

FREE Press

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IT'S ALL ABOUT OWNERS

THE LEVESON Inquiry looks set to duck the most important issue in media reform: how to cut back the corrosive scope and power of Big Media.

Ten months of hearings have laid bare evidence of malpractice and corruption by News International on a grand scale. The problem has been clearly shown to be the power generated by the sheer size of the Murdoch holdings in the UK – more than a third of the national newspapers market and the dominating share of the biggest and most profitable TV group in Europe.

Leveson was charged with producing proposals to stop any company amassing this kind of power again. The solution should be a limit on the range of media that any company can own, but related developments at the inquiry and at the culture department indicate that no such action is on the cards.

The fourth and final stage of the inquiry – following the probes into the press, politicians and the police – was to open on July 9. Its stated remit is to produce recommendations “for a new more effective policy and regulatory regime which supports ... the plurality of the media” and

address “how future concerns about press behaviour, media policy, regulation and cross-media ownership should be dealt with by all the relevant authorities ...”

Lord Justice Leveson posted a series of questions on the inquiry website and invited responses. Not one of them related to media ownership. Instead discussion is centred on a new regime for regulating media content, to replace the discredited Press Complaint Commission. The only high-profile witness who has demanded a limit on ownership has been Labour leader Ed Miliband, who said News

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NO PUBLIC VOICE ON MEDIA LAWS

by Frances Balfour

CULTURE SECRETARY Jeremy Hunt has scrapped the public consultation process planned to precede the next Communications Act.

In May last year he invited replies to an open letter on communications policy, promising a green paper for wide consultation, leading to a formal White Paper and draft Bill in 2013.

Publication of this green paper was repeatedly delayed until in June he announced it had been cancelled; instead he is staging a series of private seminars with industry figures.

The decision means that campaigning organisations like the CPBF will lose their say on forming media policy. The culture ministry justified it by claiming that the responses to the open letter said “there was no need for a complete overhaul of the legislation”, though there is the need “to update regulations to ensure they are fit for the digital age.”

Not all the responses said that, for sure. Indeed, CPBF submission to the ministry a year opened with this paragraph: “There is no doubt that the regulatory structure for the media in the UK is in need of change. The current regime is confused and driven by an over simplistic conception of the social and

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‘The government is seeking to break the security of the internet on a scale that the most ambitious dictator could hardly dream of’

HORROR OF CYBER SNOOPING LAW

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How Leveson let Tories off the hook

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News

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Corporation should be forced to sell either the Sun or the Times because “no one person should control 34% of the newspaper market”. He said: “We should have no worries of somebody owning up to 20 per cent of the newspaper market ... There is then a question of between 20 per cent to 30 per cent where you should set a limit.”

His evidence was derided by commentators who made much of the difficulties in calculating shares of complex converging – and declining – markets. BBC media pundit Steve Hewlett wrote in the *Guardian* that Lord Justice Leveson “visibly winced and it’s easy to see why.

“Miliband’s idea is deceptively simple. In a converging media marketplace, measuring and controlling newspaper ownership alone rather misses the point. TV viewing, radio listening and internet use all need to be taken into account. Once you do so the difficulties of measuring anything meaningful multiply.”

Meanwhile the culture department is preparing for a new Communications Act that could strengthen competition law and introduce regulations on cross-ownership and the conduct of media corporations. But a planned Green Paper on communications to stimulate public debate has been summarily scrapped and replaced by a series of invitation-only industry seminars whose announced subjects ignore questions of ownership and control.

The CPBF has urged Leveson to stick to his original remit. In its final submission it says: “This is a historic opportunity to address the totality of communications regulation.

“The UK media system has high levels of concentration of ownership, bottlenecks and gateway control at key points across the press, TV, radio and online media markets. Current media ownership rules do not adequately protect pluralism.”

The Co-ordinating Committee for Media Reform (CCMR), of which the CPBF is a member, has also told Leveson that

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economic purposes of mass communications. The structures of regulation are profoundly undemocratic in constitution and the procedures adopted by the main media regulator, Ofcom, can fairly be characterised as more concerned with the commercial interests of the industry it regulates than with the wider interests of the public.”

The replacement seminars are invitation-only, with a limited number of places, though interested individuals can apply, and their requests “will be considered”.

“reforms to press regulation will fail if they are not accompanied by a more decisive challenge to the concentration of media ownership.

“We are concerned that this focus on the need for structural change is in danger of being lost amidst narrower discussions concerning freedom of expression and the best way to balance editorial independence with public oversight, a debate largely framed by editors and proprietors. It is vital that we do not lose sight of the overwhelming need to break up the concentrations of media power that have corrupted British political life.”

It is not just campaigning groups that have drawn attention to the need to curb Big Media power.

When it considered the Murdoch bid to buy out BSkyB, Ofcom warned that, once that move or any other merger was approved, “there is no subsequent opportunity or mechanism to address plurality concerns that may emerge.”

In other words, had it not been for the the phone-hacking scandal, News Corporation would be the outright owner of BSky, the Murdochs would be more powerful than ever before, and there would be nothing anyone could do about it.

For legislation that will set the future regulation of the broadcast media ad digital technology, their subject matters are entirely commercial, including: The Consumer Perspective, Competition Content Markets, Maximising the value of spectrum to support growth and innovation, and Driving investment and growth in the UK’s TV content industries.

No mention is made in the programme of the need for regulation to address the concentration of media ownership – the great problem exposed by the Leveson process; nor is there a single reference to the BBC.

FAR BETTER THAN THE PCC

THE CPBF is calling for a Media Standards and Freedom Council to replace the Press Complaints Commission.

The proposal is in the campaign’s evidence to the final stage of the Leveson Inquiry.

The MSFC would :

- produce a code of ethical standards and administer a public right to reply and redress on matters relating to the application of its code of ethical standards.
- issue advice and guidance to the media and the public investigate and monitor media standards, ownership and control
- investigate and monitor media standards, ownership and control.

It would help members of the public make complaints to media organisations, via an ombudsman who would mediate with a view to achieving an agreed solution.

Where no resolution is achieved it could order a publication to print a correction, retraction, clarification or apology.

If an editor does not comply, the MSFC could get the order enforced by the courts.

The MSFC itself would have representatives of media owners and editors, media unions and members of the public.

It would be financed by a levy on advertising revenues generated by the publishers concerned.

Its remit would cover not just newspapers but all print and online publications.

The only exceptions would be broadcasters already regulated by Ofcom according to statutory regulations, and their websites.

HOW TO STOP MORE MURDOCHS

The CPBF’s formula to check the power of Big Media

THIRTY PER CENT must be the maximum share of any national media market that any one company can control.

That’s the CPBF’s formula for new ownership regulations in its submission to the Leveson Inquiry. And any company hitting 15 per cent of a market is liable to be subjected to conditions on its performance.

The regime should centre on the “Public Interest” (PI) test, under which regulators would be able to assess the impact on media plurality. The campaign said: “Strong cross-ownership rules are needed with clear ceil-

ings on the share across media markets. Any supplier with a 15 per cent share in a designated media market should be subject to a PI test in respect of any merger or acquisition in the same or another media market.

The PI test was established by the Communications Act 2003, and should be revised and expanded to be applied by Ofcom at any time, not just, as at present, during takeover or merger bids. The markets concerned could be national and regional news in radio, television, newspapers, online).

● These are summaries of the proposals submitted to Leveson. Full details are at www.cpbf.org.uk

Editors' cover is blown as the readers say what they want

IT'S THE oldest riddle in the media quizbook: what's the difference between a story in the public interest and one that interests the public? Downmarket journalists say there's none, which justifies any intrusive and offensive reporting; upmarket colleagues and media campaigners say there's a world of difference.

For once there is now an answer. Opinion research carried out by YouGov for the *British Journalism Review* set out to test attitudes to the publication of stories that involved intrusion into private life. The results confounded the belief that readers just want to read salacious gossip and don't care about journalistic practices.

To establish how attitudes to "public interest" varied across different kinds of stories, the pollsters posed eight story lines and asked people whether newspapers should publish them. Respondents were offered three possible answers: that a story was:

- definitely in the public interest and should be published
- not in the public interest but nevertheless should be published, or
- a private matter and should not be published

The results showed a strong feeling that intrusive reporting into private lives is not justified for stories that lack a genuine public interest.

Steven Barnett, professor at Westminster University whom commissioned the research for the BJR, said: "There was a very clear majority in favour of publication in the public interest, but for those stories which were more about inappropriate behaviour or misfortune relating to people in the public eye, there was an equally clear majority against publication.

"With the footballer story you have two ingredients which – in the opinion of most tabloid editors – would make the story fair game, but most people think it should not be published, and those figures barely change between readers of different kinds of newspaper.

"The British public understand the distinction between watchdog journalism which holds power to account and celebrity journalism which has little public value even if some of it might be 'interesting' (after all, most of us like a bit of juicy gossip). This survey has not been reported elsewhere. None of the newspapers has shown the slightest interest in survey data which manifestly contradict the public views of most national newspaper editors," Steven Barnett said.

Serious reporting, not tittle-tattle

Foods sold by a major supermarket have been contaminated with bacteria	92	3	2
A High Court judge has large investments in foreign companies linked to the illegal drugs trade	80	12	2
A schoolteacher has been passing on exam questions to her students to help their GCSE grades	70	22	4
A company testing medicines is suspected of cruelty towards animals	7	21	5
A well-known England footballer, who is married with young children, is having an affair	6	30	58
A leading politician's daughter is found drunk in public	2	22	69
A member of a leading pop group has had cosmetic surgery to change the shape of her face	3	25	66
A contestant on Britain's Got Talent who has reached the final once tried to commit suicide	3	12	80

IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND SHOULD BE PUBLISHED

NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST BUT SHOULD BE PUBLISHED

NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND SHOULD NOT BE PUBLISHED

They hope for better press regulation too

MOST BRITISH people trust the Leveson inquiry to deliver more effective regulation of the press and better protection of the public from intrusion, according to a poll carried out for the *Times*.

In a poll carried out by Populus 59 per cent agreed that "the Leveson Inquiry will lead to more effective regulation of the press offering better protection to members of the public against unwarranted

intrusion into their private lives." 27 per cent disagreed.

Interestingly, however, the *Times* did not itself report this finding. It was one of a series of questions apparently designed to discredit the Leveson process.

The *Times* did report that 61 per cent agreed that the "Leveson inquiry has lost its way as a procession of politicians, journalists and celebrities have simply

tried to defend themselves against one another's allegations."

And the same proportion felt that the inquiry had "received too much coverage in the media" – as if either proposition was the point. The phantom question was uncovered by Hacked Off campaigner Brian Cathcart who went through the data on the website.

Now, who owns the *Times* again?

Cyber-snooping

SPIES ON THE LINE

Internet security is facing its biggest-ever threat, says **SIMON DAVIES**, and it comes from the UK government. The Communications Data Bill about to go through Parliament would set up the most pervasive and intrusive regime of cyber-snooping in the world. But there is a growing protest movement against it. Approaching 200,000 people had signed an online petition by the campaign group 38 Degrees as *Free Press* went to press

THE GOVERNMENT has published legislation that will permanently cement Britain's standing as the developed world's most watched society.

The Draft Communications Data Bill purports to make Britain safer by requiring all phone and internet providers to retain detailed files of all online activity, emails, mobile phone location and every phone call. There will be no exceptions. Whether you send and email or text, visit a gay sexual health website or call your Aunt Mabel in Maidstone, the government will have the right to scrutinise that activity for up to a year.

The surveillance relates to "communications data" (who contacted who, with what technology, in what location and at what time) rather than the content – listening in to a call or reading an email. But communications data surveillance is by far the most intrusive technique. Imagine an informant sitting behind you and noting down everything you do online.

Authority already exists under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) for government and police to request communications data. In 2010 public authorities made more than half a million such requests, a figure that rises 5 percent year on year and which is likely to rise even more once a richer reserve of data is available to them.

On the basis of what we know about existing requests, it's clear that they have relatively little to do with crime prevention and much more to do with government administration and tax collection.

The government argues that it needs these new powers to catch up with new

communications media. It asserts that online social networking, gaming sites, advanced email and mobile systems, voice-over IP and instant messaging have eclipsed the government's ability to conduct surveillance.

They claim the measures are necessary because most investigations are conducted post-fact and this requires the creation of a distributed national archive of everyone's activity "just in case it is needed".

Then the justification was the "class

It is breaking the security of the internet on a scale that the most ambitious dictator could hardly dream of

enemy"; now it is criminality. The level and process of mass infiltration is the same in both cases. That's why Germany, with other countries such as Romania and the Czech Republic, has already ruled the technology unlawful.

The scheme however is more than just a mammoth threat to civil liberty. By seeking to access major communications systems such as Gmail, which use encryption, the government is proposing to break the security of the internet on a scale that the most ambitious dictator could scarcely dream of.

These plans were originally drawn up in the autumn years of the previous Labour administration but were shelved shortly before the general election. Labour was right to sense an election risk.

It was, after all, proposing to reach deep into the private life of everyone in the nation. The government had laid out its cards that it wanted to know everything you do across the communications spectrum. Labour strategists with long memories recalled the bitter campaign of resistance in the early 2000s against email and phone snooping under RIPA. And with the Tories trying to build a civil liberties platform Labour needed to narrow the divide.

BACK THEN the scheme was known as the "Interception Modernisation Programme". It was an idea that a London School of Economics report described (and I'm paraphrasing here) as a complete and utter technological farce without any evidential basis. The report went on to warn that such a scheme would inevitably "result in a level of surveillance never seen before".

In an attempt to escape such savage attention and shake off the dogs of civil liberties the scheme was dusted off and renamed the "Communications Capabilities Development Programme". The two are one and the same scheme.

Neither has offered any evidential foundation about the "threat" that the scheme claims to target or the likely benefits to be realized as part of the "balance" (sacrifice of rights) that must be made.

Indeed the most entertaining common feature of the most intrusive surveillance scheme of modern times is the extent to which Home Secretaries on both sides of the House – while extolling the scheme – have fallen over themselves to establish

Cyber-snooping



their deep regard for privacy and liberties.

The government has tried to assuage civil liberties concerns by arguing that only terrorists and criminals have cause to fear – with a repeated emphasis on paedophiles. The paedophiles were only recently wheeled in as a sort of PR patch. They certainly weren't in evidence in 2009.

The introduction to the draft legislation plays down the intrusiveness of the new measures, and infers it should be self evident that safeguards should be at a lower level for communications data than for traditional phone intercept requests.

The argument is flawed. The “traffic data” generated by mobile calls alone provides a wealth of information on who you know and where you've been. Police and other agencies have for more than 15 years used systems such as Harlequin's WatCall software to convert lists of phone calls, obtained automatically (without any judicial oversight) from phone companies, into “friendship networks” that can be matched with information in police intelligence computers.

The traffic data also contains information on the areas from which calls were made and the phones that are active in that specific location. The data can be retrieved retrospectively or – depending on the sophistication of the technology – in real time. When this data is combined with analysis of internet activity the result is a devastatingly detailed profile of a person's movements, associations, interests and transactions.

This legislation – despite a length of 36,000 words – is silent on the details of exactly how this plan will work, its limits or the technology behind it. The type of data available, who will gain access to it, for what purposes and in what circumstances, are left to the order-making powers of the Home Secretary.

DR GUS HOSEIN, Executive Director of the rights watchdog Privacy International, was scathing in his criticism: “In the UK, we've historically operated under the presumption that the government has no business peering into the lives of citizens unless there is good reason to – that people are innocent until proven guilty.

This legislation would reverse that presumption and fundamentally change the relationship between citizen and state, and their relationship with their internet and mobile service providers. Yet there are still big question marks over whether Facebook and Google will be brought under RIPA, and how far the government is willing to go in undermining internet security in order to fulfil its insatiable desire for data.”

● *Simon Davies is the founder of Privacy International and now works with the London School of Economics. He blogs at www.privacysurgeon.com*

SIR TIM JOINS THE PROTEST

INTERNET PIONEER Sir Tim Berners-Lee has joined the growing chorus of condemnation over the legislation.

In an interview with the Guardian he warned that the scheme would become a “destruction of human rights” and would make a huge amount of highly intimate information vulnerable to theft or release by corrupt officials.

Tim Berners-Lee said: “The idea that we should routinely record information about people is obviously very dangerous. It means that there will be information around which could be stolen, which can be acquired through corrupt officials or corrupt operators, and [could be] used, for example, to blackmail people in the government or people in the military. We open ourselves out, if we store this information, to it being abused.”

“You get to know every detail, you get to know, in a way, more intimate details about their life than any person that they talk to because often people will confide in the internet as they find their way through medical websites ... or as an adolescent finds their way through a website about homosexuality, wondering what they are and whether they should talk to people about it.”

The distinguished engineer has in recent years become more vocal about his concerns over internet snooping by government. His original optimism that the internet could organically build solutions to circumvent such scrutiny seems to have taken a somber turn.



CAMPUSPARTYBRASIL

How the Murdoch war was won

NICHOLAS JONES tells how the Leveson Inquiry let the Tory leaders off the hook over their dealings with the Murdoch press

DESPITE ALL the hullabaloo over the sensational appearance of Britain's political leaders before Lord Justice Leveson, the inquiry has failed to examine the nuts and bolts of the political patronage exercised by the Murdoch press.

Both Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne, when they gave evidence, were allowed to dodge the tricky questions on how they had brought the Tories to toe the Murdoch line.

George Osborne – one of the key strategists in the Conservatives' 2010 general election victory – said he “could not remember a specific strategy” by the Conservatives to seek the endorsement of the Sun newspaper.

Robert Jay QC, counsel for the inquiry, let this vague reply pass without a single detailed supplementary question, making no mention of the signed articles and exclusive interviews given by the Conservative leader David Cameron in support of Sun campaigns. Perhaps the

David Cameron put a spin doctor's gloss on the relationship

most glaring omission of all was Robert Jay's failure to question Osborne on the pre-election support given by the Conservatives to the campaign in the Sun and the *News of the World* for a freeze in the BBC licence fee – a freeze which was duly delivered by the coalition government within months of the 2010 general election.

If Jay had taken the opportunity, he could have put George Osborne's answers to the test: there were repeated examples of campaigns waged the Sun and *News of the World* which were endorsed by Cameron and were clearly the inspiration of the Conservatives' spin doctor, Andy Coulson.

The Chancellor was given similar

light-touch treatment when questioned over the sequence of events that led the Conservatives, on his recommendation, to choose former *News of the World* editor as head of communications.

Robert Jay left unasked questions regarding the need for due diligence in checking the former editor's role in phone-hacking. Had the Conservative Party made its own inquiries? And were no further checks made in the light of accumulating reports that challenged the claim that only one reporter had been involved?

George Osborne stressed repeatedly that Andy Coulson's connections with *News International* had not been a factor in his appointment; he was chosen because of his experience as editor of a national newspaper, running a national newsroom, and his ability to handle the hour-by-hour problems thrown up in a fast-moving news environment.

Both he and David Cameron were

Osborne was given the light-touch treatment over appointing Coulson

unchallenged in denying that they tried to woo the support of the Murdoch press. David Cameron was asked if he had tried to develop a strategy as to see how the Sun might be won over. He replied: “No I think we developed a strategy about how to explain the policies we believed in and how to spread them as far as we can.”

George Osborne said: “We were aware of the importance of the Sun because of the role people think it plays in British politics but I don't think there was a conspiracy which fused the endorsement of the Sun with the commercial interests of the Murdoch Press.”

At this point Jay could have referred to the *News of the World's* “exclusive” story in November 2008 about the “more than fifty” BBC executives who earned more than the Prime Minister and David Cameron's follow up article next day in the Sun: “Bloated BBC out of touch with viewers”.

He might have asked about the Conservatives' pre-election commitment to scale back the BBC which was trumpeted with the Sun headline: “Cameron: We'll freeze the licence fee”; or about the campaign by James Murdoch against the broadcasting regulator Ofcom and David Cameron's promise – again trumpeted by the Sun – to return to government Ofcom's policy-making functions.

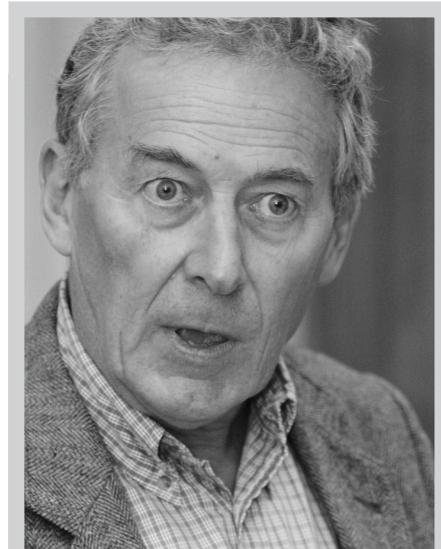
David Cameron put a spin doctor's “chicken and egg” gloss on the relationship: Rupert Murdoch had no alternative

but to respond to what the Sun's readers were telling the editor and the switch would have taken place anyway, without the help of Andy Coulson.

In this the Prime Minister precisely echoed Tony Blair's earlier evidence that the same mysterious thing happened 12 years earlier, without the efforts of Peter Mandelson and Alastair Campbell.

David Cameron also insisted that Andy Coulson's ability to win over the Sun was not the reason why he was appointed. Regrettably Robert Jay did not pursue the point nor press David Cameron on Andy Coulson's role in reconnecting the Conservatives to the news agenda of the Sun and the *News of the World*.

In fact Andy Coulson did have a pivotal role. The Tories could not have done more to endorse such Sun campaigns as support for “Our Boys”, the sacking of Sharon Shoemith over the death of Baby P and the attacks on the “bloated BBC” and the broadcasting regulator Ofcom. This was the day-to-day currency of a developing relationship which culminated in the Sun abandoning Labour during the party's 2009 conference.



STEFANO CAGNONI

READ Nicholas Jones's commentary on all the political evidence at the Leveson Inquiry at www.cpbf.org.uk

The campaign website also carries podcasts on hot media topics, presented by Nicholas Jones. Recent additions include:

- Saving the BBC from itself: podcast on the tasks facing the new Director-general
- Leveson after Murdoch: podcast on the deception and consequences of the Murdoch's evidence.

Reviews

IN THE FRONT ROW OF THE FIGHT



ARTHUR SCARGILL leads Yorkshire miners to support the Grunwick strikers, 1982. This almost biblical scene is one iconic image from Andrew Wiard's current exhibition, "Us and Them".

Andrew Wiard has been tirelessly chronicling radical campaigns and workers' struggles for more than four decades, from Grunwick, the Brixton riots and the Greenham Common protests of the 1980s to the 2010 student protest and last year's traveller evictions at Dale Farm.

In 1974 he joined Report, the radical picture agency run by German exile Simon

Guttmann, who, he says was "one of the most influential figures in the history of photography".

The nature of photojournalism has changed, not least with digital technology, but to Andrew Wiard the biggest and most damaging change is in the market place. As an active member of the NUJ, and passionate about protecting his profession he says: "When I began picture agencies were run by people ... whose life was photography.

"Now the market is increasingly dominated by a few big buyers and few big distributors, principally Getty, and freelance

photographers are crushed."

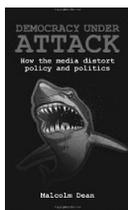
Alongside the image of Arthur Scargill is another taken at Grunwick's that shows strike-leader Jayabeen Desai confronting the police on a picket line.

The caption reads: "The strike is not so much about pay; it's about human dignity". Andrew Wiard gives dignity to those he photographs, with a sense that he is not only observing the struggle but is part of that struggle as well.

Janina Struk

● *Us and Them* is at the Karamel Gallery, 4 Coburg Road, London N22 6UJ until July 28

No care for the community



DEMOCRACY UNDER ATTACK: HOW THE MEDIA DISTORT POLICY AND POLITICS

Malcolm Dean

The Policy Press, £19.99

MALCOLM DEAN launched the Society section of the *Guardian* in 1979, and edited it for 20 years. He is thus the ideal author for a book which tries to answer the question: what role do the media play in formulating social policy?

More specifically, he asks: "Has this role changed over time? Are there some areas – asylum, crime, immigration, drugs, welfare, for example – where right-wing tabloids have more power because of their ability to fan public fears, prejudices and anxieties. To what extent do the media change public opinion. Perhaps more importantly, to what extent do ministers believe tabloids influence public opinion and adjust their decisions accordingly?"

Malcolm Dean begins with an examination of how the media responded to the rise of the welfare state. He then examines media influence on policy-making on law and order, asylum, poverty, education, health and social care, and housing. The final chapter, *Subverting Democracy*, explores the "seven sins of the reptiles": dumbing down, being more interested in party politicking than in policy issues, the rat

pack mentality, and being too adversarial, too easily duped and too negative.

This is a remarkably detailed book, drawing not only on 40 years of journalistic experience, but over 150 interviews with participants in the policy-making process. Dean is careful not simply to lay all the blame for ill-thought-out and populist policies at the doors of the media (by which he actually means the press, for the most part), and the book is an intricate and subtle study of the interplay between politicians, media pressure groups, civil servants, think tanks and social research funders.

But what emerges is the sheer vile-ness of most of the British press and the appalling pusillanimity of politicians who have allowed, indeed encouraged, this attack dog to develop and flourish in our midst.

Julian Petley

Review

The Murdochs: Tom's part in their downfall



DIAL M FOR MURDOCH
Tom Watson and Martin Hickman
 Allen Lane, £14.99

TOM WATSON is the pugnacious Labour backbencher who helped bring down the Murdochs by fighting with weapons to which they had no defence.

They are not accustomed to facing public confrontation, dogged persistence and a refusal to be intimidated or bought off, just as they could not get a handle on the similar journalistic qualities displayed by Nick Davies at the Guardian. Journalists do what they're told, don't they?

So, as a rule, do Labour MPs, and Tom Watson is an intensely tribal party politician, a ferocious Brownite in Labour's internecine conflict of the 2000s.

He does not take prisoners. He forced a vote over the insertion of a gratuitous "not fit and proper" clause in the Commons culture committee report into phone-hacking, just to manoeuvre the Tories into seeming to defend the Murdochs, when a unanimously unfavourably report might have been politically more effective.

He called the Murdochs "Mafiosi", even though they don't mow down their critics with machine guns in the street, as far as we know.

So his book, with its sinister title, might have been a crude self-serving narrative of his own heroic deeds. The fact that it is far from that, an excellent all-round account of the downfall of the Murdochs, is very greatly to his credit.

In practice it is to the credit of co-author Martin Hickman, the Independent reporter who picked up on the phone-hacking story to provide the best coverage after the Guardian's. The combination of Tom Watson's campaigning zeal and Martin Hickman's scrupulous reporting makes this a very good book.

It even incorporates criticisms of the Labour leadership's attempts to lay off the scandal and snuff out Tom Watson's crusade.

A memo is embarrassingly presented in which MPs were instructed not to link the scandal with the BSkyB bid, which concludes: "We must guard against anything which appears to be attacking a particular newspaper group out of spite."

The book has had the fortune to come out a while before the one that will inevitably push it into the shade: the account from Nick Davies that is said to be on the way.

Tim Gopsill

TIP OF A BIG ICEBERG

THE AUTHORS have delivered a brave book of extreme importance and interest, detailing the scope of News International's neutering of politicians of all hues and its control of sections of New Scotland Yard from the highest officers right down to the bobby on the beat.

There's a notable comparison between top police officer John Yates's enthusiasm for pursuing the unproven allegations of selling peerages by Labour ministers and his indifference to the evidence of the extent of phone hacking; he admitted to the Parliamentary committee that he hadn't even read it.

Tom Watson and Martin Hickman lift a very slimy stone to reveal the almost gangster-like power of News International over any group or individual that dares to question their vile practices, comparing it again with the sycophantic fawning of politicians who will drop everything to traipse across continents at their master's call.

The information garnered by the authors is definitely more than the tip of the iceberg. But there still is an abundance of information to come.
Brian Donovan

Free Press is edited by Tim Gopsill on behalf of the National Council. This issue went to press on July 1.
 Send letters, comments, articles and ideas to freepress@cpbf.org.uk

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