

LIFE ON the ocean waves has been decidedly rough these past few weeks, not least for the crews and disc-jockeys of the small flotilla of pirate radio ships anchored off our coast and above all for Radio Laser 558: they need winds below Force 3 before they can go aloft to repair their damaged transmitter array, so the winter weather has kept them off the air for a month.

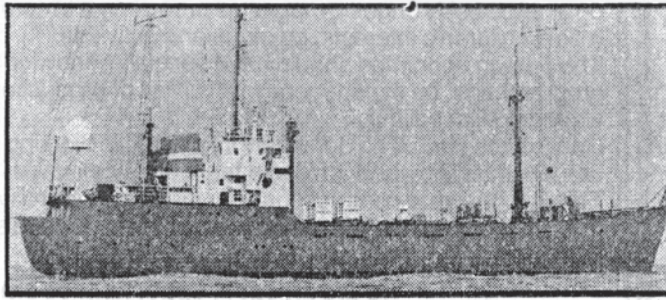
The silence is deceptive. Last week, a 30-year-old American slipped into a Kensington hotel for a few days, and though he was reticent about the purpose of his visit, certain London advertising figures were certainly alerted to his presence: John Moss is the New York-based president of Radio Laser. And he is quite clear that his outfit is poised to boost its appeal to its Top Forty-hits audiences, to increase its output, and to step up its pitch to the international advertisers it needs if it is to stay ahead of the law. But within 30 days of being back on the air, Moss claims, Laser could be in profit.

The man from Laser is everything that might be calculated to infuriate the British broadcasting establishment, above all the people trying to make a go of our own constrained commercial radio system. He is confident to just below the point of cockiness; a cheery enthusiast for the potential of radio as an entertainment and advertising medium; deeply sympathetic for the way ILR programmers are expected to please all of the people some of the time ("Radio doesn't work that way"); and very, very cautious about Laser's relationship with the law.

The crux of the offshore pirates' legal position is that they are supposedly outside territorial waters. So that national sovereignty extends to banning on-shore operations from servicing or trading with them. So Laser beams its powerful 20,000 watt signal to North Europe's

Meanwhile, he has been recruiting. A small ad in a US trade magazine brought dozens of replies and demo tapes. "Seventy per cent of them were from women, and the standard was very high — we have gone through the phase of attracting adventurers and started appealing to broadcasting talent." The success of Jesse Brandon taught one lesson: there will now be four women and four men on the expanded team, ferrying to and fro on two months on, one off, rota.

Whether they will ever come in from the queasy seas remains unclear. The changes of broadcasting principle that would enable them to make legal profits on land would let a lot of potential rivals off the regulatory leash too. Meanwhile, no one is rushing, and Moss still has to sell his airtime — in an atmosphere where, he says, "I know the inquiry is serious when their lawyer calls to check."



Radio Laser 558, above, and John Moss, right

Peter Fiddick looks at offshore radio and talks to the man from Laser

A swell on the high seas

countries from the MV Communicator, stationed next to the Radio Caroline craft off Essex, uses American jocks, and is serviced from Spain, where the EEC's writ doesn't yet run.

"No business comes to us through the UK," Moss insists. "All of it is placed in the US, and no sales are made in this country. That is not lack of interest: we are receiving ten inquiries a week and we spend a lot of time turning them away. We say 'Support your local radio station' — in fact if ILR wanted us to promote their advertising medium, I'd be prepared to do it. If ILR is healthy, that's good for everybody."

For the salesmen and schedulers of ILR, that is too goody-goody to be true. Even with two-thirds of its airtime unsold — and John Moss, the salesman since August, was

upped to president in a January shake to alter that — Laser can talk of profit because its running costs are a mere £3,000 a week, compared with their city centre sites, tax and IBA rental, and because the trading-ban means the pirates can't pay needle-time copyright charges at some £30 a disc even if they want to.

Moss says they want to, even though he thinks the British charges too tough. "We have offered to pay the record companies — and we have offered not to play their discs. They don't want either. And the performers are not beating us up the way the regulatory bodies say they are — we make them popular."

The other main line of argument against unlicensed stations is the interference with others using the same part of the wavelength spectrum. Moss, for Laser, scorns it. "There's plenty of air

space — spin the dial and you can hear the gaps. We are professional broadcasters, we have very modern equipment, we produce a very clean signal, and it doesn't wander off 558 metres medium-wave. Once, when there was a big Irish sporting event, RTE claimed they were worried — so we closed down while the commentary was on, and we still got a complaint. It wasn't us. This is not just dangling your antenna out of the bedroom window.

But at the heart of the conflict is not the law, or the regulatory system, but the philosophy of broadcasting it is intending to support, in which a carefully managed monopoly of advertising-funded broadcasting carries a requirement that a diverse audience's diverse interests should get some programming time. It's the British compromise, the Reithian quid pro quo.

"But that is not the way radio works," Moss exclaims. "It's not like television, where you are only around the set at certain times of the day, and need to get the mix available then. You carry the radio to the bathroom, you have it in the car, and you want to have your sort of programme on tap at that time — not get an hour of jazz, or whatever, at five o'clock and nothing more if you miss it."

He flourishes the trade reports from the United States, showing the top city radio station taking \$29 million a year, and a lucrative existence for dozens of others, side-by-side, as they choose their audiences — rock, "mellow-music," talk, ethnic, Top Forty — and play to them alone, around the clock.

That is what the pirates are doing here, and they can pick the easiest audiences, of hit-

chart-oriented youngsters, to go for with their no-strings scheduling. Even then, they have varying success, for Britain's landbased broadcasters are not lacking in professional guile, but Radio Laser 558's sound, launched only last May, quickly got itself heard. With commercials limited to one minute per hour, by policy as well as economics (including the prize-winning ones played without being paid for in the name of "showing how good radio advertising can be"), it claims, "You are never more than one minute away from music."

That includes the jocks' chat. Laser is just celebrating a different sort of victory, with the loss of star DJ Jesse Brandon to Capital, the London ILR music stations. Moss sees it as the sincerest form of flattery: "We're all very excited — I do hope she gets her work papers."

The offshore stations' own ultimate backers are also unclear, and although Moss says there could be another million dollars where Laser 558's first two million came from, a real return in ad-revenue must be found before long. And although the station's sub-title is All-Europe Radio, the transnational marketing notion is still a slow-grower.

On the matter of British audiences, however, the cockiness is about to re-assert itself. Laser is claiming an audience of five millions, shown last October in a survey by a leading British research firm. So, he argues, the station shouldn't just be classified among "others" when British radio audiences are measured: this week, therefore, he will ask for membership of the industry's own research body, JICRAR, along with the ILR stations and advertisers. One suspects they will feel unable to take his money.

Hunger threat to pirate radio ships

By Gareth Parry

The Government is making a determined effort to stop Britain's two pirate radio ships from broadcasting. Caroline and Laser 558 operate with impunity because they are anchored in international waters. The latest attempt to drown their music involves laying siege to the vessels to cut off their supply tenders and so starve them into silence.

While the ships cannot be prosecuted, any British citizen discovered working on them, supplying them or advertising on them faces fines of up to £2,000 or two years' imprisonment under the Marine Etc (Broadcasting) Act, 1957, which from its unusual title, would appear to be a piece of convenient, catch-all legislation.

Both ships operate from North Sea anchorages off the Essex coast. They have, however, been joined by an ocean-

going patrol boat, on permanent charter by the Department of Trade and Industry, at a cost of £50,000 a month.

The Dioptric Surveyor is equipped with searchlights and powerful radar devices to monitor all movement in the area.

The Department of Trade confirmed yesterday that the launch would be anchored near the two radio pirates in an effort to cut their supply of food, fresh water, and fuel, for the foreseeable future.

The DTI said yesterday that the pirates' "unauthorised as distinct from illegal broadcasting" was causing problems in interference with maritime and aeronautic radio messages.

But another reason for the Government's annoyance with the pop pirates is their audacity. Laser 558 broadcasts on 558 Kilohertz, the exact frequency which BBC Radio Essex wants to use when it opens in the autumn of 1986.

The pop radio pirates, of which Caroline is the progenitor, have long been a frustrating thorn in the side of government. Caroline first went on the air in 1964.

Both ignore needle time and copyright payments and restrictions which licensed radio stations have to heed. Commercial stations on the mainland have consequently seen their advertising revenue suffer. The two ships are run from New York and both were broadcasting yesterday, secure in the knowledge that their main supplies come from Spain

Pirate radio ships split up

TWO North Sea pop pirate ships under government surveillance for two weeks yesterday split up — apparently to make monitoring of their supply ships more difficult.

Radio Lazer moved 12 miles north-east, away from Radio Caroline and out of sight of the Department of Trade vessel which has been watching them. The department must decide whether to watch only one pirate ship or spend more money hiring a second vessel.

Flag ploy to take radio pirates off air

By Dennis Barker

The Government is to try to put the two main floating pirate radio stations, Laser and Caroline, out of business by persuading the Panama authorities to withdraw registration of their ships.

The Department of Trade is considering whether to ask the Foreign Office to request the Panama Shipping Bureau to withdraw the protection afforded by Panamanian flags of convenience.

A Foreign Office spokesman said that it would approach the Panamanians if requested by the department.

Caroline's ship, the Ross

Revenge, and Laser's Communicator are moored off the Essex coast in international waters, where an attempt to seize them would be an unfriendly act to another sovereign state.

But without the protection of the Panama flag the ships would be in breach of international and British law requiring all large commercial ships to bear the flag of a sovereign nation.

If Panama withdrew registration it would take the companies which run the radio stations from New York some weeks to register the ships with another country to which the Government could make

the same request.

Previous attempts to squeeze the pirates out of business by trying to cut off their supply tenders have failed partly because the tenders have the protection of a flag.

Panama makes a considerable income by registering ships which have no connections with the country.

The Panamanian government is believed to have told the Panama Bureau of Shipping that the pirate radio ships should not be harassed and that the bureau should not discuss them with the British government, which is seen as having no standing in the matter.

But the Communicator and the Ross Revenge are believed to have expired safety certificates. The Panama Bureau of Shipping inspected the Communicator nearly two years ago, but has not inspected the Ross Revenge, which British investigators believe has a transmission aerial which does not comply with international construction standards.

A Department of Trade spokesman said: "We are in regular communication with the Panama authorities on the question of the ships broadcasting, in relation to international regulations. We can say no more than that."

31 10 1985

DJs abandon 'sinking' pirate ship

PIRATE radio ship Laser 558 is on the brink of financial collapse and owes its staff thousands of pounds, say mutinous former disc jockeys.

In the past three months, six senior DJs have abandoned the ship, moored in international waters 12 miles

off the Essex coast. They claim they haven't been paid and that supplies on board have run so low they were not even able to make a cup of coffee.

Laser 558, like its pirate sister Radio Caroline, is under 24-hour Trade Department surveillance because it

is illegal for British companies to place advertisements or supply them.

Mr John Cathett, Laser 558 general manager, said yesterday: "It is true we owe money."

"But we are turning the corner and hope to meet all our debts."

2 11 1985

Pop pirate ship forced to quit

By HARVEY LEE TV and Radio Staff

LASER 558, the off-shore pirate radio station, with five million listeners in Britain alone, was towed into Harwich last night by the Department of Trade ship which had been laying siege to it.

The station has been broadcasting unlicensed since May last year from the 440-ton ship Communicator, moored off the Thames Estuary just outside British territorial waters.

It went off the air yesterday during a storm.

A distress call by the ship's master was answered by the Gardline Tracker, the surveillance vessel sent in last week by the Department of Trade at a cost of more than £25,000 a month to keep watch on the station.

Ironically, the Government-chartered vessel is the sister ship of the beleaguered Communicator, which has been operated by the American-owned radio company under a Panamanian flag.

'Horrendous conditions'

Since August, the Trade Department has kept a close watch on both Laser and a rival pop pirate, Radio Caroline, photographing all visiting vessels, monitoring radio transmissions and building up dossiers for possible prosecution.

The department's tactics appear to have had a dramatic effect.

Conditions aboard the Communicator were recently described as "horrendous" by a

disaffected former crew member, who said there had been outbreaks of dysentery and scurvy.

The presence of the surveillance ship had deterred suppliers and the station had little food, fuel, drinking water or spares on board.

Advertising revenue had also fallen to a trickle, and several disc jockeys had left the station, claiming their wages had not been paid.

Laser 558 is owned by Music Media of New York, which has an advertising sales team in Kensington.

Last night, as fans of Laser 558 arrived at Harwich to mourn the station's passing, police and immigration officials interviewed the ship's crew about possible offences under the 1967 Marine Broadcasting Offences Act.

Under the Act, British nationals are not allowed to broadcast from pirate radio ships or to supply them in any way.

Those convicted are liable to unlimited fines or up to two years' imprisonment.

SOS lands pirate radio ship in port

By Dennis Barker

Radio Laser, the pirate station which for 18 months has broadcast from international waters off the Essex coast to five million people, was in dire straits last night after the ship from which it operates was escorted into Harwich harbour. She had put out an SOS call after a generator fault in a storm.

A temporary captain was aboard the motor vessel Communicator when the fault virtually crippled her. The American-owned ship sails under a Panamanian flag.

Mr Robb Day, of Overseas Media Inc, the sales agency for Eurad, the Laser company, said: "The captain decided he would take the ship into Harwich and told the Department of Trade and Industry that he was doing so. In an ideal world it should be able to carry out repairs and leave, but in the realistic world there will be a lot of red tape."

Mr Day said it was "99 per cent certain" that Laser would fight in the courts any attempt to prevent her putting to sea again. "There is a lot of equipment aboard," he said. "You are talking about 700,000 for 80,000 dollars."

But any British ship repairer who made repairs to the Communicator would be in breach of the law — as would any British company which tried to re-provision her. Department of Trade vessels have tried to head off provisioning ships for the past few weeks.

The department's ship, Gardline Tracker had escorted the Communicator into Harwich. A DTI spokesman said: "This is a major victory and vindication for our policy of watching and waiting."

Essex police were at the port to question the Communicator's crew and station staff.

Radio wave piracy

By Dennis Barker

Radio Caroline yesterday swiftly took over the frequency — 558 — of its rival pirate, Radio Laser, now berthed in Harwich after being virtually crippled by a generator fault.

The move by Caroline, anchored in international waters off the Essex coast near where Laser used to broadcast, irritated the BBC as well as Laser. The BBC hoped to take over frequency 558 for its Radio Essex — as officially approved — in a few weeks.

As for Radio Laser, its vessel, the Communicator, was arrested because of a writ on behalf of an undisclosed private person who alleged Laser owed him money.

Caroline fights on as pirate radio surveillance halts

By Dennis Barker

Surveillance of pirate radio stations in the North Sea is to end, the Department of Trade and Industry announced yesterday.

The decision was described as "a bit odd" by the Association of Independent Radio Contractors, which represents legitimate commercial radio

Mr Geoffrey Pattie, minister for industry and information technology, said: "We have achieved our objective, which was to find out who was supplying the ships. The fact that Radio Laser 558 has ceased broadcasting is an added bonus, and I hope Radio Caroline

will follow their example."

Mr Brian West, director of the AIRC, said that this hope was "pious at the moment — it should be remembered that Caroline has been the most durable pirate, and will probably breathe a sigh of relief and carry on."

Mr West said that the DTI's decision to employ observation ships was "one of the boldest strokes they had ever pulled against the pirates." It was regrettable that DTI had pulled out, though understandable in view of the costs involved in the surveillance operation.

The cost of the surveillance

operation has exceeded £100,000 since August, at the rate of £25,000 a month.

Mr West welcomed Mr Pattie's statement that "We are still seriously concerned that the powerful unregulated transmissions, on wavelengths stolen from someone else, cause interference to other radio users, particularly helicopter navigation beacons in the North Sea."

Radio Laser's ship is now in Harwich after landing there some weeks ago in difficulties with her generators, and prosecutions are pending. Radio Caroline swiftly took over her 558 frequency, which the BBC

was due to use for Radio Essex next year.

Mr Vincent Monsey, president of Radio Sales International, the New York-based selling agents for Radio Caroline, said last night: "Laser was supplied from local bases. We have been supplied by, are supplied by, and will continue to be supplied by foreign-registered ships which can tender us with no restrictions at all."

The operation of Caroline, said Mr Monsey, was totally legal. "We have had experience during the past 21 years of broadcasting offshore. We will be there for another 20 years."

Dec 14 1985

Pirate ship for sale

By Dennis Barker

COMMUNICATOR, the motor vessel used as a base by the pirate station, Radio Laser, is to be sold next week.

The Admiralty Marshal, an official of the Lord Chancellor's office, is to place advertisements in Lloyd's shipping register and US publications offering the ship, which was seized at Harwich at the end of last year after it developed a generator fault, to the highest bidder.

"There are plenty of places in the world where it is possible to run a perfectly legal radio station from a ship," said the marshal, Mr Vincent Ricks.

Feb 24 1986

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 1 4.5KHZ audio filter.

The "COMMUNICATOR" is lying Harwich, Essex, UK and will be sold by Private Treaty in the condition 'AS IS, WHERE IS' at the time of sale and on the Admiralty Marshal's Conditions of Sale.

All offers for the vessel must be made on the Admiralty Marshal's Conditions of Sale and should be in our hands by latest noon 8th April, 1986.

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Pirate's crusade

A top-secret illegal plot to beam the word of God to the British people has been uncovered by Loosetalk. The country's first evangelical pirate radio station, Harmony 981, is taking over the ship vacated by pop station Laser 558.

Harmony Radio is scheduled to play gospel music, with News From The Bible on the hour and Prayer For The Day on the half-hour. From time to time there will be longer talks and sermons from preachers – a formula which, according to shadowy figures with unusual aliases in the murky world of underground broadcasting, is a sure-fire winner.

The name of millionaire religious crusader Steven Morgan crops up when

Morgan waits to save souls



funding for the pirate radio plan is discussed, although Morgan himself says his support is purely moral. He knows a good deal about the project, wishes it luck and roundly decries the laws which make it illegal, but says he has no direct involvement.

Morgan, whose last soul-saving venture didn't quite live up to expectations – he spent £250,000 hiring the Royal Albert Hall for a month of prayer meetings, but fewer than a dozen people turned up for most sessions – says: 'I would hope that people listening to it would be generally helped, cheered up, enabled to prosper, and blessed in every way.'

Harmony may also be planning to broadcast appeals for funds, according to Morgan, who made his millions in London property deals. He is not privy, he says, to funding details, adding: 'Because of the ludicrous legal situation, the ship can't be owned by anyone in this country. I won't say any more.'

The potential of a legitimate evangelical radio station is also very much on Morgan's mind. 'Things seem to be changing in the radio world, and I'm keeping abreast of events,' he says. 'I think this country is ready for it.'

The Laser 558 ship, MV Communicator, was seized by the Admiralty in 1985 and sold to businessman Ray Anderson for £35,000. He sold it last year to a Panamanian company, the name of

which he does not know.

One who knows more than he will say is former disc jockey Rob Day, who told me: 'I don't work for the Communicator. I work for an American agency which sells airtime. People will be able to buy time, and if their programmes happen to appear on a radio station in the North Sea, then that's nothing to do with them.'

A second station is scheduled to broadcast from the Communicator in conjunction with Harmony. It has been given the name Starforce 576, and will be a straightforward pop station.

Pirate radio ship fetches £35,000

LASER'S pirate radio ship has been sold for £35,000 a fraction of its value, to East Anglian Productions, a firm specialising in television and radio commercials and video production.

The motor vessel Communicator was escorted into Harwich last year after generator trouble. The buyers estimate that as a working ship it would be worth nearer £250,000.

Caroline knocked off the airwaves

by **Geordie Greig**
Arts Correspondent

RADIO CAROLINE, the pirate pop radio station in the North Sea, was raided by Dutch officials yesterday and closed down.

British Department of Trade and Industry investigators looked on from another vessel as the *Ross Revenge*, a 1,000-ton converted fishing trawler from which Caroline broadcasts, was boarded several miles off the Dutch coast.

Minutes before the boat was impounded, Radio Caroline disc jockeys broadcast a final SOS message to their listeners asking them to alert the media to their latest difficulty. The Sunday Times newsdesk received several calls from listeners.

The *Ross Revenge* was last night believed to be heading for the Dutch coast; if there are any British nationals on board the DTI says it will want to interview them. It is an offence for any Briton to be on board a vessel which is illegally broadcasting.

The raid is just the latest attempt to force Caroline off the airwaves since it was banned in 1967. In 1972 it was towed away after a row over debts. It sank in 1980 and in 1985 it survived a government blockade only to have its transmitter collapse in the great hurricane of 1987.

In recent weeks the government has been preparing a crackdown on pirate radio stations and will introduce new legislation in November.

New measures to be included in the broadcasting bill by Douglas Hurd, the home secretary, will make it an offence to supply an unlicensed station or to advertise on one. Ministers are hoping the two new offences will cut the pirates' lifeline.

Caroline, which has survived precariously for 25 years, broadcasts without a licence and the DTI claims it interferes with emergency services as well as licensed radio stations in other countries.

Most European governments have outlawed unlicensed radio stations and if *Ross Revenge* even put into harbour for repairs it would have led to seizure.

Despite the authorities' attitude to unlawful radio stations, Caroline has earned a place in radio history as it launched the careers of Simon Dee, Kenny Everett, John Peel, Dave Lee Travis and Tony Blackburn, all key figures in the history of pop broadcasting.

August 18 1989

Caroline lowers the Jolly Roger

By **Our Media
Correspondent**

RADIO CAROLINE, the 27-year-old pirate radio station that launched the careers of Kenny Everett, Tony Blackburn and Simon Dee, has met its end as an illegal broadcaster.

Its backers are now faced with the choice of applying for a licence as a legitimate satellite station, or becoming a floating museum to Radio Caroline's own flamboyant history.

Named after Caroline Kennedy and based 12 miles off the Kent coast on a ship called *The Ross Revenge*, the station was long a monument to the spirit of the 1960s, both for the type of music it played, and for its defiance of all official attempts to close it down.

But a combination of stiff new legislation and the decision by the Radio Authority to give the 558 Medium Wave frequency to a new London station, has convinced members of the Caroline Movement, who back the illegal station, that it has no future as a pirate.

Until the 1990 Broadcasting Act, Radio Caroline was safe from raids by British authorities as long as it stayed 12 miles offshore. But under the new legislation, no such protection applies, and attempts to broadcast can be punished by imprisonment. Already one raid has been mounted by the British authorities and equipment seized.

On top of the fear of fines and raids, Spectrum Radio, which was allocated Radio Caroline's frequency, has deafened the pirate station's signal.

This year, the pirate broadcasters moved to 828 Medium Wave, but that was abandoned because the signal was so weak it was barely picked up by British fans.

Radio Caroline last broadcast last month, when it made a two-week return to the airwaves occupying a radio transponder on the Astra satellite, belonging to another station, Radio Nova.

The remaining members of the Caroline movement are now contemplating a choice of becoming a legitimate satellite broadcaster, and finding the estimated £300,000 rental fee that would involve, or turning the ship into a floating museum.

Either way *The Ross Revenge*, currently in a poor state of repair, would need to come to shore.

May 9 1991