murrone (ibid.: 75). ‘Large size tends to bring the resources required for comprehensive high quality reporting and the case of the BBC suggests that large organizations with a share of media markets can serve the public interest’ (ibid.). This concession to the advantages of the centralisation of production and distribution, rather than the Labour left’s preferred route of decentralisation, and the emphasis on the ability of large firms to deliver public service outcomes, perhaps explains why Richard Collins was so impressed by the behaviour of News International during the project. After all, how much did media moguls have to fear from the IPPR’s proposals?

It is striking that given the reputation of News International in Labour Party circles, our experience was that they were very robust and fair in providing evidence. They never overstepped the line of legitimate influence, never attempted to improperly influence, never twisted our arms, never threatened (R. Collins, 2000).

Both Collins and Purnell deny that the IPPR project had a direct influence on front bench thinking about television. ‘I don’t think we had a terrific impact on Labour frontbench politicians but we were taken very seriously in some quarters of the policy community’ recalls Richard Collins (2000) and points to the fact that many of those involved in the IPPR’s advisory group are now in influential positions in policymaking, from the Competition Commission to the board of Channel Four. ‘I think we probably played a part in the process of moving on to a different type of policy and a lot of the assumptions and conclusions from the project have now

become government policy' argues Purnell (2000). Even though Collins talks of a 'diffuse model of influence', it is clear that the IPPR project was part of a broader realignment between the business community and New Labour and that it helped to crystallise new ways of thinking about communications policy for the Blairites.

The party's shift on cross-media ownership did not please everyone in the labour movement. The 1994 TUC conference passed a motion opposing relaxation of ownership restrictions and calling for the rules to be extended to include satellite as well as terrestrial media. In moving the motion, the delegate from the print union, the GPMU, argued that 'it is extremely disconcerting to find the Labour Party's Marjorie Mowlam suggesting "That some loosening of cross-media restriction is inevitable". Any further loosening of cross-media restrictions would be disastrous' (Burke, 1994: 390). Labour's liberalisation juggernaut continued, however, until the issue was highlighted once more with the publication of the government's White Paper on media ownership in May 1995 (DNH, 1995). The Conservatives were by now anxious to win back ground from Labour on the subject of media ownership and proposed that newspaper groups controlling less than 20% of total circulation would be able to buy into television companies, up to a limit of 15% of the television market. For Goodwin (1998: 147-48), this was a technically ingenious as well as a politically pragmatic move as it allowed the owners of the *Financial Times*, *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Mail* newspapers to build up television interests, a demand for which they had been lobbying extensively during the previous year under the umbrella of the British Media Industry Group. The losers were the Labour-supporting Mirror Group and, perhaps more surprising, Murdoch's News International, the backbone of Tory support until 1992, both of whose newspaper interests exceeded the 20% limit.

What was New Labour's reaction to the possibility of some of the party's fiercest critics expanding their media interests? 'I welcome a broadened perspective for the media industry' commented broadcasting spokesperson Graham Allen criticising the proposals only for being too 'vague' and 'far too nebulous' (Allen, 1995: 3). When they were published in the broadcasting bill in December 1995, Labour's response was even more emphatic: the problem with the government's proposals on relaxing cross-media ownership rules was not that they went too far *but they did not go far*

enough. The new team of shadow heritage secretary Jack Cunningham and his broadcasting spokesperson Lewis Moonie were anxious to make this clear.

We will not go for the government's system, I can pretty much guarantee that. My own preference is for complete deregulation and allowing the Office of Fair Trading and the MMC [Monopolies and Mergers Commission] to sort things out. Cross-media ownership is a good thing. The whole point is to ensure the creation of bigger companies that can compete abroad (Moonie, quoted in Prescott and Hellen, 1996).

For New Labour, broadcasting diversity now referred not to a genuine cross-section of political viewpoints but to a plurality of ownership that could be policed by the competition authorities (see Collins and Murrone, 1996: 61-71). Moonie clarified his position during the committee stage of the bill, arguing that the 20% rule was deliberately discriminating against the Labour-supporting Mirror Group and not Murdoch as the latter was more interested in developing satellite rather than terrestrial interests. 'If the Government really believe in full and fair competition, they should accept that adequate rules and tests already exist and remove the 20 per cent rule altogether' (HoC Debates, 21 May, 1996: col. 412). Labour then joined with two right-wing Tory MPs in voting against the proposal to introduce the 20% ceiling on newspaper circulation but was still defeated as the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru MPs voted with the government.

Such a wholehearted passion for deregulation was bound to provoke a reaction from critics of New Labour. The heritage secretary, Virginia Bottomley, said that Labour had 'lurched from a paranoid terror of large media groups to a sycophantic devotion to them' (quoted in Smithers, 1996). The left-wing journalist Paul Foot attacked New Labour not only for betraying its principles but also for playing a dangerous game in accommodating to media moguls.

The switching of Labour's policy, and the abandonment of long-established opposition to private monopolies in the media, not only stinks of the same back-scratching sleaze for which Labour are constantly and properly attacking the Tories. It is also counter-productive. It hands power, strength and confidence to unelected, irresponsible media oligarchies which, if their commercial interests are threatened for a single second, even by a Labour government, will turn on their former benefactors and tear them to pieces (Foot, 1996).

Ownership was not the only issue related to television policy that the party leadership turned to in its attempt to create and publicise the New Labour project. During the 1992 US elections, Bill Clinton and Al Gore had embraced the promise of the ‘information superhighway’ and the ‘broadband revolution’ as part of their own modernising ambitions. The terminology and excitement soon followed across the Atlantic so that, by 1994, British politicians were queuing up to be associated with cutting-edge developments around multimedia and digital technologies. The Conservatives’ response was a rather dry Trade and Industry Select Committee report urging the development of a privately-built broadband infrastructure to take advantage of the likely economic benefits of optical fibre networks (see Goodwin, 1998: 141-43). New Labour’s initiative was much bolder and far more high-profile.

Initially, Tony Blair set up a policy forum on the superhighway in November 1994, chaired by the new shadow heritage secretary, Chris Smith, who had taken over from Mo Mowlam. With a membership of 32 people, drawn from all over the Labour Party, communications industries, academia and the unions, the policy group received over 200 written submission from interested individuals and some oral presentations from leading media and communications companies like News International, BT, Microsoft and the BBC. Its report, *Communicating Britain’s Future (CBF)* (Labour Party, 1995b), was published in the summer of 1995⁵² (distributed on disk as well as hard copy) and was breathless about digital developments.

We stand on the threshold of a revolution as profound as that brought about by the invention of the printing press. New technologies, which enable rapid communication to take place in a myriad of different ways across the globe, and permit information to be provided, sought, and received on a scale so far unimaginable, will bring fundamental changes to all our lives (ibid.: 3).

⁵² and launched at the second 21st Century Communications conference with very much the same audience as the previous year’s event. According to the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, the conference ‘was a sort of meeting for the faithful. The CPBF and the media unions

Yet this communications network would be one developed only by private finance so that the government's role was essentially to create the appropriate competitive environment and to promote the use of the networks. Unlike Harold Wilson's invocation of the 'white heat of the technological revolution' to attempt to purposefully *plan* an industrial strategy, Blair's 'revolution' would have to be left to the mercy of market forces.

Blair used the rhetoric of the superhighway and broadband technology as the backdrop for his highly successful speech to the 1995 Labour conference. He triumphantly announced that he had concluded a deal with British Telecom in which, in return for BT being allowed to offer entertainment services down its phone lines⁵³, it had agreed to connect every school, hospital, college and public library to the superhighway for free. It was a very rare example of communications policy, particularly Labour communications policy, hitting the headlines.

The superhighway initiative impacted on television policy in a number of ways. Firstly, it signalled Labour's acceptance of the inevitability of convergence and the need to adapt policy and regulation to meet the needs of converging media. This meant that New Labour saw less space for separate media policies and an urgent requirement to formulate a 'communications policy' in tune with the demands of a more competitive environment. Although *CBF* contained few references to television, it made a firm promise to combine the telecommunications regulator, Ofcom, and the commercial television regulator, the ITC, into a more streamlined structure, an 'Ofcom', that would 'regulate the whole communications infrastructure and ensure fair competition' (ibid.: 8). In a clear hint at deregulation, a 'revamped' ITC would regulate content 'albeit with a lighter touch' (ibid.: 9).

Secondly, *CBF* provided clear evidence of New Labour's willingness to consider broadcasting as part of industrial policy, which until that point had been more of a feature of the Tories' rather than Labour's approach. Although the brief was initially

received no publicity about the event and had to make a direct approach to attend and have a stall' (O'Malley, 1995: 3).

given to Chris Smith as shadow heritage secretary, Smith himself was aware that many of the issues were industrial ones ‘about how you get the network in place and how you make sure you get as near to a nationwide network as you can. The issues that then follow on very rapidly are content issues’ (Smith, 1996). Lewis Moonie, shadow industry minister at the time, argues that Tony Blair was ‘mistaken’ in giving the brief to Smith and that there was tension between the shadow heritage and trade teams during the superhighway forum. ‘I saw no very good reason from the point of view of that time for the heritage team to be having anything to do with it at all. Superhighways at present are largely a matter of creating infrastructure and that is entirely at present a matter for the DTI [Department of Trade and Industry]’ (Moonie, 1996). Ironically, in a further example of the overlap of the broadcasting and industry briefs, both Moonie and Jack Cunningham, the shadow trade secretary, were moved to heritage before the 1997 election while Smith was moved to health and the superhighway brief itself moved to industry.

The clearest sign that New Labour was preparing to approach broadcasting on the basis of industrial concerns and economic regulation was provided by its attitude to Rupert Murdoch’s growing control of the pay-television market. In early December 1996, several of the broadsheet newspapers carried lengthy articles criticising both Tories and Labour for doing nothing to wrest control of pay television away from Murdoch and for failing to enforce open standards for digital television. Moonie’s response was to criticise the ‘hysteria’ of the press and to argue that Murdoch should be rewarded for his investment.

I back having open systems and standards but I don’t necessarily think that everybody should be able to have a free lunch. If they [the other broadcasters] want to use Murdoch’s technology, then they’re bloody well going to have to pay for it because that’s what they would do in any other commercial field. No free lunches, a fair system and no unfair gatekeeping: that’s what we’re trying to achieve (Moonie, 1996).

New Labour’s preferred way of ensuring free and fair competition, therefore, was to be through the use of the competition authorities and economic regulators and not the

⁵³ In 1994, the Conservative government had prevented BT from offering broadcast entertainment services on its network in order to maintain competition in the communications infrastructure and to

traditional broadcasting regulators whose remits are defined in terms of cultural as well as economic objectives. For academic Stephen Barnett, this has the advantage of being transparent and consistent but, nevertheless, media policy ‘thus becomes defined more in terms of Labour’s industrial strategy: a free market, closely scrutinised for abuse by powerful and effective regulators’ (Barnett, 1996).

New Labour’s enthusiasm for the knobs and fibres of the superhighway and the broadband revolution was replicated in its support for the government’s plans for digital terrestrial television (DTT), embodied in the 1996 Broadcasting Act. Although expressing some reservations about the prospects for DTT in the light of strong competition from cable and satellite, Moonie spoke for the whole of the heritage team in wishing DTT well. ‘We have no quarrel with the Government inasmuch as we want digital television to get going, as everyone else does’ (HoC Debates, 16 April 1996: col. 605). Labour’s pre-election arts and media document, *Create the future*, promised to ‘promote the digital revolution’ (Labour Party, 1997a: 8) and added that ‘it is important that we maintain universal access to a wide range of television services in the digital age’ (ibid.: 11). If this meant, guaranteeing the free-to-air broadcasters a place on the new digital channels, then Conservative legislation had already provided this assurance. More likely, it was a New Labour promise to ensure that no one should be denied access to the multi-channel revolution but with no further suggestion as to how to deliver on this pledge nor to provide public money to make it happen, Labour’s approach was virtually identical to the Tories.

Create the future made few new promises about television, repeating its support for a new regulator, Ofcom, pledging its support for the BBC ‘as a flagship for British creativity and public service broadcasting’ (ibid.: 8) and promising not to privatise Channel Four. The document emphasised the economic value of UK television and argued that there was no room for complacency in an internationally competitive market. However, ‘the growing globalisation of media does not mean that we should be prepared to trade creativity or independence for a large-scale monoculture’ (ibid.: 11). New Labour’s policy aims for television may be seen as reaching out to all constituencies, embracing tradition *and* innovation, creativity *and* diversity, public

protect the investment of the cable companies.

service *and* commercial success. These principles were then embodied in the party's manifesto, *New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better* (Labour Party, 1997b) where the single paragraph on media and broadcasting – longer than the section on sport but shorter than the one on the national lottery – managed to include references to 'competition' or 'competitiveness' three times.⁵⁴

How much of a change had there been since the last election manifesto? The shadow arts minister in 1997, Mark Fisher, blames the rapid turnover of broadcasting spokespeople for the lack of development of a coherent Labour television policy between 1992 and 1997. 'It wasn't so much that there was a philosophical turn [from the 1980s] but when you're playing pass-the-parcel with political responsibility as was the case in those five years, it's almost impossible to sustain either the contacts or the thinking' (Fisher, 1999). Yet New Labour's balancing act between the market and public service in the 1997 manifesto does little to obscure the fact that substantial changes had taken place between 1992 and 1997. In the five years since its last manifesto commitment to tackle media concentration, Labour had transformed itself into the party *of* media concentration; its pledge to curb the power of Rupert Murdoch and News International had been rethought as a campaign to *court* the power of Rupert Murdoch and News International. By 1997, New Labour had provided the clearest signal of any incoming Labour administration of its intentions for broadcasting once in office.

New Labour in office

According to New Labour, the party's triumph in the polls in May 1997 was due to Blair's firm endorsement of an alternative to both traditional social democracy and the free market: the 'third way'. At one level, this had long been a theme of Labour

⁵⁴ The full paragraph reads as follows. 'Labour aims for a thriving, diverse media industry, combining commercial success and public service. We will ensure that the BBC continues to be a flagship for British creativity and public service broadcasting, but we believe that the combination of public and private sectors in competition is a key spur to innovation and high standards. The regulatory framework for media and broadcasting should reflect the realities of a far more open and competitive economy, and enormous technological advance, for example with digital television. Labour will balance sensible rules, fair regulation and international competition, so maintaining quality and diversity for the benefit of viewers (Labour Party, 1997b: 31).

revisionists who had sought to tread a path between ‘socialism’ and ‘capitalism’. But, for Blair, the ‘third way’ suggests a whole new sort of politics:

My vision for the 21st century is of a popular politics reconciling themes which in the past have wrongly been regarded as antagonistic – patriotism *and* internationalism; rights *and* responsibilities; the promotion of enterprise *and* the attack on poverty and discrimination (Blair, 1998: 1).

Values of social justice, opportunity, responsibility and community are not antagonistic to market imperatives but indeed can only be delivered *through* market mechanisms. ‘With the right policies, market mechanisms are critical to meeting social objectives, entrepreneurial zeal can promote social justice, and new technology represents an opportunity, not a threat’ (ibid.: 4).

Anthony Giddens, theorist of globalisation, director of the London School of Economics and New Labour’s ‘intellectual-in-chief’, as Will Hutton (1998) put it, has best articulated the principles of ‘third way’ politics (Giddens, 1998). Firstly, he argues that class politics have been marginalised and that the traditional divide between left and right is no longer appropriate or able to express the more complex fractures in social and political attitudes. Secondly, ‘third way’ economics encourages competition but checks monopoly behaviour and recognises that not all goods or services may be best served by the market. Next, there is a need for greater transparency in public life and new forms of democratic participation like referenda and community action to stimulate civil society. Fourthly, the ‘third way’ requires a new form of national identity in a multipolar world to act as a ‘stabilising force; a counter to endless fragmentation’ (ibid.: 20) which Giddens calls ‘cosmopolitanism’. Finally, there is the need for a new sort of welfare state, ‘a social investment state’ which invests in ‘human capital rather than the direct payment of benefits’ (ibid.: 21).

Much of this is far from original and is, in reality, an invocation of market competition, patriotism, welfare cuts and revisionist ideas about the disappearance of class antagonisms. Michael Freeden (1999) argues that Blair’s ‘third way’ is simply the latest in a long line of middle ways between ‘first’ and ‘second’ ways of social

democracy and neo-liberalism but with a new emphasis on community, responsibility and equality of opportunity.

According to Blair, the first policy objective for 'third way' government is to create a 'dynamic knowledge-based economy founded on individual empowerment and opportunity' (Blair, 1998: 7). The new economy is a top priority for industry secretary Stephen Byers who argues that 'we need a knowledge driven society. Knowledge can be both empowering, liberating and a source of economic well-being...The key is the provision of a comprehensive electronic communications network' (Byers, 1999: 42-43). The government has therefore pushed to introduce more competition into the local phone loop, to develop new broadband services and to sing the praises of e-commerce as the preferred mode of trade for the new century.

The key to success in the new economy, however, lies not so much with the provision of a physical infrastructure or the production of material goods but with the nurturing of a far less tangible commodity: creativity. Drawing on the ideas of Charles Leadbetter (which eventually ended up as the book *Living on Thin Air* [Leadbetter, 1999]), Tony Blair claims that the new economy is 'radically different. Services, knowledge, skills and small enterprises are its cornerstones. Most of its output cannot be weighed, touched or measured. Its most valuable assets are knowledge and creativity' (Blair, 1998: 8)⁵⁵.

One major policy response to the recognition of the economic value of the commodification of knowledge lay in New Labour's vision of 'Creative Britain' or, as the press dubbed it, 'Cool Britannia'. This initiative sought to establish the UK as a cultural powerhouse whose television programmes, music, films, fashion and software programmes triumphantly saturate world markets and make a significant impact on the UK's trade balance. One of the government's first actions was to launch the Creative Industries Taskforce in 1997 to examine ways of maximising the value of a sector that contributes about £50 billion of activity to the UK economy (Smith, 1998a: 31). For the new culture minister, Chris Smith, these are the key

⁵⁵ For a critique of these notions of the 'weightless', 'new' and 'knowledge' economies, see Ursula Huws (1999).

industries of the knowledge economy, overshadowing traditional manufacturing and growing faster than any other sector: '[t]hey are where the wealth and the jobs of the future are going to be generated from' (ibid.).

Tony Blair handed the heritage brief to Chris Smith immediately after the election. Both Labour's victory and Smith's appointment ahead of the incumbent shadow heritage secretary Jack Cunningham were welcomed by media professionals. For Ron Zeghibe, the chief executive of Maiden Outdoor Advertising, 'Labour may be more receptive to certain concentrations of ownership and commercialisation in a broader sense than the rather dogmatic approach the Conservatives took' (quoted in Beale, 1997). Media trade journals *Media Week* and *Broadcast* greeted Smith's selection with the latter noting, in a dig at the Cunningham/Moonie regime, that 'he will have more sympathy with his brief than some of his predecessors' (Lewis, 1997). Two months later, the New Labour government 'modernised' the national heritage department out of existence and introduced a new Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), described by Smith as 'a department of the future. It is about creativity, innovation and excitement' (quoted in Thorncroft, 1997). The message from the Treasury, however, was that the new government would stick to the harsh limits on public spending laid down by the Tories so that *there would be no additional public money* to pay for more creativity, innovation and excitement. We will assess the government's approach to television in its first few years in office by drawing on the DCMS' five objectives for public policy in broadcasting.

- To promote the success of digital television on all platforms, in order to increase the number and variety of services available to consumers, and as a key component of the information age;
- To promote innovation and competition in the broadcast-related industries and support the development of new media;
- To sustain strong public service broadcasting which will continue to underpin quality and ensure that all consumers have access to varied programming which caters for the full range of needs and interests in our society;
- To ensure that regulation develops in step with changing markets and technology, in order that the consumers interest continues to be protected without placing unnecessary obstacles to the development of the industry;

- To promote the interests of the UK-based broadcast-related industries in international fora (DCMS, 1999a).

To promote digital

Labour inherited the architecture of the ‘digital revolution’ from the previous government and, far from changing policy on the licensing of new services, immediately sought to step up the pace of digital take-up. Smith commissioned an independent report from the National Economic Research Associates (NERA) to consider the barriers to the adoption of digital and, in particular, the economic costs associated with switching off the existing analogue spectrum. When NERA reported that the government should consider analogue switch-off in ten to fifteen years time, Smith responded that ‘I would not wish to switch off analogue broadcasters until digital receivers are as universally installed in households as analogue ones are now’ (quoted in Gapper, 1998). Digital was also high on the list of priorities when he first addressed the television industry as secretary of state, stressing the New Labour themes of access, competition and efficiency.

I want digital services to develop on the basis of fair competition between providers to bring content to consumers – not as a war between different receiving equipment or delivery systems. I also want to ensure universal access to the current free-to-air public service channels and I want that access as soon as possible to be through digital services, so as to end the current wasteful use of valuable radio spectrum for analogue terrestrial broadcasting (Smith, 1997: 10).

These promises were scarcely controversial. As we have already discussed, the free-to-air channels had been guaranteed access to digital platforms under Conservative legislation and the policing of competition between different providers was to be done by the existing regulators and competition authorities, precisely as the Tories had envisaged. Furthermore, the switching-off of analogue spectrum, given its market value in the billions of pounds, was a prize that every government was anxious to win. Smith repeated these pledges the following year arguing that ‘it is not a question of whether digital television will succeed, but only of how quickly it

will win acceptance' and praised the digital providers for promising that 'their respective platforms will be interoperable' (Smith, 1998b).

His government's reliance on the market and competition authorities to stop a 'set-top box war' came unstuck fairly quickly. BSkyB launched its digital satellite service in October 1998, followed a month later by the DTT service, On Digital, both using distinct operating systems and separate boxes. The need for 'interoperability' was explained away by the fact that digital providers were giving away their boxes for free in order to increase consumer demand. Even if the end result of this for viewers wanting access to *all* channels was a substantial increase in subscription fees, the government could still claim that there was 'fair competition' for digital services. The *Observer* countered that the government had failed to use its power to enforce interoperability and that if 'the Government wants the consumer to come first it could do a lot worse than to start knocking a few heads together in the worlds of television and regulation' (Bell, 1999). James Purnell, the media adviser at the Number Ten Policy Unit, not surprisingly sees things differently and claims that a key achievement of the government is in 'having an effective competition policy which has meant that digital has so far been introduced in a pro-competitive way. We're having a unique subsidy of set-top boxes' (Purnell, 2000). The importance of market subsidies is set to be a popular topic for television policymakers in the future.

In September 1999, the government decided that, after observing digital television in the UK for nearly a full year, it was ready to announce its plans for the digital future. Analogue transmission would cease some time between 2006 and 2010 but only on the basis of two tests: availability and affordability. Digital signals would need to match the availability of current analogue ones, approximately 99.4% of the UK population, while 95% of consumers would have to have access to digital equipment in their homes before switchover was completed (Smith, 1999a: 9). The definition of affordability, however, was far less precise: '[i]t means prices which are within the reach of people on low and fixed incomes, particularly elderly people for many of whom television is the most important and reliable companion in their daily lives' (ibid.). Smith provided no clue as to what the government would do should prices *not* be within the reach of the poor or the elderly, apart from to rely on the charity of the digital providers as 'it will be in the interests of the television broadcasting

industry to ensure that the final 5 per cent are helped directly to make the switch-over' (HoC Debates, 29 October 1999: col. 1210).

One solution that has definitely been discounted is the provision of public subsidies to encourage the take-up of digital services. According to the head of general broadcasting policy at the DCMS in 1997, Harry Reeves, it is

highly unlikely that there will be crude subsidies, partly because of public finance considerations, partly because the government genuinely believes that this is something for the public to determine the pace and direction of development. I don't think there will be a subsidy, crude or sophisticated (Reeves, 1997).

If New Labour was serious about facilitating a digital revolution in which all citizens have a 'stake', it might well consider spending some of the billions it is already earning from the sale of radio spectrum to lower the cost of access to digital services. This, however, would conflict with the government's determination to keep a tight rein on public spending and its reluctance to entertain any notion of subsidies, particularly in the provision of market goods. It would also conflict with its philosophy for digital, that new services will succeed or fail on the basis of consumer demand above all else.

The problem with this argument is that the government was clearly not just reacting to but anticipating consumer demand for digital in its ambitious timetable for switch-off. Curiously, in his speech to the 1999 Labour conference, Smith failed to dwell on the part of the government's digital philosophy that said that a minority of households would have their television sets switched off should they not be able to afford digital conversion. Instead he described the social implications of digital for the deaf, the housebound, flexible workers and the elderly and promised that 'we've told the broadcasters that the digital revolution in television must work for everyone' (Smith, 1999b). Once again, no mention was made of the penalties commercial broadcasters would incur should they fail to live up to this aim nor was there a clarification of the incentives for the industry to 'work for everyone', including the poorest households. New Labour's faith in the market allows them to articulate a vision of digital in which all groups would find a range of benefits but one where

entry is guaranteed only to those who can afford to pay. Broadcasting minister Janet Anderson's comment that the government 'is only prepared to facilitate the handover to digital if it is in the interest of the public' (Anderson, 1999: 32) therefore needs to be considered both in the light of government's enormous financial gain from analogue switch-off and its reluctance so far to enforce any positive regulation on the digital providers. New Labour has certainly promoted the digital revolution but it remains to be seen who will be the winner and who will be the losers.

To promote competition

So important is this aim for New Labour that of the six economic and social objectives for public policy on communications in the party's 1998 Green Paper, *Regulating communications* (DCMS/DTI, 1998a), two are listed as 'competitiveness' and 'competition' (ibid.: 13). New Labour's understanding is that for a media firm to be 'competitive' and efficient in relation to its rivals, nationally or internationally, the task of government is to encourage a high degree of competition in the home market. This is not the relatively stable sort of competition for viewers that marked the early years of UK broadcasting but a fully-fledged battle for revenue, audiences and market domination. However, while introducing competition into the home market is fairly straightforward, achieving true competitiveness is more difficult although absolutely essential in an era when multi-billion dollar cross-media mergers are taking place:

Since markets are increasingly global – particularly if they are mediated electronically across global networks – domestic firms increasingly must compete with strong players from abroad. It is clearly central to the health of the UK economy that UK firms are fully competitive in world markets, not only to defend the domestic position, but also to attract a share of global revenues and jobs to the UK (ibid.: 14).

New Labour's preferred way of building up strong, domestic media firms to cope with convergence is to further review existing cross-media ownership rules and continue the process it started while in opposition. In developing this strategy, the government was able to draw on the conclusions of a report, *The multi-media*

revolution (House of Commons, 1998), produced by the influential Parliamentary Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. Chaired by the Labour MP, Gerald Kaufman, a firm believer in the process of convergence and the need for liberalisation, the committee insisted that *size matters*:

excessive concern over ownership and size in a domestic context might create a market so fragmented that the United Kingdom lacks organisations with the range of skills and the investment capital to compete effectively in increasingly global markets. Dominant positions are often beneficial viewed in an international context; they are also often a legitimate reward for risk and innovation. The aim of regulation should be to reduce the possibilities for the abuse of a dominant position, not to reduce dominance (ibid.: para. 81).

Just as the IPPR research distinguished between the desirability of cross-ownership and the undesirability of media concentration, Kaufman's committee was keen to distinguish between market dominance and the abuse of dominance.

A single paragraph in *Regulating communications* followed up this point and argued that '[s]ome concentration of ownership has been regarded as inevitable, and possibly desirable, since it confers advantage in terms of global competitiveness' (DCMS/DTI, 1998a: 16). However, the document also acknowledged the need for particular controls on media ownership that may be necessary to protect the aims of diversity and plurality of voice. The problem was that there was no firm indication about whether these rules were still necessary apart from a clear hint that 'the changes which are unfolding in broadcasting and telecommunications will call into question existing approaches to the achievement of those aims' (ibid.: 18). In any case, it was an extremely brief overview of one of the key areas of Labour's media policy up to the 1990s.⁵⁶

The government made its intentions even clearer with the publication of *The Way Ahead* (DCMS/DTI 1999), its review of the consultation process following *Regulating communications*. Here, while its key policy aims were to 'foster

⁵⁶ It is notable that a far more comprehensive account on the need for cross-media ownership rules may be found in the Tories' White Paper on media ownership published three years before *Regulating communications*. 'Special media ownership rules, which exist in all major media markets, are needed therefore to provide the safeguards necessary to maintain diversity and plurality' (DNH, 1995: 3).

competitive markets' and to 'ensure that the United Kingdom builds on its competitive strength' (ibid.: para 1.1), there was no mention at all of the need for continuing with cross-media ownership restrictions. Instead, the document confirmed that more use should be made of the competition authorities and economic mechanisms rather than specific media regulation. General competition law, it suggested, would be enough to check any abuse of a dominant position while in no way discouraging the pursuit of dominance. Several months before *The Way Ahead*, the government had scrapped the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and introduced a Competition Commission that, together with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), was given tough new powers to rule on anti-competitive behaviour without any political interference affecting key merger decisions. According to James Purnell at the No. 10 Policy Unit,

our approach [to ownership questions] will be very similar to what is now. Our primary tool is competition. As a government we're very keen on effective competition policy, we've replaced the Competition Act which is as tough as any in the world and we'll apply those principles to the media (Purnell, 2000).

The first example of this 'depoliticised' approach to media mergers happened in November 1999 when Stephen Byers, the trade and industry secretary, referred a merger between two cable companies, NTL and Cable & Wireless Communications, to the Competition Commission against the express advice of the OFT. The referral was inspired by government concerns not so much about the concentration of the cable television industry than by the threat that a powerful cable company might present to BSkyB. Byers' action, wrote the *Observer*, 'opened the way for criticism that the Government's relationship with Rupert Murdoch...was more important than its aim of promoting competition' (Morgan, 1999). The decision of the New Labour competition minister, Kim Howells, to have lunch with the chief executive of BSkyB shortly afterwards did not help (see Wighton, 1999).

A further challenge to the new media ownership regime was set in motion by the proposed merger, also in November 1999, of two ITV companies, Carlton and United News & Media, the latter controlled by Labour peer Lord Hollick. Byers

referred this merger and the subsequent bids by Granada Television for both Carlton and United, to the Competition Commission. Once again, his rationale was less likely to be a concern over the centralisation of the ITV network and the resulting impact on regional broadcasting than an opportunity to review the upper limits currently imposed on ITV companies' share of the advertising market and the television audience and to reflect on the desirability of a single ITV company. While officials at the DCMS claim neutrality on the latter issue, Sarah Thane, director of programmes at the commercial television regulator the Independent Television Commission (ITC), states that

I get the idea that the government, certainly at DCMS level, are extremely torn. For the first few years of Chris Smith in opposition and once he became secretary of state, every conference speech he gave said "the key things are choice for viewers, quality of programmes and plurality of ownership". Now that's started to slide away of the speech list because anyone now would be intimidated by the scale of the deals that are going on in America and are thinking to themselves "are we really being a bit ridiculously careful and narrow here and are we hampering our companies on a global stage by trying to keep a diverse media provision with UK shores?"...I think they [DCMS] are in the camp, like most of us are, in thinking that in due course there will be a single ITV but it's how long that course needs to run and how quickly you ought to facilitate that (Thane, 2000).

The government has now prioritised the redrafting of cross-media ownership rules for its forthcoming White Paper and, according to the DCMS official responsible, 'everything is very much up for grabs' (M. Collins, 2000). New Labour, therefore, has vigorously embraced competition in the communications sector and has promoted the idea that the public interest – in television as in other areas – is best served not through regulation but through effective competition. The problem is, as yet, there are no obvious signs of effective competition in broadcasting. Indeed the fact that, in the UK, one company dominates satellite television, two companies dominate cable, two companies are set to dominate ITV, and one company dominates digital terrestrial television – and that company is owned by the companies who dominate ITV – is hardly a ringing endorsement of vigorous competition and certainly not of diversity. The government's activity in this area increasingly points to a conception of broadcasting not as an area of cultural life with

distinct needs and rules but as an industrial sector to be exploited using standard economic tools and arguments.

To ensure that regulation develops in step with changing markets and technology

Although New Labour came to power proclaiming the onset of a digital revolution and promising to shake up the existing regulatory system, the government proceeded cautiously to begin with. Plans for broadcasting legislation were postponed while the proposals for a single regulator, an Ofcom, were shunted to one side. According to the government's media policy adviser:

We thought it was the wrong time to do it because that was the time digital was being introduced and regulatory changes in the media are incredibly destabilising. Sometimes change is good but when people were taking very big risks in investing on new platforms, it was important to have regulatory stability (Purnell, 2000).

This was an early sign that New Labour's media policy would do nothing to antagonise corporate interests in the media industry and that the immediate task for television policymakers was to protect the substantial investments of companies like Carlton and Granada.

The government's strategy of maintaining 'regulatory stability' was undermined by the publication of two reports within a year of taking office. Firstly, in December 1997, the European Commission released its highly deregulatory Green Paper on convergence, calling for the adoption of market mechanisms to embrace the possibilities of convergence and for the scrapping of any regulation that would act as a barrier to the creation of jobs and profits (European Commission, 1997). Next, in May 1998, the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee published its report on *The multi-media revolution* attacking the plethora of regulatory agencies in the UK communications field as being 'more reminiscent of a feudal State than a regulatory structure for the multi-media age' (House of Commons, 1998: para. 157). The report called for the creation of a new Department of Communications and for a Communications Regulation Commission, modelled on the American FCC, to replace the existing alphabet soup of regulators (ibid.: para. 158).

While the government was sympathetic to the view expressed in both reports for increasing the use of competition law and reducing the scope of regulation, it concluded that there is ‘sufficient flexibility within the current system of regulation to cope with developments over the next few years and the Government is actively encouraging co-ordination within the existing framework’ (DCMS/DTI, 1998b: para. xx). Co-ordination took the form, not just of closer working relationships between the current regulators, the ITC, Oftel and the OFT, but also between the industry and culture departments of government. At one level this was particularly ironic as, having spent over a decade arguing for a dedicated media ministry, as soon as Labour had set one up, it was forced to share responsibilities with one of the most powerful departments in Whitehall. At another level, this was simply evidence of the direction in which New Labour was headed – towards a conception of media policy as a branch of industrial policy – and therefore a very logical move.

The two departments published their joint Green Paper, *Regulating communications* (DCMS/DTI, 1998a), in July 1998. The document conceives of viewers purely as consumers – there are ten references to ‘the consumer’ in the executive summary alone – and sets out to find a balance between recognising the needs of the ‘providers’ and protecting the interests of the ‘consumers’. It is quite clear, however, that it will be market forces, wherever possible, that mediate this relationship: ‘[t]he government will seek to provide a structure which reflects market realities and will seek to distort them as little as possible’ (ibid: 10). Given the inescapable fact of convergence, it was time for traditional assumptions to be overturned: from now on, regulation should be the exception and not the rule. ‘Regulation should be the minimum necessary to achieve clearly defined policy objectives. The presumption that broadcasting and communications should be regulated should therefore in general be reversed’ (ibid.: 23). Furthermore, even the argument for any remaining regulation to be based on fixed principles was now too rigid.

The regulatory structure must also be sufficiently flexible to adapt to new developments in a fast-changing environment. We have to regulate for the reality of the market today and tomorrow, not for a snapshot of yesterday’s market frozen in time, nor for a vision of the day after

tomorrow which may never materialise in the form we anticipate (ibid.: 24).

Following the Green Paper's notion that 'market forces represent a natural "default position" against which any regulatory intervention has to be justified as a special case', as the media union BECTU stated in its response (BECTU, 1998: para. 9), the document's support for public service broadcasting seems a little shaky. The role of positive content regulation in promoting diversity, impartiality and quality is acknowledged but treated almost as an historical curiosity. For example, the document notes that 'there is a long tradition in broadcasting of regulation to ensure that broadcasters observe due impartiality' and that 'intervention has been necessary to ensure that the needs of all sections of the community are met' (DCMS/DTI, 1998a: 17) but says nothing about future plans to safeguard minority interests or balance. Indeed, public service broadcasting and non-commercial objectives are marginalised as compared to the bright new future of interactivity and converging markets.

Regulating communications was notable more for the way in which it shifted the agenda towards regulation only 'in the last instance' than for any specific policy proposals. It repeated the argument that there was no need to change the regulatory arrangements in the immediate future, preferring instead to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude to development in the communications market. The DCMS/DTI's *The Way Ahead*, published the following year, reaffirmed this stance of following market developments and pledged to 'continue with the evolutionary approach to adapting communications regulation set out in the Green Paper' (DCMS/DTI, 1999: para. 1.19). However, it stressed the importance of the two new committees that had recently been set up: the G3, comprised of members from the OFT, Oftel and the ITC and the G6 including officials from the DCMS and the communications policy and competition policy directorates of the DTI (ibid.: para. 2.2). Both committees were clearly weighted towards the interests of economic regulators, deprioritising the traditional concerns of broadcasting regulators. Indeed, although the report pledged the need for continuing content regulation of *generalist* television services 'to guard against misleading advertising and prevent viewers being shocked or harmed' (ibid.:

para. 3.12), there should be as little interference as possible. 'It is important to consider whether regulatory objectives in communications can be achieved with a lighter touch and to ensure that the regulatory impositions on commercial broadcasters are no more than is necessary to protect the public interest' (ibid.: para. 3.10). Given that government was now defining the public interest in terms of fair competition and the efficient use of spectrum, 'light-touch' regulation was evidently to be the preferred option.

This deregulatory approach was echoed by the secretary of state's comments in September 1999 when announcing the proposals for analogue switch-off. The *Guardian*, under the headline 'Smith signals TV free-for-all', quoted the minister as saying that there 'is a sensible discussion to have about whether there is a place for content regulation beyond those basic provisions [of impartiality and the watershed]' (Gibson, 1999). The amount of positive programming requirements would have to be weighed up against commercial considerations and the need for competitiveness. In February 2000, the secretaries of state for trade and for culture finally announced plans for a White Paper on communications to be followed by primary legislation in the next year or two. Their objective was broadly similar: to consider how to re-regulate the media and communications sector to enhance the UK's market share. While the DTI's Byers wants to 'ensure that the UK remains a world leader in providing communications services', for Smith the 'government's aim is to promote the global competitiveness of our media and communications industries, as well as protect the interests of the consumer' (DCMS/DTI, 2000). In terms of television, this would mean examining 'how to achieve deregulated but distinctive content regulation' (Smith, 1999a: 8).

Is a single regulator likely to be the outcome of their deliberations? The DCMS' head of general broadcasting policy claims that 'Ofcom is one of the options, but there are other options. There's no favoured option at present. The important thing is to determine what the objectives are and then see what sort of structures would best meet those objectives' (Dawes, 2000). Yet, the government has made it abundantly clear that its key objective is to increase competitiveness, so whatever institutional form the new regulatory structure takes, positive regulation is likely to

take a back seat. James Purnell from No. 10's policy unit, puts this down to the unstoppable effects of technological convergence.

This area of policy has functioned partly on the basis of trading, giving people spectrum for them to provide you with public service goods. That kind of bargain is becoming less easy to strike as the spectrum becomes less valuable because of the penetration of multi-channel television. So we'll need to consider, as those tools slip away, what are the tools which remain to us (Purnell, 2000).

Three years into New Labour's term of office, it is evident that the tools Purnell refers to will increasingly be those of the market, that 'lighter touch' regulation will become more common and that the influence of industrial policy on broadcasting ever more stark.

To sustain strong public service broadcasting

In the light of a more commercial broadcasting environment, the role of public service broadcasting in providing an oasis of non-commercial aspirations would seem to be particularly important. No one has made this point clearer than Chris Smith himself. Attacking the notion that public service is dead, Smith (1999a: 8) argues that it is more vital than ever: '[i]n an era of multiplying services and an ever tighter squeeze of budgets, quality is under unremitting pressure and it is part of the function of public service broadcasting to set and sustain benchmarks for quality.' The government's aim, therefore, is to vigorously commercialise the broadcasting system at the same time as championing those institutions which are not solely driven by market considerations. One example of this broadcasting 'third way' is Smith's reluctance, so far, to privatise the highly successful advertising-funded Channel Four. Indeed, in 1998, he strengthened its public service remit and forced it to promise to commission more original programmes and to broadcast fewer repeats. Its licence was revised to clarify its public service status and to formalise its commitment to 'experiment, innovation, originality and diversity' (ITC, 1997). For some, Channel Four is a testament to the possibility of public service objectives being met through market mechanisms; for others, however, Channel Four today is a testament only to consumerism and the power of marketing. For Anthony Smith, one

of its first board members, the channel has lost its distinctive experimental vision and, in its obsession with youth-oriented programmes, 'doesn't seem to have a mission to be anything other than another television channel' (quoted in Beckett, 2000).

Of course, the key example of any government's support for public service broadcasting lies in its relationship to the BBC. While Gerald Kaufman, the Labour chair of the Heritage Select Committee, welcomed Labour's election victory as an opportunity to privatise the BBC (Kaufman, 1997), Smith has shown no such interest and has placed the future of the BBC at the heart of broadcasting policy. This is not to say that the government's relationship to the Corporation has been particularly warm. In August 1997, Labour accused the editor of *The World at One*, Kevin Marsh, of waging a 'vendetta' against the government for concentrating on Peter Mandelson's news management techniques. In December of that year the party's chief media spokesperson threatened to sever all contacts with the influential *Today* programme after a particularly bruising interview between one of its presenters and the social security minister. As one New Labour MP, Barbara Follett, argued in a parliamentary debate on the BBC, the 'original three "I"s – impartial, informed and intelligent – are in danger of being replaced with a new trio; impatient, interruptive and imitative' (HoC Debates, 29 October 1999: col. 1242).

However, just as Harold Wilson had regularly fallen out with the BBC in the 1960s before subsequently agreeing to licence fee increases, in October 1998 Chris Smith extended the licence fee until at least 2006 and announced the setting up a committee to examine the funding of the BBC until that time. With the government determined to build up large multimedia companies to compete on the global stage and with the BBC demanding a substantial rise in its revenue to meet the demands of digital, Smith turned to Gavyn Davies to head the committee. As a multi-millionaire partner at the investment bank Goldman Sachs, Davies was perhaps not the most obvious choice to consider the future funding of a public service broadcaster. As a personal friend of both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and a supporter of New Labour's economic policies (see Laurance, 1999), he was at least a reliable person to turn to.

The left-wing Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom immediately attacked the narrow remit of the committee. 'Bracketing the issue [of finance] off in this manner, and forcing discussion into a tight timetable suggests that the government does not want a full open public debate (CPBF, 1999a: 5).⁵⁷ The campaign's demands for a public inquiry were turned down unequivocally, although the fact that there were some two thousand submissions to the Davies Committee suggests a lively interest in the BBC's future. It soon became clear, however, that Davies was considering the introduction of a supplementary licence fee for digital households, dubbed the 'digital levy', of between £30 and £40 a year (see Hutton, 1999). This suggestion was greeted with horror, largely by commercial broadcasters like BSkyB, Carlton and Granada who had already invested heavily in digital television. These broadcasters launched a vigorous lobbying campaign against the levy, claiming that it would deter the take-up of digital services and undermine the government's plans for analogue switch-off.

The committee's report, released in August 1999, proposed a lower than expected digital levy of £24 a year in order to placate the commercial lobby, a maintenance of the existing index-linked licence fee and privatisation of some of the Corporation's activities. This was a neat package that fitted with New Labour ideology: a partial sell-off of public assets to demonstrate its commitment to efficiency, together with the shouldering of an extra burden by the minority of viewers who could afford to do so. The former minister, Peter Mandelson, supported the levy as it would mean that 'only those with digital televisions will pay for the costs of new digital services, rather than as now the poor subsidising the services received by those able to afford digital' (quoted in BBC, 1999a). With this approach, New Labour matched the language used by the Wilson government in arguing for a levy for colour television back in the 'white heat' of the 1960s.⁵⁸ However, this was still nowhere near enough to satisfy the digital broadcasters who resumed their campaign to scrap the levy

⁵⁷ This resembled the attack by the Labour Party itself on the parameters of the Peacock Report some ten years earlier. 'The extremely narrow remit of the Peacock Committee is a major cause for concern. By restricting it to purely financial issues it demands answers which are likely to preempt future developments in broadcasting' (Labour Party, 1985: 1).

⁵⁸ 'It is the Government's view that the cost of colour programmes, which are likely at the outset to be available only to a small minority of viewers because of the cost of receivers, should not fall upon viewers in general. Accordingly a supplementary licence of £5 [a 100% increase] will be required from those equipped to receive colour programmes' (White Paper, 1966: 6).

entirely. BSkyB, in particular, indicated that it would only drop its opposition if the government put pressure on the BBC to scrap its dedicated news channel, News 24, perceived as a rival to the Sky News channel.

By September, the *Financial Times* was able to reveal that Tony Blair, although keen on the digital levy, was concerned about the amount of opposition it had generated and was considering alternatives including, according to one Whitehall adviser, advertising.

Just raising the licence fee is less politically attractive even than the digital licence fee. If Number 10 decides that the digital licence fee is something the government shouldn't go for because of the impact on digital, it will have to look at alternatives, namely advertising on [the BBC's] digital channels or advertising on the main BBC channels (quoted in Newman, 1999).

This marked a return of an old solution to an old problem. As with Tony Benn in the 1960s and with Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, leading politicians were prepared to supplement the licence fee with a dose of advertising, partly because of an unwillingness to be seen as raising taxes. Indeed, even when Chris Smith suggested the compromise of a reduced digital levy combined with a small rise in the analogue licence fee, this was countered by Treasury officials 'wary of setting a precedent by reopening a five year settlement' (Newman, 2000).

James Purnell, media policy adviser at the No 10 Policy Unit insists that 'there wasn't actually a sort of pitched battle around the DTI and the DCMS and that all were agreed on the importance of the BBC's role in a multimedia future' (Purnell, 2000). This analysis appears to fly in the face of splits that had already developed. The prime minister initially supported the levy but was to prepared to contemplate alternatives in order to pacify BSkyB and ITV, the Treasury was against the idea of any tax-raising schemes, the DTI was anxious not to undermine analogue switch-off while Smith at the DCMS was keen to keep all sides happy.

The tortuous negotiations were finally concluded in February 2000 when the government announced that there would be no digital levy but instead that the licence

fee would increase by RPI plus 1.5% until 2006/7, giving the BBC an extra £200m a year. For the BBC, however, the deal came with a few strings attached: the government was to review the future of News 24, as BSkyB had demanded, while the Corporation would be expected to make over £1 billion in efficiency savings and to develop more public/private partnerships. The emphasis of the 'tough love' package was very much on efficiency savings, cutting red tape and increasing commercial competitiveness. The headline of the *Financial Times* was that 'Private sector is a TV winner in BBC funding deal' (Harding 2000). David Elstein, the chief executive of Channel 5, claimed that '[t]his is a big win for the commercial boys. There's no digital levy, limited BBC expansion, tighter control of BBC activities and no premium channels. It's a small win for the BBC. The only loser as usual is the poor, honest, single-set, non-digital licence payers' (quoted in *Broadcast*, 2000). Given the government's vocal support for the BBC in the digital age, it could hardly do less than sustain its current funding but what appeared to be more important during the course of the negotiations was the government's desire not to antagonise its commercial allies in the broadcasting industry. 'This is a very political settlement', one broadcasting executive commented. 'It gives Sky and Rupert Murdoch what they wanted. It gives the BBC more money. And it tightens the screws on the BBC in terms of efficiency and transparency' (quoted in Harding, 2000).

The irony of the situation is that the settlement satisfied neither the BBC nor Rupert Murdoch. While welcoming the retreat from the digital levy, the *Sun* complained about the huge amounts of money being extorted by the BBC and that 'of course, it isn't the government's money to give away in the first place – it's **YOURS** (*Sun*, 2000). The fact is that the settlement amounted to a tax rise which, given the regressive nature of the licence fee, would hit the poor the hardest. The government's commitment to public service broadcasting and its enthusiasm for the BBC to join the digital revolution was therefore to be funded not by income tax receipts nor by the billions of pounds raised by the auction of radio spectrum, but from the pockets of those least able to afford it.

To promote UK broadcast interests in the international market

One of the most consistent themes of ministers' statements on contemporary broadcasting concerns the need to take advantage of the popularity of the English language and to increase the exports of UK television output. This approach was first taken up in the early 1990s when Conservative government thinking 'had been stimulated by a sudden realisation that the country's pre-eminence in the cultural industries offered the UK tremendous export opportunities in a rapidly expanding international market' (Barnett and Curry, 1994: 221). Michael Heseltine at the DTI and Peter Brooke at the DNH embraced the possibilities of an export-led strategy and incorporated this line of thinking into the government's 1994 White Paper on the BBC, optimistically titled *Serving the nation, competing world-wide* (DNH, 1994). The monthly magazine *Sight and Sound* immediately described the BBC's plans to sell more programmes abroad as a 'fantasy':

The central illusion of the whole strategy...is the belief that the world of multi-channel television is panting to pay big money for British programming. The global television market is highly skewed. The big terrestrial channels in each country will continue to take most of the audience (*Sight and Sound*, 1994: 3).

Despite this warning, New Labour politicians followed up the vision of increased television exports with particular enthusiasm. In 1995, Tony Blair announced to Labour's conference that Britain has 'such huge advantages. Some of the finest telecommunications companies in the world. World leaders in broadcasting. The world's first language, English. Together, they could put us years ahead in education and technology and business' (Blair, 1995). The following year, Peter Mandelson wrote that what he had learned from his visit to the Far East was that '[s]preading the word is Britain's secret weapon. Expanding the activities of the BBC and the British Council around the world...are essential economic policies for Britain' (Mandelson, 1996). Globalisation developments together with the increased saliency of television as a cultural force had moved broadcasting from the domestic to the international stage. Tony Blair characterised this as a constituent feature of 'third way' politics: '[f]ree trade has proved itself a motor for economic development, political co-

operation and cultural exchange. The development of global modern media will intensify this process' (Blair, 1998: 18).

The most successful British exponent of global television at the time was long-standing Labour supporter and backer of Tony Blair, Greg Dyke, the then chief executive of Pearson TV. According to Dyke, 'in every industry the globalisation concept is happening...The trick is can you globalise programming and make it local? You own a load of formats, you make them in different countries, you take them from one to another... (quoted in Baker, 1997). The consequence of this sort of globalisation is that Pearson owns three versions of *Family Feud* in Indonesia and controls the rights to *Neighbours* across the world. Was this what Blair had in mind when he talked of the media facilitating 'political co-operation and cultural exchange'?

Once in office, Chris Smith and his civil servants at the DCMS eagerly adopted this approach and prioritised exports on the policy agenda. For Harry Reeves, the head of general broadcasting policy in 1997, there appeared to be no contradiction between the demands of the UK audience and the potential for increasing sales internationally.

It [global television] is very high on the list of policy objectives. We're in one of those situations where it's move on or die...There is a widespread perception that there is a conflict between the cultural objectives and the economic objectives and to a degree there is. But I don't think that it has ever been demonstrated that the kind of [requirements for] quality and variety that is placed on broadcasters necessarily impairs their competitiveness in international markets (Reeves, 1997).

His colleague, Paul Heron, head of the DCMS' public service broadcasting branch, also saw no problem with the BBC following the guidelines laid down in *Serving the nation, competing world-wide*. 'There are great opportunities, great markets...extra revenue for the BBC which goes into quality public service broadcasting. The government would certainly not want to curtail the BBC's commercial activities...I don't see any contradiction [between public service and commercial activities]' (Heron, 1997). The government therefore encouraged the activities of the BBC's

commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, and welcomed its commercial partnerships with companies like Flextech and the Discovery Channel, arguing that international sales could only benefit domestic viewers.

Smith at the time was relatively sanguine about the UK's position in the international market. 'Britain is the second biggest exporter of television programming in the world. We are ahead of the game in what is a rapidly growing market of great cultural and commercial significance' (Smith, 1998a: 101). Other Labour supporters in the television industry were more impatient. The then independent producer Waheed Alli, recently made into a life peer by Tony Blair, argued that '[w]e focus on domestic market share when we should be focusing on global market share as a group of television companies (Alli, 1998: 42). The DCMS therefore commissioned a piece of research to quantify the UK's share of the export market and to suggest if there was room for improvement. The report, *Building a global audience: British television in overseas markets*, was co-written by David Graham, a former member of the free-market think-tank the Institute of Economic Affairs, and backed by the sales arms of some of the UK's leading broadcasters like Carlton, Pearson, Granada and the BBC.

The survey made for some grim reading. It found that British television was *not* perceived as the best in the world, that it had a relatively small share of the global export market and that the UK had a substantial trade deficit in television of some £272 million in 1997 (Graham, 1999: 8). This was partly because while UK programmes 'are praised by international executives for their high production values, quirky sense of humour, and high standards of acting...our drama is too dark; too slow; unattractive; too gritty or socio-political' (ibid.: 24).⁵⁹ The report also found that the length of programmes or series that was designed for the UK market was often too short for the international market and that the more popular genres abroad, like TV movies and the mini-series, were not ones produced in any quantity in the UK. The logic was that an emphasis on gritty dramas relevant to a UK audience should be replaced by output that is more internationally packageable: *Benny Hill*,

⁵⁹ *Variety*'s headline was 'Bleak fare blights export' (Dawtre, 1999).

Mr. Bean, Teletubbies, Thomas the Tank Engine, Survival and *Don't Forget Your Toothbrush* were all mentioned as successful exports.

The recommendations of *Building a global audience* were particularly interesting and concentrated on one central issue: that the 'Government and regulators should consider whether domestic regulation hinders export performance' (ibid.: 11). The report heartily suggested that any rights agreements with creative staff that might hinder the sale of programmes abroad should be re-negotiated and that domestic scheduling patterns might be changed to suit international markets. The report was littered with hints that, despite the optimism of DCMS civil servants, 'excessive regulation can leave catalogues of material that are incompatible with overseas audiences' (ibid.: 32) and concluded that 'it is important to recognise that domestic regulation and export performance are in tension, if not in conflict...Another of our recommendations is that the Government and regulators consider this tension carefully. It may be constraining the UK's export potential' (ibid.: 40).

This invitation to consider whether domestic regulation was undermining international sales was eagerly received by a government engaged in its own discussions about whether to maintain the existing regulatory arrangements. Chris Smith immediately set up a creative industries taskforce panel to 'take forward the recommendations' (DCMS, 1999b) made in *Building a global audience*. The panel comprised of representatives from the commercial broadcasting and independent production sectors as well as the ITC and the British Television Distributors Association. After only four months of discussion, the taskforce produced its own report that firmly rejected the line of thinking adopted by David Graham. Its key findings were that 'the UK is performing well in television exports' and that '[w]e are firmly in the number two position, as we would expect and hope' (DCMS, 1999c: 40). Just as pertinently, it rejected any idea that domestic regulation should be loosened to allow for increased sales abroad.

Developing the international business is important for the industry, but serving the UK audience is essential. Dramatic modification to the style of UK programming is not, therefore, a realistic aim. It is not just the UK that prefers its own programmes – this is true across all territories. Local productions consistently attract the highest ratings (ibid.: 47).

Indeed, according to panel member Sarah Thane of the ITC, the whole discussion of regulation as an impediment to exports ‘was the dog that didn’t bark. It basically became very clear to people on the taskforce that it was a non-issue’ (Thane, 2000). For the panel, the strength of UK television was precisely its orientation on domestic audiences and domestic issues and so it would simply not be possible to develop formats with a global appeal without undermining the domestic production base. Another non-issue was the notion that UK television was failing to take advantage of the popularity of the English language. Again, Thane disputes this.

I felt quite strongly that we may use the same language but the *lingua franca* of television worldwide is American not English. All those cultural references, the language, the phraseology...is Disney English. We were kind of flagellating ourselves about not exploiting the English language fully when it’s much more complex than that (ibid.).

To what extent is New Labour justified in its concentration on the economic importance of television exports given these criticisms from one of its own committees? Firstly, the BBC’s global strategy, backed by the government, has hardly transformed its financial base. Revenue from commercial activities outside Britain has risen from £44 million in 1990 to £153 million in 1999, up from 3% of total revenue to around 5.5% today (see BBC, 1990 and 1999b). The remaining 94.5% of income continues to derive either from the licence-fee or commercial revenue *inside* Britain. State-based audiences are still the economic foundation of the BBC. Secondly, as Colin Sparks puts it (1995: 156), ‘the attempt to direct resources into programming that has an appeal to an audience wider than that of the state diverts from attempts to satisfy the plurality of the population of the state itself.’ In other words, an obsession with export sales is bound to compromise any remaining commitment to provide a diverse and relevant range of programming in Britain. Thirdly, the initiative resembles elements of the ‘Cool Britannia’ strategy of re-branding the UK as a dynamic, cutting-edge creative economy more than an informed analysis of the complex nature of international broadcasting. According to Sarah Thane,

I don't want to sound pejorative about people who are highly intelligent...But what I got a sense of was that there was a lot of activity going on in all sorts of government, particularly the DTI and the Treasury, showing Britain as a very entrepreneurial, forward-looking sort of place and that the DCMS wanted a slice of that. I take my hat off to Chris Smith and others for engendering a sense of the economic power and importance of the creative industries...But I'm saying that all he needed to do was just test whether our television industry was batting as effectively as it could do (Thane, 2000).

Strangely enough, in the same month in which the taskforce published its critical report on building up television exports, another DCMS committee published its own findings, *creative industries exports: our hidden potential* (DCMS, 1999d). The Creative Industries Export Promotion Advisory Group (CIEPAG) examined the export potential not just of broadcasting but film, design, publishing, music, performing arts, heritage and tourism. The report concluded that the 'UK's content industries offer perhaps the best prospects of any UK industrial sector for substantial export growth' (ibid.: 14) and discussed the main barriers to achieving this. Although it did not specifically refer to regulatory impediments, it did note that British television programmes, for all their quality, 'can be regarded as elitist in international markets' (ibid.: 15). Chris Smith welcomed the report saying that in an 'ever more competitive world economy Britain has to play to its strengths. We must exploit this potential and assure our place in the world market' (DCMS, 1999e). New Labour's enthusiasm for the expansion of international trade in television appears, therefore, to be both undiminished and unwarranted.

Conclusion

What achievements in television policy can New Labour point to since winning office? The government has adopted the Conservatives' legislative approach to digital broadcasting but has proposed an ambitious timetable for analogue switch-off that, as we have argued, is driven more by consideration of the prize to be gained for the Treasury than by the perceived needs or demands of viewers. It has maintained 'regulatory stability' but has shifted the balance of power towards the DTI and the competition authorities and has marginalised traditional concerns about the dangers

of media concentration. In championing the importance of public service broadcasting in the multi-channel age, the government has insisted any additional income must be matched by efficiency savings and commercial revenue. Finally, the government has encouraged strategies for increasing television exports when the evidence points to the fact that this can only be done at the expense of the UK viewer.

In all of this, New Labour has adopted the policy framework and ideological parameters of the previous government who set in motion many of the above developments. The process of commercialisation, developed under the Conservatives, has been consolidated and accelerated under the present administration so that commercial success and economic efficiency have become the 'benchmark' of contemporary broadcasting, alongside which all other considerations are to be judged. According to Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (1999: 118), the movement of what they term the new 'orthodoxy' of marketisation 'from the margins to the center of policy debate represents a major gain in corporate control over the communications system and a corresponding weakness of initiatives designed to defend and extend the public interest.'

To what extent does New Labour's approach depart from that of its Tory predecessors? For Sarah Thane of the commercial television regulator, the ITC, 'Labour governments [including the current one] tend to be more interventionist, tend to want to manage the process with regulators and with key players in a slightly greater way than Conservatives who will set a framework and broadly let you get on' (Thane, 2000). The imprint of New Labour has found its way into a whole series of television-related issues that would ordinarily be the preserve of the regulators, from the scheduling of the former *News at Ten* to the government's plan for soap operas be more 'on message' (see McSmith, 2000). New Labour has also stressed the need for more transparency and accountability within public (though of course not private) broadcasting organisations and has advertised vacancies for BBC governors and ITC members. Indeed, the government has now appointed two black people as BBC governors and the average age of the board has fallen from 59 in 1995 to 55 today as part of New Labour's determination to embrace more representative institutions.

Both examples, however, point to another development: the increased *politicisation* of media policy. The ‘modernisation’ of the appointments process has led to criticisms similar to those made against the Conservatives in the 1980s when Tory supporters were packed onto the BBC board. In 1998, the filmmaker Lord Puttnam was rejected by the selection panel in favour of the apparently more acceptable Baroness Young. The *Guardian* wondered ‘whether the process is an improvement on the old one’ and quoted a BBC insider asking whether the changes ‘really made the system more open, or simply created a different sort of charmed circle’ (Brown, 1998). Accusations of political intervention are increasingly common. According to the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, ‘[t]he Blair/Murdoch connection ensures that media policy is kept under careful scrutiny from Downing Street and it is rumoured that a section on cross media ownership was withdrawn from the Government’s Green Paper on Convergence’ (CPBF, 1999b). More recently, the decision by Stephen Byers to refer the NTL/CWC cable deal to the Competition Commission was also seen to be motivated more by political than economic concerns.

Whatever the truth of these accusations, there is a lingering perception that the government is beholden to its media allies, in particular to Rupert Murdoch, for their role in supporting the New Labour project. When Tony Blair intervened on behalf of Murdoch in 1998 and telephoned the Italian prime minister to recommend to him Murdoch’s acquisition of an Italian television station, Downing Street justified this as Blair speaking up on behalf of British business. The *Financial Times* reported one Murdoch aide as saying that ‘you’d have thought Blair would have wanted to avoid the faintest suggestion of cronyism. Fortunately for us it doesn’t seem to bother him’ (quoted in Preston and Blitz, 1998). Blair has certainly been loyal to his wealthy backers from the television industry, appointing Lord Hollick as a special adviser at the DTI and Granada TV’s Gerry Robinson as chair of the Arts Council. The former head of Pearson Television, Greg Dyke, who described global television as a ‘financial buy. You do it for money. This is a business not a cultural pursuit (quoted in Baker, 1997: 16) was asked to chair the NHS taskforce before being appointed as director general of the BBC in 1999.

Given all this activity, it is clear that New Labour has demonstrated its eagerness to develop close relations with corporate interests in the media. Leading figures in the television industry are no longer to be feared by the Labour Party but to be embraced and nurtured. New Labour in government may have followed in the steps of the previous administration but it has demonstrated an 'activist' stance that suggests that Curran's formulation of the party's innately conservative approach to television policy may be obsolete. This should not, however, suggest that New Labour has produced any real innovations in the field but simply that television has moved closer to the core of Labour's policy agenda and that New Labour is determined to intensify the processes of deregulation and marketisation launched by the Tories. As we enter the age of multi-channel television and digital convergence, New Labour's greatest achievement in the field of television may be that it is increasingly the home of media millionaires. MAI's Lord Hollick, Carlton's Lord Alli, the BBC's Greg Dyke and Granada's Gerry Robinson are all examples of the fact that there is no contradiction today – if there ever was one – between being a millionaire television executive and being a Labour supporter.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis opened with the proposition that the Labour Party has traditionally adopted a conservative and reactive stance towards broadcasting developments and that the party's lack of policies concerning television stems from its ambivalence to questions of culture and communications. The rest of the thesis has, I hope, illustrated that the real picture is more complicated. Labour has not only had extensive discussions about the role and the structures of British television but both right and left have turned to the subject of television as part of a wider political argument about the direction of the party as a whole. Revisionists in the 1950s referred to the popularity of ITV and advertising as justification for dropping policies on public ownership in favour of attempts to identify the party with consumerism and choice. Harold Wilson then used developments in communications as part of his attempt in the following decade to paint Labour as the party of science, technology and progress. More recent Labour leaders like Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair have used the alleged power of the media as a reason for shedding left-wing policies and embracing the market. The Labour left, on the other hand, has been deeply involved in discussions concerning television reform and, in the 1970s and early 1980s, prioritised this area as an important part of its struggle for industrial democracy and grass-roots involvement in politics and the community.

Party members and committees have made positive and innovative contributions to all the main debates about television since 1951. Anticipating contemporary discussions about the need for local television and regional identity, Labour MPs like George Darling and Tony Benn and publications like *Tribune* and *New Statesman* proposed plans for the decentralisation and regionalisation of broadcasting back in the early 1950s. Over twenty years before Channel Four was launched, Labour had already decided that it was in favour of a new corporation independent of the BBC and ITV while a key figure like Anthony Crosland was publicly committed to a new channel for minority and experimental programmes in the early 1960s. Similarly, well before Margaret Thatcher pressed for the introduction of advertising onto BBC services in the mid-1980s, Tony Benn and Hugh Jenkins had already argued that advertising finance might be used to supplement the licence fee and improve the

quality of public service broadcasting. Also in the 1960s, Labour ministers had pondered the industrial benefits of broadcasting, discussed the advantages and disadvantages of pay television and even proposed a public-private partnership for a new fourth television channel.

The issue, therefore, is not that the party leadership has been lacking in proposals for television reform but that it has shown a weak commitment to implement them, leaving the initiative for television development to the Conservatives. This is partly, as I suggested at the beginning of the thesis, because the Tories have been in office for longer and have been able to benefit from policy initiatives developed under Labour governments. For example, the initiative to set up Channel Four lay with the Annan Committee instigated by Labour although it was the Conservatives that eventually took the credit for launching the new network. A more important reason, however, for Labour's thin record in television policy is due to divisions within the party itself. Conflict between left and right has repeatedly prevented Labour from developing a policy on which all sides could agree. In the 1970s, the party had several television policies running concurrently: the one developed in *The People and the Media*, the one contained in the party manifestos and the one discussed at Cabinet level. Furthermore, there has also been a concern on the right of the party that radical proposals for television, like the left's opposition to commercial television in the 1950s, would be electorally damaging.

These battles between right and left over television policy have led to the establishment of compromise positions that fall back time and again on the broadcasting status quo, inviting accusations that the party has no firm proposals for television. This is a mistaken view as the party's apparent conservatism regarding television policy is the consequence not of indifference but of profound disagreements concerning the issue of television reform. The party leadership's formal opposition to commercial television in the 1950s, to a fourth channel in the 1960s or to the marketisation of broadcasting in the 1980s was not the result of an instinctive desire to block broadcasting developments. Rather, this opposition masked a variety of positions that were argued out at different levels of the party, including suggestions for radical reform as well as a defence of the broadcasting establishment.

Labour's television policy has been developed through the input of a range of competing groups and constituencies. Forums like the NEC and annual conference, which were dominated by the left from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, regularly expressed their desire for democratisation and their disdain for the commercialisation of television. Left activists were the most vocal opponents inside the Labour Party of the duopoly and pressed hard for new voices to be heard and new structures to be established. Socialist arguments for television reform, culminating in the publication of *TPATM* in 1974 and *Labour's Programme* in 1982, were favourably received in the party at a time when the left had won control of key sections of the party. The left dominated discussion of broadcasting reform throughout the 1970s but socialists influenced the terms of the debate from much earlier, particularly with the rise of a New Left that articulated a 'cultural politics' in the early 1960s. Indeed, all sides of the party purported to agree with left-wing arguments against media concentration and it was not until the 1990s that these arguments were systematically challenged with the emergence of New Labour.

Labour's parliamentary leadership has approached television policy with rather different concerns in mind. Firstly, it has aimed to reach out to, or at least not to alienate, floating voters. Both Gaitskell and Crosland considered media policy in the second half of the 1950s as an opportunity to relate to the aspirations of the growing television audience and sought to distance the party from threats to scrap ITV. Secondly, the leadership has pursued policies designed not to antagonise media owners and television executives. Whilst this is clearly the case with New Labour's behaviour in recent years, it also characterises Harold Wilson's close relationship with the ITV companies in the 1960s. In an effort to placate these two crucial electoral constituencies, floating voters and corporate interests, the leadership has attempted to marginalise the party's more left-wing media proposals in several different ways. When Labour's annual conference voted for the restructuring of ITV in 1962, the leadership simply ignored the resolution and went on to be a firm supporter of commercial television. In the 1970s, the Labour government dealt with the pressure for radical media reform expressed in *TPATM* and at TUC conferences by setting up the Annan Committee and therefore postponing difficult decisions for a substantial period of time.

A key pressure, therefore, on the leadership not to establish or implement radical media policy has been the party's close relationship with media entrepreneurs. We have seen how Labour's opposition to the development of commercial television was compromised by its links with businessmen like Sidney Bernstein, Eric Fletcher and Cecil King. In the 1960s, PMG Tony Benn met with Lew Grade of ATV to discuss plans for a public/private partnership for a new channel while, more recently, the media tycoon the late Robert Maxwell and the millionaire publisher Geoffrey Robinson have both been Labour MPs. New Labour can now count on the backing of an unprecedented number of media moguls but it was not New Labour that initiated the link in the first place.

The media unions have played a more ambiguous role in policy-making because of both political and organisational reasons. Firstly, for most of the period covered in this thesis, the vast majority of television technicians were organised in different unions, ITV workers in the ACTT and BBC staff in the ABS, undermining the possibility of a united lobby on behalf of workers employed in television. While the ACTT was affiliated to the Labour Party, the ABS (until its merger with NATKE in 1984 to form BETA) was not. BBC staff, therefore, did not have the formal representation in Labour policy-making circles that ITV workers were always entitled to. While BETA and ACTT did work together in the Public Service Broadcasting Campaign in the run-up to the 1990 Broadcasting Act and eventually merged to form BECTU in 1990, this distinction may partially explain Labour's particular identification with commercial television interests.

Secondly, the ACTT has on many occasions separated its often politically radical proposals for the industry as a whole (see ACTT, 1973) from its more conservative approach to changes affecting the pay and conditions of its members. Despite opposing the introduction of commercial television in the early 1950s, the union reserved the right to change its position and recruit ITV members to the union. Despite its criticisms of ITV's excess profits in the early 1960s, it sought to amend Labour and TUC motions supporting the Pilkington's Committee's proposals to reform ITV for fear that they would undermine the economic viability of the commercial companies. Despite calling for the social ownership of mass

communications in the 1970s, the ACTT backed the call for an 'ITV-2' instead of an Open Broadcasting Authority. Representatives of the media unions played an important role in the party's various study groups and sub-committees on broadcasting but consistently placed the sectional interests of their members above the movements to democratise television structures. This sectionalism has reinforced the more conservative approach towards television policymaking of the party leadership and stands in stark contrast to the activities of media workers, especially those in the Free Communications Group, who have sought to connect questions of pay and conditions to broader issues of media content and accountability.

Influenced by these different constituencies, the Labour Party has regularly divided along the lines of a 'democratising left' *versus* a 'conservative right' in debates over television policy, although that division is by no means comprehensive. There are, for example, those on the left who want to increase social ownership of the media *and* those who favour public service objectives in a mixed economy. *The People and the Media*, for example, is the product of debates between different sections of the left, with some arguing for nationalisation and others for reforms within the existing structures of television. There are also divisions on the right of the party between those who want to embrace market structures and those who contend that broadcasting has a moral and cultural responsibility that requires strong guidance from the state. The market-led conception of broadcasting advocated by the IPPR in 1994 is distinct from the then shadow home secretary Roy Hattersley's defence of public service broadcasting following the 1988 White Paper. Indeed, the model of a 'radical' left and a 'conservative' right does not necessarily reflect the debates in broadcasting policy in the party. In the 1950s it was mainly the revisionists on the right of the party who took up the issue of television while the Bevanite left largely ignored it. Similarly, in recent years, it has been New Labour that has sought to reform television along market lines while the left has attempted to defend the party's traditional positions against the 'new revisionists'. In these situations, we may instead talk of a split between a 'radical' right and a 'conservative' left.

This echoes James Curran's argument that 'the simple dichotomy of left and right does not adequately describe the politics of the media' (in Curran and Seaton, 1997: 353) and his point that there are similar tensions in the Conservative as well as in the

Labour Party. We have seen how parts of the ‘libertarian’ Labour left shared the radical right’s desire for independent production in the 1980s. Critical of the narrow consensus of the duopoly, left-wing Labour supporters were prepared to join with free-market theorists in the Conservatives in pressing for an independent production quota which both groups thought, for very different reasons, would help to open up broadcasting to new voices.

Nevertheless, disagreements between the Labour left and the parliamentary leadership have regularly surfaced throughout the periods of government *and* opposition covered in this thesis and have been crucial in determining the eventual outcome of television policy. In practice, the shadow Cabinet did not share the enthusiasm for a new television corporation in 1958 and attempted to distance itself from the party conference’s firm support for the Pilkington Report’s attack on ITV in 1962. The majority of the Cabinet did not share the NEC’s criticisms of advertising in the 1960s and profoundly disagreed with *TPATM*’s proposals for abolishing the BBC, ITV and the licence fee. Kinnock refused to act on the left’s demand for an arts ministry with Cabinet status while Blair totally ignored the criticisms from union and grassroots activists over his plan to relax cross-media ownership restrictions in the mid-1990s. However, unlike other areas of policy (for example over public spending cuts and incomes policy) where there has been particularly vocal opposition to the leadership, television policy has rarely resulted in public displays of dissension. With the exception of the resistance to the proposals in the draft White Paper in 1978 to hand over the fourth channel to the IBA, there were no high-profile backbench revolts against Wilson’s attacks on the BBC nor against Callaghan’s accommodation to cable interests.

This is a reflection of the fact that, up until the emergence of New Labour, television policy was simply not a key issue for the party leadership. In opposition and government, the leadership was always far more interested in the use of television to project a modern image and to publicise personalities and policies. To the extent that it did consider policy, television was used as a means of identifying Labour with key themes: the consumer revolution in the 1950s, technological developments in the 1960s, questions of accountability and democracy in the 1970s and with issues of quality and standards in the 1980s. From its very inception, however, New Labour

focused on broadcasting as a vital part of 'rebranding' the party as modern and dynamic *and* as an important area of policy in the 'knowledge economy'. Yet although New Labour's television policy has involved some dramatic changes to the party's traditional views on media concentration and the role of the market, there are nevertheless examples of commercial forces driving television policy in previous discussions within the party. Both the revisionists in the 1950s and Neil Kinnock in the late 1980s emphasised the need for Labour to accommodate to the growing consumerist instincts of the population while Harold Wilson was loath to tame the profit-making instincts of the commercial television companies in the 1960s. It would, therefore, be too simplistic to suggest that New Labour has transformed what was previously a monolithic policy on the media into a more relevant and multi-dimensional one given that there are strong *continuities* in the evolution of Labour's television policies.

For example, Labour's relationship with the BBC has followed a predictable pattern characterised by both loyalty and criticism. Whenever the Conservatives have attacked the BBC because of its status as a public body with non-commercial principles, the Labour leadership has tended to jump to the Corporation's defence. This was the case particularly in the early 1950s and 1980s when Labour was in opposition and prepared to champion the cause of public service broadcasting as a necessary corrective to the market. However, when Labour has been in government, it has been just as ready as the Tories to withhold or minimise licence fee increases either because of difficult economic conditions or because of hostility to what it perceives as anti-Labour coverage. This was especially true for Harold Wilson who continually threatened to starve the BBC of funds in the 1960s and then agreed to licence fee increases because of the lack of suitable alternatives. It is also broadly similar to New Labour's attitude towards the BBC that combines hearty praise for the Corporation's high-quality brand name with warnings that it must improve its efficiency and temper its attacks on government. Labour, therefore, has been simultaneously supportive of the BBC's public service mission, reluctant to fully fund that mission and hostile to its occasionally critical political interventions.

The BBC has also always faced dissenting voices from within the Labour Party. One strand in the centre has accused the Corporation of being too bureaucratic and stuffy

and has argued that its monopoly status has resulted in complacency rather than innovation. George Darling's attack on the BBC monopoly in his submission to the Beveridge Report in 1950 and, more recently, the IPPR's proposals to restructure the BBC along federal lines typify this approach. The call to privatise the BBC by Labour MP Gerald Kaufman, the current chair of the Select Committee on Media, Culture and Sport, is an example of hostility to the BBC from the right of the party. There has also been a long tradition of criticism by left-wingers of the Corporation's paternalistic, establishment-minded and anti-labour outlook, exemplified by the arguments in *TPATM*. These critics have issued a series of proposals, discussed in this thesis, to either abolish or to radically restructure the BBC and to replace the licence fee with a more egalitarian revenue source. Yet we have also seen that some of the most staunch defenders of the BBC and the licence fee against these proposals have been Labour leaders, including Attlee, Callaghan and Kinnock. When Tony Benn pressed for advertising to be introduced on the BBC in the mid-1960s to compensate for the declining amount of licence fee revenue, even Harold Wilson, despite his personal battles with senior BBC figures, was not able to bring himself to agree with the plan.

The Labour leadership's relationship to commercial television has been rather less ambiguous. Time and again, conference delegates, trade unionists and party committees have demanded that ITV's profits be curbed while the Labour frontbench, mindful of the popularity of commercial television with its supporters, has refused to accede to these requests. As we have seen, at the height of the controversy over excess profits in 1960, Labour's sub-committee on television suggested a far less drastic tax on profits than the one eventually introduced by a Conservative PMG. It was a Labour government that raised the levy later in the decade but then, concerned about the impact of the rise in the run-up to the 1970 election, lowered it again. The leadership has always had a far more comfortable relationship with ITV than with the BBC, from Wilson's warm friendship with the ITA's Charles Hill in the 1960s to the Labour frontbench's close ties with the ITV companies during the 1990 Broadcasting Act. While the NEC and the Labour left have, at different times, called for alternatives to advertising on ITV or at least for the centralised collection of advertising revenue, Labour leaders have consistently rejected these arguments. Ironically, given Labour's status for many years as a party

committed to social ownership, it has been the Conservatives that have introduced the measures that have been least popular with the ITV companies: the introduction of the levy in 1964 and the auction of ITV franchises in the 1990 Broadcasting Act.

The struggle for television reform cannot, however, simply be reduced to a clash between Labour's grass-roots and the leadership or between left and right. I have tried to show how each of the various groups that make up the Labour Party – unions, ordinary members, academics, wealthy backers – may be the dominant influence at any one time. But I have also attempted to demonstrate that whatever view is dominant, whether that of the revisionists in the 1950s or the 'Bennite' left at the start of the 1970s, the parliamentary leadership always has the controlling power. There appears to be, therefore, an impasse between the demands of left-wing reformers, determined to open up television to new voices and to restrict the activities of both state and the market, and those who are keen to maintain the existing framework and priorities of broadcasting. As long as Labour remains above all a parliamentary machine, with an eye on opinion polls and a nervous approach to left-wing innovations in policy, this impasse will always be resolved in favour of the status quo.

This perhaps explains the consensus between Labour and Conservative leaderships over television policy. Once again this is partly due to the fact that television policy has generally been of secondary importance to both parties and is unlikely to be the site of inter-party struggle. But it is also the case that, while in office, Labour has never attempted to change the framework of broadcasting that it inherited from the Conservatives. In opposition, Labour committees have challenged Tory priorities for television and suggested a wide range of alternative structures, but in government Labour has endorsed all the broadcasting developments initiated by the Conservatives. Labour governments have made no attempt to restructure the ITV network nor the BBC, while New Labour has accepted the framework for Channels Four and Five and has clung to the vision of digital television first developed by the Conservatives. The one major Labour innovation, the Open University, has in practice had far more of an impact on educational structures than it has had on broadcasting. Furthermore, where Labour *has* departed from the consensus, for example with New Labour's vigorous attempt to loosen cross-media ownership

restrictions ahead of the Tories, this has been done on the basis of market, rather than traditional socialist, principles.

I have attempted to demonstrate that Labour's inconsistent approach to democratising television in the UK is not a question of individual betrayals, indifference to the area, nor of ignorance of the issues themselves. A whole host of imaginative and creative policies have been proposed at virtually all levels of the party, many of which were innovative responses to problems posed at the time about the lack of accountability or lack of diversity of British broadcasting. There has been no shortage of enthusiasm in party sub-committees and conference discussions and amongst intellectuals and Labour-supporting publications for proposals to open up television in ways that would reflect the principles of Labourism.

The problem is a structural one. Socialists who oppose the commercialisation of broadcasting find themselves in a party with people who have gained from commercialisation; reformers who wish to see an independent and critical television system are confronted by parliamentary leaders who have no such desire; activists who want to curb the power of millionaire television executives are rebuffed by senior Labour figures who want to court the influence of media entrepreneurs. Left-wing demands for more accountability and diversity have been articulated throughout the last fifty years inside the party and then cast aside by a leadership with little inclination to act on these demands. By repeatedly emphasising electoral respectability and sound economic government, the party has in practice consistently shied away from challenging the status quo and alienating those in positions of power in the media.

The many demands for television reform expressed inside the Labour Party have fallen victim to the contradictions of a party that seeks to contain and minimise movements for radical change. The party's poor record in democratising British television reflects its position as a political organisation that is more accountable and responsive to the system it aims to manage than to those constituents on whose behalf it claims to govern. Under 'old' Labour there were many conference resolutions protesting against media monopolies, many sub-committees considering how to make television more representative of the majority of the population and

many party statements promising to increase diversity and plurality. However, as long as the party remained firmly committed to the political establishment, there could be no challenges to the institutions and individuals that dominated the television industry. Under New Labour, there are now policy commissions, think-tanks and civil service departments determined to *increase* the liberalisation and corporate control of British television. The gap between those Labour supporters who wish to see broadcasting serving the needs of the public and Labour leaders who see communications as, above all, serving the needs of industry and government is growing ever wider.

Chapter Eight: Sources cited

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