

FREE PRESS

No 193 May–June 2013

£1

Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

REGULATION

The time to decide

THE CRUNCH is coming in the battle over media regulation, as the press barons defy government, Parliament and most of the people to defend their waning power.

Six months after Lord Leveson delivered his report the niceties of discussion over his moderate reforms have come down to a naked power struggle.

Last December, even as the papers were damning them as dictatorial, the editors were indicating they could go along with the bulk of them and were prepared to negotiate over the rest. That didn't last long.

The editors (the Times, the Guardian, Independent and Financial Times) who had convened the gathering were pushed aside; the Times editor James Harding was sacked by Rupert Murdoch. The right-wing editors took over and negotiations stopped.

In March the political parties concocted a formula for establishing the new regulator, by means of a Royal Charter.

There was no formal reaction but the publishers indicated they would never accept it, and in April the right-wing papers – the Murdoch, Mail and Telegraph titles – produced their own version. Other editors had been excluded from the exercise.

The new plan would be submitted to the Privy Council, the archaic body responsible for issuing Royal Charters.

The Council was due to meet in mid-May to endorse the government plan, but constitutional experts said it was now unlikely to be able to do

so. Royal Charters are supposed to be generally agreed to and not contentious.

The outcome could be chaotic. The national press has never had to make concessions to anyone and is unlikely to do so. It will also refuse to join any regulator set up under the government charter.

It is also unlikely that the Prime Minister, whether he wants to or not, could abandon the charter plan agreed with the other parties and accept the editors'.

There could be a new regulator that no major publishers will join. There could be several regulators. There could be none. The Press Complaints Commission could even keep going, under a new name and with a few Leveson amendments, without joining the government scheme.

The editors are adamant they will not give up the control they have enjoyed over the regulator. These are the main sticking points in their plan that the government will find it hard to accept:

- The Royal Charter could only be changed with the agreement of the industry (not by Parliament).
- An industry veto on appointments to the regulatory board
- No power for the regulator to order the publication of apologies
- A representative of the industry on the appointments panel.
- Retention of the powerful industry-controlled Press Board of Finance as the funding body for the regulator.

3 WHAT REALLY IS PLURALITY? And why it really matters

4 GOOD NEWS ON LIBEL LAW But for Leveson it's not

6 IT'S ALL ABOUT POLITICS 'I call it Fraudcast News'

For all the latest on the campaign go to www.cpbpf.org.uk

WHO'S THAT WITH MARTIN?

European Parliament President Martin Schulz grips and grins with British media reform idol Hugh Grant as they sign the European Initiative petition for media plurality. The CPBF is supporting the circulation of the Europe-wide petition in the UK and took part in the formal launch in March.

TURN TO PAGE 2



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The race is on for one million names

THE CALL has been made in March for fairer and more diverse media with of a Europe-wide petition asking the EU to legislate against the concentration of ownership and control in the hands of too few companies.

The European Initiative on Media Plurality had its UK launch in London on March 21. The initiative has to attract a million signatures across the continent; if it achieves that the EU commission must discuss issuing a directive to ensure media in every state must be widely owned.

"This is an ambitious and inspiring project to develop a clear, democratic framework for the media across the European Union," said Granville Williams, the UK co-ordinator for the initiative. "It involves co-operation amongst over more than 100 organisations who care about free and independent media."

Granville Williams is a writer and campaigner on media freedom and a member of the CPBF national council. The CPBF is supporting the online petition.

The petition specifically rules out any government interference in journalism. Editorial content must remain independent of legislation.

Steve Barnett of Westminster University, a prominent commentator and Parliamentary adviser on the media, said the campaign was needed because politicians were "wary of grasping this political nettle."

In Britain the problem was exemplified by the power of News Corporation, the Murdoch-owned

group that effectively controls both 37 per cent of the national press and the biggest commercial TV network, BSkyB. The Leveson Inquiry had investigated the journalistic malpractice and political corruption that arose from this media power, but the report had shied away from recommending any action to restrict it.

There were participants in the event from European nations with media concentration problems of their own.

From Italy, Giovanni Melogli, who jointly instigated the initiative, told of the political corruption that had arisen from the immense media power of Silvio Berlusconi, who controlled the three biggest commercial TV networks as well as the public broadcaster RAI in his capacity as the country's longest-serving Prime Minister.

Bill Emmott, a former editor of the Economist and expert on Italy, said: "The concept of a businessman taking over government is not acceptable. It is not a question of singling out one man, terrible as he is. The problem lies in the political parties as well."

Istvan Hegedus of the Hungarian Europe Society said the problem was the oppressive power of the nationalist government that had set up a Media Council to control both broadcasting and the press. "We need competent European institutions to give legal instruments to the ongoing struggle for freedom of media in Europe."



The petition calls for:

- **Effective legislation to avoid concentration of ownership in the media and advertisement sectors**
- **Guaranteed independence of media supervisory bodies from political power and influence**
- **Definition of conflict of interests to avoid media moguls occupying high political office**
- **Clearer European monitoring systems to check up regularly on the health and independence of the media in member states.**

To sign the petition go to www.mediaiinitiative.eu

Join the **campaign** for press and broadcasting **freedom**

Join online at www.cpbp.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER YEAR

- a) Individual membership £15
- b) Unwaged £6
- c) Supporting membership £25 (includes free CPBF publications)
- d) Institutions (eg libraries) £25 (includes 10 copies of FREE Press)

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- f) Fewer than 500 members £25
- g) 500 to 1,000 £30
- h) 1,000 to 10,000 £50
- i) 10,000 to 50,000 £115
- 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 _____

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Organisation (if applicable) _____

Return form to CPBF, 2nd floor, Vi and Garner Smith House, 23 Orford Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9NL tel: 07729 846 146, email freepress@cpbf.org.uk

Media plurality – what it really means ...

THE CPBF is committed to “media plurality”, but what does it mean?

In the context of the current rows about the power of the popular press, the definition applied by the OK regulator Ofcom looks fair enough: “The underlying principle is that it would be dangerous for any person to control too much of the media because of his or her ability to influence opinions and set the political agenda”.

But there is a lot more to it than that. Take the Council of Europe’s criteria. They say that media pluralism encompasses “the diversity of media supply, use and distribution, in relation to ownership and control, media types and genres, political viewpoints, cultural expressions and local and regional interests”.

Expanding those points, plurality concerns include:

- 1 Content variety and cultural diversity**
- 2 Media access (social, cultural and economic access for individuals and groups in society, especially marginalised groups)**
- 3 Independence of creators, programmers and journalists**
- 4 Owner influence affecting media content and performance in entertainment, fiction and factual programmes as well as news**
- 5 Plurality of sources of funding for media**

A healthy media culture should mean that there is a real range and diversity of voices,



Granville Williams, UK petition co-ordinator, co-chaired the launch

of creative expression, ideas, information and opinion. The widest possible range of creative expression is vital for social and cultural, as well as economic, enrichment.

The UK does have some basic restrictions on media ownership but falls down badly on these measures. There are high levels of concentration of media ownership and bottlenecks at key points across the press, TV, radio and online media markets.

As Ofcom itself said when it reviewed News Corporation’s attempt two years ago to take over BSkyB, there would be “no subsequent opportunity or mechanism to address plurality concerns that may emerge in future” if the bid had gone ahead. But Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp would have extended its reach amongst regular news consumers to 51 per cent.

... and why we are looking to Europe

BUT WHY look to Europe for the solution? The character of the media in each country is distinct, and rules should be set at the national level. But there are good reasons for setting basic standards at the European level.

As a single market the EU requires universal standards in the production of goods and services to stop firms moving production to wherever they have the fewest obligations.

The Union is based on mutual benefit and trust, and if other states have been captured by special interests, then we lose faith in the governance of the whole union.

In other industries, when a firm becomes dominant it is reasonably straightforward for the competition authority to dismantle the monopoly. It’s not so easy to do that in the

media, where market dominance brings huge political influence.

In the media sector above all others, the global market has created international companies that national authorities find it very difficult to regulate.

The media are not just newspapers and broadcasting – that’s the whole point. And it is internet companies that are coming to dominate the world media scene.

Brussels is currently investigating whether Google favours its own products in its search results. This shows firstly that there is already a monopoly issue in online media, and secondly that it is really only the US and EU that have big enough markets to give their authorities the necessary clout to police such global companies.

CAMPAIGNING TOGETHER

THE AFTERMATH of the Leveson report, media ownership and the CPBF’s future work will be subjects of discussion at the CPBF’s annual meeting 2013. This will be on Saturday 13 July 2013, from 10am to 1pm at the NUJ head office, 308 Gray’s Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP.

The meeting will be open to all, though only members can vote. Supporters can join at the meeting but better to be a member in advance. Membership is open both to individuals and to organisations; you can use the coupon on the opposite page or, easier still, join online at

www.cpbf.org.uk

THE CAMPAIGN has thanked Unite the Union for a grant of £1,000 to buy a new computer and accessories for the office; also the News International Dispute Archive for a donation of £200 towards the cost of producing Free Press 191 last December, which carried extra pages to cover the Leveson report.

The Archive group, which mounted the 25th anniversary exhibition on the Wapping dispute two years ago, is now preparing a comprehensive website of material on the strike, the most crucial in media history.

It costs Murdoch more and more

THE AFTERMATH of the phone-hacking scandal in Britain is costing Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation more money in the USA, where it has had to pay out \$139 million to shareholders. Big financial institutions had sued News Corp directors for putting Murdoch family interests ahead of the company.

The shareholders claimed the board failed to prevent the phone-hacking scandal and had benefited family members, notably daughter Elizabeth Murdoch, when they bought up her TV production company Shine, the maker of Master Chef, for \$675 million in 2011.

The lawsuit accuses the Murdochs of nepotism and of treating News Corp “like a wholly owned family candy store”.

The settlement includes the splitting of News Corporation into two separate stock market-listed publishing and entertainment businesses.

Brands on the run

Product placement – advertisers paying for their branded products to be featured in programmes – has been permitted on commercial TV for two years. It has all been very low-key so far, but

JONATHAN HARDY

predicts that it is about to take off

HAVE THEY slipped by unnoticed, those branded goods? A coffee machine, a branded bank cash machine, Nokia phones, hair gel, pots of yogurt ... Two years since deregulation in February 2011, how has product placement featured in British TV?

According to *Campaign* magazine it has been a damp squib, with estimated revenues of £10 million at best, against the breathless projections of £170 million-plus made by advocates for deregulation.

In the first six months, aside from Nestlé's coffee brand on ITV1's *This Morning*, the placements were in minor, advertiser-financed shows: a shampoo in Britain's Next Top Model, an Xbox on a Sky panel show, a food brand on Channel 5, and so on.

But bigger brands are becoming involved, with ITV's deal for a branded cash machine in Coronation Street marking the way. Major brands now striking placement deals include L'Oreal and Nokia in *Hollyoaks*, PG Tips in *Deal or No Deal*, and Yeo Valley yoghurt in *Jamie's 30-Minute Meals*.

Samsung was reportedly delighted by the prominence given to its tablets used by XFactor

judges. Others such as Morrison's supermarket featuring in Channel 5's *Big Brother*, Sainsbury's in Channel 4's new daytime show *What's Cooking?* and B&Q's deal with *This Morning* show the UK moving towards a US-style TV culture where brands will influence editorial content.

Analysts are forecasting rapid expansion of the market. A recent report by KPMG predicted product placement revenues will grow soon grow to £100 million a year. It said industry was ready with deals that "can prove rather lucrative for both the creators of popular shows and the participating brands", and that consumers were ready too, as brands "have been blended in to UK shows without any notable loss of viewership".

Product placement is extending across media from advergames to social media, which some expect to be the most effective and lucrative platform. Cadbury's is amongst the brands that have experimented with product placement on Facebook.

Product placement is even advancing in journalism. Trinity Mirror recently announced the introduction of product placement into news and features across its various news titles and platforms. Readers of stories online will be able to click to buy items featured in editorial.

According to Trinity Mirror's director of new business development Matt Colebourne, "the editorial team has worked in the normal way and have not been influenced by the potential for the readership to buy those items".

Meanwhile in the USA, growing disquiet about the state of commercial integration has prompted the Government Accountability Office to call for clearer disclosure of sponsored content by broadcasters.

But the struggle to attract advertiser finance, for superprofits or even for survival, is driving product integration onwards.

The industry measure of public acceptability is whether or not viewers switch off. Instead, on the measure of what is positive and acceptable in our popular media culture, we should say that product placement is not, and add it to the list of policies to be reversed in the audit of the public interest in communications.

INSET: The onscreen logo that broadcasters must show when a product is placed



New Level

AFTER A five-year campaign, libel law in the UK has been changed to cut the chances for the rich and powerful to bully honest reporting through the courts. **TIM GOPSILL** celebrates the success of the campaign but warns it will make things much worse for media reform.

THE LONG-AWAITED Defamation Act cleared its final Parliamentary hurdle in April with a new amendment restricting the ability of companies to sue for libel. They will now have to show that the material has caused them "serious financial loss".

The Act will end decades of discontent at the way the law has been used by rich people and powerful companies to intimidate journalists by threatening or initiating libel proceedings that they could not afford to defend.

This stunning success has been won by a group of press freedom campaigners, a great example to others in the field.

The CPBF has supported it from the start, but it was not involved. It was Index on Censorship, English PEN and Sense About Science that did the work.

They were able to succeed, winning the support of all the main political parties at the last election, because they did not appear to be advancing a vested commercial interest.

The biggest beneficiaries of the reforms – the corporate press – kept a discrete distance.

Instead they focussed on the blatant injustice of individual writers and bloggers being intimidated, silenced and threatened with ruin by well-funded individuals and institutions, notably the science writer Simon Singh, the heart surgeon Dr Peter Wilmshurst and the blogger Hardeep Singh.

Simon Singh said: "This is an

The industry's struggle to attract advertiser finance – for profits or even for survival – is driving product integration onwards

Libel law leaves Leveson in the lurch

THESE ARE the main ground-breaking changes in the Defamation Act:

A “serious harm” test stating that defamatory material must cause serious harm to the reputation of the claimant

A “public interest” defence that will protect the media if they can show they “reasonably believed that publication was in the public interest”.

An extension of “qualified privilege” to scientific and academic journals and reports of proceedings of government, international conferences and international court proceedings.

This means that fair and accurate reporting will be protected from the kind of attacks suffered by medical and scientific bloggers threatened by commercial interests.

A “single publication” rule that extends the 12-month time limit on bringing libel actions to the internet. In the past the courts have said that accessing a page constitutes a fresh publication, allowing cases to be brought years after a page’s first appearance.

An end to “libel tourism” through the provision that a case can only be heard in London if the claimant can show that England is the most appropriate place.

But they didn’t intend what has happened since, which is that the passing of the libel law has instead wrecked the chances of the Leveson’s system of regulation following it into the statute book.

This is because it depends on the co-operation of the publishers to sign up to the new self-regulator. Various incentives were proposed – and disincentives if they didn’t. These included the award of heavy “exemplary damages” against any of who didn’t sign up and were found to be in serious breach of the code of practice in a losing defamation case.

But Leveson’s regulator would have the power to impose fines of up to £1 million for persistent serious offenders.

In effect, the new libel law has removed the incentives on the press to sign up. With much stronger defences in future defamation cases they will be prepared to risk the remote chance of exemplary damages, especially as, if they do sign up, the regulator can fine them more! So why should they play ball?

At the same time they will benefit hugely in defending their cases from changes to the civil court funding regime. The much-criticised contingency fee arrangements (CFAs, or “no win, no fee” agreements) under which defendants have had to pay out

millions to claimants’ lawyers, sometimes even if they win, are to be abolished after a review by Lord Justice Jackson.

The recently retired Appeal Court judge Sir

Stephen Sedley, who knows what he is talking about (and is indeed a supporter of libel reform) wrote in the London Review of Books in March:

“Shielded by a newly benign defamation law, relieved of the risk of punitive awards of costs and with a liability to exemplary damages that are unlikely to be any worse than a regulator’s fine, it may be legitimate to wonder why any newspaper should feel the need to sign up to a voluntary self-regulation scheme.”

extraordinary story of cross-party collaboration, fired up by a grass roots campaign, backed by everyone from nerds to Mumsnet.

“Four years ago libel reform was not an issue that anybody cared about, but charities, bloggers, MPs, Lords and a multitude of others pushed this issue up the agenda, into manifestos, into the Queen’s Speech and now we have [a law] that will change the

landscape of free speech in Britain.”

Index chief executive Kirsty Hughes said: “The Defamation Bill is a major advance for freedom of

expression. For too long, free speech was chilled, restrained and threatened by our archaic libel laws, that were a laughing stock around the globe.

“We now have a Defamation Bill that will strengthen freedom of expression, end the global chill from libel tourism and prevent corporations from suing citizen critics.

But there’s an unintended downside.

When the libel reform campaign launched in 2008 no-one knew that the News International

phone-hacking crisis and the consequent Leveson Inquiry would come barging into the arena.

Both issues touch on the relationship between media and the public: on the standard of media output and the way that people on the rough end of poor standards can obtain redress.

Many campaigners, including the CPBF and the Media Reform Coalition,

backed both causes:

fairer libel laws and fairer media. But in reality the interests diverge. Essentially, libel reform benefits the publishers, while media reform

benefits the public against them. And this divergence had its effect.

While the Defamation Bill was going through its main proponents were desperate to keep out of the Leveson mire, fearing the whole issue could be put back for the two to be taken together or even that everything could be wrecked in the looming battle between the press and the state.

The main advocates, Index and PEN, became vociferous opponents of Leveson, lining up with the Fleet Street editors to declare that any

statutory involvement in media regulation, however remote, constituted a grievous assault on freedom of expression. In effect, they have functioned as the intellectual wing of the national press.

The Leveson proposals duly ran into the sand. And when, to break the logjam, Labour peers led by film producer Lord Puttnam inserted an amendment to the Defamation Bill

to set up a quick and cheap arbitration service for defamation claims, along the lines of the Leveson report, the libel campaigners went berserk.

The campaign declared: “The bill has been hijacked by a group of peers who have inserted amendments to introduce press regulation proposals from the Leveson debate by the back door.” They launched a petition to MPs to demand that the bill return to the Commons to have the amendment knocked and pass into law.

That is what did happen, once the trick had succeeded and the government had acted on Leveson – which was what the Labour peers intended.

It may be legitimate to wonder why any newspaper should feel the need to sign up to a voluntary scheme

Turkey at war with journalists as it moves towards peace

AT LEAST FIFTY journalists are in prison in Turkey, the state that currently jails the most in the world. At one stage last year 95 were locked up, as a series of trials on trumped-up "terrorism" charges saw whole newsrooms being rounded up.

In the Oda TV case, eleven journalists on the news website were detained in February 2011. They were charged with establishing and administering an armed terrorist organisation, being a member of an armed terrorist organisation, inciting hatred among the public, procuring confidential documents relating to state security and attempting to affect the judiciary.

After several drawn-out hearings the evidence against them was proved to have been planted on their computers from outside. An expert report ordered by the court showed that the files had never been opened; the journalists had no idea they were there.

All had to be released, though 76-year-old Yalçın Küçük was sent back to prison, still on the



Members of the Turkish journalists' union in Istanbul protest against the arrest of journalists

same bogus charges. He says that the case is an excuse to bully independent and critical journalists and is an attack on press freedom and freedom of expression.

The journalists were alleged to have been involved in an imagined coup attempts against the government. Also charged over a coup

attempt are the journalists of Ulusal Kanal TV. Editor in chief Turhan Ozul has been held since August 2011.

In March one of Turkey's senior journalists, Hasan Cemal, a veteran columnist on the daily Milliyet, walked out of his job in protest at censorship.

For the previous two weeks the paper had refused to print his column following a row with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Milliyet had published a story, based on leaked secret minutes, of a meeting between the Prime Minister and Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK).

Tayyip Erdoğan attacked the paper, declaring: "Down with your journalism!" He has also called for the reintroduction of capital punishment for "terrorist" crimes – of which many journalists have stood accused.

The persecution of the media is continuing at a historic moment when, for the first time in decades, there is a serious prospect of peace between the Turkish government and the PKK, which has declared a ceasefire in its 30-year armed rebellion for autonomy for the country's Kurdish region.

THE STORY ONLINE

CPBF national organiser Barry White is a leading figure in the support campaign for Turkey's journalists, as a representative of the European Federation of Journalists. He has three times been to Istanbul to observe the trials and organise solidarity work with the Turkish journalists' unions.

He says these cases are "an excuse to bully independent and critical

journalists and an attack on press freedom and freedom of expression. The prospects do not look good, with more journalists facing calls for long prison sentences in connection with the coup plot case."

Barry White is a speaker in a podcast on the state persecution of journalists in Turkey on the CPBF website.

■ The podcast is at www.cpbf.org.uk/body.php?id=2889#

■ SUPPORT for Turkish journalists was the subject of a World Press Freedom Day event in London on May 2, organised by the CPBF and the NUJ. Speakers included Oda TV columnist Coskun Musluk, on video link; Mehmet Koksal, European Federation of Journalists; Jim Boumelha, president of the International Federation of Journalists; and TUC policy officer Sean Bamford.

USA

Ownership the issue in the USA as well

MEDIA REFORM campaigners in the USA are fighting to hold on to the regulations that stop Rupert Murdoch or other big corporations from owning newspapers and TV in the same cities.

The rules are supervised by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and President Barack Obama is about to appoint a new chairman to succeed Julius Genachowski, who has resigned.

He had proposed scrapping the cross-ownership rule. Rupert Murdoch has been lobbying to buy the Los Angeles Times to add to his

big New York papers and Fox TV network, and this would be a gift to him.

The CPBF's Granville Williams attended the Free Press Media Reform conference in Denver, Colorado in April.

He says: "The fear was amongst people I spoke to was that Obama would appoint a new FCC chair who

would talk the citizen talk but walk the corporate walk".

The conference was addressed by Michael Copps, an FCC commissioner from 2001-2011, who was scathing about Barack Obama's record on media policy. He cited the massive merger of Comcast and NBC-Universal which the FCC approved in January 2011; Michael

Copps's was the lone dissenting vote. "This is simply too much, too big, too lacking in benefits for American consumers and citizens," he said.

He pointed to the unbridled media merger mania of the Bush years and asked: "Wasn't that supposed to change after the 2008 election?"

"After all I had a file folder filled with letters and statements from Senator and candidate Barack Obama indicating that if he was president the brakes would be applied to this merger mania."

THE CAMPAIGN group Media Matters for America (MMFA) is calling on Rupert Murdoch's Fox News channel to sack regular commentator, Erik Rush, who outraged millions of Americans when he tweeted after the Boston Marathon bombing about Muslims: "Yes, they're evil. Let's kill them all."

Spinning is no longer enough

Media & Terrorism: Global Perspectives, Des Freedman and Daya Kishan Thussu (eds), Sage

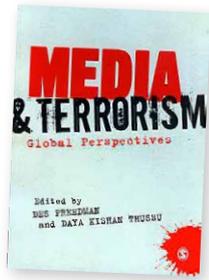
IT'S NOT just PR, it's not even spin, nor public diplomacy. It's not even propaganda. The concept is "strategic communication". That's the term used by UK government security chiefs for the process of managing not just the information about war but the very "behaviour" of the population.

This is the doctrine of the vast and hidden apparatus of information control revealed by David Miller and Rizwaan Sabir in one of the core chapters of this timely book.

Steve Tatham, head of strategic communication at the Ministry of Defence, says it is "an extremely powerful tool that may hold ... the power of information and opinion and its ability to enable behavioural change."

Indeed, Miller and Sabir show, actual military operations have become secondary to the propaganda war. They quote the MoD's David Kilcullen as saying: "In Counterinsurgency we should design [military] operations to enact our influence campaign."

This collection of articles by



mostly radical academics was planned after the 10th anniversary of the September 2001 atrocity in New York as a comprehensive survey of every aspect of media and propaganda activity in the wars that followed. The invasion of Iraq "will be remembered as a conflict in which information fully took its place as a weapon of war," said US Colonel Kenneth Allard, but in fact it goes back further.

It was the British that pioneered "psyops" – psychological operations – in Northern Ireland, and the preposterous "humanitarian interventionism" propagated by Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell in the Balkans in 1999 that apparently bamboozled so many people.

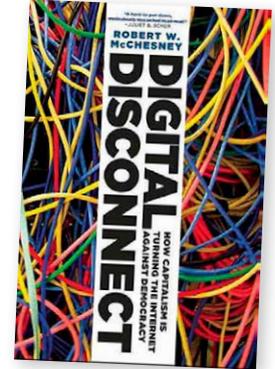
Media & Terrorism's wide range also takes in TV coverage of the Middle East, the CIA's manipulation of Hollywood movies for war propaganda, the Wikileaks revelations on Iraq, the coverage of immigration in France and Australia and of terrorism in Russia, the Indian subcontinent and the Arab world.

It concludes with a call to action, to expose and oppose the "weapons of mass deception", from the US TV journalist and activist Danny Shechter. This sets a retrospective context for the wealth of material that precedes it.

Tim Gopsill

Online revolution not democratic

Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet Against Democracy, Robert W, McChesney, New Press



THIS IS another powerful, unpromising book from the prolific media analyst Bob McChesney whose works explore US media, capitalism and democracy. The theme of his books is that, from the early days of radio to the arrival of the internet, media commercialisation has served America poorly.

He was prompted to write the book after reading a review of George Gilder's *Life After Television* in 1992. Gilder argued that the internet would eliminate all traditional concerns about media monopoly and terminate the need for policy making; it would usher in a great democratic communication revolution.

He says that in many books, the understanding of the internet and its potential is deeply flawed.

This book is an intervention, an attempt to shape opinion for what he predicts will be "a series of crucial policy fights in the next decade that will determine where the internet – and, by extension, our society – are going to go."

But it is not narrowly focused. McChesney draws on mainstream economics to discuss the notion of public goods whose side effects

produce a healthier economy and society. His analysis of the internet is also placed within a broader political economy framework.

It is a book stuffed full of insights, at times disturbing, with its revelations about the way giants like Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon develop strategies to entrench their market dominance and attempt to own consumers' "every waking moment", aided and abetted by lax government enforcement and deregulation.

"People thought the internet would be ... a non-commercial zone, a genuine public sphere, leading to far greater public awareness, stronger communities, and greater political participation," he observes. "To the contrary ... the internet has been commercialized, copyrighted, patented, privatized, data-inspected, and monopolized."

Granville Williams

On film, how the news is censored

Shadows of Liberty, documentary directed by Jean-Philippe Tremblay, DocFactory

that clashed with corporate interests.

Jean-Philippe Tremblay says: "Through the stories of journalists revealing truths about our society, we learn about how the media affects

our society. My hope is that more people will get a sense of how the corporate control of information operates."

Granville Williams

SHADOWS OF LIBERTY is a powerful film. The Canadian film-maker Jean-Philippe Tremblay focuses on the US media to explore censorship, cover-ups and the increasing corporate control of the news media.

It paints a grim, compelling picture, documenting the suppression of controversial reporting and the censorship of journalists pursuing stories



Shadows of Liberty is online at <http://shadowsof-liberty.org>. It will be shown at a CPBF-promoted showing at the Holmfirth Film Festival in West Yorkshire on Wednesday 22 May at 7.30pm. There will be a discussion after the film, introduced by Granville Williams. Buy tickets online at holmfirthfilmfestival.co.uk or phone 01484 222444.

We've got to take the longer, wider view



Former
Reuters TV
reporter

**PATRICK
CHALMERS**

says media
campaigners must look at
the whole of society and
politics, not just at the
media themselves

FREE PRESS readers know plenty about more or less radical critiques of conventional news media. You know all about the choking effects of monopoly ownership on the plurality of output. The insular narrowness of mainstream political debate in the UK is a direct consequence.

But none of the approaches that I have seen weave together critiques of both our governance and media, along with suggested remedies. My concern is personal; I've lived out these problems myself.

We journalists like to boast that the goal of our work, at its best, is speaking truth to power. It's a fine idea. Yet on the rare occasions reporters do achieve such a feat there's little guarantee that power is listening and still less that it's minded to respond.

It does happen but generally as the exception. Among the rare successes is the public-interest victories landed by The Guardian's Nick Davies. He worried away at the UK phone-hacking story for years, facing hostility from other sections of the media and from elsewhere as he did. Eventually his findings, and those of his colleagues, became so uncomfortable as to demand an official response.

The Leveson Inquiry was among the results, as were a whole series of criminal proceedings against reporters, their editors and executives. Whatever the final outcome in terms of media regulation or prosecutions, the process Nick Davies kicked off has hugely improved public understanding of media failings. It also produced valuable evidence of media intrusion and bullying, making it easier for people to address

such issues without fear of defamation suits.

Far less certain is whether the phone-hacking story will prove to have sparked the once-in-a-generation chance for media reform spoken of by the likes of life-time media critic James Curran. Reining in reporters' excesses and getting a workable system of redress for their victims is hardly revolutionary. It ignores the critical elements of Lord Leveson's wider remit, ones he side-stepped in his conclusions. These included the closeness of relationships between politicians and key media, and the related question of media monopolies.

Ironically, Nick Davies himself did the same in his otherwise salutary book *Flat Earth News* (2008). Even in his insightful account of declining media standards he failed to nail the problem of cosiness between media and political heavy-weights, still less suggest any solutions.

So how should campaigners for press and broadcasting freedoms tackle such problems?

A start would be to have them focus on fundamental questions of who is running our societies and to whose benefit. Only then can they tackle what work the media might do in

**To whom should
journalists
be accountable?**

the interests of freedom. Their first task is to understand the nature of political power and have others do the same.

That would mean exploring the realities of governments we routinely accept to be described as democracies when they are nothing of the sort. Conventional journalists use the term unthinkingly, quoting politicians who use it or employing it themselves without qualification.

More accurate would be to talk of oligarchies or plutocracies. Such terms are used freely to describe Russian leaders or football club owners but never for the sclerotic politics of Westminster, Brussels or Washington.

Far from aiming to speak truth to power, journalists and their campaigning supporters should focus on speaking truth about power. They should look at who holds it how they deny

a wider public from taking power from them.

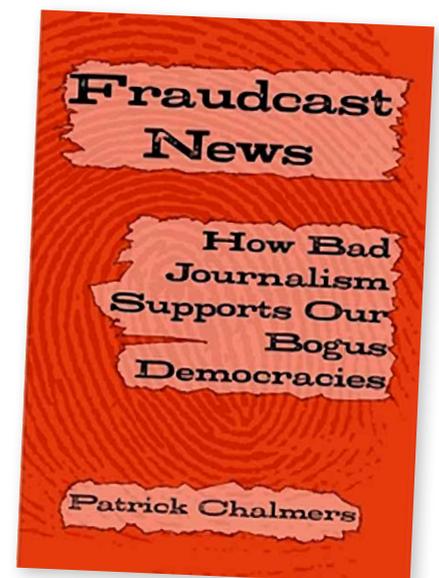
I attempt this in *Fraudcast News*, using climate change as one of several story threads to illustrate my arguments. I covered the issue in depth as a Reuters staffer and then on my own account after leaving in 2005. That trail included reporting on global talks in Kyoto, Copenhagen and elsewhere.

Along the way I moved from being a conventional news agency reporter to getting first-hand experience of a beating and pepper spraying by Danish police alongside civil disobedience activists.

Yet Copenhagen was no gung-ho, gonzo journalism trip. By then, I reckoned conventional politics, and by extension conventional media, had failed to serve the global public's interests. It made sense to investigate people's responses to those twin failures, including various forms of civil disobedience.

Political accountability questions raise fundamental problems for journalists. On what grounds should we transmit the views of the powerful in news stories, essentially what I did at Reuters, if they lack all accountability to the majority of ordinary people, not to mention credibility? To whom should journalists be accountable?

Fraudcast News, which is free to download as a PDF or to pay for as a paperback, tries to lay out some answers.



FRAUDCAST NEWS – How Bad Journalism Supports Our Bogus Democracies – is at <http://fraudcastnews.net/>