

FREE Press

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PLEASE DIG DEEP FOR OUR FINANCIAL APPEAL

BY THE time you read this we will have taken an important initiative. At the October National Council we discussed the threat posed by the domination of Rupert Murdoch's new venture into digital television broadcasting. We agreed to hold a public meeting in London on Wednesday 27 October, and speakers included Polly Toynbee from *The Independent*, Chris Mullin MP, Robin Simpson from the National Consumers Council and CPBF Chair, Tony Lennon.

We agreed to do this, in spite of our dire financial situation, because that is what the Campaign was established to do way back in 1979. Then and now we are about challenging media

power, arguing for diversity and access, and warning of the danger to democracy of excessive media power concentrated in the hands of a few global groups like News International.

But now we've got to pay the bills for the London meeting, and some other big ones we had already. That's why we're appealing to all our members and supporters to help us make a solvent start to 1997. Please send us your affiliation renewals promptly, and add a donation if you can afford it. If your union or Labour Party branch is affiliated can you raise the issue of a donation to us, or have a collection? Finally the best way to ensure we get our finances on a stronger footing is

to build a bigger membership, and ensure our ideas are getting out as widely as possible.

1997 is election year and the other discussion at our October National Council was to plan Electionwatch. This will involve our members and supporters in an important exercise to track and monitor media coverage of the election. We ran Electionwatch in 1992, but this time we are planning a more ambitious media monitoring exercise. (See the article in this issue)

We have an exciting programme of work planned for 1997. Our ideas and policies are more relevant and important than ever.

Please dig deep to help us promote them.

DIGITAL TV: MURDOCH'S NEXT CONQUEST?

THE alarm bells are ringing. Suddenly the commentators are aware that something is going awfully wrong with a Broadcasting Act on which the ink has barely dried.

The CPBF warned of the digital threat posed by Murdoch in *Free Press* over a year ago but many of the British media groups were too intent on lobbying for the cross-media ownership rules to be changed to keep their eye on Murdoch's plans for digital satellite TV, and the deal with Michael Heseltine to realise them.

But suddenly there's a major panic alert, triggered partly by Polly Toynbee's pieces in *The Independent*, and taken up by *The Guardian*. There's even been a piece in the *Daily Telegraph* by Boris Johnson where he writes, 'As Murdoch waxes in strength and influence, the politicians, pragmatic chaps that they are, dare not attack him. The less they have the guts to take on the Murdochian Moloch, the more he waxes in

strength.' He concludes, 'Someone must stand up to him. If the Government has the guts of a gnat, it will insist that whoever makes Murdoch's new gadget, it must take signals from all broadcasters impartially.'

Or how about this from Sir Christopher Bland, chairman of the BBC, also attacking Murdoch's potential stranglehold over the gateway to digital television? 'I am certain that it would be unwise to rely on the normal process of commercial negotiation to sort out the gateway issue. Broadcasting information is too important to be left to market pressures

alone. We should not, if we value democracy, create an "information underclass" through allowing subscription and pay channels to become the main source of news and current affairs.'

So there we have it. A range of voices across the political and media spectrums urging action. Let's see some from the politicians before it's too late.



BBC licence fee

THE high-profile campaign by John Birt for an above-inflation increase in the licence fee, launched at this year's TV festival in Edinburgh, seems to have failed. The current colour television licence is £89.50, and the BBC was hoping for an increase of about £5 in 1997, and a £100 licence within two years.

The Heritage Department commissioned a report (which probably cost an arm and a leg to complete) by the consultants, Broxton Associates. The report praised the BBC for its cost-cutting, but said there is more scope for savings and raising additional revenue from commercial ventures. This was the basis for reports that the government had rejected the licence fee increase.

Already the savage round of cost-cutting – £500 million over the past five years, and further savings of £100 million a year into the future – have done damage to the BBC's in-house resources. The BBC's costume, scenery and make-up design units are to close, victims of the Producer Choice policy. These were the units responsible for the design of a host of award winning shows, from Dr Who to Martin Chuzzlewit. And there are plans to float the BBC resources directorate off as a wholly owned subsidiary company.

The trade magazine Broadcast

How low can the Sun sink?

THE Sun's article, 'The Big Earner', on October 28 was an 'exposé' of Mark Harris alleging that he made £1,000 a week selling the paper which enabled him to live in a flat in a well-to-do suburb. The story prompted a backlash affecting sales, which were 4,000 down on the previous week, and leading to Big Issue sellers being assaulted and abused.

Mark Harris says, "The Sun well and truly stitched me up. They made up and twisted what I said. I never earned as much as £1,000 a week. Whatever I earned was very hard work, standing in all weathers and losing my voice shouting all day."

The net result of the story is that he can't sell the magazine now, and other vendors have seen sales slump. But if this action by

Scotland be brave

ANDREW Neil is now editor-in-chief of Scotsman Publications, which the secretive but Conservative Barclay brothers bought in 1995. The papers in the group – The Scotsman, Scotland on Sunday, the Edinburgh Evening News and The European – will no doubt feel his impact soon. The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday have adopted a

(15/11/96) carried a scathing editorial. The decision 'smacks of cost-cutting overkill of the worst kind... What it means is that the BBC will now rely on freelance staff for all its costume and scenery requirements' and asks the question:

Which is the biggest threat to the BBC's future – a few million pounds overspent on costumes and scenery or the loss of its programming excellence that makes us happy to pay our licence fee in the first place?

It is against this background that the three main broadcasting unions wrote the BBC governors expressing fears about the ability of the BBC to provide high-quality public service broadcasting.

The Birtist reforms are one threat to the BBC, but the government's stance over the licence-fee puts another question mark over the BBC's ability to survive.

Whilst the BBC's revenue remains static, the figures for BSkyB have soared as people pay ever increasing sums to watch the sport and other programmes that used to be on BBC and ITV.

The BBC needs to be securely financed, but what hope is there of that from a government which presided over two disastrous Broadcasting Acts and now seems intent on privatising C4?

the Sun was pretty tacky, the paper was later accused of stealing and using extracts from a world exclusive interview with George Michael which was to appear in the Big Issue. The Sun was turned down for a deal on the interview, and approached a news agency in the south-west, where the magazine is printed and probably obtained a copy from someone at the printers. To rub salt in the wound the Sun editor, Stuart Higgins, then sent a letter to Big Issue editor, John Bird, with a cheque for £2,000, and the kind sentiment, 'I hope the cheque will help you in your excellent work ...' A bit rich, really, but it didn't work – the paper is being sued for malicious falsehood and damages.

devolutionary line, but Neil is an ardent unionist, and his appointment has raised the spirits of Conservatives in Scotland.

Neil will have a regular column in The Scotsman to air his views, and has suggested that he wants to bring the papers in behind John Major, who intends to make the integrity of the union a key election issue.

Labour's media policy – Wait for it!

MIKE JEMPSON

ADDRESSING the Social Market Foundation on 11 November, Labour's media spokesperson, Lewis Moonie, expressed a hope that his party would be able to spell out details of its media policy by Christmas, or if not then at least before the General Election. Well, that's a relief.

He doubted that plans for a Consumers' Council of the Airwaves, which once graced the policy pages, would resurface, at least not during Labour's first term, but endorsed the view that some way should be found to provide a voice for viewers and listeners through a revamped Independent Television Commission.

Meanwhile, he assured his audience, Labour's approach to the media, as in all things, would be 'rational and pragmatic'.

We 'should not be frightened by the issue of media ownership – as if ownership rather than regulation of content was of any long-term significance.'

Welcoming the BT take-over of MCI in America, he said Labour would encourage cross-media ownership in order to give Britain a more prominent role in the global, but especially the European media marketplace.

"Added value is the key to commercial growth," he said. "Commercial risk-taking is to be applauded, but not anti-competitive behaviour."

Labour will promote open markets and fair competition without 'undue Government interference', but he will be pressing for 'a new legislative framework to inhibit anti-competitive monopolies.'

He criticised the Office of Fair Trading and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for being 'too slow and ineffective' and promised a new Office of Communications to handle technical matters and 'an enhanced ITC' to regulate content and especially to protect regional broadcasting.

It's political and it's about ownership and control

ANNI MAJORAM

FREE Press readers will be aware of the distribution problems facing small daily titles.

You may also be aware that Tribune has launched a campaign about the new formula that W H Smith now have for whether a publication gets displayed. You may perhaps have lost your local newsagent recently, or maybe magazines relating to your interests and hobbies are increasingly difficult to find.

These are, of course, different chapters in the same story. That story is political and it is about the ownership and control of the whole British media.

On Tuesday 29 October this year in the House of Commons, a report was published by the Committee for Diversity and Pluralism. This Committee is co-chaired by Ken Livingstone MP and Peter Bottomley MP, and has representatives from the Newsagents' Trade Associations, and over twelve distribution companies who distribute magazines including International Herald Tribune, the Morning Star, several ethnic and religious publications, and newspapers from EU member states. Also present were the GPMU and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. It is an inclusive committee, and that it exists at all is itself a powerful statement about the state of the industry.

The Committee has agreed a programme of parliamentary activity and public campaigning. The report will go to every MP, and will have wide circulation within the media. The case for a free and independent distribution service will be taken to both the European Parliament and Commission.

The story starts at Wapping, for it was at Wapping that, when the new technology made publication more accessible and, in theory, more democratic, the proprietors turned their attention to the methods of distribution as a means of control. Before Wapping there was a national distribution network – the railways. After Wapping, newspapers went by road, with the larger titles having their own dedicated delivery services.

But this was still not enough for some publishers. In 1993, the Monopolies and

Distribution
campaign
takes off

Mergers Commission report into the supply of national newspapers found that the monopoly that the wholesalers held on appointing retail outlets, whilst not perfect, did act in the public interest. The choice of newspapers and magazines was the same wherever customers lived and the system facilitated the home delivery of newspapers. This service enabled newspapers to be with customers at the right time of day – that is, the morning – and ensured that the disabled, the elderly and those without transport could access the newspapers and magazines of their choice.

The government's response to this was unprecedented. The then Minister for Corporate Affairs, Neil Hamilton, under threat of ministerial order, imposed a new code of practice on the industry. The consequences of this were felt in every section of the industry. In the twelve months that followed over 500 local newsagents closed and the wholesaling depots shrank from the pre-Wapping 1000 to a mere 43. And despite the opening of over 7000 new retail outlets – almost all in supermarkets and petrol stations – not one more daily newspaper has been sold. These new outlets take only the major daily titles and a selection of magazines. Needless to say, they do not offer home delivery.

At the same time the proprietors imposed exclusive contracts with the wholesalers covering geographical areas to suit the individual proprietors.

Consequently retailers may have to pay three

or four different wholesalers instead of the previous one. And if they complain, they lose supplies. The publisher also sets the cover price of the newspaper, and decide the margin that they will allow the retailers. This used to be a percentage of the cover price – now it is a flat figure that varies from publisher to publisher which is adjusted according to sales. The continuing price wars are debilitating the industry.

The government asked the industry to sort its own problems out on a voluntary basis. They have tried. There have been inter-industry talks initiated by the Minister for Corporate and Consumer Affairs, chaired by Edward Leigh MP, and endorsed by the Director of Fair Trading. The retailers have been there, the wholesalers have been there, and the distributors have been there. The publishers have refused to attend. It is, of course, not in their interest to have a level playing field. But it is essential for democracy to have a diverse press, and that means there must be fair access to the means of distribution. Mark Fisher, Shadow Minister of Arts, wrote: "The key retail process is no longer production, but distribution."

At the moment, small titles like the Morning Star are dropped in places like motorway service stations to be collected by wholesalers. However, wholesalers concentrate on the big titles and large outlets, so if one of the big titles arrives late, smaller titles go by the wayside – wholesalers now make only one daily drop. Rural and outlying districts are not serviced with even the big titles.

It's clear that this situation cannot continue. The Morning Star has a stable, indeed a rising, readership, but we must continue and win the battle. The Committee for Diversity and Pluralism will undertake a parliamentary campaign. It will continue to be a broad cross-party alliance – that is its strength for we all have a vested interest in this fight. For some members of the Committee it is about the survival of their small businesses, for others their jobs, for the small titles the dissemination of their news and views. But for all of us it is about the survival of a free press.

□ Anni Marjoram is Co-ordinator of the Committee for Diversity and Pluralism

WITHOUT COMMENT

Having lured millions of viewers to his Sky television service with the promise of big sporting events, Rupert Murdoch is now charging them extra for the privilege; after the success of last weekend's Tyson-Holyfield contest, I'm sure he will extend the pay-per-view principle to international cricket, football and golf just as soon as he thinks he can get away with it.

In short, he is asking subscribers to pay for something they thought they already owned. Now where have we heard that before? Ah, yes: it was the brilliant idea behind Margaret Thatcher's privatisation jamborees in the 1980s. It is also the sort of con often practised by men in camel-hair coats at Brighton racecourse.

When spivs do it, they are hauled off to the local police station; when Murdoch does it, his share price soars. As Lady T herself once observed: funny old world, isn't it?

Francis Wheen

The Guardian 12 November

Cometh the hour, cometh the word. In an intriguing piece of research for Sleaze, Stuart Weir and Patrick Donleavy have counted the appearances of the S-word in British national newspapers. In 1985-86, it appeared 21 times; in 1994-95, 3479 times... Contemporary sleaze derives from the systematic removal of the props - the checks and balances - in modern capitalism which previously kept its excesses under control. The result has been a proliferation of bureaucracies and monopolies far more powerful than the most powerful trade union or government regulator. In the matter of making money, the new monopolists and bureaucrats have shed embarrassment, shame and self-discipline.

Paul Foot

London Review of Books 17 October

CHALLENGING RACISM

1997 is European Year Against Racism and the initiative will be launched in the Netherlands in January. Some of its objectives are:

- to highlight the threat posed by racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism to human rights and to the economic and social cohesion of the Community
- to encourage reflection and discussion on the action required to combat racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in Europe
- to promote exchanges of experience on good practice and sound strategies at local, regional, national, and European levels in the fight against racism, xenophobia and anti-racism.

Watching us, watching them

'IT'S THE Sun wot won it,' crowed Kelvin MacKenzie's headline the day after the 1992 General Election.

Hype or reality - the evidence is disturbing. Readers of both the Sun and the Star swung 8 per cent to the Tories in the three months running up to the election. Those of the Daily Mail 14 per cent. Those of the Express and Telegraph 8 per cent.

Readers of the Daily Mirror and Guardian didn't swing at all.

Will there be no change on the magic media roundabout this time round? With your help we're going to find out.

Once more the CPBF will be monitoring national TV, tabloid and broadsheet coverage the moment the general election is announced. But we need our supporters throughout the country to help us - keeping an eye on local daily and evening papers and local TV news: checking the issues discussed, the balance and bias between the parties.

It's a dirty job - but somebody's got to do it! DIY monitoring forms and guidance will appear in the next Free Press.

This is a critical area of work for the CPBF. We believe a diverse and accountable media should exist to enhance democratic debate and facilitate citizens' control over decision making.

Yet our analysis of front page leads and editorial comment in the press during the 1992 election campaign revealed a systematic and differentiated mobilisation of the Tory tabloids in pursuit of a Conservative victory - confirmed by the unpublished ICM and MORI polls reported above.

Exploration of issues was replaced by the promotion of (Tory) party propaganda as fact. Vitriolic denunciations of individual personalities, especially Neil Kinnock,

replaced political discussion. And the hysterical character of much tabloid coverage served to disguise the fact that competing ideas and arguments were neither fairly presented nor engaged with.

No wonder Lord McAlpine, former Conservative Party Treasurer, was quoted in the Sunday Telegraph (12 April 1992) three days after the election as saying: 'The heroes of this campaign were Sir David English, Sir Nicholas Lloyd, Kelvin MacKenzie and the

other editors of the grander Tory press. Never in the past nine elections have they come out so strongly in favour of the Conservatives. Never has their attack on the Labour Party been so comprehensive. They exposed, ridiculed and humiliated that party, doing each day in their pages the job that the politicians failed to do from their bright new platforms.'

The Sun delivered its own coup de

grace on polling day. 'If

Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights,' ran the headline. Of course, it didn't want to influence voters as to who the next prime minister should be 'but if it's a bald bloke with wispy red hair and two Ks in his surname, we'll see you at the airport.'

Don't hold your breath for a change of heart at the Sun and Mail. Tax 'bombshells' and floods of migrants are guaranteed re-runs. And will it be Blair's Barmy Army or Blair's Smarmy Army - or both? One thing's for sure. Political debate will be debased again.

The lights have been fading on a free and responsible media in this country for years. By turning the spotlight on the media during Election Watch 1997 you can help the swing for change.

Please call 0171 278 4430 to help



World service broadcasting

TULLA ONSTAD

PROBLEMS and concerns for the future of world service broadcasting were the issues under discussion at a London conference organised by the Freedom Forum on 31 October.

In the post-cold war world political shifts, technological developments and changes in the economics of broadcasting have altered international broadcasting. However speakers argued a strong case for maintaining services.

Sam Younger, Head of BBC World Service said, 'In many countries the lack of a local infrastructure can still not provide the public with a proper international or local information service.'

It was the BBC World Service's role to

present an international service, an alternative source of information.

In many countries the changing political climate of broadcasting meant deregulation, cuts in budget and pressure on broadcasters to privatise or find new sources of funding. Government funding can help maintain an impartial and independent service, but Myrna Whitworth from Voice of America argued, 'Financial backing from private organisations can cause a point of conflict in interest.'

Terry Hargreaves of Radio Canada International stressed the importance of raising public awareness: 'It is extremely important to make people conscious about what they can lose out on if world services close down.'

Child exploitation and the media BT merger raises questions for OFTEL

MIKE JEMPSON

A PUBLIC inquiry into the way child abuse issues are handled by the press is being planned by PressWise and the charity, Action on Child Exploitation.

The event, which will take place on Tuesday 11 March 1997 at the Abbey Community Centre in Westminster, is backed by childcare agencies as well as the NUJ, the International Federation of Journalists, the Broadcasting Standards Council and the ITC.

Speakers will include Lady Howe, Chair of the BSC; Professor Robert Pinker of the Press Complaints Commission; Aidan White, General Secretary of the IFJ; Michael Hames, former head of the Obscene Publications Squad; and the columnist Dorothy Grace Elder.

Written submissions are invited from journalists, care workers, and law enforcement agencies outlining the problems they have experienced in dealing with publicity about child abuse issues.

Full details are available from Gini Baber, Conference Administrator, c/o PressWise, 25 EBC, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE (please enclose sae).

BT merger raises questions for OFTEL

BRITISH Telecommunications' \$20 billion dollar bid for MCI, the US telecommunications group, if successful, will create a gigantic multi-national corporation with a presence in 70 countries.

The new group would be dubbed Concert.

Such mega-mergers mean that, by some estimates, there will be three telecommunications companies operating globally, with enormous power based on their ownership of the electronic highways down which all business and personal traffic will be conveyed. Such organisations also become less susceptible to controls by national regulators.

In the UK we wait with interest to see what the telecommunications regulator, OFTEL, will do about Concert, especially when it owns nearly 10 per cent of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.

EUROPEAN MEDIA

Carole Tongue MEP has worked tirelessly in the European Parliament to defend public service broadcasting.

Her report, *The Future of Public Service Broadcasting*, should be widely read. She argues: 'Public service broadcasters (PSB) have traditionally provided impartial views in news and current affairs. With the explosion of a multi-channel culture driven by profit, it is essential that we maintain broadcasters who provide the accurate and balanced news and current affairs which are the key building blocks of modern democracy.'

The report reviews the changing shape of PUB in Europe, and highlights a number of policy issues, including future restrictions on cross-media ownership and protection of copyright. The report was also the basis for a resolution on the role of public service television in a multi-media society adopted by the European Parliament on 19 September 1996. Copies of the report available from Carole Tongue MEP, 97a Ilford Lane, Ilford, Essex IG1 2RL Tel 0181 514 0198

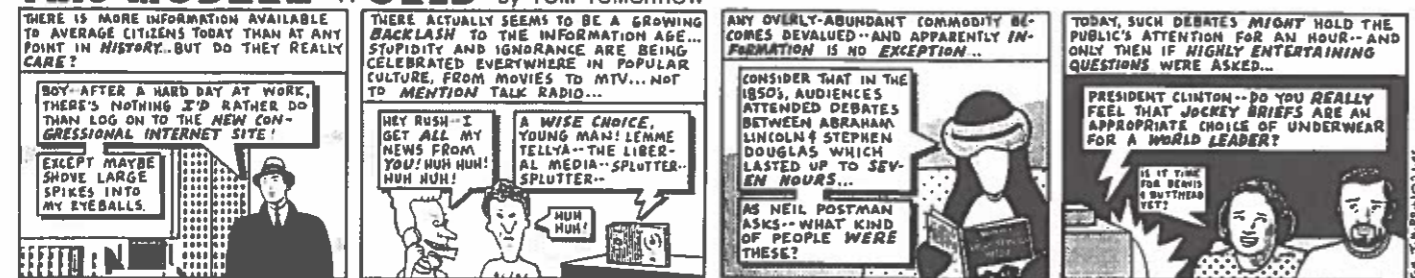
The Television Without Frontiers (TVWF) directive is designed to protect European audio-visual production, programme making, and employment by requiring European broadcasters to devote 51 per cent of screen time to European programmes.

Until now many channels, particularly cartoon and movie channels have broadcast a majority of US programmes because of a loophole which says the quota should only be followed 'where practicable'.

A move by MEPs to delete the phrase 'where practicable' was unsuccessful because whilst 291 members supported its removal, it was short of the 314 votes needed.

The vote took place after intense lobbying by the US media companies to resist the change, but also coincided with new figures which show that the US has extended its lead over the European television and film industries, with the trade deficit widening by 14.3 per cent to £3.8 billion in the last year.

THIS MODERN WORLD by TOM TOMORROW



Banning, cutting, cleansing, missing ...

CENSORSHIP is in the air again, its wings beating frantically as the usual sources – the populist press, and sound-bite, knee-jerk response politicians attempt to sustain it. Of course we're talking here about the obvious public manifestations. The Daily Mail's high profile campaign urging the banning of Cronenberg's *Crash*, the rubbishing of Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins*, or the call by the widow of the headteacher, Stephen Lawrence for a new moral agenda. The Conservative response was Virginia Bottomley's intervention urging broadcasters to reduce their pre-occupation with "the darker and violent side of society".

But what about the more insidious process, by which news stories of national or international importance get marginalised, and the techniques of news manipulation and self-censorship which ensure stories never reach the public? One of the most useful publications dealing with this issue in the United States is the annual report of Project Censored, and their 20th anniversary yearbook for 1996 is *Censored: The News That Didn't Make the News and Why*.

It's a publication which sends waves of frustration through me, because I wish we had something like it in the United Kingdom. Of course there's *Index on Censorship*, but Project Censored does a different but very important job. Each year the project surveys important stories which the mainstream media ignore or play down, and a group of judges then choose the top twenty-five.

The list for 1995 included: *The Deregulation of US Telecommunications*; *How The Budget was Balanced on the Backs of the Poor*; *Child Labour in the US is Worse than in the 1930s*; and *The Privatisation of the Internet*. Carl Jensen, Project Censored Director, explains its role as 'to stimulate journalists, editors, producers and publishers to support more muckraking

investigative journalism.' He points out that while the United States is without equal in terms of communications technology, it 'has suffered a massive breakdown when it comes to communications content.' He argues that the primary sources of news and information are increasingly controlled by a very small, elite media group which insulates people from controversial, subversive or dissonant messages.

Censored 96 is packed full of detail, addresses, reprints of the key articles selected as the top 25 stories the mainstream media ignored, and information on the US media scene. It also contains the splendid Tom Tomorrow cartoons which allow us to smile even though the book's analysis is so grim

□ *Censored 96* Carl Jensen and Project Censored Seven Seas Press £10.99

CAMPAIGN AGAINST NET CENSORSHIP SET UP

FOLLOWING the article in the last issue of *Free Press* about Censorship and the Internet (*Knacker nets the Internet*), a campaign has been set up opposing the establishment of the so-called Safety Net. The Campaign for Internet Freedom is completely opposed to what it sees as an unprecedented attempt to censor and regulate material on the Net. The proponents of the Safety-Net are advocating that we need to be protected for our own good, but censorship, the group argues, is always against our own good. It destroys our autonomy, our ability to judge for ourselves as to what we watch, the Campaign argues.

You can get more details from Chris Ellison *Get the Met Off the Net!* The Campaign for Internet Freedom. E-mail: censorship@www.junius.co.uk Web: <http://www.junius.co.uk/censorship/index.html>

Lifting the lid

War and Words: The Northern Ireland Media Reader

Edited by Bill Rolston and David Miller
Pub. by Beyond The Pale Publications; £12.95

THIS is an important book, and it joins that tiny group of studies which have looked seriously at the pressures and problems of reporting on the conflict in Northern Ireland. Indeed as the editors point out, 'publishing books on Northern Ireland can ensure that one runs up against the same kind of nervousness from publishing houses which seems to afflict parts of broadcasting and the press'.

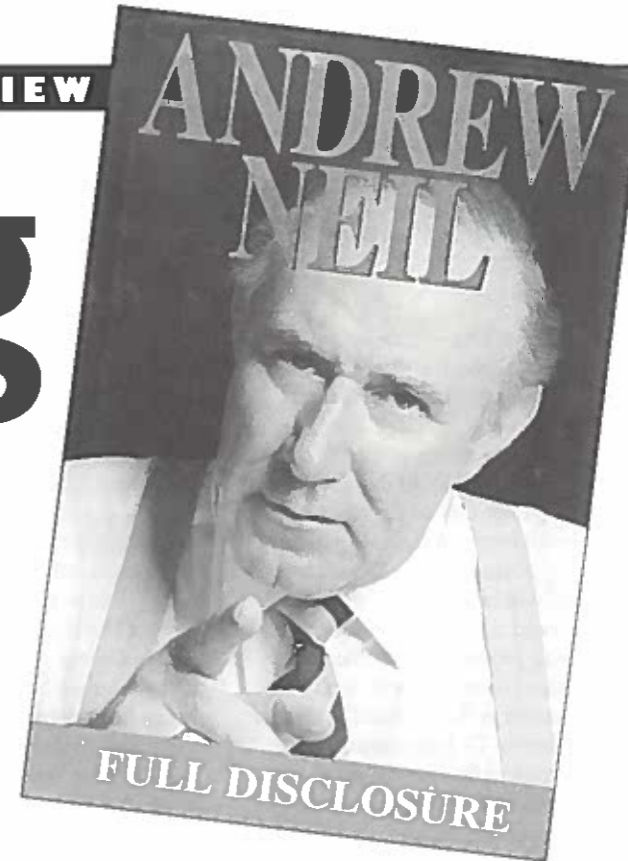
For example, David Miller's book, *Don't Mention the War*, was rejected by a number of major academic publishers before publication by Pluto in 1994, and reasons given for a reluctance to publish, despite positive readers' reports, included 'books on Northern Ireland do not sell well' and possible legal worries.

The editors suggest, 'Although the debate about censoring the 'troubles' usually revolves around newspapers, broadcasting and film, there is at least some evidence that the climate of caution and self-censorship to which many authors refer in the pages that follow, affects other areas of the media, such as publishing, as well.'

Words and Images is an extremely useful book, and one that needs to be read widely, because it draws together an extensive range of material published over the past 25 years, including some by the CPBF, and organises it under a number of key themes. Some of this material is not easily available, and for that reason the book should be on the library shelves of any institution studying the representation and management of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

One other plus for the book is that with over 450 pages, clearly edited, laid out and printed to a high standard, it's good value compared with the inflated prices of some publishers.

Working for the man



Full Disclosure
Andrew Neil Macmillan; £20.00

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

ANDREW Neil's memoirs contain some dramatic revelations. They are an insider's account of the disturbing management style and ambitions of his former employer, Rupert Murdoch, and convey some insights into the psyche of his erstwhile enthusiastic, but now disillusioned, lieutenant.

But it is a book which we should treat with caution. There is a strong streak of self-justification in Neil's account and evasion of events in which he played a dubious role. In that sense the book's title, *Full Disclosure*, (derived from the name of the abortive current affairs programme which Neil left *The Sunday Times* to go and develop for Murdoch on his Fox TV channel in the States) is less than accurate.

Take, for example, *The Sunday Times* and the Thames TV programme, *Death on the Rock*, transmitted on 28 April 1988. The only reference to the producer of the programme, Roger Bolton, is in an unconnected context. When the Thames TV programme was transmitted in the face of an unprecedented political attack, we should remember that it was *The Sunday Times* which deployed journalists to undermine the programme and support the assault by the Thatcher government on the integrity and independence of current affairs journalism on ITV. As Roger Bolton explains in *Death On The Rock* and other Stories, 'Mr Neil had called his team together when the *Death on the Rock* row began and told them to take the programme apart and examine every bit of it. The zealous young Features Editor, Robin

Morgan was put in charge of the project.' But even the journalists working for the paper couldn't stomach what they were required to do. Rosie Waterhouse, a journalist who later resigned from the *Sunday Times*, wrote in an internal memo to Robin Morgan, 'You were not interested in any information I obtained which contradicted your apparent premise – that the Thames documentary was wrong, and the official version was right ... It became almost impossible to make any point which contradicted the official line.'

When the report by Lord Windlesham and Richard Rampton was published in January 1989 it vindicated the integrity of the programme and the journalistic methods. Roger Bolton confronted Andrew Neil in a programme Thames ran on the report: 'Why does not Andrew Neil agree to have an independent enquiry into the reporting of the *Sunday Times* on the *Death on the Rock* programme?' Neil's response? 'We are not in the dock, you are.'

But in spite of such selectivity by Neil this is an important book because it gives us some grim insights into the way the Murdoch media empire is run, and the kind of people Murdoch uses, and rejects, once they incur his displeasure. In a key chapter, 'At the Court of the Sun King', he writes about 'telephone terrorism' as the 'weapon of choice to make sure his influence extends throughout his world wide empire.' His contemptuous attitude towards managers is also directed at shareholders. News Corporation boards are full of placent who will do Murdoch's bidding. When Murdoch spent \$550 million for a 64 per cent share of the Asian Star satellite system, he phoned one of his executives, Gus

Fischer with the instruction, 'Could you call a couple of directors and tell them.' He had not bothered to seek board approval. News Corporation is run as a personal fiefdom, even though the family holding is down to 30 per cent.

Another Neil revelation is the terrible state of industrial revelations in the Wapping plant. Murdoch reneged on any recognition deal for the EEUPTU which had done the dirty work recruiting scab labour at Wapping. Industrial relations deteriorated in the plant once the sacked printers and supporters called off the pickets. The production manager's office was attacked with firehoses, and daubed with posters; production sabotaged with a high number of web breaks, regular late runs and short-falls; and a survey showed 70 per cent of the work force would vote for union recognition. Neil coyly says the real picture of how bad it was has never been revealed before, but the evidence punctures once again the elaborately constructed Wapping myth that crushing union organisation solves management problems.

But Neil's ousting as *Sunday Times* editor dramatically confirms the basic Murdoch philosophy – don't let the truth get in the way of business. The controversy stirred up in *The Sunday Times* over the links between the £234 million of British aid to Malaysia to build the Pergau hydro-electric dam and a £1.3 billion contract from Malaysia to buy British arms infuriated Murdoch as he was busy developing his media empire in the region. Murdoch subordinates everything to one guiding ambition – the ruthless and single-minded seizure of all commercial opportunities to build his global media interests. Neil was expendable.

Labour fringe meeting

SALLY BAILEY

'21ST CENTURY Media – Shaping the Democratic Vision' was the theme of this year's CPBF fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference.

CPBF Chair Tony Lennon predicted that if the ownership and control of the media is allowed to be purely market-driven, and that given the choice between the two potential new systems – Murdoch's satellite based system which will be capable of providing 500 channels and the BBC's land based system that will provide 40-50 channels, it is inevitable that consumers will choose the former. A situation will be created 'where the de facto standard of TV broadcasting under current legislation is beyond the reach of most of the laws that actually specify what the content should be,' he said.

The nature and power of information and the issue of ownership of intellectual

property were the key issues examined by Andrew Graham from Balliol College, Oxford. He questioned the premise that 'what is inevitable is always desirable', and that information and the media should be regarded purely as consumer goods.

Information can be bought, repackaged and sold and in the process becomes distorted and manipulated according to its owner's own agenda. Microsoft's Encarta, for example, he said, fails to mention Christian Democracy – one of the biggest political movements in Europe. Having recently conducted research on the Internet, he commented that 'we should be under no illusions that it is a democratic form of information.'

MEP Philip Whitehead examined European media issues, the proposed privatisation of Channel 4 – an act, he said, of 'bank robbery', and potential solutions to develop a different public broadcasting sector.

Spreading the message

INVITATIONS to speak at a wide range of meetings up and down the country, distribution throughout the National Union of Journalists, support in the Community Radio Association magazine Airflash and distribution to its members, a commitment from the public service union UNISON to promote it through its network of regional publicity groups ... Just some of the ways the Media Manifesto is now giving a practical focus to discussions on an alternative media policy.

We believe that it is possible to regulate and organise our media so that the commercial imperatives of the big media corporations are challenged. What is needed is the political will to make it happen. The Media Manifesto is part of the CPBF's effort to develop just that.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- It's vital that the debate on media policy continues beyond the next general election. A Labour government will need to look again at media reform. Contact the CPBF National Office if you need a speaker or if you want to frame a resolution to encourage media policy debate in your organisation.
- Order a copy of the Manifesto – single copies free, but please send SAE. Ten copies, £2.00. 50 copies, £7.50. 100 copies, £12.00 inc P&P. Bulk order prices by negotiation.
- We have had valuable comment and feedback already on the Manifesto so please send your own or your organisation's comments on the Manifesto to the CPBF.



Philip Whitehead speaking at the fringe meeting

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