

FREE Press

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Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

YOU CAN GET INVOLVED! Now you see it – now you don't

THE election campaign has already started. Never mind the fact that John Major hasn't ended the speculation by saying whether it's March 20, April 10 or May 1. The party image-makers and media strategists are in overdrive; the billboard campaigns grab attention with their negative messages; and some sections of the press are keeping us guessing about which party to support in the most important general election since 1979.

One Tory party political broadcast used exactly the gamut of fears and smears which the media relayed with such relish in the run-up to the 1992 election. It showed a series of fictional 'news flashes' about Britain under a victorious Labour government. They included sterling crises, strike waves, massive tax increases, and the resignation of John Prescott.

The health of a genuinely free press depends on its ability to search out and present facts, but the 1992 general election demonstrated the massive pro-Tory bias of the bulk of the national press. The exploration of issues was replaced by the recycling of Conservative propaganda. Vitriolic denunciation of individual personalities, particularly Neil Kinnock, replaced

ELECTION WATCH '97

The withering battery of statistics fired off yesterday by the Audit Commission is utterly devastating. Of the seven million offences a year committed by 10 to 17-year-olds only 19 per cent are recorded by the police; 5 per cent are detected by the police and an infraction by the police per cent result. You crooks are slick and sharp. The police, who did catch them, are handicapped by bureaucracy. The bill for his coat, cement can cost the taxpayer seven times the fee for Elton or twice as much as a standard Ritz.

CPBF

political discussion, and ideas and arguments were neither fairly presented nor engaged with.

We ran Electionwatch 92 and it was the information and experience we gained then which has spurred us to launch Electionwatch 97. We want to establish just what impact media bias has on the issues discussed and the way people vote in the election. It will help to build up a picture of how the media influences our democracy.

We are appealing to all our members and supporters to monitor media coverage at a crucial time in the democratic process. Our Electionwatch special media monitoring form which you can use to check your local paper, TV station or radio station is now published. We will be monitoring and analysing the national newspapers and broadcast news from the BBC, Channel 4, ITV and BSkyB. The monitoring form should be in your copy of Free Press but if you need extra copies contact the National Office (0171 278 4430) and we'll send you some.

If you live in the London area come along to our Electionwatch meeting on Thursday 27 February at 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF (off Pentonville Road).



Information and experience gained during Electionwatch 92 led to the launch of this year's exercise. At the launch of the last Electionwatch in Manchester were Professor Anthony Easthope, Hilary Wainwright, Granville Williams and Stephen Dorril

IN THE final weeks before an election what will Labour's media policies be? It was encouraging to see splashed across The Guardian front page (22 January) some answers to this question with regard to broadcasting. Lewis Moonie had presented some ideas at an informal discussion at the International Press Institute (IPI) and agreed that his remarks should be published.

Nothing wrong with that, because he didn't say anything new, except to stress that the role of the BBC governors would be radically changed: 'Governors wear two hats which has ensured they have done neither job well' so scrutiny of the BBC's programmes and complaints would be located with a new regulatory body, OFCOM. In future the governors would only oversee the BBC's internal management. His other policy ideas had all been covered in a New Statesman piece, 'Media Rules Not OK' (22 November 1996).

All the more surprising then, that less than 12 hours after the IPI event the party leadership intervened to disown the draft document proposing a single media regulator, which would merge Oftel, the telecommunications regulator, and the Independent Television Commission, and weaken the power of the BBC governors.

In fact, the CPBF Media Manifesto does make a similar policy proposal for a single regulatory body. In an age of cross-media ownership it makes sense to have one effective regulatory body overseeing the digital TV revolution, the new media of cable and satellite, and the terrestrial TV channels. So why has one of the few concrete areas of media policy suddenly been dropped by the Labour leadership?

A TARNISHED MIRROR

THE Daily Mirror dropped the daily bit and relaunched as The Mirror, 'the paper for the new millennium', in January 1997. The eight extra pages include a daily features section aimed at women, more consumer advice, and a weekly semi-investigative column, Sorted, which is a pale reflection of the old Paul Foot page. The new design with a page one poster-style based on the New York Daily News has won some compliments, but as the Express Newspapers know, redesigns and relaunches don't solve the problem of circulations in free-fall.

The Daily Mail and the Sun, for example don't need relaunches. Circulation of the Mail has increased in the six months up to December 1996 by over 11% and it has broken through the 2 million barrier, whilst the Sun hovers around 4 million.

The Mirror in comparison lost nearly 5% of its readers in the six months to December, ending the year with a circulation of 2.3 million. But beneath the circulation slump there's a more significant issue. The Mirror still has an important role as Britain's only Labour supporting mass market tabloid, but it doesn't have the journalists or creative talent which marked the paper out and built popular support in its great days. When Robert Maxwell bought the paper in 1984 it was already losing its way as the Sun ate into its readership after its take-over by Murdoch in 1969, or people deserted it as Maxwell projected his outsize ego in the paper's pages. Since then, under David Montgomery, appointed by the banks to 'rescue' their investments, the paper has been purged, its best writers taking with them the paper's distinctive radical campaigning style.

We've never needed a popular radical campaigning Labour-supporting tabloid more, but the Mirror, whatever its claims to be the paper for the millennium, has lost its key role.

PROGRAMME NOTE

ON TUESDAY February 18 John Pilger is presenting an important programme in the

Network First slot on ITV which deals with the recent history of the Sun and the Mirror. Watch out for Breaking the Mirror: The Murdoch Effect which analyses the death of Fleet Street and the dire impact of the man former Sunday Times editor, Andrew Neil, likened to France's autocratic Louis XIV in his recent memoir, Full Disclosure.

GOOD READS

FORGET all the hype about the Waterstone's Top 100. Here are two books, with journalistic themes running through them, which Free Press readers should enjoy.

Both have North American settings, vivid, well-researched backgrounds and are excellent reads.

Snow Falling on Cedar

by William Guterson; Bloomsbury; £5.99

The Shipping News

by E. Annie Proulx; Fourth Estate; £5.99

ITV

REDRAWING THE NETWORK MAP

A SECOND wave of corporate activity will soon put an end to the nostalgic notion of 15 ITV regional franchises. Of course they will still be there in name and for form's sake, but the reality will be that ITV is in the hands of three media barons – Gerry Robinson at Granada, Lord Hollick at United News and Media and Michael Green at Carlton.

There's still a bit of tidying up to do, but it's all going to be sorted out behind doors in the boardrooms. Michael Green beat Lord Hollick, acquiring Westcountry for £85m and bidding 10% more than the Labour peer's offer. Hollick in turn moved sharply to pay £36.7m for a 29.9 stake in HTV, with a view to acquiring the lot this year. Granada has its eyes on Yorkshire-Tyne Tees, and if Labour wins the election a modified Broadcasting Act would allow Mirror Group Newspapers to move for control of Scottish Television.

For those who want an insight into how all this has come to pass, read *Greenfinger: The Rise of Michael Green and Carlton Communications* by Raymond Snoddy (Faber).

Dangerous liaisons

TONY LENNON

OFTEL, the government telecommunications watchdog, must be a tough place to work at the moment. It's hard to concentrate on the regulatory framework for digital satellite TV while being deafened by a stream of press releases thudding onto your desk. Most of the thuds announce yet another cross-media alliance between companies desperate to consolidate their position in a marketplace built on shifting sands.

Every one of them brings the danger that its size, or novelty, could force the policy-making process back to square one – and new policies don't come easily.

Last month the official government position on digital satellite became clear. OFTEL began accepting applications for Services Class licences from operators wanting to provide "Conditional Access" services to TV viewers using digital technology. These are licences to transmit programmes which can be seen by viewers only if they have paid to watch, either through regular subscription, or by ad hoc pay-per-view charges. The invitation covered satellite and cable services hoping to offer pay-per-view TV through the new technology, and coincided with the bids from existing and would-be broadcasters to secure Independent Television Commission licences to operate up to six multiplexers for Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT).

In theory, a host of vibrant and ambitious operators was expected to come forward with attractive bids for every tentacle of the new digital TV distribution system.

In practice, OFTEL seems to have resigned itself to a digital satellite market dominated by BSkyB, probably operating as a near-monopoly, with DTT and digital cable limping along in its shadow. Just as British Telecom, the original target of OFTEL's intentions, is subject to line-by-line regulation of its activities, the conditional access licences break down digital TV into four key business functions: "customer management" is the billing service for digital viewers; "subscriber management" is the despatch of smart cards to be plugged into set-top boxes; "subscriber authorisation" covers the relay of electronic signals hidden in the TV signal which will enable subscribers to

watch a particular service; and "encryption" is the coding system used to scramble programmes within an overall service to prevent unpaid access.

According to OFTEL, no broadcaster can be compelled to buy any, or all, of these services from a conditional access operator. Broadcasters could hire bandwidth on the digital Astra satellite used by BSkyB, and transmit programmes without having to treat with the Murdoch-dominated company. However, a decision to eschew Murdoch's proprietary technology would put broadcasters using Astra in a position where they have paid to hire the rowing boat without being given any oars – afloat on the airwaves, but going nowhere because most viewers were equipped only to receive Murdoch-encrypted programmes.

BSkyB's inheritance, a secure and unchallenged digital TV licence, seems to have been anticipated by OFTEL – with four separate services within the conditional access licence, the regulator at least has something to get its teeth into.

If BSkyB turns out to be the only applicant for a digital satellite licence, the company will be well placed to negotiate on the two issues which are still to be settled with OFTEL: Electronic Programme Guides (EPGs) and multiple smart cards.

OFTEL wants all broadcasters to have "fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory" access to EPGs, the on-air pages which will help viewers navigate around the 200-plus channels on digital satellite, as well as the ability to issue their own smart cards. Sky are likely to pitch for full control of EPGs in order to give their own services prominence, and are already arguing that a system involving multiple smart cards presents impossible technical difficulties for any broadcaster trying to send subscriber authorisation instructions to enable individual viewers to access pay-per-view programmes – the set-top box can't be re-programmed if someone else's card is in it at the time the instruction is sent over the air.

Funded mostly by borrowing, BSkyB's satellite project is highly risky, not least because it depends on breaking into new markets which don't currently have Sky dishes, particularly middle class viewers. But the company is 40% owned by Murdoch, a man consummately able to exploit the kind of monopoly BSkyB could win when it secures a conditional access licence. The stable of sporting rights it has already bought into, and the tacit promises from broadcasters like the BBC and Granada that their programmes will be available on digital BSkyB, almost guarantee that Murdoch will mop up.

Meanwhile, the politicians watch on helplessly.



Background briefing

RUPERT Murdoch in a Der Spiegel interview suggested one of his News International titles might support Labour, Lord Rothermere mused on Desert Island Discs about a developing warmness towards Tony Blair and New Labour, and Labour peer Lord Hollick is in the driving seat at Express Newspapers.

So what is the likely line-up in terms of the political stance our national papers take towards the parties in this crucial election? Well one thing certainly has changed. Sir Nicholas Lloyd – he got his knighthood whilst editor of the true-blue Daily Express under Lord Stevens – recalls 'I received regular calls from senior Tories suggesting a drink in my office at, say, 6.30pm. The likes of Cecil Parkinson, David Young, John Wakeham and Sir Gordon Reece would pop in under the guise of seeking my opinion on how things were going. But in fact theirs was the soft-sell to brief me on Conservative strategy.'

Since Tony Blair won the Labour leadership he has been assiduously courting the editors and proprietors of the traditional Tory-supporting press. He travelled round the world to speak in Australia at a News Corporation 'Leadership Conference' in July 1995 and in October 1996 accepted the invitation of Sir David English, chairman of the Daily Mail group to speak at the Commonwealth Press Union conference in Cape Town, and his speech was previewed and reported prominently in the Daily Mail.

Tony Blair's troika of media advisers – David Hill, Alastair Campbell and Peter Mandelson – ensure that a steady stream of articles appear in the Sun, Mail and other

papers which would never have carried material by Neil Kinnock or John Smith. There are also regular meetings with editors and right-wing columnists like Simon Hefner and Paul Johnson.

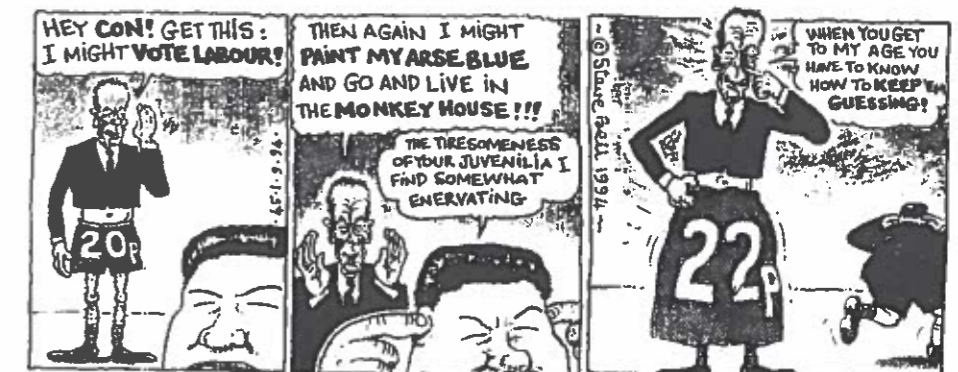
So will this public relations offensive translate into fair and neutral reporting of New Labour's policies, or even a positive endorsement to vote Labour? I doubt it.

Express chairman, Lord Stevens, has a letter dated from the time of the merger of United News and Media in February 1996 saying he, not Lord Hollick, will decide the political direction for the Express, and the paper's editor, Richard Addis, has admitted that he discusses the paper's stance on politics with Lord Stevens.

And for the other papers the key question is, what price does Tony Blair have to pay to maintain the support he apparently seeks? After all the Tory editors are Euro-sceptic, hostile to the social chapter, and long for the right-wing authoritarian stance that they fondly remember Mrs T for. We should remember that if the Sun backs Labour it will be for the good of Mr Murdoch, not this country. Any support that these papers give Labour will be transient and conditional; it will evaporate the moment policies inimical to their interests are even mentioned.

Labour was once committed to a policy of limiting media ownership and diversifying choice. All of the effort the Labour leadership is putting into its charm offensive underlines how vital such a policy remains. After all should our democratic processes be subject to such intrusive influence by unelected, unaccountable media barons?

Order your copy from CPBF – price £7.50 inc p&p



THIS review article is the first of three pieces by Tom O'Malley. The next, to appear in the run-up to the General Election, will deal with Labour's media policies, and the final one with a strategic review of where the CPBF stands on media policy issues in the post-election period. We welcome comments and responses to the three articles.

Losing a sense of ownership

THE Institute of Public Policy Research is a think tank closely associated with the Labour Party. In 1994 it established a Media and Communications programme with funding from British Telecom, the Cable Communication Association, London Weekend Television, Mercury Communications, News International and Pearson. *New Media New Policies* summarises the findings of this research. It is an important book, in its range, specific proposals, underlying assumptions and in the way it echoes recent shifts in Labour Party thinking around media ownership.

The book starts from a recognition of the need for systematic reform of the media. It covers telecommunications, ownership, universal service obligations, freedom of expression, audio visual policy, public service broadcasting and the BBC. It rightly stresses the complexity of regulating computer based, optical fibre, digital communications. The problem of how to regulate technological bottlenecks – known as essential facilities – like set-top digital decoders, is discussed in detail.

The authors stress the need to encourage competition and to prevent abuse by dominant companies. They point out that universal service in telecoms – the provision of basic services to all at affordable cost – and in broadcasting – public service broadcasting – 'is likely to decline in the near future' (p93). They therefore argue that PSB be maintained, that 'must carry' rules apply on new delivery systems and that universal access to the telecoms network and its basic services should be funded by the industry. They support the need for a comprehensive audio visual policy devised in the context of EU policy.

Although they want the BBC to continue, they also accept the idea, developed in the 1992 White Paper, that it should become more commercially orientated by breaking it

up into 'autonomous units with public service and commercial mandates' (p157). They seem over optimistic about the long term implications of this kind of policy. Their proposals for a more democratic method of appointing BBC governors, for making freedom of expression a constitutional right, for basing censorship policy on the principles outlined in the 1979 Williams Report on Obscenity, for a right of access to official information, and a right of privacy, rehearse variants on proposals debated by the CPBF for many years. The proposals for a one stop media regulator, Ofcom, and for a Consumer Council of Media and Communications reiterate widely canvassed arguments, and are welcome. *New Media New Policies* therefore does a service in discussing the genuinely complex issues which dominate media policy. Yet there are problems with the book.

New Media New Policies does a service in discussing the complex issues which dominate media policy

The Introduction gives a potted history of Left and Right wing media policy. It is a selective history. Left media policy is characterised by reference to a few Labour Party documents and academic critiques, mainly dating from the 1970s and 1980s and is labelled 'paternalist' and 'corporatist' (p4). Yet some attention to Left thinking and practice in film and print, from the 1990s onwards,

to work in community radio and video, to critiques of the media from trade union and community groups from at least the 1940s, and to the wide ranging debates about media conducted in and around organisations like the Campaign since 1979 would have provided the authors with a more complex, rich and diverse set of practices and policy ideas. Inadequate consideration of this tradition impoverishes their analysis.

The authors state a clear preference for market driven solutions to problems of media regulation: 'Fair competition between many providers is widely seen as the key to unlock an effective marketplace for media goods and

a democratic marketplace for ideas' (p59). But should policy be geared towards creating a marketplace in ideas? Won't that largely exclude those who haven't the funds to buy into the market?

New Media New Policies suggests that fair competition in media goods and services is desirable and possible, but recognises that, left to its own devices, the market will deliver neither fairness nor competition. Consequently the authors argue that regulation can be used to force markets to work the way theorists think they should. But work for whom?

In the UK national press the free market has produced a press which works for the profits and political interests of small groups of people. Some regulation exists to limit ownership, but political influence has been deployed to fatally undermine its effect. Equally, political influence has been used to prevent the implementation of regulations to make the press behave in a responsible way. What evidence is there that influence will not be used to block the proposals in this book which are designed to make markets fair and less subject to abuse?

According to the authors, UK 'newspaper buyers can choose between some ten national newspapers of which at least five, judged by any reasonable international standard, provide comprehensive and well-founded accounts of events and issues' (p163). Any reasonable assessment might also point out that the UK press is divided between a mass circulation popular press and a relatively small circulation quality press. The five papers of international standard are in the small circulation bit, not read by most people. With few exceptions all papers are conservative in their social and political policies. The book does not analyse the way market forces have failed to deliver fair competition and diversity of viewpoint in the UK press.

New Media New Policies proposes a relaxation of controls on cross ownership. This would allow seven companies to control all UK national papers, the regional press, and national radio and television. This proposal is based, in part, on the reasonable assumptions that 'simply' acting on concentration doesn't ensure plurality, and that there is no necessary link between the size of an organisation and its behaviour.

A further, linked assumption is used to justify downplaying issues of concentration: 'No research has demonstrated continuities in content between media in common ownership and discontinuities between them and other media in other ownership' (p64-5). Yet the CPBF in the UK, FAIR in the USA, and a host of books and articles have dealt with such links.

What evidence is there that influence will not be used to block proposals to make markets fair?

In 1988 the European Institute of the Media showed that the Murdoch press covered Sky and British Satellite Broadcasting in a different way to newspapers owned by other companies. The Guardian has consistently covered issues of race, gender and politics in a manner distinctly different to the Sun. You need only examine the difference between papers controlled by political parties, be they the Morning Star or Socialist Worker and those owned by conservative proprietors such as the Sun or the Mail to see the continuities and discontinuities in content alluded to in the book. A review of any standard bibliography of press or broadcasting history would have yielded plenty of evidence for analysis.

It might be that the authors consider that this kind of work has not demonstrated the continuities and discontinuities they seek. But surely, they should have examined it before drawing such a conclusion?

■ R Collins and C Murrone; *New Media New Policies* Polity Press; Cambridge; 1997; ISBN 0-7456-1786-7, £12.99.

Press payments to trial witnesses

THE National Heritage Select Committee has called for laws to outlaw media payments to witnesses in criminal trials and to restrict pre-trial publicity.

The Heritage Committee report, *Press Activity Affecting Court Cases*, published by HMSO on 22 January, states that there are no circumstances which justify payments to witnesses by newspapers or broadcasters.

The report also criticises the efficacy of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) and says it should change its rules so that it can impose heavy fines on offending newspapers and order them to pay compensation.

At present the PCC code condemns payments, but newspapers which break the rule can invoke a public interest defence if they are exposing a crime, protecting public health or preventing public deception.

Gerald Kaufman, the Heritage Committee chair, said, 'A reprimand from the PCC is simply a slap on the wrist. Fining would tell editors these matters are taken seriously.'

The report has been influenced by the 1995 trial of Rosemary West in which 19 witnesses were said to have signed contracts or been paid by the media, but its recommen-

dations and tone were quickly criticised for being censorious and combative.

The PCC said no new legislation was necessary – there had only been four cases in 35 years to arouse concern – Hindley and Brady, Peter Sutcliffe, Jeremy Thorpe and West.

The Press Gazette leader attacked the members of the Select Committee: 'These men appear to lack any credible experience of the world of crime and crime reporting...of the marketplace which increasingly obliges journalists to pay for information of public interest which would not otherwise be disclosed...'

Presswise, in a separate response to the Lord Chancellor on the issue of witness payments, calls for the practice of buying information from witnesses in court cases to be made a contempt, not a criminal defence. Presswise argues, 'Offering inducements to witnesses in court cases is tantamount to bribery, and puts at risk the course of justice. There are strong arguments for making it a criminal offence, but we would prefer to see the Contempt laws broadened to outlaw the offering of inducements to witnesses and others connected with a case.'

WITHOUT COMMENT

WHAT Murdoch has done to the press over here is very serious ... It's impossible to overrate the injurious effect he's had, and it's sad the other papers are inclined to follow his lead rather than restore any decent standards in British journalism, though I exclude some from this – the Guardian and the Observer and some sincere journalists on other papers. You can't have journalists running the country; Murdoch has such power he thinks he can run it and more, and you've got to stand up to him. When in power I hope Labour will act on concentration of power in the media.

Michael Foot

New Statesman, 10 January 1997

CHILD EXPLOITATION AND THE MEDIA

PRESSWISE is organising an Open Forum, to examine the problems faced by children, voluntary and statutory bodies and journalists when child abuse stories hit the headlines. It will be held on Tuesday 11 March, 10.00-17.00 at the Abbey Community Centre, Great Smith Street, Westminster. ■ Bookings and further information from Presswise 0117 941 5889

Taking on the censors

Julian Petley puts the case against the Daily Mail's moral outrage over Crash and the strident calls from the censorship brigade, and Conservative National Heritage Minister, Virginia Bottomley

THE British press guards its freedoms jealously. As the long-running debate over possible privacy legislation has all too clearly demonstrated, newspapers are quite prepared to use both fair means (intense lobbying) and foul (the character assassination of ministers thought to be too legislation-prone, such as David Mellor) to ensure that their cherished freedoms remain intact.

However, newspapers' concern with freedom of expression does not always extend to arguing for the freedom of other media from censorship and other forms of official interference. Indeed, quite the opposite on many an occasion in the case of film, video and television. In recent times press campaigns against so-called 'video nasties', *Natural Born Killers*, *Crash*, *Death on the Rock*, *The Monocled Mutineer* and the *Secret Society* series, to name but a few, all bear unfortunate witness to certain newspapers' determination to try to ensure that the freedom which they themselves enjoy will be significantly curtailed in the case of other media.

Thus, to take two very recent examples, in the case of *Crash*, the Daily Mail and the Evening Standard (both owned by Associated Newspapers) launched a concerted (if lamentably ill-informed) campaign against the film which led directly to the Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley calling for local authorities to use their powers to ban the film. Right on cue, a committee of Westminster councillors viewed *Crash* and indicated that they would not allow it to be shown in London's West End without cuts. At this point the British Board of Film Classification itself had not viewed the film and, at the time of writing, it is in the unenviable and unprecedented position of having to decide on a film which, if it passes uncut, it knows it cannot be shown in its prime location and will thus be assigning it to commercial oblivion! Not content with this, the Mail's film reviewer, Christopher Tookey, has called for the BBFC's director James Ferman to be sacked for being too liberal, and for Mail readers to boycott all products made by Sony, the parent company of the film's distributors.



Bottomley and the Mail also feature in our other example, which concerns the announcement last December of the Department of National Heritage's plans for the further tightening of the rules concerning the portrayal of sex and violence on television. Given the Mail's self-appointed role as the scourge of Channel 4 (and of anyone else, for that matter, who doesn't share its own blinkered and bigoted view of the world), it wasn't in the least surprising that Bottomley should choose it as the recipient of a leaked copy of her Department's plans on the day before they were made public. Thus, under the headline *Curb the Dark and Brutal Side of TV*, the Mail was able to engage in campaigning against all its favourite TV targets once again and, better still, to appear to be doing so with the full blessing of the Heritage Secretary. Thus, out were wheeled *Cracker*, *Eastenders*, *Brookside*, *The Bill* and all those other home-grown programmes which have the temerity to suggest that contemporary Britain is not the Thatcher-created heaven on earth that the Mail and its ilk would have us believe. As Stuart Jefferies put it in the *Guardian*, 11 December, the real message of this squalid put-up job between Bottomley and the Mail was: "Let's silence these dissenting voices, the authentically grim stories of underclass suffering, politically biased dramas that lay bare the effects of Conservative rule on public services. Let's do these things and say that they're part of a moral crusade against filth!" And, he might have added, let's make our television so thoroughly market-led that the terrestrial broadcasters are forced to fill the entirety of their schedules with the utterly bland, stupefying pap and crap that characterises

Sky 1 or, for that matter, Associated's own witless, pathetic Channel One.

Of course, there's nothing particularly new about such campaigns. Editing a recent book on the vexed question of 'media effects' has once again brought home to me extremely forcefully just how ill at ease with the moving image culture are significant sections of established opinion in this country, how far back that uneasiness stretches, and the key role played by newspapers in propagating views which are deeply hostile to the media of cinema, video and television. From the arrival of cinema in 1895 through the growth of TV in the 1950s to the spread of home video in the 1980s the message from certain quarters, and especially from the press, has been remarkably and consistently negative: the moving image is bad for you, it encourages all sorts of anti-social behaviour and attitudes, and it should therefore be subject to the strictest possible control. But why should such significant sections of the press be so hostile to these quintessentially modern media? There are several possible answers. Firstly, newspapers are jealous of television which, even in these days of increased cross-media ownership, they regard as a rival. Television has replaced newspapers as most people's main source of news, and ITV and Channel 4 are also rivals for advertising revenue. In the case of video, this is a definite hindrance to the growth of BSkyB's movie channels, so it's hardly surprising that the Sun is addicted to 'video nasty' stories. Secondly, stories about lurid films and videos, and sex and violence on the television, offer newspapers the chance to titillate their readers whilst at the same time indulging in thoroughly hypocritical

Read on ...

ILL EFFECTS

The Media/Violence Debate
ed. by Martin Barker and Julian Petley;
Routledge £12.99

AS CONTROVERSY about media violence and its influence on society erupts once again, a group of leading academics challenge conventional 'common-sense' ideas on the issue and call for a radical re-examination of the whole 'media effects' debate.

The next edition of Free Press will carry a review of this book.

Electronic Empires: Global Media and Local Resistance
Coventry University, 28-29 March 1997

AN INTERNATIONAL conference, with US speakers Edward Herman and Herbert Schiller.

Other speakers include Peter Golding and Tony Dowmunt, Series Editor, 'Channels of Resistance', Channel 4 TV. Sessions on the Internet and Empowerment, Globalisation or corporate colonialism, and much more.

Full conference details from: Dr Daya Thussu or Pete Every, Coventry School of Art and Design, Coventry University, Coventry CV1 5FB.
Telephone 01203 838248 Ext 7475.
Website:
<http://www.cov.ac.uk/newevent/web conf/>

condemnation of such 'filth'. In this respect it's worth pointing out that those newspapers loudest in their criticism of the Official Solicitor for optioning the film rights to Geoffrey Mansell's Fred West biography were perfectly happy to run page after lip-smacking page of coverage of Rose West's trial.

Thirdly, fear and dislike of these newest of media are, I would argue, symptoms of a deeper unease about modernity in general. Thus it's hardly surprising that a press which is, if anything, increasingly reactionary and fogey-ish in every respect, culturally profoundly conservative as well as politically Conservative, should be so hostile to (and uncomprehending of) the culture of the moving image. And finally, as the above example of Bottomley and the Mail demonstrates all too clearly, the cinema, television and video are the unfortunate victims of an unholy alliance of opportunist politicians and a press which grows more shrilly populist with every day that passes. In these circumstances the nauseating sight of one medium calling for the censorship of another looks set to continue.

Desktop internationalism

The new internationalism
Eric Lee; Pluto Press; December 1996;
Paperback: 0 7453 1114 8; £14.99;
Hardback: 0 7453 1119 9; £45; 256pp

"It wasn't easy, being active in the international labour movement while living on a hilltop in the Galilee. And then, one winter evening in early 1994, I logged onto the Internet for the first time."

THE WORDS of Eric Lee, an American labour movement activist who is now living on a kibbutz and programming IBM computers. Not your stereotypical internet anorak.

In his new book — the first to look at how the internet can unite trade unionists around the world — he strikes a balance between 'techie' talk and a concise history of the labour movement. The book is very readable, although it certainly isn't a story for bedtime and does require the reader to understand something of the workings of electronic communications.

In explaining the history of the Internationals and the recent decline in union membership through out the world Eric Lee builds a strong case for the use of the internet and electronic mail to regenerate the movement. Unlike every other form of media

communications the internet is, so far, unregulated by governments and the demands of multi-nationals, and furthermore is not subject to censorship. He explains in straightforward language how to set up a web site and how to use other sites to advantage.

We learn that the labour movement in Canada and the USA have been using the internet for recruiting and campaigning for many years. In many instances the internet has been used by unions to conduct campaigns, co-ordinate strikes and disrupt the web sites of the companies that they are in dispute with. Special mention is given to 'on-line strike newspapers', web sites set up by striking journalists: the Irish X-press, the site operated by the locked out Irish Press NUJ members, is probably the only one listed that European readers may be familiar with.

This is a well researched piece of work and Lee's commitment to the advancement of international labour by using new technology shines through. There is a comprehensive list of relevant web sites in an appendix and a web site has been launched to accompany the book. This book is a must for people who work in the labour movement or anyone interested in freedom of communication. **Geoff Mason**

Beginning to understand

Chomsky for Beginners
David Cogswell and Paul Gordon
Writers and Readers; £6.99

THIS is the latest publication in the Readers and Writers "Beginners Documentary Comic Book" series. It is a great introduction into the life and work of Noam Chomsky. Most commentaries on Chomsky focus either on his work on linguistics or on politics, whereas this covers both. Although it is a serious book, the humorous cartoons and anecdotes make it an easy read. Chomsky grew up in one of the only Jewish families in a bitterly anti-Semitic neighbourhood in Philadelphia, and was deeply affected by the rise of Fascism in Europe. He published his first article, at the age of 12, on the Spanish Civil War in his school newspaper.

The next section looks at those who influenced Chomsky's thought and work. From Plato to Marx to the linguist, Zellig Harris, their ideas formed the basis for Chomsky's views. George Orwell was of great importance to Chomsky, especially his work on language and how it is related to political control. The chapter on linguistics examines how he developed his theory of generative linguistics and links this to his

general political views through his understanding of human nature.

The largest chapter is on Chomsky and the media. Chomsky's main assertion is that the media in so-called democratic countries actually function as a public relations industry for the rich and powerful. He developed a 'Propaganda Model' in his book *Manufacturing Consent* where he described the underlying forces which ensure the mass media play out the role of propagandists for those in control without being told to. Many people are still unaware of the work of this man, the eighth most cited author (just behind Freud), partly due to censorship by the mass media he so avidly criticises.

I have only one criticism. In the section on 'Fighting Back — What Can One Person Do?' the reader is urged only to 'question everything' to 'enhance (their) chances of survival'. However, in the interview at the end of the book, Chomsky states over and over again the importance of the need for people to organise. He says we need to organise to develop alternatives to the mass media, to stimulate interaction between people and counter the isolation we feel alone in front of our TV screens, and to bring about change.

Sam Dewhurst

CPBF FINANCIAL APPEAL

A BIG thank you to all our members and supporters for the splendid response to our urgent financial appeal.

We needed to clear our debts and move into 1997 in a stronger financial position. Lots of you sent donations or added extra cash to your membership renewals, and we also had some more substantial donations, including: GPMU Chiltern £50, UNISON Oldham £50, N Leggatt £50, GPMU London Region £50, FBU £95, BECTU £100, NUJ £100, USDAW £100, NUJ Central London £250 and the GPMU £250.

We still need to raise more cash to cover our projects in 1997 for Electionwatch and for our pamphlet on the Information Superhighway, so if you haven't done so, please send your donations into the National Office.

**DATE FOR YOUR DIARY
CPBF CONFERENCE/AGM**

THIS year the CPBF AGM will be held in London on Saturday 28 June at the Conference Centre, Holloway Road, Islington. Please put the date in your diary now as we'd like as many members and supporters at this event as possible.

Apart from the important business of reviewing our work and electing our National Council, we also want to have a discussion on the CPBF's role in the post-election period. We are planning an exciting and attractive event, with distinguished speakers, so please keep the date clear. Full details will appear in future issues of Free Press.



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Media: Shaping the Democratic Vision, produced to stimulate debate on media policy.

We've learnt very painfully that policies for a diverse and democratic media won't fall out of the trees, and the debate on

media policy will continue after the next election. That means we have to ensure it's on the conference agenda at union conferences this summer, the STUC and the TUC, and at the Autumn Labour Party conference. The Media Manifesto gives the arguments and policies which we believe provide a real alternative to those pursued by the Conservative government and the big media corporations, so contact the National Office for copies to distribute in your organisation.

- Media Manifesto Single copies free but please send SAE. Ten copies £2.00, 50 copies £7.50, 100 copies £12 inc P&P. Bulk order prices by negotiation
- If you need a speaker, or a model resolution to encourage media policy debate, we can help too.
- We'd also like to organise fringe meetings at trade union conferences,

where we have an opportunity. Again if you can help in any way, we'd like to hear from you.

MEDIA MANIFESTO

IN THE crucial pre-election period don't forget our Media Manifesto, 21st century

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