

FREE Press

No 184 September-October 2011 £1 Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

Return of the right to reply

THE RIGHT of people who can show they have been maligned or misrepresented in the media to get their point of view published is nearer to becoming realised than ever before.

In the fall-out from the *News of the World* scandal, the right to reply figures prominently in the dizzying range of proposals being drawn up for consideration by the Leveson inquiry.

Groups and individuals from outside the usual array of campaigners and academics are calling for media justice. Debates are going on over definitions and such questions as whether the right to reply can be enforced by a self-regulatory structure, or whether some statutory backing is required.

What is generally agreed, outside newspaper circles at least, is that the Press Complaints Commission is beyond redemption and must be got rid of.

It is all most welcome to the CPBF, which for years has called for the right to reply, only to be knocked back by the media and political establishments.

These attempts include no fewer than four Parliamentary private members' bills between 1980 and 1993.

The press said it was unworkable and a threat to press freedom, and governments were scared to take them on.

The CPBF itself has just published a pamphlet, *A Chance For Change*,
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BBC out to 'Destroy Quality Forever'

DEATH BY 2,000 CUTS

BATTLE has been joined to save the BBC as its managers, in league with government, seek to undermine it from within. Since 2004 the BBC has been constantly destabilised, with a succession of reorganisations, cutbacks and redundancy programmes in which more than 7,000 jobs have gone.

The latest cull of 2,000 is the consequence of the last year's licence fee settlement, in which Director General Mark Thompson agreed to accept a six-year freeze in income and the responsibility to fund new areas such as the World Service, BBC Monitoring and the Welsh channel S4C.

In effect, Mark Thompson is collaborating with the enemies of the BBC in the private sector, who have complained long and loud that the BBC, with its guaranteed public source of income, presents them with unfair competition – a viewpoint shared by the Conservatives now in government.

The DG has caved in to the associated demand to cut non-broadcasting services and sold the BBC's highly profitable stable of magazines, which used to bolster licence fee income, including *Radio Times*, to a venture capitalist firm.

Spending is now being slashed by £670 million a year and managers have been reviewing operations, to choose what to cut. They gave this operation the laughable title of "Delivering Quality First".

BBC staff are angry and are fighting back. They were infuriated in October when Mark Thompson went to meet staff in Belfast and declared: "If you think you can't do your best work here then leave – no one is forcing you to stay".

Gerry Morrissey, General Secretary of technicians' union BECTU, said: "When Mark Thompson did the licence fee deal he said the BBC could not continue to do everything. I believe the BBC should have been brave and should have said we are not going to damage quality. This strategy is destroying quality, jobs and the BBC itself."

BBC News will bear the brunt of the job losses, with 800 positions lost, partly through merging the national newsroom with that of the World Service. A total of 387 are due to be scrapped at the World Service and BBC Monitoring, 100 of them compulsorily.

The NUJ has already held two days of strike action in protest. Former union President Pete Murray, a radio producer in Scotland, said: "Delivering Quality First is not about saving money. It is a politically-driven attack on public service broadcasting itself."

"Far from defending the BBC, Thompson has taken on the task of acting as the government's own axeman inside the BBC itself."

Now the unions are preparing ballots for intensified strike action to save jobs and, as they see it, the Corporation itself. The unions had tabled proposals

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FALL OF THE HOUSE OF MURDOCH

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PLURALITY MEANS EVERYONE

Media must listen to alternative views PAGES 2-3

Right to reply

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setting out the arguments for positive media regulation in all the areas to be examined by the Leveson inquiry. It argues for a law which "would give individuals a statutory right to the correction of factual inaccuracies".

This year is the 25th anniversary exhibition of the bitter year-long Wapping strike, in which the print unions that were routed by Rupert Murdoch had used the industrial right of reply to get some balance in the reporting of the 1984-85 miners' strike.

Most famously the NGA union stopped the *Sun* printing a front page attack on miners' leader Arthur Scargill under the headline MINE FUHRER.

And now the trade union movement is again taking up the call. The TUC congress in September unanimously supported a motion from the NUJ that stipulated that any new regulatory body set up to replace the PCC must have "clear powers to order meaningful recompense and ensure that the right of reply is established." The motion was moved for the NUJ by Barry White, the CPBF's national organiser.

The GMB union at its July congress passed a resolution calling for "an automatic right of reply for individuals and organisations".

Executive Council member Roy Dunnett said: "When the press maligns individuals and misrepresents the news there should be a body that insists on corrections and a right of reply."

At the Labour Party Conference the shadow culture secretary, Ivan Lewis, said: "We need a new system of independent regulation including proper like for like redress which means mistakes and falsehoods on the front page receive apologies and retraction on the front page."



● Front page of the *Sun*, May 18 1984: "right to reply" action by the NGA chapel stopped the paper's "MINE FUHRER" attack on the miners' leader



● The 32-page CPBF pamphlet *A Chance For Change* is available from the office for £1 each or 10 copies for £7, including post and packing. Send your order with a cheque to CPBF, 23 Orford Road, London E17 9NL.

DEATH BY CUTS

From page 1

to ensure "meaningful and transparent" consultations, which management brusquely rejected, signalling, the unions said, that it intends "to drive ahead with its planned schedule of cuts."

Staff in regional centres have started appealing to the public above managers' heads.

Leaflets are being handed to visitors to studios in Nottingham and Newcastle, calling on them to write to

politicians and BBC Trust chairman Lord Patten to oppose planned cuts to local services.

BBC Nottingham's leaflet renames the cutback programme plans "Destroy Quality Forever".

The Newcastle leaflet says: "Local radio's budget is being cut by 20 per cent. The programme budget is being cut by 40 per cent ... Staffing cuts mean the quality of ALL local radio programmes will be effected."

At national level the BBC announced that Radio 4 had been protected from budget cuts, but the producers of no fewer than 37 programme wrote to the

Journalists must learn to listen

JOY JOHNSON argues that true plurality is more than the sum of the usual voices: it means bringing them in from outside the consensus

TO COUNTERBALANCE a partisan press, UK broadcasting is predicated on a public service ethos with a duty of impartiality and balance. The BBC and the commercial broadcasters play an important role in Britain's democratic life, but balance must not be confused with the ritualised ping pong of political party sound-bites. Balanced journalism requires a plurality of voices, beyond of the "usual suspects".

Then again, broadcast journalists themselves, while their work may be impartial, do have their own views; in fact it is positive that these views inform their journalism. Lindsey Hilsum, international editor for Channel 4 News, writes on the Arab Spring in the current edition of *British Journalism Review*: "Opinion and emotion should enable us to understand the people we're reporting on, but if they distort our perception of reality, or blind us to the complexity of a conflict, then they've become an obstacle to establishing that ever elusive target, the truth."

In Britain we have had two major recent journalistic failures: the run-up to the war in Iraq and the financial crisis.

Nick Robinson, the BBC's political editor has publicly stated that he regretted that he did not "push hard enough"

BBC house magazine *Ariel* – itself to be closed down in the cuts – accusing Mark Thompson of failing to tell the truth.

The letter says: "Minutes after he finished speaking, we learned that 25 per cent of the producer and senior producer posts would be cut ... It is impossible to believe that quality won't be affected."

Pete Murray said of the chairman of the BBC Trust, Lord Patten: "His last big public job was to wind up Britain's last colony" – he was the last governor of Hong Kong. "Is he now about to preside over winding up the BBC as we know it?"

Regulation

in questioning ministers in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003; instead he saw his role as presenting the government's thinking – perhaps to explain the decision but not to critically analyse it. That would have required him to be opinionated, and to seek out views from outside the “prevailing wisdom” of the time.

The second journalistic failing related to the global financial crisis. While the speed of the economic firestorm after the collapse of Lehman Brothers may have been unpredictable, warnings of the turmoil to come had been building up, chronicled by a handful of journalists such as the *Guardian's* Larry Elliott, Gillian Tett from the *Financial Times* and the *Observer's* commentator Will Hutton.

Outside the journalistic sphere there were others filling in the financial jigsaw and issuing warnings for those that wanted to heed them. Ann Pettifor, economist and campaigner, argued before the crisis that the silence, collusion and complacency of central bankers, finance ministers and other world leaders would render those who were heavily indebted helpless in the face of an international “financial tsunami”.

Professor Joseph Stiglitz of New York's Columbia University, former Chief Economist at the World Bank and Chairman of President's Clinton Council of Economic Advisers, had warned since 2003 of the dangers of misguided deregulation.

He debunked the myths that had governed American economic policy and spread around the world and chastised the media for the “puff pieces” that glorified supposed heroes such as Alan Greenspan who had apparently created the boom years.

Yet how often were these voices heard on the mainstream media? They were outside the consensus established by the journalists in the field.

Just as the correspondents in the Westminster political lobby, with their obsessions with political personalities, had excluded opinions that were critical of the warmongers, so the city reporters were obsessed with the latest hot gossip from city insiders and didn't want to hear the voices of doom.

This suited everyone: the government who wanted the housing boom to go on forever, the banks who felt the same about the credit boom, the Treasury whose coffers were swollen with tax revenues and of course the bankers, whose bonuses then weren't the subject of politicians' derision.

These concerns require a change in how journalism is practiced. They demonstrate that real media plurality means breaking out of the cosy collusion between the politician and journalists – the very phenomenon that the Leveson inquiry was set up to examine.

There's a whole media world outside London

Plurality must apply not just to national media but all round the regions too, says **ADAM CHRISTIE**. The monopolistic companies that control the local press and broadcasting must be stopped from owning even more

THE MOST intense cutbacks and contractions of the last three years have been in the local and regional media, which are virtually all controlled by a handful of monopolistic companies.

The local and regional press, regional TV and local radio are all dominated by a very few news providers. And the fact they have been able to get away with the most savage cutbacks in spending and provision is directly connected.

At a time when the ownership of national media has become a hot political issue it would be cheating people all round the country to ignore the local scene.

And policy should cover not just publication but newsgathering and distribution too; however many publishers there may be, the fact the Press Association news agency has a monopoly of the supply of national and international news to regional media means that only one view of them – and a pretty limited, pro-establishment one at that – permeates through the country.

It is well-known that the “big four” regional newspaper publishers – Newsquest, Northcliffe, Trinity Mirror and Johnston Press – have resorted to “slash and burn” cost-cutting programmes as their only answer to the effects of the recession.

Their financial predicaments had been exacerbated by vast debts incurred making unwise acquisitions,

funded by borrowing at the height of the market, to expand their empires. Yet they still see even further consolidation as the route to salvation and their return to greater profitability.

Together with three smaller publishers they formed the Local Media Alliance, a lobby group closely linked to the Conservatives that pressed the case for fewer constraints on local media ownership – perhaps allowing the “big four” to become the “big three” or even “big two”.

When the Conservatives took power the first major media move they made was to relax the regulations on cross-ownership of local media, to allow companies to control combinations of newspapers, radio and TV, which had hitherto been restricted.

Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt then launched his scheme for local TV stations, with initial funding stolen from the BBC licence fee – but nothing to cover the operating costs.

Some see the extension of the “internet TV” online news bulletins produced by many regional papers as a way of “sharing” the expenditure with the newspapers they emanate from, with plurality being sacrificed to the newly-permitted cross-ownership.

Either way, campaigners and policy makers proposing new regulations at national level must take account of the effects in the very different conditions outside the metropolis.

THE WORKERS' STORY, the exhibition marking the 25th anniversary of the Wapping strike of 1986-87 against the Murdoch newspapers, is at the following venues over the next few months:

MANCHESTER
October 8-November 18: People's History Museum

November 18-14: Working Class Movement Library, Salford

BRIGHTON
November 28-December 1: Unite national sector conferences

LONDON
December 5-16: Unite Regional Sector Conferences, Green Lanes
January 9-31 2012: Bishopsgate Institute, Bishopsgate

For further information go to www.cpbfg.org.uk

The group of trade unionists who mounted the exhibition have produced a special anniversary edition of the *Wapping Post*, the tabloid produced by the strikers throughout the year-long dispute.

BBC

THE CRIMES OF OTHERS

Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt has been forced by the *News of the World* scandal to review the regulations on media ownership. He has announced that the review will focus not only on the newspapers that plunged the industry into crisis, but also on the BBC.

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS says that it would be utterly perverse to penalise the BBC because the press has abused its power



Jeremy Hunt: deflecting the crisis onto the BBC

JEREMY HUNT has had to change his tune since his unseemly attempt to stitch up a deal to give News Corporation control over BSkyB. The public exposure of the role of the Conservative-led government in trying to bend the rules in the Murdochs' favour has forced him to concede some of the objectors' points.

During the year that the BSkyB bid was going through the regulatory process there were mounting demands that News Corporation should be subjected to the "public interest" provisions of the 2003 Communications Act.

The test can be applied only when a takeover or merger is under consideration. The campaign demand that it should be applied at any time, whenever there was concern about the conduct of a large-scale media proprietor, was articulated by former Labour minister Graham Allen in a Parliamentary debate he initiated in September.

Jeremy Hunt's deputy Ed Vaizey responded that he understood the need to look at the system, "but we do not want to rush into a change in media ownership regulations simply as a reaction to one controversial takeover bid. However, that does not take away from the fact that we want to investigate the issue thoroughly."

In other words, the installation of a regime in which regulators might start investigations into companies and propose remedies to protect plurality as a matter of course is now on the government's agenda.

Jeremy Hunt has even had to recognise

The press want to shift the debate away from dubious journalistic practices to the supposed unfairness of the dominance of the BBC

the conflict of interest he personified during the BSKyB affair. The procedure was criticised for leaving the final decision in the hands of a minister with a political interest – in his own case a fairly open proponent of the Murdoch cause. He has now suggested that decisions on takeovers should rest with the regulators, to ensure “justice is seen to be done as well as actually being done”.

THE Culture Secretary was addressing the Royal Television Society conference in September, presenting his proposals on how to protect media “plurality”, which is the key concept in assessing media ownership.

Ofcom, he announced, would be asked to establish an agreed means of measuring media ownership to cover TV, newspapers, radio and other media. The regulator will “look at whether or not it is practical or advisable to set absolute limits on news market share; whether they believe a framework for measuring levels of plurality could or should include websites and if so which ones.”

Then he added another question: “and whether or how it should include the BBC”.

There is no equivalence between the

BBC and News Corporation. The BBC is a highly-regulated organisation subjected to continuous analysis and dependent on the periodic renewal of its Charter. It is required to produce impartial local, national and international news.

News Corporation on the other hand – with the exception of Sky News, which is required by law to be impartial – is driven by a different set of news values, those of the proprietor. When News Corp is at the centre of a story, reports in the Murdoch-owned media are non-existent or skewed – is in complete contrast with the way the BBC reports stories about itself.

Hostility to the BBC comes directly from the right wing press – the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph* and the Murdoch papers. Melanie Phillips wrote in the *Mail* recently that the problem lies explicitly with the BBC. There is, she said, “a media oligarchy which exercises far more power in Britain than News International. And that is the BBC”.

As press regulation comes under the Leveson spotlight the very papers that attack the BBC will fight tooth and nail to resist any attempt to impose regulation on them. They want to shift the debate away from dubious journalistic

practices to the supposed unfairness of the dominance of the BBC.

Especially the Murdochs; Charles Lewington, a BSKyB lobbyist with the PR group Hanover, has said: “In the arguments about media ownership and plurality of provision, the BBC and others who fought the BSKyB takeover might come to regret stirring up a hornets’ nest”.

There’s further irony in the position of Ofcom. In opposition Jeremy Hunt threatened to downsize and restrict its scope, again to please James Murdoch, yet now, if he keeps his word, it would take decision-making off ministers.

Ofcom was set up by New Labour to relax regulation and open up media markets – in its remit to promote competition it never once raised concern about the market dominance of News Corporation – not to turn down media moguls!

Any review of media plurality and the market share of firms has to be more than a statistical exercise (useful though that would be). It has to differentiate and factor in the roles and impact of different media too, and it would be perverse if policymakers were to regard the elevated position of BBC news as a problem to be corrected.

Thompson talks the press freedom talk

THE HYPOCRISY of BBC Director General Mark Thompson was laid bare when he made a ringing call for press freedom in September. He warned that British journalism is facing a “dangerous period” because of attempts by police to force news organisations to hand over confidential information.

Mark Thompson was speaking about police use of the Official Secrets Act to compel Guardian reporter Amelia Hill to disclose the source of her story that the *News of the World* had hacked the mobile phone of slain teenager Milly Dowler. He said it was part of a “disturbing trend ... for police forces routinely to demand that journalists disclose sources and hand over journalistic materials.

“At the BBC, we receive an ever-growing number of demands for untransmitted news rushes which the police seem to regard as having no more privilege or protection attached to them than CCTV pictures.”

All very true, but a week earlier he had himself ordered the surrender of such material to the same police force. The Metropolitan Police had asked broadcasters for raw footage of the London riots in August.

The BBC, together with ITV and Sky News, handed hundreds of hours of unbroadcast footage after being served with orders under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). The BBC said its policy was to “require requests for untransmitted

material to be made through the courts. A production order requiring footage of the riots was served on the BBC and a court agreed that the material should be supplied.”

It has always been axiomatic among journalists that you do not hand such material to police. It jeopardises the independence of the news media, making them appear to be part of the forces of law and order.

This in turn endangers reporters and camera crews on the streets. Many have been attacked by crowds who believe their images may be passed to police.

The courts have often refused to grant PACE orders when told that police have plentiful alternative sources. In London, the Met have



Mark Thompson: handed over riot footage

more than 20,000 hours of CCTV footage of the rioting – plus that taken by their own videographers.

Judges have often declined blanket applications, insisting that police indicate specific crimes at specific locations before granting limited orders for the precise material concerned.

No one can know what the courts might have said had broadcasters resisted this year’s applications, but this wholesale surrender of news footage is a worrying precedent.

News Corporation



THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF MURDOCH

It's part *Dynasty*, and part horror film ...
TIM GOPSILL chronicles the decline of
the first family of the global media

DONKEYHOTY

PEOPLE WHO don't read the *Daily Telegraph* will have missed Matt's front page cartoon on July 16. It showed two dinosaurs in the swamp. One is saying: "Murdochs used to rule the earth. Nobody knows why they suddenly disappeared."

They might not be totally extinct just yet, but the dynasty is doomed, at least as far running one of the world's biggest media groups is concerned. Major shareholders in News Corporation came close to dumping the sons of Rupert Murdoch off the board in October and the whole family is living on borrowed time.

The patriarch Rupert, his lovely wives and his unlovely children will disappear from the face of their own company once the American justice system and the corporate beasts who manage the enterprise have got their acts together.

The crisis of corruption between the Murdochs, governments and police chiefs has brought huge reverses for News Corp in Britain – not just the closure of the *News of the World* and the resignations and arrests of top News International executives, but the collapse of the crucial acquisition of the BSkyB satellite TV network. But it's the US that matters to News Corp and that is where the terminal damage will be done.

Rupert Murdoch took American citizenship in 1985 to meet a requirement of US laws on media ownership and run a TV network there. In 2004 his News Corporation, founded in Australia, shifted its HQ to New York.

There it is covered by the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act that forbids US-based companies to profit from bribery overseas, and the prosecuting authorities in the USA are rather more assiduous in pursuing wrongdoers than those here; a Wall Street hedge fund manager has just been jailed for 11 years for insider dealing, which would be unthinkable in Britain.

US prosecutors have opened an investigation into allegations that News International journalists in the UK had paid police officers for information.

The company was already under investigation by the FBI following allegations that victims of September 11 had their phones hacked by *News of the World* journalists. The *Daily Mirror* reported in July that journalists offered to pay a New York police officer to retrieve the private phone records of victims of the September 11 attacks.

London solicitor Mark Lewis, who has become something of an avenging angel in his work for the victims of voicemail-hacking, has teamed up with US lawyers representing 9/11 families to seek witness statements with a view to launching a class action against News Corp under the foreign corruption law.

There are also increasing moves against the Murdochs from elsewhere in corporate big business. A group of banks and investment funds with substantial

News Corporation

holdings in News Corp has issued a legal complaint accusing the company of widespread corporate misconduct.

The legal action is led by Amalgamated Bank, which manages \$12 billion in News Corp stock and holds a million shares itself. The shareholders accuse the board of allowing Rupert Murdoch to use News Corp as his “own personal fiefdom”.

In addition to the phone-hacking scandal at the *News of the World*, the complaint focuses on the business tactics of two News Corp subsidiaries – News America Marketing (NAM) and a British-based manufacturer of satellite TV smart cards called NDS – that are accused of “stealing computer technology, hacking into business plans and computers and violating the law through a wide range of anti-competitive behaviour”.

In the case of NAM, News Corp has spent \$650 million settling lawsuits brought by competitors. NAM’s former chief executive Paul Carlucci has been quoted as threatening a company starting up in the field of instore advertising: “If you ever get into any of our businesses, I will destroy you. I work for a man who wants it all, and doesn’t understand anybody telling him he can’t have it all.”

Evidence was presented in the trial of that case that NAM had broken into its rival’s computer systems at least 11 times. A former NAM executive who turned whistleblower and gave evidence against the firm was hounded into bankruptcy by a series of vindictive legal actions.

NDS is accused of illegally extracting the code of a rival firm’s smart cards used to unscramble satellite TV signals and charge subscribers. The firm allegedly posted the codes on the internet, allowing hackers to break into broadcasts for free, costing the competitor more than \$1 billion.

The shareholder banks allege that these cases show a “pattern of misconduct that extends far beyond the UK subsidiary. It demonstrates a corporate culture that allows this sort of misconduct to take place over a very long period of time.”

Their campaign against the Murdoch family gathered momentum with the call



The shareholders accuse the board of allowing Rupert Murdoch to use News Corp as his personal fiefdom

from Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS), an agency representing stockholders, for Rupert Murdoch and his sons James and Lachlan to be voted off the board at the 2011 AGM, which took place in Los Angeles in October. A number of other investors and associations took up the call.

Such open attacks are rare in the corporate world, but ISS said the phone hacking scandal had “laid bare a striking lack of stewardship and failure of independence by a board whose inability to set a strong tone-at-the-top about unethical

business practices has now resulted in enormous costs – financial, legal, regulatory, reputational and opportunity – for the shareholders the board ostensibly serves.”

The fact that News Corp’s structure gives the Murdoch family 40 per cent of the voting rights, despite owning only 12 per cent of the equity, saved the family bacon this time.

Even so, 35 per cent voted against James, who is effectively the company’s number three, and 34 per cent against his brother. If you discount the Murdochs’ votes and those of their Saudi backers, a big majority of shareholders did vote to unseat the boys. Chairman Rupert himself received 14 per cent “no” votes.

Outside pressure also prevented the appointment to the board of Elisabeth Murdoch, Rupert’s daughter, whose TV production company Shine was bought up by News Corp earlier this year for \$675 million. She herself received \$214

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Murdoch’s style – ‘ethics and integrity’

THE BREATHTAKING self-delusions of Rupert Murdoch were on show in August when he announced increased profits for last year.

It was a month after he had been summoned to appear before the Commons culture committee and demonstrated how hard he found it to answer

unwelcome questions; this is a man, after all, who has not been contradicted by anyone for decades.

But just weeks after this humiliation, brought on by the corruption, cynicism and deceit that are endemic to his entire operation, he was able to say: “There can be no doubt about our commitment to ethics and

integrity.

“I have run this company for more than 50 years, and the kind of behaviour that occurred in that [News of the World] newsroom has no place at News Corporation. Our fundamental goals are to produce sustained, meaningful value for shareholders, provide outstanding content and

services to customers and consumers – and do it with integrity.”

The reward for his transparent inability to ensure that his company performs as he clearly intends was a salary of \$33 million and cash bonus of \$12.5 million, up from \$4.4 million the year before despite the UK scandal.

Review

HOUSE OF MURDOCH

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million, a salary of \$1.7 million a year and the promise of a seat on the board, but this was withdrawn amid much muttering from the shareholders.

So it might not happen today, but the family will be gone tomorrow. Murdoch pere is 80 years old and can't keep hold of the reins for much longer, and his progeny are damaged goods – especially James, who until this summer was the heir presumptive.

But his gross miscalculations over the *News of the World* have cost him the confidence of the American big money men whose consent he would need to take over.

Within a year or two News Corp will be just another gigantic American media corporation, like Time Warner, Google, Facebook and the rest, run by business bullies like its present number two, Chase Carey, Paul Carlucci, or Fox TV chief Roger Ailes.

These men have no interest in British newspapers, which they regard as a nuisance and an obstacle to their greater ambitions, such as taking control of the BSkyB profit-churning machine.

The News International papers don't make nearly enough money and they will no doubt put them up for sale.

And as for who would buy them, that would be the stiffest test there has ever been for UK media ownership regulations.

No regulator could let them pass into the hands of rival national newspaper publishers, could they?

The greatest paper ever sold

PAGE ONE: INSIDE THE NEW YORK TIMES
dir Andrew Rossi, USA

POM WONDERFUL PRESENTS: THE GREATEST MOVIE EVER SOLD.
dir Morgan Spurlock, USA

AS WITH everything else, media in the USA are like the UK's but bigger. Big city newspapers are collapsing with debts of millions, and hundreds of lost jobs. TV programme content is determined by oilwells of money from sponsorship and product placement advertisers, or "co-promoters".

These phenomena are on show in two American documentary movies now touring UK cinemas. *Page One*, directed by Andrew Rossi, follows a year of the work of the *New York Times*, focusing narcissistically on the media desk. *POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold* is about product placement, focusing even more narcissistically on filmmaker Morgan Spurlock's determinedly hilarious project for a movie about PP financed entirely by PP.

Morgan Spurlock is one of those superego American writer/reporter/presenters who build the story round their own adventures. He got famous through *Super Size Me* (2004), in which he affected to poison himself to death by gorging on McDonald's products.

His shtick is to act the chancer who gets away with outrageous demands through roguish charm. The makers of *POM*, a pomegranate juice drink, duly gave him \$1 million to get the movie title. This doesn't

so much prove Spurlock's point that integrity in the media is a thing of the past, as that some entrepreneurs are vain and gullible morons with money to burn.

At the opposite media pole sits the *New York Times*, an institution so venerable that it warrants a documentary presented in hushed and worried tones. *Page One* does without the shouting that is standard for the genre, but it still has to state its point every few seconds – the point being that newspapers are mortally endangered by the internet and falling ad sales, and the demise of the *NYT* would be the greatest catastrophe for humanity since the fall of Carthage.

The paper is down to its last 1,000 journalists, after two rounds of 10 per cent job losses over the last two years. The decline is put in the context of the whole industry, as reported by the media desk – or at least, by four male staffers, since the two women on the desk declined to cooperate.

Among them is the surprise star of the film, reporter David Carr, an apparently chaotic reformed drug addict with a brilliant mind, an acid wit and a devotion to the *NYT* that borders on idolatry. He is the one who did last year's stories on the *News of the World* voicemail-hacking scandal that so infuriated Murdoch's London lieutenants, who raged that the *NYT* was motivated by rivalry with Murdoch's *Wall Street Journal*. Fine by me!

But these movies, by current standards of British documentaries, are a mess. By tomorrow's standards, who knows?

Tim Gopsill

Free Press is edited by Tim Gopsill on behalf of the National Council. This issue went to press on October 26. Send letters, comments, articles and ideas to freepress@cpbf.org.uk

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