

FREE Press

No 198 March–April 2014 £1 The Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

OUTRAGE OVER MILEAGE RATE CUT

On your bikes, regional group tells journalists

JOURNALISTS working for papers owned by the Johnston Press group (JP), one of the UK's "big four" regional publishers, have effectively been told to "get on their bikes" as executives try to stave off a continuing debt crisis by cutting mileage rates.

The firm told employees this month that the allowance for using private cars for work would be cut from the HMRC recognised rate of 45p per mile to just 25p. (Freelance journalists who use bicycles for work are allowed to write off 20p per mile against tax.)

Within hours, some reporters had cancelled their expensive insurance cover for business use, preferring to wait for buses instead.

A statement from National Union of Journalists (NUJ) members working for JP subsidiaries said: "There is a huge amount of anger among members throughout the company who are united in their opposition to these proposals.

"We have seen evidence that Johnston Press originally intended to introduce this change in November, which makes it even harder to accept the decision not to consult staff in any way and to give them just 24 hours' notice about this reduction in mileage rates."

The NUJ suspected that the cut was delayed as JP did not have alternatives in place, adding: "The reduction in mileage rates will heavily impact on our members, particularly photographers, sports reporters and staff who have no longer have an office. It not only wipes out any minimal pay rises staff have received in recent years, but will also prevent them doing their jobs properly. (Union) reps have told us there are no pool



WHEELED OUT: Johnston Press reporters feel forced to turn to pedal power.

cars available at their offices or that it costs more to get a bus from their new out-of-town office into the centre than it would to drive and claim 45p per mile. It brings the whole idea that this is a justifiable cost-saving measure into question."

NUJ newspapers organiser Laura Davison added: "Johnston Press says it wants all its employees to feel valued, but actions like these show just how little it thinks of staff who have shown a great deal of loyalty and commitment in the face of jobs cuts, office closures, increasing workloads and below-inflation pay rises. There has been no consultation on this mileage cut and editors have been briefed not to negotiate.

"The company has made much of giving staff the right tools for the job and talks about journalists working from their patches when it is trying to justify closing or relocating offices - but this move will make it prohibitively expensive for our members to use their own cars to do that and suitable alternatives are not in place. It will also render impossible some of the quality,

Continued: Page 2.



AERIAL WARFARE

Tory onslaught seeks to undermine BBC

Pages 6-7



THE PITS

News clashes with history as strike details emerge

Pages 4-5

BETTING ON HONESTY

Media committee MP tests proprietors' code

Page 3

**MORE CAMPAIGN
NEWS**
www.cpbfb.org.uk

PODCAST UPDATE

BBC journalist reveals effects of harassment on colleagues

A BBC journalist and NUJ activist at the centre of supporting individuals affected by bullying and harassment within the Corporation has spoken about the effects in the first CPBF podcast of the year.

There, workplace rep and NUJ executive council member David Campanale talks about the sensitive topic with presenter Claire Colley and NUJ campaigns officer Frances Rafferty.

The recording followed a conference about bullying in the media industry organised by the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU).

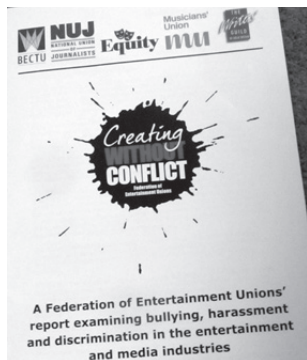
Presenter Claire Colley said the media industries are often seen as glamorous, but a report commissioned for the conference confirmed that bullying and harassment in such workplaces are rife, adding: "The reality is further from the dream."

The research also revealed that the creative industries are a "hotspot" for bullying.

"Journalists," said David Campanale, "have had enough."

The seriousness of bullying and harassment – and surrounding silence – became apparent to the NUJ while officials were collating evidence for the Leveson Inquiry. Anonymous statements revealing the demands of some national newspapers were published on the Inquiry website.

- www.cpbf.org.uk
- www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns/creating-without-conflict
- <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140122145147/http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Second-Witness-Statement-of-Michelle-Stanistreet.pdf>



From Page 1.

Mileage rate cut adds to fears for empire's viability

award-winning investigative work that the group's journalists have produced, enhancing Johnston Press's reputation."

Another experienced NUJ activist pointed out that tax relief can be claimed on the difference between what the HMRC thinks is a reasonable rate and what is actually paid. Consequently, taxpayers appear to be expected to help fill the gap in JP finances.

Johnston Press publishes more than 200 titles, including the *Scotsman*, *The Yorkshire Post* and *Lancashire Evening Post*.

Revelations of the proposed cut became public within hours of a "relaunch" of *The Yorkshire Post* – an exercise quickly criticised as wasteful window-dressing by a firm increasingly pressured by debt.

NUJ members in the north had already expressed concern that while a temporary agreement with the banks could provide some respite, the potential costs of hiring Rothschild as advisers could seriously reduce the long-term savings, even though these have, so far, remained private. Staff feel that – from past experience – they may well have to pay for this with their jobs.

The credibility of JP's executives had taken a further battering hours earlier. A trade website had revealed that they had presented the *Bourne Local* with an in-house award for "innovation" (by charging readers to buy material they had produced themselves) at the same time as the *Scarborough Review*, an independent free monthly newspaper published by a former JP sub editor, had had to increase the pagination of its latest edition to meet local advertising demand.

Some media commentators also quietly fear that JP's move to make photographers redundant and force them into freelancing could yet be investigated by HMRC – as an attempt to evade employers' national insurance contributions.

Taken together, decisions emanating from CEO Ashley Highfield's boardroom are doing nothing to reassure either employees or readers about the future financial viability of the JP empire.

AC

Join the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

THE Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom depends on its membership for day-to-day operating funds - including the production and distribution of *Free Press*.

Taking out - and maintaining - membership will allow the Campaign to maintain its work, strengthen its voice and enhance its profile at a time when the media industry is facing more repressive political and commercial constraints than for generations.

If you're interested in a media and journalism that contribute to an informed electorate, then please join the Campaign or renew your membership now.

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER YEAR

- a) Individual membership £15
- b) Unwaged £6
- c) Supporting membership £25 (includes CPBF publications)
- d) Institutions (eg libraries) £25 (includes 10 copies of *FREE Press*)

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Tel _____

Organisation (if applicable) _____

Please return to: CPBF, Second Floor, Vi and Gamer Smith House, 23 Orford Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9NL
Tel: 0 772 984 6146 E-mail: freepress@cpbf.org.uk

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- f) Fewer than 500 members £25
- g) 500 to 1,000 £30
- h) 1,000 to 10,000 £50
- i) 10,000 to 50,000 £115
- j) 50,000 to 100,000 £225
- k) More than 100,000 £450

Tory media committee MP tests PCC code of practice

A VOCIFEROUS Tory member of the Commons' Culture, Media and Sport committee looks to have put the *Yorkshire Post* in breach of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) code of conduct.

Shiplay MP Philip Davies wrote an opinion piece for a Saturday edition of the paper claiming to "dispel the myths about gambling machines". The standfirst byline noted that he had spoken in parliament on the betting industry.

The piece failed to include the fact that four of five "gifts" listed in the January edition of the register of members' industry came from gambling giants Ladbroke and Coral. The fifth came from Channel 4 - for a trip to Aintree on April 6 last year, the day of the Grand National when UK bookmakers are often busiest.

In December 2012, the *Guardian* reported that Mr Davies had received more than £10,000 in benefits from companies linked to gambling which he did not declare during a "contentious" year-long inquiry into the industry.



The very first clause of the controversial Press Complaints Commission code of practice says: "the press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information ..."

By failing to disclose Mr Davies' links with the industry, the *Yorkshire Post* appears to have put itself very close to breaching the industry's own standards.

Even the *Daily Mail* called Mr Davies "an ally of the bookmaking industry who had, days earlier in the Commons, spoken in a debate about fixed odds betting machines, accusing Labour of condemning pursuits enjoyed by the poor.

"This is basically middle-class

people being patronising to working-class people, telling them how they know best on how they should spend their money," the paper said.

Small comfort comes from the revelation that the *Mail* paid the outspoken Conservative MP only £400 for two articles in 2012 - neither of which was published.

FREE PRESS UPDATE

Local TV contracts fail to attract interest

FURTHER questions are being asked about the viability of former culture secretary Jeremy Hunt's personal quest for local television stations after four contracts failed to attract any bidders.

Ofcom revealed that no one had come forward to run stations in Barnstable, Londonderry, Gloucester and Plymouth earlier this year. Five of the nine contracts offered attracted only one bid each - from a London-based company, That's Media, run by Daniel Cass. Consequently, it now has franchises for a ring of commuter towns and cities around the capital - including Basingstoke, Guildford, Luton, Reading and Salisbury.

In what looks like a move that will mirror newspaper coverage of North Wales, Liverpool's Bay TV is a sister operation to Bangor-based Bay TV Gwynedd. The Bay

Group also put in a bid to run the station for Clywd, but faced competition from Wirral-based Serch TV Mold.

The *Kent Messenger* newspaper group also faced a challenge from TV Kent, based in Faversham, to run a station in nearby Maidstone.

The first local station - in Grimsby - went on air last year. Mustard TV, covering Norwich and run by the Archant newspaper group, the major regional newspaper publisher in East Anglia, is due to start broadcasting on Freeview channel 8 this month, potentially posing problems with Ofcom impartiality regulations for journalists more accustomed to the politics of print. London Live - due on air at the end of March - is owned by the same company as *The Independent* and *Evening Standard*, raising further concerns about media plurality in the capital.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Comment on the CPBF website

www.cpbf.org.uk

Campaigning champion dies

THE founder of the campaigning group, the Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV), Jocelyn Hay, pictured, has died, aged 86. She was awarded the CBE



in 2005. CPBF chair Julian Petley said she was one of the first to recognise the threats to public service broadcasting by technological changes and bleak hostility from the Thatcher government.

OBITUARY



MAKING POINTS: Book editor Granville Williams, above, and former BBC correspondent Nicholas Jones, below, address the meeting in Leeds to mark the publication of *Settling Scores*. Pictures: Adam Christie.



Tightening the focus

THE 'Twitter generation' may believe that news 'breaks', then is reported and over in five minutes, but the latest revelations about the miners' strike of 1984 suggest otherwise – that finding out what actually happened and who was responsible is a far slower process. *Free Press* editor **Adam Christie** went to a meeting in Leeds to mark the publication of the CBPF book *Settling Scores* – and found reflection running into reality.

THE television crews were behind the police lines and the cameras then could only record wide, long shots.

This explanation of how technology affected aspects of coverage of the miners' strike of 1984 is just a part of the latest analysis of how the London-based national news media portrayed events in Yorkshire and the North East by former BBC industrial correspondent Nicholas Jones.

Nick's observations came at a meeting in the council chamber of Leeds Civic Hall this month to mark the publication of the book *Settling Scores; the media, the police and the miners' strike* by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

Nick also told the 100 people at the public meeting of his belief that mobile phones and social media would today ensure that police conduct is under the scrutiny of easier photographic close-ups while simple and fast distribution of images could stop the violence and tactics associated with the strike from happening again. There would, he said, be "an online insurgency".

Examination of cabinet papers from before the strike began had confirmed that the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher had personally tried to influence funding for the police so they could fight

her battle against the miners. More, he said, would become apparent when official papers from later in 1984 and 85 are released, probably in a few months' time, revealing ministers' preparations to sequester National

Union of Mineworkers' funds.

Nick also admitted that he had been misled during his radio reporting of events in 1984 and that writing about the time had, for him, been a time of personal soul-searching.

The Conservative government, he added, set worker against worker and the national newspapers of the

time, apart from *The Guardian*, had presented a "threat to democracy" with their portrayal of the miners and their dispute.

"Reporters," Nick said, "are however usually on the side of revolutionaries. They're behind the lines and they're the ones getting killed."

But, he added, miners then also alienated many reporters. Nowadays, trade unions must understand how to use the media.

■ *Settling Scores; the media, the police and the miners' strike*, edited by Granville Williams and published by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, costs £6.99. ISBN: 978-1-898240-06-8.



FORENSIC: In *Settling Scores*, BBC journalist Dan Johnson, left, tells Granville Williams how an academic exercise evolved into a hard-hitting regional TV documentary.

PUBLIC MEETING Revealing Truths Just how free is the press today?

Speakers: Granville Williams and *Salford Star* editor Stephen Kingston.

Tuesday 29 April - 7.30-9pm

Friends Meeting House
Mount Street, Manchester.

Free entry

Organised by the Mary Quaile Club
<http://maryquaileclub.wordpress.com>
E-mail: maryquaileclub@gmail.com



More to come as radio and TV get to work

THE first edition of a new series of the BBC Radio 4 programme *The Reunion* to be broadcast early in April marks the anniversary of the strike – by bringing together Barbara Jackson, miner Mel Hepworth, Tory grandee Kenneth Clarke, former MP Kim Howells and a Bedfordshire traffic policeman. Ms Jackson told the Leeds meeting that the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign had also been talking to other television programmes – including *Panorama*. “There is a lot of unfinished business,” she said.

SETTLING SCORES:

THE MEDIA, THE POLICE & THE MINERS' STRIKE

Powerful – and personal

ALMOST anonymous television pictures of rows of miners have now been replaced by personal faces – making accounts of the strike all the more powerful.

Among them are Barbara Jackson, a founder of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, pictured left beside meeting chair and Unite regional secretary Karen Reay.

The meeting also heard personal testimony from former miner Ray



Riley, far left, of police brutality. While, above, former Yorkshire MP Paul Truswell, back, and *Settling Scores* contributor Pete Lazenby also attended.

HEAR THE SPEAKERS

– in the latest CPBF podcast Online – at www.cpbf.org.uk

DEBATE

FROM Page 8.

Positive proposals for maintaining a diverse media landscape

or face possible divestment. At the light end such requirements would include compliance with relevant industry codes of conduct, measures to safeguard editorial independence. At the stronger end, they would include undertakings to ensure greater plurality, for instance by sharing resources with other suppliers or community users. The committee broadly rejected this approach but did so in part on the pragmatic grounds that there is a lack of consensus on obligations across industry. In fact, the CPBF proposals anticipate and accommodate such differences. However, the opposition to even Leveson-compliant self-regulation from amongst powerful commercial media may have been enough to convince the Committee to duck the challenge for now. The bigger question is what societal demands can be placed on the firms who provide communication services so vital to democratic life and culture today?

Ownership caps contravene the principle put forward by the committee that “the assessment of plurality should drive the decision about which remedy or intervention is appropriate, not the other way around”. Yet the rejection of caps is highly problematic too. To be clear, a system without caps could work. The committee propose that Parliament lays down in statute “narrative” guidelines on what

constitutes sufficient pluralism for Ofcom to follow. The problem is that what is proposed is highly discretionary for Ofcom yet lacks publicly accountable safeguards. Thresholds for action and caps based on market share, audience share or other measurements have limitations and should not be the only route to action but they provide a level of transparency and certainty for citizens. That contrasts with the real risks of opaque deal-making, or protracted litigation, between industry players, regulators and government. After decades of inaction it is time to move to a system that can instil confidence. One requirement for that is to bring the public into regulation, something the CPBF advocated but the report entirely ignores.

The other major problem concerns scope. In future, plurality policy should only address media enterprises engaged in news and current affairs content, the committee argues. The CPBF and others will continue to call for a much broader pluralism capable of addressing when media power and market power work together to the detriment of entertainment, sports, culture, content and communications services.

■ Jonathan Hardy is a member of the CPBF national council and reader in media studies at the University of East London.

'Mission from Mars' succumbs to propaganda

Dissembling by the UK's major national newspaper proprietors has gone hand in hand with Lord Leveson's recommendations for improved press regulations – causing confusion and ridicule around the world, as **Julian Petley** explains, having encountered missionary zeal from publishers elsewhere.

LAST November, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) announced that it was sending an “unprecedented top-level press-freedom mission to the United Kingdom” as a “direct response to recent actions widely seen as contrary to press freedom guarantees: government interference in the regulation of the independent press, through the Royal Charter and associated legislation, but will also include discussion of the criticism of *The Guardian* for its coverage of the revelations from former US National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden”.

The ever so slight problem here, however, is that there has been absolutely no government interference in the press via the Royal Charter, whilst the government's attacks on the *Guardian*, which are indeed a most serious assault on press freedom, have been loudly amplified and endorsed by newspapers such as the *Sun*, *Mail* and *Telegraph*. (Significantly, in its report of the “mission”, the *Telegraph* managed not to mention the *Guardian* at all).

In early January the “mission” duly arrived, and I, along with a number of other journalism academics, was asked to meet it. Not before, however, it had met Lord Black, in his capacity as chair of the CPU Media Trust, which is a constituent member of the co-ordinating committee of Press Freedom Organisations. But, of course, he is also executive director of the Telegraph Group and chair of PressBof, which funds the PCC and is bitterly hostile to the Royal Charter. This no doubt would explain why, allegedly, he told the assembled missionaries that editors could face gaol under the Charter – which would be a barefaced lie.

But this simply compounded the grotesque misrepresentation of the Charter which had been a feature of most UK newspapers ever since it was announced in the first place. As Sir Harold Evans put it in his Hugh Cudlipp lecture in January 2013, the misrepresentation of Leveson's proposal for the statutory underpinning of press self-regulation has been “staggering”, and to portray it as state control is an “amazingly gross distortion”, whilst speaking on

the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme in October 2013, he complained that “the exaggerations of some of the papers comparing the UK to Zimbabwe is so ridiculous, so self-interested as to destroy confidence in the very freedom of speech they claim to protect”.

Long before we encountered the missionaries, then, we feared that their ideas about the Charter would be based on the utter garbage that had been written about it in the UK press, and assiduously pedalled abroad by its representatives.

We were not wrong. We did our best to explain that the Charter did not introduce “statutory regulation” of the press, and that it would indeed provide greater freedom for investigative journalists by significantly

lowering the costs of defending libel cases. But the Charter and its associated mechanisms are not the easiest things to explain at the best of times, and it rapidly became clear that months of simplistic and alarmist propaganda pumped out daily by UK

newspapers had done their job. We were received politely enough – but with an almost tangible sense of incredulity, as if they came from another planet.

We are constantly told that those who advocate the Charter are in favour of “statutory control” of the press, and, in so doing, are giving succour to those abroad who want to muzzle the press in their own countries. The really tragic irony, however, is that those who have done by far the most to assist such people are precisely those newspapers which have repeatedly regaled global audiences with lurid lies about what the Charter entails.

Any organisation in the UK responsible for this state of affairs should be utterly ashamed of itself, but, given that this is the bulk of the UK press which we're talking about here, one can rest assured that “shame” is a word that doesn't feature in their vocabulary – unless, of course, it's applied to others, and particularly to those groups which it loves to demonise, which includes those campaigning for a genuinely free press.

■ *Julian Petley is Professor of Screen Media at Brunel University and chair of the national council of the CPBF.*

“The Charter and its associated mechanisms are not the easiest things to explain at the best of times”

Union branch reveals local devastation

JOURNALISTS in Leeds have taken the rare decision to make themselves the story.

Fed up with covering up their everyday working conditions and the consequences of staff cuts, the local NUJ branch tabled a 1,000 word motion to the AGM of the TUC in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Among the revelations, at a time when Newsquest,

the UK subsidiary of the US Gannett corporation, was trying to “relocate” production work 270 miles from Bradford, York and Darlington to Monmouth in South Wales, the journalists also revealed how they had had to work in offices with condemned heating systems and how the *Yorkshire Post* had been without a dedicated South Yorkshire reporter for months.

Tories turn to law in onslaught against BBC

PICK up a Saturday edition of the *Daily Telegraph* and the chances are increasing that the front page lead will be a clumsy attempt to undermine further the BBC.

While the Corporation's behaviour has been far from perfect, the concept of a publicly-owned broadcaster and news

organisation, financed with a compulsory subscription detached from state coffers is, by far, the least worst way of trying to maintain an informed electorate in a representative democracy that has yet been devised. (Alternatives, such as commercial domination in the US or state

broadcasters whose output is synonymous with propaganda, seem to lead inevitably to political polarisation and, in some cases, even conflict.)

The latest attack on the BBC came with a proposal that not paying the licence fee should no longer be a crime.

Chasing those who do not pay has become too expensive apparently – and the proposal is justified by those on the right as a way to reduce the burden on the courts.

Culture, Media and Sport committee chair John Whittingdale MP also apparently thinks the £140 a year fee is too expensive. However, the price of 40p per household per day has not increased at the same time as those advocating this change have increased personal tax allowances in a way that makes the sum far more affordable for

everyone. (The cheapest cans of baked beans in one supermarket chain cost 19p each.)

If the law changed, more people would refuse to pay – and the BBC's income would both fall and be unpredictable, increasing costs and undermining planning.

(That not-paying for gas or electricity is a civil offence is no excuse; the counter argument is stronger – that failing to pay utility bills or parking tickets should also be criminal. This could also increase pressure on energy suppliers to pay tax "morally", rather than "efficiently".)

The BBC is far more than *Newsnight* and the *Today* programme – not that anyone working in Westminster gives the impression of knowing that (until they can't use local radio to maintain the profiles they need for re-election, of course).

The Corporation is

a huge employers of writers, actors and musicians – not that anyone would know it from the nationals. Indeed, many readers no longer take any story about the BBC at face value if it appears in the Barclay Brothers' *Telegraph* papers, Mr Murdoch's *Times* or *Sun*, or Mr Desmond's *Express* or *Star*. They see the *Mail* as putting Paul Dacre's prejudices ahead of public propriety.

The BBC is nowhere near perfect. Its managers *must* get their acts together. A news organisation as free from political and commercial influence as possible is essential for the democratic, social and cultural health of any nation. So, the BBC must be protected against predators. That too many politicians appear so cowardly that they fear scrutiny cannot justify this onslaught. AC

Three's a crowd

Corporation executives seem to be rushing to move BBC3 from TV to the internet, claiming this reflects evolving viewing habits. CPBF national council member **Pat Holland** disagrees.

WOULD it matter if BBC3 went online? Would it make that much difference? Presumably the targetted 16 to 35-year-olds are just as likely to catch up with *Our War* or *Sun*, *Sex and Suspicious Parents* at a time of their choice on a device of their choice. (Enders Analysis has reported far fewer young adults watching traditional linear TV.)

The announcement about BBC3 has, no doubt, a political dimension – to bring home to viewers and politicians precisely what cuts of 16 per cent imply – but it's worth considering it in relation to the future of television itself. Perhaps the move confirms moves to step to a non-linear "connected" future. Is the familiar, once-loved box in the corner is on its way to the scrap heap (or re-cycling)?

At the March Westminster Media Forum, some of the high powered architects of the connected future (including managing directors and executives of Freeview, Freesat, YouView, Sky, Virgin and more) considered the prospects for free-to-air, pay-TV and connected devices in the UK. And even they acknowledged that currently most viewing by far is through traditional linear television sets, and most on-demand viewing is as "catch up". It emerged that free-to-air, linear television, continues to be valued as the backbone of the UK system. Competition with free-to-air forces pay-TV to keep up standards.

So would it matter if the BBC took BBC3 off Freeview and satellite? Of course it would. Not only would the interesting and innovative channel be less public and less visible, it would send a message to the younger audience that they are less valued. In addition, the move would undermine not only the BBC but the important principle of free-to-air broadcasting.

FREE Press

Free Press is published by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom,
2nd Floor, Vi and Garner Smith House, 23 Orford Road, , London E17 9NL
E-mail: freepress@cpbf.org.uk
Editor: Adam Christie: editor.ac@btinternet.com
Editorial address: PO Box HP346, Leeds LS6 1UL

Views expressed in *Free Press* are those of the contributors and should not be regarded as formal CPBF policy.

Ideas, comments, letters, articles are all welcomed. Please contact the editor.

© 2014 Copyright in the words and images in *Free Press* remains with the originators. All rights reserved.

Printed by Swallowmax Ltd, 43 Aden Road, Enfield EN3 7SY

This edition went to press on March 14 2014.

The deadline for the next edition is Friday May 16, 2014.

How much is enough?

The question of media ownership – and plurality – is not going away. **Jonathan Hardy** outlines the CPBF position.

TONY Blair, we now know from evidence in the phone hacking trial, offered to help Rupert Murdoch, his son James and Rebecca Brooks shortly before Brooks was arrested, providing further evidence of how toxic has been the trading between media and political power in the UK.

A parliamentary report on tackling media plurality offers steps forwards, backwards, and tentatively around this thorny problem. In July 2011, then culture secretary Jeremy Hunt was days away from approving Murdoch's bid for total ownership of BSkyB, when the phone hacking scandal re-ignited.

Since then we've had Leveson, an Ofcom report on measuring media plurality, and now this report, Media Plurality, by the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications. As a contributor, on behalf of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF), I must declare my interest, disappointment and concerns.

First, the positives: The report affirms the importance of media plurality at a critical moment for UK policy, explains that it raises different concerns from competition regulation, and concludes plurality must address digital intermediaries as well as content providers across print, broadcasting and the internet. It accepts advice that the BBC should not be subject to new "control measures" to sustain plurality beyond the public service system, and it strongly rejects top-slicing the licence fee.

The key proposal is that the regulator Ofcom should be given a statutory responsibility to conduct plurality reviews every four or five years. Ofcom will report to the Secretary of State who can reject the report and proposals but must give reasons for doing so. For "media transactions", mergers or take-overs like the News Corp's bid for BSkyB, the power to decide should be taken away from the Secretary of State altogether. So, in proposals that will excite much discussion and controversy, the Committee recommends that Ofcom investigates plurality, the Competition

Commission investigates competition issues, and the Ofcom board gives the final decision.

Some have argued it is time to shift from actions to break up old monopolies to measures to foster digital newcomers. The choice is false; both are needed. In the UK three companies control some 70 per cent of daily national newspaper circulation, the five largest regional newspaper publishers control 70 per cent of circulation, one news bulletin wholesaler supplies most commercial radio stations. The power of digital

In the UK three companies control some 70 per cent of daily national newspaper circulation, the five largest regional newspaper publishers control 70 per cent of circulation, one news bulletin wholesaler supplies most commercial radio stations.

intermediaries such as Google demonstrates how misleading it is to regard media concentration as a 20th century problem. So, might the proposals actually help to tackle current and future plurality problems? Current ones, no; any retrospective action is regarded as unfair. Future? They might, but in rejecting alternative proposals the Committee opt for a highly discretionary, narrow approach whose outcomes are extremely uncertain.

The main alternative proposals for action have been for fixed caps or so-called "hybrid" schemes that combine structural remedies (divestment) with behavioural remedies (requirements placed on firms whose size and influence raise plurality concerns). Fixed caps alone are regarded as too restrictive in changing market conditions. The CPBF agreed and proposed that market share should be a guide for triggering investigations that would consider plurality concerns as they arose across local and national media markets. The CPBF and others propose that firms with a large share in news and other media markets should have to meet public interest requirements

Continued: Page 5.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEBATE

Contribute to the CPBF

**AGM 2014
at the**

**National Union of Journalists
308-312 Gray's Inn Road
London SW1X 8DP**

**Saturday June 21, 2014
10am – 12.30pm**

All members welcome.