

Challenging Media Bias

By Andy Smith, Press & Public Relations Officer, Campaign for an Independent Britain

On Britain's relationship with the European Union, says Rod Liddle, former editor of the Today Programme on Radio 4, "The BBC is undoubtedly institutionally biased." Liddle is one of a growing number of current and former BBC staff who have admitted that the Corporation has its own political agenda. Europe is not the only subject on which Britain's official Public Service Broadcaster suppresses alternative viewpoints. Regarding "the other side of the story" on climate change, TV presenter Peter Sissons recently claimed that "It is effectively BBC policy ... that those views should not be heard."

There is a common misconception that Britain has a free, pluralistic and diverse media, and that the wide variety of political opinions expressed by columnists in the national daily and Sunday papers – including Eurosceptics such as Christopher Booker, Peter Hitchens and Simon Heffer – highlights this diversity. But while columnists like these undoubtedly provide a range of refreshing alternative viewpoints, including scepticism about the EU and climate change, they are not typical. Most newspaper editors and senior journalists are, like their opposite numbers in the broadcasting world, unashamedly pro-European and dismissive of Eurosceptic opinions.

The British press is far from diverse. Editors and senior journalists, including the lobby correspondents who report from Westminster, are guilty of "groupthink". While a few columnists are willing to challenge the Establishment consensus on Europe, those in charge of the nation's daily and Sunday newspapers, TV and radio stations, and leading press agencies, are not. The view that we are in the EU forever, and only extremists and cranks believe otherwise, is so deeply ingrained in the higher echelons of the British media that any organisation or individual calling for the UK to withdraw from the European Union is automatically written off as "beyond the pale". This is the challenge that the Campaign for an Independent Britain faces on a daily basis.

In my role as Press & Public Relations Officer for the CIB, I am in regular contact with journalists and broadcasters, and try to provide them with a steady flow of news and comment from an anti-EU perspective. They listen to what I have to say, they take notes, and they sometimes even call me back later for more information. Very occasionally, they manage to persuade their editors to let them squeeze a quote from me, and a name-check for CIB, into their reports. But hardly ever will they publicise CIB's call for Britain to leave the EU. Quite simply, we are seen as a useful source of information about Europe but our uncompromising withdrawalist policy makes us "too extreme".

No newspaper, not even the broadly Eurosceptic Daily Express, the most maverick (and in some ways the most patriotic) of the national dailies, has been willing to promote the CIB or align itself publicly with our cause. That is why we have had to produce our own tabloid newspaper – Free Britain – and why we concentrate most of our PR efforts on the regional and local press which is less susceptible to the "groupthink" of the national media. We are also focusing much more attention on the web. In addition to our own site, www.eurosceptic.org.uk, and our blog site, we post news and information on numerous other websites and online magazines, and endeavour to secure online coverage wherever and whenever we can.

We will of course continue to fight to get our message across in the "mainstream" national media. But until the Great British Public wakes up to the true extent of media bias and control, and starts to challenge the pro-EU mindset of those in senior editorial positions in Britain's newspapers and broadcasting organisations, CIB will be fighting an uphill battle.

Help us challenge the media consensus on Europe. Write to the editor of your daily or Sunday paper and urge them to give a fair hearing to anti-EU opinions. Write to the Director-General of the BBC and to the Head of News & Current Affairs demanding that the Corporation upholds its Royal Charter commitment to “due impartiality” and that it airs “all significant viewpoints” including that of CIB, Britain’s leading cross-party Eurosceptic organisation.