

TELEVISION AND TERRORISM

By

Eoghan Harris

A critique of the liberal case for the abolition of Section 31: a commentary on the crucial concept of consensus; a critique of the psuedo-professional consensus which together with a leaky national consensus is certain to offer major propaganda victories to Provisional mouthpieces; some proposals for assisting the emergence of a less leaky consensus in Southern attitudes to the North.

This treatise is meant to be read in tandem with a video of role-playing exercises on Section 31, carried out by the staff of the RTE Training Department at Booterstown who simulated the realistic studio conditions under the supervision of Peter Canning and Tommy Ryan. I want to thank them and the reporters, researchers and trainee reporters who threw heart and soul into a distasteful exercise that cast a lot of light in dark places. Peter Canning suggested a precis of the 14 lectures I gave from 31 August to 14 September. Peter's idea might have remained a notion had not the events at Enniskillen made it a duty..

The videotape may only be viewed on application to Tommy Ryan RTE Training Department who will determine clearance with participants and author.

Eoghan Harris
Editor 'Cursai'
RTE.

© Copyright 15 November 1987.

WHO WANTS TO ABOLISH SECTION 31 AND WHY ?

Three groups of broadcasters want to lift Section 31.

First: a tiny tantrum of liberals who believe all censorship is wrong, even scrubbing swastika slogans from Jewish tombstones; and whose belief to absolute free speech must logically include the right to shout "fire" at a crowded U2 concert. There is nothing printable I have to say to them.

Second: Hush puppy broadcasters who think the abolition of Section 31 will do the Provos a lot of good. A Hush Puppy is a Provo broadcaster who does not openly state his support but sends these signals: always amends ICTU peace motions on the North to 'peace with justice'; is very voluble at union meetings about the Guildford Four but silent on the Enniskillen 11; believes that Eamon McCann and Nell McCafferty may be invited onto radio programmes* as objective voices on Northern Ireland; plants hush puppy stories in hush puppy journals like Magill and Phoenix to damage honest broadcasters who vote for the status quo on Section 31 at union meetings.

Third: the majority of honest broadcasters- producers, reporters and researchers- who believe that abolishing Section 31 would expose the Provisional case, and that the forensic skills of RTE reporters in the wake of a bad atrocity, like Enniskillen, would make bits of Gerry Adams.

This treatise is addressed to this majority of honest broadcasters in the hope that it will help them face up to a few facts of life.

The first fact of life is that Mr Gerry Adams appears regularly on the BBC and UTV and nobody has yet made bits of him. The second is that the Provos are very anxious to lift Section 31 which hardly argues any fear of being reduced to smithereens. The third is that there is no possibility of the Provos being ever exposed on television as long as the National Concensus leaks like a sieve and we have no adequate theory of television.

This has nothing to do with the Provos having a good case. The Provos themselves admitted they had no case after Enniskillen. The point I wish to make and that is reinforced by the videotapes is:

A Provo spokesperson could appear one hour after Enniskillen, and without any defence of that particular case, win support for the Provos general cause provided the spokesperson exploited the professional and national consensus which governs the praxis of production in RTE.

* My animus against certain producers in the Radio service is explained by my decision to resign from my trade union after Enniskillen because of their continually ambivalent attitudes to the Provisional IRA campaign.

My belief is that the Hush Puppy broadcasters and the Provisionals know that they could not only 'draw' a one-to-one interview after Enniskillen, but, as the videotapes show, 'win' such an interview by exploiting three big weaknesses in our current broadcasting culture:

These weak points are (a) the poverty of the those practices which we call 'professionalism' which are demonstrably not able to handle interviewees with training in the theory of consensus (b) the leaky and ambivalent nature of the National Consensus on the North which is however beginning to solidify and needs our help (c) the lack of any theory of the praxis of television production in RTE.

The honest broadcasters who argue with me always end saying: " Look we'll have to do it to find out.". This is the tombstone inscription familiar to all producers " Look it'll be all right in the night"

You don't have to do it to find out. You don't have to fight a nuclear war to find if it hurts. You can test the theory by the laws of logic and test the practice by means of controlled simulations.

Theory and testing had convinced most people that a nuclear war would hurt long before the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. There was surely a Soviet official in Chernobyl saying: " Look- it'll be all right on the night."

Theory and practice on Section 31 convinces me that it will be far from being all right on the night Section 31 is abolished.

Let's look at the theory and practice of the honest broadcasters case but never forgetting that if the Provos and the Hush Puppies want Section 31 abolished they must have good reason to believe they will survive.

They are absolutely right.

HOW DOES RTE KNOW IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT ON THE NIGHT ?

For years now RTE management and unions have waffled on about Section 31 in terms of broadcasting freedom, without any reference to what the public thinks, or what the practical results would be if it were abolished.

The refusal to examine either the theory or practice of this abolition arises from a profound distrust by broadcasters of academic or empirical research into the nature of television.

Broadcasters believe they have natural pitch and can play it by ear.

A HYPOTHESIS ON WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF SECTION 31 WERE ABOLISHED

Let us assume Section 31 has been lifted and an RTE reporter is free to interview Gerry Adams in the wake of the Enniskillen atrocity.

The Provos believe that they would 'draw' or even 'win' such a one to one interview.

The Broadcasters believe that their 'professional' skills would expose the weakness of the Provo case and damage their cause.

I believe that by manipulating the concept of concensus the Provos can always draw and often win any such interview no even if the interview takes place within minutes of film of the most appalling atrocity.

This belief was given a rough and ready empirical test at the RTE Training Department Refresher Course conducted by Peter Canning and myself over a two week period from 31 August- 14 September.

One day, without warning, we held a role playing test on Section 31.

That test was carried out with full studio facilities to simulate the normal RTE studio conditions and supervised by the Training Staff and myself and Peter Canning, and with the co-operation of 16 presenters, reporters and trainee presenters who carried out a small but significant exercise which can be repeated again if necessary.

The tapes of this exercise make grim viewing in the wake of Enniskillen.

THE HILLSBORO ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE

The test was carried out as follows:

1. I told the 16 journalists, presenters and trainees that I personally supported Section 31 until the National Concensus stopped leaking (of which more anon) without explaining what I meant.
2. I asked the 16 journalists how many agreed with me. Only one.
3. I told the 16 journalists that it was now noon but that early that morning the Provisionals had fired three mortars at Hillsboro RUC barracks and that one had overshot, ploughed into a schoolyard and killed scores of very young children.

4. I told them the Government had declared a day of National Mourning.
5. I told them I was going to pick 5 experienced presenters of reporters from all kinds of programmes to play the RTE interviewer and 2 of the new trainees to play Provo spokespersons (and one experienced reporter Gerry O Callaghan to play a Provo in case the trainees felt isolated.)
6. I told the 16 journalists that the trainee 'Provo' spokespersons with only 10 minutes notice would either 'draw' or 'win' every interview.

I picked the trainees not for how well they spoke, but because both of them- Ronan Kelly a graduate of NIHE and Tadgh Mac Donnagain, a teacher- had no rubbish about 'professionalism' to clutter up their minds, had no animus against 'theory', and above all had started the course early when I gave the most important lecture in any broadcasting course- the lecture I call 'The crucial concept of concensus.'

7. I sent the RTE Reporters off with 10 minutes to prepare their interview and most went off confident of making 'bits' of the Provo.
8. I gave the three 'Provos' a quick checklist of concensus weak points:

(a) how to exploit the 'professionalism' concensus. The RTE reporters, trapped in their Fleet St/Newsroom "professional" concensus would be chained down by the tyranny of Factualism (who, what, when, where, how, why) to which we would answer: Who ? The Provos. What ? Rocket attack. When ? This morning ? How ? From a lorry. Why ? Because it's a war/ in a war bad things happen/ we're sorry/ look at Dresden/ Bloody Sunday/ we really are very sorry/ look at the Birmingham 6/ we're sorry/ yes it will happen again/ as long as the North is under British rule/ sorry..

(b) how to exploit the leaky national concensus: we ran a checklist on the leaky national concensus: who gave you a mandate and all that ? Look we're really sorry/never meant to kill the kids/ meant to kill the RUC/ Why ?- even Cardinal O Fiach won't endorse the RUC/ we never set out to kill the kids/ the Paras set out to kill kids on Bloody Sunday/ it's a war/ look at Hiroshima/ mandate ? Gerry is an MP/ had Patrick Pearse a mandate at the GPO/ terrorist ? - what would you call Mick Collins ?/ we said we were sorry/ the rocket overshoot/ happens in war/ happened to many a good man during war of independence/ sorry/ no peace up there until Brits are out/ look there'll no peace down your way either until they're out/ again we're sorry/ I didn't have to come in here and be abused/ I knew you'd abuse me/ I was sent here to tell you we're sorry, but it's a war and we're soldiers and yes it will happen again/ Sorry/ Good night.*

* All Provo lines used to great effect on BBC/letters to Irish Times etc.

9. We then taped the 'interviews' and ran them for the Jury of 16, silent, shocked journalists who brought in a verdict by absolute consensus:

10. Unanimous verdict: Provos= 5 RTE= 0

11. We asked if the exercise had changed anyone's view. Now 5 reporters said they would not support the lifting of Section 31. But 14 of the 15 spoke to say that they had been deeply disturbed.

The person who did not speak -Ronan Kelly- when challenged to speak said he saw no point. Any first year student at a school of communications knows that you can't win while you have a leaky National Consensus.

And if you add a defective professional consensus to a leaky national consensus you might as well hand RTE over to the terrorists.

Lets get down to the question of consensus:

THE CRITICAL CONCEPT OF CONSENSUS

Consensus is the basis of any theory of television: we must know what it is, how it works, and why it decides who wins or loses on the screen.

What is consensus ?

Consensus is a contract to allow the expression of certain norms of speech, ideas, and behaviour, so long as they are perceived to fall within the general tolerances current at that time in the society; such consensus or contract being liable to break down at any given moment to be replaced by a new consensus which is instantly binding until it in turn breaks down.

This is why a broadcaster's family needs a good life insurance policy.

Consensus is a contract that allows us to do our work. If we break it too often the public will fire us. If we don't break it ever the public will switch off from boredom. Research shows that television cannot create a good consensus but it can help the public accelerate the pace of change.

The central thrust of this treatise is that the public is changing the national consensus on the North and that RTE is not helping that change because it is hanging on to an old broadcasting consensus in the South*

* Naturally the hush puppy broadcasters, very active in radio, do not want a change in either the national or broadcasting consensus.

A GENERAL DEFINITION OF CONSENSUS (AND CONSENSUSES*)

Consensus on television is not one consensus but a complex of contracts between: Broadcaster/Broadcaster, Broadcaster/ Public, Broadcaster/State, Broadcaster/Public/ State- endless variations of interlocking, unwritten and unspoken agreements. Consensus indeed, like the British Constitution, derives its coercive authority from the very fact of being unwritten, while at the same time understood as the ground rules by which the game is to be played by all parties on the field.

The number of consensuses that govern broadcasting is astronomical: taste, religion, clothes, nudity, bad language- you could say shit on the Late Late and live but not on Today Tonight- humour, blasphemy, and the well known consensus that no strike is a justified strike, and so on and on.

But by and large only 4 major consensuses need concern us here:

1. THE PROFESSIONAL CONSENSUS: This is the unspoken agreement as to what constitutes 'professional' behaviour by themselves and each other.
2. THE PUBLIC CONSENSUS: This is the area of tolerance extended by the public in reporting matters of public and private conflict.
3. THE POLITICAL CONSENSUS: This is the tense no man's land between the broadcasters need to know and the politicians' need to govern and mediated by the public consensus that one is as bad as the other.
4. THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS: the consensus that rules all others. This the dominant consensus contains all others- professional, public, political, religious, cultural- and assumes to itself the final power of decision.

The treatment of terrorism on television takes place in the context of two main consensuses: the professional and the national.

If the professional consensus is defective, as I believe it is, it can be changed by the broadcasters of RTE.

But if the National Consensus is defective, as I believe it is, then it can only be changed by our political leaders.

At present the National Consensus is not firm enough to allow Section 31 to be abolished without RTE becoming a propaganda vehicle for the Provos.

The next section sets out to show why this is so.

THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS

One of the most useful exercises I have set over the past ten years of producer training is to set up a role-play between two protagonists such as an IFA leader and a PAYE reformer in a profile two shot.

We tape the interview and play it back to the class. During this I hold a small toy umbrella over the head of whatever speaker at that moment is holding the national consensus. The decision is made by the class calling out: 'left' or 'right' upon which I move the umbrella.

There is never a hesitation in the class. People know within about 10" who is holding the consensus. You can play the game at home but be warned that it spoils current affairs programmes for ever.

The umbrella moves continually from side to side. At the end the person who has held it most often and can hold it at the end is the winner.

The class as it improves can call a change within 5" -that's all it takes to decide whether or not what the speaker is saying is in accord with our perception of what the national consensus is at that moment on that day.

Example (Hypothetical but typical remarks)

August 15 1987: Nell McCafferty: " I'm from Derry. We suffered.."

Class: Conditional Consensus Miss McCafferty.

November 15 1987: Nell McCafferty: "I'm from Derry. We suffered.."

Class: No consensus. (They suffered a damn sight more in Enniskillen.)

December 15 1987: Eamon McCann: "I'm from Derry. We had Bloody Sunday.."

Class: Conditional consensus Mr McCann. (Memory of Enniskillen fading)

Time is one level at which consensus changes.

Example (Hypothetical but typical remarks)

1 November 1987: Ogra Fianna Fail Kid: " Extradition ? No Way. Look at the Birmingham six situation.."

Class: Consensus with the kid.

15 November 1987: Ogra Fianna Fail Kid: " Extradition ? No way. Look at the Birmingham 6 situation.

Class: No consensus with the kid. He's either a psychopath or hasn't read the papers for the past week.

Circumstance is another level at which consensus changes.

The National concensus, swings like a pendulum, but given time will come to rest, where it always rested, unless the whole rope is shifted.

The opinion polls show that on the North the rope is slowly but surely shifting and the pendulum swings are growing less erratic.

RTE cannot shift the rope but it can and does have a duty to assist if the public is clearly trying to get out of the pit and out from under the pendulum which threatens to slice the South apart as well.

The interviews with the 'Provos' show clearly however that the process is far from completed and that the pendulum is still swinging over us.

Right now it is doubtful if an RTE reporter could take the umbrella away from a trained Provisional spokesperson versed in communications theory.

In the training videos the you might very charitably say that at the end both hands were on the umbrella of national concensus still struggling.

THE NATIONAL CONCENSUS IS IN CONTINUAL CHANGE

Example: It's 1936. Four people are standing at a bus-stop. One puts up the Umbrella of the then National Concensus- Daniel Corkery trinity of land, religion and nationality- which Corkery rightly said at that time constituted the national concensus on what it was to be Irish.

Mr Umbrella remarks: 'The farmers are the backbone of the country'. Three heads nod agreement. Mr Umbrella says: 'A Catholic country ought have a Catholic constitution' Three heads nod. Mr Umbrella says: 'The only solution up North is to get the Brits out.' Three heads nod.

Any head that did not nod to land, religion and nationality in 1936 got very wet- and sometimes it wasn't just rain that poured down.

Example: It's 1987. Mr Umbrella does his farmers bit- the PAYE worker goes mad. Mr Umbrella does his religion bit- the woman who voted for divorce goes mad. Mr Umbrella does his nationality bit- two others will shun him as a Provo supporter and the third will stand in out of the rain.

Example: It's the day of the Enniskillen massacre. When Mr Umbrella does his nationality bit, one of the others might even speak out in rage.

A good RTE broadcaster is always trying to figure out the bus-stop.

WHAT IS THE SOUTHERN NATIONAL CONSENSUS ON THE NORTH ?

We don't know. It changes briefly after an atrocity - goes green after the RUC kill someone with a plastic bullet or goes pale after the Provos kill 11 with a plastic bomb. The Provos can kill a lot more of 'them' than 'they' can kill 'our side' without provoking a reaction as we can see from the fact that Enniskillen is only an average Provo two month period compressed into one morning.

But even these short term changes can profoundly affect broadcasting and politics. This week a radio hush puppy proposal to offer Eamon McCann as an objective voice on the North ran into some minor flak. Normally radio hush puppies have no problem pushing on McCann and McCafferty although these two are not in the least hushed about where their sympathies lie. One wonders why the hush puppies want Gerry Adams on - a good downtown hush puppy with an NUJ card can do the same job even more effectively.

Or consider how Enniskillen created a consensus change that forced Fianna Fail to bite on the bullet of extradition within hours of the tragedy.

But by and large the National Consensus on the North is what media expert Stuart Hall calls a leaky consensus- the umbrella lets in rain. You might have a reporter waxing indignant in the aftermath of Enniskillen during a studio discussion when a news flash comes in that Cardinal O Fiach is flying to Rome to ask the Pope to intercede for the Birmingham 6 and suddenly the green consensus is back and the umbrella is leaking..

Three hard conclusions were drawn by us from the training course:

1. THE PROVOS CAN ALWAYS DRAW AS LONG AS THERE IS A LEAKY CONSENSUS.
2. THE PROVOS CAN ALWAYS WIN IF THERE IS A HUSH PUPPY INTERVIEWER.
3. THE PROVOS CAN NEVER LOSE IF THERE IS A LEAKY CONSENSUS AND NO CHANGE IN PROFESSIONAL BROADCASTING PRACTICES OR MONITORING OF HUSH PUPPIES.

This is a grim scenario but less grim for the politicians than for RTE.

1. At the time of writing there is ample evidence that the leaks in the national consensus umbrella are being mended by public and politicians.
2. There is no evidence however of RTE putting it's house in order. Hush puppy producers remained active in Radio One in the week of Enniskillen.
3. There is no sign either of a a new theory of 'professionalism' to help the public cope with the change in consensus now emerging from the polls.

FIRST CATCH YOUR CONCENSUS...

One of the many difficulties for television broadcasters is that each consensus has a television contractual life whose life-span ranges from butterfly to elephant, from 30" to 30 years.

Gay Byrne could be happily taking the mickey out of the Royal Family and up comes a news flash of the Mullaghmore atrocity and the death of Lord Mountbatten and suddenly Gay is in bad trouble- but only for that night- because the leaky consensus will be dripping away again next week.

You never know for sure that you have a firm grip on consensus.

Conscensus must not be confused with the fixed, set, views of the public. Consensus is the fixing of the views of the public. Consensus is infinite in range, in continual flux, intangible as a shadow- until it changes and knocks you unconscious.

The RTE film library has a fine documentary that offers very convincing testimony that Knock was a magic lantern joke. It was shown ten years ago to no public outrage because neither Knock airport nor statues had moved. It's as true today as when it was made. Yet consensus stoppe us repeating it during the Knock Airport controversy. That is an example of how bad consensus can degrade and cheapen a public service broadcasting.

.... NOW CHANGE IT AND SURVIVE

The 'professional' that is the bad broadcaster will always remain just on top of the current consensus and surf along with it until it suddenly recedes and pulls him/her into an undertow of oblivion.

Television cannot change a consensus. But it can force examination of a bad one (fiddling the dole) or accelerate a good one (stop saying nigger)

Television can delay or speed up- but not initiate or abort- a consensus without getting into bad trouble.

The mark of a great broadcaster is to be able to strengthen a good consensus (against violence) or break or change a bad concensus (don't inform on the lads) or shove along a developing one (shouldn't we stop calling people tinkers) and survive and surf along until he and RTE are safe ashore and the public feels a lot better for being helped across the dangerous road onto which it had taken it's first brave step.

And so from the concept of National Concensus on which we have only limited powers to the concept of television theory on which we have absolute powers and about which we have done absolutely nothing.

We must do something after Enniskillen..

Television is a great force for good. These are evil days. Television must break it's silence.

To break silence it must learn to speak with it's own voice...

TWENTY FIVE YEARS AND STILL NO THEORY OF TELEVISION

Now that we know that terrorists can exploit a leaky national concensus it is time to face up to a second unpalatable fact.

Terrorists also exploit a leaky or defective theory of 'professionalism'.

Our notions of 'professionalism' wheezed out of Fleet Street 25 years ago and then lay like a fog over RTE until banished by Leilia Doolan and me and others from the Programmes Division which is why Today Tonight is so good and why the public trust it. The public can smell 'professionalism' because 'professionalism' stinks.

But it still hung low over the Newsroom from which it spread to the third floor and gave RTE management and the RTE Authority a taste for it's bromides- the sounding brass of concepts like 'objectivity' (what kind of reporter except a psychopath could be objective about Enniskillen?), and 'balance' conceived as arithmetic (how many Protestants does it take to 'balance' the Pope in a divorce discussion on the Late Late Show ? Answer: no number could 'balance' him) And despite learned articles from philosophers and scientists and sociologists, Irish and foreign, showing that no human being could be 'objective' about events of which he was a part and that relativity theory showed that the presence of an observer affected the results - still the nonsense went on from Ministers for Post and Telgraphs and Corporate executives at Jacob's Award dinners, while eminent theologians stared in disbelief at men who could run an instrument of mass communication and imagine that it could be impartial on racialism*

Objectivity in the face of human suffering argues that the person is unfit to be employed in RTE on the grounds of being a psychopath.

*

To his great credit Tom Hardiman knocked the obscene notion of objectivity on racialism firmly on the head in a strongly worded public statement.

WHY HUSH PUPPIES ARE SO OBJECTIVE

Let me say I am not objective, impartial or balanced about Enniskillen nor is anyone else, whether hush puppy or Fine Gael broadcaster, and all the 'facts' about Enniskillen will be inevitably loaded with moral judgements such as how long you hold the camera on a corpse.

It's a small country. The public know your politics to the decimal point. All they ask is that you don't try to tell them any lies, and when you have a story to tell, that you tell it as well as you can, don't twist the facts, and if the story makes you sick, that you say that too.

So the public knows I support the Workers Party and can make adjustments for that. But how are they to make adjustments for hush puppy producers and reporters who decide to keep quiet about their politics as well as the fact that the Provos have killed 200 Protestants in Fermanagh with no retaliation from the Protestant side ?

The broadcasters will have to handle the hush puppies and this paper is an effort to get them to start to clean up their own house.

A simple example is the professional concensus among radio current affairs producers that The North is the big issue with listeners.

All the polls say the public do not want to hear about the North at all.

Some of this passion for the North is hush puppy stuff but most honest broadcasters go along with it because they think that public indifference is a kind of laziness instead of what it really is - a perception that the situation in the North is unmanageable unless the Provos call off the campaign. And until they do the public don't want to hear Provo hush puppies on radio saying it's going to go on. But the public now wants to hear, not about Provo politics, but about Provo victims. That's why Tish Barry's harrowing TV documentary 'Victims' was one of the few programmes about the North not switched off in the South. The South has heard about Catholic grievances for 60 years. Now it suspects that the Protestants of Fermanagh with 200 dead have a case. The Protestants in the worst days of discrimination never murdered one, never mind 200, Catholics..

The suspicion that the public is changing it's concensus is more than speculation: the MRBI polls, the hostile responses to shrill Catholic special pleading by Nell McCafferty, the warm response to the dignity of bereaved Protestants- all of this is palpable to most broadcasters as it is unpalatable to hush puppies who keep ringing Eamon McCann to come on and give an 'objective' view of some horror or other.

WHY THE HUSH PUPPIES HATE THEORIES OF BROADCASTING

The determination of the Hush Puppies to keep the Section 31 debate locked up in a cell marked 'censorship' and their hostility to attempts to consider the philosophical and political implications of absolute freedom of speech in civil society, must arouse some suspicion.

More marked is the hush puppy anger when Section 31 is debated in a wider perspective: the need for a comprehensive theory of television and society including a policy for dealing with those who wish to break down civil society while using the freedoms it confers to do so.

Tackling terrorism, the greatest threat to working people, means tackling the need for a theory of television that offers theory and practice on all aspects of broadcasting praxis- including handling those who try to use and abuse the medium from within or without.

So let us start...

THE BARRIERS TO A THEORY OF BROADCASTING

Twenty five years after the birth of television few RTE broadcasters could give a cogent account of the theory and practice of their work in the context of a civil society which charges the broadcaster with vast powers.

They could tell you what their job was - but not what it was for.

They are not alone. A global inarticulacy descends on all journalists when asked to think about what it is that they are doing, and why, apart from the money, they are doing it.

A UNESCO survey reveals that, of all professions surveyed, those whose job it is to ask questions are least able to answer questions about the theory which governs their own work- journalists, producers, editors.

Doctors, when they cut you, must know Harvey's theory of blood circulation. Engineers must know the theory of electro-magnetic fields. Bus drivers must know the rules of the road. All of them have a theory of their work.

But not broadcasters - and not us in RTE. We don't need any theory. We play brilliantly without it. We don't need the sheet music.

We play it by ear..

That is why the public is complaining about so many bum notes. We're getting it wrong about the North and we're getting it wrong about audiences in the greater Dublin area where our figures are dismal.

This is very sad as all producers and broadcasters I know, except for a poodle of hush puppies, think they are doing some public good. I think they are too. They could do better if they had an adequate theory of the new electronic medium called television.

But here we are still in Fleet Street- not even in Wapping !

NEVER MIND THE TRUTH- GIVE ME THE FACTS !

Broadcasters who operate on the psyche of the general public not only have no theory of the social dynamics of television- they are actively hostile to anyone who advances any theories on it.

Challenged by academics or critics (or more often by me on a course) for a theory of their work, they either trot out a 100 year old dictum from CP Scott of the Guardian " Facts are sacred but comment is free" (which is even more false on television than it is in print, given a 50° lens); or they wave the arcane NUJ Code of Conduct, which is not a theory but a manual of mythological aspirations; or if they are producers they take you to the library and show you show you a film they made about Vatican 2. But to give them their due they usually just grab their anoraks and rush off shouting about 'getting on with the job' or ' Look we have to play it by ear'; or- most terrifying valediction of all- " Don't worry about Section 31- it'll be all right on the night ! "

But as the videotapes show it won't be all right on the night.

It won't be all right until television reporters go up to the Training Department and people are brought in from Leeds and Strathclyde to talk to them about the basic differences between 'facts' and 'truths', and explain subtext in news bulletin prose, and the principles of fact retention on current affairs programmes, and how concensus is formed, and lots more..

RTE IS NOT THE IRISH TIMES ON OUTSIDE BROADCAST

RTE is not a newspaper. It can't work on print culture. An RTE reporter without a theory of television is like a man who lived all his life with oil lamps deciding to wire his house after asking a neighbour how to do it. If we keep on like that somebody is going to get a bad shock.

WHAT HAS A THEORY OF BROADCASTING GOT TO DO WITH SECTION 31 ?

For 20 years now our society has lived cheek by jowl with a savage civil conflict in a neighbouring state, which continually threatens to engulf our society. The public is telling us in the polls that after 20 years of the facts it wants to tell itself a truth: it wants out of the North:

The public is trying to change the national consensus.

The proof of that gigantic effort is all around us: the growing majority who refuse to contemplate a united Ireland in it's lifetime; the steady refusal to elect Provos to the Dail; the general shame, anger and sorrow at Enniskillen; the long lines of people who signed their condolences in the books at the Mansion House; the tardy decision of the Government, forced by public opinion to bring in extradition, the support for the police, whose competence was in question but whose not courage was not.

The sad truth however is that honest broadcasters are not assisting as midwives in the birth of remorse and renewal of conscience that is now going on in the aftermath of Enniskillen. The hush puppies barking is still keeping the honest journalist from knocking on the public's door and asking if it needs any help.

Television, like all the media, has fallen well behind in the challenge to chart and clarify the mighty struggle of the South to bury the past and face the future without a gun in it's pocket or hate in it's heart.

NEVER MIND THE TRUTH- GET ME THE FACTS !

Print professionalism is still tapping out 'facts' with dirty fingers when the public wants it to wash and feel the public pulse.

The people look up for truth and they are given facts. And a television fact, like a newspaper fact, is not a truth but a choice of perspective, of the elevation of the camera, the focal length of the lens, the total composition of the shot- change one and you change the facts.

The camera can't help lying but the broadcaster can.

The public looks up for truth and is told that, come the abolition of Section 31, the broadcaster will be able to bring it Gerry Adams live into it's very own home to tell it things it didn't know, like that it's a war and that the bomb was carried in a red Toyota- and he is very sorry.

THE TYRANNY OF FACTS

The people don't want to hear Gerry Adams tell them it's a war. They know that he's going to say that. They want to hear themselves saying they no longer mean to fight Gerry Adams war. And as for the red Toyota they just want to tell the people who drove it not to look for a safe house down here. They want less Factualism and more Editorialism.

They have taken a stand, and I suspect and other television producers too suspect, that the hush puppies don't like that stand. We are going to have more hush puppies on radio programmes to keep the tension up in the teeth of the public's determination to isolate and silence the Provos.

Facts ?

THERE IS NOTHING ANY PROVO COULD TELL THE IRISH PEOPLE THEY DO NOT KNOW EXCEPT THE NAME OF THE NEXT PROTESTANT OR POLICEMAN THEY MEAN TO KILL.

Facts ?

Facts are things you pick up at street corners. They tell you they love you but you suspect they tell everyone what suits them.

If you keep picking them up you get a disease called factualism.

Factualism is a lot of small talk to cover up the big silence on love.

Factualism is fancy foreplay which never penetrates to truth.

Factualism is media masturbation.

NO WONDER OUR AUDIENCES ARE FRUSTRATED...

Lets nail down what the public want and why we can't give it to them:

If the Provos kill innocents in Enniskillen ordinary viewers feel angry. The viewer does not want 'facts' (he can see the bodies): the viewer wants 'feelings' (moral anger). But RTE is not able to reflect what it's own viewers want because of (a) "professionalism" (I'm here to find out the facts) and (b) by "consensus" (well the guy with the beard has a point about Bloody Sunday) and (c) by the media consensus which dictates that if you ask a question you must let the man answer and no matter how much you hate him, if he is bullied, consensus comes over on his side.

The reason an RTE reporter can't 'win' is because he/she is working from a defective set of principles which I call 'professionalism' which derive from print technology where they work, are barely acceptable on radio, but have as much relevance to television as a book of Victorian etiquette has to the Rape Crisis Centre.

The root of the problem is the RTE conventional wisdom that an interview is a kind of forensic courtroom interrogation which, properly conducted, elicits the 'facts' which the jury, the public, then judges.

Empirical research from all over the world says this is rubbish:

TELEVISION IS NOT ABOUT THOUGHT- TELEVISION IS ABOUT EMOTION.

An hour's hard reading or ten minutes thought will tell you a truth:

Television is deeply inimical to thought. Television is deeply receptive to feeling. The delusion that thought is more important than feeling is confined to men. The folklore called 'professionalism' is constructed on a completely false male/thought/fact/ axis. All these assertions are proven in countless research papers, all unread by broadcasters.

TELEVISION CAN FEEL- SO IT CAN CONSOLE

Most broadcasters get nervy at the idea that television might be a woman.

Only men think that thought (facts) are more important than feelings (moral beliefs). Women think otherwise, and more and more, men are being forced to accept that women may well be right when they assert that the fact of a matter is not always the truth of the matter.

All empirical research shows that television is not good on facts but is powerful on arousing legitimate moral and emotional responses- as the Live Aid concerts demonstrated so well. It is extraordinary in a Christian country that I should have to go on so long about the legitimate place of moral feelings, but I driven to do so by the deep rooted status given in RTE to a demonstrably defective theory of factualism.

Television is not a fact medium. Television is a theatre and it deals only in drama and in facts only insofar as they are dramatic- and drama deals not in facts but in moral truths.

The empirical truth of this is to be found in the videotapes:

(a) The most gauche interviewers were the most effective. Siobhan Cleary who ignored the politics (the facts) was the most effective in terms of trying to say what she felt.

(b) The most 'professional' interviewers were the least effective when dealing with a Provo who was using the emotion of quiet commitment.

THE PROBLEM WITH PROFESSIONALISM IS THAT IT HAS NO FEELINGS

That is a real problem: a broadcaster suppressing his/her feelings and a public boiling over for an expression of some normal human emotion-

The problem of 'professionalism' is that the public don't want the RTE Reporter to ask who, what, when, how, or even why. Not when kids are dead.

The public want the reporter to cry and get angry like any parent and say: people who can do this are the scum of the earth, and I find it impossible to say anything here, and so on your behalf I am now going to go around and say I am sorry since I come from the South, and they are doing this in the name of a United Ireland, and I want no part of killing kids for that...

Instead of a human response RTE professionalism keeps the reporter buttoned up in his anorak for a thirty second burst on the red toyota, and if there is an interview with anybody it's a silly series of factual questions while the public is screaming for some sign of moral outrage..

How can we claim to be a public service if we can't perform the public service of helping our people to express grief and moral anguish ?

The reason we can't do that is because 'professionalism' - a spectre from the graveyard of Fleet Street- is stifling the development of a true professionalism of television that would enable us us to help our people grieve without being asked what colour was the car that carried the bomb - the kind of asinine question which the Newsroom dogma of Factualism deems appropriate to dealing with a national tragedy.

PROFESSIONALISM IS NOT PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

The professional consensus in 1977 was that if you talked to Mr Haughey about his career you brought up the arms trial. The professional consensus in 1987 is that you do not bring up any such thing.

Yet nothing has changed except Mr Haughey's fortunes. How can you build a code of 'professionalism' on a change of concensus? Do barristers or doctors change their ethics every 10 years or 10 minutes?

Let's stop using the pretentious word 'professional'

Broadcasting is not a profession; it does not require years of rigid academic study followed by admission to a profession by your peers.

Broadcasting is a craft, not a profession. Broadcasters are storytellers. Getting the facts right is the least of their duties. Like the storytellers of old they have other duties: to interpret the facts, to give moral guidance, to help their audience mourn the dead, to celebrate life, to ritually enact the sense of community loss at times like Enniskillen.

We are far more important than 'professionals' who pull teeth or title deeds or strokes..

We are the storytellers of our society.

We sit by a sun-gun instead of sitting by a fire. But the job is the same as it was when our ancestral story tellers sat to the fire at night- to tell our people of the doings of our rulers with fairness and dramatic colour to keep them interested so they can learn about politics; to help them laugh and celebrate life; to make them cry and console them when they mourn their dead; to advise and guide and draw out the minds of youth; to harness the productive and creative forces of society- these are our tasks. Sitting on the fence is not 'professionalism'- it's cowardice.

The storytellers would never demean themselves to the level of mere reporters- grey men who chronicled other men's deeds and offered no comment on them- a storyteller was part of his society and if it needed a kick in the arse as well as a pat on the back it got both, sometimes in the same night and in the same story.

The news should be more than anoraks outside factory gates.

Nothing is more disturbing than the delusion among broadcasters that the interview is a voyage of discovery, that they are recording angels set above that which they record, that given enough facts you get the truth- or indeed the more common delusion that the broadcaster's job is to get the 'facts' and that the 'truth' can be left to theologians.

THE THREE DELUSIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM

The code of 'professionalism' is nowhere more absurd than in the delusions that most broadcasters hold about what happens in an interview. Either they believe the stuff I shall now outline, or they don't believe it and if so, they should stop it and stop others doing it.

I refer to the three notions that can roughly be called (a) the interview as a voyage of discovery (b) the reporter as barrister in forensic cross-examination (c) the 'facts are sacred, comment is free' myth.

(a) The interview as a voyage of discovery. This is the notion whereby the intrepid Lois Lane sits down with C.J. Haughey and asks him questions not knowing what the answers will be - a kind of voyage of discovery up the waters of the Amazon, and they paddle along until a clever question makes him say something awful about the Arms Trial and she wins a Jacobs Award.

Now I have been 21 years producing interviews with politicians and I never heard a politician say anything he didn't want to say. All broadcasters know roughly what all politicians must say in answer to any question of the hour. Like, I know what Ray McSharry will say if I ask him isn't his leader wrong in his current economic policies? So I don't ask him that.

I don't mind Lois Lane asking Neil Blaney what he thinks of Conor Cruise O'Brien. What I object to is the pretence that she doesn't already know the answer, and if she doesn't she should not be employed in RTE. I object to the fiction that she is on a voyage of discovery when in fact every inch of it is charted by the RTE reference library. Or she can ask Donal Kelly.

The praxis of television production is much different. If I am producing such an interview I would tell Neil Blaney the question well in advance, since I know the answer, and he knows I know, and I want him to polish his reply to a cutting diamond edge. Then I would do the same for Conor Cruise O'Brien and give him plenty of time to buff up a bon mot, because I want the audience to get value for money and adlibs are never as good as well-scripted lines from two such polished actors as Conor and Neil.

The same goes for Mr Haughey and the Arms Trial. It's an old play. The audience knows the plot. So let's at least try and earn our money by giving them a first class production.

The public, since it has heard or seen the old troupers on stage before, prefers the lines to be well delivered. There is no voyage of discovery. Neil will not say he loves Conor and Conor will not say he loves Neil.

There is of course an outside statistical chance that Lois Lane will strike it lucky on the day Neil converts to Conor's scenario. If so she deserves her Jacobs award. I won mine by knowing what they would say.

Yes isn't it awful the way television isn't really spontaneous like real life at the Ard Fheiseanna when the crowd rises to it's feet quite as spontaneously as the special machine projects the spontaneous script for the party leader who was elected spontaneously without anyone ever going around on his behalf ?

As Otto Preminger said to a Lois Lane who told him she couldn't believe in Lifeboat because of the music 'I mean it was out in the ocean so where did they orchestra come from ?' " Same place as the camera came from."

I am not going on a voyage of discovery. I am going up a river I know well and the public expect me to show them the crocodiles and not keep saying "I wonder what we'll see next". I know what I am going to see next and if it is not very entertaining they'll switch off and I am then on a real voyage of discovery - up shit creek without a paddle.

Lois Lane wondering what Neil will say about Conor when she pops the question is like wondering what happens at the end of Hamlet. I know what happens. The public knows what happens. They don't want to know the plot. They know the plot. They don't want to know the facts. They know the facts. They want the ritual enactment of the facts in a way that offers them a dramatic truth.

They want documentary drama.

(b) The Reporter as Barrister. The videotaped interviews with the 'Provos' saw plenty of examples of the tired old notion that a television interview is a courtroom, and that the reporter by forensic cross-examination will trip up the Provo, who will burst out crying, and whisper into his hankie that 'yes my lord, we have no mandate and so we'll call off the campaign.'

The Public is very tired of RTE barristers who don't care whether the client is guilty or not. The Public is crying out for justice.

The public knows all the answers- they've heard the dreary ritual before: Who? /The Provos, What/a bomb, When ?/this morning, Where ?/the memorial how?/timer, Why?/it's a war, plastic bullets, Brits, Ruc, and so on and on and on until the currency of factualism is totally devalued. He said his crowd planted the bomb. The public want to know what the sentence is ?

At this point the intrepid RTE reporter barrister folds his brief, makes an excuse and leaves the courthouse while the public stare after him..

By what principle of public trust does RTE avoid taking sides (I don't take sides, I take pictures) in a savage terrorist campaign conducted against the wishes of the majority of citizens in the two states ?

Why did we have no programme on Enniskillen programme using the facts as signposts to a measured editorial moral summary by RTE acting on behalf of a nation which desperately needed to express it's anger?

No of course the Newsroom can't do it. Not because it doesn't have the talent- it is stuffed with talent. But because it's News Executives are still in thrall to the notion of 'professionalism', to the delusion of the reporter sitting on a fence outside civil society, to the fantasy of the reporter as recording angel chronicling our suffering from afar, to the dreary spectre of CP Scott rising from the mists of Fleet Street with that greatest of all lies: " Facts are sacred but comment is free"

Let me tell you. Facts are whores. To be used by whoever bought them. The camera always lies. Buy a rubber plant and a jar of vaseline for the lens and stick the rubber plant in front of the lens and the vaseline on the lens and point the camera at Ballymun and it will look beautiful.

Facts aren't sacred- they can be used and abused. Comment isn't free- the commentator is not free to tell lies in my book.

Compare an contrast two views of communication theory:

"Facts are sacred- but comment is free." (Scott of the Guardian)

"Facts are free- but comment is sacred." (Harris of RTE)

Today Tonight satisfies the public as News never does because it never gives the 'facts' on the wicked and ungodly: it collects all the facts, not just as facts, but as evidence, informed by a moral vision and lays them before the jury of the public with such style and logic and erudition that the jury does not have to stay out even for the commercial break.

Today Tonight does not see the an interview as a voyage of discovery, or as a cross-examination or as an arid exercise in finding out the 'facts' as if that were a substitute for finding out the truth. What it does is find the answers first and then makes the whole programme one huge question to an answer it already knows. Stating the question on film in a dramatically intelligible way is what makes it a moral drama and not a trivial pursuit full of useless answers to useless questions. A computer could probably 'ask' the question by the time TT is finished it's research. Television praxis is not to ask the right question in the hope of a bit of the truth. It is to find out the answer as far back as possible and then spend as much time formulating a visual way of asking the question that makes the banked-up answer dramatically satisfying and morally elevating.

This praxis reached it's highest point in the recent brilliant programme on a dirty West Cork land swindle. Possibly the most professional programme ever made in RTE current affairs there was nothing of the dreary "professionalism" in it. It used all the techniques of drama- music, shock cuts, captions- just as any good teacher would and for the same reason: to inform, to educate, and above all to entertain.

Pat Butler knew all the answers. Months of research by Shay Howell went into getting these answers. Weeks of thought by producer Con Bushe went into determining what visual context would best point up the meaning of the predictable answers. It's no good getting a mumbled reply in bad light. Pat Butler then had to entice the interviewee to give known answers so lucidly that the viewer would grasp their every nuance whether that was tragedy, comedy or mendacity.

This is the true praxis of television production- the kind of craft that has evolved a technique of handling facts, not reverently as valuable in themselves, but as bricks in a mosaic that literally puts you in the picture. Brecht called this kind of drama not seeing but seeing through.

The 'professional' broadcaster just wants the public to see the Provo. The Brechtian broadcaster wants the public to see through the Provo.

It's called documentary drama.

And documentary drama is the only way that RTE can handle the problem of treating terrorism in our society. The Provos can win in any one to one interview. They can win in any voyage of discovery. They can win against any Lois Lanes in wig and gown from props. They can especially win if all the public gets are facts that make no mosaic.

They can't win against documentary drama.

They can't win if we evolve a theory of television.

They can't win if we understand that television is always drama.

TELEVISION IS A THEATRE OF FACT

Television is not a courtroom but a theatre- a unique mass medium of moral and dramatic communication with laws of presentation unique to itself. When it borrows the philosophy of print culture instead of creating it's own as I am helping to do in this document it (a) digs it's own grave because it cannot do what newspapers do and (b) sells itself short.

Television is a conduit for public drama, public ritual, public debate- all of which must observe the laws of drama if the public is to be satisfied. It is more like a Mass than a leader in the Irish Times.

Drama is a dirty word. RTE executives think it takes place over in Airfield House. Actually it takes place in supermarkets.

Go into a supermarket with a seeing eye and watch people watch themselves pick tins of beans. They are watching a drama. Television has the power to make the commonplace strange and give back a sense of wonder.

Since it is now commonplace to blow a milkman's head off in front of his children it is important that television make that commonplace murder strange again and restores the sense of the wonder of life and the cruelty of taking it, and the barbarity of the hurt to his children, and such feelings of wonder move to shame and grief and anger and action..

Drama is a ritual enactment of the public or private predicament of a character, a society, a world, into which we are drawn and during which our souls are 'purged with pity and terror'..

Was there ever a nation so badly in need of the ritual enactment of it's predicament, in need of purging the terror with some pity ?

Certainly our 'factual' footage did no such thing. We got the "facts" on the bodies but where was the purging, the pity and the terror from television- the most powerful emotional medium the world has ever known ?

The News Gurus don't believe this stuff. Television is always drama ?

IF TELEVISION IS NOT ALWAYS DRAMA THEN-

Why does Brian Farrell wear a carnation on election night ? You don't need a carnation for such an important male/thought/fact/ situation. He does so because Brian Farrell understands that election night is also a social rite, a cultural event, an emotional ritual. In short- a drama.

IF THE NEWS IS NOT DRAMA THEN-

Why is the signature tune so tense ? Why not play Brahms ? Why do the headlines use terse dramatic language ? Why do reporters outside factory gates go into a high decibel level instead of a conversational tone ? Why do news editors scour the station for the most dramatic pictures. Why not feature the most important events of the day- stock market prices- instead of the most dramatic- a row in the IFA ?

THE RTE NEWSROOM IS A THEATRE THAT PRETENDS ITS A NEWSPAPER

The whole news day in RTE is a search for drama which is what the public wants, and rightly wants, because drama is about truth and facts are only facts. Yet only the best and brightest in the Newsroom are prepared to admit that television is a theatrical medium dealing in facts not fiction.

I believe our news staff are probably the best in the world but I believe that news culture and the gurus that form it live under the illusion that our wondrous electronic medium is a moving leader page in the Irish Times. And such gurus get very ratty about programmes like Borderline when they dare to discuss heavy issues of sex in an explicit way because such discussions in the minds of the Gurus should be only done by heavy reporters in the heavy pages of the Irish Times.

This is arrogant pomposity on the part of the News Gurus who are much more in showbusiness than Borderline given the dramatic choice of stories each night. The News in the canteen is in the drama business but for purposes of Lions dinners pretends it's in the information business. The truth is that it is in both, but more in drama than information as we will see-

Countless research papers have shown over and over that viewers retain almost no 'facts' from bulletins with film footage. The retention of fact is much higher (but still low) if the news is read by a newscaster. Yet in defiance of all empirical research, news editors will tear the station apart for film footage. And like Borderline they will pick the most moving, emotive and thus dramatic shots. They're in drama.

They are doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. Ask them and they will say it's to inform the public about the facts of the famine in Ethiopia. They seem to find it impossible to face that the footage gives us no 'facts' about Ethiopia but does give us 'feelings' about Ethiopia. We need more feelings about Ethiopia than facts so what's the problem ?

I mean who in God's name thinks that pictures of starving kids gives us the slightest idea of the factual economic and political situation in that country ? And nobody knows better than News that if they did give us the kind of lofty 'responsible' (to whom ?) factualism that they preach at Junior Chamber dinners the viewers would rightly switch off.

Those who want print technology 'facts' are advised to switch to Aertel which does what newspapers used do only much quicker.

In God's name- or in the name of humanity- where is the shame in showing footage to arouse 'feelings', of pity or anger about hunger in any poor country. The real shame is to be arousing emotions under the pretence of dealing in facts, while at the same time whinging about Borderline which, openly arouses emotions so that it can get to grips with the facts of life

The News is just as much in showbusiness as the Late Late and News Gurus at Divisional meetings have no more insight into what the people of Dublin think than the youngest presenter on Borderline.*

Like everybody else in RTE he's in show business. At least Brian Farrell has the gumption to wear a carnation instead of a long face.

Television is documentary drama and nothing else:

That is why there is no more riveting television programme than an Outside Broadcast. An Outside Broadcast is real life drama as it happens. Since the Irish Times can't do that, and we can, why don't we stop pretending that we are only a visual newspaper and be proud of being a conduit of public drama which is a nation talking out conflicts with itself ?

If RTE took it's own medium seriously it would mark Enniskillen not by 'fact' news interviews, or 'fact' current affairs discussions, but by taking it's OB units to the people of Dublin gathered in halls or pubs and in ten minutes you would get a genuine and compassionate outpouring of real and not synthetic public emotion - and the odd Provo would only show how isolated they were from the majority.

RTE feels that it is somehow shameful to admit that television is not a 'fact' but a 'feeling' medium; that 'drama' is a dirty word; that we must mimic the gravitas of print culture. And while we go around pretending we are a factual and not a theatrical medium, the very politicians we hope to impress are paying Bunny Carr to suppress the 'fact' side and play up the 'feeling' side of their personalities !

TELEVISION MUST CHANGE IF THE CONCENSUS IS TO CHANGE

The Irish people are steeling themselves to battle against their own ambivalent history.

They need all the help they can get.

RTE must play it's part, without respect to person, in helping on that dialogue and examination of conscience that began at Enniskillen.

A 20 POINT PROGRAMMING PLAN TO EXPLAIN PROTESTANT FEARS AND ACCELERATE CHANGE IN THE SOUTHERN CONSENSUS AGAINST TERRORISM ON A SECTARIAN BASIS.

1. All reporters to be instructed to ask all guest hush puppies a question at the beginning of all interviews: 'Do you support the armed struggle that led to Enniskillen?' No if's, but's or modifiers. Yes or no.
2. The News to send political staff to do personal 'Editorials' regularly from the North with no regard to present norms on "Professionalism". These editorials to be frequent, sharp, incisive and replete with value judgements. All the better if hush puppies are forced to do some on the next Enniskillen so we can find out who they support.
3. All News Bulletins to hold on close ups of shot postmen, teachers, lorry drivers and others so that the public can be sure the hush puppies miss nothing of the glory of the armed struggle. This footage to be shown at peak hours and RTE to engage in seminars and discussions with teachers, psychologists, and doctors about how much the public can take of close-ups of men with holes in their heads and flies in their eyes.
4. Sean O Casey's three plays on nationalism to be televised with fresh emphasis on his polemics against bloodthirsty nationalism, together with new productions of Behan's 'Hostage' O Connor's 'Guests of the Nation' Frank McGuinness's 'Sons of Ulster' and rescreening of 'The Informer'.
5. A schools series edited by Louis Cullen dispelling some of the major myths of the Penal Laws which go on poisoning generations of children.
6. Two films on the the poor Protestants of Donegal and West Cork.
7. A programme explaining the progressive role of William of Orange in creating a Dutch republic against the Spanish and their Inquisition so as to place in context the historical fears of 'Popery'
8. A documentary on militant Catholicism and Catholic Action 1936-56 with special reference to the firing of teachers, librarians, the picketing of the Central Church Mission, the Mother and Child scheme with a view to explaining Protestant fears of Roman Catholic interference in the State.
9. A major series on the role of the Catholic Church in the North since 1900 with special emphasis on it's opposition to social legislation and religious reconciliation and interdenominational education.
10. A programme on the atrocities committed against Protestants during the the rising of 1641 and the atrocity at Scullabogue in 1798.

11. A 13 part Revisionist series entitled: " Nationalist Myths of Irish History" Any good historian is always revising..
12. Regular cross border studio discussions to remind us that the North is full of men like Mr Wilson of Enniskillen.
13. Revival of cross border quizzes, games, competitions on the strict condition that there be a 50/50 religious mix.
14. A series on Luther, Wesley and other great Protestant divines.
16. A major series on Northern Ireland exploring clinically the relative oppression of Catholics and Protestants and the historical role of the Republican Movement in breaking up all progressive tendencies to united action by raising the national question at the expense of workers unity.
17. A clinical and polemical critique of the relationship between fascism and the Republican movement from 1936- 1948. Let them reply.
18. A full time,myth-destroying unit like Timewatch to clear away folklore, substitute history, and do little items like why the Abbey Players were not allowed to attend the funeral service of Ernest Blythe.
19. A frank and funny examination of what Protestants and Catholics thought of each other growing up North and South and the myths and fantasies on both sides.
20. All Northern correspondents to be supplemented by regular visits from political staff who wish to do editorials. Northern staff to be changed more frequently to avoid danger of going native. Northern staff to be required to do frank editorials on current matters which may be commented on by Dublin Political staffs without regard to dog eat dog.

POSTSCRIPT

The Good Book never said anything about the facts setting us free. It is the truth that sets us free. We learned all that from parables.

A parable is a documentary drama.

O.....O

Title: Television and Terrorism

Organisation: Irish Television Producers Association

Author: Eoghan Harris

Date: 1987

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit www.leftarchive.ie

The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.