FREE Press

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The Salford Star: an economic execution

By Stephen Kingston

n some "less enlightened" countries they don't mess about with meddling journalists – they just shoot them or blow up their offices. Here in England they censor and execute you economically. It has the same affect. Hence the winter issue of *Salford Star* didn't appear.

It was a real shame because had the *Star* appeared, people would have read about how Salford council managed to spend £175,000 on its own magazine, how the council is giving wage rises of over ten grand to its execs while cutting the wages of its low-paid workers, and why current voting on the future of the city is, basically, rigged.

We would argue that this sort of stuff is vital to the democratic process. But it never appeared. We couldn't afford to print it. Economically censored and executed.

It's fair to say that the *Salford Star* is like no other publication in the country. The aim has been to take the concept of community magazines to a different planet, one where a big, bold, glossy independent magazine that gives a voice to the working class, that does hard core investigative features and seriously holds public bodies up to account can compete in the current media world.

The facts that demand outstrips supply every time we print 15,000

copies, and our collection tins get filled three times over between issues, tell us the community overwhelmingly likes and trusts the *Star*.

The growing collection of awards we're winning, and the financial and moral support from other professional journalists, tells us that we've won approval in the media world.

We seem to be doing everything right. Yet the *Salford Star* is currently sprawled on its deathbed, waiting for someone to give it the kiss of economic life.

Donations are brilliant and we get loads, but never enough to sustain the *Star*. Its health lies in advertising and public funding.

Half the print costs of every issue are covered by ads from small businesses and community organisations that have the budget.

But the big advertising spenders in Salford are the very people we're investigating – property developers, the council, the university, the Lowry arts palace et al – who won't touch us with a barge pole.

And, scared stiff that their contracts might be stopped, neither will anyone who has any dealings with the council (as they tell us in whispered phone calls).

Then Hazel Blears, minister for communities and Salford MP, came along with her big idea about devolving power to "community committees" which would decide where to spend a big wad of money. The first time we applied for this funding we were successful.

But that was before the *Salford Star* was launched. When we went back a year later, after the magazine was on the streets, the application never even got to the community committees. Salford council held the application back, re-wrote its own constitution (just for "publications") and decided we didn't meet the criteria. They ripped it up.

Now, Hazel's reappeared with her Communities in Control: Real People: Real Power white paper, going on **Continued on page eight**

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Regional media

Page 2

NUJ starts campaign against regional job losses

By Barry White

The National Union of Journalists has launched a campaign against job losses, cut backs and pay freezes in regional newspapers in the UK in response to the latest round of cuts. The decision was taken at a crisis meeting of NUJ representatives from across the newspaper industry held at the end of November.

At the urgently arranged meeting, NUJ representatives from regional publishers Johnston Press, Trinity Mirror and Newsquest agreed to coordinate industrial action against compulsory redundancies and hold a union-wide day of action against job cuts and pay freezes.

The planned action comes

as new research undertaken by the union in November revealed that more than 500 journalists' posts have been scrapped or left unfilled by local newspaper groups since June.

More than 30 local newspaper offices have closed together with over 50 titles. And that total of job losses rises to around 2,000 (not all of them editorial) with subsequent announcements, and including losses at national newspapers in England and Scotland, ITV regions, Channel 4 and BBC Scotland.

In a strongly worded statement issued after the meeting Jeremy Dear NUJ general secretary accused regional newspaper owners of "grand larceny and reckless cost cutting" in their recent cutbacks and announced it was planning protests and industrial action across the UK.

The NUJ action will cover regional newspaper publishing centres in Glasgow, Liverpool, Cardiff, Bradford, York and Sheffield where journalists' jobs are under threat.

Lobbies of the UK and Scottish parliaments and the Welsh and Northern Irish assemblies are also planned by the union. In addition the NUJ will build community-based "Stand up for Journalism" campaigns to mobilise local trade unionists and the public against the cuts.

The NUJ action comes as more cuts were announced in regional newspapers, with news that Trinity Mirror, Carlisle-based CN Group and Gannett-owned Newquest were collectively cutting more than 100 jobs in the northwest of England and north Wales.

Jenny Lennox, NUJ assistant regional organiser, summed up her members' anger at the decision: "Given that just two months ago Newsquest North West management told us that there were no plans for further closures, it's no wonder journalists feel betrayed."

The union is also planning a wider jobs summit in London on 24 January 2009 when union members will get an update on the campaign and discuss how to spread the action in defence of local, regional and national journalism against owners who are rushing to shore up profits by putting quality content and strong local coverage at risk.

Unions slam BBC retreat on local video

The decision of the BBC Trust to reject plans by the BBC for investment in local journalism and news by creating a network of 65 local online video news services has been attacked by media unions BECTU and the NUJ.

Writing in the letters section of the Media Guardian on 1 December, Mark Scrimshaw, chair of BECTU's BBC Division described the Trust's decision as "craven and pusillanimous, more beholden to commercial interests than any idea of public service broadcasting. Clearly bbclocal was seen as a handy sacrificial lamb to media interests and to take the heat off other decisions. Mark went on to describe how: "The best educational online service - bbcjam - was similarly sacrificed to commercial rivals. The Trust appears to have no problems showing its teeth when slashing BBC services, if not its executives. Any credibility it might have had with staff has been irretrievably flushed away...³

The decision was also attacked by NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear who described the decision as "a missed opportunity to improve local news for communities around the country". He went on: "Local papers are closing and job cuts mean thousands of journalists don't have time to do their jobs properly. ITV is withdrawing from its regional and local news commitments. Against a significant decline in local journalism, here was an opportunity to take a small



Jeremy Dear: missed opportunity

step in the opposite direction by actually enhancing local news provision. The BBC made commitments to invest in local and regional programming. We expect the corporation to stick to its promises and ensure that other news services now benefit from this investment."

The rejection of local online video news was also supported by the media regulator Ofcom in their market impact assessment. They stated that the BBC proposals to launch a local online video service would have a significant negative impact on commercial providers. Meanwhile plans for a commercial internet video service run by ITV, Channel 4 and BBC Worldwide have been dealt a blow by regulators. The Government's competition commission's provisional findings on Project Kangaroo in early December concluded that the joint venture "will restrict competition" in the UK's nascent video-ondemand sector. But the commission found that Kangaroo would not lessen competition in online advertising or content acquisition.

In a joint statement, ITV, BBC Worldwide and Channel 4 said: "We will continue to make the case for a service that will be both in vast majority free and non-exclusive and of great benefit and value to British consumers." They added that they "remain committed" to launching Kangaroo in 2009.

Kangaroo plans to offer catch-up television, broadcast in the last week, as well as programmes from the three broadcasters' archives, via a service similar to ITV.com or the BBC iPlayer. Most content would be free to view, paid for by advertising. As well a consumer service, it also plans to licence its service to other on-demand sites.

Discussions between the competition commission and the joint venture are continuing, but the Commission has warned that if agreement with them cannot be reached, "prohibition would also be an option".

News and reviews

Page 3

Pilger celebrates 50 glorious years of muck-raking

By Barry White

This year marks John Pilger's 50 years in investigative journalism. To mark the occasion, Network has released *Heroes: The films of John Pilger 1970-2007* (£99.99), a 16-disc definitive collection of his documentaries containing many special features including a biography and the acclaimed documentary series *The Outsiders* in addition to his latest film *The War on Democracy*.

Behind the Façade (£24.99), a 3-disc set that comprises a fourth volume of his work, was also released on 27 October.

Heroes is the first, definitive collection, of ground-breaking documentaries from John Pilger's career as a world renowned film-maker, author and investigative journalist. The title, *Heroes*, is taken from one of his films and his seminal 1986 book, which celebrates the struggles and heroism of ordinary people all over the world.

Pilger began his career as a journalist in his native Australia before moving to London. He has received a multiplicity of awards, including Britain's highest award for journalism, twice, and television



academy awards in both the UK and the United States. He has been a foreign correspondent and frontline war reporter, and is a regular contributor to international media, including the ITV Network, the *Guardian* and the *New Statesman*. He is also an occasional writer for this journal, *Free Press*.

An incisive and rare critic of Western economic and military power, Pilger's humane eyewitness reporting has been described as a unique presence on British television that explores where <u>others dare not go</u>.

The 16-disc set brings together almost

four decades of landmark journalism, including, for the first time, *The Outsiders*, Pilger's Channel 4 series of interviews, along with the awardwinning cinema film *The War on Democracy* and an updated edition of Anthony Hayward's filmography of his work, *Breaking the Silence, the television reporting of John Pilger*.

Behind the Facade contains 11 previously unavailable documentaries from Pilger and is the perfect companion to the three volumes of the documentary maker's work already available from Network.

Murrer wins victory for right to report

By Barry White

ocal newspaper journalist Sally Murrer has won her 19-month fight against the threat of being jailed for receiving information from a police officer. Charges against her of "aiding and abetting misconduct in a public office" were thrown out at Kingston Crown Court in Surrey on 25 November, but the story received little coverage in the press and other media.

Sally Murrer, a mother of three children, is a reporter on Johnston Press's *Milton Keynes Citizen*. Her office and house were searched by police when she was arrested at her home on Dunstable Downs, Bedfordshire in May last year. She was strip-searched, held and interrogated for 30 hours.

The use of such a charge against a journalist is unprecedented, according to the NUJ, which backed her from the start. It is a "common law" offence that could have lead, in theory, to indefinite imprisonment. After the case she thanked the National Union of Journalists and fellow journalists for their support.

The charges related to information she is alleged to have received from recently retired Detective Sergeant Mark Kearney. Much of the evidence came from 20 hours of recordings police obtained by bugging their phones and Mark Kearney's car.

But the trial judge ruled all the evidence "inadmissible" because it had been obtained in breach of Sally Murrer's rights as a journalist under the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights.

She and Mark Kearney are close friends and their conversations were bugged to find out what he was telling her. In fact the three stories over which they were charged were inconsequential, and only one got into print.

Two other men were charged in the case, over further stories allegedly leaked by Mark Kearney. But the cases were all dropped after virtually all the evidence was ruled out by Judge Richard Southwell QC.

Lack of media coverage of the case was criticised by Peter Wilby. Writing in the *Media Guardian* on 8 December, he compared the coverage to that given to Conservative MP Damian Green, who could also face charges of aiding and abetting misconduct in a public office (although had not been charged at the time of writing). "Why was this not worth big headlines? Because Murrer worked for the *Milton Kevnes Citizen* and as far as the nationals are concerned, there's nothing so unimportant as a local paper."

The case had, however, been noticed by Conservative MP David Davis who reminded the Commons in the debate (8 December) on the police raid of the parliamentary offices of Damian Green MP, that the judge had dismissed the case against Sally Murrer, 'because the vast amounts of legal writ from Britain and Europe state that it should never have been brought because of protection under articles 9 and 10. If a journalist can receive that protection, surely a Member of Parliament can do so?" he asked.

On the subject of questions, the Thames Valley police and the Crown Prosecution Service should be made to answer for the costly failed prosecution of journalist Sally Murrer. But will we get an answer? America

Can he do it? With luck, he can

The election of Barack Obama is causing considerable excitement amongst campaigners for media reform in the USA. Obama could be dubbed the "YouTube" president. Once he moves into the White House on 20 January, he has vowed to continue to address the nation each week via YouTube. Technology and the internet will be centre stage in the Obama administration.

What's more during the campaign he built up a database of millions of voters/supporters who can be engaged instantly (and who can also engage with him, communications being a twoway process). The new administration is already communicating on the web at Change.gov — "and special interest groups and lobbyists will now contend with an environment of transparency and a president who owes them nothing" wrote David Carr in the **Observer edition of the New York Times** on 16 November."The news media will now contend with an administration that can take its case directly to its base without the television networks."

But we also have to remember that some big-hitting media favoured Obama, with the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Chicago Tribune (which now faces possible bankruptcy protection) endorsing him and it was reported that some of his biggest campaign donors were Wall Street investment banks.

So what will an Obama presidency mean for the future of the US media? Josh Silver from Free Press USA wrote this article shortly after the election. Barack Obama has a quite amazing opportunity to transform the whole system of regulation of the US media, writes **Josh Silver**

ow that the reality of an Obama presidency is sinking in, here's what it means for the future of the media. In a nutshell, if the new president lives up to his campaign promises, we are poised to see an unprecedented transformation of US media.

Unlike George W. Bush, the presidentelect is a strong supporter of Net Neutrality and universal, affordable Internet access. He is opposed to further consolidation of media ownership, and he is a friend to public broadcasting. Obama's election represents a sea change in leadership that allows us to go from playing defense to offense. These are exciting times.

While Free Press is a tax-exempt, nonpartisan organisation that cannot and does not endorse political candidates, we are heartened by our nation's new direction.

Obama's election rekindles hope that media reform may finally claim its rightful place in American politics as a *bona fide* issue — one whose success is essential to progress on every other issue: from



health care to the environment, from financial reform to war and peace.

Free Press has worked tirelessly since our founding five years ago to stop the Bush White House from allowing runaway consolidation of media ownership, from slashing funding for public broadcasting, and from handing over control of the Internet to the largest phone and cable companies. Thanks to the unwavering support of our activists, allies and donors, we have succeeded to an extent that few thought possible.

However, as the new president inherits a severe economic crisis, two wars, and myriad other problems, it will be too easy for media reform to get pushed down the to-do list [details of Obama's on the CPBF and Free Press web sites]. Our job is to keep our momentum going and make sure President Obama makes good on his campaign pledges in the face of competing priorities and wellfinanced lobbyists from the phone, cable and broadcasting companies. The future of our economy and our

media campaign pledges can be found

democracy requires that Congress and the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] (the regulator) pass policies that get fast, open, affordable Internet to every home and business in America, urban and rural, rich and poor.

We must foster hard-hitting journalism that holds the powerful accountable and covers the issues that affect people most.

There must be no more consolidation of media ownership, and we must create incentives for more independent, local radio, television and print media.

We must double funding for public media — for the public broadcasting system and national public radio, as well as for community media and other noncommercial outlets, and ensure that public media are protected from undue political influence.

Free Press has emerged as one of the most effective advocacy groups in the nation, with a top-caliber combination of grassroots activism, legal capacity, aggressive communications and legislative expertise.

We are building a new and unstoppable coalition of every constituency, company and organisation that uses the Internet — young people, religious organisations, nonprofits and labor. Together, we can wage and win this looming battle for media that nourish rather than undermine — our democracy.

We are pulling together the countless millions of Americans who treasure public and independent media to create the political will to dramatically increase funding and distribution of alternative media.

And we are going to fight efforts by the Bush administration to give more handouts to Big Media before they leave office on January 20. Free Press is already mobilizing to block eleventhhour moves.

Over the next few months, we will have a rare moment of opportunity to turn president-elect Obama's pledges for media reform into a reality in the next FCC and Congress.

Together, we will determine whether critical, independent voices will reach living rooms in red states and blue states, East and West, rural and urban.

If we do our job right, we could advance several crucial issues in 2009: a permanent Net Neutrality law; redirecting billions of dollars in the Universal Service Fund away from subsidizing telephone service and toward high-speed Internet deployment; and laying the groundwork for a major increase in support for public, non-commercial media — the crucial alternative to our failing commercial media system. Thanks to overwhelming public opposition, we do not anticipate further efforts by the FCC to let Big Media get bigger.

We have a lot of work to do, but Free Press is ready.

Books

Campaign launches website to promote miners' strike book

he CPBF is publishing a book to mark the 25th anniversary of the miners's strike — and has now launched a website to promote it.

Most of the contributions for Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath are now in and I really do think the final product when it is published will be impressive.

Janina Struk, for example, has liaised with a number of photographers (John Sturrock, Raissa Page, John Harris, for example) who did exceptional work capturing images of the strike from the perspective of the miners and their families. A selection of their work is in the book.

Contributors come from both journalistic and academic backgrounds and their topics range widely. Pete Lazenby, who has worked on the *Yorkshire Evening Post* since 1972, reflects on covering the coal industry before, during and after the strike in what was the heartland of the industry.

of the industry. Michael Bailey and Julian Petley reconstruct the history of a powerful photo by John Harris — a mounted policeman swinging his truncheon at a woman at Orgreave. Robin Ramsay, editor of *Lobster*, delves into the murky world of MI5, Special Branch and the miners' strike.

The book will sell for £9.99 — £12.50 inc p&p — and people will be able to pay either by sending cheques to the CPBF national office or by PayPal by visiting our website: www.cpbf.org.uk/shafted.

The website will also carry other material on the miners' strike and give details of meetings we are arranging to launch the book.

The first meeting on March 12 2009 (the date 25 years after the strike started) will be at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds. The meeting, a joint CPBF and Leeds NUJ event, starts at 7.30pm but we are planning some other activity to take place before the meeting (music, stalls, photography).

We are very keen to get the maximum exposure for the book and to generate the widest discussion so if you would like to organise a meeting and invite contributors to speak please get in touch.

And we also need money. The cost of the project is £4,000 and we are appealing to our members and supporters for donations. Please send them to the CPBF National Office indicating it is for the miners' book appeal. *Granville Willams*

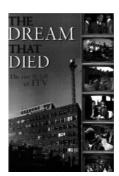
BEQUESTS

From time to time we receive bequests from readers who want to contribute to the continuation of *Free Press* and the CPBF. Those who wish to do the same may simply state in their wills that the bequest is to the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. For additional information please contact the CPBF. Details on page 8.

How the pursuit of profit took ITV to the deaners

Granville Williams

reviews a stunning indictment of greed and myopia by a former Granada head of current affairs



THE DREAM THAT DIED: THE RISE AND FALL OF ITV Raymond Fitzwalter Matador £14.99

ay Fitzwalter knows his stuff. He worked at Granada from 1970 through to 1993 and was head of current affairs for the last five years. His book is a passionate indictment of what happened to ITV which was until the 1990s a standard setter in UK broadcasting but is now floundering creatively and economically.

This situation was brought about by a toxic mix of deregulatory Government policies and the rise to power of two greedy asset-stripping, profit-seeking individuals (Gerry Robinson and Charles Allen) who seized on the freedoms they were given by the 1990 Broadcasting Act and a toothless regulatory body, the Independent Television Commission (ITC), to take control of the ITV system.

Add to this the intervention of institutional investors like Mercury Asset Management who wanted annual prof-



INTERNE R YOU?

its boosting, whatever the long-term implications for quality television.

The consequences have been devastating and this important book, which deserves to be widely read, identifies what went wrong.

This book should be essential reading for all the staff of Ofcom, DCMS officials and the key Labour ministers who may have a role in the formation of policies which will shape a Communications Bill in 2010 or 2011.

The conclusion is inescapable – there needs to be a radical change of direction from the path being followed.

UK broadcasting since the mid-80s has been pushed down a relentless deregulatory route through three pieces of legislation (the 1990 and 1996 Broadcasting Acts and the 2003 Communications Act). Ownership rules were torn up and public service obligations shredded. A vibrant ITV franchise structure was destroyed in the relentless pursuit of profits to assuage shareholders.

Ofcom has continued the work of the ITC, pursuing deregulation and allowing ITV to weaken its PSB regional news and programming commitments even further. Its preferred form of regulation is industry self-regulation or co-regulation with bodies often reflecting the views of the media and communications industry.

Although the author's abhorrence for the damage wrought on ITV comes

Charles Allen (above) and Gerry Robinson: disastrous impact on ITV

through clearly, the book is not a polemic.

It is structured around what happened to Granada and the wider ITV system from 1980 to just beyond the Communications Act of 2003 and Fitzwalter draws on his own invaluable insider experience and a series of 90 interviews with key participants (including Robinson and Allen).

Some of the facts he presents made my blood pressure soar.

In 1990, when the turnover of Granada Group was ± 1.3 billion, the highest paid director received $\pm 200,000$. In eight-and-a-half years

'Ownership rules were torn up and public service obligations shredded. A vibrant ITV franchise structure was destroyed in the relentless pursuit of profits to assuage shareholders' with Granada Gerry Robinson collected £24.2 million and a pension pot of £5.5 million. Add to this £3.3 million consultancy money from Compass, £6.3 million in shares and a Compass pension of £15 million. He also made between £15 and £20 million from the original Compass flotation in the late 1980s.

Charles Allen took approximately £30.5 million from Granada in the thirteen years and four months he was there — £2.28 million a year — and a pension whose transfer value in 2006 was £9.29 million.

This whilst freelance programme makers, 80 per cent of whom were graduates, 30 per cent post-graduates, were earning well below UK average earnings.

Gerry Robinson thought television was just another economic activity but as Fitzwalter points out, "broadcasting is the central cultural, not economic, experience of our age. It is also a critical instrument in the education of the British people and the flag of our international reputation abroad. It is ... distinguished from other industries, in that it is a crucial component of out democratic life... Broadcasting has also been made more distinctive in Britain because of a long tradition of public service."

Happy New Year to all our readers from the CPBF

Page 8

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Mail man denounces anti-Muslim bias

By Barry White

Use the provided and the sector of the secto

Oborne's contacts on the right of British politics mean he is now regarded as one of the foremost conservative commentators in the land. The chair of the plenary, Jeremy Dear, said he was sure Peter had never thought he would share a platform with human rights lawyer Louise Christian and Lyndsey German from the Stop the War Coalition.

Oborne contributed many examples of press abuse of Muslims. He singled out the Daily Express, the Star, the Sun, Polly Toynbee in the Guardian and Independent columnist Bruce Anderson, who he accused of "gross distortion" in one of his articles. Not so high up on his list was his own paper, the Daily Mail, but his main point was that much media coverage ignored moderate Muslim opinion and nurtured anti-Islamic sentiment.

The conference broke up into various workshops. One examined how photographers, camera crews and journalists are bearing the brunt of a new drive by the police and private security staff to restrict coverage of public order issues, protests and dissent. Examples were shown where photographers' equipment and data were confiscated and individuals suffered harassment and physical assault. Although some of these actions were unlawful, many are now legitimised by the use of anti-terror legislation by the authorities.

The workshop was shown first-hand evidence in Reel News video "Press Freedom: Collateral Damage" a video sponsored by the NUJ and reviewed in Free Press 166. This showed increasing levels of intimidation and harassment against photographers and journalists and the activities of the police Forward Intelligence Teams in targeting photographers and journalists.

The conference then came together for a final questions and answers session with a panel comprising Moazzam Begg (one of nine British Muslims who were held in Guantanamo Bay and released after three years in January 2005, without charge, compensation or apology), Nick Davies (author of *Flat Earth News*) and Irish journalist and NUJ activist Eamonn McCann.

From page one

about empowerment and giving people a voice and lots of other chest beating stuff about the Chartists, the Suffragettes and all. We wrote her an open letter...

"Surely you should be singing our praises from the rooftops? You have the top community magazine in the country, empowering people and giving them a voice, in your own constituency – how cool is that?...We've ticked all your boxes...can you show me any Government fund that supports community magazines like the Salford Star?"

We're still waiting for a reply. The only funding we can see is for online projects – which is useless considering that only one fifth of Salford's community has access to the net. The digital divide mirrors the wealth divide in the so-called "media city".

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of pounds are being poured into what we regard as "safe" community media projects in Salford where councillors sit on the board.

Of course, public money is being sunk into the council's own magazine, where an opposition councillor has just resigned from its editorial board saying that it was a "propaganda vehicle for the cabinet...an often misleading and relentlessly and unjustifiably upbeat publication".

Which all leaves the *Salford Star* with no funding to get the next issue out and Hazel's words ringing in our ears... "A strong independent media is a vital part of any democracy".

It does your head in...

Free Press is edited by Julie-ann Davies on behalf of the National Council

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