

unions committed to protecting their members. To them, it is Thatcherism in its purest form.

THE TIMING of the Peacock Report is relevant in assessing what action (if any) the government will take as a result of it. The present plan is to deliver it to the Home Secretary next July — later than many expected but still too early, in the view of some delegates, for it to be a properly considered document. The government can scarcely publish it before September or frame legislation until well into the 1986-7 Parliamentary session. By then, the next election will be in everyone's mind and the Conservatives might decide to delay action.

The BBC could then be pushed into the (for them) uncomfortable position of relying on Labour to ride out of the sunset to the rescue. Norman Buchan, who is co-ordinating the Labour Party's evidence to Peacock, told the conference that if the Tories did force the corporation to take advertising, a Labour government would reverse the decision.

But the Beeb have every reason to question whether his intentions are strictly honourable. Over the years their relations with Labour have been on balance worse than with the Conservatives. It was Roy Mason, while Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who made a direct threat to take action via the licence fee unless Ulster coverage was adjusted on his terms. It was Harold Wilson who leant on Hugh Greene to prevent a BBC interview with rebel Rhodesian Premier Ian Smith. It was Wilson again, when in opposition, who took legal action over the programme 'Yesterday's Men'. In the '60s and '70s there were numerous rows over BBC coverage of Labour Party conferences.

Most recently, James Callaghan put the frighteners on the Beeb in 1978, when he published a White Paper proposing the creation of supervisory boards for the television, radio and overseas services. These boards, appointed by the Home Office, would have been inserted between the governors and the board of

management to exercise extra control over output.

The plan evaporated with Labour's 1979 election defeat. In the introduction to their 1980 Handbook, the BBC management expressed huge relief at the disappearance of the threat, with its 'implications of profound, and to our minds perilous, change in the constitution and practice of public service broadcasting in Britain'. No wonder there is a fear in Broadcasting House that if Labour does come to the rescue it will be at a price.

When I last wrote on this subject in the *New Statesman* I said it was difficult to determine a correct socialist line. I have now resolved that. Clearly the socialist position must be to defend the large public corporation against those who seek to fragment and privatise it. Yet those of us who are libertarians as well as socialists are still vulnerable to the seductive appeal of cultural diversity over duopoly, and might well be won over if there are more Portland Place scandals to come. □

## INVESTIGATION: DUNCAN CAMPBELL & Patrick Forbes

# DOCTORS WARNED ON NUCLEAR ACCIDENTS



Martin Bond

Bradwell: just take two of the tablets

EMERGENCY PLANS and advice to doctors on actions they should take in the event of a nuclear accident have been released by the DHSS. Copies of a circular on 'Health Service Arrangements for dealing with major accidents' have been sent to medical authorities, and a special leaflet — 'Advice for General Practitioners in the event of a Civil Nuclear Emergency' is to be circulated to all doctors working within 40km (25 miles) of nuclear installations, chiefly nuclear power stations.

The one page leaflet claims that the probability of any accident is 'extremely remote'; it is said to be 'almost inconceivable' that anyone off-site could receive a large enough dose to produce early symptoms of radiation sickness. But British emergency plans, unlike American studies, are not based on the worst conceivable accident. Instead, they consider only the worst accident that it has been judged economically feasible to plan against.

Government advice to health authorities thus focuses on the possible consequences of such a minor accident, called a 'reference accident'. Details of the likely effects of a reference accident were drawn up three years ago by the Health and Safety Executive. The official description of this accident starts with the

unconvincing comment that 'the most likely outcome of any accident at a nuclear plant is that no one would be hurt at all.' But if anything *did* happen outside the site, the consequences might include:

- A radioactive plume; 'some traces of the (radioactive) material might be found at large distances from the site';
- People in the vicinity '(should) shelter, or take potassium iodate tablets, or possibly temporarily evacuate their homes to limit exposure';
- Large numbers of people at long distances might be exposed to 'very small doses' of radiation. 'There is a statistical possibility of a few additional deaths from cancer in the whole of the exposed population over the course of the following 20-30 years.'

This analysis stands in contrast to the official US study completed in 1982, by the Sandia National Laboratory, which increased the foreseeable consequences of the 'worst conceivable' reactor accident to some 100,000 deaths and the loss of \$300 billion worth of property. The DHSS admits that the British 'reference accident' is not the worst possible accident, but more damaging accidents are ruled out as 'even more improbable events' against which the high cost of 'further design safety measures or more extensive emergency plans' is 'unlikely to be justified'.

The new leaflet to GPs cites the experience of the Three Mile Island accident in the United States to warn doctors that after an accident, people living locally who had not been exposed to 'any significant dose of radiation' nevertheless developed 'psychosomatic manifestations, including vomiting. Vomiting in members of the public several hours after an accident is not therefore a sign of dangerous radiation exposure'.

Once a nuclear accident has been confirmed,

the nuclear reactor manager has to declare a site emergency, and contact the police. As soon as possible, the nuclear operator responsible for the accident should set up an Operational Support Centre between 10km and 30km from the scene. The Department of Energy will open a Nuclear Emergency Briefing Room at their headquarters in London. In Scotland, a similar emergency centre would go into operation.

The most likely nuclear reactor to affect London is Bradwell power station, in Essex. The North East Thames Regional Health Authority has prepared contingency plans for an accident, while the CEBG has already equipped its accident Operational Support Centre (OSC). This is earmarked to work from an adult education centre in Maldon, Essex and is 'fully equipped with communications and facilities for use in an emergency'.

While health authorities are told to ensure that NHS arrangements for a nuclear accident are part of their major accident plans, separate arrangements for dealing with nuclear weapons accidents are not revealed to them.



## NEW BUG FOUND



So much for the special detector

A NEW DESIGN of bug for tracking cars has

been found in Northern Ireland. It was discovered last month, clamped beneath the car of a prominent member of Sinn Fein, Sean O'Hagan, of Lisnahull near Dungannon.

The nature and use of government tracking bugs was first reported in the *New Statesman* on 20 June. We reported that two bugs, planted by the Metropolitan Police, had been found by London men concealed below their cars. The bug just discovered in Dungannon is of a different type, and is more advanced than those used in London.

Both bugs have a broadly similar design, using black-coated die-cast boxes, which clamp to the underside of a car using powerful built-in magnets. The Northern Ireland design uses two boxes, one containing extra batteries for longer life. In both designs, a special detector would warn the secret trackers if the bug was removed from the car.

O'Hagan, however, successfully removed the bug and passed it to Sinn Fein electronics experts without being detected. Soon after, however, he was repeatedly stopped by Army and RUC patrols, and his car carefully searched. Finally he was arrested by an RUC sergeant, who accused him of removing the device they had planted on his car.



## BUT BUG DETECTOR WON'T WORK

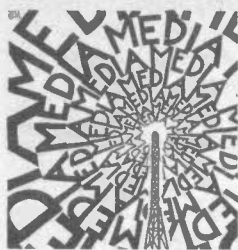
'TELEPHONE TAP DETECTORS', advertised for sale in the *Observer* colour magazine two weeks ago are incapable of detecting taps.

A company called Security Consultants, of Nuneaton, displayed a 'TA 1000 Telephone Tap Detector Executive Model' in a half page advertisement. It claims that a 'warning light (is) set to go on when a tap is put on the line or someone picks up an extension'. It then claims that the TA 1000 'will detect any line tapping from the telephone exchange to the actual telephone'. Built into a clock, it costs £130 — '£243 cheaper than its nearest rival'.

But the claims made for the TA 1000 are completely untrue. It is impossible to detect most taps, and the TA 1000 will not detect official taps placed at the telephone exchange, or even a tape recorder connected directly to the line. Similar devices are offered for sale by other manufacturers, principally London's notorious 'Counter-Spy Shop', in Mayfair. These tap detectors do not work either.

The device is manufactured by a second Birmingham company, Abraxis Design. Abraxis's manager, Mr T N Jinks, admitted this week that the device would not detect a tap at the exchange, but claimed that detecting all other taps was 'within the realms of possibility'. Challenged that it was in fact impossible to detect almost all taps, Jinks claimed that 'I have no need to substantiate any of these claims. If you had technical knowledge of surveillance you would understand'.

We could not contact Mr Mahon, who owns both firms as, according to British Telecom, the number advertised for him was a 'spare line' not allocated to a subscriber. □



## Neighbourhood set to drive out pirates

Peter M. Lewis

IN A WRITTEN answer just before the summer recess, Leon Brittan announced the long-awaited details of the government plans for community radio. They went unnoticed by the media which have since had other matters to concern them. Community radio, however, is an issue that we need to unravel, and it has more connections with broadcasting's dependence on the State than first appears.

In the USA community radio has an honourable 35-year-old record. Supported by listeners who share in programme-making and policy, community stations pioneered on-air discussions of civil rights, the Vietnam war and feminist issues. Canada's provision for remote rural communities goes back to the early 1960s, and in cities radical stations like Vancouver Co-op Radio are accepted as part of overall regional balance. In Australia over 50 stations provide a flourishing and diverse alternative to a State/commercial duopoly not unlike ours. A recent GLC report on Australian public (community) radio notes that it has not damaged mainstream broadcasting.

In Europe, the route to a separate sector providing for small and specialised audiences had been spearheaded by piracy. Though originally highly political — and therefore often severely repressed — the radical forms of 'free radio' have tended to be diluted or ousted by American-style music programming, financed ultimately by the multinational music and electronics industries.

The lessons to be drawn from this are that community radio is *both* an explicit condemnation of mainstream broadcasting and an exploitation of new technology (low cost studios and transmitters) which allows unsatisfied groups to do-it-themselves. This new form of local public service needs some regulation and support if there is not to be a commercial radio jungle, legal or illegal.

And so to Britain. In 21 locations from the Shetlands to Penzance and including five in London, the Home Office is inviting applications for two-year experimental licences to transmit on low power either to neighbourhoods (5km radius) or over larger areas (10km) to communities of interest. Finance will be the responsibility of the stations themselves through advertising, grants and subscriptions. Programme content need not be balanced, but stations may not be primarily religious or political. Independent TV and local radio can own up to 49 per cent of such community stations. Applications must be submitted by 30 September.

To make sense of these proposals we have to recognise that the arrival of community radio in Britain is already hedged in by restrictions. On the other hand, a government bent on deregulation and believing in small-business enterprise has been embarrassed by piracy into a limited experiment that aims to exclude

the pirates and calm the fears of commercial radio. Playing safe, Leon Brittan is keeping control within the Home Office.

On the other hand, the proposals are the culmination of a long campaign that has recently gathered Left support, notably from the GLC. One of its planks is a critique of the duopoly's record in local radio. Despite its rhetoric the BBC has never cared for its local empire; station budgets have been cut, service areas expanded. The IBA, admonished by Annan and a dying Labour government, made a token gesture to innovation in Cardiff where a non-profit Community Trust held half the shares in the winning consortium. Thereafter, the most dutiful of quangos, it rejected all similar bids and raced ahead with conventional ILR expansion till the bubble burst. Now take-overs, relaxation of rules on sponsorship, the axing of drama and features and the sacking of entire newsrooms have been approved as measures to bail out a troubled commercial sector.

Local radio is still, as Annan found it, a mess. So the other plank of the community radio movement is the development of alternatives in structure and programming. New programmes have for some years been produced by workshops and projects up and down the country and under the new proposals all these can be transmitted by stations which will not be neutered by the requirements of 'balance'.

On structure, the Community Radio Association (CRA) has been quietly tutoring Whitehall and can take some credit for having got this far. But it is arguing for an extended deadline for applications, more licences and higher power for 'community of interest', rather than geographic community stations: the 10km radius would not in London, for example, allow ethnic broadcasters to reach more than a minority of a minority. Above all, the CRA wants groups applying for licences to adopt the CRA Code of Practice, a staunchly anti-sexist, anti-racist document.

Two new measures would improve the chances of lively community radio: a Channel Four-type agreement that wins union recognition of stations which meet certain staffing conditions; and a Community Broadcasting Trust which could raise and redistribute funding while employing more credibility than a Home Secretary who uses censorship like CS gas.

Otherwise the Radio Jackies, with glossy applications dressed in the language of 'community', will have the field to themselves, the Adam Smith Institute will be cheering on the sidelines, and it will be deregulation with a vengeance. □

Peter M. Lewis is a Lecturer in Communications at Goldsmiths' College.