

FREE PRESS

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LEVESON

... AS IF IT DIDN'T HAPPEN

IT WAS THIRTY years almost to the day since Rupert Murdoch triggered the traumatic dispute at Wapping that his son James made his own big move in London. The former chairman of BSkyB and chief executive of News International returned to head Sky TV, the cable network now rebranded as his father's domain.

The former BSkyB satellite network is even bigger and richer than it was when James was whisked to New York for fear of arrest in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal that had exploded in July 2011.

Sky TV was first launched using the enhanced profits that Murdoch's News Corporation had generated as a result of Wapping, when on January 25 1986 he sacked 5,500 workers and moved production to a the new plant there, with a ready-trained non-union strike-breaking workforce.

James Murdoch's return followed that last September of Rebekah Brooks, former editor of the Sun and News of the World, who indeed was arrested and charged over phone-hacking and the bribing of public officials, to be sensationally acquitted after a ten-month trial at the Old Bailey. She resumed her role as head of News UK, as the newspaper group was likewise rebranded as part of the corporate scheme to erase the scandal.

Their rehabilitation has been enabled by a series of strokes of legal good fortune. The trials of lower-level scapegoats from News International (NI) papers have all finished; prosecutors have announced there will be no more cases and the Metropolitan Police, who took a bashing from the right-wing press, have wound up the various operations investigating the cases.

More importantly for the company and its bosses, prosecutors have also said there will be no corporate prosecution. That was the big worry for the Murdochs: it might have led to a similar process in the US, which would have been serious.



BACK: James Murdoch



BACK: Rebekah Brooks

In these ways did the UK authorities give the green light for the resumption of business as usual for the Murdochs. They might think it's all over, which would be another scandal in itself. But it shouldn't be.

There are three ways in which the seemingly relentless progress of the Murdoch media can be checked:

1. The Leveson Inquiry must be resumed. Its spectacular hearings in 2012 were intended only as the first part of Lord Justice Leveson's work. With the trials then due, it was decreed that he could not investigate who did what over phone-hacking and considered instead the associated ethical questions raised about the press and their relations with politicians.

Stage Two, the inquiry into "unlawful activities" at NI and its dealings with police, was supposed to start when the trials finish. The government would have to activate it. Well, the trials ended last year, but no word as yet on Leveson. In fact there has been so much speculation that it will never take place that even Tory culture secretary John Whittingdale has said it would be "very strange that actually the most important questions

What Wapping meant for media Pages 6-7

3 **THEY'RE AFTER CHANNEL 4**
Privatisation giveaway in photo grab

4 **REVENGE OF LOCAL READERS**
They want the papers that Big Media don't

8 **EUROPE'S MEDIA MUDDLE**
Questions on regulation in EU vote

For all campaign news go to cpbf.org.uk
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→ continued page 6

Mirror boss's pay rises as sales and profits fall



GIANT REGIONAL and national newspaper publisher Trinity Mirror gave chief executive Simon Fox a 45 per cent pay rise for a year in which operating profit fell by 25 per cent.

Last year's profit was £82.2 million but Fox's pay was up from £1.68 million to £2.35 million.

The accounts were published the day TM launched its new cut-price

daily paper New Day in an attempt to find new ways of generating income from print.

During 2015 revenue from print fell from £521.6 million to £458.9 million.

They showed also that TM made a provision of £29 million for the cost of dealing with civil claims arising from the widespread use of

phone-hacking at its national titles. A charge of £12 million had been made in 2014.

Even though prosecutors have announced there will be no more charges, the company still faces civil claims over the long-denied intrusions.

New Day, a middle-market, middle-of-the-road tabloid, will sell

for 50p, though the first edition was given away free. 2 million were printed.

It has a staff of only 25 people and is expected to break even if regular paid-for sales reach 200,000.

TM is hoping to emulate the success of the upmarket tabloid i, which the Independent group that launched it in 2010 has just sold off.

'It's worth buying it up just for the ads'

THE INDEPENDENT'S cut-price spin-off the i has been sold for £24 million to a big regional publisher that wants its advertising reach. Ashley Highfield, chief executive of Johnston Press, told the business paper City AM: "This is a scale game and we wanted to go after more national advertising revenue and have a bigger train set across which to offer our digital services."

The i's in-house editorial team is to expand from 17 to 51. There will be an £850,000-a-year deal to buy content from the Independent website and the Evening Standard, still owned by Yevgeny Lebedev. Content will also come from Johnston Press regional titles.



The paper's circulation is around 268,000 – while the Independent's was 56,000 and The Independent on Sunday's 93,000.

■ Staff at the Independent have condemned the closure of the daily and Sunday print titles and cast doubt on managers' promise to improve the quality of the website as the company transfers to a digital-only format. They said the move was likely to cost about 100 jobs while staff in a statement said they were "deeply sceptical about the company's ability to generate confidence in the new Independent website while downgrading existing terms and conditions for new roles".

BUT WAS IT EVER?

IT HAD long since ceased to be independent, but the demise of the paper that managed to carry the name for 30 years is a tiny milestone on the triumphal procession of Big Media.

It might have become the plaything of a vain and rich Russian social climber but there was a time when the notions it stood for were at

least regarded as feasible. They were independence from political parties, big business, advertisers, sponsors and public relations, and conservative media values such as unthinking nationalism and deference to the royal family. They are unthinkable for commercial publishers now. The Independent didn't

manage to stick to them for long, but even the compromised version could not survive the competition of corporate media power.

At last year's UK general election under Yevgeny Lebedev's uninformed direction the paper that pledged never to be partisan called for support for the

outgoing Conservative-Liberal coalition – which wasn't even standing! A little bit of social conscience to mask the malign Tory neo-liberalism, eh?

The Independent was so eviscerated that its pale cut-price imitation, the i, became a bigger success. So he sold it.

Tim Gopsill

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Channel 4 sell-off: the picture told the story

THE GOVERNMENT was caught lying when it denied planning to privatise Channel 4 television but a photographer caught an image of a document showing it was considering the move.

The revelation came at a meeting held in Parliament by the National Union of Journalists in February. Scottish National Party media frontbencher John Nicholson said that Culture Secretary John Whittingdale had come to the DCMS select committee and said there were no plans to privatise C4. "So we were surprised when an aide was photographed going into no 10 carrying a file called 'Plans to Privatise Channel 4'".

The document was shown to say: "...work should proceed to examine the options for extracting greater public value from the Channel 4 Corporation (C4C), focusing on privatisations options in particular ..." The picture was taken in Downing Street by freelance

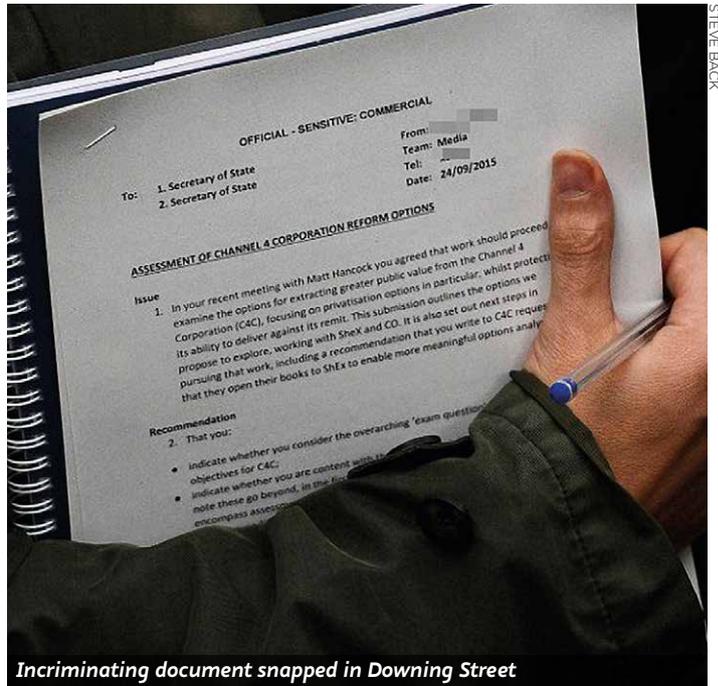
Steve Back, who has captured a number of such embarrassing exclusives over the years. It showed an unidentified aide carrying the incriminating document to a meeting.

After the photo was published the Prime Minister had to confirm that the sale was on the agenda, John Nicholson said. "The cat was out of the bag."

He said that recently retired chairman of Channel 4 Lord Burns had been trying to work up a plan to "mutualise" the channel by selling it to a non-profit trust but the government was not interested and Lord Burns's tenure was not renewed.

"My view quite clearly is that any substantial change in the ownership of Channel 4 towards an equity-based ownership would be very damaging."

Former Business Secretary in the coalition government Vince Cable revealed that the Conservatives had



Incriminating document snapped in Downing Street

wanted to sell it off then but he had used his powers to block it.

"I felt strongly about this," he said. "Channel 4 has public service obligations that could not be maintained."

"The government said the sale would raise £1 billion. This was based on the sale of Channel 5 by Richard Desmond for £500 million. I thought that was questionable, because with the obligations that would be too expensive."

"Buyers would expect industry average shareholder return of 20 per cent which you could not make if you stuck to public service

standards. So I thought, why do it? But now they are trying again."

Dorothy Byrne, head of news and current affairs programming at C4, warned the meeting of what had happened when ITV was bought up by outside investors in the 1990s. "I was there and that's why I went to 4," she said, "I know what would happen if C4 was privatised." She said that at the Royal Television Society awards last year Channel 4 had won in every current affairs category.

"We are about making the best programmes possible not the best return to shareholders."

LESS BBC NEWS

THE BBC is to chop £80 million a year from spending on news over the next five years.

Head of news James Harding, a former editor of The Times, told staff in a blog post in February: "BBC News must contribute its share to achieve the £150 million

of annual savings ... BBC News is committed to £5 million as part of this effort.

"And by the spring we have to present a plan of how we propose to meet BBC News' share of the £550 million annual savings required by 2021/22."

“People ask me: ‘Is the BBC biased?’ and my answer is that the fundamental corporate bias is pro-government, regardless of party. It’s the licence fee – stupid. Of course not every story will be pro-government but the overwhelming narrative will be.”

Meirion Jones, former long-serving researcher on BBC Newsnight, forced out as part of the post-Savile purge of staff who had tried to get the child sex abuse story on air.

FAKE SHEIKH FACES TRIAL

‘FAKE SHEIKH’ Mazher Mahmood denied conspiring to pervert the course of justice in a court hearing in London in February. The former News of the World investigative reporter and driver Alan Smith are charged with conspiring to change a statement to police regarding the drugs trial of pop singer Tulisa Contostavlos in 2014. They were remanded on bail to stand trial at the Old Bailey on September 19.

‘British press ‘most right wing in northern Europe’

THE BRITISH press is regarded as the most "right-wing" and "biased" in Europe, according to polling by YouGov. Then survey of people from seven European nations found that 26 per cent of Britons viewed their newspapers, TV and radio as "too right-wing", more than people in France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark or Finland.

By contrast, only 17 per cent of British respondents felt their media were too left-wing.

Respondents were asked whether they felt about their media reporting on five policy areas: immigration, housing, health, economics and crime.

Between a quarter and a third of Britons felt that coverage struck a reasonable balance. But in every area they were more likely to describe it as "too right-wing" than "too left-wing".

Only Finnish people saw their own press as similarly skewed to the right; everywhere else was more likely to assess media as tending towards the left. Only 19 per cent of French people, for example, perceived their press as biased towards the left.

Commercial papers

THE GREAT gaps in local media left by the obsessive cost-cutting of the Big Media corporations are being filled by the staff they have booted out.

Since the millennium half of the journalists employed by the four (now three) big provincial chains have been thrown out of work. At the same time whole areas of the country are losing their news service; fewer than half of Britain's communities now have a regional daily paper, and 85 per cent have only one weekly in their area.

But the demand for news doesn't go away, and a great surge of new micro-local publications has taken off around the country. No-one knows how many there are, but many of the people producing them are journalists sacked by the companies, and proving them wrong.

They're proving a lot of people wrong, in addition, by publishing in print. For 20 years it has been received wisdom that printed papers will sink into the swamp like the dinosaur as the internet takes over, and while most of the micros are primarily websites, their producers report that readers and advertisers alike want to see print.

■ **In a big city like Bristol, where the pioneering media co-operative the Cable has firmly established itself (story right) there is room for plenty of micros. The Voice series hand-distributes 90,000 copies of a free magazine a month and has just launched its tenth edition. It was launched four years ago by former Bristol Evening Post assistant editor Richard Coulter and advertising manager Emma Cooper. Coulter said: "It is a shame there is so much emphasis on digital all the time when it comes to ultra-local publishers when print is what is working. We never get asked about online advertising. But in the mad rush to work out the digital conundrum, print remains profitable."**

■ **IN THE north west of England journalists are launching titles in the new independent Cheshire Today Group, which publishes online and in print. Websites cover news in Chester, Warrington, Crewe, Wilmslow and Macclesfield, and there are the newspapers Macclesfield Today and Wilmslow Today. Media entrepreneur Martin Regan launched Cheshire Today last April after selling his 48 per cent stake in business publishing group Excel Publishing. He believes that the future of local news remains predominantly in print: "There is no money to be made in online general news websites, while local newspapers are still quite profitable, they are just not as profitable as they used to be and most of the big newspaper groups are stacked up with debt." There is a team of eight journalists, with Regan himself as editor, and a readership of 190,000 web browsers a month.**

"Most regional newspapers have retreated from the towns they purport to report on," he

says. "Trinity Mirror's features are produced in Liverpool and its news journalists are in Oldham. I think you have to have a base in the town you report on." Macclesfield Today has a print-run of 12,000 delivered to affluent homes and more than 500 paid-for copies (priced at 50p) in local newsgents.

■ **IN SOUTH London the success of hyperlocal newspaper the Peckham Peculiar has led to sister title the Dulwich Diverter, to be launched in May. Co-founders Kate White, a freelance journalist, and Mark McGinlay, a social media manager and publicist, say that the Peculiar, launched two years ago, breaks even. It employs eight freelancers. McGinlay said: "We love local newspapers and we passionately believe that hyperlocal news isn't just for the internet. While social media is a great way of engaging with the local community, not everyone is online."**

■ **TWO LOCAL news websites in Wales are diversifying into print to fill the hole in regional coverage caused by editorial job cuts. The Caerphilly Observer is producing a fortnightly, 16-page tabloid newspaper that founder Richard Gurner also hopes will attract more advertisers. He says: "The response to the website from readers and businesses alike has been overwhelmingly positive, but the question they kept asking us is, when are we going into print?" Launched in 2009, the Observer claims to have overtaken the website traffic of Newsquest's local newspaper Campaign, where Gurner began his career. The website claims to attract an average of 50,000 page views and 20,000 unique visitors a month. "I am head-to-head with my former newspaper," he says. The Port Talbot Magnet is following the same path, launching a monthly printed edition. The town has been without a local paper since the closure of the Port Talbot Guardian in 2009 by Trinity Mirror.**

■ **THE DORSET magazine Seeker News is set to relaunch as a fortnightly newspaper. The free 40-page paper will print an initial 10,000 print-run distributed in Poole and Bournemouth. Started as a website three years ago, editor Steve Cook launched the print magazine in 2012. He said: "Too many people are too keen to write newspapers off, but we're not done yet."**

■ **A NEW PAPER has been started in west Norfolk to compete with Big Media papers that are cutting back on coverage. Your Local Paper has a staff of five and a circulation of 20,000. Managing director Alan Taylor and editor Donna Semmens both worked for the Eastern Daily Press owned by Archant and the Johnston Press-owned Lynn News. She said: "We are completely independent so don't have to dance to anyone else's tune. We will produce a local paper serving our community and creating a viable platform for our advertisers."**

Bristol: the community fights back

MIKE JEMPSON reports on a local enterprise for quality journalism in a city where commercial media owners have all but destroyed it

IN LITTLE over 18 months more than 800 people have joined the media co-operative that is The Bristol Cable – an innovative attempt to restore serious investigative journalism to the city. It is a multi-media production which extends its print and online journalism with open training sessions, public debates, film nights and social events.

"We want to give voice to those left out by the mainstream," says one of the three co-founders, Alon Aviram. "Inevitably young graduates

Brixton: news on a shoestring

ALAN SLINGSBY charts the travails of providing news for a dynamic area without the resources

THE SOUTH London district of Brixton has the politics, crime, features, arts, food, entertainment and personalities to fuel a daily paper, radio stations and a couple of TV channels besides.

Brixton used to be covered in detail by the twice-weekly South London Press, now a victim of collapsed classified advertising. Today there are several blogs, its own monthly newspaper, the



Brixton icon

, who needs them?

in precarious employment are attracted to the Cable, but so are older people who remember better days in journalism.”

Bristol had lacked independent investigative journalism in print since the local alternative magazine Venue magazine was bought up by Bristol United Press, publisher of the city's dailies and part of the Daily Mail-owned Northcliffe Newspapers group, in 2000. The Evening Post is now, after changing hands twice in the last four years, part of the all-conquering Trinity Mirror Big Media chain.

So many staff have left that its coverage has fallen back on the safe and sorry. Some of those who left now are now working for at half a dozen hyperlocal monthly news sheets – which secure corner shop advertising and are popular in their communities.

The Cable's main focus is on investigations. It has dug into wages and conditions for the city's catering workers, Bristol University's investment portfolio, the city council's links with offshore companies and the distribution of public funds during Bristol's year as European Green Capital. It has also looked at gang culture,



A Bristol Cable directors' meeting: no doubt rather different from Trinity Mirror's

violence against women, the politics of Bristol's music scene and the privatisation of public spaces. It carries articles by and about the local Kurdish, Somali and Spanish communities.

In January volunteers helped to distribute 10,000 copies of the sixth quarterly free issue in print. Meanwhile the Cable promotes its investigations via social media and on its website thebristolcable.org.

As often with co-ops the Cable has a cumbersome structure. Most decisions are taken by contributing members who are newcomers to community journalism. More experienced hacks are available to assist with sub-editing and professional advice. A Board of Directors ensures compliance with the Co-op's constitution and editorial stance and acts as a sounding board for strategic decisions.

The members pay an average of £2.50 per month and grants have been received from various foundations, allowing the Cable to pay key contributors.

The founding triumvirate plan to step back once the co-op has achieved financial viability.

■ *Mike Jempson, co-founder of the East End News Co-op backed by the CPBF in the 1980s, is a director of The Bristol Cable*



Brixton Blog co-founder Tim Dickens giving out copies of the Bugle in Brixton's street market

Brixton Bugle with its associated Brixton Blog, and social media feeds too numerous to count.

The Urban 75 forum has been running for more than 20 years and spun off the Brixton Buzz blog in 2012.

The same year the Brixton Blog, launched by two young journalists, Zoe Jewell and Tim Dickens, hived off the Bugle, whose ad sales bring in the lion's share of the income.

Last year the founders stood down to go and earn a living and have a life.

The new editor is Linda Quinn, a former director of marketing and communications for the Big Lottery Fund.

The long-term aim is to secure the future of both Blog and Bugle by transforming or replacing the current limited company, Brixton Media, with a "community interest company" (CIC) – a social enterprise recognised in law as

using its assets and profits for the public good.

The Blog is billed as an "online community newspaper". We try to avoid the temptations of churnalism.

You have only to encounter the friends and families of people campaigning for justice for events in Brixton many years ago to know that only proper, resource-demanding reporting will do.

One source of reporters is the local NCTJ short course. Students need cuttings, bylines and evidence of online reporting. We need reporters. The synergy is impossible to resist.

But as Rupert Murdoch, the Scott Trust and many others – including the Blog & Bugle – have discovered, the synergy of publishing online and in print and not losing money is rather harder to attain.

■ *Alan Slingsby is production editor of the Brixton Bugle*

MURDOCH

... as if it didn't happen

→ from page 1

surrounding the hacking scandal may never be properly looked into. It must go ahead."

2. Leveson of course proposed a new, fairer system for press regulation that was properly independent of the publishers. The publishers responded by ceremonially killing off their tame self-regulator, the Press Complaints Commission, and, after a decent interval, reviving it with a new name – the Independent Press Standards Organisation – and a structure and way of working that are little changed.

The new Parliamentary-ordained system has now been set up after a long and painstaking process and IPSO is not included. The law contains penalties for publishers who refuse to join the system. These must be rigorously applied.

3. The return of Brooks and James Murdoch and their apparent clean bill of health is more than likely to lead to a new bid by the Murdochs' also rebranded company 21st Century Fox to buy up the 61 per cent share of Sky it does not already own. The last bid collapsed at the last minute when the scandal broke out but had been delayed anyway by a massive public campaign.

There must be a repeat campaign the second time round, and again it must succeed.

**CAMPAIGN
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Saturday 2 July 10am-1pm

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128 Theobald's Road, Holborn, London
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WAPPING

Murdoch: What did he ever do to us?

Myths persist about the great dispute at Wapping 30 years ago. **TIM GOPSILL** sets the record straight

IT WAS the greatest trauma ever to hit Britain's media industry. On January 24 1986, Rupert Murdoch's UK company News International sacked its non-journalist workforce and switched production overnight to a new non-union newspaper factory. More than 5,500 people lost their jobs in the move to Wapping and a year-long strike failed to win them back.

This outcome was a catastrophe not just for the workforce but for all of us. It tilted control of the press into the hands of Big Media – the mega publishing corporations that have reduced British journalism, at least in commercial publications, to a rump, in the interest of shareholder value.

Thirty years on from Wapping, Murdoch's News Corporation still sits on top of the pile of media conglomerates. His relationship with the Tory government is once more as close as it was in the 1980s. Once again there are grudging admissions of cosy meetings with David Cameron and George Osborne.

The print workers were blamed almost universally for their own sackings. The story is that the dispute was about new printing technology that greedy unions were desperate to block, to preserve their vast pay packets and their stranglehold on the industry.

It is certainly true that the technology to produce newspapers with the direct input of copy into computers and to compose pages by "pasting up" paper columns rather than hot metal had existed for 20 years. But that's not what it was about – which was the protection of the owners' monopoly power.

For them, new technology was not the straightforward means of sacking workers and cutting costs that you might expect. In fact for them it was a headache: the possibility of producing newspapers at a fraction of the cost meant that competitors could gatecrash the industry and threaten their cosy cartel.

There were millions of readers and plenty of lucrative advertising then; the papers made piles of money. They were also paying very high wages to (actually only) a minority of their staff but decent wages to others, who were all represented by tightly organised unions with "closed shop" agreements: everyone was required to be a member.

The publishers realised that this "union power", as they publicly condemned it, could offer them short-term salvation. Instead of

cutting costs to compete, they set out actually to increase them, to make it too costly for competitors to enter the industry. That strategy could only work if one factor was firmly in place. You guessed it. The union closed shop.

Competitors had to be stopped from hiring production staff, and the unions could do that, provided they were kept sweet. So it was that the two big print unions SOGAT and the NGA blundered into a trap that led to their downfall.

IT IS RARE in industrial production in Britain for trade unions to be handed effective control over employment terms but that was Fleet Street in the 1970s and early 1980s. They controlled the recruitment of staff, maintaining the daily casual system with its cash-in-hand and the potential – not in reality as widespread, again, as myth would have it – for corruption and overpayment.

They also maintained workplace discipline, with close to "no-go" areas for management. The unions operated a "right to reply" policy to stop the publication of the worst right-wing anti-union material without a reply being offered

to the victims, and did, from time to time, when this did not materialise, stop the papers. It was practically the only time in our history that workers had the confidence to do that.

And the print unions were politically progressive, giving great support to other unions in their struggles, notably the miners in 1984–85.

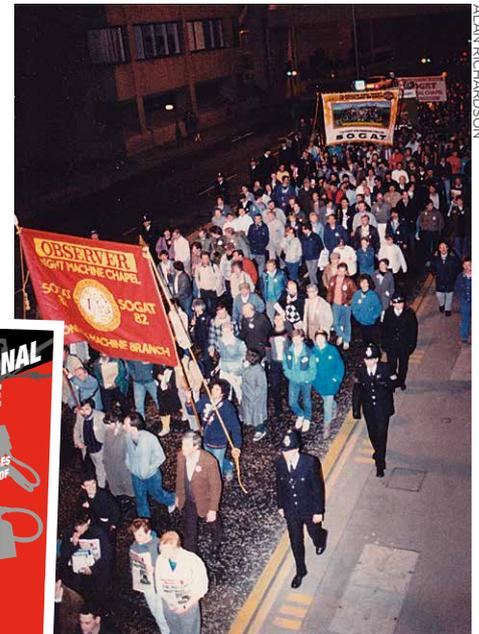
But this gloriously upside-down world was far from a

triumph for socialism. For union leaders it was almost as difficult as for employers: they knew what was going on and that it would end in disaster unless they could find a fair, negotiated way out of it. But there was no escape.

The Times locked out its workforce for 10 months in 1978–79 when the unions resisted provocation from the company and refused to go on strike. (Mythology, nevertheless, has this one falsely memorialised as a "strike".) Rupert Murdoch, who took over the Times from the humiliated Thomson Corporation in 1981, set out on the same course and refused to negotiate terms for the new plant at Wapping. Instead he presented the unions with a series of non-negotiable ultimatums that included "no unions" and no promise of jobs.

All through the long run-up the unions had tried to get their members to take action to force negotiations, but they would not listen;

**It was a battle
the workers
could not win.
The enemy
was simply
too strong**



ALAN RICHARDSON

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POLICE obstructed and attacked pickets and supporters time and again throughout the Wapping dispute.
 For the whole year there were mass pickets every Wednesday and Saturday evening, starting at 9pm, attempting to stop

Murdoch's trucks loaded with papers emerging from the plant.
 One local youth was killed by a speeding truck.
 Time after time waves of riot police, on horseback and foot, violently beat the protesters back. Dozens were injured or arrested.

Four pickets were jailed.
 These pictures are from the News International Dispute Archive, a collection assembled by former strikers and union activists, which is showing a 30th

anniversary exhibition in east London, near where the Wapping plant, which was demolished last summer, once stood.
 The exhibition runs until April 9 at the Idea Store in Watney Market, 260 Commercial Road, London E1 2FB

unsurprisingly, the workers were scared to put their good fortune at risk. And by January 1986 Murdoch had secured the resources to make the big break.

This is why the Wapping dispute was so traumatic and violent. So much water had built up behind the dam that when it burst there was a torrential flood.

Murdoch had lined up the government of Margaret Thatcher and the law: her employment acts of the 1980s that outlawed solidarity action and picketing; he had the Metropolitan Police, fresh from their success at smashing heads and unions in the miners' strike; he had a new non-union workforce, thanks to the collaboration of the right-wing electricians' union, the EETPU, which had recruited and trained them, in one of the vilest acts of betrayal in labour history; he even had the trucks to distribute his non-union papers by road, to replace the railways, whose unions would certainly not have played his game.

The truth of Wapping is that it was a battle the workers could not win. As with the miners, the enemy was simply too strong and the longer the stand-off went on, the weaker they became.

The outcome was win-win-win for the owners. After Murdoch's victory the others bravely rushed through the breach he had made in the workers' defences. Within months of the end of the dispute in 1987 every national paper had dropped hot metal production and had journalists inputting their copy directly into the system; papers outside London had done so ten years before. Tens of thousands of print workers were thrown out of work.

THE BOSSES also had a propaganda victory. They could rub the sacked workers' noses in the dirt and crow that the market had won and the excessive power of trade unions had been

curbed, propagating the myth that persists because it is they who persistently promote it.

There was another, associated and equally dishonest myth with which they disguised their grab for power: that they had achieved some kind of democratic revolution. The claim was that the cheaper production resulting from digital technology would mean a wondrous proliferation of new media as a democratising force. Another myth.

There may have been new small publications but in the commercial field the numbers have fallen ever since. Of the handful of newspapers



“ I once asked Rupert Murdoch why he was so opposed to the European Union. ‘That’s easy’, he replied. ‘When I go into Downing Street they do what I say; when I go to Brussels they take no notice.’ ”
 Anthony Hilton, business editor of the London Evening Standard, February 25

that did launch after 1986, the only one that lasted at all was the Independent, which survived only on the whim of a classic megalomaniac proprietor, the narcissistic Russian oligarch Yevgeny Lebedev, until he closed it down this year.

The Independent has gone online-only, and of course the internet is the main factor in the decline of print. At the turn of the century the internet was in just the same way held up as great democratising medium – the slogan this time being “everyone is a publisher”. Everyone can be, but 15 years on four giant US corporations – Apple and Microsoft, Google and Facebook – dominate the world.

What Murdoch established at Wapping was the untouchable power of the global corporation.

Yes, he abuses his immense media power to corrupt governments and drive them into devastating wars. He fills his newspapers with hateful lies that are blight on our national life.

But it's worse than that. The Big Media corporations do not run according to the whims of megalomaniac proprietors but the requirements of capital. Profit, share price and shareholder value are what matters, even in Murdoch's giant companies which are run by bunch of aggressive right-wing American magnates, including his sons Lachlan and James, with little interest in the troublesome London papers.

Rupert himself is an anachronism. The old press barons, monsters that they were, did have some kind of purpose and commitment to publishing. Those around him including his sons do not.

Before Wapping, among media folk it was a commonplace riddle to ask whether an owner was in it for the political clout or for the money. No-one ever asks that now. The answer is too obvious.

Media with Frontiers

The Europe debate ahead of the UK referendum in June rarely extends beyond migration and questions of national independence. But the European Union's reach goes into all areas of national life. **GARY HERMAN** asked the questions about its policies on the media.

2016 IS ALREADY an interesting year for the EU. Press freedom, a fundamental right within EU legislation, is flouted by, among others, Hungary and Poland. The refugee crisis is opening fault lines in the EU's structure and the Union seems incapable of acting against members who ignore its laws and treaties.

Transnational treaties that will profoundly affect its citizens are negotiated in secret while the Union's evident desire to expand eastward is both politically explosive and internally divisive.

On April 6, the Netherlands – one of the original six members of the Common Market – will vote on whether the country supports the EU's association agreement with Ukraine; this may turn out to be a prelude to a second in-out referendum after the UK's vote on leaving. It looks like a failed project.

While all this is going on, Brussels seems

Nowhere else are national borders such bottlenecks as in copyright

blithely to pursue its Frankenstein-inspired master plan to build the world's most powerful economy from the rotting stump of the disintegrating Union.

A key ingredient of this strategy is the Digital Single Market (DSM). 2016 has been loudly heralded as "a decisive year for the development of the digital economy and society in the European Union" by Günther Oettinger, the European Commissioner responsible for DSM.

The buzz phrase, unveiled at the recent Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, is "Empowering Verticals" – increased integration and connectivity, based on the next (fifth) generation of mobile technology, which, it is claimed, can drive the growth of vertical markets such as the media, automotive and healthcare sectors at a European (not to say, global) level.

If the EU survives, we will see radical changes to the media across the board. We are promised 16 initiatives by the end of the year to update the regulatory framework supporting digital media. The deadline for all this is 2017, at the same time as mobile roaming charges are abolished within the EU, but much of it hinges on the roll-out of the fifth generation, 5G.

Günther Oettinger
EU Commissioner
for Digital
Economy
and Society



ENZO ZUCCHI/CONSILIUM OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

According to a White Paper launched in Barcelona by the 5G Public-Private Partnership (the Commission, industry and research), 5G will not be fully deployed until 2020. That is just a target; it would be difficult to overestimate the potential technological, political and legal obstacles that could delay its achievement.

Oettinger has presented a proposed a new "Regulation on the cross-border portability of online content services" to revise the copyright rules that block users from accessing online services paid for in their home country (for example, movies, TV broadcasts, e-books, music or games) when travelling to others. This would allow catch-up TV services like the BBC iPlayer to be received across the EU, and would as a consequence enormously increase the availability of online media in every state. These initiatives should make significant advances towards creating a single market for media within the EU. But "should" is not "will" and Oettinger's "fourth industrial revolution" may be indefinitely delayed.

The biggest problems facing European media in the age of DSM are neither technological nor narrowly legal. There are much deeper questions relating to the cultural and ethical environment that need to be addressed, such as contending cultural values, the concentration of ownership, the decline of public services and the growing dominance of global "content aggregators" like Google, Apple and Amazon.

Oettinger is looking at copyright law. "Copyright reform is crucial," he has said. "Nowhere else are national borders such bottlenecks as in the area of copyright.... By mid-2016, we will consider legislative proposals including cross-border distribution of television and radio

programmes online and cross-border access to content." This is an area that has proved pretty intractable for many years, and there is no evidence that the EU can come up with answers. It has never been able to get its member states to agree on a standard electric plug, let alone to act together to resolve an issue as urgent and relatively uncomplicated as the refugee crisis.

One of the EU instruments which could address these questions – the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) – is outside Oettinger's remit.

It belongs to directorate of Culture and Education, and it has not been revised since 2007. Well before the Digital Single Market was a gleam in anyone's eye, the AVMSD's predecessor programme, Television Without Frontiers, considered the issue of cross-border media. But the digital revolution proceeded too fast and the Commission failed to keep up with it.

One consultancy organisation, Dehaventilland Europe, observed last year that a reopening of the AVMS Directive has been on the cards for

The digital revolution proceeded too fast and the Commission failed to keep up

some time.

In 2014, the EU established a European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) to report directly to the Commission. This group of national broadcasting regulators has been largely preoccupied with advising on the revision of the AVMSD.

It has no power to make policy in its own right and the primary allegiance of its members is national, not European and certainly not global. And in the age of Netflix and YouTube, that's a problem.