

Task and Finish Group on the future outlook for the media in Wales

Response from Vale of Clwyd Trades Union Council

Introduction

The Trades Council says that in Wales at this time there is a need for the development of the media not to find ways of cutting back.

Devolution

It is particularly true of Wales as it adapts and uses its new powers that the Welsh Assembly's aims and the legislation enacted are conveyed to the general public in a manner they understand with their avenues to express their views made easily available.

A media doing its job needs to relay the information in some depth and to comment on it so that we have a well informed populaceAll the evidence shows that currently these objectives are under threat as the undermining of all sectors of the industry continue apace; operatives are sacked, there's no other word suitable enough, and resources cut, with continual dumbing down of the news on view and its presentation.

The media as an industry in Wales.

Development

A prime consideration of the Wales media is the provision of opportunities for our brightest and best young people to forge well paid highly skilled careers- At Home in Wales - This requires new gathering and broadcasting, in all its forms to advance and be developed here in Wales.

The Trades council sees the media not just as news gathering and current affairs but as a tool for economic advancement much as the opportunities are being built, programme making by the BBC in Cardiff. There needs to be research into media as new technology advances and how hard copy on paper fits in with on line technology.

The committee should look at media industry hotspots (enterprise zones) developing new and existing technology in the production of print on paper (mags say) and on screen. Looking to develop such a clean industry in desirable environments

And look at the Labour plans, abandoned by the Coalition government, to combine and develop newspaper, radio and television locally keeping it on the agenda - particularly when, as it will, the Jeremy Hunt plan for local television fails.

Television is undoubtedly the main medium with Radio second) for people to receive their news and views on current events and here again cuts will lead to a less knowledgeable populace making it likely will be making the best of the new devolutionary process as well as improving through an informed society a better society.

So we must ensure that Wales has a proper TV and radio service fit for a bi-lingual Country. However uniquely to Wales because of geography and our North/South Border some 70% of the people of Wales can, and many do, watch TV from transmitters in England. People tend to watch news programmes from where they came from not where they live.

It is certainly true for North East Wales and Anglesey where many of the people are from the North West of England. According to the 2001 census the Welsh born population is: Conwy 54%, Denbighshire 58% and Flintshire 51.1%. It is lower on the Coast. The Winter Hill transmitter started before Moel y Parc and traditionally Erectors pointed aerials to Winter Hill. The Trades Council Secretary is from Rhyl and can see the Moel y Parc transmitter but around him 80% of aerials point to Winter Hill.

These people have to be persuaded that what the Assembly Government does affects them and their daily lives even more so now with new powers. They must be persuaded to watch news and political programmes from Wales.

The Secretary has attended Wales TUC Conference in Llandudno since 2001 as well as being involved in lobbying at the Political Party Conferences in this popular and well-used Conference Venue. On numerous occasions delegates have complained that they could not watch the Welsh news programmes in their Hotel rooms as the TVs were tuned into the North of England. Similar complaints followed the Urdd Eisteddfod held in Llandudno a few years ago.

On 3 November the Secretary stayed overnight in Llandudno prior to attending a meeting the following day. He wanted to watch Sharp End on ITV Wales but when he turned the TV on it was tuned to Granada. He went through the channels and found that for Welsh channels the TV screen showed "No Details".

The problem is likely to be the Little Orme blocking the signal from Moel Y Parc. This may have an influence on where Organisations want to hold all Wales Conferences. This could be solved by a small Relay Station on the Little Orme.

There is still an issue in parts of north Wales in that poor reception leaves people particularly in the border areas to get their news and current affairs from England and even though some prefer this it means a diminution ways of receiving Wales news.

National and local radio (BBC and commercial, English and in Welsh) is one of the bright spots of the media in Wales (and in Britain) and a great source in the two areas but it should make more room for the news, current affairs and relevant drama that they do so well which of course costs more than a man or woman playing CDs.

Newspapers..

Nationally the big figure is that 85 per cent of national newspapers are published in England and that is reflected in the huge amount of coverage of the English scene and a poor coverage of Wales with not one newspaper having a Welsh correspondent.

The two "national" newspapers of the south and the north are only national in terms of across counties and are more "local." This panders to the north south divide with few copies sold outside their comfort zone. They need to spread their wings.

An argument can be made that the near demise of a well made well received local newspaper is part of the break up of cohesive local community and that because of this it needs support to make it vital again.

The problems include a shortage of staff which means an unmanageable workload so the management have devised a number of ways of publishing newspapers with a system that makes a little go a long way but leaves them with papers short on information and a difficulty in producing items of interest to a general readership.

A nominated title (Old Journal) provides small doses (three?) of close to home, local, parish stories, a front page and page three and sport and supplements this with news stories from nearby parishes and features say on health by a doctor the same pattern then for say Ruthin and Denbigh titles.

These are usually put together in one office by a couple of journalists and subbed centrally or the opposite is happening where there were two or three dedicated editions of one title they have come together as one in one office, or there are there are bigger operations say at Trinity Mirror which produces copy for local, regional and national titles. All likely to make papers less local.

To get and keep a loyal local readership it needs an affinity with those readers with enough copy which they know or know of issues, sites and people close to home; a parking issue or a council plan that comes from the next parish/village very rarely takes their eye. Anyway people know when they are being short changed!

Vale of Clwyd Trade Union Council covering Denbighshire.