

Ethnic Minorities Committee

Report (27.9.82) by

Director-General

Item	
6	EM 50
COMMUNITY RADIO/BLACK RADIO STATION	

1 SUMMARY INTRODUCTION

The Ethnic Minorities Committee agreed on a report on "Media and Ethnic Minorities" (EM 50) which included the recommendation "that officers submit a further report on sponsoring research into the feasibility of establishing a black independent local radio station". This report provides the information requested, within a context of local London wide and community radio provision.

2 THE UNITED KINGDOM SITUATION

2.1 All public radio broadcasting in the UK is provided by the BBC and the IBA and the Home Office is the only body with powers to grant licences for broadcasting. The BBC has 22 local radio stations while the IBA has 34 stations and hopes to increase by 7 or 8 a year. A more specialised local radio service is also provided by hospital radio and student radio.

2.2 Cable Radio - Cable radio distribute their programmes down a cable rather than over the air and a number have developed up and down the country. The experiment grew out of an initiative taken by the Telford Development Corporation in 1975, who commissioned a former producer of the Bristol Channel Community Cable TV Station to produce a feasibility study for a similar service in Telford but operating on sound only. It was in response to this that the Home Office announced in 1976 that it would allow six experiments, subject to conditions. The two stations established in the London area are Greenwich and Thamesmead both of which are still in operation. Cable radio constrains reception of programmes since the receiver is attached to the cable and a portable set is not practicable.

2.3 Development of the concept of Community Radio in Britain - The idea of community radio was discussed at Government level in 1951 when the Beveridge Committee, set up to look at the future of broadcasting, and considering the use of the VHF frequency made the following observations:-

"Use of VHF could make it possible not merely to give the existing BBC programmes to people who now fail to get them, but to establish local stations with independent programmes of their own and the setting up of some local stations should be tried without delay".

Since then various government committees have addressed themselves to the idea of "Community Local Radio" but all working within the existing broadcasting format established by BBC and IBA. In June 1962 the

Pilkington Committee recommended that the BBC should provide local sound broadcasting. This was followed by the 1971 White Paper which launched the concept of "Commercial Local Radio" and gave the go ahead to IBA to expand its Radio programme. All these initiatives produced responses from the various lobbying groups in the community campaigning for "Community Radio".

- 2.4 The various different lobbying groups joined forces to form "Community Communication Group" (COMCOM) whose objective was to campaign for community radio. By now the term "Community Radio" had gained general acceptance and was being widely used and misused by both the BBC and the IBA. COMCOM drew up a Community Broadcasting Charter that called for equal employment opportunities for women and for ethnic and other significant social minorities, commitment to providing local people with access to training, production, and transmitting facilities and a programming policy which encourages the development of a participatory democracy.
- 2.5 Despite the continued pressure and lobbying from various groups calling for community radio what emerged was the concept of 'local radio'; with the BBC and the IBA as the sole holders of the licences to broadcast. While the IBA concerns itself with giving franchises to groups who meet their criteria, the BBC local radio stations continue to broadcast with little community access or involvement. Thus whether community radio in this form has any future depends entirely upon government decision and the granting of the necessary Home Office approval.
- 2.6 Current Initiatives so far fall into the following broad categories:
 - (a) those campaigning to set up a community radio station of their own;
 - (b) those content with setting up radio workshops which produce programmes for distribution on tape/cassettes and for access slots on BBC and IBA local stations. There are several of these scattered around the country of which Local Radio Workshop, Islington Radio Project, Basement Project, Radio Bethnal Green, Woolwich Simba Project, Inter-Action Audio-Visual Unit and Black Womens Radio Group are based in London.

3 OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE

- 3.1 The Committee might find it useful to bear in mind how the concept of 'community radio' is viewed abroad. Particular attention is drawn to the examples of France, the United States of America and Australia although it should be noted that there are also developments in Canada, Italy, Belgium and Sweden.
- 3.2 France - The French government authorised 16 "free radio" wavelengths as well as four neighbourhood radio stations, each with a VHF frequency shared between six or more competing groups, in July of this year. The decision followed the mushrooming of many 'pirate stations' in Paris. The struggles for a "free-for-all" on the air had seen occupations of stations and many hunger strikes.

- 3.3 The USA - Community radio began in the USA in 1948 when KPFA, an independent non-profit station supported by listener subscribers, began broadcasting from Berkeley, California. There was a rapid growth in this type of operation in the mid-1960's and by 1975 there were over 60 stations broadcasting.

These stations saw themselves as alternatives to both commercial and public broadcasting, were entirely self-supporting and staffed by volunteers. They provided people with opportunities to present their views in commentaries, phone-ins and as programme producers in their own right. The stations concentrated on providing alternative view points on the news, uncensored commentary of community spokespersons and coverage of important community events.

- 3.4 Australia - Community radio here is known as 'public radio' and there are about 30 such stations in existence with many more applying for licences. The initiative for community radio came from four different sources; the first were the hi-fi and music enthusiasts who wanted classical music on the air waves; the second lobby was formed by ethnic communities who wanted their own service; the third group was higher education institutes and the fourth was composed of more overt political elements. Community radio came to be defined as a "Station operated by non-profit organisations and licensed to serve a geographically defined and special interest section of community".

4 ETHNIC MINORITIES AND RADIO

- 4.1 London's present three local radio stations, namely Capital, LBC and BBC Radio London, all provide some programmes aimed directly at Afro-Caribbean and Asian listeners. Between them these programmes add up to 14½ hours a week of air time of which 2 hours are for Asians and 12½ for Afro-Caribbean listeners. This is considered inadequate by the communities, a view held also by the Ethnic Minorities Committee. The continued misrepresentation and lack of access to the white controlled mass media has led the black communities to develop alternative means of communication, for example the ethnic press. This is also being extended to include radio and the Ethnic Minorities Unit has received a number of proposals from ethnic minority groups wanting to set up their own radio stations. These fall into the two broad categories of (i) actually setting up a station (ii) running and participating in radio workshops.

4.2 Ethnic Minority/Black Radio Stations

- (a) 'Apna Radio' in Wandsworth:- Mr Iftikhar Sheikh and his colleagues are proposing to set up an ethnic minorities radio station in Wandsworth called 'Apna Radio' which will broadcast in the Greater London area in 10 different languages. Mr Sheikh and his colleagues have already acquired a disused former cinema building in South London and have obtained planning permission to convert these premises into a leisure/entertainment centre that would also house the radio station. 'Apna Radio' has attracted much publicity, especially in the local and ethnic press and has lobbied MPs and GLC members. The proposal is presently being considered by Mr Timothy Raison, Home Office Minister of State.

(b) CEB - Committee for Equality in Broadcasting.

A proposal by Mr Sam Roberts received by the Ethnic Minorities Unit outlines the need for a London radio station for Afro-Caribbean and Asian listeners. This proposal is linked with CEB, who are concerned with influencing the IBA on the Capital Radio franchise to be advertised next summer. CEB have presented a case for creating an independent local radio station in London which will provide a service of information, education and entertainment to meet the needs of the Afro-Caribbean and Asian residents of the capital. A copy of the report has also been sent to the Home Office Local Radio Working Party. CEB lists a variety of sources for investment to finance such a station but feel that before they work out details of such a station they have to win the argument for creating such a station.

(c) A Community Radio Station for Hounslow

The Hounslow Community Relations Council commissioned a feasibility study for setting up a community radio station for the Hounslow area. The study was funded by the Commission for Racial Equality and researched and written by Simon Partridge. The feasibility study was seen to be needed because the existing mainstream broadcasting did not cater for local needs in an area which has seen a significant change in the racial composition over the last few years. The station would promote good community relations in the area; help develop its variety of cultural and artistic traditions and provide a service of information about local government and education, health and community services in both English and the main ethnic languages. It is suggested that the project be run by a management committee which would be made up of representatives from the borough council and all the main sections of the community under the auspices of the Community Relations Council. The feasibility study published in December 1980 also gives an outline of organisational structure, location and operation for such a station, finance and where it might come from, and a breakdown of type and cost of equipment. The projected cost of setting up such a station could be between £20,000-30,000. The study has been sent to the Home Office for an experimental licence but, as with other applications, the outcome depends on the Home Office granting a broadcasting licence.

4.3 Observations on the above proposals

The above are examples of those campaigning to set up local/community radio stations to serve the needs of ethnic minority groups in general, or Afro/Asian communities in particular. All are dependent on the Home Office granting them the licence to broadcast. The Committee may wish to consider giving full support to all the proposals presented to the Home Office by having letters of support sent to the Home Office Local Radio Working Party and by putting pressure on the IBA to consider applications from ethnic groups for the Music Radio Franchise. The organisations would like the Council to communicate with the Home Office Broadcasting Department on this.

4.4 Radio Workshops - Black Womens Radio Group

Black Womens Radio Group share premises with Local Radio Workshop. Their objectives are simply to campaign and work towards more access to the media by black people and to encourage more black people to get involved in sound recording and programme making. The group has been working together for four years making programmes; running workshops with community groups and youth clubs; recording conferences and meetings; and compiling material on black experiences in the UK for a library. They have plans for making more programmes; running regular monthly workshops on studio usage and programme making; and holding technical workshops to share skills with/from other technicians and users. Black Womens Radio Group has made an application to the Ethnic Minorities Committee for a capital grant towards the purchase of equipment, which would be housed in Local Radio Workshop but for their exclusive use. This application will be the subject of a separate report to the Committee. One of the problems the group faces at the moment is sharing facilities with other users, which restricts their activity to the availability of the equipment. However, if the group had their own equipment they would be able to run regular workshops, go into the community for recording, make the equipment available to people free of charge to record, make their own programmes and learn new skills. No such access is offered by any of the present local radio stations.

4.5 Other known activities:-

- (a) Dread Broadcast Corporation have been broadcasting illegally for two to three years in London. They have been caught and fined on several occasions and their equipment confiscated. The group have shown determination to continue broadcasting, arguing that the present radio stations do not cater for their needs. The members have persisted and have attracted a wide following amongst the local community. They broadcast music, news and views of local black people.
- (b) Brent Black Music Co-op were recently granted a DOE grant to set up recording studios for black musicians. They argued the need for access to radio stations for black musicians and support any campaign that is attempting to get greater access to this media for black people.

5 WOMEN'S CONSIDERATIONS

All initiatives supported by the Committee will seek actively to involve ethnic minority women on an equal basis and projects (such as para 4.4 above) by Women for Women will also be supported by the Committee.

6 WHAT THE GLC MIGHT DO

- 6.1 Given that a number of feasibility studies, reports and proposals for ethnic minority radio stations have been written, another feasibility study at this stage is not recommended. However, the GLC could undertake to bring together in a meeting the interested groups and individuals as a more practical way of assisting at the present time.

6.2 One initiative which might develop through the bringing together of the interested parties would be the creation of a London black radio workshop. Such a workshop might act as a central resource for all those interested in radio and be:-

- equipped with tape recorders, editing machines, microphones etc;
- accessible to groups and individuals interested in making programmes or learning new skills; could hold regular workshops in studio usage and programme making;
- managed and run by black people;
- able to sell the programmes made to existing channels such as IBA and BBC, and also to Third World countries where radio is a strong media;
- a training resource, with several black people with skills imparting these to others;
- supported by various groups and individuals, including those who have already approached the GLC for assistance.

Despite the existence of the Local Radio Workshop there is a need for a similar resource catering for the needs of ethnic minority groups. At present the groups are reluctant to use these facilities for lack of access.

6.3 As reported at the previous Ethnic Minorities Committee (EM 102) a meeting has been convened by Mr John McDonnell at County Hall on 5 October 1982, to which a wide range of interested groups and individuals have been invited and which is intended to discuss ways in which a longer term strategy for London local radio and community radio might be developed. It is hoped that minority ethnic groups will be attending and that the sorts of issues raised in this report will be discussed. It is therefore proposed that any necessary follow up action taken by the Ethnic Minorities Committee with regard to the suggestions set out in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 await the outcome of the meeting on the 5 October.

It is recommended that:-

- (1) Subject to the outcome of the media meeting being convened on 5 October 1982 that officers call a meeting of all interested groups and individuals who might be interested in discussing the concept of themselves establishing a black radio workshop for London.
- (2) Officers continue to monitor developments and keep the Committee informed of these and on any future action to be taken to improve black people's access to the media.

DG/EMU/PV/1273