

In tune with apartheid

Duncan Campbell writes: Capital Radio, London's highly profitable and allegedly 'socially aware' commercial radio station profess to be highly embarrassed that their name, style, and even their printed logo have been appropriated by a new station now about to start operating in the Transkei, South Africa. Capital Radio Transkei, based in the 'independent' black homeland of the same name, will begin broadcasting on 26 December this year, aiming its medium wave transmissions not just to the Transkei but the whole of South Africa.

Capital Radio (London) maintain that there is 'absolutely no connection' with Capital Radio (Transkei). But John Moody, the Transkei's managing director, says that the London station were 'amazingly co-operative' in providing help and advice, and in allowing the South Africans complete access to study their own operations. This liaison began about two years ago. Moody added that while nothing might be 'nearer and dearer' to his heart than to have direct involvement with the London station, the London managers felt that direct financial links would be untenable in view of likely union attitudes. So, instead, they opened their doors for the Transkei station to be modelled on the London one - for love and no money.

Inside Capital Radio (London), staff were of course aware of being studied by the South African visitors. They were assured that Capital (London) took no objection at all to the use of the name or logo. (The London logo is the station's name, featuring a sparrow fluttering over the last letters. In Transkei, a seagull appears instead.) The London staff were told that the South African station would be the first 'truly multi-racial' station in the area, and would thus enhance Capital (London)'s prestige and further the black cause. This version of the Capital Transkei story appears however to be reserved for staff inside the London company, and those who have been recruited to the new station's staff.

This week, Capital (London) spokespeople would only acknowledge the 'approach' from the South African company. Meanwhile, a former programme controller for Capital (London), Michael Bukht has just departed for Cape Town on a four month consultancy. Capital disc jockey Kenny Everett's producer, Stewart Lee flew off to South Africa two weeks ago. Transkei station director John Moody says that their relationship with Capital (London) is 'still very co-operative'. Overall Capital Radio Transkei will, says Moody, be 'dedicated to making profits' and like London, 'dedicated to radio as an art form'. Relying on South African advertisers and offices for most of their revenue, it is a foregone conclusion that Capital Radio Transkei will entirely accommodate itself to the South African government. There will be no 'crusades' or other 'politics', just an aspiration to 'bridge the gap between black and white - musically'. Can one (musically) bridge the gap between opposite ends of a gun barrel?