

FREE Press

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HERE COME THE MARKET FORCES

THE TORIES START AS THEY MEAN TO GO ON

Following the UK General Election this issue of *Free Press* focuses on what the outcome is likely to mean.

On media policy – as indeed in some other areas – the nominal Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition seems to be thoroughly Tory, with as yet no perceptible LibDem influence.

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The new government has already begun the drive to deregulate media ownership ... and top-slicing the BBC licence fee is back, as **GRANVILLE WILLIAMS** reports

LITTLE SIGN of any “new politics” at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). There isn’t a Liberal Democrat in sight, and Jeremy Hunt, the culture secretary, and Ed Vaizey, culture minister, are both close to David Cameron.

If you add to this the fact that one of David Cameron’s first visitors, in a private meeting after he became Prime Minister, was Rupert Murdoch, then you can safely predict that the Tories will pursue their manifesto commitments to dismantle media regulations, and will favour their media friends, with vigour.

Among the changes will be the revival of the contentious “top-slicing” of the BBC licence fee – taking part of it to fund other projects – for a new purpose, to roll out high speed broadband.

Jeremy Hunt’s first policy speech in late May gave the first indications of the detail. With a dismissive comment on Labour’s commitment in the Digital Britain report to a “paltry” 2mb per second universal broadband speed by 2012, he announced a broadband infrastructure to “stand comparison with anywhere in the world”: within the term of this parliament, he said, Britain would have “the best superfast broadband network in Europe”.

This commitment was a real hostage to fortune. Jeremy Hunt acknowledged that the UK is ranked 33rd in the world when it comes to broadband speed; in Europe, according to a recent study, the

UK is 17th, behind Slovenia and the stricken Latvia.

So how will this ambitious policy be realised? Well, as Jeremy Hunt stated in the run-up to the election, he would scrap Independently Financed News Consortia (IFNC). Labour planned to use £130 million of BBC licence fee money allocated to help pay for digital TV switchover to fund the three IFNC projects in Scotland, Wales and the North-East.

That will not now happen. The Tories will scrap the scheme and the cash will fund three market-testing projects to bring broadband to rural and hard-to-reach areas.

Despite this initial subsidy, at the heart of the vision for superfast broadband Britain is the firm belief that the market will do the job. But with only a maximum of £300 million of public money to be used, it’s impossible to see how Jeremy Hunt’s targets can be reached.

The same market idealism permeates his thinking on the future of local media. The IFNC pilots, he said had “risked turning a whole generation of media companies into subsidy junkies”. His alternative is to relax the local cross-media ownership rules, to benefit the newspaper and local radio chains that already cover the country, allowing them to concentrate ownership even more tightly.

Companies will be able to own newspapers and radio stations and set up

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MARKET FORCES

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local TV stations, benefiting from greater economies of scale. But the newspaper groups that have been clamouring for an end to the restrictions on ownership have dismissed the "City TV" idea as too expensive without the public subsidy (see story below).

Jeremy Hunt is asking Ofcom to conduct a study to "see whether we should remove all cross-media ownership rules". He has commissioned Nicholas Shott of investment bank Lazard to look at the potential for local television stations and how a modernised, updated regulatory environment could "nurture a new generation of hungry, ambitious and profitable local media companies". A report is due in the autumn.

If broadband and local news were the policy areas covered by Jeremy Hunt's announcements, he has also fired his first shot across the bows of the BBC. Next year, he said in an interview with the *Guardian*, he intends to open the question of whether the licence fee is the right way to fund the corporation, in time for the mid-term licence fee settlement due in 2012; the BBC's current full licence runs until 2016. He also intends to change the way the BBC Trust operates and possibly replace it.

Higher and higher — Sky raises the limit

FEW PEOPLE are likely to benefit more from the Conservative-led government than Rupert Murdoch, who quickly responded to the change with a burst of significant investments.

The biggest was the £7 billion bid to buy up the 61 per cent of Sky TV that the Murdochs' News Corporation does not already own. The first offer was turned down by the directors amid much talk of preserving their independence but media commentators are unanimous in concluding that the parties are only haggling over the price and the buyout will be a "done deal" for around £8 billion.

The two sides have signed a co-operation agreement and begun the process of seeking approval from competition authorities in Brussels.

But it is the UK authorities that pose the most pertinent question, for the Business Secretary in the coalition gov-

ernment is the LibDem Vince Cable, who is supposedly more critical of the Murdoch businesses than the Tories.

He was kept out of the Treasury to stop him interfering with the public spending cuts but now finds himself with the power to order a "public interest" investigation into the transaction.

The CPBF's Granville Williams said in a letter to the *Guardian*: "It is absolutely essential that complete control of BSkyB by Murdoch is not just nodded through. Vince Cable should trigger the public interest test, initiate a robust enquiry and encourage the widest public debate."

Few in the industry however expect this to happen, not without a big public campaign, and the issue will in any case most probably go to the EU.

Assuming success, it will be a huge boost to the Murdochs' business, not least for the profits Sky will generate. BSkyB is about to achieve 10 million

'NO THANKS' SAYS SLY BAILEY

AN INTRIGUING insight into the kind of local media Jeremy Hunt envisages was provided in an interview he gave to *The Independent*.

"What we are proposing is a revolution in local media that would get rid of the cross media ownership rules at a local level," he said.

"That would mean that if you are Sly Bailey (Trinity Mirror chief executive) you can say that I own the Liverpool Echo, I have got Liverpool.com, I've got Liverpool FM and I've got Liverpool TV, so if you want to reach people in Liverpool there's no better way. I think that would be a very compelling offer for advertisers."

(Jeremy Hunt seemed to neglect the interests of readers.)

Such a policy, not just endorsing but positively encouraging local and regional media monopolies, would simply reinforce the worst cost-cutting practices which the big regional newspaper groups have pursued for years. But whether it would lead to the development of local TV or an expansion of innovative local media projects is another matter.

Unhappily for the witless Jeremy Hunt, it turned out that Sly Bailey was dead against the local TV proposal.

"We don't see City TV as a viable proposition," she said. "Our research suggests that the costs are too high and the revenues too low to support a sustainable business model."

In other words, for a company interested only in short-term profit making, it would cost too much in investment for the likely returns.

For it also happened that TM had the chance to get its hands on a ready-made city TV station when it acquired the *Manchester Evening News* and other regional papers in the north-west of England from the Guardian Media Group in February. Sly Bailey explicitly rejected the acquisition of Channel M, the Guardian group's digital station for Greater Manchester, and a month later it was closed down.

Roger Parry, former boss of the Johnston Press newspaper group and a key figure in the local newspaper lobby for the scrapping of ownership regulations, attributed the demise of Channel M to its traditional television cost model, high staff numbers, and a



Bailey: spurned the Tories' big idea

"virtually non-existent" integration with the *Manchester Evening News*. "If you look at this as purely a local TV station they are a non-economic proposition," he told a conference in May.

TM had, however, been a partner in one of the now condemned IFNC pilot schemes. Perhaps it was just the loss of the public subsidy that so upset Sly Bailey.

The future ● The owners



The Sky News newsroom: likely to fall under the Murdochs' complete control

customers, spending on average more than £500 a year each – nearly four times the BBC licence fee. Next year it is expected to register profits of £910 million on a turnover of £6.4 billion, which is four times that of ITV and half as much again as the BBC's.

The deal would make BSkyB a wholly owned subsidiary of the Murdoch family operation. It would allow News Corp to share content more easily between different divisions, such as Sky News and the papers, with relentless cross-promotion.

In May Sky bought Virgin Media's

subscription channels for £160 million as part of a deal that saw its own channels restored to Virgin's cable packages. But probably Rupert Murdoch's most significant move has been the acquisition of three American software companies specialising in methods of payment for web content.

Two years ago he bought the *Wall Street Journal*, which runs the world's most successful paid-for newspaper site, and in June his Times titles in London retreated behind a paywall too.

His new acquisitions are Skiff, founded by Hearst Newspapers to develop software for publishing paid content; Next Issue Media, a coalition of US newspaper and magazine publishers for publishing content, selling advertising and generating reader revenues on tablets and smartphones; and Journalism Online, a subscriptions platform designed to be used by a vast number of paywalled publications: customers will sign up for a single account to buy from more than 1,500 publishers. It specialises in the crucial area of micropayments – keep adding to that basket! – and handles subscriptions as well.

The decision to make the *Times* and *Sunday Times* websites paid-for was widely questioned, but Rupert Murdoch is serious. It's not the first time he has taken a massive risk; back in 1989 Sky TV itself was one of the biggest. Now he is banking on a Tory-dominated government in London easing the way to boosting his revenues to pay for new investments. And that does not look like much of a risk at all.

HOW DARE THEY?

THE ARROGANCE of the Murdochs' attitude to public institutions extends beyond the BBC. In May James, the son and heir to Rupert who heads all the European and Asian operations, unleashed an extraordinary attack on the British Library, for daring to put its newspaper archive online.

James Murdoch accused the library of "harming the market" in print journalism by digitising its vast newspaper archive and offering online access.

He said this would undermine businesses such as News International, which sees the *Times* archive as an attraction to its newly-paywalled site. "The public sector interest is to distribute content for near zero cost, harming the market in so doing."

THEY SAID IT

'Content is king, as we so often hear. The problem is, the internet is a republic.'

Charles Arthur, technology editor, the Guardian, on Rupert Murdoch's strategy of charging for online content

'The Press are regulated by a Press Complaints Commission whose luminaries include the editor of the Daily Mail. It's a bit like putting the regulation of door-to-door salesmen in the hands of the Boston Strangler.'

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London

'There is no redundancy programme planned.'

Sly Bailey, chief executive of Trinity Mirror, speaking as TM's 2010 results were released in March, three months before announcing the loss of 200 jobs, a quarter of the journalistic staff, on the Mirror group papers in London

'Her period in office has been pretty much a disaster for the readers, shareholders and the employees. She's done all right for herself, mind you.'

Kelvin MacKenzie, former editor of the Sun, on Sly Bailey

THE BBC'S STRATEGIC PUBLIC SERVICE IS

PATRICIA HOLLAND analyses the motives and the consequences of the Corporation's latest plan for cuts

OVER THE YEARS the BBC has frequently been accused of giving in to government pressures. Now it seems to feel it must give in to commercial pressures as well.

The Strategy Review that includes the much-criticised proposed closure of Radio 6 Music, the Asian Network and big chunks of its online presence is a deferential response to the hostile clamour from its commercial rivals and a campaign in the right-wing press supported by conservatives of all parties who want the market to rule.

The tone of the review is obedient, upfront and clear. In the words of Director General Mark Thompson, the BBC will "listen to legitimate concerns from commercial media players more carefully than it has in the past and act sooner to meet them". The BBC must "define its boundaries" and "know its limits". The review dutifully announces cuts and, like a pupil caught out by a teacher, promises a new type of BBC "behaviour".

The public response has been noisy and considerable, including several online petitions, a vigorous campaign to save the 6 Music (save6music.com) and an outcry over the website cuts. The BBC Trust has promised to make its final decisions in the light of the public response, and chairman Sir Michael Lyons has said the cuts could be rethought if there was evidence of "massive public concern", but we can't be too confident. For one thing it was the Trust that ordered the surrender in advance by requiring

Thomson to make the concessions, and for another we now have a government that has indicated that the Trust will be abolished.

It is worth looking closely at the language of the review. When the BBC Trust demands "a clarity of purpose around a public service mission", alarm bells start to ring. No-one could reject the focus on five editorial priorities: the best journalism; inspiring knowledge, music, and culture; ambitious drama; outstanding children's content; and national events.

These "share a civic and universal aim, with a commitment to providing what markets alone cannot guarantee". That is saying that if the market can supply them, the BBC need not. The BBC will abandon any area of programming which is not so inspiring or ambitious --and might tread on the toes of its commercial rivals. Indeed this is the explicit reason for cutting 6 Music: the station must go precisely because "it competes head-on for a commercially valuable audience".

Don't be scared, stick to your guns ... the C

The CPBF has submitted a 5,000-word response to the BBC Strategy Review. These are extracts

ALTHOUGH we support the BBC's stated commitment to quality and outstanding content (who wouldn't?) we do not believe that the Strategy Review ensures this commitment across the Corporation's whole output. In particular we regret the Corporation's acceptance that, in the words of its Director General: "The BBC should not attempt to do everything. It must listen to legitimate concerns from commercial media players more carefully than it has in the past and act sooner to meet them."

Many of the proposals appear simply to acquiesce to the view of its commercial rivals and political enemies that the BBC should confine its activities merely

to compensating for market failure. Its principles "doing fewer things better" and "setting new boundaries" both imply shrinking BBC services and abandoning certain areas of popular programming.

The BBC should aim for high quality in all its output, across all genres, and whatever the medium. It should not be satisfied with simply copying formats from other broadcasters, but should attempt to enhance and develop them, as well as formulating new ones. The job of the BBC is to meet the wide range of needs of its audience, and it must always be remembered that the job of public service broadcasting is to educate, inform and entertain.

6 MUSIC

The rationale for cutting 6 Music is that "it competes head-on for a commercially valuable audience" whereas the whole of UK broadcasting history strongly suggests that purely commercial companies will not devote a whole station to broadcasting independent and left-field music because they do not regard doing so as commercially worthwhile. The proposal would be more

convincing if it advocated abolishing Radio 1.

THE BBC TRUST

The role of the Trust should be to support the BBC's activities, not to restrict or undermine them, nor to subject them to judgement by market criteria which are not only inappropriate to a public body but also questionable in themselves.

NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

BBC journalism is far too heavily based on unquestioning acceptance of the nostrums and assumptions of the Westminster consensus, and more generally of neo-liberal economics, even when alternative perspectives are readily available from such respected figures as Joseph Stiglitz and George Soros.

And for an organisation with such large journalistic resources, the BBC is far too heavily dependent on the news agenda set by the partisan press. The BBC's desire to broadcast the best journalism in the world is admirable, but if it wishes to do so it must do a great deal more to develop its own journalistic agenda and its own dis-

MY REVIEW: BETRAYED

For many within the BBC, the historic commitment to educate, inform and entertain in the interest of the public at large has changed to a situation whereby these three functions are seen as three types of “content”. The education and information can safely be described as public service, but the entertainment is at risk.

The buzzword of the review is “public space”. This poses fewer challenges than

The BBC's principles will need to be more strongly defended

the venerable notion of “public service”. The Corporation, states Mark Thompson, should be a “guarantor” of public space and a “catalyst and connector” within it. The proposal that follows is that while the BBC's own web pages and special sites are to be reduced, the site will be “a window on the web by providing at least one external link on every page and dou-

bling ‘click-throughs’ to external sites”. The problems are obvious. The links will be to the wider web, to commercial and competitive sites. The BBC will share its “power of discoverability”. The BBC's own news, committed to impartiality, will share a platform with the highly partial online news channels of the *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and others. The BBC's principles will need to be strongly defended in this new, and unprotected “public space”.

In the past the BBC has benefitted from the tough competition posed by its commercial rivals. Its news got sharper and its entertainment more popular. Likewise the commercial channels have broadened their scope in response to the publicly funded channel.

Together they provided a diverse and responsive public service. The new mood of deference and “partnership”, rather than healthy rivalry, can only damage the provision of a service to meet the interests of the whole population.

Support for the stations that face the chop

PRESENTERS from BBC 6 Music and its sister station the Asian Network – the two digital broadcasters earmarked for closure in the review – won prizes at the Sony Awards, the radio industry's top ceremony.

6 Music took two and the Asian Network one award – for best speech programme – while the BBC's most popular station, Radio 2, won only one. Large forces of both listeners and performers have rallied to support the two stations. Both stations have shown a big jump in their audiences – helped by the high-profile campaigns to save them.

This is drawing audiences onto DAB, a positive consequence considering that the government and BBC are still committed to a “digital switchover” in radio, despite widespread scepticism. The fact the stations are available only on DAB has been a handicap in their ability to build bigger audiences.

A Facebook campaign to save 6 Music has gained 200,000 members while more than 100 prominent British Asians, including actress Meera Syal and boxer Amir Khan, have urged the BBC to reverse the plan to close the Asian Network.

PBF response to the BBC strategic review

tinctive style, not ape that of Fleet Street or Sky News.

THE BBC WEBSITE

The proposal to spend 25% less on the BBC's excellent and pioneering website is truly shocking. Any reorganisation and development of the site (and we fully accept that technical developments will mean very great changes to the site in the next few years) should be undertaken purely with the benefits to the licence fee payer in mind, and with the idea of expanding and improving the services which it offers, as opposed to reducing them. Judgements about the shape of the website should be creatively and editorially driven and taken in interaction with its numerous users, not in response to attacks from the BBC's commercial competitors and their political allies.

The BBC should offer a robust defence of its services rather than a timorous willingness to offer up important services to placate its opponents. The BBC's numerous and loyal users expect nothing less, and are absolutely dismayed by its current stance on these matters.

TOP-LEVEL PAY

The BBC in its upper echelons is caught up in the spiralling culture of excess that characterises the reward structure at the top of the commercial media industries, and indeed of industry in general. Recent controversy over the pay and perks of senior managers and of individual artists points to something of an identity crisis at the BBC, and a failure to grasp what it means to be a public service broadcaster.

The BBC is powerful and attractive enough in its own right to draw in fresh new talent on its own terms, and, although it should pay its staff properly, it should not, as a matter of principle, feed the culture of greed and excess which gives those at the top of industry outrageous rewards and keeps those at the bottom on low pay and suffering from massive job insecurity.

Aping the practices of the commercial media sector should, quite simply, not be an option. If it does so, then the BBC risks losing the support of those who defend public service broadcasting as a matter of principle.

We do, however, support the aim of

removing the “remaining elements of its traditional hierarchy and replacing them with a flatter, more dynamic and flexible structure”, if this means a thinning of the ranks of micro-managers, strategists, market-researchers and others who make little or no creative contribution to BBC output, and for the most part actually impede it.

CONCLUSION

The BBC's pusillanimity only intensifies our distinct impression that the BBC is either unable or willing to grasp the elementary fact that it is not only the Corporation's own interests which are at stake in the processes outlined in the Review, but those of the wider public which, as a public service, it is supposed to be serving. If the BBC cannot be trusted to take a firm and decisive lead in its own defence against what all informed opinion clearly recognises to be an entirely self-interested anti-BBC campaign by vested interests and their political allies, it is not only endangering the very principles of public service media which are entrusted to its care but also betraying those whom it exists to serve.

LIBEL REFORM REVIVED AFTER THE ELECTION

TIM GOPSILL says that there is still a good chance of a change for the good, with a new law on defamation

THE DRIVE to reform Britain's libel laws seems likely to bring results, even after the defeat of the Labour government that had pledged to do so.

Former Labour Justice Secretary Jack Straw had become a late convert to the cause after the publication last autumn of the damning report from English PEN an Index on Censorship.

The report, *Free Speech is Not For Sale*, showed how the trials are stacked against defendants, leading to London becoming the "libel capital of the world" for wealthy claimants.

Jack Straw had promised legislation, and had also prepared regulations to reform the Contingency Fee Arrangement (CFA) system under which some law firms have engaged in outrageous profiteering by charging losing defendants double fees in successful "no-win-no-fee" cases.

All three parties in the election had

promised some kind of reform but the first move has come from a Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Lester, who published a Defamation Bill in May. There has been no announcement from government but it is assumed the coalition will give the Bill an easy run.

The Bill would toughen defences against defamation actions and encourage out-of-court settlements. It does not address the abuse of the extravagant fees extorted by lawyers, which can be dealt with administratively by the Justice Secretary.

Neither does it address two contentious legal issues: the "burden of proof", which campaigners claim is unfairly placed on defendants, and the lack of legal aid for non-corporate defendants; but the first is a thorny legal question that might derail the whole thing, and the second a difficult question to raise at a time when legal aid provision for deserving cases is constantly being cut back.

Lord Lester, a prominent human rights barrister, said: "The time is over-ripe for parliament to replace our patched-up archaic law with one that gives stronger protection to freedom of speech.

"My bill creates a framework of principles rather than a rigid and inflexible code, and it seeks a fair balance between reputation and public information on matters of public interest."

The bill would, among other things:

- Introduce a statutory defence of "responsible publication" on a matter of public interest, consolidating the "Reynolds defence" introduced by the judges
- Clarify the defences of justification and fair comment, renamed as "truth" and "honest opinion"
- Establish a "single publication" rule to stop cases being brought over web pages more than a year old – the statutory time limit.
- Clarify the responsibility and strengthen the defence of internet service providers, bloggers and forum hosts over comments posted on their sites
- Protect those reporting on proceedings in Parliament and other issues of public concern
- Require claimants to show substantial harm, and corporate bodies to show financial loss
- Encourage the speedy settlement of disputes without recourse to costly litigation

Particularly significant are the backing for internet publishers who find defamatory comments cropping up in their comment sections and the requirement for companies to show they have actually lost money to bring an action.

So is a further provision that the unchallenged publication of material overseas provides a defence to actions brought by "libel tourists" – foreign citizens who come to the London courts because it is easier to sue here than in their own countries.

The bill might be expected to be helped through by the new Justice Secretary, Dominic Grieve, who took part in an all-party debate in London on the libel laws, called during the election period by the Libel Reform Campaign – a coalition of Index, PEN and Sense about Science, the group that co-ordinated the defence of science writer Simon Singh, who successfully resisted the action brought against him by the British Chiropractic Association (BCA) over the expression of his opinion of the effectiveness of chiropractic treatment.

Dominic Grieve competed to please the campaigning audience with outgoing Labour junior minister Michael Wills and LibDem MP Evan Harris, the most active of all MPs on the libel question, who was to lose his Oxford West seat to the Tories.

Press freedom goes offshore

THE FINANCIALLY challenged nation of Iceland is setting itself up as an offshore freelance internet host to beat libel tourism.

The Icelandic parliament has voted unanimously for what is called the Modern Media Initiative, changing Icelandic law to strengthen journalistic source protection, freedom of speech, and government transparency.

"It has not only an impact here, but in changing the dialogue in Europe," said Birgitta Jónsdóttir, the Member of Parliament who sponsored the measure. But although the idea appears beneficial, it has not been

made clear exactly what the proclaimed "offshore freedom of expression haven" will mean to journalists elsewhere.

It cannot affect defamation cases being brought in other countries if the offending material is in the public domain there. The best that commentators can deduce is that internet servers on which the material sits are less likely to be seized or forcibly shut down.

Actions in the Icelandic courts to compel the identification of anonymous sources would also fail, but they are hardly likely anyway.

Coalition puts the party PRs in a spin

Can two spin machines be successfully merged into one?
NICHOLAS JONES puts the question

AN EARLY pointer to potential splits in the new coalition government might well be an outbreak of the anonymous briefing which proved so corrosive to the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

By merging together two hitherto hostile teams of party propagandists David Cameron and Nick Clegg have broken the mould of political public relations. They run the risk of sparking off a spin war between Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers but by trying to weld together two rival spin teams the coalition does stand a chance of limiting the extent of collusion between press proprietors and the government of the day.

Under a two-party administration, the decidedly partisan political influence that newspapers try to exert can no longer be exercised with the same degree of certainty.

If the coalition fails to be even handed in its relations with the media and begins to exploit the traditional political affiliations of the press, journalists will suspect dissension at the heart of the government. If, for example, spin doctors of a Conservative persuasion are found to be favouring the Murdoch press at the expense of other news outlets, or if the Liberal Democrats appear to be holding separate briefings for the *Guardian* or *Independent*, the leaders would soon find they were being threatened by instability from within.

Among the political apparatchiks of Westminster and Whitehall, party spin doctors tend to be the most tribal; the Blairite v Brownite fight to the death between competing ministerial aides illustrated the folly of allowing them free rein to offer journalists anonymous and negative briefings.

Both David Cameron and Nick Clegg have media advisers who were campaigning and briefing against each throughout the election but must now speak with one voice on the government's behalf.

Former *News of the World* editor Andy Coulson, the Tory media chief, is the new Downing Street director of communications. Nick Clegg took with

him to the Cabinet Office his director of campaign communications Jonny Oates.

Promoting a united message, especially at times of political turbulence, will be a critical test of the new administration's cohesion. To the surprise of many commentators, the coalition managed to get through the shock of David Laws' resignation without the collateral damage of poisonous off-the-record quotes of a

Journalists will be on 'coalition watch', ready to pounce on counter briefing against the Tories or the LibDems

kind which were all too common under Labour.

Two days before David Laws' expense claims were exposed by the *Daily Telegraph*, David Cameron gave a pep talk to his newly-merged team of media handlers. The coalition's 66 politically-appointed special advisers were told they would "automatically be dismissed" if they were caught preparing or disseminating "inappropriate material or

personal attacks". They were told in no uncertain terms to refrain from briefing against each other or their partners in the coalition.

David Cameron is the first former special adviser to become Prime Minister and is well versed in the black arts of media manipulation, having served an apprenticeship in his early twenties as a party researcher, spin doctor and political attack dog and been head of PR for Carlton Television.

From now on journalists will be on "coalition watch", monitoring the activities of the new insiders and ready to pounce on manipulative counter briefing against either the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats.

Andy Coulson will be a marked man because of his long-standing links with the Murdoch press and his expertise in managing a highly partisan team of propagandists. Did he order the briefing of friendly journalists that led to the barrage of stories highly critical of Nick Clegg that appeared in Tory tabloids on the morning of second televised leaders' debate?

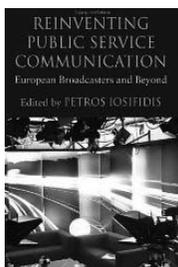
Before the election the former *Sun* editor David Yelland offered an authoritative insider's account of why the Murdoch press had always ignored the Liberal Democrats. In a *Guardian* article he revealed that the *Sun* never sent reporters to the party's conferences "for fear of encouraging them". Except when the news was critical, they were effectively banned from the paper.

David Yelland wrote that if the Liberal Democrats ended up in government there would be a party leader in power who was totally unknown to Rupert Murdoch and "utterly beyond the tentacles of any of his family, his editors or his advisers". He could not then know that a fellow former Murdoch editor would end up directing communications for a government in which a Liberal Democrat had become Deputy Prime Minister.



Nicholas Jones, a member of the CPBF national Council, is a former BBC political correspondent who writes extensively on government and party public relations and spin. His new book *Campaign 2010: The Making of the Prime Minister* is out in July, published by Biteback at £9.99.

There is a future for public media



**REINVENTING
PUBLIC SERVICE
COMMUNICATION:
EUROPEAN
BROADCASTERS
AND BEYOND**
Petros Iosifidis (ed)
Palgrave Macmillan, £60

by TOM O'MALLEY

"In the midst of a global economic crisis it is becoming increasingly apparent that the public sector, rather than the free market, is the answer to the continuing supply of high quality public service output." So says Petros Iosifidis in the foreword to his edited collection of essays, *Reinventing Public Service Communication*.

This collection, by academics from around the globe, puts flesh on the bones of his assertion. The essays show the value of comparing international experiences as a way of understanding what is happening to public service communications.

Karol Jacobowicz points to a major problem at the European level where public service media seems to concern officials "primarily in terms of compe-

tion and state aid policy" rather than as important cultural artefacts.

He argues for a major restructuring of public service institutions across Europe to cope with the challenges they face.

Petros Iosifidis himself points out that having lots of organisations providing public service media does not guarantee plurality and diversity of content.

This is an important point in the UK context, where the right-wing think-tank Policy Exchange has recently called for whole chunks of the licence fee to be made available to outside bidders.

These are just two of the essays covering a wide range of European issues. Others by Maria Michalis, Mark Wheeler, Jean Chalaby and Katharine Sarikakis provide detail and insights into what has been going on in Europe over the last few years.

The second part of the book has essays on the UK, Austria and Switzerland, Greece, Germany, Spain, France, Hungary, Poland, the USA, Canada and New Zealand.

They illustrate the variety of funding mechanisms and the range of different challenges that public service organisations have been facing.

As Raymond Kuhn argues, in France

the combination of a hostile, interventionist President Nicolas Sarkozy, and the lobbying influence of commercial broadcasters means that the current political climate is "scarcely conducive to the well being of public service broadcasting institutions".

Not all ideas in these essays will find support amongst CPBF supporters. Farrel Corcoran for instance argues that impartiality requirements "may actually impede the expression of genuine diversity".

He wants a "less rigid approach ... to encourage greater engagement among a younger internet generation". But encouraging more engagement should not be at the price of allowing an open door for a Fox News-style approach to news reporting.

The attractions of this book for readers of *Free Press* are many. It covers a wide range of relevant issues. The references provide a valuable resource for anyone wanting to dig deeper. The essays are brief and readable, but substantive.

Above all it forces us to think about the developments in the UK in a wider perspective and provides much food for thought on a rapidly changing, and complex communications environment. The drawback, however, is that it is only in hardback – and costs £60!

**Free Press is edited by Tim Gopsill on behalf of the National Council.
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