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MURDOCHVISION!

'... We will aim to create and cover global events.'

Granville Williams highlights the dangers in Rupert Murdoch's global media vision.

Wednesday September 1 was a busy day for Rupert Murdoch, and one which vividly revealed the overweening political and economic clout of his global media empire.

First, he launched his new Sky 12 channel subscription package with a £15 million advertising campaign, including billboard posters and double page spreads in the national press proclaiming "Watch what you want when you want on more than twenty channels."

Rupert Murdoch's tone was triumphant: his multi-channel satellite television service heralded the "first day of a new age of satellite television" with his critics routed and his vision of a new world of consumer choice in television vindicated.

In the evening, at a £100,000 presentation in Westminster, National Heritage Minister, Peter Brooke, John Major and the movers and shakers from the media were amongst 700 guests who heard Murdoch's plans to expand his global media empire. His acquisition of Hong Kong based Star Television now gave News International a reach over two-thirds of the planet. "Our activities include the creation of new channels with worldwide reach. We aim to create and cover global events," he said.

With breathtaking effrontery he also argued that technology had "liberated people from the once-powerful media barons. The days when a few newspaper proprietors could sit down and agree to keep an entire nation ignorant of a major event are long gone."

To end the day, *Times* editor Peter Stothard announced, in a blatant piece of predatory pricing aimed to undermine the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*, the indefinite price reduction of 15p for the paper. This price cut, whilst the paper is



already losing substantial sums of money, will mean an additional loss of £17m revenue. The *Independent* (September 2) commented: "Murdoch has decided to crush his nearest rival with the power of money. While he may lose more than £20m on the *Times* in the next 12 months, he reckons that will be a good investment if it drives the *Independent* out of the market."

These events highlight yet again the dangers of excessive media concentration. Far from opening up diversity of ideas, information and experience Murdoch's world vision is monolithic.

The market is supreme and individuals become consumers. Of course, there is choice but only within the commercially

viable alternatives on offer.

Murdoch has also demonstrated time and time again how, in the United States, Australia and this country, he can use powerful political support to push forward his empire. He shrugs off calls for tougher ownership restrictions, saying he feels no threat either from this or a future Labour government: "A Labour government isn't going to do anything about it; the sting has gone out of it. They are not going to close Sky Television down."

At the time of his 1989 MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh Television Festival, Murdoch complained there wasn't a level playing field for him to build his media empire on. Since then he's managed through political patronage to extract a range of commercially preferential arrangements.

■ In November 1990 the government didn't intervene when the two stations, Sky and BSB, merged, with News International in the driving seat. Wholesale redundancies amongst BSB's 560 staff and the withdrawal of the more technically sophisticated 'squarials' followed.

■ News International were specifically excluded in the 1990 Broadcasting Act from the cross-media ownership restrictions which prevented other newspaper groups from taking shares about 20 per cent in ITV companies.

■ BSKyB does not have to conform to programming requirements to provide, as ITV and BBC do, news, current affairs and children's programmes.

■ ITV companies have to pay £350m for their franchises while BSKyB pays nothing.

■ BSKyB has a greater freedom; there is no requirement for it to screen European originated programmes, or to commission original material. Indeed, BSKyB's director

● *continued from page 1*

of programmes, David Elstein, admitted, "Some channels will start off with virtually all US material."

The dominance of News International shouldn't distract from other media groups whose activities will lead to further media concentration. Companies are lobbying strongly to redraw the ITV map, so that it will comprise four or five, rather than 15 companies across the UK. Under government rules, companies will be able to own up to 25 per cent of the ITV network.

As the conference season approaches, national newspaper groups are also lobbying for a relaxation in cross-media ownership rules. Pearson, Associated Newspapers, the Telegraph, and the Guardian and Manchester Evening News group have hired a lobbying firm, Market Access International, to run a campaign. The object is to lift the legal restriction which prevents newspaper groups from owning more than 20 per cent of any terrestrial television station.

What we think

We face a stark social and political choice. If communications are to be in any

sense representative, restrictions on monopoly control of the media must go hand in hand with the provision of broadcasting and publishing facilities open to everyone and under democratic control.

At a minimum, any British government seeking restrictions on concentration of ownership would have to win support for measures at a European level because of Community legislation.

Legislation should strictly limit the number of media outlets which any one company can own or have a major stake in. It would include a clear definition of what constituted 'a media independent' and take measures to prevent concentration and cross-ownership between television publishing and computer based information systems. We would argue for:

- the principle of 'one owner, one outlet' covering national newspapers, national radio stations, satellite television and regional commercial television channels with a bar on cross-ownership between these four outlets;

- making local regional monopolies covering television, radio, cable and newspapers illegal;

- making it illegal for one media supplier to own two media operations in any one county or region;

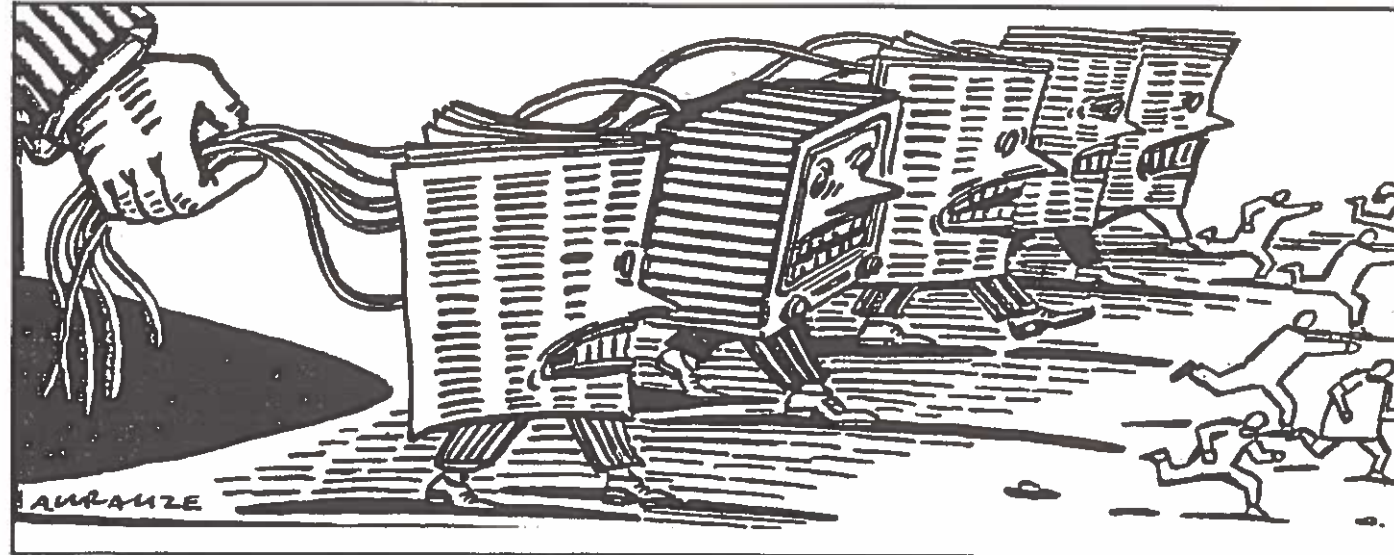
- legislation to guarantee all lawful publications the right to distribute.

This area is beset with technical difficulties relating to definitions of ownership, control and influence, and to the economic and organisational consequences of divestment. Authority to make decisions on these issues could be delegates to a revamped Monopolies and Mergers Commission, with powers to act independently of the government and organise divestment.

The crucial point, however, is that policy should be geared towards dealing with these issues and not ducking them because of their complexity or the concerted opposition of vested media interests.

Breaking the grip of the media monopolies is only one half of the equation. The other half is the active promotion of diversity.

The cost of publishing distributing and promoting newspapers, magazines or TV programmes is a major reason why the media remains controlled by a tiny elite.



Playwright Dennis Potter urged restrictions on media ownership in a Channel 4 Opinions slot earlier this year, and returned to the theme in his MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh Television Festival

In his *Opinions* piece he said: *We need some barriers to delay or deter the vandals; and to insist that the dollar or the pound are not the only measures of human culture.*

Let us begin by properly enforcing cross-ownership provisions so that a Murdoch or his clones either has his TV or his newspapers. But, more: if we really want to clean up some of the things which so contaminate our democracy and our values, and so diminish our sense of citizenship in our own government and culture, then do not enact laws about what should or should not be in our newspapers. Let us enact laws about who owns them.

First, no newspaper should own any

part of any television company, and vice versa. Second, no person or group should own more than one daily, one evening and one Sunday paper. It's very simple, very hygienic, very straightforward, very just and would at one stroke immeasurably improve the validity of our own democracy and its defences against those who abuse it.

In the MacTaggart lecture he said: *Our television has been ripped apart and falteringly re-assembled by politicians who believe that value is a monetary term only, and that a cost-accountant is thereby the most suitable adjudicator of what we can and cannot see on our screens. And these accountants or their near clones are*

employed by new kinds of Media Owners who try to gobble up everything in their path. We must protect ourselves and our democracy, first by properly exercising the cross-ownership provisions currently in place, and then by erecting further checks and balances against dangerous concentrations of the media power which plays such a large part in our lives. No individual, group or company should be allowed to own more than one daily, one evening and one weekly newspaper. No newspaper should be allowed to own a television station and vice versa. A simple act of public hygiene, tempering abuse, widening choice, and maybe even returning broadcasting to its makers.

A SHAMEFUL ANNIVERSARY

By MIKE JEMPSON

It is five years since the broadcasting ban formalised political censorship of the conflict in the north of Ireland. Is it another lost cause, or should we be stepping up demands for more open debate about Britain's presence in the province?

What would, or could, any British Government do if all the broadcasting companies refused to implement Douglas Hurd's 1988 executive order banning 'actuality' relating to the concerns of republican and unionist groups in the North of Ireland?

It could remove broadcasting licences, it might even take legal action and fine or jail the Chief Executives, it might even place all broadcasting under direct state control. But would it?

Unless it wanted to be out of power for generations it is extremely unlikely that a British Government would take any such action faced by a united front.

Two years ago in Greece, when the editor of *Eleftherotyia* was arrested under the criminal code for publishing a statement by the November 19 terror group, six other editors immediately published the same statement in solidarity and were jailed. Their incarceration lasted 10 days. It was the Government that climbed down, agreeing to reconsider the application of the law as it related to the Press.

But a united front was the one thing the Tories did not fear, because their plans for the future of broadcasting already had Chief Executives and broadcasters further down the chain of command, squirming with anxiety.

A measure which won the British Government praise from the apartheid regime in South Africa wounded the credibility of those who claim that Britain is free from political censorship. Ireland has seldom been an issue for which British broadcasters have been prepared to go to the wall, as the CPBF's new compilation of programmes tampered with or taken off the airwaves makes only too clear.

More importantly the ban set back any chance of full public debate about the causes and the resolution of the conflict in the north of Ireland.

Seventy years ago Partition was enforced against the consent of the vast majority of Irish People, under threat of war, after two general elections had given Sinn Fein enormous all-Ireland majorities in favour of a united, independent republic. And today all opinion polls show that the majority of British people want British troops out of the province.

Yet the broadcasting ban has been pre-



north of Ireland deserves to be heard. In no other conflict throughout the world is the British media so hog-tied, or so subservient.

It has been left to the NUJ, backed by the broadcast union BECTU, to challenge the ban in the courts. Unsurprisingly their case in favour of the right to know has been rejected by the British courts. This autumn the European Commission on Human Rights in Strasbourg will decide whether Britain has a case to answer before the European Court of Human Rights.

Many worthy sentiments have been expressed by senior broadcasting executives, including John Birt and Liz Forgan, expressing antipathy to the ban, but not one British broadcasting company has been willing even to contribute to the costs, let alone join forces in the action.

October 19 is a shameful anniversary. It is a reminder of the acquiescence of the people who insist that their job is to examine and challenge the activities of institutions and individuals who hold power in society. It is a reminder that a Government, which owes its survival to behind-the-scenes dealing with Unionist MPs during the Maastricht debate, prefers to stifle open debate and conspire against the declared wishes of the majority of the electorate that Britain should get out of Ireland.

It is also a reminder to journalists and civil libertarians that any concession to political censorship weakens us all. Whatever token protests are made on the anniversary itself, our commitment should be to busting the ban and asserting our right to know and the right of the people of the north of Ireland to be heard.

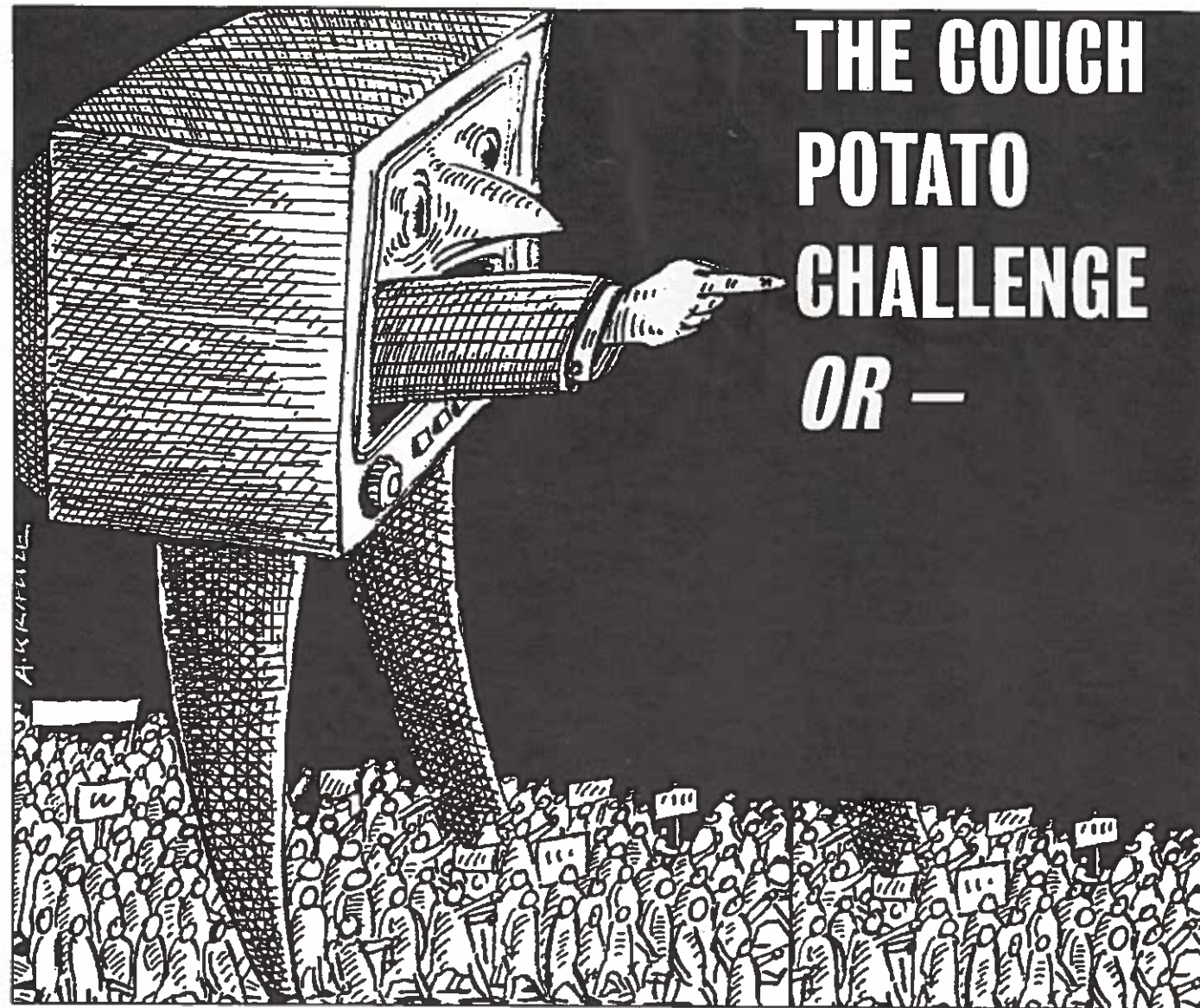
NEW CPBF PUBLICATION

To coincide with the fifth anniversary of the Broadcasting Ban the CPBF is publishing **INTERFERENCE ON THE AIRWAVES: the Broadcasting Ban, Ireland and the Media**. It will contain an introductory chapter by Mike Jempson and list every programme on the North of Ireland since 1959 which has been censored, delayed or banned. The list, compiled by Liz Curtis, author of *Ireland: the Propaganda War* (Pluto Press) provides a vivid example of the insidious process of censorship and misinformation which existed before the Broadcasting Ban, and has been strengthened since. The pamphlet will be published on the Fifth Anniversary, Tuesday October 19, and can be purchased from the CPBF Book Service for £3.99 plus 50p p&p. *Ireland: The Propaganda War* by Liz Curtis is also available through the Book Service. It costs £9.95 plus £1.00 p&p. *Cheques and order to: CPBF Book Service, 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF.*

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Manchester: Troubled Images: The Broadcasting Ban, the Media and Northern Ireland. Speakers include novelist Glenn Patterson (*Burning Your Own, Fat Lad*) and Stephen Doril, author of *The Silent Conspiracy: Inside the Intelligence Services in the 1990s*. *Tuesday October 19, 7.30pm The Cornerhouse, Oxford Street. Tickets bookable (price £1) after October 1st from Cornerhouse (Tel: 061 228 2463).*

A meeting is also planned in London on October 19. Contact us on 071 278 4430 for further details.



THE COUCH POTATO CHALLENGE OR —

Media pundits would have us believe that Michael Grade's Channel 4 is the success story of the Nineties. Note that nowadays it's the scheduler's channel rather than the viewers'.

C4 seldom makes it in to the weekly Top Fifty ratings chart and in its whole life has only achieved viewing figures of 8 million plus on seven occasions (only once since 1985), a figure which has caused mainstream channels to axe programmes in the past.

In the first six months of 1993, only 311 C4 programmes managed to attract audiences of more than 3 million. The vast majority were light entertainment (196), including 91 game shows, 64 editions of Countdown, and 13 editions (plus 6 repeats) of the Crystal Maze.

So how is Michael Grade's 'success' being measured? Certainly not

in terms of C4's original brief to cater for minority interests and experiment with new directions.

The rescheduled and expanded Brookside, which topped 3 million 66 times during the period, offers a clue. C4's top drama series has won notoriety this year by being referred to the Broadcasting Standards Council for a storyline involving domestic violence, father/daughter incest and the abuser's subsequent murder by his wife and child.

BSC disapproval was no doubt shared by C4's competitors, but the objective had been achieved, winning fresh public attention for the discreet soap of the chattering classes.

The storylines were a shrewd move in C4's advertising sales strategy. When C4 was cut adrift from the rest of commercial TV under the 1990 Broadcasting Act, a safety net

had to be incorporated in case it could not attract sufficient advertising revenue.

Now its mainstream competitors are belly-aching because C4 has proved so adept at niche marketing - delivering significant, carefully tailored segments of the viewing public to advertisers.

Indeed, C4 has acknowledged that some of its more worthy fare does not provide the packaging advertisers want, and persuaded the ITC to grant it extra time for adverts during more popular programmes. It has also increased the time available to advertisers in the middle of top-rated programmes.

C4 continues to rely heavily on cheap US imports and has adopted a more populist approach to programming. The 'doom and gloom' of environmental series 'Fragile Earth' is to be replaced by Global Trail featuring

— How Tory Broadcasting policy brought incest and murder to peak-time soap, and put BBC and ITV in to a tail-spin

'a strong sense of storytelling, adventure and explanation', for instance.

The commercial success of its film strands, at the box office and the Oscars, has helped to boost its image as the advertisers' friend.

And that, after all, is what the Broadcasting Act was all about - treating radio and TV as the means by which consumers are put in producers to stimulate economic growth.

Yet one flaw in the logic, which most politicians chose to ignore, was the likelihood that there would be insufficient advertising revenue to sustain the planned broadcasting explosion.

It did force the Government to abandon its plans for a sixth terrestrial commercial TV channel, and has hindered the awarding of C5. Now a report by accountants Coopers & Lybroad has warned that the rapid expansion of commercial radio is threatened by lack of advertising revenue, and promises a crisis by 1996 unless the 180 local/regional and three national stations can double their ad sales by 1996.

Unless radio stations can find new sources of potential buyers for air-time, this means clawing custom from newspapers and TV where competition has become even more fierce since the new franchises came in to operation.

Radio's current share of the advertising cake is a mere 2 percent. Although it remains a popular and convenient medium, the poor quality and intrusive nature of radio advertising may be its worst enemy in the battle for survival.

Meanwhile commercial TV and the BBC have been vying for the lead in shedding full-time staff. Between them they have created a pool of skilled casual labour over whose heads the cost accountants draft increasingly tight production budgets. This is no recipe for creative programming, and certainly not for challenging journalism.

Those submitting programme proposals must now have an eye for potential sponsors. The small screen is beginning to resemble the posts for art exhibitions, concerts and theatrical events where commercial sponsoring is now a prerequisite for public performance.

Already there are signs that a new Broadcasting Act may be introduced in response to demands from ITV companies for changes in the ground rules barely nine-months after they came into effect.

Chief among the demands are that take-overs should be allowed. This would further reduce jobs and regional identity, and is a clear sign that the industry does not share Ministers' bullish confidence that the economy is capable of sustained growth.

Meanwhile John Birt's BBC, (not ours anymore) wracked by internal strife in the wake of Producer Choice, is to do away with collective bargaining, making its staff even more vulnerable. And we are soon to be treated to the unedifying spectacle of the BBC acting as a recruitment agency for BSkyB's future ratings.

The Murdoch channel has sold the Corporation the rights to several of its programmes, including US

comedy show 'Seinfeld' and the mini-series 'Lonesome Dove' in the hope that once viewers are hooked they will fork out to see the sequels on satellite TV.

And the BBC is already encouraging the switch away from terrestrial transmission through its UK Gold satellite deal with Thames TV, and by supplying a third of the programmes planned for UK Living, the cable and satellite channel aimed at women viewers.

Broadcasting via the Astra satellite and marketed as part of the Sky Multi-Channel package launched on 1 September, UK Living will be screening some of the BBC's 'archive' material only days after it is first seen by terrestrial viewers.

These desperate efforts to show that the BBC has entered in to the spirit of free-market broadcasting with no more than the occasional ministerial nudge will merely strengthen demands that it should survive on a much reduced licence fee - or becomes a subscription service when its Charter comes up for renewal in 1996.

It is clearer than ever that the Broadcasting Act, ostensibly concerned only with the commercial sector, was a stalking horse for privatisation of the BBC.

One faint glimmer in the gloom is the gradual year-on-year collapse in TV viewing figures. As the public wearies of what is channelled in to its home perhaps there will be a shift towards interest in direct political action. Who knows, couch potatoes may yet sprout and bring new life where now there appears only to be blight.

The price of press freedom

by Jo Treharne

It is a widely held view within the labour movement and elsewhere that a genuinely democratic society needs a truthful and independent press.

However, events over the past year or so have raised concern over journalistic standards of news reporting and news gathering. This concern has prompted many parliamentarians to issue calls to the Government to hurry through some kind of privacy legislation, designed to protect themselves, minor royals and celebrities from press intrusion into their private affairs.

One Government response appeared at the end of July this year, in the form of a Consultation Paper issued by the Lord Chancellor's Office entitled 'Infringement of Privacy'. As the title suggests, this paper is solely concerned with the privacy issue, suggesting the creation of a statutory right to privacy for individuals. This would be enforceable through law - although without access to Legal Aid.

"Infringement of Privacy" is woeful inadequate on more than one level. The rich and famous have always had the power of redress through the libel laws, and have been able to use this facility on occasion to prevent potentially damaging articles appearing in our national newspapers. At the other end of the scale, individuals such as those who gave evidence to the special parliamentary hearings on Freedom and Responsibility of the Press last December had no such redress. The new Consultation Paper offers no hope to those who cannot afford to pursue a court action to the end, because without Legal Aid "ordinary" people who have suffered press intrusion will not be guaranteed a defence.

"Infringement of Privacy", also will not necessarily prevent cases similar to those that apparently caused the problem in the first place - due to a 'public interest' cause that can, in limited circumstances, be used as a defence. This could easily include high-profile 'Royal Exclusives' and items such as the Mellor story, as persons holding certain types of office would be deemed to be in the public domain.

So after a year of intense debate on the subject, we appear to be back to square one.

But the significance of the Consultation Paper should not be underestimated. Privacy legislation such as this, without

counterbalancing press freedom legislation has serious implications for investigative journalism - already fettered by existing laws governing what the press may or may not print - for example the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the use of contempt of court and libel laws.

As usual, the Government has fundamentally failed to address the root cause of print media excesses that inevitably lead to harassment and intrusion. Recent examples of gutter journalism in part reflect the bitter circulation wars that have arisen from the monopolistic tendencies of just three major press organisations - News International, Mirror Group Newspapers and Associated Newspaper Ltd. Circulation wars encourage sensationalism, over-simplification and - in extreme cases - total fabrication of the truth.

"Infringement of Privacy" is an uncoordinated response to a situation that needs much more careful, open consideration. The system is crying out for carefully drafted legislation that will protect both the right of the public to read the truth, and the right of the journalist to discover, and write, the truth. The public must be given a moderate measure of redress through a simple and accountable system of correction of factual inaccuracies, wherever and however they occur. At the same time, journalists must be supported by the encouragement and promotion of the best traditions of journalism, and protected from editorial interventions by unaccountable proprietors.

But experience has shown that media legislation in this country is rarely balanced, coherent or effective. "Infringement of Privacy" is another example of an inadequate piece of draft legislation. The National Heritage Committee are expected to release a White Paper on the press in the Autumn of this year. (The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom have submitted a detailed report to the committee, a copy of which can be obtained from the office). The paper is expected to concentrate on the subject of privacy and harassment, and is unlikely to tackle the wider issues of monopoly ownership.

Copies of "Infringement of Privacy" can be obtained from: The Lord Chancellor's Department, Southside, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QT. Tel: 071 210 2154.

The media and one parent families

by Sally Witcher, Director of the Child Poverty Action Group

Lone parents are not often deemed newsworthy. On the rare occasions they do find themselves elevated to the headlines, it is generally for the wrong reasons. Given the series of recent media attacks, lone parents may have preferred to remain in impoverished obscurity. The likelihood is that they will, once the current furore has abated.

At times, recent media coverage of lone parents has demonstrated all the sensitivity, understanding and capacity for analytical debate of a shark in a feeding frenzy. Following the illuminating experience of visiting a housing estate, John Redwood MP described lone parents as "one of the biggest social problems of our day." This was followed by Tom Sackville's explanation as to why young women have babies. Nothing to do with storks or gooseberry bushes. Instead "the existence of a very comprehensive benefit system and free housing system" is apparently to blame.

What comprehensive benefit system? What free housing system? Why are lone parents so often portrayed as teenagers when the vast majority are older women whose relationship has broken down? Such points remain largely unchallenged. Media myths quickly blossom into undisputed fact. Evidence that teenagers get pregnant in order to jump the housing queue seems to be based on 'stories read in newspapers', hardly the soundest of foundations on which to construct government policy.

However, the dearth of 'real' news over the summer did allow time for serious debate of the issues - proving that the silly season doesn't have to be silly. Against the odds, the connection was made between the lack of childcare and the large number of lone parents unable to take up work. The 'home alone' cases started by focussing on the selfishness of lone parents who neglect their children, and finished by exploring the dilemma confronting those who have to choose between childcare or food and clothes.

Of course, the media soon found two lone parents who had left their children to go on holiday, and once more we were back with the feckless, irresponsible lone parents. But the poverty of lone parents is not 'sexy'. Their poverty cannot be sentimentalised like that of disabled people and other 'deserving poor'. Nor should it - such treatment is just another way of obscuring the real issues.

The media's willingness to leap on rumour and to promote damaging stereotypes, allows the government to test the water of public opinion from a safe distance, as it carries out its review of public spending. Are lone parents only a bad thing when they 'live off the state'? Perhaps if the state took issues such as childcare and low pay seriously, they wouldn't have to. There are laws against incitement when it comes to race. Other are not similarly protected. Some may argue that they should be.

TV'S BATTLEFIELD: Programmes versus Money

Just over ten years ago television was described in the United States, with neat linguistic barbarism, as just "a toaster with pictures." It was a statement, full of meaning about a subject I want to address.

I want to ask whether we wish public service broadcasting to survive in Britain or whether we wish to completely embrace the culture of the international money-men - Murdoch, Berlusconi and the rest - and have a purely market-led system.

TELEVISION: Public Service

We could suggest that some producers acquire money to make programmes and other producers make programmes to acquire money. But to be specific - public service broadcasting aspires to universal appeal - you can please a lot of the people a lot of the time and everybody some of the time. Good programmes should be made popular, popular programmes made well. It is often forgotten, for example, that the range of innovative comedies, produced by the BBC, *Rising Damp*, *Last of the Summer Wine*, *Porridge*, was public service broadcasting at its best - original, innovative, not bound to succeed; reflecting the quality of our culture; pleasing millions. Public service broadcasting is not just trooping the colour and state funerals.

The same is true of drama and current affairs - it is not narrow casting. It isn't, as Mr Murdoch suggested, all history and crinoline ballgowns fondly looking back to a non-existent golden age.

Secondly, we should remember universal availability. Public Service broadcasting was designed to reach everyone and so it does at a very reasonable price. Those who, in principle, attack the BBC's licence fee do a disservice to opportunity cost.

We should remember a third characteristic - broadcasting can motivate viewers as citizens, not merely as consumers. It sees that they have duties as well as rights. It can encourage them to play a part in a better society.

And serving national diversity is not the same as giving people what they want. Not everything is demand led. Popular demand, ratings will always determine a great deal - and no broadcaster should fail to respect their audience, but there should always be room to innovate, to cater for substantial minorities to invest in people, their training and development, occasionally to fail, but above all there will be room



The set piece occasions at the Edinburgh TV Festival are extensively reported, but tucked away in this year's programme was an impassioned talk by Ray Fitzwalter, former Granada TV Commissioning Editor for Current Affairs. His theme deserves a wider audience and we're printing edited extracts here.

to lead an audience to new things which, when seen, surprise and please an audience. But leading, not merely following, perceived demand, which reflects risk-taking, is critical.

Mr Murdoch made much of the term independence, asserting that British broadcasting had financially been too close to Government. The new market led system would be its liberation. There was something in his first point, for his patron Mrs Thatcher had never flinched from exerting pressure with Murdoch's papers in close attendance.

But it is another principle of public service broadcasting that it should be independent of all vested interests. In Britain it has been, but with periodic abuses. What

Mr Murdoch didn't mention was not merely independence of government but independence of commercial interests. He would be hard pressed to maintain that much of the British media including his own hasn't shown an increasing tendency to serve the advertiser first, the viewer second. That in fact is what the American system he so warmly recommended is actually designed to do.

These are some of the characteristics of public service broadcasting - it not merely seeks to entertain but also to inform and educate a whole nation. As perhaps the most powerful means of communication it provides some of the cement that binds a society together.

TELEVISION: Business Service

A purely market-led system has in fact quite different characteristics. The market makes no pretence to universal appeal or universal availability, nor does it necessarily seek to educate or inform, nor does it recognise citizens, only consumers.

The market seeks - quite properly - to make a profit where it may. When driven by global corporations it will seek to produce to the lowest - not the highest - common denominator acceptable to the maximum number of markets. The interest of those Corporations in maximising returns will not recognise the character and culture of individual nations; Dallas in France is Dallas in Spain is Dallas as in Dallas.

It does not mean that purely commercial systems can't produce good programmes, they do, but usually their general character is just OK. And the beauty of being mediocre is you are always at your best - and that is the point - no real risk, formulaic, maximising audiences, playing to the obvious. It ignores what actually defines us, the divergencies of taste between and within countries.

Viewers tend to be treated as statistics in skins, as consumers with wallets and credit cards. The market seeks to divide up audiences making no pretence of reaching or catering for the old or the poor; of bringing great occasions of sport or state to the whole nation; but aims to buy up, lock out and sell off to those customers who can and will pay more.

Few recognise that the Americans and the British took public service broadcasting to Germany and Japan in the aftermath

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TV'S BATTLEFIELD • continued from page 7

of World War II. But in their own country, in contrast to the British, the Americans let those values evaporate.

You may recollect the memorable statement from Ed Murrow in 1958 saying of television: "This instrument can teach; it can illuminate; yes, it can even inspire. But it can only do so to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box."

But the pursuit of the market to sell goods with infotainment and personality-driven news wrecked Murrow's CBS, the best news and documentary organisation in the world. They didn't even succeed in their own terms. They went for full-blooded ratings and profits and got neither.

The same lesson was repeated in Australia, in France, in New Zealand and is with us now. The real achievements of American television drama and current affairs, now forgotten, were overthrown by men who believed that television was "just another business."

And that is the opportunity the Lords of the Global Communications Village saw. Everywhere they pressed home the same assault on public values. They believed they would destroy the old values and greatly profit from the new - it involves smoothing out the geography of nations and placing the needs of their corporations ahead of any public or national interest.

But profound disquiet arises when global corporations attempt to impose pan-national products which come into conflict with fundamental human aspirations to self-identity. All countries import some programmes and should benefit from that, but audiences generally prefer to watch reflections of their own humour, drama and news - given the choice.

It was Mark Fowler, appointed chairman of the US Federal Communications Commission by Ronald Reagan, who in

1981 described television as "a toaster with pictures". He went on like Rupert Murdoch to say: "From here onward, the public's interest must determine the public interest."

It's unclear whether he didn't know the difference, but the same could be said of public hangings, *Sunday Sport* and *Prisoner Cell Block H*.

The appointment of Fowler had its parallel in Margaret Thatcher putting Lord Chalfont into the IBA. They were political appointees there to do a job - men somewhat opposed to the businesses they were supposed to help regulate.

And there were other echoes. In 1988 Michael Green of Carlton Communications said: "I think of television as a manufacturing process. What is the difference between a television programme and this cigarette lighter?"

It should be no surprise that businessmen should see things this way, but is television just another business? Producers in any industry easily plead for privileges and this is no argument for a soft touch, but there are legions who would quickly recognise that while television is manufacturing it is something more. It is the central cultural experience of this age; it is a crucial component of our democratic process; it is a critical instrument of education; it is the flag of our international reputation. None of that can be said of manufacturing steel or cars, nor even toasters or cigarette lighters.

How many businessmen stay awake at night because of the democratic process; how many captains of industry worry about an instrument of education; how many times has Rupert Murdoch pondered the central cultural experience?

Should we therefore put our trust in them or choose those who believe that broadcasting can also illuminate and inspire?

LABOUR PARTY FRINGE MEETINGS

TELEVISION DOWN THE TUBE?

Tuesday 28th September 8.00pm
Speakers include Ann Clywd, National Heritage Shadow Secretary and Tony Lennon, President BECTU

What impact is Conservative broadcasting policy having on the television industry, and what policies do we need to repair the damage being done to ITV and the BBC?

THE PRICE OF PRESS FREEDOM

Wednesday 29th September 1.00pm
Speakers: Clive Soley MP, Francis de Souza (Article 19), Professor Eric Barendt and Linda Townley, former maid to Princess Anne (Presswise)

What rights should we have to get fair and accurate reporting in the media and how are the government's privacy proposals a threat to press freedom?

"TO UNDO EXCESS" - Dismantling Media Concentration & Power

Wednesday 29th September 8.00pm
Speakers include Robin Corbett MP, Professor Graham Murdock and Aidan White, International Federation of Journalists.

In September Rupert Murdoch unveiled his new satellite plans and mounted an assault on newspaper competitors through price cuts on The Times. What are the arguments for tackling the enormous concentration of media power in this country and what can be done about it?

All meetings in the Fitzherbert Room, Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton.

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