

Belgian expert on Cambodia,

"...are the creation and property not of the journalist, but of a political personality. The goal of the newspaper is not to transmit information but rather the propagation of political ideas."

In effect, many are really political pamphlets. Thus, even if a journalist follows the Press Law's, Khmer Journalists' Association's (KJA) or League of Cambodian Journalists' (LCJ) Codes of Ethics, an editor may change the story to suit the owner's bias. Since the violence in July, polarization of journalists has proceeded further.

Corruption is also a problem. With so many newspapers and so few advertising revenues, journalists' salaries are extremely low: inevitably many take bribes to alter a story. The President of the LCJ, Chum Kanal, was quoted in the Cambodia Daily in April 1997 as saying that "I think...it is a lovely sentiment to give journalists money."

The problems with broadcast media are different. Here, ownership is dominated by the government and CPP.¹⁸ This is seen as a key election issue, including by the SRSR (HR) who said on his December 1997 visit that the present distribution of radio stations was not conducive to free and fair elections. The new elections law provides that the NEC shall take all necessary measures to ensure that the elections are free and fair (art. 16 (1)) and "take measures to ensure equal access to the public media" (art. 16 (17)). However, CPP MP and Secretary of State in the Information Ministry Khieu Kanharith stated early in December 1997 that only National Radio and state-run TVK would be allowed to air campaign messages; parties that wished broadcast licenses would be denied them because "we don't have enough frequencies."¹⁹

The government's relationship with the media has been troubled, and in December/January, seemed to have hardened. The Press Law, passed in 1995, contains a provision which prohibits the press from publishing information that "may affect national security and political stability" (art. 12) and another that prohibits the publication of anything that "humiliates or contempts national institutions" (art. 14). In December 1997, the government claimed that some media, especially the Khmer press, was biased in favour of the Khmer Rouge and that other reporting tarnished Cambodia's international image (harming investment). Pursuant to a new regulation, it threatened legal action under Press Law art. 12 against any news organization that did not cite at least two government sources on issues of national security. Shortly thereafter, Kanharith threatened to expel, them to cancel the work permit of Canadian

¹⁸There are 5 television stations in the capital, and 4 in the provinces. Of these, 3 are publicly-owned (one is the national station, TVK, one the military's, the third, the municipality of Phnom Penh's). There are 10 radio stations, of which one is public (National Radio); Apsara radio and TV are CPP joint ventures.

¹⁹Frequently heard during my meetings was the complaint that there would not be, as in 1993, a Radio UNTAC, which had provided impartial access for parties and unbiased information.