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Letters to Cable from right, left and centre

ELEANOR CAMPION, a volunteer with the campaigning group 38 Degrees, handed in a 19,000-signatory letter at Business Secretary Vince Cable's office in London on October 8 (above).

Its message, 38 Degrees said, was that "we'd all be behind him if he decides to stop Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB power grab."

The CPBF got together with 38 Degrees to launch the online petition, which asked Vince Cable to call in the anticipated bid from the Murdochs' News Corporation to buy out rival shareholders in BSkyB. The long-awaited bid must be submitted to the EU for approval but the UK Secretary of State can order an inquiry on public interest grounds.

The concern is that the Murdochs could abuse the complete control of Sky to turn it into a heavily politicised right-wing station following Rupert Murdoch's personal inclinations and the style of his

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JUST HOW BAD IS FOX NEWS? The TV fate that Britain could face pages 4-5

BBC FALLS ON TORIES' SWORD

THE FUTURE of the BBC under the ConDem coalition government was determined in October as the corporation accepted a 16 per cent spending cut, offering no resistance and pre-empting any campaign on its behalf.

A six-year freeze in the licence fee and the imposition of additional liabilities will put increasing pressure on programming and the corporation's public service obligations.

The cuts were agreed in 48 hours' desperate negotiations amid the crisis atmosphere of the government's spending review which was announced the same day.

The deal means

- Freezing the BBC licence fee at £145.50 for six years, a 16 per cent cut in real terms, in the period up to the renewal of the BBC charter in 2016. Annual income is £3.6 billion.

- The BBC paying for the World Service (currently funded by the Foreign Office) at £272 million a year, plus £25 million for the associated BBC Monitoring service at Caversham near Reading.

- The BBC running the Welsh language broadcaster S4C at £102 million a year.

- The BBC to meet the cost of broadband internet roll-out to rural areas at £150 million a year and to pay for local TV and online services at £25 million a year.

Both the World Service and S4C were already facing demands for big spending cuts. Several World Service language services in eastern Europe were under threat from savings of 25-40 per cent, and

S4C was planning to cut 25 per cent of staff.

The BBC must also underwrite the roll-out of the digital radio network. In present terms the extra costs were summarised at £340 million a year.

The battle was brief, one-sided and decisive. In its trepidation the BBC had already offered to freeze the licence fee for two years – an offer the government gratefully accepted – but was then confronted with a threat of having to cover the cost of free TV licences for the over-75s, estimated at £556 million a year. The threat was soon withdrawn but it had the effect and managers grabbed at the alternative.

They were following Director-General Mark Thompson's well-tried tactic of "getting your capitulation in first"; Mark Thompson's relations with government have always been characterised by bluster, indecision and surrender, at great cost to public broadcasting in the UK.

The deal was not entirely forced on the BBC. In an email to staff Mark Thompson said the initiative had come from the corporation: "The idea of reaching an early multi-year settlement came from the BBC and negotiations on it began more than a week ago."

Tory Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt commented that it "must be the fastest negotiation in the corporation's 83-year history", confirming that the government had not expected to be dealing with the licence fee so quickly.

He added: "The assurances I have

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All together to stop Murdoch stranglehold on BSkyB

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Fox News channel in the US.

Battle lines were clearly drawn after months of skirmishing.

Murdoch's team were bullish with BSkyB recording record new subscriptions for TV/internet/telephone packages, with a 36 per cent month on month increase in September. BSkyB is just about to net its 10 millionth subscriber.

But ranged against them, as well as 38 Degrees, the unions and the CPBF, was almost all the British national press not owned by the Murdochs.

Vincent Cable has received another protest letter, signed by the *Telegraph*, *Mail* and *Mirror* groups, the *Guardian* and *Financial Times*, plus the BBC, Channel 4 and BT.

It was an unprecedented collaboration between rival publishers, and their motive may have been their combined rivalry with the Murdoch press, but the pressure they can exert must



Vince Cable (right) with Tory culture secretary Jeremy Hunt

be considerable.

Most influential was the *Financial Times*, which carried the campaign into its pages, with a leading article that said there was a "clear risk" that News Corporation could "dominate the media scene, lock out challengers and stifle the diversity of debate.

"Mr Cable should call a halt to establish whether this really would serve the public

interest."

The media bosses were joined by Claire Enders, founder of the influential media consultancy Enders Analysis, who also wrote to Vince Cable, and to Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt, expressing her concerns.

She said the proposed takeover represented a "Berlusconi moment" for the country, referring to Italian

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi who owns Italy's biggest commercial broadcaster, Mediaset.

The deal would represent "a reduction in media plurality to an unacceptably low level."

The level of opposition is a big test for Vince Cable and a headache for the Tories in the coalition. They came to power with the support of the Murdoch press and employ former *News of the World* editor Andy Coulson as director of communications.

Vince Cable's Liberal Democrats enjoyed no such support, but whether they have the stomach to stand up to the Tories is another matter.

He would have 25 days after submission of the bid to decide whether to order an inquiry on the grounds that "media plurality" could be compromised by other newspapers and broadcasters being put at risk of closure or by democratic debate being restricted.

BBC throws in towel over licence fee freeze

From page one

secured on magazines, local and online activities will also give some comfort to the BBC's commercial rivals that the licence fee will not be used to blast them out of the water" – implying that the BBC had made some not-yet-announced concessions on these vital areas of its output.

But Mark Thompson said it was "a realistic deal in exceptional circumstances securing a strong independent BBC for the next six years."

BBC Trust Chairman Sir Michael Lyons said it was "a good deal for licence-fee payers as it protects the independence of the BBC... It gives us clarity of funding and takes the discussion about the right level of licence fee out of play."

"There is no doubt that the settlement will present us with some difficult choices, but importantly, these choices will remain firmly in the hands of the BBC Trust and we will of course seek the views of licence fee payers."

No-one however sought licence fee payers' views over the corporation's agreement to take on extra liabilities, arguably outside the BBC's charter, in return for a reduced income. The speed of the deal has denied any opportunity for BBC supporters like the CPBF and the broadcasting unions to mount a campaign



BBC Director-General Mark Thompson: erratic relations with government

against the cuts.

The BBC's finances are further exacerbated by its bitter dispute with staff over the future of their pensions. There have been successive reductions in the benefits of the scheme and in the summer union members voted by more than 90 per cent for a series of two-day strikes against a bid to do away with the final salary scheme altogether.

A strike in early October was called off after a marginally improved offer was made but members are balloting on this offer and the signs are that the NUJ at least will reject it, throwing the BBC into

another costly crisis of its own making.

Licence fee revenue is supposedly separate from Treasury funds, and one of the most serious consequences of this sorry tale has been to blur that distinction: linking BBC finances to the public spending review has conceded that its operations are subject to government will.

To claim this settlement as an achievement, or even "reasonable", is ridiculous. The BBC's Charter runs until 2016 and there was no way its independence could be challenged until then; the licence fee had likewise been negotiated and could not be reduced. The BBC could hardly have done worse than to accept a freeze for those six years.

It has not even secured editorial independence for the World Service, which has been funded by Foreign Office grants. Sir Michael Lyons said in a BBC interview that government will "have a voice on the opening of new services and closing of existing services ... The government will retain these rights".

When it comes to charter renewal in 2016, whichever government is in power will no doubt set out to weaken the public service element. They can only be heartened by the cowardice and misjudgement displayed by BBC chiefs in this episode.

Business as usual at the PCC: owners are right, journos wrong

NEW REVELATIONS in the *New York Times* on the *News of the World* phone-hacking affair have compelled the Press Complaints Commission to conduct a third review of the case.

The *NYT* quoted former *NoW* journalists who claimed that former editor Andy Coulson had been well aware of the operations of jailed royal reporter Clive Goodman and the private investigators who hacked into celebrities' mobile phones for the paper.

Andy Coulson, now head of spin for the coalition government, has always denied he knew what was going on but the *NYT* stories have revived suspicions that he did.

The Metropolitan Police have reopened the case and PCC Director Stephen

Abell has confirmed that he was looking again at the *NYT* allegations and the revived police enquiries.

In earlier reviews the PCC managed easily to brush the suspicions aside – it didn't interview anyone from the paper – but it is getting harder each time.

The PCC has an impressive record in defending publishers even from apparently damning allegations. In October it threw out a complaint from the National Union of Journalists against Johnston Press (JP), one of the big regional paper chains, over its deliberate lowering of editorial standards in the interest of maintaining profits.

JP is introducing a new Atex content management system around the 270-title group.

The system fits stories into pre-set page templates that supposedly require less editorial judgement than in the past, allowing the group to fur-

ther reduce its staffing levels.

The managing director of JP's South Yorkshire titles, Paul Bentham, sent round a memo setting out new rules that removed a number of checks for accuracy and undermined the role of the editor, removing their final responsibility for the content of the paper.

The memo said that editors should not "continue with the old practice of reading every story", adding: "Editors should evaluate the risk for each story based on content and the seniority of the journalist and act accordingly."

The NUJ's North of England Organiser Chris Morley complained to the PCC about these "extremely worrying developments which strike at the heart

of an editor's responsibilities ... It is entirely possible that editors and other journalists will be in breach of the (editors') code and therefore their contracts."

The PCC, whose remit is to ensure that editors adhere to their Code of Practice, gave the complaint short shrift. The minutes of the Commission's October meeting include this terse decision:

"Commissioners discussed recent correspondence between the Chairman and Johnston Press, and between the Chairman and Director and the NUJ, about the new Atex (content management) system in use at Johnston Press titles.

"Commissioners agreed that no further steps were appropriate at this stage, Johnston Press having affirmed its commitment to the PCC – a commitment it said was unchanged by the latest technological developments."



Media for All: CPBF meet at the 2010 TUC

MANCHESTER Town Hall was the sumptuous setting for a CPBF meeting at the TUC conference entitled *Media For All: The Democratic Challenge*. The event was organised by the campaign and hosted by the Carnegie Trust, whose report *Making Good Society*, published earlier this year, made recommendations to protect the pluralism and freedom of news media.

Joyce McMillan, a member of the Carnegie project inquiry team, chaired the meeting and highlighted the key policy recommendations in the report.

Judy Gordon, NUJ rep at the *Manchester Evening News*, described the havoc wreaked on the title since Trinity Mirror acquired it, with 21 weekly publications, earlier this year. Journalists have been relocated out of the city to an industrial estate near Oldham.

For the CPBF, Granville Williams spoke of the vital watchdog role of the local and regional media, and the threat to local democracy if newspapers close or if staff cuts prevent journalists reporting and investigating institutions in their localities.

NUJ General Secretary Jeremy Dear said that local democracy had been hit by the closure of 107 newspapers and by the loss of one in four local journalism jobs. He cited the estimate by media analysts Enders that half of the local newspapers will close by 2013.

The panel were united in the urgent need for an economic stimulus plan for local and regional journalism, and for funds to be generated through a levy on recording devices, as happens in other countries.

CONFIRMATION of the sorry state of the local press came in October from the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, Peter Fahy, whose force launched a Twitter feed reporting every call it took from the public.

Much fun was poked at the project over the mundane nature of most of the calls, but Peter Fahy explained that it was becoming "more difficult to get out information, particularly with the decline of local newspapers."

Murdoch TV

So what might Sky be like if Rupert Murdoch got the chance to turn it into 'Fox UK'?

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS, who has been working with the Free Press movement in the USA, gives a chilling report



FOX'S LIARS

IN JULY Shirley Sherrod, the Director of Rural Development in Georgia, USA, working for the Department of Agriculture (USDA), gave a speech to a conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP).

She spoke of an incident 24 years earlier when she worked for an agricultural support organization and a white farmer threatened with bankruptcy came to her seeking help. At first she had been reluctant and didn't do much, but she realized she was in the wrong and went on to help rescue the farm from bankruptcy and to help other white farmers as well.

A video of the speech surfaced on Andrew Breitbart's right-wing Big Government website. The video omitted the context and made it appear as though she discriminated against white farmers while working at USDA. The story was picked up by Fox News which transmitted the video without bothering to contact her.

Fearful of Fox News's immense power, the NAACP issued a press release condemning Sherrod for her remarks, despite of course knowing the context full well. The USDA demanded her resignation. Agricultural Secretary Tom Vilsack accepted the resignation, saying that "the controversy surrounding her comments would create situations where her decisions, rightly or wrongly, would be called into question".

Fortunately Shirley Sherrod, toughened by years of activity in the civil rights

movement, refused to be cowed by the right-wing media smear machine and fought back. White farmers came forward to defend her and she was able to expose the roles of Andrew Breitbart, Fox News, the NAACP and the cowardly government officials in the affair.

UK viewers would be shocked if any news channel perpetrated such crude, racist and biased journalism, but we need to be aware that proposals are being mooted to move away from the regulatory environment in which news channels are required to be impartial.

In the USA too broadcasters operated under requirements on fairness until 1987. From the earliest days the Federal Radio Commission granted licences which required them to serve the "public convenience, interest or necessity" and to "show regard for the opinions of others".

In the debates preceding the 1927 Radio Act Democrat Representative Luther Johnson observed presciently: "American thought and American politics will be largely at the mercy of those who operate these stations, for publicity is the most powerful weapon that can be wielded in a republic. And when such a weapon is placed in the hands of one person, or a single selfish group is permitted to either tacitly or otherwise acquire ownership or dominate those broadcasting stations throughout the country, then woe to those who dare to differ with them."

The Act's "Fairness Doctrine" required broadcasters to devote airtime to contro-

versial matters of public interest, and to air contrasting views on them. But all this changed dramatically in the Reagan era with the appointment of Mark Fowler as chair of the Federal Communications Commission. He argued that the doctrine violated broadcasters' First Amendment right to free speech by giving government a measure of editorial control and the doctrine was torn up in 1987.

One consequence was a dramatic increase in unanswered conservative opinion on the airwaves. The number of talk-radio stations in the USA jumped from 200 in 1986 to more than 1,000 eight years later, with right-wing talk-show hosts like Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly becoming prominent.

Fox News is talk radio on TV. The channel, launched in 1996 by Rupert Murdoch, brought the confrontational approach to the screen. Matt Gross, a former Fox News editor, says they were instructed to "seek out stories that cater to angry, middle-aged white men who listen to talk radio and yell at their televisions ... The facts of a story don't matter at all. The idea was to get those viewers out of their seats, screaming at the TV, the politicians, the liberals – whoever – simply by running a provocative story."

The post-1987 broadcasting regime boosted conservative political success through an echo chamber effect that creates and amplifies false information with increasing virulence.

Rupert Murdoch reportedly views the

Murdoch TV

present UK operations of Sky News as “BBC Lite” because of the impartiality rules. He would dearly love to unleash a form of Fox News on the UK, vigorously cross-promoted by his other UK media.

In the US, in times of social crisis and political uncertainty, a crude political perspective, underpinned by patriotic appeals, can be appealing. At the time of the invasion of Iraq Fox News gave uncritical support to George W Bush’s drive to war and suspended any sense of journalistic objectivity – despite its ironic slogan, “Fair and Balanced”.

The other networks have been dragged to the right themselves and are less fair and balanced than they were. Critical views on the war were excluded, most notably on cable channel MSNBC where Phil Donahue’s popular show was cancelled because, as an internal NBC report noted, he seemed to “delight in presenting guests who are anti-war, anti-Bush and sceptical of the administration’s motives”.

At CBS’s “60 Minutes”, anchor Dan Rather was forced to resign in 2004 after presenting a perfectly accurate story on George W Bush’s draft-dodging during the Vietnam war. Dan Rather was America’s leading news journalist; imagine Trevor McDonald and John Simpson rolled into one. Now imagine the pressure that might lead to either of them getting the boot.

In 2010 America is again fractured by

economic recession, extremism and violence in politics, expressed through the populist rage of the right wing Tea Party movement. Fox News has hired Tea Party mascot Sarah Palin as a commentator – despite, or perhaps because of, her lamentably poor performance.

It has also hired Glenn Beck, who has become a powerful amplifier of these malcontents. In August he fronted not just a TV show but a huge rally entitled “Restoring Honor” in Washington – provocatively on the same date and at the

‘Beck pits American against American, telling his audience that our country is under attack by a demonic Nazi regime’

same Lincoln Memorial venue as Martin Luther King’s celebrated March on Washington “I have a dream” rally in 1963.

Sarah Palin was a speaker but Glenn Beck far outshone her. The *Washington Post* reported: “In a matter of hours, Beck went from a hugely popular media figure... to a spiritual player, embracing a new and overtly religious rhetoric that made him

sound like an evangelist.”

The sinister side to Glenn Beck’s journalism has been brought to light by the case of Byron Williams, a bank robber on parole who injured two Californian Highway Patrolmen in a shootout in July. Heavily armed and in full body armour, Byron Williams had attacked a voluntary organisation called the Tides Foundation, that works on environmental education and AIDS prevention.

In jailhouse interviews the gunman said he took inspiration from Glenn Beck whom he called a “schoolteacher” who “blew my mind” and gave him “every ounce of evidence” to pursue his target. Glenn Beck had done no fewer than 29 hostile Fox News stories on the Tides Foundation in 18 months, accusing it of indoctrinating children as part of a conspiracy to undermine America and the capitalist system.

Drummond Pike, the founder of the Tides Foundation, appealed to companies to stop advertising on Fox News. He wrote: “For hours every day Beck pits American against American, telling his audience that our country is under attack by a demonic Nazi-like regime seeking to destroy all that is great about America while insisting it’s up to his viewers to resist and revolt”.

This is Rupert Murdoch’s style in the USA. Does anyone want to see it here?

THE TWO-WAY TRAFFIC IN TACK

FURTHER PROOF, if proof were needed, of the demise of political journalism in the USA comes with the appointment of Piers Morgan to take over the Larry King Show on CNN.

The 25-year-old show used to be the premier interview programme on the air but has slumped badly in its prime time slot, with only a third of the audience of Fox News’s Sean Hannity, and CNN is desperate to recover its position.

For all his brash and provocative style Larry King is a serious traditional journalist and the last thing they want is a stuffy replica. What CNN wants is a mindless self-obsessed celebrity to communicate with the celebs on the other side of the studio desk and Piers Morgan is worth a reported \$6 million a year to take that seat.

It is true that he edited two national newspapers in London before his telly

career, but he is far from a traditional editor. Piers Morgan is one of the pioneers of celebrity journalism. As editor of the Bizarre showbiz column in the *Sun* in the early 1990s he

invented the genre of the journalist-as-the-story-in-celebrity-land.

He was the first to fill his pages with pictures of himself hanging out at showbiz parties, posing with

the stars or wannabe stars at photo-ops carefully arranged with their agents.

It was from Bizarre that Rupert Murdoch plucked the 28-year-old to edit the *News of World*, setting a pattern that has persisted. John Blake, Andy Coulson and the current *Sun* editor Dominic Mohan followed the same path, promoted for their appreciation of the professional imperative for editors to temper journalistic values to the celebrity-based populist demands of the proprietor.

In his mawkish TV shows Piers Morgan might occasionally poke a cheeky question at some celeb about their private life, but I’ve never seen him put a truly challenging one.

He’ll no doubt boost CNN’s ratings. As usual, Rupert Murdoch’s long-term strategy will have proved correct. **Tim Gopsill**



Piers Morgan: celebrity groupie

LEARN TO LOVE NET REGULATION

'Net neutrality' – universally equal and unfettered access to the internet – is a demand supported by many. **GARY HERMAN** says it is a fantasy and the debate should be about how online traffic is managed

LAST JUNE Ofcom published a discussion document on “the practice of internet traffic management”. This document is part of an international, if uncoordinated, process to draw up global standards to manage the explosive growth of traffic on the internet.

The very idea that governments and supra-governmental bodies such as the European Union should concern themselves with how the internet operates has some people up in arms. The internet, for them, is a poster boy for open, democratic communications.

You could be forgiven for thinking that internet traffic management was something new, a threat from the nasty party to censor our emails and restrict access to websites. Worried that network operators and regulators intend to create first and second class users, these people have adopted the rallying cry of “net neutrality”, arguing that there must be no discrimination between different kinds of traffic on the internet and no censorship.

Two US advocates of media freedom, Lawrence Lessig and Robert McChesney, argued in the *Washington Post*: “Net neutrality means simply that all like Internet content must be treated alike and move at the same speed over the network. This is the simple but brilliant ‘end-to-end’ design of the Internet that has made it such a powerful force for economic and social good”.

It may be brilliant, but it hasn't worked like that for a long, long time. The idea that the internet could ever treat “all like ... content ... alike” derives from a myth propagated by right wing libertarians in the early 1990s that bandwidth – the capacity of digital communications channels – was effectively unlimited. Had that been true, net neutrality might have been feasible. If you wanted more speed just add more bandwidth.

In reality the right wing libertarians

were promoting the interests of cable companies or telcos rather than describing a natural law. Bandwidth is limited by economic as well as technological realities and “the practice of internet traffic management”, far from being a threat to freedom, is the means by which these realities are dealt with.

In any case, net neutrality is a confusing idea. It requires no restrictions on content, sites, platforms, interconnecting equipment and modes of communication associated with the internet – a completely free market for internet communications with no

**The network itself
doesn't need to be
neutral, but the
way in which traffic
is managed does**

effective oversight of technical standards, no regulation of the market and no imposition of universal service obligations. It is a fantasy.

There are, of course, narrower definitions, drawing distinctions between the interests of end-users (the public) and infrastructure and service providers. These divide into the “swipes” – service providers such as Google and AOL – and the “pipes” – technology suppliers such as telecoms and network infrastructure companies.

Broadly speaking, pipes don't like net neutrality because it would open their networks to any service providers who want to use it, while swipes are in favour because lack of restriction would increase traffic and the profitability of their services. Independent ISPs, reselling bandwidth, fall between the two stools, on the one hand wanting unimpeded access to the network but on the other wanting to profit from the utilisation of their services.

There are already restrictions in

place, some built-in to the network and some imposed by supervening agencies such as national governments. There are various forms of traffic shaping, network handover protocols, government regulation and censorship, not to mention market domination by giant “telcos” and local loop monopolies.

In the UK, BT uses market dominance to manage access to its infrastructure by selling competitive broadband services. ISPs and carriers may restrict traffic by quota or content, using deep packet inspection to block certain kinds of traffic, such as P2P (“peer-to-peer” or file-sharing), FTP (file transfer) and online gaming.

Some carriers block VoIP (internet telephony like Skype) because it conflicts with their profitable phone services, some governments (like the Chinese) block access to whole categories of websites, while others (the previous UK Government among them) enforce restrictions on P2P traffic through ISP compliance.

So the argument is about traffic management, and while transparency regarding traffic management is critical, it is not necessarily important to end-users, who are less concerned with the technological process than enjoying universal service and high Quality of Service (QoS) standards.

A QoS “meter” – similar to the “traffic lights” nutrition system – could be used, backed up by mandatory declarations of service restrictions by ISPs.

So the network itself doesn't need to be neutral, but the way in which traffic is managed does.

This will be difficult to guarantee but requires regulation at an international level, rather than an ill-defined and market-driven idea such as net neutrality.

● Gary Herman is chair of the NUJ's New Media Industrial Council and author of its submission to Ofcom on internet traffic management.

Review

On show in Yorkshire, pitman paintings

THE PITS AND THE PENDULUM – COAL MINERS VERSUS FREE MARKETS
A retrospective of Andrew Turner's paintings, drawings, prints and banners

National Coal Mining Museum for England, near Wakefield, West Yorkshire, until January 23 2011

THE NORTH Selby NUM banner, designed and created by Andrew Turner, is the front cover of *Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath*.

It is an angry portrayal of the forces raged against the miners during the year-long pit strike of 1984-85, distinctive in its graphic detail.

Andrew Turner grew up in a pit village in West Lothian, Scotland and was "moulded by the rich culture of the mining community. My father's politics, humanity and union activity influenced me, and these themes slowly infiltrated my early drawings and paintings."

He trained as an artist and his portrayal of conflict reminds me of classic depictions by Goya and Picasso.

He has painted two dozen banners over the years but only two are on display (the North Selby NUM banner and ASLEF's Leeds branch banner) in the exhibition.

The others, he explained, are being used for their proper purpose, carried by their members in actions against the savage cuts the Lib-Dem coalition plan to drive through.



'The Nation mourns the death of Churchill': Andrew Turner drawing in the Wakefield exhibition

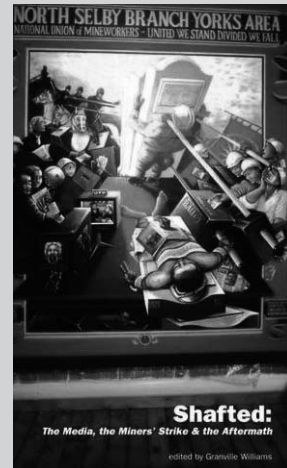
The exhibition does have the Black Friday Triptych, which comments on the 1921 Triple Alliance and has hung in the South Wales Miners' Library for more than 30 years, and a selection of Andrew Turner's drawings, studies and sketches.

"The Nation mourns the death of Churchill", in particular, captures his distinctive linkage of art and politics.

Granville Williams

SHAFTED: THE MEDIA, THE MINERS' STRIKE AND THE AFTERMATH

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Cameron's spin doctor past



**CAMPAIGN 2010 –
THE MAKING OF
THE PRIME
MINISTER**
Nicholas Jones
Biteback 9.99

by JOY JOHNSON

NICHOLAS JONES has been a keen observer of the political scene and in particular the dark arts of spin for a number of years. No one has been more assiduous in chronicling political theatre and its actors.

So it is entirely appropriate that he has recorded the end of an era, if not the end of spin, and with the creation of the coalition the beginning of something new – at least in principle, if not in ideology.

Jones recounts David Cameron's early years spinning for Conservative Central Office.

"Cameron's aptitude for briefing ministers and his ability to conjure up jokes and insults with which to taunt Labour's front bench was put to

immediate use during the heat of the 1992 election campaign," he writes.

Cameron gained a reputation for being the "perfect hand-holder" and following yet another Tory victory he became political adviser to Norman Lamont.

With an economic storm gathering over Britain's membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism Lamont floundered in the maelstrom of "Black Wednesday".

Cameron can be seen in the TV footage on the sidelines during Lamont's lamentable TV announcement outside the Treasury when Britain was thrown out of the ERM.

The Chancellor's credibility was in tatters but Cameron managed to extricate himself by showing "loyalty to his beleaguered ex-boss while at the same time avoiding doing anything to damage the Major government or the Conservative Party".

He managed this trick by becoming a valuable source of quotes and tip-offs, earning his spurs as a "Treasury insider" and "cabinet source", a trader in sensitive, off-record information.

Cameron took his skills to Carlton Television as Head of Corporate Relations. From the other side of the fence he saw TV proprietors courted by politicians.

No one courted the media more

than New Labour in the run up to 1997 election, in return for favourable coverage later.

Tony Blair convinced Rupert Murdoch that New Labour posed no threat to his media ambitions and in return Murdoch supported Blair and the war in Iraq.

This support was to last until Blair announced he would stand down. Murdoch professed himself not sure about Cameron but he had a problem with Ofcom and the Office of Fair Trading looking into various bits of his empire.

Cameron rode to the rescue and promised to strip Ofcom of much its authority. At the same time James Murdoch launched a tirade against the BBC and the Sun reported that Cameron would curb the BBC's bloated bureaucracy.

Cameron was duly rewarded. The day after Gordon Brown's Labour Conference speech the Sun splashed that "Labour's lost it".

After years of Murdoch's support for Blair, Cameron and his new director of communications Andy Coulson (a former *News of the World* editor), had won it back.

Nicholas Jones devotes a chapter to Murdoch that pulls the threads together.

It's a warning to us all.

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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j) 50,000 to 100,000 £225
k) Over 100,000 £450

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

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Tel _____

Email _____

Organisation (if applicable) _____

Return form to CPBF, 2nd floor, Vi and Garner Smith House, 23 Orford Road,
Walthamstow, London E17 9NL Tel: 020 8521 5932