

F. R. A.

Rise & Fall

of a misguided association

by

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Organisations mentioned in this booklet:

Action Central News Agency, publishers of Breakthrough magazine. 2 Alvanley Road, West Derby, Liverpool LI2 8QX.

Free Radio Campaign 28 Kingaby Gardens, Rainham, Essex.

Free Radio Association 239 Eastwood Road, Rayleigh, Essex.

Impulse Publications Ltd. c/o Dorothea Benson Ltd.,
18 Southampton Place, London WCI. (Publishers of
"When Pirates Ruled The Waves" by Paul Harris.)

National Commercial Radio Movement 49 Welby House,
Hazellville Road, London NI9.

North Eastern Free Radio Association
301 Durham Road, Gateshead 9, Co. Durham.

Free Radio Supply Service 30 Eastmont Road, Hinchley Wood,
Esher, Surrey.

Sutton Commercial Radio Association
385 Sutton Common Road, Sutton, Surrey.

"My grateful thanks are extended to all who have
at last made this publication possible."

B.J.Schofield

Nottingham April 1969

At the begining of 1967, with 10 stations in operation, English Offshore commercial radio had reached it's peak, although it was becoming apparent that the Marine &c., Broadcasting (Offences) Act would become law and the stations silenced. In an attempt to combat this Act, which National Opinion Polls were already showing the majority of the English public to be against, a number of organisations had been formed.

These organisations, generally small in size, recieved no help or official recognition from the stations they actively supported.

In February, 1967, one of these organisations, under the leadership of a Mr. Geoffrey Pearl, called a meeting of representatives from similar bodies at an old people's home at Mottingham in North London, at which the two largest groups present were one from Oxford led by Mr. David Prewitt (now a key figure in the National Commercial Radio Movement) and a nationwide group led by Roger Taylor of Leicester, and Miss Baker from Leamington Spa, called the Commercial Radio Listeners Association.

At this meeting Pearl stated that he had recieved support from the owners of nearly all the Radio Stations, and delivered an ultimatum to the effect that the other groups joined him or folded up through lack of publicity. At a second meeting, held shortly afterwards Pearl was informed that it was considered an amalgamation was advisable in the interests of commercial radio, and the virtual ultimatum he had delivered was unnecessary.

This decision was not reached without some disagreement, a valuable loss to the free radio cause was Miss Baker, who walked out rather than work with Pearl.

In this way the Free Radio Association was formed, the official constitution being drawn up and the National Committee appointed Sunday 26 February 1967. The next step by Pearl was to contact the station owners and, by virtue of the size of the now amalgamated organisation, arrange the advertising he had claimed to already have. For a period of three months, climaxing in a large rally at Trafalgar Square on 28th. May, successful in all aspects save publicity—the Association moved from strength to strength.

THEN THE ROT SET IN !

The first blow was the breaking away of the largest & most active branch—the Coventry Free Radio Association—due to the refusal of its leaders to work in conjunction with Mr. Pearl, in whom they had lost all confidence. On its own this group met with greater success and was largely responsible for the successful protest demonstration at the opening ceremony of BBC Radio Leicester.

The next major F.R.A. project was the Alexandra Palace Ball of the Year on July 22nd, which was preceded by saturation radio publicity. At a meeting a few days prior to this dance Pearl arranged an amalgamation between the F.R.A. and two similar but smaller campaigns—Oxford Free Radio Movement & the Darryl Lane Campaign. The merger was known as the Broadside Free Radio Movement. The Committee accepted Pearl's word that the amalgamation was necessary and ratified his actions. Within two months Pearl announced he had operated an escape clause and the F.R.A. was no longer connected with Broadside. He claimed that Broadside was a business concern run for the personal gain of Peter Phillipson, and the F.R.A. should not be involved. Geoffrey Pearl's word was accepted.

Pearl, in addition to being involved in the campaign for commercial radio, is a key figure in a libertarian political movement which at this time was called Free Britain.

On September 9th. 1967, an Extraordinary Annual General meeting of the F.R.A. was called at Epsom in Surrey, and for those present this meeting certainly proved extraordinary!

The main aim of this meeting was to turn the F.R.A. into a large libertarian organisation, to work in conjunction with other similar movements, in short, an amalgamation with such bodies as The National Federation of Property Owners, Aims of Industry, the Pure Water Society (!) and other groups not in any way connected with radio, free or otherwise, including Free Britain, of course. For some inexplicable reason, the Flat Earth Society was excluded from the list, but only just! The idea was that F.R.A. members would automatically join this new body unless they specifically requested their names to be excluded. As objections were raised against various organisations on various grounds, one of which for example was that a specific organisation was pro-Fascist, the list dwindled and the meeting deteriorated into a heated argument, finally breaking up in complete disorder.

At about this time two important events occurred almost simultaneously. F.R.A. Publications Ltd. was set up to publish SOUND magazine, and Broadside collapsed with debts of over £800.

The Alexandra Palace Ball raised a great deal of money to launch SOUND, although Pearl never revealed quite how much—a newsletter stating £450 and the agenda of a committee meeting on 25th July 1967 stating £500. This gave the F.R.A. assets of about £800. At the next Committee meeting following the Extraordinary meeting detailed, Pearl attempted to persuade the Committee to reverse the decision of the A.G.M. and the meeting once more broke up in disorder. A few days later, Peter Phillipson, who had gone to Spain following the collapse of Broadside, returned to England and telephoned F.R.A. H.Q. at Rayleigh. I took the call and Mr. Phillipson, who appeared very agitated, asked to speak to Pearl on a matter of considerable urgency. Following the call, an elated Mr. Pearl told me he had successfully negotiated yet another merger with Broadside.

It should be explained here that the Broadside files at this time contained about 40,000 names, and the F.R.A.'s 6,000. This figure had been doubled by Pearl from 3,000 by the simple process of writing to everyone who had ever contacted the Association, even if they had not become members, and telling them that they were now members, unless they would like to write in and have their names removed from the files. This blanket coverage even included a few people who had written jokingly asking the Free Radio Association for free radios!

At the next Committee meeting on November 5th. Pearl presented his proposed Broadside amalgamation. He brushed off the Broadside debt as something in no way connected with the F.R.A. and denied earlier statements he had made that he was a director of Broadside. This matter was left open at the time, the Committee wanting more time to investigate the Broadside debts. He then announced proposals for smaller Committee, excluding, just by chance, most of the people who strongly queried his most erratic actions. This motion was defeated by 17 votes to 4 and Pearl closed the meeting. Two days later he announced an emergency meeting at the old peoples home, owned by his mother at Mottingham, to take place on November 9th. at 7.30 p.m. Pearl telephoned me and offered one of the top positions in the F.R.A. to me if I voted in his favour and forced one of the National Officers to resign. This is a serious allegation of which I have proof. (His offer was partially repeated in writing.)

At Motttingham, Pearl repeated his demands for smaller Committee, and additionally insisted that Peter Phillipson be made General Secretary of the F.R.A. The committee were worried that if, as Pearl had frequently claimed, Peter Phillipson had made a business concern bankrupt, he should now be put in a position where he was largely responsible for F.R.A. funds. The Committee vote this time was three in favour and 18, including myself, against. At this juncture Pearl announced that under the powers invested in him by article 9b of the F.R.A. constitution he was suspending the Constitution, dismissing the Committee and taking personal control of the Association. Pearl then read out Article 9b. which invested him with these emergency powers. It states:-

"In the event of any questions or matters arising which are not provided for in the Constitution, such questions or matters shall be dealt with by the Executive Committee, whose decision shall be final."

It is an interesting digression here to consider an extract from the minutes of a meeting held February 11th. 1968.

"Mr. Pearl said that at the time of the Motttingham meeting the F.R.A. had been facing certain destruction. He had known that he would have to take such actions as he had in order to save it. He had not known the legal position and so he had selected Article 9b. as being the nearest thing to an authority for his actions. He had acted on moral & practical grounds. Paul Peters said that Article 9b. was just about the farthest thing from an authority for Mr. Pearl's actions. ~~President~~ Sir Ian McTaggart remarked that he had never in his life heard a more horrifying admission. Because Mr. Pearl thought that the F.R.A. was being disrupted, he took action which at the time he had thought to be illegal, which was illegal, and which he still thought to be illegal. The admission was at least honest, and Mr. Pearl was to be congratulated on that score. Sir Ian thought that Mr. Pearl was a most remarkable combination, in that he displayed tremendous dedication to the Association plus a determination to take it over for himself. Sir Ian said that if Pearl dropped this latter effort, the Association would undoubtedly succeed in it's objective, but if he persisted, the Association would be destroyed."

Following Pearl's statement his mother suddenly appeared, announced that the uproar his statement had caused was upsetting her boarders, and the Committee found itself deposited on

the front doorstep in the pouring rain! Fortunately, Pearl had not had time to close the meeting and after a hurried consultation an alternative venue was found and the meeting continued. An acting Chairman was appointed until, it was hoped, Mr. Pearl's attitude altered. Two people were appointed to go to Raleigh to temporarily take possession of the files of the Association, a letter was drafted to the Associations bank, freezing the main account, but leaving open a Promotional Materials Account, the Pools Syndicate & Monthly draw which legally could not be closed, and the meeting was adjourned at 4.30 a.m.

At this stage, after many legal difficulties had been overcome, and printing & distribution arranged, the first issue of SOUND magazine was reaching the final stages of preparation. Top disc jockeys, radio station owners & show business personalities had donated articles free of charge, competitions had been arranged, and advertising had reached it's peak. Pearl's actions brought the magazine to an abrupt halt. With the heavy advertising the magazine had been given on radio fading from memory it was obvious that SOUND would have to be published soon, or not at all.

Within days the bank investigated the case, decided the Committee was in the right and opened the account in their favour.

SOUND could continue!

Immediately, Pearl's solicitors issued a writ to freeze the accounts, and this time all accounts were frozen, including the Pools Syndicate. At the same time, Pearl refusing to believe that it could hurt the magazine, attempted to get SOUND advertised on Radio Caroline International, knowing full well that it would be refused retail distribution if so advertised. This action, plus the fact that the accounts, except for a short time, remained closed for several months, and then were found to be empty, completely destroyed SOUND magazine. It has been stated that even at this stage SOUND was too late to have succeeded, due to loss of public interest. However, the success of Breakthrough, a monthly commercial radio magazine first published over a year later, tends to invalidate this argument.

On November 5th., a meeting was called for the 26th. and members were obliged to attend or Pearl could pass any resolutions he liked in their absence.

Committee members arrived, were met by carloads of police, 6 in all, with Alsatian dogs, and after a three hour friendly discussion in the roadway, were turned away. Pearl had informed the police that hooligans were going to break into his home and demanded protection. This subtle hint that Pearl did not really want a compromise was understood by the Committee members, who at this stage consisted of 5 in favour of Pearl, (including Pearl himself) 5 don't know, and 24 against.

Six days later a cheque for £50 was presented at a bank with which the Association had drawing facilities, but which had not yet heard of the dispute. Co-signatories of the cheque, cashed on the Association's account, were Pearl & Peter Phillipson. The bank held the Committee responsible for Pearl's action, and requested them to repay this money.

On November 17th., Pearl, who had now "accepted moral responsibility" for the F.R.A. to repay the Broadside debt, triumphantly stated the debt was reduced to £50. This was contradicted by a Broadside statement issued from Rayleigh three weeks later giving a figure of over £400 as an outstanding debt. By this time problems were arising over the monthly draw & Pools syndicate. Legally, as already stated, these had to continue. The monthly draw was "forgotten for a while" according to Pearl, then quickly brought up to date when members threatened legal action. It was being run by Roger Taylor, founder member of the Commercial Radio Listeners Association, but the names of members, essential for the draw to continue, were withheld by Pearl, even when Roger Taylor was threatened with court proceedings over its discontinuation. The Pools Syndicate could not be run as a syndicate for legal reasons and entries were submitted in the name of a Committee member, Fred Hasler, who is now Chairman of the National Commercial Radio Movement. He continued to run the Syndicate using his own money, until the pools company-Zetters-returned an entry stating that Pearl had instructed them to do so. From this stage Pearl continued the Pools Syndicate using his own money, but safe in the re-assurance that it would eventually be returned, as the Pools account had been frozen on his instructions.

This was an assurance Fred Hasler never had. One of Pearl's early entries resulted in a win for the Syndicate of £1,337. This money was placed in his personal account and could not be frozen.

During the critical months after August, 1967, F.R.A. activities ground to a halt. To keep the F.R.A. name alive, the Committee decided to hold, on December 23rd., a carol singing

trip to Radio Caroline South. This trip, in the face of a force eight gale, took seven hours and was a great success. Rumours have circulated since that at one stage the F.R.A. boat & the Mi Amigo were so close that presents were exchanged, something I neither confirm or deny.

Pearl, who knew nothing of this venture in advance, lost no time in taking full credit. He received many congratulatory telephone calls, in which he modestly stated that it was just one of his minor ventures. I know this because, immediately on landing, using an assumed name, I made one of the congratulatory calls.

On January 12th. 1968, the Association accounts were again unfrozen in favour of the Committee, and SOUNDS pressing debts were paid, although, as explained at this time to Pearl, there was no hope of the magazine being published. This time it took Pearl seventeen days to refreeze the accounts. About this time, Pearl began circulating his 1968 newsletter, one issue a year, as opposed to the monthly Newsletters promised. A great portion of it was filled with advertisements and the total commercial radio news content was:

"The Marine Offences Act is almost dead. Caroline plays on. A new sweet music station (highly hush-hush) is coming."

This was followed by the news that the membership stood at 100,000 (later described by Pearl as a necessary exaggeration) and an appeal to send in subscriptions in advance in order to take part in a discount purchasing scheme. The ideal solution is, instead of Free Radio, you will compromise for one at 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ % discount.

During the next two months things went from bad to worse. The Committee made several attempts at reaching a compromise, but were always rebuffed.

The Marine Offences Association became affiliated to the F.R.A. under John Pole. An agreement was effected whereby Pearl would get M.O.A. advertising on Caroline in exchange for the M.O.A. membership, and a small amount of money. Pearl could not get the promised advertising and John Pole withdrew his members.

In March a compromise was reached, and new bank mandates approved. Towards the end of the month I went to Rayleigh, and was amazed at the way money was being handled. Receipts were signed in a haphazard way by a variety of people - myself included. On one occasion I took some foreign currency sent to Rayleigh to a bank in the town, and exch-

anged it for English money. Apparently, Pearl did not want the bank to know this money came from the F.R.A. so he wanted a stranger to exchange it.

For this, and other reasons, on April 7th. the Committee withdrew these mandates at a meeting which Pearl attended, and he knew of this decision. The bank was notified of this but for some reason the accounts were opened on April 26th. and following Committee action, were refrozen on the 29th.

During this time cheques to the value of £1104-8-0 were cashed using the invalid mandates.

NOW THE TRUTH WAS REVEALED!

Pearl had used the money won in the Pools Syndicate, which was not F.R.A. money, to finance the Association. The money frozen to prevent Pearl misusing it was owed to the Pools Syndicate. During the three days the accounts were open this money was paid out in Pools winnings.

The money donated by thousands of people to aid the commercial radio campaign, and the money raised to launch SOUND magazine was gone. To this day no-one is certain how much money went into Rayleigh in those fateful months, or what happened to it.

The book, "When Pirates Ruled the Waves" by Paul Harris was financed by an F.R.A. loan which only Pearl knew about. This money was repaid, and in return Pearl received a wonderful write up in the book.

The money went on many things such as £7 per week office rental to Pearl, who called the police rather than allow access to the office, also enormous quantities of publicity materials and Pearl's living and travelling expenses.

A meeting of the F.R.A. Executive Committee took place in London on July 7th. 1968. Under the terms of article 6 a. of the F.R.A. Constitution an Annual General meeting had to be held by the end of May 1968. Pearl, who had the files, refused to call an A.G.M., and the Association, legally, no longer existed. Under articles 8e & 9b of the F.R.A. constitution the Association was formally wound up, and all properties & funds handed over to the newly formed National Commercial Radio Movement. No Committee members present at this meeting were members of N.C.R.M.

Pearl, of course, refused to release the files.

At this time, May 1969, the organisation purporting to be the Free Radio Association still has many of its original branches, all of which do a good job, unaware of the truth about their devious Chairman, who is striving mightily to increase his mail order custom.

The North Eastern F.R.A. offers an ever increasing range of supplies, also the Free Radio Supply Service.

While small groups like the Free Radio Campaign and the Sutton Commercial Radio Association (and even the land-based pirate stations) carry on the fight, and the larger National Commercial Radio Movement-with no subscriptions-issues regular newsletters and campaigns at Parliamentary level, Mr. Geoffrey Pearl continues the struggle in his own way by appealing for more 5/- enrolment fees and offering bed linen and camping equipment-at a substantial discount!

Extracts from the Constitution of the
Free Radio Association

- 6(a) Not more than 15 months may elapse between the Annual General meetings of the Association.
- 8(d) No officer nor member of the Association may spend any money on behalf of the Association unless he or she has a specific authorisation signed by either the Chairman and the General Secretary, or the Chairman or the Treasurer. This authorisation may only be signed for expenditures which have the approval of the Executive Committee.
- 8(e) In the event of dissolution of the Free Radio Association all funds and property shall be handed over to an organisation which the Executive Committee approves, and whose objective is freedom of the individual.
- 9(b) In the event of any questions or matters arising which are not provided for in the Constitution, such questions or matters shall be dealt with by the Executive Committee, whose decision shall be final.
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Quote;

"You can fool all of the people some of the time,
you can fool some of the people all of the time;
but you can't fool all of the people all of the time!"

Abraham Lincoln
(1809-1865)

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