

H. K. Standard

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## Bray was being frank and honest about GIS

IN your issue of February 24, on the front page, there is a news item with the heading "Censorship, propaganda in GIS, says Bray". This, no doubt, was meant to convey to the reading public the Standard's implied disapproval of such "censorship and propaganda" in the GIS.

As a reader I am in full agreement with Mr Bray. I find his answers to your reporters' question refreshingly frank; and in my long life so far I cannot remember of any other government official being so openly forthcoming in a public interview.

In my years as a journalist — and happy years they were too — I had always insisted that the GIS (Government Information Services) was a government propaganda machine. The word propaganda has a bad connotation only in the Anglo-Saxon usage. It is a perfectly respectable word, if honestly used.

Misguided editors and improperly directed young reporters today have been fed on the belief that the GIS should act and react as if its existence were a convenience of the press and the media. It is not. And neither are the other elaborate public relations operations — now called many different fancy names, but all meaning the same thing: propaganda for its own purposes — merely conveniences of the media.

Of course, the GIS — as with other public relations organisations — tries to influence the media as best it can in the interest of the establishment. But so does other PRs, and certainly so does every newspaper etc.

When I used to be active, I have always complained that

the then building-up of the GIS worked against the interest of the free press in that it endeavoured to manage the news in Hongkong.

And by its very operations (an enormous staff of ex-journalists, all lured away from the newspapers by various attractions) it makes newspaper dependent upon the very resources reporters must tap and which it the GIS commands. The government today has valid arguments for this criticism no doubt, as they had in the days we were active, the main one being that government officials cannot daily be at the beck and call of inquiring reporters; they have work to do, etc.

Coming to terms with the what and why of the GIS is the only way a professional newspaperman in Hongkong will be able to do his work without undue frustration.

Indeed, the GIS by its very size and by the resources it commands, does to a very large extent (certainly more than in my time) assist the media today. My advice to the young tyro however, is: Don't let the GIS be too helpful.

Having come to terms with the department, one must accept the fact also that a major function of the GIS must be to protect the interest of the government. And that was what in fact, Mr Bray probably meant. So it does put out propaganda; and it surely must censor information that will act against the interest of the Hongkong government.

This is all perfectly legitimate. It is only wrong when GIS and their personnel pretend that they are anything but government public relation tools.

Which brings me to the

## Letters

subject currently exciting the foreign community, via the South China Morning Post (which I once worked for also).

This is the "revelation" that wings of the producer and editor of the very fine "Here and Now" programme has been clipped because of a number of reports in his show which did not quite toe the government line.

On RTHK this morning the man himself told "Open Line" this was not so, but he didn't sound very convincing. However that is not the point. The point really is: Why should not government do what it is supposed to have done? RTHK like GIS is a government propaganda machine also, wholly funded by the government.

If people who work for it want to make-believe that full "freedom of the press" and other such idealistic but impracticable nonsense can and should obtain in GIS or RTHK, then these people have themselves to blame; they are deluding themselves.

The Chinese media community have no problem with this matter. The reason is because they have a pretty good perspective of things and circumstances.

That, I would believe, is an important prerequisite of a working newspaperman.

Old Pro (Ret'd)