

# Submission of Men's Voices Ireland to Commission on the Future of Media

## Journalism in crisis in the West

We shall confine our remarks on media to social and political issues, in particular those social issues which we have been engaged with in our work.

Trends in the Irish media have broadly followed those in other Western countries but particularly in the Anglosphere.

The media has become a major player in at least shaping news rather than in reporting news as exemplified in the dissemination of partisan views along with the censorship of opposing views and this is happening in many western countries.

Certain issues have become defining: a particular ideology obsessed with victimhood and so-called victim classes; issues of race, gender, sexual orientation or "woke" in the jargon; hate speech is another touchstone.

Two key issues in the past 10 years which exemplify the media's attitude have been the Brexit referendum in the UK and the US Presidential election of 2016.

It is fair to say that both results came as a huge shock to the media which staunchly campaigned for a Remain vote in the UK and for a Clinton victory in the US. In neither case did the media carry out a dispassionate, impartial analysis of the trends, the swings which were at work in both cases. It ignored trends which pointed to a possible upset.

It was as if the media wished to be a player in the result.

Other headlines have been set in the US. In August 2019 the New York Times initiated the 1619 project, a series of essays which claimed that the founding act of the United States was not the Declaration of Independence of 1776 but rather the landing of a slave ship in Virginia in 1619. The message was the US was founded on slavery and slavery was written into its DNA.

Aside from the fact that the interpretation of history was strongly challenged, the NYT was the scene of turmoil in June-July 2020 amid race disturbances in the US when two opinion editors were forced to resign in quick succession. Most of the opposition came from within the organisation itself. At about the same time there were many other dismissals related to statements on the Black Lives Matter campaign both in the media and in academia. We instance a few:

- Martin Shipton, a senior journalist, being forced to step down as a Wales Book of the Year Judge after he complained that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest broke the Welsh Government's social distancing rules.

- Leading economists, including Paul Krugman, calling for Harald Uhlig, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, to be fired as editor of the *Journal of Political Economy* because he **criticised** the BLM movement.

In a series of tweets Harald Uhlig said BLM had "torpedoed itself" by backing the call to defund the police.

- Hundreds of poets calling for the President of the US Poetry Foundation to be fired because its statement saying it "*stands in solidarity with the Black community and denounces injustice and systemic racism*" **didn't go far enough**.

When J.K. Rowling posted an essay defending the right of certain women to question elements of transgender ideology without fear of retaliation she was subjected to a flood of denunciations on social media. This led to an open letter in Harper's Magazine in July 2020 defending the right to free expression and signed by over 150 eminent people, writers and scientists including Rowling herself.

Certain areas of academia in the humanities and social sciences such as social justice, the so-called "grievance studies", multicultural and colonial studies, have had a strong influence on journalists.

The social media generally has been a focus for activists where their activism is the driving force.

One instance of the influence of social justice activism within social media was the firing of engineer James Damore by Google in 2017 after [an internal memo he wrote](#) was leaked to technology website Gizmodo, causing an uproar within the company. His resulting lawsuit [offered some insight](#) into how social justice ideology has become institutionalized through training programs and lectures, and is now being implemented into a variety of company policies.

It isn't just [Google](#). A [recent survey](#) suggested that intolerance towards non-progressives is spreading throughout Silicon Valley, with one respondent claiming there's a "concerted purge of conservative employees at [Apple](#)."

Tech giants in Silicon Valley have adopted the causes and campaigns of the social justice activists. In general, they are hostile to conservative figures, ideas.

In an article on the lamentable state of free speech in social media on June 9 2019 the [London Times](#) quoted a content moderator in one of the "trust and safety teams" now employed by Facebook, Google and the other network platforms to detect and remove "hate speech".

In February 2019 the online journal Quillette published a series of articles on social media “Who Controls the Platform”? authored by social-media insiders which gives an idea of the culture within.

One crucial issue is hate speech. In one piece [Brian Amerige](#) described “how Facebook’s draconian content policy evolved, and what I think should be done to fix it.” He goes on:

“In Facebook’s Seattle office, there’s an entire wall that proudly features the hashtags of just about every left-wing cause you can imagine—from “#RESIST” to “#METOO.”

As this culture developed inside the company, no one openly objected. This was perhaps because dissenting employees, having watched the broader culture embrace political correctness, anticipated what would happen if they stepped out of line on issues related to “equality,” “diversity,” or “social justice.””

## Comments from various sources

Two commentators who have warned in the past about lack of control of the media are Onora O’Neill and John Lloyd.

In her 2002 Reith lectures, the philosopher Onora O’Neill asserted that the media were the only great power left unregulated.

John Lloyd, a former editor of the Financial Times, has been a consistent critic of the media. In books such as *What the Media Are Doing to Our Politics* and *The Power and the Story* Lloyd contends that that this out-of-control colossus substantially damages the political process; that practitioners insert the notion that politics has no high, or even moral, purpose. It merely consists of a series of strategies for getting and keeping power.

Lloyd does not hold a high view of media and believes journalists are capable of exaggerating, sensationalising and distorting almost every aspect of the news they supposedly ‘report’.

Stories of the impact of Covid-19 on the newspaper industry abound: loss of circulation, loss of advertising revenue, newspaper closures.

The UK [Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Oliver Dowden](#), said the pandemic had caused the “biggest existential crisis” in the history of the press, as local and national newspapers experienced circulation decline.

A stark [comment](#) on some of the problems within traditional media found:

Between 2008 and 2019, total newsroom employment in the United States declined **by 23 percent**. At newspapers, the drop has been more **than 50 percent**. Journalists are hardly to blame for the underlying causes of this contraction. But they *can* be blamed for the

gratuitous acts of self-sabotage that are exacerbating the industry's woes. Many journalists—and even their unions—now seem more preoccupied with **denouncing heresies** among colleagues than with maintaining their audience and livelihoods.

At the *Guardian*, employees have passed around petitions [demanding](#) that editors block all but the most doctrinaire viewpoints on gender dysphoria.

At Spotify, staffers have threatened to walk out or strike because the company has [refused](#) to grant them **editorial control** of Joe Rogan's [Spotify podcast](#). But this was not tolerated by management.

## Men's Voices Experience

RTE is not fulfilling its role at the moment as a public service broadcaster. It is not fair, objective and impartial in its reporting of issues of general concern. While RTE constantly claims to act on behalf of minority groups, and of women, it neglects the elephant in the room, that is to say men, boys and their concerns. Practically every other interest group in society has a national representative body: Travellers have several; LGB, Transgender groups, children and the aged have theirs; immigrants have a number; women have the National Women's Council a body which has been state funded for almost fifty years as well as a great many other bodies with a more particular focus, all state funded.

There is no such body for men and this absence has enormous consequences when it comes to getting hearings before Oireachtas committees, access to policy-making bodies, public standing and making a case in the media.

Why has this huge void been tolerated and allowed to continue? Why has the media had nothing to say about this gaping omission in how 50% of the population is represented, its concerns unvoiced?

Men's Voices Ireland has been in existence for 5 years as an advocacy group, in the absence of any group calling attention to a broad range of issues affecting men and boys.

Men commit suicide at a rate of four to one compared to women and have been doing so for thirty years, the reasons why never explored, men are consistently discriminated against in the family courts in judgments around separation, access to children and allocation of family resources. The services for male victims of domestic violence are pathetic in the extreme when compared to those for female victims and the narrative around this sensitive issue is never examined, never debated. Boys have been consistently underperforming in education for decades and the question why is never examined. Other issues are false accusations, the male preponderance of rough sleepers and unjust laws in relation to sexual offences.

We have sought access to current affairs programmes on RTE to highlight these issues many times over the past five years. We have never been invited on any current affairs programme but have lost count of the times other interest groups listed above have

appeared. This kind of thing does not happen by chance: this is discrimination pure and simple against 50% of the population with very legitimate grievances which deserve to be heard.

We also want to say a word about BAI procedures for handling complaints. We have complained to the BAI about bias in RTE, the exclusion of men's voices, on about ten occasions. The latest was in relation to the coverage of domestic violence during the pandemic.

We wrote to RTE on 12 June to complain how RTE had chosen to devote an item on Morning Ireland on two occasions to this matter in the previous 8 days in which **only** abuse of women was discussed and representatives of women's organisations were interviewed.

The problem is that the complaint procedures deal with individual programmes/items only. They do not cover trends over a series of programmes or items.

It is not permitted under the code to complain about a consistent bias over a period of months in which only one side of the case is presented. Thus, between mid-March and mid-June 2020 on six occasions RTE presented items on Domestic Violence either on Morning Ireland or the Today with X programme in which only representatives of women's groups were interviewed. Neither then, nor since has a representative of Men's Aid been interviewed.

But under the BAI code it is not permitted to raise such a complaint. In its reply to us RTE said:

"Firstly, the BAI also publishes on its website its Guidance Notes for the above Code, effectively setting out how the BAI interprets and applies the Code.

I would draw your attention to the following from the Guidance Notes:

*"Each broadcaster has the editorial freedom to make choices in relation to what issues to cover in a news and current affairs context. The BAI cannot nor should it make decisions or have a role in requiring broadcasters to cover a news and current affairs issue. The Code is not intended to govern perceptions of 'bias' on the basis of topics and/or subject areas that a broadcaster has chosen not to cover. In the context of this Code, a decision not to cover a particular event or news story is not de facto evidence of a lack of fairness, objectivity and impartiality on the part of a broadcaster."* [Page 9]

Also:

*"It is not always the case that the omission of a viewpoint/perspective in relation to a particular issue will automatically result in unfairness and indeed, there is no requirement to cover every aspect of an item in order to achieve fairness."*

There is no obligation on a broadcaster to canvass all viewpoints and the absence of a viewpoint does not mean a programme has breached the Rules on fairness, objectivity and impartiality."

In the period from mid-March to end of year, RTE interviewed representatives of women's groups on perhaps ten occasions on this matter but not once has a representative of Men's Aid been interviewed nor of another men's group to our knowledge, on the problems facing men.

Yet this clear evidence of bias is not covered in the BAI code. It is little wonder that RTE can carry on in the same old way without any fear of censure. There is nothing to hold it to account.

In the [Sunday Independent](#) on Nov 15 2020 Eilis O'Hanlon wrote:

*"RTE claimed to an Oireachtas committee that it was a Public Service Broadcaster: "We need journalism and a national news and current affairs service that we can trust, that is fair [and] fearless," it declares, adding that on "matters of public controversy", RTÉ journalists should be "impartial and objective" and "fair to all interests"."*

Deprecating RTE's claim to provide Public Service Broadcasting she went on: *Those who don't subscribe to a predictable nexus of self-styled progressive values feel increasingly as if their genuine concerns are sneeringly dismissed.*

O'Hanlon also had this to say about the BAI:

*"The regulator is "broadly... satisfied that the broadcasters are fulfilling their statutory obligations" and provide "great value"; and that may once have been true. But what if the model which underpins this complacency is outdated, based on a vision of broadcasting that no longer exists?"*

The problems we encountered with RTE we have met also with the national print dailies. Again, we have never been accorded an opinion column to air any of the issues listed above despite making numerous appeals to do so. The closest we came was when contacted by a new young reporter in April 2017 to ask if we would do a piece for the online website for which he was responsible. We did so and received an enthusiastic response promising publication in a few hours. The piece never appeared. He was embarrassed and shamefacedly silent when contacted later by us. He had clearly been overruled by a senior editor.

On the occasions we did manage to speak to journalists we met with a distinctly frosty attitude.

## What should be done

It is clear to us that Irish media, broadcast and print, is not diverse, is not open to a variety of viewpoints and overwhelmingly tends to see issues through a very narrow lens. It is dominated by a particular ideology in which claims of a tyrannical patriarchy wielded by

straight white men plays a fundamental role and is encapsulated in words and phrases such as white privilege, racism, sexism, transphobia, misogyny, toxic masculinity.

This explains the hostility toward men and why male issues are consistently excluded from the table.

Evidence for this can be seen in the almost total lack of debate on matters concerning transgender ideology including the replacement of sex with gender as a mark of identity, gender dysphoria, race, immigration, the nature of domestic violence, discrimination against men and others already listed.

Irish media is very similar to media in other Western countries particularly the Anglosphere. We can see evidence of the intolerance in the manner in which Kevin Myers was summarily fired by the Sunday Times Ireland in July 2017 outwardly for alleged anti-semitism, though the staunch support of Jewish organisations in Ireland made nonsense of this charge. The NUJ simply acquiesced in the dismissal without even calling for a hearing which must also be unprecedented. RTE jumped in with a charge that Myers was a holocaust denier, a libel for which it had to pay a substantial sum in 2020. George Hook was suspended for several months for an admittedly ill-judged remark on Newstalk. John Waters was forced to resign from the Irish Times in 2014 though there was no concrete charge.

All of these people had one thing in common: they challenged the consensus around one or more of the sacred values.

We can see no benefit in bailing out media which continue to hold to these values and are not open to proper debate. There has to be fundamental change starting at the top.

A striking fact about broadcast media, RTE in particular, is the lack of vigorous debate on a whole range of social issues: family values, family breakdown and how best to support families; domestic violence, its nature, prevalence and the extent of support services; suicide and its causes, particularly in men, and prevention measures; education and the needs of boys, the importance of role models.

It ought to be a simple matter to arrange panel discussions with a broad diversity of views from participants providing vigorous, robust argument which would encourage people to feel that their views were important and might be heard. Today such discussions are mainly heard on Youtube. Diversity today is considered sacred but not viewpoint diversity as the US academic Jonathan Haidt has commented.

Truth on such matters can only come about through the clash of opinions, through the testing of ideas by vigorous argument, informed by a wide variety of sources. This has been a principle of liberal democracy for centuries.

Unfortunately, we do not get this from today's media.

For reasons already explained we do not believe that the BAI is fit for purpose and is in need of radical overhaul. This view is supported by the journalist Eilis O'Hanlon who has said:

*There's no point looking to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland to stand up for listeners' and viewers' interests.*

The remaining comments are offered simply as ideas, food for thought.

In an [article in February 2020](#) the UK Institute of Economic Affairs proposed that the licence fee paid to the BBC be replaced by a subscription in which those who pay can watch and those who don't are locked out. The report concluded that the concept of public service broadcasting no longer resided in a single institution. Perhaps the same is true for RTE.

The Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press in the UK was established in 2011 following gross breaches of privacy by elements of the press.

It recommended that an **independent regulatory body** for the press should be established.

It should take an active role in **promoting high standards**, including having the power to investigate serious breaches and sanction newspapers.

The new body should be **backed by legislation** designed to assess whether it is doing its job properly.

The legislation would enshrine, for the first time, a **legal duty on the government** to protect the freedom of the press.

The body should be **independent** of current journalists, the government and commercial concerns, and not include any serving editors, government members or MPs.

The UK government declined to implement this body.

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