

News from everywhere

MILLIONAIRE ship-owner Ravi Tikkoo, who leaves Britain at the end of the tax year, will probably be most remembered for using Grimsby 'pirates' to relieve his strike-bound tanker, Globtik Venus. But the story of his Globtik Tokyon is just as interesting. This £20m super-tanker was built in Japan with the aid of a £4m grant from Britain.

Private Eye (March 18) describes how Tikkoo and the Distillers company got together to use the tanker in a neat little tax dodge which cost the Exchequer a further £12m.

In 1972 Distillers bought a controlling interest in Tikkoo's firm, Globtik Tankers Ltd., and agreed to help finance the building of the Globtik Tokyo.

What attracted Distillers was a loophole in the tax laws which meant that the enormous depreciation on the tanker could be set against tax on their highly profitable whisky and gin.

In 1973 Globtik estimated tax losses on the ship at £12m. Globtik then "sold" these losses to Distillers for just over £4m.

The result was that Distillers saved themselves £8m in tax. Tikkoo got finance for his ship, £4m in cash, plus the £4m government grant.

The trick annoyed even the Tory government at the time, and Chancellor Anthony Barber plugged the

loophole in his next budget.

Distillers promptly sold back their shares to Tikkoo and his wife.

Although Tikkoo is leaving, he plans to keep his company in Britain. That way he will avoid having to repay any of the grant on his ship.



WITH RENEWED controversy over the Official Secrets Act, there was a phone-in at MI5 during March.

The department, which keeps track of "subversives" in Britain, is in Curzon Street, London. Callers to 01-930 6789 blocked the switchboard for a time, but then MI5 found a way to stop people pumping money into coin boxes to keep the lines engaged.

Anyone who wants to chat to MI6 (object: dirty trick abroad) can still reach them on 01-928 5600.



LATEST organisation to join the amateur espionage craze is Midland Bank.

A pin-striped young man from one of their Brighton branches went round shop-keepers, asking about a radical bookshop called "Public House". He wanted to know what sort of people frequented the shop and whether their literature was

"I want nothing to do with this migration."

subversive.

His explanation was that the bookshop had asked to open an account at the Midland. This was odd, because the shop had not asked for an account and never had any dealings with the Midland.

At first the bank refused to comment, but then said the investigation had been ordered by their Chief Inspector in London. The reason, they said, was that the bookshop had been mentioned in a magazine which criticised Midland Bank's involvement in South Africa. —Bristol Voice.

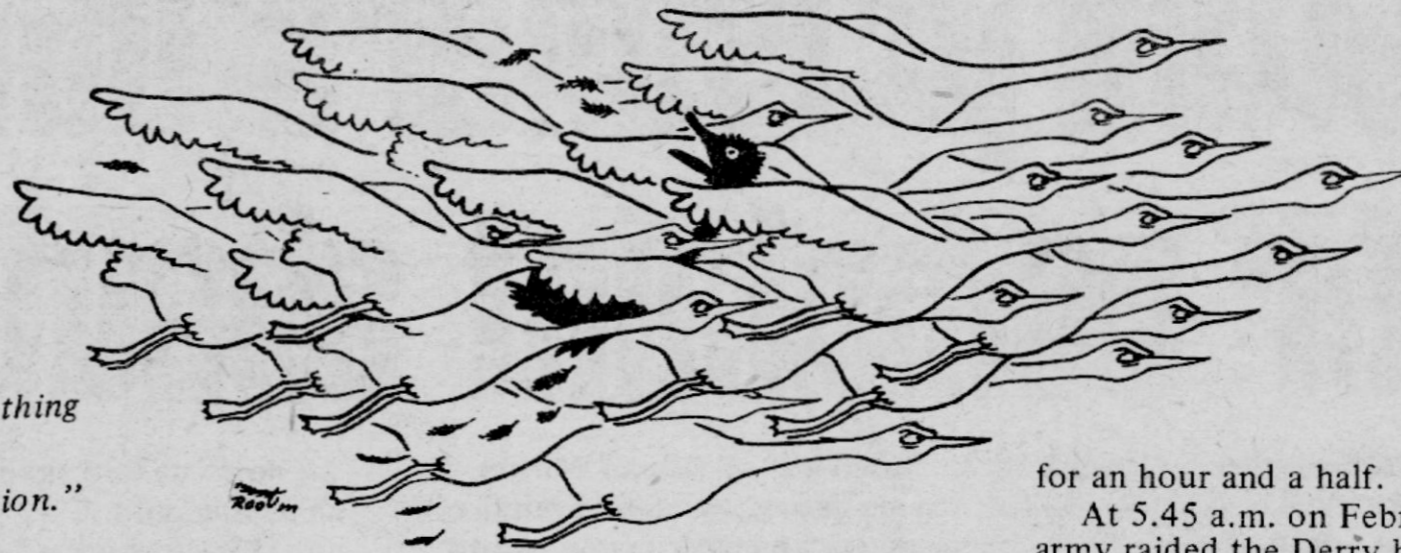


LONDON TRANSPORT — still under attack by the Fare Fight campaign (Free Press 29) — plan to instal carpets on 25 buses.

The carpets, in 100% pur wool, will be laid on the centre aisles of upper and lower decks of buses used on some central routes.

Colours will be black, red and silver-grey. As you might have guessed, it's part of the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations.

The carpets will appear on



Easter Monday and disappear — appropriately — on Guy Fawkes night. —London Free Press.



PACIFIST Jim Hindson was arrested in Liverpool under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and released after 33 hours. Press reports left the impression this was just a silly, isolated blunder by the police.

In fact it was part of a combined police/army operation on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Mr Hindson was returning from a weekend conference in Londonderry organised by supporters of Peace News. The conference — attended by about thirty people — discussed what "community initiatives" might achieve in northern Ireland.

(Peace News, incidentally, does not give wholehearted support to the government-approved Peace People, and they did not attend.)

Possibly the authorities were simply curious, but more likely they wanted to discourage "initiatives" outside their own control.

The first trouble came on February 14 at Stranraer, the route chosen by most people from the conference to return to the mainland. Many of them were searched and questioned

for an hour and a half.

At 5.45 a.m. on February 17 the army raided the Derry home of the conference organisers, Hilary Sidwell and Robin Percival (who comes from Widnes). Robin was taken away, together with three issues of Peace News and an old British Withdrawal campaign leaflet. He was released after four hours' questioning.

Mr Hindson was picked up off the Liverpool boat on February 16. A woman travelling with him was questioned but not held. He was photographed and fingerprinted (no magistrate's order is necessary under the Terrorism Act).

What annoyed the police was that he refused to give his home address. He gave his family's address and that of his employer so that his identity could be checked. He was questioned about an article he wrote for Peace News several months ago.

Clearly the Terrorism Act is useful for investigating a wide range of dissident activities. Jim Hindson said the Special Branch accepted that he was a pacifist. If they had seriously suspected him of terrorism they would have made chemical tests of his clothing for traces of explosives.

Recent Home Office figures showed that nine out of every ten people arrested under the Act by Merseyside Police were later released. It would be interesting to know how many of these 504 "mistakes" provided the Special Branch with useful information about non-terrorist activities.

TURNING OFF THE NEWS

THERE'S A WIDESPREAD belief that the news on television is more 'neutral' and 'reliable' than that in newspapers.

One recent survey showed that 75 per cent of people thought BBC television was the "most accurate and trustworthy" source of news. But evidence compiled by a research group at Glasgow University shows the reality is very different.

Equipped with video-tape recorders, the group monitored all national TV news bulletins for five months (January to May, 1975). Their first results have just been published in a book, "Bad News".

In particular the book deals with the way news is selected and how this affects reporting of industrial affairs.

When reporting industrial action, the media usually concentrate on the effects of the action and neglect the reasons for it. If no reason is offered, people naturally get the idea that no reason exists. The result is that what may well be a perfectly rational action by strikers appears stupid or even sinister.

RUBBISH FROM GLASGOW

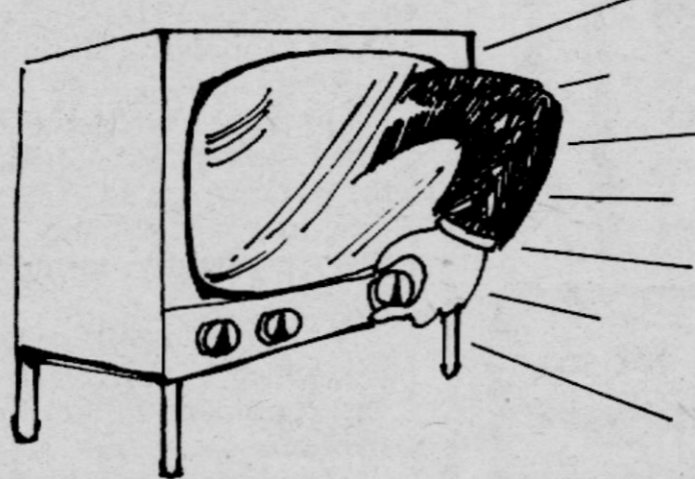
An example, studied in detail in the book, was the "Glasgow Rubbish Strike". Actually it was a strike by corporation drivers with Heavy Goods licences (only half of them dustcart drivers). It lasted over three months and was one of the biggest TV news stories in the first half of 1975.

In all fourteen people were interviewed on national bulletins during the strike. They were: The Secretary of State for Scotland (four times), a university professor (three times), the Lord Provost of Glasgow (twice), a Member of Parliament, a councillor, a fire officer, a Lt. Colonel (twice), a 2nd Lieutenant, four soldiers and two union officials (four times). No-one taking part in the strike was interviewed, and since the strike was unofficial, the union could hardly be expected to speak for the men.

On the day the strike ended one man did appear on ITN. He said the drivers were prepared to go on strike again "if it comes to the cause again, and it's a justful cause."

The book comments: "The public hardly had a chance to discover from the bulletins what this 'justful cause' was."

Out of 102 reports on all channels, 67 gave no indication what the dispute was about. Where the cause of the dispute was mentioned, generally it was made out to be a simple pay claim. Only 14 reports men-



tioned "parity" or "regrading".

Much was made of the fact that this was the drivers' second strike within three months, leaving the impression the men were strike-happy. In fact there was a rational explanation: The drivers had gone on strike the previous autumn, wanting parity with HGV drivers in other industries. They went back after four weeks on the understanding the corporation would negotiate a local agreement if national talks (still in progress at the time) failed to produce a satisfactory settlement.

The second strike started when the corporation went back on their promise to negotiate a local agreement. This was the central issue, yet it was only reported on local programmes in Scotland and in fifteen words on one national BBC bulletin.

The need to illustrate television news with pictures and film affects the choice of items. News which is visually interesting often gets preference.

The day the Glasgow strike was announced news bulletins focused on the "health hazard" and showed film of piles of rubbish.

At that time there were no piles of rubbish, and it was another seven weeks before the corporation officially declared a hazard. So why choose a hazard which did not exist as a news 'angle'?

Part of the reason is that there was interesting library film readily available of rubbish during the previous strike.

CREATING A DISASTER

When troops were eventually called in to clear the rubbish, Glasgow Trades Council organised a protest march.

ITN's news at 1 p.m. had no film, but reported a peaceful march which "met a certain amount of heckling and abuse from passers-by." At 5.50 there was no comment on whether the march was peaceful or how it was received by onlookers. Six shots of film

were shown — five of marchers passing, and one of women standing watching passively.

News at Ten showed seven shots of film — five of silent marchers, one of an army landrover, one of several women shouting and another of two children shouting. This inspired Trevor MacDonald to report: "If the purpose of today's march was to rally support for the strikers, their demonstration was a disaster... marchers were shouted at, booed and jeered by people whose rat-infested rubbish has been lying in backyards now for ten weeks..."

So the same peaceful march, reported by the same channel at 1 o'clock had, nine hours later, become "a disaster".

JUST MAD ABOUT CARS

The book confirms what many people have long suspected — television is obsessed with the motor industry.

During the five-month study period the motor industry featured in 255 bulletins and took up 28% of all TV strike reporting. Actually strikes in car factories accounted for only 6.7% of total days lost through strikes.

Engineering was more seriously affected. 24.9% of days lost were in engineering and there were 260 stoppages (compared with only 38 in the motor industry). Engineering strikes features in only 43 bulletins and took up 5.3% of strike reporting.

Out of the Government's list of the "Top Twenty" strikes, nine were completely ignored by television. Six of these major disputes were in engineering. Only one was reported by television, and even then the issue seemed to be how far it would affect the motor industry.

The book concludes there is no direct relationship between the severity of strikes and the amount of coverage they get. So why is one strike "newsworthy" and another not?

One reason seems to be that those who work in the media see themselves as consumers rather than workers. And the car, as the supreme symbol of the consumer society, naturally gets the most attention. The book points to other strikes reported from a consumer's point of view:

"A strike that grounds aircraft is highly inconvenient to the holidaymakers and businessmen, a railway strike is very troublesome to the commuter, a doctors' work-to-rule or hospital workers' boycotting of private patients is distressing to the consumer

of health services and a strike of dustcart drivers is a growing difficulty for the consumer wishing to dispose of his unconsumed leftovers.

"Given this emphasis, it is difficult to structure news in a way that does not, implicitly at least, blame those groups or individuals who precipitate action that, in one way or another, is defined as 'disruptive'."

WILSON'S SPEECH RE-WITTEN

The media's hunting season in the car factories usually goes full blast for several weeks then stops abruptly when reporters get bored with it. The one described in the book lasted for two months and seemed to be sparked off by a speech Harold Wilson made about "manifestly avoidable stoppages".

A little earlier in the speech Wilson had spoken of the problems of "private capital" and it's likely he used the word "stoppages" deliberately to include not only strikes but stoppages caused by bad management and shortage of cash.

The first report of the speech, on the BBC's Nine O'Clock News, was accurate: "The Prime Minister... appealed to management and unions in the car industry to cut down on what he called 'manifestly avoidable stoppages'." Extracts from the speech, including the bit about private capital, followed.

During the next 1½ hours the BBC did a "1984" job on the speech. The next bulletin went like this:

"The Prime Minister has appealed to workers in the car industry to cut down on avoidable stoppages..." Extract from the speech again, this time leaving out the bit about private capital.

On ITV, News at Ten reported Wilson "gave workers a blunt warning" and "it was up to workers to cut what he called 'manifestly avoidable stoppages'."

The re-writing of Wilson's speech continued for days. Almost a week later BBC-2 referred to it as a speech "about senseless strikes". Altogether the improved version (emphasising strikes rather than stoppages) was quoted 21 times by ITV and 21 times by BBC.

● Anyone interested in the way the media work will find "Bad News" very revealing. For trade unionists who deal with the media, the book is essential. Unfortunately the book, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, is only in hardback. So you'll have to fork out £5.95 or borrow it from the library.