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Israel's Electronic Broadcasting: Reporting or Managing the News?

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The Israel Broadcasting Authority's obligations as a quasi-governmental institution include: objectivity, prevention of the politicization of the Authority, fairness, equality, no conflict of interests, and integrity in its decisions.

Aaron Barak, President of Israel's Supreme Court,
in a speech on May 13, 1996

"Who says that the media is something sacred?"

Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister,
"Popolitika" TV Program, July 27, 1998

1. Introduction

In the final days of Israel's 1996 election campaign, Channel One television broadcast for a few days a promo for "Public Poll", a discussion show which also allowed for the home-viewing audience to "vote" and express their opinions. The program which was to be aired on May 21, was to have dealt with the topic "The Media – Balanced or Leftist?". No one, it seems, thought that the media could possibly be rightist. In any case, the show, unexpectedly, was canceled on the day before it was to have been broadcast. The reason published by media reporters was that certain elements within the IBA had expressed opposition to the show's structure and guest lineup.

This example highlights the complexity and problematics of Israel's broadcasting media. The ability of senior employees of the Israel's Broadcasting Authority (IBA) to prevent an open discussion of such an issue and to succeed in removing it from the public agenda illustrates that the media has engaged itself not only in reporting the news but also in the management and direction of the public agenda.

This study describes the increasing influence of the broadcast media on the political life of the State of Israel and the bias that exists in its reporting and management of public affairs deliberations – the very essence of a democratic dialogue for which the press assumes responsibility by championing the public's right to know.

2. Israel's Broadcast Media – An Overview

Until 1965, the broadcasts of Kol Yisrael Radio were administered by a government unit within the Prime Minister's Office. In that year, the Broadcasting Authority Law was passed, creating an independent body whose mandate was to produce electronic broadcasts. The Director-General and the members of the Public Council of the IBA, the "Plenum", are appointed by the Government. The law was expanded in 1969 to accommodate the reality of television broadcasting which first began that year.

Approximately 85% of the IBA's budget (700 million NIS in 1998) is based on a fee paid by the public.

Additional legislation established in 1990 a Second Radio and Television Authority. This broke the monopoly long enjoyed by the IBA. Although the Second TV Authority is commercial and funded through advertising revenues, it too is supervised by a public committee appointed by the Minister of Education and Culture. The Second Channel's news programs are produced by a company formed by the station's three broadcast production concessionaires which, together, provide its budget.

The IBA broadcasts one terrestrial TV station, Channel One, and another, Channel 33, which is cable. The programs are mainly in Hebrew with a fixed Arab-language schedule. The radio broadcasts include some dozen stations including seven in Hebrew, one beamed to the Diaspora, another for Russian and Ethiopian immigrants and others for educational purposes. The Second Authority provides one terrestrial TV station, Channel Two, a cable station, Channel 23, intended for educational programming and some 15 local and regional radio stations.

A third broadcaster is the Israel Educational Television Network (IET), which is an integral unit of the Education Ministry and responsible to the Minister. The IET is carried over both the First and Second TV channels during the morning and afternoon hours. The Defense Minister is responsible for the Israel Army Radio (Galatz) which broadcasts on both AM and FM frequencies.

Formally, the non-army programs of Galatz are supervised by the IBA's plenum, as set forth in Paragraph 48b of the IBA Law.

Another media phenomenon which should be noted is that of radio stations which have not received their frequency through lawful procedure. The veteran Israeli peace activist, Abie Nathan, began transmitting from a ship anchored off-shore in March 1973.

In 1988, another station, Arutz 7, followed suit and also initiated offshore broadcasts. At present, according to Ministry of Communications reports as well as police announcements, approximately 120-140 additional stations broadcast from land-based studios.

These stations reflect mainly Arab listeners, ultra-Orthodox, alternative radio and Oriental music lovers. They provide transmission content which cannot be adequately found in the official public broadcast stations.

Referring to this, Professor Rina Shapira, Chairperson of the IBA (1995-98), commented during a special seminar held at the Israel Democratic Institute:

We do not maintain an adequate dialogue with various communities and therefore, a religious network, and a Russian network and a Shas network will arise. The television [broadcasts] do not even attempt to reach a common denominator.¹

For all intents and purposes, the electronic broadcast media in Israel, that is, the radio and television, are "public". The first reason for that is that the government appoints the public representatives to the supervisory committees of the two authorities. Secondly, the vast majority of the current affairs and news broadcasts are run by government-related bodies. It was only in January 1998 that regional radio stations were permitted by law to broadcast independently news programs not originating in the newsrooms of either Kol Yisrael or Galatz.

Israel's High Court of Justice has a long judicial tradition of upholding the broadcasting authorities' freedom of expression. The Court has minimized to the utmost any possible interference in the internal editorial decisions and judgments of the various media, acting according to the principle of "no prior restraint".

Paradoxically, as outlined below, this policy is in part responsible for the imbalance and partiality of the Israeli media.

So Where Is Public Broadcasting?

There are those who are of the opinion that instead of public broadcasting, what has ultimately evolved over the years is an unwelcome hegemony of a media elite.

One outspoken critic of the broadcast media, and especially the IBA, is the journalist Ben-Dror Yemini, who defines himself as a leftist and an opponent of the Likud government's social and settlement policies. According to Yemini, there exists a despotism in Israel's public broadcasting. He has termed several of its leading personalities as "broadcast barons". He has described the relationship between the public and the public broadcasting system so:

Public broadcasting is broadcasting in which the public holds stock and asserts supervision...in the public sense, the stockholders are all the citizens that pay the license fee and other taxes. But when it comes to the public sphere, these stockholders [unlike members of a company directorate] possess no supervision and neither do their representatives possess any real control. The barons and hooligans of the freedom of expression...warn us of 'political interference' in broadcasting... they desire that [the principle of] 'freedom of expression' remains as their private domain...

There is a need to strengthen the public broadcasting also by allowing the public's representatives greater power in the supervisory bodies.

And this must take place in order that freedom of expression be increased as well as limiting the freedom to express".²

In another of his articles following upon the Gabi Butbol Affair,³ Yemini published the following:

The First Television Channel...belongs to Masuda from Sderot just as it belongs to Fatma of Ar'arah and Motti from Rehavia. There are those in the IBA who are not prepared to accept this basic fact. For them, it is assumed that 'freedom of expression' is their own private fiefdom and that only they can do what they want with it. He who seeks to say something different becomes, in their eyes, a danger to democracy and to the country.

In the framework of this brainwashing, they make sure that only what they want is said...media democracy is not just the ratings but the democracy of representatives who will assure that the media provides expression for all.

In a variety of public preferences. In the present condition, when the power is in the hands of a clique, the result is tyranny".⁴

And in another piece on the affair, Yemini wrote:

The believers in freedom of expression have become those who hide information. An affair that should have reached newspaper headlines, has become something that never was...indeed, freedom of expression is an important foundation in democratic society. If the collective silencing of this unfortunate affair reflects the freedom of expression in Israel, then we have a serious problem. Liberal terrorism has bested democracy, and at the same time buried freedom of expression".⁵

Another element of the cultural restrictiveness exercised by the electronic broadcast system is the obsessive chase after news and what may be considered as the constant rehashing of current affairs. Kol Yisrael's main radio station, Reshet Bet, which boasts the highest listener rating, broadcasts every weekday over 11 hours of news and discussion programming between 6AM and 12:15 PM of the next day. This includes four hours of back-to-back interview shows between 8 AM and 12 PM, seven hours of studio roundup and one hour devoted to analyzing foreign news reports.

The situation in Galatz is not much different. Every weekday, between 7 AM and midnight, the Army radio station broadcasts four hours of back-to-back interview shows, paralleling those of Reshet Bet, and another four hours of studio roundup.

The average listener cannot escape the frame of reference set by the radio directors which is a tom-tom cacaphony of news and current affairs discussion and interviews with politicians and other leading personalities, minute after minute, hour after hour, over and over.

3. The Ideological and Credibility of Israel's Media

In an article which appeared in *The Seventh Eye*, a bimonthly magazine devoted to media criticism, edited by *Ha'Aretz* columnist Uzi Benzamin and published by the Israel Democracy Institute, Nahum Barnea, one of Israel's leading newspapermen, related to the character of Israel's media in the aftermath of the 1996 elections:

It is doubtful whether the majority of the journalists were to be considered 'with Peres', but for sure they were anti-Netanyahu... Netanyahu had to overcome a hostile media.⁶

The realization that, as Barnea further pointed out, "Netanyahu was forced to deal with two fronts – against the Labor Party and against the media", stems from an open secret. The overwhelming majority of journalists, reporters, editors, interviewers, radio and TV talk show hosts as well as broadcasting directors and producers can be defined, in Israeli terms, as "leftist".

This definition includes the adoption of political, economic, social and religious viewpoints that political scientists and sociologists would acknowledge as liberal, humanistic and even radical, placing them within the leftist camp.

This camp was delineated by Chanoch Marmari, editor of the prestigious liberal *Ha'Aretz* daily newspaper:

We, the people who populate the printed and electronic media, belong to a small, elitist, well-off, urban and secular group. The press naturally tends to lean towards those political elements that express and fulfill these positions, most of them within the sphere of the Labor-Meretz parties. The media followed with support and even enthusiasm the peace process...it was not difficult to distinguish the natural bias of many media personnel towards the political left and an almost full sympathy in favor of the peace makers – Rabin and Peres.⁷

The apprehension that the electronic media would unfairly intervene in the 1996 election campaign caused a group of leading intellectuals and literary figures, covering a broad spectrum of Israeli political opinion, to publish a newspaper advertisement on both May 1 and 2, 1996 in the three main daily newspapers. The ad, entitled "Out of Concern for Israel's Democratic Character",⁸ called upon Israel's media professionals:

To place the obligation to democracy and political fair play above your personal inclinations for this or that side. Journalists must draw a clear line between their right to express their opinions in op-ed columns and between their tasks as news editors and interviewers.

The ad, as expected, stirred up public controversy regarding the ideological identity of media personnel in Israel.

On May 2, 1996, Shelly Yechimovitz, broadcasting on her Kol Yisrael Reshet Bet interview program, stated

Let's be open about it for a moment, and admit to the simple fact that most of the media persons in Israel are leftists. Left? They either vote Labor or Meretz.

Her guest, then IBA Director-General, Mordechai Kirschenbaum, reacted and said,

I don't want to deal in statistics. I am not sure that in the IBA, throughout its stations, that that is the situation. But it is true that most of the journalists, not only here but most newspeople throughout the Western world are very liberal people. They are people who are very liberal, and avant-garde and open-minded and due to this, it is quite possible that they are perceived and identified as being Left.

Ms. Yechimovitz, one of the media's leading personalities⁹ has constantly been outspoken on this matter with no guilt feelings. In an interview with Oshrat Kotler of the Second Authority,¹⁰ Yechimovitz was adamant on the leftist orientation of the Israel media:

...I also do not believe in objectivity. This is a hypocritical and mendacious term...(and concerning) this claim that 'the media is leftist'...the time has come to admit to the facts – the media is indeed leftist. Place a ballot box in any media office and the results will be clear: from center to the left.

The press dialogue in Israel is not a public dialogue and the alienation that exists between the public and the media reaches new heights every day. There is total lack of confidence...and it's true...the sole solution to this alienation is the entry of right-wing journalists into the media.

The mobilization of the media in 1992 in favor of the election of Rabin was an unprofessional mobilization, clearly. The 'Operation Grapes of Wrath' for example, that problematic campaign, did not receive the criticism due it because Shimon Peres was Prime Minister at the time.

During a discussion evening open to the public hosted by the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem on January 11, 1996, Hebrew University's Professor Ehud Sprinzak, a noted observer of Israel's right-wing politics, confirmed that the claims that Israel's media was hostile to the rightist camp.

According to his interpretation, this hostility stemmed from the cultural *weltanschauung* of the media personnel more than any strictly political bias.

After the elections, *Ha'Aretz* political reporter Orit Galili, was a guest on the media critique program "Shetach Hefker" (lit. No Man's Land) that was devoted to analyzing the media's performance during the elections. Asked to comment, Galili said:

The press was completely mobilized on behalf of Peres, absolutely so...I feel personally a professional failure and I think that the failure was collective...the milieu of the regime and the journalists together, and with the campaign managers, when they all rubbed shoulders one with another, and each feeding off the other, in the end they could not see what was in the guts of the people. The preference of the media was for Peres...the solution is more limits, more criticism, more listening.¹¹

On that same program in the following year, the political commentator of Ma'ariv, Menachem (Chami) Shalev, admitted that "it was no secret that most of the journalists did not support Netanyahu".¹²

A prime example of a media person combining his ideological leanings and his professional work is Aharon Goldfinger, the former producer of the "Popolitika" program, the central current affairs show on Channel One.

Upon the conclusion of the broadcast of the program on November 6, 1995, two days after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Goldfinger declared "I will pursue them, the Likud, and you can even quote me on that".¹³

His anger rising toward the regular panel members whom he perceived as not attacking the Likud aggressively enough, he shouted at them that as long as he was producer of "Popolitika", no program under his supervision would allow right-wing opinions to win.¹⁴

It was, ironically, Shimon Peres, in a televised interview, who expressed the general exasperation of many politicians, both left and right, at the lack of media credibility. In response to a report by the senior commentator of TV's Channel One, Amnon Avramovitz, Peres retorted:

Who says that this material is at all reliable? And I tell you, the time has come for the press to step down off its pedestal of 'faked martyrdom' and become responsible for what it reports. This is a calamity what they are doing.¹⁵

Public Opinion vis-a-vis the Media

The Geocartographia Institute, at the behest of a local news weekly,¹⁶ conducted a poll amongst a representative selection of 620 interviewees, who responded to questions dealing with the political leanings of the television media personnel of both channels. The results were as follows:

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|---------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| a) "Mabat" | – 28% – neutral; | 33% – leftist; | 8% – rightist. |
| b) "Hadashot" | – 41% – neutral; | 19% – leftist; | 9% – rightist. |

Another poll, from the Gallup Organization, was commissioned by **Israel's Media Watch (IMW)**. Like the previous one, it showed that most Israelis consider their media to be leftist. The poll was carried out on June 6, 1996 amongst 505 interviewees of the adult Jewish population. Asked "did the electronic media prove itself objective during the election?", 50% said no; 39% said yes; 11% had no opinion. Of those who believed the media was not objective, 74% believed the media favored the left-wing; 6% thought they favored the right-wing and 8% had no opinion. A third question was asked about reporters involving their own political outlooks in their work. Twenty-six per cent said to a large degree; 44% said yes; 18% responded no; 4% said not all and 8% had no opinion. They were also queried whether they would support, given the nature of electronic media as a public network, a private media company broadcasting news programs. Sixty-six per cent said yes; 22% opposed and 12% had no opinion.

Dr. Yaakov Katz, director of the Community Research Institute of Bar-Ilan University, the sole pollster to predict correctly Netanyahu's election victory, published results of a survey collected in December 1996. Asked if Israel's mass media networks relate in an objective fashion to the activities of the Netanyahu government, 77% replied in the negative and 17% in the positive. The representative sampling was 1,250.

Another survey published in the summer of 1996, the results of which were broadcast on the "Davar Acher" (Another Matter) current affairs program on Kol Yisrael, showed that despite the fact that while some 90% of the populace believes that the mass media is necessary, 50% consider the media to be leftist, unfair and that its freedom should be restricted in some fashion. Yet another poll was broadcast on that same radio program on January 16, 1997. It indicated that while a majority consider the electronic media to be more reliable than the written press, 83% of those polled thought that the media should limit itself to simply reflecting reality by reporting the news and should not be engaged in criticism. The television received the highest rating (78%) of media instruments that have influence, but only 38% were of the opinion that its reports were credible.

A Gallup poll taken amongst a sampling of 497 persons from the adult Jewish population¹⁷ asked "to what degree do you have trust in the following institutions?". The media ended up in last place following the IDF, the Supreme Court, the police and the Knesset. The specific breakdown was: 13% – full trust; 16% – trust; 40% – certain trust; 14% – little trust; 15% – no trust and 2% with no opinion. On that same theme, the "Peace Index Project", conducted by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University, released data on its own poll on the public's trust in state institutions.¹⁸ The findings indicated that whereas the court system received a 78% rating and the police 70%, the media received only 53%. In a previous "Peace Index" survey published in August 1996, the media received 49% of the public's trust.

Orit Shochat, a political commentator for the *Ha'Aretz* daily, published an article which confirmed that leftists themselves are quite well aware of the general perception identifying the public broadcasting system with left-wing ideology. She wrote, in part:

Every time the right achieves power, it is dismayed to discover that the reporters, the news presenters and the talk show hosts remain in the Left...the problem is that even after they privatize [the IBA], the majority of the media will remain leftist in spirit.

Journalists, directors, satirists, producers, show hosts and broadcasters in Israel and the world, in public as well as commercial networks, tend to position themselves to the left of the political map.

And Shochat adds: "this is a sociological fact".¹⁹

Ron Meiberg, writing about the period of Summer-Fall 1996, explains:

As journalists and as opinionated people, we never were so mobilized to bring down the Prime Minister and to hold up for show his idiotic behavior. In the meantime, this hasn't turned out the way we wanted, and the public is not displaying any love for us.²⁰

Meiberg, along with his companion columnist, Amnon Dankner, pointed out another instance of the sympathetic attitude shown to fellow leftists, unlike their relationship with anyone from the right:

The charge sheet brought against Shimon Sheves, who served as the country's boss [in his position as Director-General of Prime Minister Rabin's office] before we loved to hate Evette Liberman [the former D-G of Netanyahu's office], carries on his back not a little of the feeling [about regime corruption]. That the media, being just slightly left (joke), reports on Sheves as if we are referring to a medical bulletin on a survey made about a drug to heal diabetes, is doing a great favor to the Labor Party.²¹

The Media's Style and Its Influence on Its Credibility

In an article published in a media periodical, Dr. Dan Boneh defined Israel's media as a "Communicator" and spelled out his criticism:

Indeed, the Communicator in all its finery – or, if you wish, a media gone mad, a media gone dizzy in gorgeous feathers, which crowns itself and takes credit for all sorts of achievements that are but losses – its influence on its viewers and public opinion being destructive, negative and insulting. Instead of "democracy's watchdog", guarding "the public's right to know", we have a despotic media which encourages shallowness and populism, simplicity and extremism, an atmosphere of shouting and violence. All this hampers the ability of the public to clarify and know, to consider and think, to uncover and receive information, not because the public is uninterested, but that the Communicator is not interested in allowing it to do so.²²

Yizhar Smilansky, outstanding author and prizewinner, also felt pressured to relate to Israel's media style. In an op-ed piece,²³ the former Labor MK found an original way to express his repulsion, calling out: "People! Don't Go to the Television!". His forthright criticism included the following:

They will invite you there so as to shut you up. They will mock you, they will torment you...all the interviewer needs is one sentence...and after you have uttered it, your job is finished. And if you stammer on or attempt to clarify or, God forbid, suggest another direction, you'll be tossed out immediately, thank you. You're despised and out...they'll obliterate you before you take a breath before speaking; you're despised before you begin and if you do not utter the line they expect you to say, they'll turn you stupid fools.

As if in support of Smilansky's view, Yaakov Achimeir, veteran IBA reporter and news presenter, published conclusions about his experience as Channel One's Washington correspondent during 1995-1997:

Here in Israel, the screen serves as a ring where pure poor taste is defended... by us, interviewers act with roughshod antagonism...[doing so] so as to please the circle of friends and those who share their political and social outlook.²⁴

The Public's Representatives vs. The Professional Staff

In a public broadcasting network there is a natural tension between the professional staff and the public governing board. The staff is involved in the production and transmission of hundreds of weekly hours of programming. The public representatives are mostly volunteers who spend at most one day a week in their public capacity. In the IBA's Plenum Report covering the period October 1995-October 1996 a whole section is devoted to this tension. Professor Rina Shapira writes there that this matter is an in-built dilemma which stems from the definition of the IBA as a public institution. According to Shapira,

[There exist] two essential difficulties regarding the fulfillment of the role of the executive committee, both interrelated: the first is the political make-up of the committee and the second is the interpretation of the committee's role as administrator or setting of policy of the authority [by the authority's own employees].²⁵

Further in the report, Shapira describes a complex and confrontational relationship between the senior professional employees of the IBA and the public representatives. Beyond the claim of guilt by “political” association, Prof. Shapira notes that not only were ethical code standards violated but that proper and correct administrative and managerial aspects of the IBA’s work were not carried out. The picture emerging from the report, as well as from items in the press published by media critics is that the senior executives of the IBA deprecate criticism by labeling it as “political interference”, using this label to cover up failures of management, financial and organizational. Shapira sums up and points out that

The blur that exists in the IBA Law [regarding] questions of authority and responsibility over the various bodies made our work difficult.²⁶

A recent incident illustrates this complexity. For over two decades there existed an informal understanding, confirmed in the minutes of plenum meetings of that period, that there is a status quo whereby the IBA plenum defines broad policy decisions and operational guidelines. The professional staff, however, is solely responsible for matters relating to editorial decisions, management concerns and personnel appointments. The plenum, it is understood, does not deal in removing a news presenter nor does it dictate who will host a specific show.

However, when Kol Yisrael’s director, Amnon Nadav, decided during July 1998 to alter the structure of a weekly program devoted to legal and judicial affairs, as well as replacing the presenter, the person in question, Moshe Negbi, appealed to the Jerusalem District Labor Court. He claimed that according to the law, the only institution that has the right to alter his standing is the plenum, not the radio’s executive director. The judge concurred and as of this writing, the judgment of an appeals court has not been handed down. The previous status quo had been dearly adhered to by left-wing politicians who successfully warded off various attempts by representatives of the nationalist camp to fire or transfer veteran IBA employees with whose style and content they did not agree.

Now, to avoid being removed, Negbi, a radical liberal whose personal newspaper columns do not hide his political and social extreme left outlook, was willing to overturn the decades-old understanding. Negbi’s stand in this issue is in contradiction to several decisions of the High Court of Justice.²⁷

This has been a further major contribution to the blurring of the lines between the IBA’s plenum members and the persons they are bound by law to supervise.

In another sphere, one of the problems that prevent the managers of the offshore Arutz 7 national radio station from accepting the offer to enter into the Second Authority’s regional radio setup is their fear of the extent of the authority’s supervisory powers. The managers of Arutz 7 are concerned that in the guise of administrative restrictions their right of expression would be severely curtailed. As a result, the station prefers to spend some one million dollars annually on the upkeep of an offshore ship as well as broadcasting over an unofficially obtained frequency rather than submit themselves to the proffered arrangement. This lack of trust is an additional symptom in the charged atmosphere existing between the broadcasting bodies and the supervisory institutions responsible for maintaining ethical standards as set out by law and secondary legislation.

4. The Media Treatment of the Oslo Process

Beginning in late August 1993, at the time when the first news items began appearing about an agreement reached between Israel and the PLO, the media treatment of this story – in terms of relaying factual news, the setting-up of interviews and commentary – was sympathetic to and protective of the process.

Television Channel One’s main weekly political panel program, “Popolitika”, was researched by **IMW** during the months March-July 1995 for a total of 19 broadcasts. The statistics pointed conclusively to bias in presenting the views held by the public regarding the Oslo Process.

The program suffered a lack of balance both in the amount of representative opinions expressed by the guests as well as the time devoted to the variety of their opinions. The permanent panel of three journalists, who set the tone for the show, was unbalanced in the extreme. Out of a cumulative total of 61 appearances by panel members, only two spoke out against the process. This is an important element as it is the panel which creates the show's character by not only asking the guests questions but in their license to state their own opinions.

The amount of time divided between coalition and opposition members of the Knesset, the number of appearance of Ministers and MKs and the promoting of public personalities to the detriment of others all contributed to the lack of balance. For example, Shimon Peres, the Foreign Minister, was given three unique appearances, for unusual extended periods of time, without any other guests at the table, all of them following terror attacks on Israelis. For over more than half a year, he was the sole politician to be granted such a platform. This, for all intents and purposes, was turning "Popolitika" into a governmental mouthpiece. Meretz Minister Shulamit Aloni starred in the program. The selection of themes to be discussed consistently favored the government's policy.

Another IMW research paper reviewed 22 programs of the "Yoman" (lit. "Diary" – Friday night weekly news summary show). The show presents an in-depth treatment of the week's news items. The paper dealt with five months of broadcasting: March-July 1995. This show too displayed a biased approach on behalf of the government spokesmen in terms of the time permitted them to put their case across, the amount of their appearances as well as questionable editing methodology.

Another study on the treatment, during one week, of a campaign slogan issue on Jerusalem, again indicated, this time on both the First and Second Channels, a clear preference for the Labor-Meretz coalition point of view.

The "Yoman" program also initiated a basic personal-view column which introduced formal editorializing in the guise of commentary. Mr. Amnon Avramovitz, an enthusiastic supporter of Oslo, was allowed to dominate the column, entitled "Accounting", expressing his own outlook to a large audience on a public broadcasting network. A petition to the High Court of Justice, 4453/95, with the Chief Justice sitting in session, did not correct the inherent imbalance. Avramovitz appeared, in a period of over a year, in more than 85% of the columns broadcast despite the fact that the IBA committed itself before the judges to maintain the balance and variety obligated by law.

The general public support for the Oslo Process was made possible among other reasons, by the letter signed by the PLO's Arafat and addressed to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin whereby the PLO Chairman committed himself to invalidate those elements of the Covenant which were incompatible with the peace accord. In April 1996, two and one-half years later, then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres announced that Arafat had canceled the Covenant, calling it an event of historic proportions. The opposition lambasted Peres, saying that the Covenant had simply undergone a sleight-of-hand maneuver, and that it had actually been shunted off to a sub-committee of the PA's legislative council. Only one journalist, Uzi Benziman of *Ha'Aretz*, published claims to this effect by MK Benny Begin, backed up by filmed material of the PA council session and other statements from Palestinian sources. These facts were ignored or at best ridiculed by the rest of the Israel media.

Recently, in an article published in the *Ma'ariv* daily newspaper,²⁸ Joel Singer, the special Oslo legal advisor at the time, revealed that not only was MK Begin correct in his suspicions but that Peres himself was an active participant together with Arafat in creating the illusion that the Covenant was altered, thus permitting Arafat to avoid fulfilling his obligations under the terms of the Oslo accords. Begin's opinion on the behavior of the media was biting:

The media joined in on the scam most willingly. Laziness, negligence, as well as political interests linked up together. Except for Uzi Benziman, no one stood up to ask, to pressure, to investigate.²⁹

MK Begin was involved in another affair in which the media was perceived as serving the personal preferences of various editors and reporters rather than the public's right to know. Beginning in late January 1994, Begin became aware of the existence of videotapes in which speeches of Yasser Arafat were recorded in the Arabic language. In these appearances, Arafat used terminology that was far from the language of peace agreed upon in the Oslo accords. Arafat was expressing himself in the most maximalist positions as championed in the PLO Covenant, including clear allusions to armed struggle and terror.

Begin repeatedly attempted to interest the editors of the two main television news programs. He asked to be interviewed and that selections from the tapes be broadcast. As he later recalled,³⁰ some four months passed before he was afforded air time on Channel One. Interestingly enough, the reason he finally managed to appear was that Shimon Peres, in a session of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, accused Begin of dealing in tampered tapes, suggesting that Begin was being less than honest as to the contents of Arafat's speeches. It was this angle, that perhaps the tapes were worthless, that interested the news editors. It was possibly their hope that the tapes would prove unsubstantiated.

Once a month, for over four years, the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Studies at Tel Aviv University has been publishing a "Peace Index" on various issues, political, social and cultural, related to the evolving peace process.

The project is headed by Professor Efraim Yaar and Doctor Tamar Herman. The public opinion polls are carried out by the Modiin Ezrachi firm. The *Ha'Aretz* newspaper provides full coverage of the monthly report. Unlike other polls, the Peace Index includes in its representative sampling residents of kibbutzim and the communities in Judea and Samaria.

The July 1998 Index included two questions regarding the performance of the media within the Oslo peace process. The first question was:

Does the Israeli media influence the public's support of or its opposition to the peace process?

The answers were:

Not at all	11%
Not much	22%
Significantly	28%
Greatly	34%
No opinion	5%

The second question was:

In your general opinion, does the Israeli media report objectively about the peace process or are its reports biased more to the support of the process or more in opposition to it?.

The replies were as follows:

Tend to support	46%
Tend to oppose	13%
The reporting is objective	34%
No opinion	7%

These results point to the trend amidst the general public which considers the media itself to be a player on the political stage, involved and influencing events.

The size of the headline, the favorable commentary, the "little" stories from behind the scenes, the minimizing of certain news items among other instances are the instruments which were manipulated by the media in its efforts to create a positive public opinion relating to the peace process.

Another method of managing the news was the publishing of derogatory commentary, bordering on the ridiculous. Following the revelation of Arafat's infamous Johannesburg speech in May 1994, in which he called for the faithful to practice *jihad*, Amnon Avramovitz quoted approvingly the words of Shlomo Gur, then assistant to Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, who said in response that the recording "reminded me of a recording of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef [the Shas Rabbinical mentor]".³¹

The Second Television Authority's satire program, "Chartzufim", an Israeli version of the British "Spitting Images", depicted Arafat as an almost lovable and cute doll, easing his acceptance as a cultural icon by the Israeli public.

A left wing journalist, Ari Shavit, summed up the positive relationship that the media had developed vis-a-vis the Oslo process thus:

In present-day Israel, there exists an almost absolute identity between those persons dedicated to the idea of peace, in its most radical-dovish version, and the journalists, lawyers and academics who are charged with setting the civil and legal norms and the flow of information...a certain camp, very well defined, fulfills three or four functions: they are the players, the judge, they report and they explain the process on the various media outlets.³²

In a report composed by Israel Media Resource director, David Bedein, who was present at most of the press conferences held during the first two years of the Oslo process and who made available the first video tapes of Arafat's speeches, one finds several instances in which the media preferred to skip over uncomfortable issues. These included the non-condemnation of terror acts, the invalidation of the Palestinian Covenant, the extradition of murderers, the lack of clarity expressed by Palestinian spokespersons when relating to the "Right of Return" and the continuation of the "armed struggle". One special case was the refusal to report on and analyze the agreement worked out in Egypt in December 1995 between Arafat and the Hamas which provided the latter with the 'green light' to kill. Bedein notes the use of superlatives when describing diplomatic moves during the talks on the Declaration of Principles (DOP), when media personnel employed semantic weapons to convince their audience. Another case in point is the preferential treatment afforded certain research institutes, which supported the Oslo route, which then had their research fellows appear on the broadcasting media.

Reporters who dared to criticize the process or to publish unfavorable reports were pressured in certain ways to change their tune or to risk a deep freeze. For example, Bedein claims that after Ehud Ya'ari, IBA's Arab affairs senior correspondent, was interviewed in *Ma'ariv* in May 1994, strongly criticizing the Israeli negotiating team's concepts, he never repeated his criticism, as if he was forced to recant. Ya'ari found a refuge of sorts for independent thought when he published English-language articles critical of the Oslo process in the *Jerusalem Report*.

Pinchas Inbari, reporter and commentator on Arab affairs in Judea, Samaria and Gaza (YESHA) for the now-defunct left wing *Al HaMishmar* daily, expressed professional frustration in private conversations. He complained that the editorial line adopted by his paper mostly ignored the essence of the material he was reporting, obtained from central figures in the Palestinian and PLO leadership. Inbari rarely, if ever, appeared on the electronic media and unlike many other print journalists was not given a chance to air his views over the electronic broadcasting networks.

Another aspect of media bias is the hostility displayed by certain media persons against one particular ideological-political camp. Reports on the Israeli residents of YESHA reflected clearly the reporters' antagonism towards the YESHA settlers. Only recently, Guy Kotev, Kol Yisrael's territories' reporter, allowed an insight into the heart of the Israeli media and its approach to the question of the Jewish residents in YESHA. Interviewed on Kol Yisrael,³³ Kotev admitted to Shelly Yechimovitz, that the media's dealing with illegal actions conducted by Jews against Arabs is always louder and more extensive than the coverage of Arab crimes against Jews. He also revealed that many Arab acts of low-level violence against Jewish residents were never reported.

This, he made clear, was due to the personal preferences of the reporters and their editors.

Many complaints are to be found in **IMW** files regarding the lack of professional ethical behavior in the reporting on issues connected with the so-called “settlers” and their life in their communities. One special item, for example, was a report broadcast in August 1995 dealing with water scarcity in the Hebron area (see page 56 below). Despite the fact that the falsity of the story was brought to the attention of the IBA ombudsman no correction or apology was issued. The summer of 1998 saw a basic replay of that first story: Israel is responsible for the dearth of water in that region. A Jewish swimming pool was counterpointed with an empty faucet, again and again. In fact, Israel was delivering all the water agreed upon in the Oslo accords.

A major fault we found with the Israeli media during this period was its treatment of the mass public protest movement and its multitude of groups and organizations. Many demonstrations were conducted and the interplay with the media was complex. While the scenes of sit-downs and marches were transmitted, and while the leaders voiced their support for non-violent actions, the media consistently characterized the demonstrations, especially of the “Zo Artzeinu” (This is Our Land) group, as “violent” and preferred pictures of occasional rambunctiousness. When in December 1993, 80 professors and lecturers of right wing academics group “Professors for A Strong Israel” demonstrated against the IBA’s media bias, the IBA ignored the activity. This phenomenon of media bias, which in turn affected the activities of extra-parliamentary groups, causing a heightening of tension in the public political and social climate, is treated in a new book that was published in the summer of 1998. Written by Professor Gadi Wolfsfeld of the Hebrew University’s Communications Department, the book, “Media and Political Conflict”, devotes two full chapters discussing the inter-relations between the media as a reporting institution and the pervasive influence it generates because of the way it reports the news and allows or limits discussion of issues (see pages 77-123 in particular).

Another element of Israel’s media-political complex as it is reflected in the treatment of the Oslo process was the cooperation that developed in regard to the activities of the General Security Services agent provocateur, Avishai Raviv. The electronic media, and especially Channel One television, chose Raviv as their “media star” and made him into a symbol of the entire anti-Oslo camp, those the late Prime Minister Rabin, with purposeful measure, called “the extreme Right”. The practical result of this media concentration on Avishai Raviv was that the insignificant fringe was pushed into the limelight. When Raviv and his ilk were repeatedly displayed on the television screens while, at the same time, the media consumer was unaware of the true strength of these activists, what occurred was the creation of a virtual reality. This virtual reality had little in common with the actual reality but, in turn, created a new reality. The media contributed, in an irresponsible and illegal fashion, to the driving of a wedge between Israel’s citizens.

The truth of the discomfiting role played, knowingly or otherwise, by the media in the Raviv affair was revealed in the fall of 1997 when, after a long struggle, a secret portion of the Shamgar Inquiry Commission’s report dealing with Raviv was released for publication. The Commission, established to investigate the events leading to the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, wrote in their official report:

Eyal...existed, for all intents and purposes, only in the publications of Avishai Raviv and through the coverage afforded him by the television.³⁴

All that time, [Raviv] continued in his contacts with the media in order to portray Eyal as a real organization and received assistance from the television in that it broadcast a swearing-in ceremony, that was but a put-on show, that anyone who was present there had to be aware that indeed it was a show.³⁵

That swearing-in ceremony, mentioned in the report, was shown on Channel One’s “Yoman” program in late September 1995. **IMW** complained to the IBA heads at the time that we suspected a fabricated presentation. Subsequently, the police were instructed by then Attorney-General Michael Ben-Yair to initiate a criminal investigation. As of this writing (October 20, 1998), no charges have been brought. The Attorney-General’s office, as well as the State Prosecutor’s office, have repeatedly written to **IMW** that they are still investigating.

In another media manipulation event which sought to portray the right-wing as a criminal element, Raviv assumed responsibility in early September 1995 for a murder of an Arab resident of the village of Halhul, near Hebron. The media prominently and repeatedly broadcast the statement, as was its obligation, but neglected to engage in its own independent investigation.

In fact, on the "Popolitika" program a few days later, Moshe Feiglin of the "Zo Artzeinu" protest movement was ridiculed by the moderator and panel members when he suggested that the Eyal group had nothing to do with the crime.

Prominent government ministers, especially those from the extreme Left, such as Yossi Sarid, exploited the incident and the pronouncements of Raviv to denigrate the entire right wing as well as calling for the removal of Hebron's Jewish population in response. All during this period of over a week, as noted, the media somehow "lost" its ability to act on its own.

Even after it eventually became known that the Arab was killed by other Arabs for criminal reasons, the lack of balance in the media coverage continued.

The tension that had formed between the media and their sympathizers amongst the academic community, natural allies in the reality of Israel broke out into the open in March 1996. At the height of the series of Arab terror attacks at the time, which involved the horrendous results of suicide bombers, Professor Shlomo Avineri, former Director-General of the Foreign Ministry and a Labor Party member, a founder of the 77 Circle, attacked the media coverage of the events. First appearing on the "Erev Chadash" (New Evening) show,³⁶ he called Chaim Yavin, anchorman of the main evening news broadcast on Channel One TV, "a collaborator of the Hamas" and further described him as the "national crybaby". In another interview, this time in the presence of Yavin, Avineri stated that he was acting "at the time as one who is concerned with the public's morale".³⁷

It was obvious to all that it was actually the supreme electoral interest of the Labor party that concerned Prof. Avineri. The more the coverage of terror attacks, the more negative effect they would have on the election chances of Labor on polling day which had by then been set for May 26.

There is then yet another question that should be asked: as personalities opposed to the government's position were denied air time during the election campaign (noted below), why did the IBA permit a discussion of Avineri's criticism to be aired?

Dr. Raya Epstein, who researches the cultural, political and ideological sources of totalitarianism, arrived at conclusions that paralleled those of Ari Shavit and Ben-Dror Yemini mentioned above, concerning the role played by the clique of Israel's mass media. According to Epstein, Israeli democracy is unique in that it "forces itself" upon the populace with the aid of elites whose roots are to be found in pre-state Zionist socialism. Epstein's thesis is that it was this interpretation of democracy which allowed the so-called "peace camp" to plant its version of utopia into the consciousness of society as, what she terms, "compatible democracy". She explains:

['The peace camp'] forces Israeli society to go in this single path which it itself has laid out, neutralizing all opposition and protest by portraying them as anti-democratic...the media mobilization, with all its tremendous power, on behalf of the attainment of this goal, allows an indoctrination of the people to take place... it is abundantly clear that the power which forces left-wing radicalism on the daily agenda of the Israeli public is the mass media. It makes no difference if the media is aware or unaware of its campaign against democracy.

In this matter, the usually heard remark from media personnel, often in all honesty, that their left-wing inclinations do not prevent them from being neutral, objective and professional, is lacking all foundation.³⁸

Supporting testimony of Epstein's theory is included in an op-ed article written by the veteran press journalist, Yisrael Rosenblatt, who previously served as the Ombudsman of the *Ma'ariv* daily newspaper. Concerned by the global phenomenon of a reduction in the credibility of the media, Rosenblatt deals with the

special situation in Israel and points to the media being “out to get” Netanyahu, as he sees it. He describes the reality as:

Woe to anyone who attempts to doubt the considerations [of the media] to undermine its claims or is skeptical of its professional integrity. The media possesses standard ammunition (“danger to freedom of expression”, “clamping down on criticism”, “watchdogs of democracy”) which has proven its worth...if at any time previously, the left-wing character of the media was rejected, today everyone in the profession admits it, for indeed, such is the reality. In place of a total denial, there is humorous apologetics: from “there is no such thing as an objective journalist” to “journalists are lefties but the media isn’t”.³⁹

And, as if to close the circle, at a conference of Israeli and Palestinian journalists convened in July 1998 in Rhodes and sponsored by UNESCO, Chaim Yavin, veteran anchorman of IBA’s television news, declared, in reaction to Palestinian claims of censorship and lack of understanding on the part of the Israeli press and media, that

Without the Israeli press, there would have been no peace process. Without the Israeli press, the Intifada would not have led to Oslo. That was a product of Israel’s freedom of the press. The press is the watchdog of Israeli democracy.⁴⁰

5. Rabin’s Assassination and the following Week as Reflected in Channel One’s TV Broadcasts

IMW reviewed the broadcasting schedule of TV’s Channel One during the week following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995.

The programs included in the report were the coverage from Sunday morning until the funeral service, two “Popolitika” shows (November 5th and 7th), a special tribute by artists and actors (November 7th), a special retrospective program on Rabin (November 8th) and the weekly news roundup, “Yoman” (November 10th).

These programs were selected for their centrality in the schedule lineup, their importance as reflected by the hosts and the guests and because their relative length enabled adequate in-depth research.

Our main finding was that balance was not preserved. The “Popolitika” show of November 5th included 12 guests from the leftist camp and 3 from the right.

The representatives of the left received 71% of the discussion time. It was only on the second “Popolitika” show of November 7th that a semblance of balance was presented. This was achieved, as the show’s moderator has revealed,⁴¹ when the producer, Aharon Goldfinger, was forced to invite four representatives of the right as well as of the left. Nevertheless, Finance Minister Avraham Shochat, a close political ally of Rabin, was allowed the special privilege of being interviewed with no other guest present at the panel table for several long minutes before being joined by MK Naomi Chazan of the coalition Meretz Party for another interview period with no one from the right. Despite the balance in the number of guests, the left-wing representatives were allotted 68% of the debate time versus 32% for the opposition members.

Another aspect regarding these two “Popolitika” shows was that the panel interviewers acted with impunity, asking their questions in an aggressive and belittling manner. Their behavior was seen as a contribution to the “brutalization of television culture”, influencing in a negative manner the general gloomy political atmosphere.

Channel One broadcast live, from the HaBimah National Theater hall, a tribute to Rabin by many of the country’s artists and performers. Not one representative of the right was included in the long list of stars. Harsh words of slander and libel were spoken, some in a menacing manner, causing complaints to be made to the Attorney-General’s office. Mordechai Kirschenbaum was reported to be on the verge of pulling the plug on the show but permitted it to continue. A central guest who addressed those assembled was Minister Shulamit Aloni, a very opinionated person in her own right. No other political personality appeared. The

show served as a platform for politically motivated attacks with no modicum of fairness by the public broadcasting network to allow for a true and representative presentation of their views.

Another special program, shown that week, was “Goodbye to Rabin” on November 8, 1995. Not one right wing representative appeared. There were four left-wingers and one PLO representative, Ziad Abu-Ziad. This was a sorry week for broadcasting ethics and was summed up by Haim Assa, a former Rabin analyst who worked as a government employee in the Prime Minister's bureau, in a newspaper opinion piece:

The way the media stars smeared themselves on to the difficult atmosphere that was formed brings to mind desperation. Instead of fulfilling its role – to be a platform for neutral public debate, it became a party to that dispute. Despite the fact that the majority of Israel's media are positioned on the side that I believe in, I find it hard to express my own mind.⁴²

Meiberg described Channel One's efforts that week as a conscious decision of “managing the mourning”.⁴³ In a private war carried on through the use of public instruments, the media hounded, against Benjamin Netanyahu in particular and the National Camp⁴⁴ in general. This vendetta was reviewed by Tamir Shefer, a lecturer and doctoral student at the Hebrew University's Communications Department in an article published in the *Ha'Aretz* newspaper. According to Shefer:

The media coverage after the assassination created a contextual paradigm of a special character – the ‘paradigm of incitement’...the two representative narratives which formulated this ‘paradigm of incitement’ are the ‘coffin demonstration’ [a demonstration that took place in Raanana in the presence of Netanyahu in which a coffin symbolized the “death of peace”. Netanyahu denied seeing the coffin's inscription] and the “Zion Square rally” [in Jerusalem during which a photo montage of Rabin in an SS uniform was displayed before television cameras].⁴⁵

Shefer's article was written in response⁴⁶ to another event which occurred in May 1998 when Jerusalem's Betar soccer team won the league championship. The celebrations were held at Safra Square in the presence of the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the mayor, Ehud Olmert. Television camera microphones picked up chants of “death to Arabs!” from a portion of the crowd. Despite Netanyahu's denial, together with Olmert, that they had not heard chants from their position on a balcony overlooking the square, a claim backed by press reporters, Israel's Channel One showed a few seconds of Netanyahu waving to the crowd together with the chants in the background. The inevitable image conveyed was that Netanyahu was, as it were, encouraging the crowd's chants. In her commentary, news presenter Geula Even left no doubt that she had linked this event with the previous event in Zion Square. That event, as noted above, was central to the incitement thesis in that there, too, Netanyahu had stated that he had not seen the posters from where he was standing even though television shots created the image and sense that he was smiling in direct reaction to the posters. Netanyahu, the media was unmistakably conveying, was a secret partner to the incitement.

The clear conclusion of the week's broadcasting was that the media utilized the difficult and unparalleled circumstance in the history of the State of Israel of the assassination of a prime minister to create an orchestrated campaign of a certain cultural, social and ideological elite against a group hostile to that elite as well and hated by it.

The media, posits Shefer, mourned in two spheres.

Firstly, the media engaged in self-flagellation. An example of this is Michael Karpin's documentary (“The Government Announces With Shock”) that blames the press directly for ignoring the obvious signs that indicated an incitement campaign...and the second expression of the media's mourning was an increased awareness that highlighted in a massive media coverage every item and instance that could be associated with incitement...the problem in this mode of activity (that is, the review and categorization of events according to their appropriateness to existing media paradigms) created a mental fixation and invited stereotyping.

In addition, Shefer relates to the problems resulting from the fact that the media must shorten, classify edit and present an event by showing a sample of the reality. Journalists are those who, by their roles, create the

contexts in which the event will be displayed. In this professional process, several questions should be asked, such as:

Who is permitted to decide when a sample represents the reality? When are created contexts legitimate? When is it proper to assign an event to the existing media paradigm and when is it correct to disassemble that paradigm?

In the current situation of the Israel media, when many of its central personnel hold opinions that negate the political path of Netanyahu, the clash between the personal biases and the rules of professional ethics has brought about a deprecation of those rules. The cameras and the microphones in the hands of those media people have served the editors, broadcasters and hosts as tools to bring before the viewers and listeners their own personal outlooks while, at the same time, battering the National Camp and he who stands at its head.

The deprecation of the code of ethics is exemplified in an article written by a former IBA employee and currently, a lecturer in media studies at the Hebrew University, Dr. Yitzhak Roeh. The Nakdi Document, the code of ethics of the IBA is termed by him as “an anachronistic document”, which “stirs up but merciful empathy”, as “an ancient legend” which is therefore “irrelevant”.⁴⁷

6. The Israeli Broadcast Media During the 1996 Election Campaign

Infractions of the Electioneering Law

The influence of the mass broadcasting media on an election campaign at the end of the 20th century may be crucial. The selection of news items, their repetition, the coverage of candidates, general events, participation in interview programs – all these, impact on the voter. That elections are equal for all is an elementary principle of the democratic process. As much as possible, each candidate must receive an equal chance to present his position. Therefore, not unlike other democratic countries, the electronic media in Israel is restricted by law during an election campaign.

In the clash between freedom of expression and the right of the public to know on the one hand, and the freedom of choice and the principle of equality on the other, the law comes down on the side of equality of the election process. The election campaign must be held in a fair manner which does not award an artificial advantage to any side, especially not to those parties that are veteran, incumbent and large. As such, paragraph 5 of the Basic Law: Election Law (Electioneering) that was applicable during the elections for the 14th Knesset and the Prime Minister in 1996 fixed two periods, one within the other.

The first, is a 60-day period prior to Election Day, during which “no electioneering may be broadcast”. The second is a 21-day period prior to Election Day, when “no events may be broadcast in which candidates for the Knesset participate”.

The then chairman of the Central Elections Committee, Supreme Court Justice Theodor Orr, made it clear in a letter he sent to all directors of the broadcasting authorities on March 27, 1996 that:

Every specific broadcast or program must be reviewed in their special circumstances in order to ascertain that they do not contain any electioneering.

Israel's Media Watch staff followed the transmissions of both television channels, One and Two, during the entire 60 day period leading up to ballot day. These included all the news and central current affairs programs. We found that the law prohibiting election propaganda was violated daily in one form or another.

The infractions were committed by reporters, broadcasters, show hosts, editors and producers and, on the side of the politicians, by representatives of the two major blocs as well as other guests on interview shows. They all exploited loopholes so as to promote a political stand. The majority of the infractions were done by members or sympathizers of the-then coalition parties, Labor and Meretz.

There exist three options to enforce the election law: voluntarily by the broadcasting authorities themselves; by the Central Elections Committee; and by judicial action brought by the Attorney-General's office or by

the State Prosecutor or the police. The networks did not exert themselves in enforcing that which is prohibited and basically ignored their responsibilities.

For example, Channel Two's main evening news broadcast included a short daily item entitled "Political Area". Reported by Itai Engel, it included unadulterated political campaign propaganda, mouthed, even if by people in the street, on behalf of the two candidates for Prime Minister as well as a variety of parties. The complaints submitted by **IMW** to the Complaints Commissioner of the Second Authority were of no use. It was only after that **IMW** threatened to undertake legal steps and then, after tough negotiations with the legal advisor of the news corporation, that the item was eventually removed from the program, and then, after a long delay and just a few days before the elections. In another instance, when clear election propaganda on behalf of Shimon Peres was broadcast on a Kol Yisrael program hosted by Yaron Enosh, the laconic reply received in the **IMW** office, signed by the IBA spokesperson, was that since the elections were over, there is no need to deal any more with the matter.

Voluntary restraint by the broadcasting authorities was nonexistent.

The second way to uphold the law was through action taken by the Central Elections Committee (CEC). Its chairman, Justice Theodor Orr, saw himself as taking the path of the golden mean. As he explained in the CEC meeting held after the elections:

[I decided] to balance out between the two: on the one hand, between the wish to defend the right of expression, including, of course, that of the media which represents the soul of our democratic regime and between, on the other hand, the need to protect that which the law obligates.

And he continued: "I admit that the task was not easy."⁴⁸

In a meeting with representatives of **IMW**, held on May 8, 1996, Justice Orr explained that in any case, the CEC did not enforce the law. That was the job of the police. At most, the committee could prevent a broadcast or assert its moral authority. It had no standing in cases of infractions already committed. In this instance, it was up to the police and the public prosecution to act. Orr prevented only one program from being aired and that, on the eve of Election Day. The helplessness of the CEC and its chairman as well as the deprecation of the law by the media can be judged from the following incident.

Words of support for Shimon Peres by the Baba Baruch, a Sefardi Rabbi, were broadcast on the "Popolitika" show of May 13. In view of this illegal electioneering within the 60 day period prior to election, **IMW** requested that the CEC exert its responsibility to prevent a future infraction on this program. Justice Orr decided, in line with the suggestion of **IMW** representatives present at the hearing, to order IBA director general Kirschenbaum to personally and closely supervise the program to prevent any electioneering propaganda from being broadcast.

The next program again dealt illegally with election issues and the conduct of the candidates. **IMW** demanded a restraining order against the program or it being pre-recorded. In response, Justice Orr decided that Kirschenbaum had not fulfilled his obligations. He further demanded that Kirschenbaum inform him prior to broadcast of the next program, the precise issues to be dealt with by the show as well as the list of invited guests to prevent any further infractions.

Despite all this unprecedented judicial intervention, during the next program broadcast the night before the elections, two of the panelists, Amnon Dankner and Shelly Yechimovitz, took advantage of their live appearance on the screen, ridiculed Justice Orr's decisions and proceeded to make statements of support for Shimon Peres while belittling Benjamin Netanyahu.

Complaints about illegal electioneering that were made to the police and other judicial bodies such as the Attorney General's Office, the third option, proved useless as well. They referred the complaints to the CEC.

Thus a vicious circle was created. Infractions were admitted freely after the elections by Razi Barkai, host of Channel Two's media critique program "Tik Tikshoret" (lit. Media File), produced by Israel's Education

Network. He stated: “we are all delinquents”.⁴⁹ Daliah Ravikovitz, an outstanding poet with left-wing views, also admitted the media’s biased intervention:

When the two candidates were interviewed [on the “Popolitika” program] we saw Peres being treated with royal honor, and Bibi was set upon as if by a pack of dogs.⁵⁰

The law which was intended to prevent unfair electioneering via the instruments of the mass media was violated both in spirit and in letter. There was no way of preventing its infraction nor of punishing those who acted illegally. Spokesmen of the Labor Party openly exhibited their confidence in the media’s help. The head of Labor’s Information and public relations unit, Avraham Burg, referring to the incumbent’s advantage was quoted by *Ma’ariv*’s political reporter, Shalom Yerushalmi, as saying:

What “shows” better – news which is supposed to be objective or political propaganda?⁵¹

Haim Ramon, head of Peres’ personal election campaign unit, was also quite open in his admiration of the way the media was serving the Labor Party’s interests:

The Labor Party does not even require at this time [during the Grapes of Wrath Operation] any electioneering. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet Ministers are receiving maximum media coverage and they are promoting well the government’s policy.⁵²

The law prohibiting candidates from being shown indeed proved its logic as pointed out by Yaron Dekel, the IBA’s political correspondent. Appearing on the weekly “Yoman” program he said:

In the past three weeks, when the electronic media outlets were blocked for Shimon Peres [because of the law], I think that there was a restriction in his ability to make headlines as he had done in the past two months. Peres in the headlines, Bibi in advertisements [was the reality], but not so much in the last three weeks.⁵³

The broadcast media failed to keep the law and thereby allowed the lists associated with the then governing coalition to significantly increase the gap of coverage between them and the opposition as well as between the candidates of the large parties vis-a-vis smaller, new or sectarian lists that hardly appeared at all. The principle of equality was violated and there was no balance to speak of.

Advocate Yuval Karniel, the former legal advisor to the Second Authority, claimed in a newspaper article that what defines who or what will be broadcast are “professional editorial considerations”. He went on to explain:

The professional consideration obligates the presentation of a position championed by the opposition when it has news value, all the while distinguishing between a report and an expression of opinion or outlook.

The intent of the law, Karniel explained, was to prevent the “taking over”, through the vehicle of a “professional consideration”, of air and screen time due to the advantage of the coalition parties in influencing the public via news broadcasts. Also according to Karniel, the media violated the law:

Today, the various media channels are ignoring, ever elegantly, the clear existing prohibition of the election law to broadcast propaganda on television and radio.⁵⁴

Infractions of the Ethics Code: Reliable Data and Fair Reporting

In addition to the law, the media violated their own ethics codes. The following examples are illustrative.

- “Mabat”, on May 12th, presented a distorted report regarding videocassettes distributed to voters and dealing with terror attacks. According to the report, “the Likud cited evil quotations of Shimon Peres”. Characterizing the statements as “evil” was a personal opinion of the reporter, stemming from his own ideological position. For after all, the quotations were authentic and backed by reliable sources.
- The entire affair of the supposed invalidation of the PLO Covenant during April 1996 was handled in a biased fashion, unreliably and incorrectly reported, as discussed above.

- An attempt to kidnap a soldier on May 12th was relegated to insignificance and no true attempt was made to investigate the story.
- On Memorial Day, April 23, a radio item was broadcast which included interviews with families who had lost relatives due to Arab terror. **IMW** researched and revealed that those interviewed were selected with the active help of one Yitzhak Frankenthal whose son had been kidnapped and murdered by Arab terrorists. Mr. Frankenthal, however, was a leading activist in the "Darchei Shalom" (Paths of Peace), a religious group advocating territorial withdrawal and supporting the Labor Party. Attempts by other bereaved parents, who disputed the current government policy, to appear on the program were thwarted. A promise, by IBA's director general was given to Dr. Aryeh Bachrach, whose son was killed in Wadi Kelt, that an effort would be made to allow him air time but it was not kept.
- The humor and satire programs were a special source of media bias against Mr. Netanyahu. The essence of political satire is the humiliation and deprecation of politicians and parties. At election time, such satire can easily cross the boundaries of simple criticism and turn into electioneering. The Supreme Court justices took note of this problem when, in an earlier decision, they distinguished between material with artistic content and political propaganda.

It is the opinion of the authors of this report that the value of art in a satirical sketch is relatively negligible when shown during election time. Its influence as a propaganda device is highlighted and therefore should be treated according to another standard. The determination of the two broadcasting authorities to grant free license to artists allowed the showing of humor and satire programs that contained unadulterated propaganda. During the election campaign, Channel One broadcast the "Cameri Quintet" and Channel Two, the "Chartzufim" and the "Zehu Zeh" programs.

Examples of humor as prohibited electioneering material presented as humor were:

- A song included in the "Zehu Zeh" show of April 29th referring to candidate Netanyahu in his youth was a furniture salesman, described a salesman of antiquated objects singing of "a leader melting in the heat, yesterday angry and today a man of peace/ platforms of synthetic material...today before the elections...selling used material, second-hand..."

In reply to a complaint by **IMW**, Mr. Yoel Rekem, the Second Authority's Complaints Commissioner, wrote that

The darts of satire in Koby Luria's song...are aimed, in my opinion, against Israeli politics in general and this, too, in a gentle hint...we found no reason to intervene...your complaint was investigated and found groundless.⁵⁵

- The "Chartzufim" program, brought satire down to a level of raunchiness unknown until then. Netanyahu's campaign slogan "A Secure Peace" was distorted to "A Secure Peace = Safe Sex". Ms. Limor Livnat, a Likud candidate, was shown instructing Netanyahu and other Likud candidates how to use condoms. Such low-level humor was utilized mostly against the Likud and religious parties, but not exclusively.
- Rafael Eitan, a Tzomet candidate, was held up as a stuttering fool who can't remember a thing. Netanyahu was always shown with a violent streak, constantly striking Shimon Peres. And if there were any problems of communication between Peres and Yasser Arafat, it was always Peres' fault. The "Chartzufim" writers even exploited Rabin's assassination, portraying him as an angel in Heaven, observing the antics of his political inheritors.
- An **IMW** study of all 92 skits shown on the program during the 60 day pre-Election Day period when electioneering is banned showed that only 57% of skits relating to the coalition were detrimental and negative (27 out of 47) whereas 73% of the skits dealing with the opposition parties were negative (33 out of 45).
- The "Cameri Quintet" of the IBA presented another problem. Two of its stars, Rami Hoiberger and Dov Navon, participated in electioneering clips on behalf of the Labor Party. The previous IBA

Chairman, Aryeh Mekel, had set out IBA policy in this matter in a decision published on February 10, 1992, during that year's election campaign to wit, no one participating in election commercials could appear as a performer on IBA programs during the 60 day period. Following an appeal to Director-General Kirschenbaum by IMW, he ratified the policy but only prevented their appearance in a program that was to include the two in question during the week prior to Election Day.

Preventing Criticism and Halting Flow of Information

An intolerable phenomenon, especially during a period of national debate and decision, was the policy to prevent persons critical of the electronic media's performance and behavior from being allowed to air their points of view.

As mentioned earlier (see section 3), on the first two days of May 1996, a prominent newspaper ad was published, signed by an outstanding cross-section of intellectuals demanding fairplay and objective reporting on the part of media personalities during the election campaign.

The ad read:

Out of concern for the democratic character of Israel, we call upon you, media personnel, to place the obligation to democracy and political fair play above your personal inclinations for this or that side. Journalists must draw a clear line between their right to express their opinions in op-ed columns and between their tasks as news editors and interviewers.

The affording of a proper and fair platform for both candidates for the position of Prime Minister before the public is a professional-ethical obligation. Any act injurious to these principles is a stab at the heart of democracy.⁵⁶

Several of the various radio programs and television shows invited a number of the signatories of this ad to appear and be interviewed. In the end, these interviews were canceled.

Professor Gabriel Moked, who considers himself a member of the social Left and a non-party member of the Labor Party's social affairs committee and Dr. Yuval Shteinetz, who supported the Likud, were asked to participate on the May 13th "Popolitika" program. At the last moment, they received an urgent announcement that "due to the intervention of authoritative elements within the IBA's management", the invitation was recalled.

Prof. Moked was again invited, this time to "Shetach Hefker", the media critique show to be broadcast May 15th. His participation was canceled due to a strange (to him) excuse. Despite the fact that a taxi had already been ordered for him (as he had been informed) and only two hours after he had discussed his appearance with an editorial research assistant, he was told that as the Likud had withdrew its complaints regarding charges of bias in the broadcasting, his participation was no longer needed and he was not to come. Even though Moked protested that there was no connection between his criticism and the Likud's complaints, he was refused airtime even after he became aware that, in fact, the Likud had not withdrawn their complaints.

On May 21, the public opinion show, "Da'at Kahal" (lit. Public Poll), was to have aired a debate entitled "The Media – Balanced or Leftist?". Dr. Shteinetz and a representative of the Left were asked to participate but the program was canceled the day before it was to have been broadcast. The reason given was that opposition had arisen within IBA circles. And on May 22, the Army Radio station, Galatz, requested Prof. Moked to appear live on one of its morning programs. But less than half an hour later, again he was told that the invitation had been rescinded. The excuse this time was that the IBA director general Mordechai Kirschenbaum, opposed the discussion unless he was a participant. However, as he could not be available, the broadcast was canceled.⁵⁷

In a handwritten letter, entitled "A Strange Thing Happened to Me on the Way to the Media",⁵⁸ Moked relates to the ominous ramifications of the media's behavior:

All these incidents only strengthened me in my position that our media is not only suffering from a powerful haughtiness... [and] unity of ideology...but in addition, a significant portion of those who set the tone in the

media are attempting to exert control in a super extreme radical note, much closer to the desires of the 'New Historians' to crumble the Israeli narrative rather than displaying a balanced line of support for the peace process.

An outstanding example of the media's ability to betray its professionalism is in a campaign anecdote found in a book describing Peres' election loss, entitled "The Suicide". The authors recall that during the "Grapes of Wrath" operation in April 1996, Shimon Peres, while on a tour of the north, shared a table and some beers with a group of journalists. Asked to comment on the harsh criticism of the military operation against Lebanon coming from the Israeli Arab community, Peres retorted: "those stupid Arabs". As the authors describe it:

The journalists were dumbfounded. For Peres, this was an act of political hari-kiri in the main square of the city. Had his remarks been given publicity, and they were recorded and spoken for the record, it could have brought about his premature end. Following a discussion among themselves, in the end, Peres' words were not reported.⁵⁹

Not only were persons critical of the media's role in the elections prevented from reaching the public but there were journalists who themselves yielded to self-censorship in accordance with their political outlook.

The Last Week of the Elections and Polling Day

The attempts of the media to influence voters and to affect the outcome of the elections reached new heights during the last week of the campaign and Election Day. Representative examples of their efforts are as follows:

1. The Chabad campaign under the slogan "Netanyahu. Good for the Jews" was presented in a biased fashion without proper consideration of the right of rebuttal. A reported remark from within the cabinet meeting, that the slogan carried the stigma of being racist, was not discussed in a balanced way in any of the current affairs programs. On the day of the elections, the Chabad spokesperson phoned **IMW**'s offices complaining that his attempts to get airtime and respond to charges leveled against his movement had failed. It was only at 5 PM, on the "Erev Chadash" program that he finally got an opportunity.
2. The media reported that a supposed complaint had been tended to the Central Elections Committee against Arutz 7 for broadcasting election propaganda. The story was a fabrication.
3. Two days prior to the elections, the grave of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin was desecrated. The event did not receive any extensive coverage nor any panel discussion. In comparison, a media frenzy took place earlier, when a Labor Party campaign worker was injured in a shooting incident as a result of an altercation with Likud campaign workers. The desecration affair was glossed over.
4. On Election Day, the electronic media allowed themselves to be manipulated to the point of encouraging the Arab sector to vote. When it became clear to Labor Party activists that the percentage of Arabs voting was low, a statistic that would be damaging to Peres, increased news items and commentary discussions were heard. The interest was artificial and blown out of proportion.

The biased performance by the media, both printed and broadcast, did not surprise anybody. Ron Meiberg, as quoted previously, left no doubt as to the clear sectarian-political interest displayed by the members of the media when he wrote: "Never had we been so mobilized to bring down a prime minister."⁶⁰ Chami Shalev was of the same opinion, when, a year after the elections, he stated on television: "It's no secret that most journalists did not support Netanyahu."⁶¹

Tzvi Li-dar, the IBA spokesman and public relations chief, outlined back in February 1996 the elements of unbiased television coverage. Writing to a member of the IBA's executive council, Li-dar detailed the approach of the professional staff:

The IBA executive is well aware of the very heightened political sensitivity of these days...every move of an eyebrow and every lip movement is interpreted as an expression of an indication of support in this or that side of the political debate...due to this, the Director-General has decided that in every weekly News Forum meeting from now until the elections, the importance of responsible and balanced news coverage will be stressed and in instances of a violation of the regulations, comments will be noted.⁶²

In reality, the letter wasn't worth the paper on which it was written. Not only was nothing practical ever done but as related previously, the senior IBA employees collaborated in electioneering for Peres. **IMW** summed up its research with the following conclusions and recommendations:

- a. Due to managerial failure the law prohibiting the broadcasting of partisan election propaganda 60 days prior to elections was not upheld in both broadcasting authorities. The review systems did not work.
- c. Balance and objectivity were not kept. The tendency was to prefer the government and its spokesmen.
- d. The IBA chose to prevent a proper public discussion of the media's performance during the elections by canceling appearances and programs.

The Israel Broadcasting Authority Law, the Second Television and Radio Authority Law and the Nakdi Document set out clear and unambiguous restrictions and instructions regarding professional media ethics. These are not unique to Israel. Similar codes and regulations exist in Britain for the BBC, in France, the CSA acts to assure ethical behavior and in the United States, the NPR also is obliged by a code of ethics. During elections, a period of extreme tension, there exists a special need to maintain ethics. In Israel, the failure in this regard could have been calamitous.

7. Imbalance in the Israel Broadcasting Authority's Programs

The IBA is a public media network. As such, it must provide the media consumers with a balanced coverage of rival political groupings. This, especially in a country where interest in the activities of the Prime Minister, the government and the Parliament (Knesset) is intense.

During 1997, due to several prominent issues, the subject of media interference and its perceived lack of balance came to the fore. One such incident occurred in September when President Ezer Weizmann slapped Channel Two's reporter Moshe Nussbaum, an incident that was hushed up and went unreported for weeks even though it had been filmed.⁶³ Neither of the two television channels thought the action of the President newsworthy.

It later was revealed that at least on two other occasions, Weizmann had used, what was described as "over-friendly physical force", on two other journalists, one a woman. It wasn't until Shelly Yechimovitz, who had read the *Ha'Aretz* item and interviewed Nussbaum on her radio interview program, that the issue was discussed. Nussbaum appeared on Channel Two's afternoon talk show, "At Five with Rafi Reshef", and that was the extent of electronic media interest.

President Weizmann merited a protective wall of media indifference. On the other hand, Netanyahu's private remark in September 1997, uttered to a Rabbi, that "the Left has forgotten what it means to be Jewish", was covered extensively, several times daily for a full week.

To compound the imbalance and the consequent favoritism, that same week, his Labor Party rival, Ehud Barak, was quoted in *Yediot Ahronot* as referring to his possible left-wing Meretz partners as having less than full Jewish roots. His remark was glossed over and received little media attention.

In early October 1997, following publication of the attempted assassination of Hamas official Khaled Mash'al in Jordan, Carmela Menasheh, Kol Yisrael's military affairs reporter, was accused of combining her personal views with her factual news reports. On October 9, IBA Director- General Kirschenbaum released a statement that said:

The public is not stupid and knows to distinguish between a news item and commentary on the news. In a matter such as the affair in Jordan, all the press dealt with both news and opinion while reporters brought both news and opinion together. To the best of my knowledge, Carmela did not express her own personal opinion...⁶⁴

Here we find that the IBA head, who also serves as its chief editor, seeks to excuse an incident of blatant unethical behavior while noting, at one and the same time, that “everyone is doing it” and that “she didn’t do it”.

The inability of the IBA director general to differentiate between what is practiced and what should be practiced, while belittling the ethical code of the IBA, is symptomatic. There is no real serious attention paid to the matter of broadcasting ethics.

The IBA’s professional executive were not willing to recognize the problem. The result is unbalanced biased broadcasting and an undermining of the IBA’s mandate as a public broadcaster.

(Note: References in parentheses in the following section refer to the IBA’s official code of ethics, the Nakdi Document.)

Balance – What is It and For What Purpose?

According to the “Nakdi Document”, “balance” is defined as permitting fair and impartial expression of different opinions in correct proportions, both in news and opinion broadcasts without awarding points to any side (para. 41; 45). A central element of balance is “the ability to bring the news in the most objective and neutral manner” (para. 26) as well as the prohibition “to broadcast feelings instead of information”, that is, “the report must be factual and as complete as possible” (para. 27). These regulations, and others, all stem from the fourth paragraph of the Law of the Israel Broadcasting Authority which stipulates that

In the broadcasts, a place should be given for the proper expression of the views and different opinions currently held by the public and the third paragraph which obligates the IBA to broadcast information on “the current affairs of the state, its struggle, its creativity and its achievements”.

The editors of the last edition⁶⁵ of the Nakdi Document write in their introduction that

We should always review what is the measure of the journalist’s ability to present before the media consumer the full, exact and significant picture and what is the measure of purposefully concealing of bias in every one of the stages in the process of transferring data from the news department employee, who is the provider and agent, to the viewer and listener – the media consumer.

Imbalance is created when there is no supervision or control over ethics: expressing one’s personal opinion, lack of response, using a value-loaded term, attaching titles, not broadcasting information, lack of variety, not identifying the commentator’s background, preventing pluralism and the squelching of criticism. Balance is needed not only because of the demands of the professional code but to avoid the entrenchment of tendentiousness, especially in a public broadcasting system. A public authority must be particularly careful, due to its legal and public responsibility.

In an interview conducted by Razi Barkai with Benjamin Netanyahu on the former’s “Tik Tikshoret” television program on February 21, 1998, the Prime Minister made clear his opinion as to the responsible position that should be adopted by the IBA as well as any public broadcasting network:

R. Barkai: Is the IBA, in your opinion, balanced?

B. Netanyahu: The problem is not in the political views of the editors or the broadcasters, even if in this instance there should be a certain balance. The problem is in assuring the professional ethic. There are private views of a person and there is his ability to give expression to the variety of existing views. This is the main thing.

What follows are examples of the most frequent forms of imbalance.

Expressing Personal Opinion

IBA employees are obligated to distinguish between their opinions and the facts (para. 26 quoted above and para. 27: “the broadcaster must avoid expressions of solidarity with matters he covers”). Even in an interview, there exists a similar prohibition (para. 77b). Despite this, many broadcasters, interviewers and show hosts occasionally allow themselves to add expressions or statements that reflect their personal opinion. Such an expression can influence the media consumer as regards the subject at hand and, as such, is an act of bias. While, separately, these instances may be thought minor, it is their cumulative, “drip” effect that may present a serious problem.

Kol Yisrael’s military affairs reporter, Carmela Menasheh, often crosses the line between news and views. The IBA’s ombudsman was forced to bring this to the attention of the radio’s director. In addition to the example cited above (the Mash’al affair), Menasheh, on April 14, 1997, reported on the Prime Minister’s plan to spend the Passover Seder night at an army base. In her report, she asked “why must the PM disturb hundreds of soldiers?” who, in her opinion, would be affected by Netanyahu’s decision and would have to stay on base.

On September 14, 1997, in a report on Lebanon, she added “a solution must be found”.

Mr. Aryeh Golan, frequently expresses his own private opinions when hosting the daily morning radio news program. The IBA ombudsman, wrote **IMW** on October 7, 1997, that

Your complaint was passed on to radio director Amnon Nadav, with my request that he reprimand him (Golan) due to his expressions. I hope that he will pay special attention to the matter.⁶⁶

Needless to say, the reprimand has not changed Golan’s unethical practices.

Non-Broadcasting of Information

It is the journalist’s obligation to provide the media consumer with as full a factual report as possible. Even if there is no absolute objectivity in the selection of news items (para. 59), the journalist’s competency is judged by his ability to gather data and to expose it (Introduction, p. 10). The reporter is to be a “fair agent” in the transferal of news (op. cit., p. 11).

The slap that Moshe Nussbaum received from President Weizmann (as described above) is a classic example of a news item hidden from the public by the media. A similar situation arose over the Gabi Butbol affair. A member of the IBA’s plenum, he was quite active in criticizing the IBA’s professional executive. As a result of a directive issued by Mordechai Kirschenbaum, IBA’s Director-General, the “Popolitika” program producer Aharon Goldfinger illegally sent a researcher to dig up dirt on Butbol, checking his performance in the past as an administrator in an unrelated job. Realizing what was developing, Butbol complained to the IBA’s Chairperson, Rina Shapira. The affair eventually reached the courts, after over a year of deliberations, investigations and public debate. These clearly brought to light the serious breaches of the public trust by the IBA executives. The affair hardly made it to the headlines of the IBA television and radio news programs.

The “Mabat” evening news program never informed the public that the Palestinian Authority’s police force had invaded in August 1997, the White Russian Orthodox monastery in Hebron, throwing out its residents and their belongings and beating up two nuns, an interesting and relevant story of a religious conflict.

That same week, however, several nights were devoted to highlighting the parallel story of a young woman, Tatiana Susskin, pasting up caricatures of Mohammed as a pig in Hebron also causing religious conflict.

As was pointed out in a previous chapter on the media during the 1996 election campaign, Shimon Peres received media preference and sympathy.

Interviewed by Daniel Ben-Simon for a book on the elections, Peres’ remarks on the quality of those who voted against him appeared on the very first page.

According to Peres, those who lent their support to his opponent were “all those who do not possess an Israeli mentality”. In response to the follow-up question, “who are these people?”, Peres, in a clear racist tone, declared “it’s possible to call them ‘the Jews’”.⁶⁷

The book was widely reviewed and yet no media personality thought to question Shimon Peres as to the implications of his remarks. Even following a speech in the Knesset by Prime Minister Netanyahu who attacked Peres over the content of what he said, the broadcast media ignored the issue. This should be compared with the outpouring of media interest dedicated to Netanyahu’s statement to Rabbi Kadouri, mentioned above, or more recently, that devoted to Labor MK Ori Orr’s racist comments on Moroccans in an August 1998 interview with the same Daniel Ben-Simon.

Non-Identification of a Commentator

The code of ethics is quite clear about commentators who have a political ax to grind: “when there exists a link between a commentator’s political belief and the subject under discussion, there is an obligation to note the political background” (para. 23). This principle enables the media consumer to judge for himself the quality of the commentary. Nevertheless, the IBA has failed to uphold it, especially in regards to two frequent commentators: Amnon Avramovitz and Professor Asa Kasher.

The simple and plain fact that Kasher was a candidate for elections to the 14th Knesset on the Meretz list, a radical left wing political party, was never mentioned in any of Kasher’s appearances on television and radio over the past two years.

Kasher, was for example, the studio commentator for over two hours on the live broadcast program of the state ceremony commemorating the first anniversary of Yitzhak Rabin’s death.

Mr. Avramovitz first appeared on the “Yoman” Friday night news review program as a commentator and now is an editor of the program, sitting in the studio. He also appeared as a regular commentator for the daily “Mabat” news program on issues of security and undercover intelligence affairs. He expressed chagrin at handing over a ‘present’ to the right-wing when he identified Avishai Raviv as a General Security Services agent whose code name was “Champagne”. In a newspaper interview,⁶⁸ he revealed that he was a Labor Party supporter for years and that in publishing an item about a planned assassination attempt on a PLO chief, he intended to harm the Likud’s reelection chances back in 1981. This data, which would seemingly compromise his objectivity, and at the very least, oblige the IBA heads to balance him with an opposite number, made no impression all.

Avramovitz’s standing within the IBA has only increased over the years. He was allowed to get away with a blatant biased performance when he questioned then-Foreign Minister David Levy about Netanyahu, asking him: “do you trust the Prime Minister’s psychological stability?”.⁶⁹ The question was not only lacking in good taste but patently exceeded the professional expertise of both Avramovitz as well as David Levy.

Imbalance in the Makeup of Guests and Commentators

Imbalance in the makeup of guests invited to a current affairs program, whether in their number or in the framework of their appearance, will cause a ‘stacking the deck’ in favor of one side of an issue. A classic example is the “Popolitika” program where the regular panel journalists were open supporters of the Oslo process and leftist in general foreign affairs and security matters.

This was true both before and after the 1996 elections. In contrast to current affairs programs such as “Meet the Press”, the journalists do not appear merely as interviewers but they are encouraged to state their personal opinion. A detailed survey of this is contained in IMW’s special report mentioned above. The same phenomenon (as mentioned earlier) was observed in the week following Rabin’s assassination. Here we give several additional examples.

- Two years after the murder of Yitzhak Rabin, “Popolitika” devoted its October 27, 1997 program to the issue. The guest panelists included Daliah Filosof-Rabin – Prime Minister Rabin’s daughter, Professor Anita Shapira, head of the Rabin Heritage Center, and Dr. Menachem Klein and Dr. Gutwein, both supporters of the left-wing camp. All of them spoke out against the nationalist camp whose sole representative, one out of five, was former YESHA council head Yisrael Harel.
- On September 17, 1997, MK Benny Begin appeared as the ‘defendant’ on the “Sichat Ve’ida” (Conference Call) TV program opposite three members of the “Four Mothers” movement which called for an immediate and unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. Not only was the makeup of the guests and the time devoted to discussion unbalanced, Begin was consistently interrupted and could hardly complete a sentence.

Unreliable Information

The fourth paragraph of the IBA Law obliges the authority to broadcast “reliable information”. The Nakdi Document makes it clear that an insufficient check of sources and lack of cross-checking of sources will cause the reporter, out of neglect or personal preference, to broadcast unreliable information.

One such example is a story first reported in the summer of 1995 on the “Yoman” program about the lack of adequate water supplied to the Arabs in the Hebron Hills region due to overuse of water by the Jewish residents of the area. The Kiryat Arba swimming pool was shown juxtaposed to an empty faucet in an Arab house. Despite protests that the clip was misleading and untruthful, no follow-up story was broadcast. Two years later, the Civil Administration of the territories confirmed that 40% of the water destined for the Arab part of Hebron was stolen, drained off on the way, by Arab farmers. The false story reappeared in the summer of 1998.

In a May 9, 1997 broadcast, Yaron Dekel, political affairs correspondent for Kol Yisrael, quoted a fictitious report concerning a Labor Party gathering that day. He claimed that Ziad Abu-Ziad, a PA legislator, was a supporter of the Beilin-Abu-Mazen agreement and spoke to that effect at the gathering. Abu-Ziad called in several hours later to correct the attribution, commenting that Dekel had not been present at the Labor party gathering. Suspicion fell on Yossi Beilin as the source for the false report. Dekel, who failed to confirm his story, was perceived, along with his editor, to have provided Beilin with political back up at the expense of journalistic ethics.

The use of unclear terms, purposefully clouding issues, leads to unreliability. An example is the use of the term “security elements” to describe news sources for security issues. The public is not told whether the “security element” is truly a uniformed military officer or a political figure with a military background who has political inclinations. For example Carmela Menasheh reported in the morning news review on Kol Yisrael on April 3, 1997 “assessments” of “security elements” and “army elements” that “only the action undertaken by the Palestinian security factors can prevent planned terrorist attacks”. This assessment has far ranging implications for it implies that Israel’s army and General Security Services are not capable of providing the security.

Without a clearer definition of the source, the media consumer may have been receiving political propaganda disguised as actual army intelligence.

Political Inclination

Ronnie Milo, mayor of Tel Aviv, is an outstanding example of this problem. Until declaring his candidacy for the prime ministership in late spring 1998, Milo had been a regular panel guest on a political affairs program, “Mischak Shabbat” (Saturday’s Game), broadcast twice on Saturdays, in the morning and repeated in the evenings. He was present in over 85% of the programs transmitted.

In a period of personal elections for mayoralities as well as newly introduced primary elections, the electoral significance of television or radio appearances is great. There was no justification for granting such a unique platform to any politician. The preference granted Milo, despite many complaints, was unfair to his political rivals.

Television awards an aura of respectability to politicians by describing them as “commentators” as if they were neutral observers, academics or experts instead of being intensely involved and having a personal stake in the subject they are discussing. For example, MK Amnon Rubinstein of the Meretz Party, although a Professor of Law at Tel Aviv University, is a full-time politician. Despite this, he often appears as a commentator on legal issues. General (Res.) Oren Shachor, who joined the Labor Party and serves as a close advisor to its head, Ehud Barak, frequently appears as a commentator on issues concerning the negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

Political bias reached new heights during the media event of 1997: the “Bar-On – Hebron Affair”.⁷⁰ Many saw this affair as a media coordinated effort to act outside the democratic process against a prime minister elected in direct elections. The character of the reporting and the way the coverage was broadcast, especially by Channel One TV, was criticized severely during and after the three months the affair highlighted the news. The criticism originated from many quarters. **IMW** complained and released statements regarding ethical and professional errors. The most damaging inside media story, though, was that of Aviv Bushinsky, Kol Yisrael's police reporter and later spokesperson for Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Bushinsky published an article⁷¹ in response to remarks made in reference to his professional work ethic by Rafi Halabi, head of the IBA television's news division and by Mordechai Kirschenbaum, the IBA Director-General at the time.

Bushinsky's reports did not always coincide with the version of the affair promoted by the television. Echoes of the differences of opinion leaked to the press. Bushinsky accused Channel One TV of unethical behavior, especially on the part of Halabi and reporter Ayala Chason. Bushinsky also hinted at criminal behavior. Bushinsky quoted from tape recorded conversations he conducted with Halabi, in which Halabi threatened him, attempting to influence the way Bushinsky was reporting. Halabi, as evidenced from the taped conversation, viewed his journalistic duty as conducting a battle whose goal is to assure that criminal charges would be leveled against Netanyahu and others.

Halabi, in turn, accused Bushinsky of acting out of self-interest and pressured Bushinsky, reminding him that he (Halabi) had spoken to IBA director general Kirschenbaum and the heads of the radio and radio news divisions.

Bushinsky claimed that the television news division did not draw conclusions from the initial hurried manner in which the first broadcast was made, lacking, as it did, a reaction from Bar-On. He wrote that they labored for some time to substantiate and verify the original story, all the while putting on a “show” as if their version was authentic, that the coverage of the police investigation was coordinated with the police investigators themselves who were then praised in Chason's televised reports.

He also accused Channel One television of ignoring the fact that the suspected source for Chason's story, advocate Dan Avi-Yitzhak, was interrogated by the police.

He also claimed that Chason's reports, in part, interfered with the police investigation, as when she informed Bar-On that the police were on their way to his office, in an attempt to gain his reaction. The fact that an internal police investigation was conducted against the police investigation team's second in command was suppressed by Chason. And lastly, Bushinsky pointed out that reports carried by Channel Two and the *Ma'ariv* newspaper regarding Avi-Yitzhak's behavior were ignored by Channel One. Bushinsky reiterated his remarks on a Kol Yisrael radio interview program hosted by Nadav HaEzri and broadcast on September 14, 1997.

IMW demanded from IBA Chairperson Shapira that a special review be conducted. Such an act by the public supervisory body would have contributed to a clearing the air for if only a portion of Bushinsky's

charges proved true, the conclusions would have been far-reaching and quite serious. Except for Kirschenbaum's announcement that he intended to review all of Bushinsky's reports, which he later recanted, no internal IBA review was ever made of the handling of the Bar-On Affair.

Broadcasting Songs with Political Content

Songs with a strong left-wing message, whether in their general content or specific phrases, are frequently heard over the public radio network. For example, Aviv Gefen sings of "let's get out of the territories and conquer the peace". Shalom Chanoch's song, "Don't Call Me A People", is accompanied by a video clip which clarifies the dominance of its one-sided political message.

Songs with an opposing ideological message, such as "Hebron, Now and Forever", are not heard in any regular entertainment program. Left-wing songs are also played as background during news programs, thus doubling their impact.

During the 36-hour national mourning period following the double helicopter crash in 1997, not one song that could be defined as being Chassidic or traditionally Jewish was heard. The refraining from broadcasting cultural expressions deeply rooted in Jewish heritage during general events as well as the limited broadcasting of Mediterranean-style music in such situations reflects the lack of cultural diversity in the IBA.

Prevention of Criticism

Ram Evron, former moderator of the defunct media program, "Shetach Hefker", in an interview published in the *Ha'Aretz* newspaper,⁷² admitted that he intentionally prevented criticism of the IBA from being broadcast on the program. This discriminatory situation is well known to **IMW**. Despite repeated requests to appear on the two main morning radio programs, not once has an **IMW** representative been invited to voice his opinion on a media issue. During the three seasons that "Shetach Hefker" was shown, an **IMW** representative appeared but once. As noted above, prevention of criticism was common practice on the eve of the 1996 elections.

8. Conclusion

The question which we asked ourselves at the outset of this report was "is the essence of Israel's electronic broadcasting the reporting of news or news management?". The breadth and depth of the findings presented in this paper, and especially the open statements of central media personalities themselves, provide the answer: Although Israel's electronic media does provide listeners and viewers with news in depth and extensive commentary, it perceives that it has a major role in directing and managing the news, in setting the public agenda and in influencing current affairs. News is an instrument to be manipulated.

This state of affairs presents a serious danger to Israel's democracy. We presented in this report numerous examples from among hundreds of infractions, documented by **Israel's Media Watch**. The broadcasters are well aware of the infractions but don't take them seriously. Amnon Nadav, director of Kol Yisrael radio, who was interviewed by Shelly Yechimovitz on her program on March 3, 1998, contributed this insight into the attitude of the executive directors to the problem:

Until the period of Mordechai Kirschenbaum, the demands made of us were maximalist in that we should uproot any expressions of personal opinion over the radio and television.

The accumulation of so many instances, of ethical infractions, whether in news programs, commentary or entertainment, point to a clear trend of imbalance in the broadcasts of the IBA in favor of what is termed the "left". The damage caused by lack of ethics is summarized concisely by Allen K. Simpson, a sharp critic of the American media:

The media have largely abandoned all basics of good journalism in favor of slanted, deceptive and ruthlessly prosecutorial reporting. The public always gets the story but seldom gets the truth.

Israel's Attorney-General, Elyakim Rubinstein, is also aware of the shortcomings of the Israeli media. In a speech before the delegates of the Journalists Association, he spoke out about some of their stains which should be cleaned out, among them "superficiality, tendentiousness and lack of fairness".⁷³

There is another serious aspect of Israel's problems with its media. Israel's media elite have been very successful in preventing plurality among the journalists themselves. The clearest evidence for this cliquishness may be found in the army radio station where the proportion of children of known media personalities among the soldiers manning the station is incredibly high. At the same time, the elite makes cynical use of the most important concepts meant to assure the freedom of the press to defend themselves against any criticism. Any attempt at changing the structure of the media, at enforcing media ethics, immediately finds that itself attacked intensely, in terms of the catch phrases "censorship", "injury to democracy" and "interfering with the right to freedom of expression". This defense is very effective when employed by people who control the media and thus their critics cannot get the fair opportunity to view their criticism or defend themselves against the cynical accusations.

Former IBA Director-General, Mordechai Kirschenbaum, aptly summarizes this extreme cynicism and hypocrisy within Israel's media, especially in view of the serious accusations of unethical and illegal behavior within the IBA brought in this report.

In an interview published in the *Yediot Ahronot* he said:

We (the IBA) were politically stigmatized, naturally, from the moment Netanyahu came to power because Netanyahu's right-wing cannot tolerate free television. From the moment different views are brought to them, they become deprived. They possess no tolerance.

In all that is connected to incitement against democratic institutions, including the IBA, and against rivals from opposing political camps, Netanyahu exhibits fascist tendencies, while, as it were, carrying high the flag of liberalism".⁷⁴■

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Endnotes

¹ **Ma'ariv** daily newspaper, March 20, 1997.

² "The Democratization of Public Broadcasting", **Ma'ariv**, June 2, 1997.

³ In 1997, Gabi Butbol, a member of the IBA plenum, was the object of improper exploitation of professional media research procedures. In order to offset his criticism, the IBA's Director-General, TV Director, Spokesperson and the producer of the "Popolitika" program unethically, and in an unauthorized fashion, sought out damaging personal material on Butbol in an attempt to silence him. None of those involved were subjected to a disciplinary tribunal but instead, reprimands were entered into their personal files. The High Court of Justice, on an appeal brought by, among others, **Israel's Media Watch**, did not find a basis to intervene, claiming that the IBA's Chairperson acted adequately.

⁴ **Ma'ariv**, July 21, 1997.

⁵ **Makor Rishon** weekly, February 6, 1998, p. 21.

⁶ **The Seventh Eye**, Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem, Issue No. 3.

⁷ **The Seventh Eye**, op. cit., Issue No. 4.

⁸ **Ha'Aretz**, May 1, 1996, **Ha'Aretz**, **Ma'ariv** and **Yediot Ahronot**, May 2, 1996, (with additional signatures).

⁹ Ms. Yechimovitz, worked for the now defunct *Al HaMishmar* daily, broadcast on Galatz and Kol Yisrael. She appeared briefly on television a few years ago and during the 1997-98 season moderated a media critique program, "Press Conference" on TV's Channel One.

¹⁰ **Ma'ariv**, December 5, 1997.

¹¹ "Shetach Hefker", TV Channel One, June 5, 1996.

¹² "Shetach Hefker", May 28, 1997.

¹³ **Yediot Ahronot**, November 9, 1995.

¹⁴ Dan Margalit, **These I Have Seen**, (Hebrew), Zamora-Beitan, 1997, p. 260.

¹⁵ "Mabat", November 18, 1996.

¹⁶ "All That Moves" Media Column, **Jerusalem**, February 9, 1996.

¹⁷ **Ma'ariv**, February 21, 1997.

¹⁸ **Ha'Aretz**, March 5, 1997.

¹⁹ **Ha'Aretz**, January 10, 1997.

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- ²⁰ **Ma'ariv**, October 17, 1997.
- ²¹ **Ma'ariv**, August 14, 1998.
- ²² **Otot**, February 1998.
- ²³ **Ha'Aretz**, January 7, 1994.
- ²⁴ Israel Landres, ed., **Yearbook of the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists**, 1998, p. 138.
- ²⁵ **Report of the Activity of the Public Bodies**, (in Hebrew), Israel Broadcasting Authority, October 1995-October 1996, p. 16.
- ²⁶ Op. cit..
- ²⁷ See, for example, the comments of Mordechai Gilat, "He Shot Himself in the Foot" (in Hebrew), **Yediot Ahronot**, July 23, 1998.
- ²⁸ **Ma'ariv**, June 19, 1998.
- ²⁹ Binyamin Zeev Begin, "Of Lies and Of People" (in Hebrew), **Yediot Ahronot**, Shabbat Supplement, p. 23.
- ³⁰ Interview with MK Benjamin Begin.
- ³¹ **Ma'ariv**, Shabbat Supplement, May 20, 1994, p. 5. Avramovitz left *Ma'ariv* later that year and since the summer of 1995 has been employed as a regular commentator on a personal contract with the IBA.
- ³² **Ha'Aretz**, Weekend Supplement, December 26, 1997.
- ³³ The "Hakol Diburim" (lit. It's All Talk) program on the Second Radio Program, July 6, 1998.
- ³⁴ Shamgar Commission Report, Chapter 4, paragraph 2, p. 26.
- ³⁵ Op. cit., paragraph 4, p. 28. According to a *Ha'Aretz* item published on October 4, 1998, GSS Head Ami Ayalon had admitted to the Government Security Cabinet the previous October that the television broadcast of the swearing-in ceremony had been "a fake, also a fake of the television" and the Prime Minister's office of Yitzhak Rabin had been so informed.
- ³⁶ Educational Television Network, March 6, 1996, broadcast over IBA's Channel One TV.
- ³⁷ "Erev Chadash" program, March 11, 1996.
- ³⁸ Raya Epstein, "Israeli Bolshevism Disguised as Liberal Democracy", **Nativ**, No. 56, Iyar 5757 – May 1997, pp. 47-48.
- ³⁹ Y. Rosenblatt, "Who Will Watch the Watchdogs?", **Ma'ariv**, June 6, 1998.
- ⁴⁰ **Ha'Aretz**, Weekend Supplement, July 10, 1998, p. 16.
- ⁴¹ Dan Margalit, **I Have Seen Them All** (in Hebrew), p. 260.
- ⁴² **Davar Rishon** (now defunct), November 21, 1995.
- ⁴³ **Ma'ariv**, November 17, 1995.
- ⁴⁴ The term 'National Camp' is used to describe the wide range of political parties (including the Likud, National Religious Party, Tzomet, Moledet, et al.) as well as extra-parliamentary groups (including the Yesha Council, Professors for a Strong Israel, Women in Green, Zo Artzeinu and the Ma'amatz Committee).
- ⁴⁵ Tamir Shefer, "A Late Ignition" (in Hebrew), **Ha'Aretz**, June 3, 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Shefer relayed, in a private conversation with the author, that his conceptualization preceded publication by several months.
- ⁴⁷ **Ha'Aretz**, Book Review Section, March 27, 1996.
- ⁴⁸ CEC Minutes, Meeting June 5, 1996.
- ⁴⁹ "Tik Tikshoret", June 6, 1996.
- ⁵⁰ **The Seventh Eye**, Issue No. 3, p. 18.
- ⁵¹ **Ma'ariv**, April 19, 1996.
- ⁵² **Ha'Aretz**, April 15, 1996.
- ⁵³ "Yoman", May 24, 1996.
- ⁵⁴ **Davar Rishon**, April 29, 1996.

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- ⁵⁵ Letter dated June 20, 1996.
- ⁵⁶ See note 7 above and the article of Avi Posen in **The Seventh Eye**, Issue No. 3.
- ⁵⁷ See **IMW**'s newspaper ad, "Danger – Mobilized Media! Is There Censorship in the IBA?", **Ma'ariv**, May 23, 1996.
- ⁵⁸ The letter is in the files of **IMW**.
- ⁵⁹ B. Caspit, H. Crystal and I. Kfir, **Suicide – A Party Surrenders Its Power** (in Hebrew), Avivim/Ma'ariv, 1996, p. 183.
- ⁶⁰ See note 19.
- ⁶¹ "Shetach Hefker" program, May 28, 1997.
- ⁶² Letter to Chedva Spiegel, T/312, dated February 8, 1996.
- ⁶³ **Ha'Aretz**, Weekend Magazine, October 24, 1997, p. 8.
- ⁶⁴ **Yediot Ahronot**, October 19, 1997.
- ⁶⁵ A new edition of the Nakdi Document was published in September 1998.
- ⁶⁶ Following a series of subsequent complaints in May 1998, Grayevsky wrote the **IMW** that he had instructed Kol Yisrael director Amnon Nadav to "halt" (emphasis in the original) Golan's remarks but to no avail. Letter of Grayevsky to **IMW**, June 1, 1998.
- ⁶⁷ Daniel Ben-Simon, **A New Israel** (in Hebrew), Aryeh Niv-Modan, Tel Aviv, 1997, p. 13.
- ⁶⁸ **Yerushalayim**, December 15, 1995.
- ⁶⁹ "Yoman", October 24, 1997.
- ⁷⁰ Appointed as the Attorney General in January 1997, Ronni Bar-On resigned within two days following the broadcast of a Channel One news item. Reporter Ayalah Chason accused Prime Minister Netanyahu of choosing Bar-On due to a convoluted political commitment made to the Shas party whereby Bar-On would grant amnesty to that party's head, Aryeh Deri, in return for Shas support for the Hebron redeployment. An official investigative committee found no proof substantiating the accusation.
- ⁷¹ **Seventh Eye**, Issue 10.
- ⁷² **Ha'Aretz**, Weekend Magazine Supplement, September 14, 1997.
- ⁷³ **Yearbook of the Association of Tel Aviv Journalists**, 1998.
- ⁷⁴ "Seven Days Magazine", **Yediot Ahronot**, September 18, 1998, p. 78.