

FREE Press

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£1 Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

30,000 back the campaign call MURDOCH SKY BID IS HELD BACK

THIRTY THOUSAND people have joined one of the CPBF's most successful campaigns, against the Murdoch empire's bid to take complete control of the BSkyB satellite TV network.

The initiative from the CPBF AGM in June was taken up by the online democracy campaigning group 38 Degrees and the NUJ. 38 Degrees launched an online petition, entitled "Murdoch Inquiry Now", to urge Business Secretary Vince Cable to set a "public interest" inquiry into the consequences of the buy-up.

The issue has been taken up in the media, with concern at the way the Murdochs are using their media power to soften up the BBC for a threatened government move to cut the licence fee and undermine public broadcasting.

38 degrees – which played a leading part in the popular movement to save 6 Radio as part of the latest round of spending cuts – has launched another online campaign, against further cuts at the BBC.

By the end of August 29,756 people had signed the Murdoch petition. It has not been submitted to Vince Cable because News International (NI), the empire's UK subsidiary head by James Murdoch, has yet to attempt to push the deal through.

NI already owns 39 per cent of BSkyB and in June offered £7 share for the remaining 61 per cent. The CPBF

warned that this would put the BSkyB network – the biggest TV company in Europe, with a turnover 40 per cent higher than the BBC's – at the mercy of the Murdochs, with Sky News potentially becoming like the Murdochs' rabidly right-wing warmongering Fox News channel in the USA.

The other BSkyB directors rejected the offer, citing the independence of the network, but there was speculation that £8 a share would clinch the deal. However, there has been no further bid from NI and Hannah Lownsborough of 38 Degrees said: "It seems likely that our pressure has had an effect Murdoch is delaying making the next step."

NI would have to submit an application to the European Commission under EU competition law, but by the end of August – 38 Degrees are making daily checks – nothing had been received.

As soon as a deal is made the petition will be revived to increase the total and then presented. Although the signatures are gathered online, 38 degrees has the names printed out for delivery to the minister.

● The 38 Degrees campaign on the BBC is designed to head off the attack signalled by Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt in July when he said he would be aiming to get the licence fee reduced when discussions for the post-2012 settlement begin next year. He told the *Daily*

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NEW LIBEL LAW – AT LONG LAST

THE GOVERNMENT has promised reform of the libel laws, to provide a "fair balance" between freedom of expression and protection of reputation. Justice Minister Lord McNally said there would be a consultation exercise over the summer and a draft Bill early next year.

This was a "firm commitment"; he told peers as they gave an unopposed Second Reading to the Defamation Bill introduced by Liberal Democrat Lord Lester of Herne Hill (see last issue).

Lord McNally said: "We recognise the concerns raised in recent months about the detrimental effects that the current law may be having on freedom of expression."



PROTEST in July against the Daily Express over its 'racist and homophobic' reporting on immigration. But there were no protests when its owner, the pornographer Richard Desmond, took over channel 5 two weeks later.

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CLOSE DOWN THE PCC!

'It's a waste of time trying to come up with ways to make it work'

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NEW NAME FOR CAMPAIGN

CPBF AGM calls for a new approach for the digital age.

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THE HUNT FOR WIKILEAKS

Global pursuit of a global internet pirate

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News

MURDOCH AND BBC

From page one

Telegraph: "There are huge numbers of things that need to be changed at the BBC. They need to demonstrate the very constrained financial situation we are now in. The BBC will have to make tough decisions like everyone else."

38 Degrees points out that there is no case for cuts: "The BBC doesn't make a loss, but the Conservatives don't like the BBC and are strongly influenced by Rupert Murdoch, who wants to see it cut."

"But they know that the BBC has popular support. They'll be watching the public reaction to judge how much BBC-bashing they can get away with."

Supporters who have not already done so can sign up to the Murdoch petition at www.38degrees.org.uk, where there is also a page inviting campaigning ideas.

The name 38 degrees refers to the angle of slope required for an avalanche. The idea is that a popular campaign can generate enough momentum to launch an unstoppable political process.

BBC chief hits back: 'Sky is taking over'

A SHARP attack on the power on the Murdochs over the media industry has come from BBC Director-General Mark Thompson. He also mounted a spirited defence of public broadcasting and the BBC, as the new government, backed by the Murdoch media, sets out to undermine them.

Mark Thompson was giving the annual MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh Television Festival, an event at which last year Sky boss James Murdoch delivered a savage attack on the BBC.

This August Mark Thompson responded, saying that the Murdoch group "now enjoys unprecedented industry power in the UK. If Sky's proposal to acquire all of the remaining shares in Sky goes through, Sky will not just be Britain's biggest broadcaster, but a full part of a company which is also dominant in national newspapers." That would be "a concentration of cross-media ownership that would not be allowed" in many countries.

He defended public broadcasting, financed by the licence fee. "The purists have spent a generation making the free market case for abolishing the licence fee, but the public agree with them less now than they did when they started."

He said that according to recent research, "71 per cent of people say they're glad the BBC exists".



GUY SMALLMAN

He's a TV pornographer. His papers are called racist and homophobic. And now Desmond runs Channel 5

PROTESTERS chanting "Hey, Ho, Richard Desmond's got to go!" scuffled with police and security guards while trying to force their way into the office of the *Daily Express* and *Daily Star* in London in July.

They were protesting against a front page headline in the *Express* - **NOW ASYLUM IF YOU'RE GAY**. The paper's account of the Supreme Court decision to stop the deportation of asylum seekers fleeing persecution because of their homosexuality conveniently combined its prejudices against immigrants and gays.

There was much less protest two weeks later when *Express* owner Richard Desmond became a national TV mogul as his Northern and Shell publishing company bought Channel 5. He already has a TV channel, the pornographic Channel X, and made his fortune publishing porn magazines.

He paid £103.5 million to acquire Channel 5 from the German/Luxembourg RTL group - less than the £125 million he paid for the *Express* group in 2000.

Despite the relentlessly falling circulations of the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* he has made a further fortune from them by ruthless job-cutting, by hyping up mindless celebrity stories from his *OK!* magazine and by pandering to the lowest political prejudices in society. There have been frequent disputes with the NUJ over jobs, bullying and editorial interference.

He switched the political allegiance of the papers from Tory to Labour and back

to suit his personal interests. In short, Richard Desmond personifies everything that is wrong with British newspaper ownership. And now he has a national TV network in his hands.

His plans for Channel 5 include taking up the tired Big Brother franchise, now discarded, after its recent final series, by Channel 4.

Unsurprisingly, they also include large-scale sackings. Almost the whole executive board went within a month, following the resignation of Chief Executive Dawn Airey. Applications for voluntary redundancy were reported to be "very high".

● Richard Desmond is sensitive to criticism and suffered a rare setback in 2009 when he sued writer Tom Bower over a reference to him in *Conrad and Lady Black: Dancing on the Edge*, Tom Bower's biography of another megalomaniac media owner, Conrad Black of the *Telegraph*.

Embarrassingly, Richard Desmond lost the case, but litigation over the book may resume.

Conrad Black went to jail in the USA for swindling Hollinger International, the company that owned the *Telegraph*, out of \$6.1 million. In July, after serving two years of a 78-month sentence, he was freed on bail by the US Supreme Court. The case was referred back to the lower courts on legal grounds. Conrad Black cannot yet leave the USA, but he has sworn to sue Tom Bower himself.

New thinking on local news

TAX BREAKS and subsidies from local government are the latest idea to regenerate local media.

The crisis in local news has become a pawn in the post-election party game. Labour's plan to set up nationally-financed multi-media consortia was axed by the Tories and the government's declared policies of deregulating media ownership and fostering commercial local TV stations have been widely criticised.

The free-for-all in local media ownership would benefit only the existing newspaper groups that have brought the industry to the brink of ruin with incessant cuts in jobs, resources and editorial standards.

But in July a report from the Media Trust charity argued that income from local government advertising and targeted tax breaks should finance new journalistic start-ups to fill the gaps left by local papers drastically reducing their coverage or closing down altogether.

The report, *Meeting the News Needs of Local Communities*, says that

despite the challenge of the internet, newspapers are still the best form of local news.

The researchers, from Goldsmiths College in London, found that "nothing beats the old-fashioned local paper for ease, for accessibility, for relevance, and for social impact".

News organisation should operate from "news hubs" in public places such as community centres or pubs, in order to reconnect with readers.

"Hyperlocal" news websites are already featuring in many communities

– most of them started by journalists axed by local papers – but the report argues that these are not what people want. "Strong, vibrant, quality local newspapers reflecting the news that concerns their neighbourhoods and communities" are what is needed.

● The team producing the report was led by Natalie Fenton, professor of media and communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. She spoke on the future for local media at the CPBF AGM in London in June.

● **Report on the AGM, page 6.**

Protecting the press from council papers

THE GOVERNMENT says it wants to tighten the rules on council-run free newspapers.

Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles said local papers should not face competition from "town hall Pravdas" passing themselves off as

independent journalism.

He announced a consultation on how to tighten the rules to protect the commercial press, which for years has complained about council papers that carry all the public advertising that would otherwise go to the papers.

And at the same time Eric Pickles announced a plan to place local authority jobs and other public notices online – which will further damage newspaper advertising revenue.

MEDIA FOR ALL – THE DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGE

Fringe meeting at the TUC conference hosted by the CPBF and Making Good Society, supported by the Carnegie UK Trust

**TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER
6 PM, MAYOR'S PARLOUR, MANCHESTER TOWN HALL**

Following the publication of *Making Good Society*, the final report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland, this event will discuss the crucial role of news media in empowering peoples' participation in public debate at a time of cut backs in regional and local media. The event will also explore how civil society organisations can contribute to a more democratic news media.

JOYCE MCMILLAN member of the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society
JEREMY DEAR General Secretary NUJ
JUDY GORDON Manchester NUJ
GRANVILLE WILLIAMS CPBF

Self-regulation

LET'S JUST GET RID

HOW MUCH LONGER must we play the childish game of pretending that the Press Complaints Commission is a genuine and rigorous means of regulating Britain's press?

For nearly 20 years – brace yourself for triumphant anniversary publicity next January – we have been told that the PCC is a positive agent of change, steadily eliminating the excesses of particularly the popular press. It does this by helping those traduced by the papers to secure redress, teaching errant scribes a lesson and deterring them from doing it again.

I doubt if anybody really believes this, deep down. Evidence to the contrary, after all, is seen by millions of people every day. But there was evidence the emperor was not wearing clothes, and it gets ever harder to maintain the PCC facade.

The commission has perpetually to devise little ruses to keep it up. After the death of Princess Diana, and after the lesser embarrassments that follow the harassment of lesser celebrities, they fiddled a bit with the editors' Code of Practice and put out statements that the

The report makes 75 recommendations, none of any consequence, and ignores the reforms urged by critics

press is now even more responsible than before.

No-one believes them, but nor does anyone quote these things back to them to point out: "that's what you said last time". It's a rule of the game that you don't. But every claim of improvement must imply an admission of past failure.

In July the PCC released the outcome of a Governance Review that raises the art of tinkering to a new level. It makes no fewer than 75 recommendations, none of any consequence, and ignores the reforms urged by critics who take press standards seriously such as the CPBF, the NUJ ... and the House of Commons media select committee.

Last year's damning report on self-regulation from that committee was the stimulus for the review. The committee said the PCC was "lacking credibility and authority" and should have the power to fine newspapers that breached the code, and even, in serious cases, to suspend the

The Press Complaints Commission has conducted an 'independent' report on its future. But it's not independent and it doesn't tackle any of the key problems. **TIM GOPSILL** has had enough of this fakery and says it's time to campaign, not for improvements to the PCC, but for its abolition

publication of offending titles for one issue.

In response the PCC set up its "independent review". It was carried out by one of its own members, Vivien Hepworth, who is UK executive chairman and head of global public affairs for Grayling, the world's second largest PR and public affairs consultancy. She stood down from the Commission to conduct the review. That is their idea of "independent". Believing its own hype is a noted characteristic of the PCC.

Hepworth says the PCC should have "a more clearly defined role ... stronger leadership ... more transparent about appointments ... rigorous examination of performance ..." and so on. But she ignores the positive reforms urged on the PCC by the CPBF and like campaigners who made submissions to the review. These include:

- heavier penalties against titles that breach the code, including the mandatory and prominent display of PCC rulings, and possibly fines
- acceptance of "third party" complaints over stories that either do not affect individuals or affect people who for cannot complain
- allowing working journalists (not just editors) onto the commission
- introduction of a "conscience clause" to allow journalists subject to the Code of Practice to refuse to undertake work they consider would be in breach of it without threat to their jobs

- a general remit to cover press freedom and standards and to investigate independently of complaints

- and the acceptance of queries under Freedom of Information Act (FoI).

Hepworth's report is full of exhortations to "transparency", yet it goes out of its way to reject the FoI proposal – which was not even within her remit. That pretty much sums up the whole exercise.

Of course the PCC says it is not bound to accept her "independent" recommendations, but if it did it would make no difference. It cannot escape from its enforced status as the apologist for the industry that pays for it and dominates its proceedings.

Actually, it's even worse than that. Far from improving standards in the press, the PCC makes them worse.

It boasts every year that it gets more and more complaints, but never asks why. It is partly, of course, because the papers run so many inaccurate, slanted or just plain sloppy stories, but also it is because they don't have to face the consequences.

The PCC's real function is not to judge complaints, which it does on very few. No, its job is to settle them. It calls this "mediation", which consists of bullying

or otherwise cajoling hapless complainants into accepting the minimum grudging redress the paper can get away with.

"It's this or nothing", they are told, leaving them with little choice: take it or go to law.

**WHAT TO DO
with the PCC?**

Email your views to www.cpbf.org.uk

Self-regulation

OF IT!

In effect, the PCC is an outsourced customer services department. It does the editors' dirty work for them – which explains the apparent contradiction that the papers are so very keen on a body that is supposed to discipline them.

But what if they had to take the responsibility themselves, as editors should? What if they had to take complaints seriously, face up to what they have done and put matters right? Or defend a losing libel action fronted by an unscrupulous law firm on “no-win-no-fee”?

They have to in the USA, where there is no regulatory body and papers take their responsibility to the readers much more seriously, with teams of people to deal with complaints. (The big papers also of course have “fact-checkers” to make damn sure the stories are right.)

A lot of time and energy is spent by the CPBF and other organisations discussing newspaper self-regulation. Many people condemn the PCC and have fun at its expense, but no-one has come up with a model that would really work.

That's because there isn't one. Self-regulation by an industry-run body is a sham: it inevitably shields practitioners from outside criticism, protecting them from having

‘The PCC is just an outsourced customer services department. It does the editors’ dirty work for them’

to stick to the straight and narrow. No-one trusts politicians or the police to patrol themselves; why should editors or journalists be different?

Where self-regulation does work, for doctors and dentists for instance, there is the power to strike off the register, a power that no-one would want any journalists' body to wield. The great model routinely held up is the Advertising Standards Authority; but are the criteria really the same?

Obviously not. Self-regulation in the workplace is a better option, making editors edit constructively, with their journalists enjoying the freedom to work responsibly to their consciences and the NUJ Code of Conduct.

The owners and editors will never accept that so the rug will have to be pulled from under them. The PCC should be shut down. The CPBF, the NUJ and others should stop the game of guessing what might make it more effective and call for the PCC's abolition.

The PCC even rigs its public attitudes poll

IN MAY the Press Complaints Commission published the results of an attitude survey whose respondents gave it a pretty clean bill of health.

However, the survey's methodology casts considerable doubt on its reliability.

First, it wildly inflated the importance of newspapers as a source of news. Asked where they mostly sourced their daily news, 54 per cent of the respondents stated it was online and 46 per cent print.

The pollsters must have carried out their survey among whatever tiny proportion of the British that doesn't own a TV or radio, which can hardly be more than the 1,107 who took part.

In fact, according to Ofcom's recent report, *Perceptions of, and Attitudes Towards, Television: 2010*, people asked about their main source of news in their local areas cited 49 per cent TV, 22 per cent newspapers, 11 per cent radio and 5 per cent the internet.

In terms of world news the figures were: TV 75 per cent, internet 9 per cent, newspapers 6 per cent and radio 6 per cent.

On knowledge of the PCC, 19 per cent had never heard of it, 20 per cent had, 41 per cent knew a little, 23 per cent a fair amount, and 7 per cent knew it very well.

So only 30 per cent were reasonably well informed about the organisation about which they were being asked for their views.

Which is presumably why, when asked if they thought the PCC provided an effective service, 41 per cent had no opinion, which at least was honest.

On what basis, one wonders, did the 39 per cent who declared the PCC “effective” manage to reach this conclusion?

And it's hardly surprising that the respondents fell for a question as blatantly loaded as this: “Fining newspapers or magazines when they break the rules of the Code is likely to involve a lengthy legal process, whereas an agreement to publish an apology can be arrived at very quickly. If a newspaper

or magazine had broken the rules in an article mentioning you, which would be most important to you?”

Little surprise that 77 per cent preferred the apology option – but 23 per cent still went for the fine!

Not being experts on the PCC, the respondents weren't to know that not all apologies are published promptly. This year the *Express* has twice taken over four months to correct major factual inaccuracies via the PCC; in comparison, it took just three-and-a-half months for the Amanat Charity Trust to extract substantial libel damages from the *Express* for an allegation that it had links to al-Qaida.

Take another scenario posed by the survey:

“Imagine you have been featured in a newspaper or magazine article. A regulatory body feels that references to you may be inappropriate and in breach of the Code it enforces. It decides to publicise its views on this without contacting you first for information or consent. How would you view this unrequested decision by the regulatory body?”

Not unnaturally, only 25 per cent of respondents agreed with this course of action. But who has ever suggested that anybody should act in such a high-handed fashion?

Critics of the PCC have repeatedly argued that it should accept “third party” complaints – obviously with the involvement of the subject when the article concerns individuals – and that it should be more proactive in cases such as the long-running scandal of press treatment of the McCanns.

These scenarios completely fail to address the issues with which the PCC is most frequently taxed. Instead they just circumvent and trivialise them. Only a cynic would suggest that this is precisely their purpose.

Julian Petley

Campaign AGM

NEW AGE, NEW AIMS, NEW NAME

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom is to change its name and relaunch itself as a campaign group for the digital age.

The annual general meeting in June discussed the direction of media policy under the Tory/LibDem coalition and agreed to adopt a new campaigning approach to counter this and to embrace the rapid changes brought about by digital media.

The CPBF's title was "dated, dull and difficult", the meeting agreed. It covered only the "old" media and must be changed either to

include digital media or to drop specific references.

The campaign itself was also too restricted to debating traditional media policies. A new title and campaigning strategy will be unveiled at a relaunch event or conference early next year.

The National Council was told to consult widely through the membership before taking final decisions.

The discussion followed a series of presentations by campaign exerts on the issues in media policy in the wake of the UK General Election.

FULL REPORT
of the CPBF AGM at
www.cpbf.org.uk

LOCAL MEDIA

NATALIE FENTON, Co-Director of the Media Research programme at Goldsmith College, University of London, said there was a "critical contradiction" between the government's stated commitment to "localisation" and the reality of its deregulatory policies.

"The rhetoric of localisation and the big society is entirely antagonistic to further liberalisation of cross media ownership regulations. This means more takeovers with larger companies serving bigger regions with less relevance for local people. Local news that is not local is not news.

"Rather than increased localisation and local control we will have even larger organisational structures with even bigger corporate demands – which were part of the problem in the first place.

The government plans to foster local TV services around the UK but Natalie Fenton said: "Local TV can't generate enough advertising, not with ITV and the BBC broadcasting regionally as well. Multi-media is not necessarily a viable answer. Scrapping the regulations to allow cross-platform news won't solve the problem."

MEDIA IN THE ELECTION

WRITER Nicholas Jones, a former BBC political correspondent, said the party leaders' TV debates had "transformed the dynamics of the campaign". Once the debate started the reaction became the story, from the networking websites and from the newspapers that commissioned instant opinion polls.

"The prediction that newspapers would have far less influence in 2010 than in previous elections was off beam. So were the pre-election claims about the impact of the blogosphere.

"I thought newspaper websites would play a role, especially with highly-politicised audio visual output. Again it didn't happen."

Joy Johnson, another former BBC political journalist and Labour campaigns offi-



Natalie Fenton: Deregulation and localisation at odds

STEFAN CAGNONI

Campaign AGM



STEFAN CAGNONI

Nick Jones: Blogosphere failed to make predicted impact

cer, added: "The newspapers took back the agenda. The political parties lost control because of the TV debates."

THE RIGHT TO REPORT

PHOTOGRAPHER and NUJ activist Marc Vallee, a leading campaigner against the use of "anti-terror laws" to suppress journalistic work on the streets, said that he and fellow photographer Jason Parkinson had just won a significant case against the Metropolitan Police, over assaults they were subjected to while covering a demonstration at the Greek Embassy in 2008.

He also reported the ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which authorises police to make random stop-and-searches without suspicion of wrongdoing, was unlawful (*story right*).

"But this is a warm-up act for the main events to come," Marc Vallee said. "The cuts are going to lead to huge dissent and disorder over the next few years. I have no illusion that even if all the nasty laws passed by Labour are got rid of, if they don't want the media on the ground they will get rid of them."

BROADCASTING

TONY LENNON, until recently the President of the broadcasting union BECTU, said that the LibDems in the coalition had a commitment to pluralism, but the government was pressing on with deregulation.

The BBC's current funding formula was meant to run to 2013. Renewal will be discussed in 2012, and, he said, "they won't hesitate to raise the issue of the licence fee."

He said that top-slicing the licence fee is "happening as we speak. £150 million is topsliced already. They will have similar calls to topslice for other worthy projects like broadband. We need to think about this. If it can be ring-fenced to provide a reservoir of public money for activities that will otherwise be killed off – what's wrong with that?"

TERROR LAW DEFEATED

THE GOVERNMENT has confirmed the victory won by campaigning photographers over an "anti-terrorist" law struck down by the European Court of Human Rights earlier this year.

Home Secretary Theresa May said in Parliament in July that police will no longer be allowed to stop and search individuals unless they "reasonably suspect" them of being a terrorist.

The power to search people without suspicion under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act had regularly been used against photographers and journalists covering political protest and other events but was declared unlawful by the European Court. The case was

brought by photographer Pennie Quinton and an anti-arms trade campaigner.

Teresa May said: "The Government cannot appeal this judgment, although we would not have done so had we been able. Officers will no longer be able to search individuals using Section 44 powers; instead they will have to rely on Section 43 powers which require officers to reasonably suspect the person to be a terrorist.

The campaign group *I'm a Photographer not a Terrorist*, started last year by NUJ members who take pictures on the streets, can fairly claim some credit for this victory.



JESS HURD

The campaign *I'm a Photographer not a terrorist* can claim success over Section 44

Editor on the run: global pursuit of leaks website

The CPBF AGM voted to support the audacious website WikiLeaks, which has persistently got into trouble for posting state secret information on the internet

WIKILEAKS has come under fire this year for posting a leaked military video of a US attack on civilians in Iraq and a cache of around 76,000 secret reports written by military and intelligence officials on the conduct of the war in Afghanistan.

CPBF National Council member Granville Williams said at the campaign AGM that WikiLeaks had been described as "the intelligence agency of the people" for publishing incriminating documents that expose the activities of governments and corporations. In 2008 a US Army report had included WikiLeaks in the list of "enemies

threatening the security of the United States".

Its editor, Julian Assange, an Australian citizen, has adopted the life of international outlaw, moving from country to country as the target of an increasingly vindictive witch-hunt pursued by governments, NGOs and elements of the media.

He spent most of the summer in Iceland and Sweden, nations with progressive press freedom laws, but even there faced some persecution. In August the authorities in Sweden, where WikiLeaks is registered, accused

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Campaign AGM

Wikileaks pursued

From page 7

nim of rape – just as he announced that a further 16,000 documents, held back for further checking, were about to go up. He vehemently denied the charge and it was dropped within 24 hours.

Granville Williams's call on the AGM to "fully supports the important work done by WikiLeaks, and publicise any attempts to weaken or undermine its activities" was unanimously agreed.

WikiLeaks's great file dump revealed the details of assassination squads, the casual slaughter of civilians – and the ensuing cover-ups – as well as the corruption of the Afghan government and the complicity of Pakistan's intelligence services with the Taliban.

Documents also showed that the US military has been paying Afghan media outlets to run friendly stories, with military personnel referring to certain Afghan reporters as "our journalists".

Julian Assange arranged simultaneous publication of extracts from the material in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* – which ran a 14-page blockbuster of extracts in August – and the German weekly *Der Spiegel*. In processing the data the papers carefully edited out any identification of Afghans who have collaborated with the invading forces, which left Wikileaks open to accusations that it had knowingly put dozens of people at risk from Taliban reprisals.

There was a contrived air to the consequent outrage which came not



just from the US government, which threatened to compel Wikileaks to hand back all the documents, but also from Amnesty International and Reporters Sans Frontiers, and from some of the media.

The *Times* ran a story that one man named in the leak had been killed next to a photo of Julian Assange and a story on the row over the leak. In fact the man had been killed two years ago – as the story said in its sixth paragraph.

Julian Assange told the *Observer* that the blame for any reprisals would lie lay with US military authorities. He said that Wikileaks had invited the Pentagon to go through them to identify those that might put people at risk, and added: "We are appalled that the US military was so lackadaisical with its Afghan sources."

"This material was available to every soldier and contractor in Afghanistan. It's the US military that deserves the blame for not giving due diligence to its informers." He said there was no evidence that anyone had been put at risk and those 16,000 documents had not been released.

Julian Assange said he was under-terred by the attacks. He has claimed that WikiLeaks's system for putting secret information into the public domain was "creating a space behind us that permits a form of journalism which lives up to the name that journalism has always tried to establish for itself.

"Everyone has the whole lot at once – and people around the world are able to comment on and put it in context and understand the full situation. That's something that can only be brought about as a result of the internet."

**Free Press is edited by Tim Gopsill on behalf of the National Council.
Send letters, comments, articles and ideas to freepress@cpbf.org.uk**

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FREEDOM

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