

# FREE Press

No. 99, July-August 1997

5Op Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

## ONE HUNDRED, NOT OUT!

THE NEXT edition of Free Press marks the hundredth issue. It will be a special edition, and timed to coincide with the TUC and Labour Party conferences.

Our plans include expanding the magazine to 12 pages, increasing the print run, and inviting people who have been involved with the CPBF over the years to contribute articles on their ideas for media reform.

It will also be an important opportunity to introduce the CPBF and our activity to a wider audience. Our conference and AGM were very successful and delegates gave a clear reaffirmation of the CPBF's role as a critical voice for media reform which needs to survive and prosper under a Labour government. We also got a clear sense of the priorities to concentrate on as a result of our discussions.

But underlining all of our ambitious ideas is the need to raise extra funds and build our membership. We are producing a new membership leaflet for the CPBF and plan to distribute it widely, along with publicity for the centenary issue Free Press.

You can help us in a number of practical ways:

■ **Advertising.** To finance the enlarged issue we are approaching our union affiliates to take space to express their messages of support for the CPBF. Also we are selecting publishers of media books to book space for adverts too.

■ **Sales.** We hope all of our union affiliates take extra orders of Free Press for circulation to branches, along with the new membership leaflet asking them to affiliate, and that union journals will also do features on the special issue.

■ **Volunteers.** We will have stall space at both the TUC (September 8-12) and Labour Party (September 29-October 3) conferences to publicise the CPBF. Both conferences are in Brighton, so if you live in the area or are down there and can help staff our stall please contact us.

■ **Raise the issue of affiliation to the CPBF.** College and university libraries, trades councils, union branches and CLPs are among our affiliates but we need more. If you need a speaker contact the National Office and we'll do our best to provide one.

Let's make an impact with our hundredth edition!

## Waterstone's is going to town

THE familiar shop decor of Waterstone's in our larger cities – it has over 100 shops – will soon be a part of the scenery in smaller towns like Altrincham, Bury St Edmunds and Yeovil. It plans to open 50 new shops, giving it the most comprehensive network of branches in Britain.

The book chain, established and developed so successfully by Tim Waterstone, is now part of the WH Smith group, and has helped to boost the poor profit performance of the company. However in place of the large shop space (normally around 8,000 square feet) which is currently a feature of its stores the new stores will occupy 2,500 square feet on average.

The news brought a mixed reception,

with Louis Baum, editor of *The Bookseller*, saying it was good news for customers: 'It indicates that where there are good bookshops, people will buy books. It increases competition, but no-one can complain about that.'

But others see this as a direct threat to independent booksellers and the smaller chains such as Ottakers and Hammick's.

Their view is that Waterstone's with its wider range of stock, and the negotiating clout of WH Smith, enables it to negotiate the best deals from publishers. This, and the effect of the net book agreement, is leading to a general decline in independent booksellers.

It also adds a sharper relevance to the centre spread by Jon Carpenter in this issue.

## Freedom of information has Labour in a spin

AS WE went to press a worrying report was aired that Whitehall mandarins were obstructing progress on the draft White Paper on Freedom of Information (FoI).

This was strenuously denied by Jonathan Baume, general secretary of the First Division Association (FDA), which represents senior civil servants, who said the conflict was between Ministers, not between politicians and mandarins. This smells suspiciously of spin doctoring, but a picture is emerging of tensions between Ministers and with civil servants about how much we are allowed to know.

There's a view abroad amongst some politicians that FoI is a specialist subject which is not worth many votes and has the potential to cause endless trouble. That's not the experience or view of the CPBF, and indeed for Labour leader Tony Blair FoI was seen as an important symbolic commitment

signifying a new style of open government by Labour, compared with the secrecy, sleaze and corruption of the Tory years.

What's also of concern is that already the delay means that the White Paper will not be published until the Autumn, and that the crucial issues of what should be excluded from disclosure under FoI and who should decide on disputed areas still isn't clarified.

David Clark, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and responsible for the Labour manifesto commitment to pass an FoI Act, seems to favour a parliamentary commissioner, with responsibility to a select committee.

This is a 'fundamental flaw' according to Maurice Frankel of the Campaign for FoI. 'The government could avoid compliance by securing the support of the appropriate select committee, on which it would presumably have a majority,' he said.

# Lining up for privacy

Freedom of Information may be on the back burner, but the Labour government is moving ahead with plans to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, and must soon comply with an EC directive on data protection. CPBF National Council member **MIKE JEMPSON**, Director of the media ethics body PressWise, observes the manoeuvring of the mass media as the deadline for privacy legislation beckons.

THE LINES appear to have been drawn for the final battle over privacy.

In the great and the good corner representing the liberal elite are Alan Rusbridger and Peter Preston of The Guardian, Andrew Marr of The Independent and Richard Addis of the Express. In the red in tooth and claw corner, representing the popular masses, are Piers Morgan of the Mirror and Phil Hall of the News of the World.

Holding the ring are Chris Smith at the Ministry of Culture, Jack Straw at the Home Office, and Lord Irvine of Lairg, who must decide how to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into our law.

A Cabinet committee is wrestling with the problem of how to implement Article 8, which asserts everyone's 'right to respect for his private and family life (sic), his home and his correspondence', and insists that no 'public authority' may interfere with that

right unless legally entitled in order to protect national security, public health and safety, economic well-being, and the rights and freedoms of others.

The ECHR may be squeaky clean with good intentions, but it dates from 1950 and could use an overhaul.

One problem is how to define or extend the definition of 'public authority'. Should public utilities in private hands be excluded? And if they are included, why not other massive companies whose tentacles reach into our homes? And where do the mass media fit in?

PressWise believes that if Article 8 were regarded as a general statement about the citizen's right to privacy, it would protect many ordinary people against unwarranted intrusion by the media.

Recently the Guardian has taken up this line and its editor Alan Rusbridger has suggested that a specific privacy law may be necessary to ram the message home.

The old argument that public figures would be the first to seek protection behind any such law has been used to batter Rusbridger. This does not seem to be the case where Freedom of Information laws exist. The argument could be better applied to abuse of our ludicrous libel laws.

Article 10 of the ECHR addresses the anxiety that any privacy law is an assault on press freedom. It upholds everyone's 'right to freedom of expression', including 'the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas.' All the codicils

that surround Article 8 apply to Article 10, which also acknowledges that states may license broadcasting and the cinema.

One way of resolving the dilemma is to include the mass media among bodies which may not interfere with the citizen's privacy, unless to alert the public to serious wrongdoing. Nude cavortings in a suburban semi involving consenting adults might not then make headlines and some editors might be persuaded to set their investigative reporters onto more serious risks to the public – by exposing the businessmen who make use of free trade zones in Sri Lanka to indulge their paedophile lusts, for instance.

New technology is creating fresh privacy issues. Journalists who use PCs, and newspaper companies with databanks of stories and archive material are dealing in data about private individuals. Digital broadcasting means that sounds and images are stored and transmitted as data, and that brings them within the ambit of the EC Data Protection Directive which must be incorporated into British law this year.

That means Britain's real Privacy Commissioner will not be Professor Pinker at the PCC, but the Data Protection Registrar Mrs Elizabeth France.

There are appropriate exemptions for journalists in the Data Protection Directive, but grey areas abound.

I am entitled to insist that a commercial company remove my name from its marketing database, or correct false information held about me by a credit company.

So why should I not have the right to demand that a newspaper correct inaccuracies held in its computer files – especially as it being stored by a company that makes money by publishing information?

What price the right to privacy if the people most likely to do you most damage are the ones most likely to be exempt from regulations?

These are some of the conundrums which have yet to be resolved. Among those most anxious about the result will be the thousands who have suffered because the mass media have broadcast inaccurate information about them in the past.

Few had the resources to put the record straight. And the regulators like the old Press Council and the PCC have proved to be poor friends to ordinary folk. As Pontius Pilate once said 'What is written, is written', and the inaccurate stories have entered both folklore and cyberspace to haunt the victims for years to come.

*'The issue has gone off the boil,' I was told in the very week that The Guardian gave space to Piers Morgan to attack Rusbridger's position, Rusbridger replied along with three other editors, and Peter Preston wrote a think piece about who is private person and when (and that was just on the Monday).*

*Then I got another call from John Mulholland. Rusbridger and Morgan were to do battle in public at a gathering of Women in Journalism. Could I supply some stories to support his line? I was a little more helpful on this occasion, but reminded him about my article which included a case involving the relative of a Tory MP who was standing in the leadership election. The Guardian would use the story if I could persuade the victim to go very public on the day before the final round.*

*Understandably the victim was reluctant, so some real evidence about how weakness of the PCC in protecting ordinary people against the power of the press remained on the spike.*

*It's a funny old world.*

## Behind the scenes

SHORTLY before the James Cameron Memorial Lecture this year I received a call from The Guardian's press officer's assistant asking if I could supply evidence to support the line Alan Rusbridger was planning to take. He was going to argue for a privacy law and wanted stories about the damage done to ordinary people's lives by unwarranted invasions of privacy. I had spent the morning dealing with two people contemplating suicide over the way the press had messed up their lives.

I explained that identifying victims to espouse a controversial cause in so a public a way would do little to help people who felt isolated and abused – especially as one inevitable result will be increased media interest.

After Rusbridger's lecture I asked if he would take a piece from me based on people whose privacy had been invaded and the way their complaints had been handled. After consulting with Media Guardian editor John Mulholland the commission was agreed. But it was never used.

## MEDIA MONITOR

### DIGITAL TV AWARD – WHO REALLY WON?

IN THE weeks before the Independent Television Commission (ITC) announced the award of the digital franchise to British Digital Broadcasting (BDB) on 24 June 1997, they did some nifty footwork and suggested Rupert Murdoch push off out of the consortium and leave Granada and Michael Green's Carlton Communications to make the running. There was also pressure from the competition authorities in Brussels to ensure his removal.

The ITC also had to reconcile the fact that the rival bid by Digital Television Network (DTN) had much more to offer in the way of innovative programming.

We can't give the detail here of the two bids (if you want a good account, read Steven Barnett's piece in the New Statesman, June 13), but the decision by the ITC is one we could all live to regret.

Firstly, for doing nothing except be a member of the consortium, Rupert Murdoch will receive compensation estimated at £75 million.

Secondly, he will still be the consortium's main premium programme supplier, with a five-year channel supply deal via his existing Sky Movies, Sky One and Sky Sports satellite channels.

It means an estimated 70 per cent of BDB's programme revenues will go straight into his pocket.

And, finally, remember that he can concentrate on what he wanted to do anyway – get his 200-channel digital satellite broadcasting up and running, where he has the dominant position because he owns the technology. Heads he wins, tails he wins.

It was left to the OFTEL telecommunications regulator's director general, Don

Cruikshank, to raise concerns about BskyB's dominance as a long-term supplier 'which raised substantial competition concerns in the pay-TV and conditional access markets.'

And the losers? Well we are too, because DTN offered 23 new channels and also sought to realise the potential for the wired society which BDB ignored. In Steve Barnett's words, 'The real elegance of the DTN bid (was) in its ideas of exploiting digital technology through interactive services ... For those who believe in a new age of electronic democracy, the DTN bid (had) all the ingredients'. RIP.

### ITV: END OF AN ERA

GRANADA'S take-over of Yorkshire-Tyne Tees, Lord Hollick's United News and Media bid for HTV, Scottish Media in the throes of a deal with Grampian. Soon the only ones still to be snapped up – Border and Ulster – will go to the big media players. Granada is suggested as the suitor for Border TV and Scottish Media for Ulster.

And in the background is the insistent pressure, with Granada's Gerry Robinson leading the field, to ditch the old ITV network of regional franchise holders and create instead one national company, Channel 3.

The identities of Anglia, Yorkshire, Central and the rest may remain, but the real substance will disappear. Of course this process has been the inevitable result of the 1990 and 1996 Broadcasting Acts which shifted debates about the ITV franchises from serving the needs of audiences, both regionally and nationally, to stock market flotations and shareholder dividends.

The only obstacle to the creation of one national franchise is that the Broadcasting Act prevents any one company controlling more than 15 per cent of audiences, and the Office of Fair Trading would consider a firm with more than 25 per cent of net terrestrial advertising revenue as anti-competitive. But with Gerry Robinson publicly supporting new Labour policies, maybe a change in legislation will happen.

environmental campaigners who attacked its reputation in a leaflet, has made the OED wary that the multinational may seek to flex its muscles in other areas.

'McJob', to the great displeasure of the fast food chain, is widely used as a euphemism for any form of dead-end, low-paid unemployment. The OED believes the word is in common enough usage to be included within its esteemed covers.

**Mark Rowe**

Independent on Sunday, June 22 1997

## WITHOUT COMMENT

IN WHAT might be described as a case of McCensorship, the Oxford English Dictionary has been advised by lawyers not to include the word 'McJob' in its next edition.

The libel victory by hamburger giant McDonald's, over two penniless

# Pressure for pluralism

Anni Marjoram reports on post-election progress on the diversity and pluralism committee

THE Committee for Diversity and Pluralism met after the General Election to consider future activity in the new political situation.

The committee has been in existence for less than one year and has already raised the profile of problems linked to the distribution of newspapers and magazines that are having an adverse effect on diversity and pluralism in the press.

In practical terms, the Early Day Motions will be resubmitted and a mailing to new Labour MPs will go out when the EDMs are on the order paper.

This will be followed by Parliamentary Questions. We have written to the new President of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett, and to the new Minister for Arts, Mark Fisher. At the time of writing we are still awaiting responses.

We have, however, been told that the Director General of the Office of Fair Trading will make an announcement before the summer break. We have been waiting for him to rule since last year.

What is now being said is that the OFT cannot rule on the code of practice as this was implemented by Ministerial Order (the ordering minister – one Neil Hamilton), and is, therefore, the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry. It is quite clear that we must all continue to apply pressure.

The petition was accepted by the Vice President of the European Parliament in April. Ten thousand signatures were collected, along with several supporting statements, including one from the CPBF. The statements will now be translated and presented to the Petitions Committee for their consideration in about 12 weeks time.

Our understanding is that the proposal that the right of daily newspapers to be distributed is not contentious with any of the political groupings in the European Parliament. Such legislation already exists in several European countries.

We have circulated a model resolution for the Labour Party conference. The issue has already been debated, and our policy passed unanimously, at all the major trade union conferences.

Anni Marjoram can be contacted on (Tel) 0171 254 0033 (Fax) 0171 254 5950.



# Choice of books, choice of market



JON CARPENTER

OUR preoccupations with censorship tend to focus on the press and the broadcast media, and occasionally on the stage or cinema. Books are generally regarded as being a pretty free medium: anyone can print a book and tout it round, and advertise it for sale. It is true that we have a considerable freedom to write and publish, whether in periodical or book form, in the way that we do not have the freedom to broadcast. Computer technology has made it easy and relatively cheap for small publishers to function, and printing costs are very competitive. It is access to markets that is the problem: the act of publishing does not create a marketplace, in the way that the act of broadcasting actually creates a market stall on everyone's radio or TV tuner.

I guess most people in the book trade reckoned that the quality of the book business overall was going up – until the end of the eighties. Then one day we realised the real investment was not in stock but in real estate and valuable leases, and that bookselling chains were borrowing from publishers (by delaying payment of invoices) in order to finance their expansion.

The bookshop is a creature in transformation, and the citizen as well as the publisher has to respond to these changes to preserve an open market and free expression. If you want to be free to buy and read books that interest you, you need to be aware of what is happening.


Cutting stock and moving downmarket has been the general trend among bookshops in the nineties – unlike the rest of the retail trade. Shelf labels like 'current affairs' or 'environment' have vanished from most bookshops. Increasingly bookshops rely on just one or two wholesalers for almost all their stock; it's a very easy process, everything from one source,

150,000 titles to choose from (ready selected for you by the wholesaler from the lists of the larger publishers), and you can see why they do it. But they might as well be putting baked beans on the shelves.

Most small bookshops don't welcome sales reps and the multiples are on computerised stock control: an individual buyer may like a book, but the order may never get through the system. Many so-called academic bookshops stock titles exclusively from lecturers' reading lists chosen by a buyer in an office many miles from the campus concerned. The manager is just a skivvy on very low pay.

The end of the road will be reached when most people give up trying to find a diversity

**The bookshop is a creature in transformation, and the citizen as well as the publisher has to respond to these changes to preserve an open market and free expression**



of books in bookshops and simply order by phone from mail order centres or from the publishers themselves. Small booksellers can't justify high street costs if they are to act as mere order points. In bookselling, the end of the downmarket spiral is bankruptcy.

Of course there are people who would deny that this will happen. There are plans for giant bookstores in the big cities incorporating Internet access, coffee bars and restaurants (unsurprisingly it's only the very biggest players who can afford such notions), but buying

books is never quite like buying furniture. There is no book buying equivalent to the 100 mile round trip to IKEA, unless one is an academic on an annual pilgrimage to Oxford.

Can publishers 'support' booksellers addicted to terminal decline? Indeed, should we? The present situation probably suits a handful of very big publishers, because books from smaller publishers (who, of course, are in the vast majority) simply don't get stocked. And, of course, the reader is often unaware of just how few publishers there are to choose from: these days the single publishing multinational will publish under a whole range of imprints.

A publisher's greatest problem is to know how to bring a book to public attention. Selling books direct to the public can be profitable, but when the potential reader sees a leaflet or an advertisement but orders the book in question from a bookshop, the return to the publisher is tiny. The mechanism of supplying a £10 book to a member of the public via a bookshop costs the publisher well over £5, whereas if the order had been placed direct with the publisher that money could have been ploughed back into more publishing. Traditionally, publishers have wanted to support bookshops. But the premise has been that the bookshops are stocking the publisher's books, or at least the new titles. From my point of view, supplying customers' special orders to bookshops that never ever stock my books is my way of subsidising bookshops whose only commitment is to HarperCollins, Penguin, Reed, a few other multinationals and a couple of wholesalers. Plainly I'd rather sell direct and publish more, than sell through bookshops and publish less.

Whereas 20 years ago there was a significant network of independent 'alternative' bookshops specialising in subjects like feminism, women's issues, black studies and socialist politics that the mainstream bookshops would not touch, these have mostly been wiped out by the likes of Waterstones and Dillons who became just adventurous enough to cream off too much of the sales. The remaining independent bookshops scattered throughout the smaller towns of the country have no commitment to minority interests, and by choice or by economic necessity they cater to the mass of markets only.

If we have difficulty with bookshops, what about getting books reviewed? We soon find that 'literary editors' on the national papers are looking for books in a certain cultural mould and (consequently) from a tiny minority of publishers. Apply the test yourself: how many of the books reviewed in this week's Guardian might be bought by the archetypal Guardian reader? Have you seen the Guardian review a book on conflict resolution, ethical investment, co-operative management, sustainable economics, animal welfare, or caring for children in a violent society? Whereas such books might get the occasional mention in a specialist section, they clearly are not the kind

of book that gets reviewed when books are getting reviewed. By an almost imperceptible sleight of hand, they cease to be classified as 'books' at all in the public mind.

To have our understanding of culture defined by dated and certainly class-based notions of literary and historical academia and nostalgia is an insult to the intelligence and judgement of 99 per cent or more of the population. It's also a peculiarly insidious (and effective) form of censorship. But as a publisher I struggle on, getting reviews and advertising deals with small and specialist magazines, selling books by mail order wherever possible, encouraging people who are developing innovative ways of selling books, trying not to plough money into the 2,000 or more booksellers who are definitely not on our side of the fence. And asking you to



**To have our understanding of culture defined by dated and class-based notions of literary and historical academia and nostalgia is an insult to the intelligence and judgement of 99 per cent or more of the population**

support those bookshops who do stock our books, and to by-pass those who don't.

If bookshops and literary editors are bad news (and I ought to apologise to the tiny handful who are on our side), what of libraries? Staff cuts and pressure on budgets mean that librarians are increasingly choosing books from CD Roms of titles preselected by 'library suppliers' with whom they have negotiated discounts of well over 20 per cent, sometimes up to 35 per cent, and that's often on books on which the suppliers themselves are getting only 35 per cent from the publishers! Again, it is only the firm with big capital investment potential who can offer a monthly CD service, and the pressure to keep customers by offering ever higher discounts is matched only by the need to encourage librarians to buy books from publishers with whom the supplier has negotiated a special discount, based usually on volume of turnover. Once librarians have no time to peruse catalogues and reviews and make their own selections, the big publishers have a tremendous advantage over the smaller ones.


Where this leaves our personal and collective freedoms is a matter of some debate. The bookshop chains are not yet owned by the publishing conglomerates, but this would appear a logical step. (Blackwells are publishers, booksellers and library suppliers, of course.) As in other retail markets, the biggest players call the tune with regard to

discounts, ensuring that they can afford the most expensive locations. True discounting is kept to a minimum: most of the 'discounted' books that filled bookshops before Christmas were bought at enhanced discounts from the publishers in the first place. Since it is publishers who are cutting prices, not booksellers, publishers simply have to raise their so-called cover or go under. (And of course they may try and cut costs by printing in developing countries, or those countries where paper, water or energy is subsidised by governments.) In other words, some bookshops are getting much higher discounts across the board than hitherto, but this does not result in lower prices for customers: on the contrary, the cover prices have to go up to compensate. It is probably only landowners, property developers and a few shareholders who benefit as bookselling becomes increasingly confined to high-cost prime retail sites.

It is argued that the megastore concept of bookselling will introduce choice as never before, if only because of the miles of shelves to be filled. We shall see. We are certainly likely to see more 'own brand' books – book chains publishing their own exclusive titles, just as (for example) HMV record shops have their own label CDs not available through other outlets. Supermarkets, of course, already do this. But other recent trends have not been encouraging either. As well as the discount explosion, we have booksellers demanding extended sale-or-return facilities, particularly on new titles. This means they take no risk at all with the big best-sellers, not paying until books are sold and returning the rest to the publisher. Only the biggest publishers can underwrite this kind of game.

Rumours are also rife that American

**It is ironic that so many left-wing politicians and academics choose to be published by Rupert Murdoch. In some cases they may genuinely need the fat advance, but plainly this is not usually the case**



bookselling chains want to enter the UK market. Because of the bigger market and longer print runs, mass market US books tend to be cheaper anyway, so a policy of importing US books and editions (some of them perhaps selectively remaindered, as when publishers dispose of 'overstocks' or deliberately excessive print runs on condition that they go overseas and out of sight of the home market) could have far-reaching effects on some British publishers. Higher discounts are the norm in the US anyway.

I should not leave this subject without some consideration of remedies. If the situation is even only half as bad as I have made out, it still deserves your attention. What role do you play, and what role could you play? How can we fight these trends?

I would suggest that you, when buying books, use bookshops that stock books from smaller publishers, and are willing to be innovative in response to your interests. We cannot afford, in a collective sense, to support bookshops whose sole concern is to sell gardening books, travel guides and bonkbusters by going and placing special orders with them for those books from smaller or more specialist publishers that they refuse to stock. Please try and buy your books direct from the publisher if you cannot find a sympathetic bookshop, and any librarian knows where to find the address of any publisher you care to name.

The other thing we should remember – and I know this will offend many writers! – is that big publishers only succeed because they sign up 'big' authors. There is no compulsion on the author's part: it is their free choice. It is ironic that so many left-wing politicians and academics choose to be published by Rupert Murdoch. In some cases they may genuinely need the fat advance that a small publisher cannot afford, but plainly this is not usually the case. (And as writers like Susan Hill, who have decided to self-publish, have discovered, being published by a small publisher will not knock sales if the author's name is well-known. Even the biggest bookselling chains will beat a track to the garage door of the self-publishing best-seller writer.)

If more writers were willing to sacrifice jam today and take their jam tomorrow instead (in other words, take their royalties after the books have sold, rather than before), they could offer their books to small publishers who would thereby be enabled to increase their output of other books of interest to smaller or more radical readerships. Authors often entrust their work to agents, whose financial interest is very much in getting the biggest possible advance (because they want their commission this year, not in two years' time). So it is probably agents who are responsible for the fact that most well-known writers' new work is offered to only a handful of conglomerates: the authors themselves are culpable for their neglect of the process in which they are involved, rather than for any urge to go for the biggest publisher they can.

The other solutions to the problem are more political, and probably longer term ...

Jon Carpenter is a small-scale publisher and distributor of books on environmental, development and planning issues and other subjects mentioned in this article. His catalogue of over 100 titles is available free of charge from him at The Spendlove Centre, Charlbury OX7 3PQ (or phone 01608 811969).

## Croatia's media far from free

JOHN SANTOS

THE fighting is over and, under the 1995 peace accords, the former warring parties in the Balkans are supposed to respect press freedom. Some hope!

Take Croatia. The regime of President Franjo Tudjman adopted a media law late last year and was promptly welcomed as the 40th member of the Council of Europe. But Tudjman is no friend of the press.

Returning from cancer treatment in the United States at the end of last year, he lashed out at 'false prophets ... who preach human rights and media freedom.'

If the new media law is considered a success by many in Croatia, it is because it is seen as an effective example of collaboration between the ruling party and the journalists' union – hardly a healthy advertisement for an independent press.

Moreover, the electronic media remain at the mercy of Croatia's discriminatory Law on Telecommunications.

The Committee for Telecommunications, which decides who gets licences, is appointed by Parliament. Six of the committee's members are high-ranking members of the ruling party; two are members of the cabinet; and one is a special advisor to Tudjman on internal affairs.

'Besides laws, there are other ways to put pressure on a disobedient radio station like ours,' says Zrinka Vrabec-Mojzes, editor in chief of Radio 101 in the Croatian capital, Zagreb.

Last year, the Tudjman regime tried to close down Radio 101 – prompting a massive demonstration of support for the station through the streets of Zagreb that forced the authorities to back down.

'The trick they are trying on us now is to make us change the position of our transmitter. If it's repositioned, it won't cover the whole of the city of Zagreb. So the fight goes on,' Vrabec-Mojzes says. Extracted from IPI Report, magazine of the International Press Institute, Second Quarter, 1997.

## Television meets the new boss – same as the old boss?

JAN CULIK

MANY East European countries have not fully freed themselves of government interference in the state-run or public service television broadcasting. Yet a new threat has already arisen – that of an aggressive Western group, aiming to create a downmarket international television empire in post-communist Europe, riding roughshod over imperfect media legislation.

Ronald Lauder's Bermuda-registered 'Central European Media Enterprises' now has stakes in nine television stations or production companies in seven countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Ronald Lauder (53) is the younger son of Estée Lauder, the owner of the American cosmetics empire. According to the Financial Times, by the year 2000, CME's combined stations could be broadcasting to 100 million viewers in Eastern Europe. CME will have access to advertising markets worth nearly \$3 billion.

Central European Media Enterprises penetrates into post-communist Europe using the unprecedented success of its first media venture, Nova TV, a low-brow nationwide commercial TV channel operating in the Czech Republic since February 1994.

The launch of Nova TV was commercially the most successful launch of a TV station in world television history. Watched by some 60-70 per cent of the Czech public, the station started generating profits within nine months of going on the air. In 1996, Nova TV earned \$44 million in station operating income on revenues of \$109 million, paying out a dividend of \$12 million. (The average annual income of the Czech Republic is approximately \$3,100.)

Nova TV transmits US entertainment series and films, locally made studio-based programming, sensationalist news and late-night pornography. Nova does not hesitate to use sex, violence and voyeurism to further its business aims. The station infringes the principles of objectivity, openly promoting its business interests during its broadcasts.

As a result of the commercial success of Nova TV, Central European Media Enterprises has been able to raise capital on NASDAQ, the US alternative stock market, for the setting up of similar TV stations in other post-communist countries. Television broadcasting in Eastern Europe is ineffectively regulated. CME uses extensive lobbying in order to gain influence throughout post-communist Europe. Replicating the model of Nova TV, CME now

operates commercial TV stations or provides TV programming for stations in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia, in Slovenia, in Rumania, in Ukraine, in Germany and in Poland. However, due to recent adverse publicity, CME failed in its bid for commercial TV licences in Hungary in June 1997.

The progress of CME in Eastern Europe has not been without controversy. In the Czech Republic, the licence for the first nationwide commercial TV station was awarded in 1993 under highly favourable conditions for free to a group of five local intellectuals from the CET 21 group. CET 21 aligned itself with CME which agreed to operate Nova TV on its behalf. CME now owns 92.3 per cent of Nova TV and controls CET 21 through Nova TV's Chief Executive.

According to the original proposal, the first Czech nationwide commercial TV station was to broadcast high quality news and current affairs, educational and socially committed programmes, as well as entertainment and commercial programmes. The TV licence was governed by 31 quality conditions prepared in co-operation with the British Independent Television Commission. Most of these conditions were ignored. The original TV project was left by the wayside. By early 1997, all the 31 licence conditions had been annulled by the Czech authorities. Nova TV now broadcasts in a totally unregulated environment, using the CET 21 TV licence, although the Czech media law says the TV licence is untransferable. The Czech parliament has recently set up a commission of enquiry in order to examine the legality of the arrangement.

In Ukraine CME has obtained a contract to provide TV programming for UT 2, a nationwide state TV channel (which reaches 93 per cent of Ukrainian viewers). A Western competitor, Perekhid Enterprises, has filed a suit against CME and Ronald Lauder in New York for undermining its earlier ten-year contract to provide programming for this station which had been reneged upon by the Ukrainian authorities. Perekhid has accused CME of using political favours, bribery and co-operation with groups known for 'criminal connections'. It is suing CME for \$750 million.

Although it is not yet a monopoly, CME could become very influential in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in countries with weak media legislation. Further information is available at: <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/staff/overview.html>

# Read this book!

*Framed – Interrogating Disability in the Media*  
Ann Pounton and Chris Davies (editors)  
British Film Institute £14.99

THIS is a book that needs to be read by anyone with an interest in the media and its influence.

In the first instance I recommend it to all disabled people simply as an accessible analysis of the representational images of disability in film and television so that we may come to understand our own (often negative) attitudes towards ourselves and our abilities within the givens of our society.

In the second instance this book is a must for media students in order for them to be able to begin to develop critiques and modes of analysis regarding the representation of disability and the semiotic messages these representations contain.

It is also a book that should be read by anyone in the media industry, especially film and television producers and directors, screen-writers, publicity agents and casting agencies.

It is impossible within the confines of this review to give a full picture of this

book, but I feel much of the meaning is contained in this statement by Jenny Morris, one of the contributors:

'The crucial thing about these cultural representations of disability is that they say nothing about the lives of disabled people but everything about the attitudes of non-disabled people towards disability ... The more disability is used as a metaphor for evil, or just to induce a sense of unease, the more the cultural stereotype is confirmed.'

The book covers a lot of ground. It looks at cinema portrayal, television, and the third section (which I found very useful and informative) looks at opportunities and training within the media industry for disabled people. It also examines the

concepts of culture and identity from a refreshing perspective and seeks to offer possible ways forward and the potential for the creation of new and much more positive images of disability in the media.

Read this book!

**Phil Stannard**  
Mature graduate student,  
University of Huddersfield.

Writer and activist on disability issues



## Framed

Interrogating Disability in the Media

Edited by Ann Pounton  
with Chris Davies

## Revealing approach to minority television

*Television and ethnic minorities: Producers' perspectives*  
Simon Cottle  
Avebury, £37.50

THERE have been many studies of television programmes for ethnic minorities and television's representation of ethnic minorities and, of course, students of television and race issues frequently deplore the relative dearth of such programmes and the under-representation of minorities in programmes generally. Simon Cottle takes a different and revealing approach to ethnic minority television. His book is a study of TV producers' perspectives on the subject.

Over 20 producers from BBC, ITV, and cable channels were interviewed along with

producers from independent production companies. The producers are not named, so they speak their minds, although, significantly, it was the BBC producers who insisted on anonymity.

Indeed, the BBC's public commitment to equal opportunities, and its remit to provide programmes for minorities hides a general perception of a less than positive situation and a belief by some producers that such programmes may be phased out on the grounds that ethnic minorities have become part of mainstream Britain.

Deregulation and the growth of specialist cable channels for Asian viewers have proved to be no compensation. These channels only get subscribers if they

broadcast popular, usually bought-in, material. They produce virtually no programmes on current minority issues.

All the producers seem dedicated to ethnic minority TV, but the small independents probably most of all. Ironically, they have the most difficulty finding air-time.

The bigger independents, usually employing ex-BBC and ITV personnel, dominate because they know their ex-employers and often achieve what Cottle calls 'sweetheart' deals because of their previous professional connections.

In spite of some pessimistic implications, this book has positive overtones and is a thoroughly readable study.

**Colin Bulman**

## LABOUR PARTY FRINGE MEETING

### LABOUR AND THE MEDIA: Past, Present, Future.

Royal Albion Hotel, Old Steyne, Brighton  
Wednesday, October 1, 5.30 pm

A joint event with Pluto Press to mark the publication of a history of The Daily Herald by Huw Richards.

Speakers include Michael Foot, Geoffrey Goodman (former Industrial Editor, Daily Mirror), James Curran and Huw Richards.

### TUC

The CPBF will have space on the UNISON stall to publicise its work and meet delegates and visitors.

We're also planning a fringe meeting at the TUC. It's likely to be on Wednesday 10 September, early evening, at The Queens Hotel, 1-5 Kings Road, Brighton. Full details in next Free Press.

### CPBF NORTH

We're planning, in association with the Media Centre Huddersfield and the Institute of Communication at Leeds University, a day event on Monday 15 October on the Information Society and the Internet. Confirmed speakers include Professor Brian Winston, and the event will focus very much on how the new technologies can be used by trades unions and campaigning organisations to strengthen their work.

### CPBF AND TRADE UNIONS

We had stalls at both the UNISON and TGWU conferences. An important resolution of support for the work of the CPBF was passed at the the TGWU conference 'to urge the TUC to work with the media



unions, other unions, and the CPBF to produce a policy document based upon suggestions in the CPBF Media Manifesto and upon wide-ranging consultation'. We want to develop work around this as a matter of urgency.

### CONFERENCE AND AGM REPORT

The verdict was clear and positive. Our AGM and Conference on June 28 strongly reaffirmed the vital importance of the CPBF as a voice for media reform. As Sylvia Harvey pointed out, the organisation performs a distinctive role, bringing together both people who work in the media and those who consume its products. The result was an excellent and high level of discussion and people feeling that the event gave a new impetus and confidence for our work in these changed times.

The AGM held in the morning did the business. We elected a new National Council which is:

**Individual Members:** Jonathan Hardy, Steve Peak, Julian Petley, Ann Pointon, Barry White

**GPMU:** Brian Willoughby

**BECTU:** Yossi Bal, Kathy Darby, Turlough MacDaid, Tony Lennon

**NUJ:** Bernie Corbett, Chris Frost, Jacob Ecclestone, Chris Weal

**WGGB:** Bill Ash

**Other Unions:** Linda Quinn, CWU; Geoff Mason, Vi Scotter and John Smethurst, UNISON

**Other organisations:** Mike Jempson, Presswise

**Regional groups:** Granville Williams, CPBF North; Tom O'Malley, Wales

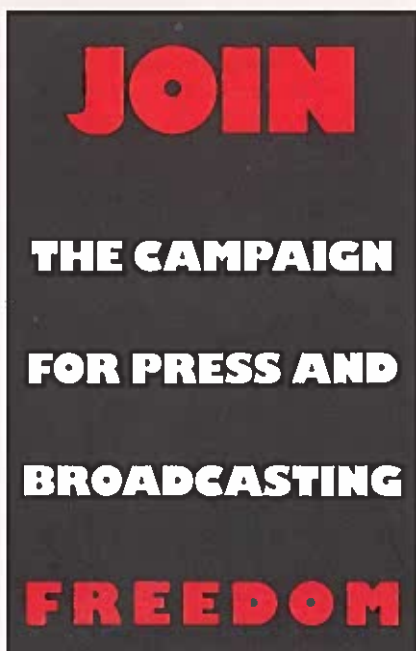
We also agreed to approach Statewatch, the Community Radio Association and Labour Telematics to see whether they would like to be on our National Council.

Our conference, UNFINISHED BUSINESS: Media Reform Under Labour, brought together a range of speakers and stimulated plenty of discussion. In the first session Chris Hird argued for a campaign to save C4 from the fate of privatisation; Julian Petley focused on the power of the press to discipline Labour on social policy and 'morality' issues; and Maurice Frankel warned us against complacency. An effective Freedom of Information act still had to be vigorously campaigned for.

The session on Media and Racism with Diane Abbot MP and Alex Pascal OBE was designed to alert to people to issues prompted by the European Year Against Racism, and to alert people to an important conference being organised later this year on this theme.

In the final session Tom O'Malley and James Curran highlighted key concerns for the CPBF to focus on. These included keeping alive concerns about media concentration on the range and quality of journalism; working for a Press Reform Bill; arguing for diversity and encouraging new voices in the media; and working for the defence of public service broadcasting.

Throughout the day there was lively and creative discussion from delegates, and the feedback from people afterwards was very positive.



### MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM

a) Individual membership	£12
b) Unwaged	£6
c) Household (2 copies Free Press)	£20
d) Supporting membership (includes free CPBF publications)	£25
e) Institutions (eg libraries: includes 10 copies of Free Press)	£25

### AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

f) Less than 500 members	£20
g) 500 to 1,000	£25
h) 1,000 to 10,000	£45
i) 10,000 to 50,000	£105
j) 50,000 to 100,000	£200
k) Over 100,000	£400

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £ ..... FP99

Name .....

Address .....

Postcode ..... Tel.....

Organisation (if applicable) .....

Return form to CPBF, 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF

Tel: 0171 278 4430