

FREE Press

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OWNERSHIP

Cut Big Media down to size

AS THE proposals from the Leveson report get bogged down in niggling about the legal basis for press regulation, the campaign that really matters must go on.

Whatever name or constitutional foundation is given to the minimally rejigged Press Complaints Commission, nothing will change in the ownership or conduct of the press.

No system of self-regulation financed and run by the papers can ever hold them to account as long as the pattern of ownership and control of the media remains the same.

The Leveson Inquiry was not into phone-hacking – it couldn't be, because there are numerous trials coming up – but media power. It was about the corrupt practices of the press and its corrupt relationships with politicians and police.

The root of all the problems was the ability of Big Media – notably the Murdoch's News Corporation – to undermine democracy by bribing and bullying.

Their power derives from their sheer size, and any serious attempt to restrict it must involve limiting the amount of media they can control.

It was actually part of Leveson's remit to address "how future concerns about press behaviour, media policy, regulation and cross-media ownership should be dealt with".

In his voluminous report Lord Justice Leveson acknowledged the issue, then ducked it. He said that triggers for regulatory intervention should be "considerably lower" than those used for other competition concerns, and that "plurality" – the

range of different owners of the media – should be kept under review.

But he came up with no concrete proposals. In fact he said that "there have been no suggestions as to what level of plurality is sufficient".

In fact concrete proposals had been put to him by the Media Reform Coalition – of which the CPBF is part – including a limit of 20 per cent of any key markets of national print, television, radio and online. No company would be allowed to hold more than that.

With the question of a new press regulator on the verge of settlement – **see story page 2** – there is no prospect of legislation on media ownership arising from the report. No party has any appetite for taking on Big Media in this way.

But there are two openings that the campaign will press.

One is the expected Communications Bill, which will cover media regulation.

A White Paper is expected, a year late, in May, and while it is unlikely

contain limits on ownership, it will be open to responses.

The second chance is already open: the European Initiative on Media Plurality (EIMP) launched its long-awaited mass petition in February. The online petition must gather a million signatures across Europe to force the EU Commission to produce legislation guaranteeing media plurality and independence.

The CPBF is co-ordinating the UK campaign, to be formally launched at a meeting in Parliament on March 21. Then the work to round up the signatories will begin.



JESS HURD/REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

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For all the latest on the campaign go to www.cpbf.org.uk

Campaign rejects 'cave-in to press barons'

THE CPBF is joining the chorus of objectors to the government plan to underpin regulation of the press by means of a Royal Charter.

Yet despite widespread scepticism there are signs that the government and editors are close to agreeing on it. It would be the basis of the feared stitch-up to neutralise the recommendation of Lord Justice Leveson that a new self-regulatory mechanism for the press should be subject to supervision by a "recognition body" established by law.

Newspaper editors and Press Complaints Commission – acting through the newly set up Industry Implementation Group – objected vigorously to anything established by Parliament, on the grounds that MPs lusting for revenge against the press could use it to censor them.

Prime Minister David Cameron hastened to agree. He ruled out legislation and had his backroom staff work out an alternative scheme. This turned out to be the Royal Charter, established by the Privy Council – a profoundly undemocratic system.

The CPBF said the move "represents a cave-in to the press proprietors and a serious attack on Leveson's

proposals for effective press regulation."

The pro-Leveson campaign group Hacked Off said that, ironically, the charter "would allow politicians to interfere in press regulation. A chartered organisation is one that is overseen by ministers, who have taken the power to appoint the chair of the panel that will pick the members of the chartered body. This self-evidently

reduces the independence of the body, and is a clear breach of Leveson's recommendations.

"It is a surrender to press pressure. It proposes ditching or watering down every one of the Leveson recommendations that is inconvenient to editors and proprietors."

The NUJ has condemned the royal charter as "pointless and doomed to failure ... a sell-out to the press proprietors because it fails to take on board many of the recommendations made in the Leveson report."

The plan as set out by the Conservatives in government, has not been supported by the other

parties, but the Labour Party has indicated it will go along with the scheme if a couple of Leveson's criteria for independent operation are factored in.



How Free Press reported the risks of post-Leveson discussions in the last issue

NOT TO YOU, SIR

The CPBF decided not to respond to the consultation launched by the PCC Editors' Code Committee to draw up a Code of Practice for the new self-regulator the editors hope to set up. The committee is chaired by Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre, ringleader of national press resistance to outside regulation.

The CPBF believes that this discredited body has no right to establish the code for a new system, which has not been decided on yet, and will not be submitting proposals.

The boycott is shared by Hacked Off! and the NUJ, which is insisting that working journalists must be represented on the committee.

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GUY SMALLMAN

BBC journalists took strike action against job losses on February 18, putting flagship news programmes off air. It was the latest action against the devastations of the so-called Delivering Quality First programme of cuts imposed by former Director General Mark Thompson after his catastrophic decision in 2010 to accept a licence fee freeze. More than 2,000 jobs are going, on top of 7,000 already lost since 2004.

SAVILE

BBC bosses would not listen to programme staff

THE PAINFUL inquiries into the Jimmy Savile fiasco conducted for the BBC led in January, as could only be expected, to gleeful commentary on the dysfunctional apparatus at the top of BBC news and current affairs – with editors, paralysed by timidity, having to second-guess their bosses and with one hand of the BBC had not knowing what the other was doing.

Then in February came the transcripts of the interviews conducted – by lawyers, for god's sake – for former Sky News chief Nick Pollard's inquiry into the aborting of the Newsnight investigation.

Now came the hunt amid thousands of pages for indiscreet remarks by celebrity presenters, and howls of outrage that the juiciest ones had been judiciously blacked out.

Naturally the media are only interested in what famous people have to say, but the evidence of lowly programme staff was much more informative. In particular, those of the producer on the doomed investigation, Meirion Jones.

Dithering

He is in fact a highly respected senior journalist who knows more about the programme than anybody, but it was not what he had to say about the dithering programme editors that was most revealing.

His criticism was of the wider BBC, not for killing his story but for broadcasting the Christmas tributes to Savile in 2011.

He said there was something "horribly wrong" with the management structure of the BBC which meant his warnings about the impending scandal set to hit the broadcaster were not heeded.

Meirion Jones's testimony reveals that he was aware of plans for the tribute weeks before the Newsnight decided to broadcast their probe. He said: "We have come to the view that this is a

predatory paedophile who is using institutions all over the country. And our expectation is that where we run this story we're going to get a hundred victims coming forward."

He said he told BBC lawyers that "plainly I did not think the tribute would go out. I couldn't believe there was any chance now of the tribute going out."

Bombshell

Three days later the Newsnight editor Peter Rippon dropped the bombshell that the criteria for the story's newsworthiness were being raised to an impossible level. It was duly killed off.

Meirion Jones said: "I said we would be accused of a cover-up, because we had clear evidence of abuse on BBC premises. Christmas specials were coming up.

"If you don't run this story, the consequences for the BBC are going to be absolutely disastrous, because all those people out there will be saying you ran the tributes knowing he was a paedophile." He said that Peter Rippon responded to the effect of "I can't go to the wall on this one".

Meirion Jones said he assumed that the "force of my arguments" had been passed up the chain of command. He did not go directly to top executives over the editor's head, he said, because "that's not the culture.

"And it's not only that it would reflect badly on you. It would reflect badly on your editor that his troops are out of line.

"If I feed in to my editor that Savile is a paedophile and that tributes planned to him, I think that message should get to DG level, frankly. If that message doesn't get up there, there's something horribly wrong with the BBC management structure."

But BBC bosses aren't interested in what the ranks have to say, any more than newspaper columnists are.

BRIEFLY ...

OFCOM SAYS 'HELP YOURSELF, ALEX'

OFCOM HAS awarded the licence for the new local TV station for London to the publishers of the city's sole evening newspaper, the Evening Standard.

The company, headed by Russian entrepreneur and former KGB agent Alexander Lebedev, also owns the daily and Sunday Independent and the cut-price morning title the i.

The channel, London Live, will begin broadcasting in September as one of 21 city stations announced by the government two years ago. 15 licences have been awarded so far.

MORE MILLIONS FOR HACKING VICTIMS

NEWS INTERNATIONAL paid off 143 claimants for damages over phone-hacking in January, and announced that it was to close the compensation scheme it has been running to pay them without going to court.

Altogether 701 claims have been registered by victims of News of the World dirty tricks since the first action was launched by Sienna Miller back in 2010, but many have opted for the £20 million compensation scheme rather than short action.

The scheme will be closed in April, but there are more claims to come. Eight new ones were laid in January, and lawyers for the victims say that some may lose out if police fail to provide the evidence for their cases.

● RUPERT MURDOCH has hinted in a tweet that the Sun might drop its page 3 topless pinup pictures. He wrote: "Page three so last century! ... don't know but considering." It will be news when it happens.

CORRECTION

In Free Press 190, page 1, the figure for government spending on providing filters for viewers whose Freeview service is disrupted by 4G mobile phone transmitters should have read £180 million, not £18.

Calling Europe: a second chance to tame Big Media

The CPBF is joining a campaign for limits on the power of Big Media across Europe. The projected million-strong petition will compel the EU Commission to legislate for controls on the market share that any company can control and on media owners wielding political power. There would also be a guarantee of media independence from the state.

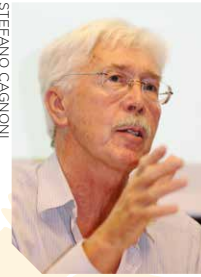
A pan-European coalition of citizens and nearly 100 media and campaigning groups has launched the online collection of signatures for the European Citizens' Initiative targeting media freedom and pluralism.

The situation of media freedom and pluralism in the European Union is worsening. Some countries, notably Hungary, suffer from significant interference by a government seeking to control and direct the media. In the UK the threat is from the undue influence of powerful economic groups over political processes, notably Murdoch's media empire. Others such as Italy suffer a dangerous overlap of economical, media, and political power in the hands of the same people.

This briefing sets out the issues, vital for the UK and all the European democracies threatened by state or media power.

The nettle

STEFANO CANNONI



GRANVILLE WILLIAMS is the UK co-ordinator of the petition campaign. He says it's a chance that must not be missed

THE EUROPEAN Initiative on Media Pluralism is a second chance for the media reforms that Britain needs, since the Leveson Inquiry failed to meet its remit to recommend ways to enhance media plurality.

European back-up is positive in any case, to help combat the various threats to press freedom and diversity across the continent.

It's not just Leveson: the nettle of media concentration is one that the European Commission has also failed to grasp. Driven by the imperative to create a single market, it has always ducked the issue.

The reason is simple. The European Union is about competition and the promotion of free markets. Numerous special interest groups have an active presence in Brussels to protect their economic interests and promote deregulation.

This is true for the media industry. Rupert Murdoch played a key role in establishing the European Publishers Council in 1991, and commercial television is represented by the Association of

WHAT THE CAMPAIGN CALLS FOR

- Effective legislation to avoid concentration of ownership in the media and advertisement sectors;
- Guaranteed independence of media supervisory bodies from political power and influence;
- Definition of conflict of interests to avoid media moguls occupying high political office;
- Clearer European monitoring systems to check up regularly on the health and independence of the media in member states.



Does it regulate media content and journalism?

No. Editorial content will remain independent from legislation. The campaign only asks the European Commission to take legislative action concerning mainly media ownership.

The campaign is recognised by the European Commission as a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). This means that our voice will be heard by European legislators. A citizens' initiative has to be backed by at least a million EU citizens, coming from at least 7 out of the 27 member states.

- THE PETITION will have its formal UK launch on Thursday March 21 at 11am at a meeting in Committee Room 4A in Parliament, London SW1. Granville Williams will be among the speakers.

to grasp

Commercial Television which consistently opposes policies to promote public service television.

New media groups like Google are also active, lobbying both in Brussels and in nation states across Europe. Google opened an office in Berlin last September.

Public concerns about concentrated media ownership and abuse of media power are now much stronger across Europe. In the UK this was highlighted by News Corporation's bid to take full control of BSkyB two years ago. James Murdoch's strategy was first to get clearance from the European Commission and then get the deal signed off by the UK government.

The EC clearance was quickly given but the decision highlighted the problem of relying solely on competition law. Promoting competition to ensure market efficiency and safeguarding pluralism on democratic, social and cultural grounds are distinct and different policy objectives.

Dramatic evidence of political subservience to powerful media groups, by Conservative and Labour governments alike, was revealed during the Leveson Inquiry. And since the report we have seen the unwillingness of David Cameron to provoke the ire of newspaper proprietors by implementing proposals for more effective regulation.

This is why we need the Europe-wide initiative, to create a clear framework to tackle media ownership and independent regulation. It is our second chance to shape media policy rather than leave it to covert lobbying by media groups.

THE ELEPHANT NEXT DOOR

MANY COUNTRIES in Europe impose restrictions on who can own mass media, and how much. The facts are laid out in a report from the Media Reform Coalition (of which the CPBF is part).

The report, *The Elephant Next Door*, summarises the broad international support that exists for plurality laws, and examines regulations from across the world on national, local, foreign and cross-media holdings.

Many countries are not afraid to limit ownership. Several impose limits on market share, with governments blocking acquisitions that threaten to breach them.

What they do elsewhere in Europe

Legal restrictions on media ownership

	TV	RADIO	PRESS	CROSS-MEDIA	FOREIGN
Denmark	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
France	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Germany	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Luxemburg	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Netherlands	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Spain	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓

Source: *The Elephant Next Door: a survey of international media ownership regulations*, at www.mediareform.org.uk

ITALY

How does he get away with it?

WATCH Silvio Berlusconi lording it on television and you can't avoid the impression that the man acts as if he owns the place. Usually he does, quite literally.

Berlusconi isn't just the richest man in Italy, he is the owner of the country's largest private broadcasting, advertising and publishing companies, with a near-monopoly on free-to-view commercial television. When he was forced to resign as prime minister just over a year ago, while the country teetered on the brink of financial disaster, his political career seemed to be over.

Now he's back, coming a close second in the February 24 general election and throwing not just Italy but the whole Eurozone into confusion. His vote increased as the campaign went on, in what was a case study in media manipulation.

The Italian media market is among the most concentrated in the world, with Berlusconi family-owned businesses at the apex of commercial television, advertising and publishing interests. Family interests also include books, newspapers and magazines.

Italy also has a long-standing tradition of pervasive political control over its public service broadcaster, RAI, so as Italy's longest-serving prime minister, Berlusconi has had ample opportunities to stuff the company with his own appointees.

Berlusconi kicked off his election campaign as sole guest of a Sunday evening programme on his own flagship TV channel, Canale 5. He didn't stop, muscling his way onto every available TV and radio show, sounding off, virtually uncontested.

His ongoing trial for abuse of office and child prostitution, was politely forgotten. With the prospect of his return, if not to government, at least to a continued position of political influence, he was treated with kid gloves at almost every turn. He refused to appear in TV debates.

It was against this backdrop that we launched our campaign in support of a Europe-wide Citizens' Initiative for Media Pluralism.

Our demands are the separation, by law, of media and political power, both to prevent media moguls from occupying high political office and to guarantee the independence of supervisory and regulatory bodies from political interference.

For far too long, by turning a blind eye to Berlusconi's anomalous concentration of media and political power, Europe's institutions have allowed Italy to set an ugly precedent.



HUNGARY

The state is enemy of the press

THE EUROPEAN Union is already under pressure to take action against Hungary, where the threat to press freedom is from the government.

Two years ago the right-wing nationalist ruling party Fidesz set up a Media Council to regulate the media. It had power to fine publications under very vague provisions and to control the licensing of broadcast stations; last year it refused a licence to a popular radio station in Budapest. There is now only one national radio station, owned by a prominent backer of Fidesz.

A report from Human Rights Watch last year declared: "Media freedom is under real threat in Hungary today, and the ruling party is responsible." It called on the EU to take action under Article 7 of the EU Treaty, on the grounds that deteriorating media freedom constituted a breach of EU values.

Under Article 7, which has never been used, the EU council can suspend the voting rights of a member state. The European Parliament last year voted to monitor human rights in Hungary, with the possibility of Article 7 action.

Control is also exercised through the allocation of government advertising, which is crucial to some media. Huge sums are spent advertising the state lottery, for instance, and papers that rely on it dare not run anti-government stories.

Tamas Bodoky, editor of the news website *Atlatszo*, says: "You receive this money if you behave. In a market the size of Hungary, it's difficult to be successful without state revenues."

Kester Eddy, Budapest

THE PAST

Owners helped the Nazis to power

CONCERNS about the damage to democracy posed by concentrated media ownership are not new. It played a big part in the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany.

By 1930 the press baron Robert Hugenberg had control or influence over half the newspapers, the Telegraph Union wire service, to which 1,600 papers subscribed, and the largest film company, UFA. He promoted a right-wing nationalist viewpoint that undermined and eventually destroyed the democratic, republican stance of the Weimar Republic.

Hugenberg joined Hitler's government in 1933, to find his belief that he could control Hitler rudely shattered as his media group came under the control of the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels.

Granville Williams

Tana de Zulueta, Rome

It's the politics just as much as the money

Murdoch's Politics: How one man's thirst for wealth and power shapes our world,
David McKnight,
Pluto Press

SAME STRATEGY, same politics: "poisoning the well", creating the climate, influencing and manipulating politicians, governments, public opinion ... this is a chilling account of Rupert Murdoch's political crusade in Australia, the UK and USA.

McKnight shows that right-wing, red-neck, neo-con politics are as essential to his motivation as the drive for profits.

News Corp profits subsidise key loss-making newspapers in all three countries to maintain the political line, the voice and the influence: the New York Post, The Australian and The Times.

There are graphic descriptions of Murdoch's strategy of appropriating the independence of political leaders – Wilson, Thatcher, Blair and Cameron in the UK; Nixon, Reagan and Bush in the USA; Whitlam and Howard in Australia.

Using his newspaper power he is as close-up and personal as possible with British prime ministers.

His vehicle in the United States is TV, alongside support for and powerful influence in the Republican Party. Murdoch's political crusade has created a web of newspaper, TV and publishing links within the media and across right-wing political parties, organisations and think-tanks, often providing generous financial support.

Murdoch launched the US neo-con magazine Weekly Standard. Harper Collins established a specialist imprint for books on conservative topics by conservative

authors, publishing Sarah Palin. Fox News promoted the Tea Party movement, and leads the media campaign against Obama and other Democrats.

Fox News ensured that in the USA "the high-pitched nature of Murdoch's tabloid media, and its overtly conservative stance, has skewed the country's terms of debate much further to the Right than would otherwise be the case". Compare The Sun in the UK.

This "inter-media agenda setting" continues across Murdoch's global empire with unremitting attacks on liberation struggles, political and social campaigns, and their organisations and leaders, and on individuals.

Murdoch pursued political wars against the "liberal media", including CNN and public service broadcasters in the UK and Australia.

McKnight states that Murdoch is "fiercely dedicated" to this crusade, including the elimination of trade unions. Yet he blames the UK print unions for the ills of Fleet Street, calling them anti-technology, with no reference to the conspiracy to sack 5,500 workers at Wapping.

The components of that 1986 dispute – government, police and a pirate union – were the same as in Murdoch's other campaigns of destruction of politicians, progressive movements and institutions and should have been in the book.

An epilogue muses on News Corp life after Rupert Murdoch and the line of succession, speculating that the company is likely to withstand the UK scandal.

Nevertheless, McKnight's description of the ultimate media mogul as being the "dominant force in the journalism and politics" of the USA, UK and Australia is borne out on every page.

Ann Field

For readers in London, David McKnight will be talking about *Murdoch's Politics* at a meeting on Friday March 15, 6.30pm, at the Centre for Creative Collaboration, 16 Acton St, London WC1X 9NG.

Journalism from the bottom up

Alternative Journalism, Alternative Voices, Tony Harcup,
Routledge

TONY HARCUP is among the legion of journalists who have gone into higher education, helping the universities meet the apparently insatiable demand for courses in journalism and media studies.

They base their teaching on their professional experience, and Tony Harcup differs from most in his concern for community-based rather than commercially-based journalism.

He spent the first ten years of his career on a local community enterprise, the Leeds Other Paper (LOP), the most enduring of the wave of such papers that sprang up in the 1970s. This was the time when cheap new production technology was supposedly enabling everybody to roll their own presses -- very like the "citizen journalist" hype around the internet today -- but it didn't last.

Within a decade nearly all had died as the big corporations resumed their hold on the press. The LOP kept going for 20 years, and Tony Harcup recounts in detail the challenge it posed to the right-wing Yorkshire Post stable of mainstream papers – notably over the great miners' strikes of the 1980s.

But this is not a history book. It does not, for instance, have much on the national or single-issue (women's, gays', ethnic, socialist, anarchist...)

alternative media of the time, which were of a huge variety and produced some great radical journalism. This is something of a disappointment.

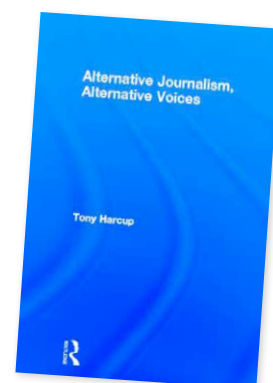
But it is the journalists and their practice, rather than the publications themselves, that Tony Harcup is interested in. He is author of a respected work on ethical journalism and the core of this new book is the outcome of research he has conducted into their attitudes. He tracked down a couple of dozen mainstream journalists who, like himself, had worked in alternative media. (Declaration of interest: I was one of them.)

Their responses to his questionnaire demonstrate a heartening idealism – Tony Harcup calls it "active citizenship" – that is still evident even in the ultra-commercial and cynical media of today.

Much of the material in the book, an updated collection of articles written for academic journals, is a few years' old so while there are a couple of pages on Indymedia there is not much on the hundreds of local news websites that are springing up to fill the void left by the decline of the local commercial press.

But the modern message would be the same: that the people who voluntarily work for alternative media are not just performing as active citizens but as journalists too.

Tim Gopsill



Willing slave labour of the digital economy

Digital Labor. The Internet as Playground and Factory, Trebor Scholz (ed), Routledge

The Filter Bubble. What the Internet is Hiding from You, Eli Pariser, Penguin

WE ALL do things for nothing. We give our time freely. We don't charge friends for our conversations. We wouldn't ask those we love to pay for the affection we give instinctively.

But imagine that someone else did – someone who takes our little tokens of friendship and finds a way of turning them into money? Now take a look at Facebook and imagine no longer.

In 2011, Facebook's revenues were estimated at £4.3 billion, almost £1 billion of which was profit, and with a workforce of just a couple of thousand.

How did it make such a huge profit? By turning our little gestures, the clicks on the internet that reflect our curiosity, the desire to share photos, stories and details of our lives, into money. These "click signals" are the source of valuable data that can be sold to advertisers or firms that specialise in tracking our behaviour on the web and selling it on themselves.

Facebook isn't the only company that works on this basis. Google and other commercial sites found the way to transform our free time into their profits. Newspapers use their "comment is free" sections to draw us in and add value to their product.

As these practices have spread, so too have the appeals to readers and viewers to generate free columns, images, videos, fact checking and other information.

The new corporate net-establishment, in spite of the open plan offices, the laid-back affectation of something vaguely counter-cultural in its management style, and the rhetoric of empowerment and choice that has become a dreary orthodoxy – in spite of all this, it is in the business of making as much money as possible out of the free labour given by the rest of us.

Digital Labor discusses the concept of free labour as

"work that is not based on employment, work that is unpaid and freely given", how social networking sites commercialise our freely given labour and the links between crowdsourcing and neo-liberal models of contracting out jobs in companies and public services.

Abigail De Kosnik investigates how the free labour of fan moderators, writers and artists who comment on Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and other social networks contribute to massive corporate revenues.

Reformers have been engaged with the problems of ownership, control and accountability in the world of print, radio, cinema and TV for decades. The world of the internet reflects many of the same issues: the concentration of power, exploitation of labour and concerns about accountability. It poses new threats to privacy through commercial and government surveillance.

But interestingly it also transfers all the issues about who profits, and who exploits whom, from the world of work to the worlds of leisure and free time, our own emotional and social spaces. We need to attend carefully to these issues.

The Filter Bubble deals with the threat to the free exchange of ideas posed by the mining of personal data by companies like Google and Facebook. Since 2009 Google has been using signals – everything from where you were logging in from to what browser you were using to what you have searched for – to make guesses about who you were and what kinds of site you'd like.

Other companies are doing the same. They personalise the data, and sometimes sell it on without our knowledge. The result is a world in which we increasingly encounter only those views which the system considers we "like".

By tailoring to our "needs" the internet constructs a bubble around us. We have to work hard to break out of it.

As Tim Berners Lee, the creator of the World Wide Web argues: "Large social networking sites are walling off information posted by their users from the rest of the Web.

"Democratic and totalitarian Governments are monitoring our use of the Web. To this we must now add the control over huge banks of data about us held by the big companies on the web."

This informative and easy-to-read book should be read by anyone concerned about implications of the internet – especially those who think that social networking sites are an unqualified benefit to humanity.

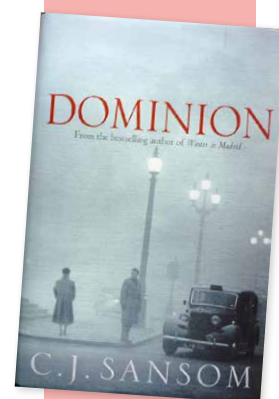
Tom O'Malley

THE UK PRESS UNDER HITLER

Dominion,
C J Sansom, Pan

DOMINION is an intriguing and riveting novel, in the tradition of alternative history inspired by Robert Harris' *Fatherland*. Its setting in 1952 is a Britain that had decided in 1940 to collaborate with the Nazis.

The atmosphere of a state dominated by Germany, with a complicit British government under pressure to move



towards a final solution for Jewish people in Britain, is totally convincing.

There is a strong media theme. The prime minister is Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, the real-world proprietor of the then market-leading Daily Express. And the way he uses the media to censor and distort the news makes for compelling reading – especially the way he acquires the Manchester Guardian and shifts its political stance to a cheerleader for his collaborationist regime!

Granville Williams

A conscience clause would not be enough

PAUL ANDERSON says journalists should raise their sights and take more control over their work

IT'S A MEASURE of how far the left has retreated in recent years that the best that most media reformers can imagine to defend journalists' independence is a "conscience clause" in their contracts to allow them to refuse their bosses' instructions to act unethically.

There's nothing wrong with the idea. The National Union of Journalists has supported it since the 1970s, and it was backed by Lord Justice Leveson in his report on press regulation at the end of last year.

If implemented, it would provide a small but significant protection for journalists. But it addresses only at the margins the fundamental problem of how little most journalists control what they produce.

You get a lot of leeway if you're a big name – a star broadcaster or a columnist on a quality national newspaper. But journalists are generally kept on a tight rein.

Media organisations are run by managers answering to owners, or in the case of the BBC political appointees. The bosses set the agenda in every way: the editorial line, news values, what you cannot touch for political or commercial reasons. Journalists do what they are told.

To some extent, this is inevitable: there will always be a tension between the individual journalist's autonomy and the collective will of his or her organisation.

Any journalistic enterprise, new media or old, needs editorial direction and a division of labour. But it's quite feasible for the producers to determine both. Why isn't anyone today making the case for workers' self-management in the media?

One reason is that it seems unrealistic. The "right to manage" ethos is entrenched even in liberal media organisations (and it's getting worse). Even the most diluted forms of self-management – workers on the board or a say for journalists in the choice of editor – would be resisted vigorously by those in charge. Maybe, in the circumstances, the priority is defending what little space we've got.

But unrealistic is not impossible. The idea that workers' self-management in the media has



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been tried and failed and isn't worth trying again is a canard.

True, there were several examples of self-managed magazines and newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s that failed:

The Scottish Daily News, created with the help of a government loan by former staff of the Scottish Daily Express after it closed, lasted six loss-making months in 1975.

The Leveller, a libertarian left current affairs magazine based in London, managed six crisis-ridden years (1976-82) before folding.

City Limits, an alternative London listings magazine, did brilliantly for several years after emerging from a strike at Time Out in 1981 (with funding from the Greater London Council) but and expired in 1992.

News on Sunday, a national left-wing paper launched in spring 1987 with trade union

backing, ran out of cash in weeks and closed by the end of the year.

Scottish Daily News was an attempt to revive a corpse. The Leveller and City Limits both came within an inch of success, however: it was undercapitalisation that did for them.

And times have changed. All those experiments were in print, before desktop publishing and long before the internet.

The internet allows anyone to publish for free to a worldwide audience, and today you can do everything online: words, pictures, audio or video.

Yet two decades years into the internet age, it's notable how little the potential of the web has been exploited by collaborative self-managed journalistic projects in the UK. Yes, there's Open Democracy, there's the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, there are dozens of group blogs, and plenty of media and campaigning organisations have adapted successfully to the online world.

But even at local level there are few independent journalism-led and journalist-run web initiatives that go further than providing forums for the expression of opinion.

Of course, journalism costs money, and no one has quite yet worked out how to make the internet pay. Open Democracy, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and the successful group blogs rely for income on fundraising or selling stories to established media outlets.

But there are signs that it won't be long before a robust business model for online publication is established, through a mix of online advertising, subscriptions and micro-payments: it's already beginning to happen in the US and elsewhere. And once it is – well, the possibilities for self-managed media are endless.

Radical journalists in Britain need to be putting a lot more thought into how, together, we can at last seriously exploit the potential of what was once known as the information super-highway.

The fundamental problem is how little journalists control what they produce

backing, ran out of cash in weeks and closed by the end of the year.

None of these failures shows that workers' self-management cannot work. News on Sunday was a farcical demonstration of how not to do it – as chronicled by Chris Horrie and Peter Chippendale in their book *Disaster!* – and the