

# FREE Press

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Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

## A BIG THANK YOU

### But keep sending your cash

OUR appeal for funds in the last Free Press produced a good response. Donations from individuals and union branches gave us the vital funds to keep the Campaign afloat.

And events covered in this issue

underline how important it is to have a voice campaigning for policies to tackle the awesome power of the media monopolies.

In a book with the intriguing title, *The More You Watch, The Less You Know*, Danny Schechter points out that media issues are covered in the business or feature pages of newspapers, but they should be on page one as a war story: 'This media war is being fought not with guns but with marketing strategies and corporate logos that value entertain-

ment more than information, diversion more than democracy.'

We agree - there is a war. And there needs to be an effective movement of resistance. For the CPBF the challenges over the next 18 months will be great. We have to mount an effective opposition and build support for our policies both in Parliament and more broadly amongst trade unions, educational, and cultural groups.

Please do all you can to make sure we don't fail for lack of funds.

## EDITORIAL

# Rupert Murdoch

# FUTURE IMPERFECT?

WILL there be a new entry in the edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of New Words* which appears sometime after the year 2000?

### MURDOCHISATION (NOUN)

It's an ugly sounding word to describe an ugly phenomenon.

But a dictionary definition would suggest its key meanings.

- The word emerged in the 1990s to describe the use and abuse of media power by a global media company, News Corporation, owned by Rupert Murdoch.
- The word was coined following a number of high profile cases which demonstrated the dangers of excessive media power in the hands of one person. These included
  - the use of predatory pricing to weaken and eliminate other newspaper titles.
  - the subordination of freedom of expression to the higher priority of commercial expansion. This was demonstrated most shamefully in the intervention by Rupert Murdoch to stop publication of a book, *East and West*, by the former Hong Kong governor, Chris Patten. Murdoch did not want the book published by his book company, HarperCollins, because it might upset plans to expand his media empire in China.

● the cynical switching of support between political parties to influence media policies, particularly those inimical to its media operations. The support of Rupert Murdoch for New Labour worried many people because it seemed impossible to get Labour ministers to say anything critical about Rupert Murdoch's blatant intervention in democratic processes.

● the description of a process which impacted on the day to day lives of journalists so that the quality and range of journalism was diminished by working for News Corporation. The ex-Sunday Times editor Andrew Neill revealed some aspects of this in his memoir, *Full Disclosure*.

If this imaginary entry did appear in a future edition of the *Oxford New Words*, it would be nice if there was another section added to it.

● The word fell out of use after 1999. In the United Kingdom, deep concerns amongst the electorate were expressed to MPs, who realised that something had to be done, in spite of resistance from the Prime Minister and his media advisers, Alistair Campbell and Peter Mandelson. In both the Lords and Commons concerted action led to the outlawing of predatory pricing, and the Office of Fair Trading intervened to prevent Murdoch's papers using it. In 1999 the

Broadcasting Bill was debated and key clauses added which required News International to relinquish its dominant position in satellite broadcasting, and allow full and fair access to other programmers.

This was backed up by a tough regulatory regime to ensure compliance.

Meanwhile at a European level a directive on Media Concentration and Pluralism, bitterly attacked and fiercely lobbied against by News International and other media groups, set limits on media ownership. It meant News International had to sell some of its newspaper titles.

For Murdoch this was the last straw. He viciously attacked both the government and the European Commission but his papers lost circulation as they increasingly lost touch with popular opinion. Finally, Murdoch sold all his UK media interests to concentrate on his media plans in China which were running into difficulties.

Now that really would be worth reading. Of course it's a fairy tale ending, but we have to try and make sure that something like this becomes reality. We have been banging on about the Murdoch threat for years. Thank goodness more people can see it now. Murdoch has to be challenged, and soon.



# WORLD IN ACTION, RIP?

## PLATFORM

IF, AS some reports suggest, Granada's World in Action is about to be ditched, then the world of broadcast journalism is set to lose its brightest star. Over the years World in Action has brought us a succession of award-winning investigations into the likes of the Queen's taxes, the Birmingham Six, Vietnam, John Poulson and more recently Jonathan Aitken. Corruption has been exposed, wrongs have been righted, and issues debated.

When World in Action began in January 1963 it introduced to our screens a style of journalism hitherto unknown on British television. There were investigations into the appalling treatment of the elderly in some hospitals, the effects of smoking, the spread of venereal disease and even a famous debate with Mick Jagger about drugs. Issues were aired that had hitherto been avoided on television. This was hard-hitting investigative journalism at its best. Even today some of those old black and white programmes have an edge that no other broadcast journalism has matched since.

Not only has World in Action brought issues and debates into our living rooms but the programme has spawned some of the finest documentary producers and directors of the post-war period: Tim Hewat, David Plowright, Brian Lapping, Ray Fitzwalter, Gus MacDonald, David Boulton, Michael Apted, Claudia Milne, Steve Morrison, Dorothy Byrne. It's also hired a few politicians in its day including Cabinet Ministers Margaret Beckett and Jack Straw as well as the likes of Chris Mullin and Brian Sedgemore. The list is impressive and a testament to the investment which Granada Television put into the programme. It was journalism with integrity. But now it seems all that is about to end.

ITV Centre, distressed at falling ratings and hungry for greater commercial success is ready to ditch one of its leading brand names in favour of some more mundane, populist form of current affairs programme. The talk is that ITV wants a sixty minutes, more reactive 'consumer' type programme. It's no coincidence that ITV recently appointed Steve Anderson, former editor of Watchdog, as its new head of news and factual output.

The current World in Action team may well find itself merged into the new programme



to dash to foreign fields as its predecessor? When Granada pitched its bid for the franchise renewal after the 1990 Broadcasting Act it did so on the back of programmes like World in Action, spotlighting the team that had won more awards than any other British current affairs

with a promise to continue its investigative style. But how long before the investigative element is swamped by the more populist approach? And what about the time slot? The betting already has it as late as 10.30pm. Equally, will the new programme be as ready

**"It's not enough to be doing marginal subjects anymore. We have to go for mainstream targets, things that the average viewer is concerned about: health, crime, money, social issues - the standard fare of any popular newspaper."**

**Steve Anderson**  
incoming editor, World in Action  
Broadcast, 20 March 1998

## What's up with docs?

ANOTHER area where there's a flagrant breach of ITV's licence commitments is serious documentaries. The Campaign for Quality Television has produced a stinging report critical of the ITC and ITV for their performances. Even though the ITC highlighted the situation in the 1996 and 1997 Performance Reviews when it pointed out that ITV's commitment to serious documentary and arts coverage was in question, the situation has not changed.

According to the report's figures,

programme. Yet now Granada seems ready to dump its favourite child in the interests of ratings. A case for investigation by the Independent Television Commission, surely.

In effect, it's just another example of the dumbing down of news and factual programmes. First Tuesday, Weekend World, This Week; it's becoming a depressing list of casualties. Next in line will probably be ITN's News at Ten, cut in length and shunted to the wilderness hours. At a time when politicians have been complaining bitterly to the BBC about moving Today in Parliament perhaps they should cast their eye towards World in Action and ask a few questions. **A Platform piece normally has the name of the contributor. In this case the author has asked for anonymity.**

serious documentaries (programmes normally broadcast at 10.40pm on Tuesdays in the Network First slot) have declined from 34 in 1994 to only 18 in 1996. At the same time as the number of commissions have been halved, budgets for the remaining programmes have been cut too.

Ray Fitzwalter, chair of the Quality TV Campaign said, 'What we want ITV to do is reassert their commitment to a major showcase series and improve the range and diversity of what's available on ITV.'

## World in Action and the ITC

THE following letter was sent on Monday 16 March to Peter Rogers, Chief Executive, ITC, 33 Foley Street, London W1P 7LB:

We are writing to express our growing concern about the future of Granada Television's World in Action programme. Reports in the media plus news filtering from Granada Television itself, suggest that World in Action is in danger of being discarded after more than thirty years of award-winning programme making. We believe that if this is the case, then ITV will be left without a flagship current affairs programme. Already such eminent programmes as This Week, First Tuesday and Weekend World have been discarded.

Over the years World in Action has excelled with its forthright investigative journalism, winning more awards than any other current affairs programme. Programmes such as those on the Birmingham Six, the Queen's taxes, Vietnam, Jonathan Aitken, John Poulson and many more have resulted either in the exposure of corruption, the correction of injustices or major political campaigns. Without World in Action many of these stories might never have come to light. Although ITV appears to be promising a one hour current affairs programme in its place, there is no guarantee that it will be scheduled in prime time or it will be of the same format as World in Action. Reports suggest that ITV favours a one hour 'consumer' programme and that World in Action will be swallowed into this new format.

We would ask the Independent Television Commission to investigate this and to ascertain the precise future of World in Action. We believe that World in Action was an integral part of Granada's franchise bid and as such Granada should be held to account. Its loss will be of concern to many who believe the programme offered journalism with integrity and honesty. We fear that commercial pressures are leading to ratings-led current affairs programming with foreign stories and long term investigations disregarded in favour of cheaper, populist consumer programming.

We look forward to receiving your reply.  
**Barry White**      **Granville Williams**  
National Organiser      Editor, Free Press

■ If you agree with the issues we raise, please send your comments to the ITC as well.

FRED FRIENDLY

## Now you see it, now you don't

FRED Friendly's name won't be all that familiar to Free Press readers. His death on March 3 1998 deserves to be recorded, if only as a reminder of the threats to news and current affairs journalism which can come when ratings and the bottom line become the driving force for television programming.

He was part of a group of US broadcasters and writers associated with Edward R. Murrow in a creative partnership which produced innovative current affairs programmes for the new and powerful medium of television. Like Murrow, he believed passionately in the ethical and civic obligations both for the medium and those who worked in it. 'TV is bigger than any story it reports,' he once said, 'It's the greatest teaching tool since the printing press. It will determine nothing less than what kind of people we are.' From 1951 to 1958 Friendly and Murrow produced See It Now for the US TV company CBS. The programme was an influential model; one taken up by, for example, Granada when it launched its new ITV station in 1955.

It was Murrow and his producer Friendly who first used television to tackle the scourge of McCarthyism. Great pressure was brought to bear to dissuade them from tackling the seemingly all powerful Senator

from Wisconsin, but they stood firm and in doing so demonstrated the power of current affairs journalism to right wrongs, expose corruption and alert people to dangers.

See It Now was the first programme to publicise a link between smoking and lung cancer, for example. But it was this very independence and the refusal to duck a subject because of political or commercial implications that also led to the programme's sponsor, Alcoa, dropping its support in 1955. The programme was shifted to a Sunday afternoon 'ghetto' slot. Friendly continued to work for CBS News until he resigned in February 1966. Senator J William Fulbright was holding hearings into American involvement in the Vietnam war. Instead of covering them CBS was ordered to show a fifth re-run of I Love Lucy and an eighth re-run of another comedy series, The Real McCoys.

Friendly went to the Columbia University School of Journalism and for the rest of his life continued to argue and fight against the forces of commercialism which gnawed away at television journalism. Just before his death he said that television news was in danger of 'being twisted into an electronic carnival, in which show-biz wizardry and values obscure the line between entertainment and news.'

## BBC privatisation fears

CULTURE Secretary Chris Smith was last month considering whether to approve plans for the BBC to transfer most of its technicians and equipment to a newly-registered limited company.

The move, which has been heavily criticised by observers including the BBC's unions, is intended to separate the operation of the Corporation's Resources Directorate from licence-funded activities, in anticipation of a significant increase in its level of profit-earning commercial work.

Senior Resources executives, faced with falling income from BBC producers whose budgets are being squeezed, want to move into producing corporate videos and TV commercials to stem this loss of revenue.

They claim that the BBC's obligation to avoid using the licence fee to cross-subsidise

commercial activities makes the accounting regime of a limited company essential if Resources is to expand into new markets.

However, critics of the plan, aided by top-level legal advice, believe that limited company status will provide no more protection against complaints from competitors than the arrangements already in place to allow the modest amount of commercial work currently done by BBC Resources. They predict that the move is the first step towards privatisation of Resources, citing the sale of the BBC's transmitter chain two years ago, and fear that too much non-BBC commercial activity could undermine the argument for licence funding to continue beyond 2001.

Chris Smith has said that he would not approve the plan unless the BBC proved that it was not a "ramp to privatisation".



# Not as green as it's pear-shaped

**Gary Herman casts a critical eye over an important European Union Green Paper on Media Convergence. The issues might seem abstract and technical, but the outcome will have a major impact on the ownership and regulation of the media.**

EARLIER this year, the Financial Times published its annual list of the world's top 500 companies – the FT 500. Unlike other similar lists, which rank companies primarily by turnover, number of employees or profit, the FT 500 is proud to focus on market capitalisation which, says the editorial, 'encapsulates the stock market's perception of a company's prospects, and as such is a forward-looking measurement.' Well, up to a point, Lord Pearson.

Market capitalisation means the number of shares a company has issued, multiplied by the share price. As such, it combines a measure of a company's indebtedness (shares are issued to raise money) and its chances in the stock market lottery (share prices rise when companies get taken over or they appear to be a good bet for other reasons). Nothing there about productivity, public service, product quality, or long-term investment.

**350-odd billionaires now account for more wealth than the whole of the world's 40 poorest nations**

In the market capitalisation league tables, then, Microsoft came third this year, and Intel – the people who make the chips for the computers running Microsoft software – came sixth. While immensely successful, these companies come well down in the lists of big companies on the basis of any other measure apart from hype. In the Fortune 500 list, for example, Intel comes 43rd and Microsoft 172nd on revenue.

So what does this all mean, apart from telling that technology stocks were hot in 1997? And what does it have to do with convergence – subject of the current European Commission

consultative document, 'Green Paper on the Convergence of the Telecommunications, Media and Information Technology Sectors, and the Implications for Regulation – Towards an information society approach'? It should remind us that the information society is not just a general pick-me-up for the global economy, but the cause of a number of companies making vast sums of money for a handful of individuals.

Microsoft boss, Bill Gates, is the world's richest man because he owns large numbers of the shares in his company, and the informa-

## Cruel and degraded transmissions for the early birds

**Expecting digital TV and radio to improve the pictures and sound you receive? Think again, warns Tony Lennon**

IN THE world of consumer electronics, whether you're talking about watches, mobile phones or microwave ovens, the word "digital" has come to mean "better". So it's no surprise that TV viewers who want to be first in the queue for new multi-channel set-top boxes when they hit the shops in July, the "early adopters" in marketing jargon, are looking forward to better quality pictures.

They could be in for a shock, though, because the digital transmission systems which will underpin the future of TV and radio broadcasting result from an engineering compromise which trades off multiplicity of channels against technical quality of the signals.

Digital compression, the new technology which makes efficient use of bandwidth by squeezing pictures and sound into narrow transmission channels, is a mixed blessing. It certainly increases the number of separate channels that can be broadcast within a given amount of bandwidth.

However, digital compression performs this sleight of hand by altering the signal in ways that can introduce corruption. In the case of TV, the MPEG compression system takes advantage of the fact that TV pictures tend to remain static for much of the time – by sending information only about changes in the content, instead of sending the whole picture 25 times a second as the current analogue system does, a lot of bandwidth can be saved. The downside comes when pictures do change rapidly – the bandwidth allowed

for digital broadcasting will not allow the full 25 new pictures per second – and freezing of pictures, or partial disintegration into low-resolution digitised blocks, will sometimes occur. This could look like a film missing several of its frames, or produce an effect where parts of the picture disappear – the ball might keep disappearing during football programmes for example.

It should also remind us of the extent to which companies, countries and entire regions are now being run for the short-term interests of share-holders. The information society may look like a good market opportunity for the likes of Microsoft and Intel, but it is an even better stock-market opportunity for

people like him who make up a fair proportion of the 350-odd billionaires who now famously account for more wealth than the whole of the world's 40 poorest nations.

Trials with test audiences have already led some terrestrial broadcasters to revise down the number of channels they will offer from November – viewers reacted badly to the effects of high level picture compression.

Picture detail is another area where technical compromises can free up bandwidth. Throughout the digital TV industry the term "VHS quality" is becoming commonplace, meaning a picture standard which allows the same level of sharpness as a home video recorder can reproduce, which is considerably less than the current analogue system is capable of.

Although there will be digital channels which offer full broadcast quality pictures, there will be plenty of operators who choose to maximise choice by reducing sharpness. This is a far cry from expectations in North America, where consumers believe that digital TV is exclusively about the delivery of High Definition TV (HDTV) pictures. Admittedly in the UK there will be some wide-screen channels, BUT these will be transmitted to the

pretty much any company with the chance of a stake in the new medium which is the information superhighway. Hence the feverish round of merger, alliance and acquisition which reflects technological convergence in the developing organisation of the media, communications and IT industries. 'In 1996,' according to the EC's Green Paper, 'more than 15 percent of the total value of world-wide mergers and acquisitions (US \$1 trillion) was generated by activity in what can broadly be termed information and communication'.

current technical standards, rather than the much higher quality HDTV standard.

In the world of Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB), which is already being transmitted but is hampered by the prohibitive cost of receivers, compression poses similar problems. The compression system, MUSICAM, takes advantage of the fact that audio signals, especially speech programming, leave the transmitter silent, or nearly silent, for much of the time. By discarding these quiet periods, and using the freed-up carrying capacity to send other signals, radio programmes can be squeezed into narrow digital chunks of bandwidth just like TV channels. But, as the architects of the system admit, the signal that comes out is not identical to the signal that goes in, and a furious debate has raged amongst audio purists over the

claims that DAB is "CD-quality". In fact it isn't, because audio CDs are not compressed, but supporters of DAB argue that the information thrown away would not be noticed anyway by the average listener. A motorist listening to a traffic report might agree with this, but an audiophile listening to a Prom concert on the latest equipment may not.

One final detail of the digital revolution which has not been highly publicised is the matter of coverage. The existing TV transmitter network reaches more than 98% of the population, and you have to live in pretty exotic parts of the UK to be out of reach –

**Viewers reacted badly to the effects of high level picture compression**

Regrettably, the Commission has failed to get the underlying message about the information society, seeing it simply in terms of supposed effects – new jobs, new means of expression, new forms of education and platforms for the delivery of social welfare. 'The global nature of communications platforms today, in particular, the Internet, are providing a key which will open the door to the further integration of the world economy,' says the Green Paper. 'This will open opportunities and challenges not only for the European Union, but also for our neigh-

universal availability is so deeply engrained in British TV viewers that the difficulty in receiving Channel 5 in many areas came as a genuine surprise.

The new digital terrestrial network will never achieve such high coverage – of the six frequencies that will be used to bundle channels together only one, allocated to the BBC, will reach anything near the 98% coverage figure. At the other end of the scale, the sixth frequency, one of the three awarded to British Digital Broadcasting, will reach an estimated 75% of the population.

The questions posed by digital broadcasting may seem highly technical, but at the heart of the debate there is a simple issue at stake. Unlike the current broadcasting system, which is founded on uniform quality, consistent standards, and universal availability, the new environment brings variable quality, inconsistent standards (two set-top boxes if you want both satellite and terrestrial TV), and availability that won't match current expectations in full.

Broadcasters will, effectively for the first time, have the same ability as suppliers of other goods to offset product quality against costs and profits. Picture and sound quality will be offset against choice of channels; availability will be offset against start-up costs for new networks; and high TV production values will be offset against the cost-saving "VHS quality" standard.

Once again we may see that new technology is used to achieve higher profits, through economies of scale and scope, rather than better quality for the consumer. Those early adopters queuing for their set-top boxes have a lot to think about – there's more at stake in the digital revolution than just a greater choice of sport and films.

bours in Central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, and more broadly, in the developing world. At the same time, the low cost of establishing a presence on the World Wide Web, is making it possible both for businesses of all sizes to develop a regional and global reach, and for consumers to benefit from the wider choice of goods and services on offer. Globalisation will therefore be key theme in future developments, as changes in Europe are mirrored by developments all over the World.

'If Europe can embrace these changes by creating an environment which supports rather than holds back the process of change we will have created a powerful motor for job creation and growth, increasing consumer choice and promoting cultural diversity. If Europe fails to do so, or fails to do so rapidly enough, there are real risks that our businesses and citizens will be left to travel in the slow lane of an information revolution which is being embraced by businesses, users and by Governments around the World.' The Green Paper focuses consistently on keeping Europe out of this 'slow lane'. In this context, it sees regulation predominantly as a barrier to market entry, rather than a framework for supporting European industry,

**The Green Paper focuses consistently on keeping Europe out of the information revolution 'slow lane'**

much less to underpin access, public service, and ethical or quality standards.

'In the new global environment,' says the Green Paper, 'the way in which networks and services are regulated in different regions has the potential to impact substantially on investment in those regions. Excessive or inadequate regulation in one region could result in a migration of economic activity elsewhere, with adverse consequences on the development of the Information Society in the former region.'

Liberalisation, it would seem, remains top

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## NEW BOOKLET ON WINSTON SILCOTT

We'd like to draw Free Press readers to a practical way that can support the campaign to free Winston Silcott. A booklet, *A Chronology of Injustice*, has been compiled by Legal Action for Women which summarises the key evidence surrounding the case, and why after 12 years in prison police and media are still pursuing him.

The booklet documents the crude and racist reporting of the original Tottenham 3 trial in March 1987, and which has continued up to the present day. The Criminal Cases Review Commission is considering the evidence that Winston Silcott case should be sent to the Court of Appeal, and the booklet presents the evidence for his conviction to be overturned.

You can purchase the booklet from LAW, Crossroads Women's Centre, PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU Tel 0171 482 2496. The booklet costs £8 for institutions and £4 for individuals.

## KIDS TV: MORE DOESN'T MEAN BETTER

A recent report, *The integrity and erosion of public television for children*, surveys the programming available to Europe's youngsters. The report's authors, Jay Blumler and Daniel Biltereyst, describe the provision of more children's television across Europe as a 'two-edged sword': 'On the one hand it gives children more to view but at the same time it has diminished diversity'. Specifically, only a minority of the children's programmes scheduled by European public broadcasters is now home made. The share of imports has increased dramatically over the last four years. Policy implications identified include support by the European Union for 'the special role of public service broadcasting in the rapidly changing audiovisual environment' and for key civic groups to keep an eye on children's broadcasting and maintain pressure on broadcasters. Copies of the report are available from the Broadcasting Standards Commission, 7 The Sanctuary, London SW1P 3JS

## 'GAndALF' - UK EDITORS JAILED

BY GIBBY ZOBEL

Three UK editors have been in jail since November 1997 for simply reporting the facts of direct action protests. They were sentenced for three years each under a catch-all conspiracy law, which Liberty has called for to be abolished.

They were found guilty of inciting 'persons unknown' by disseminating environmental and animal rights literature

WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER CONSCIOUSLY OBJECTING

# SchNEWS

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## IRAQ ATTACK

"The best way to hurt him is his core infrastructure. We're not going to leave that alone as we have in the past. But there will be far fewer bombing runs than during the last Gulf war - probably less than 400 a day" - Senior US officer

The US and Britain are preparing to let loose their war machine on the people of Iraq in order to maintain their dominant position in the Middle East. Having crippled Iraq with seven years of sanctions that are estimated to have killed two million Iraqis, half of them children, Clinton and Blair are increasingly calling for sanctions against Iraq to be lifted, allowing Iraq oil to compete with US and British controlled oil. The war being prepared for - and the horrors it will hold for the Iraqi people - will have nothing to do with all be about profits.

The excuse for going to war being fed to the public in Britain and the US is that Saddam Hussein cannot be trusted with 'weapons of mass destruction'. While there is enormous doubt about whether Iraq has any such weapons there is no doubt about who does. The United States and Britain have massive stockpiles of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. The US and Britain arm, train and subsidise brutal dictatorships throughout the world. They are currently amassing a force of 30,000 troops, aircraft carriers, stealth fighters, B52 bombers, cruise missiles and much more in order to bomb Iraq "back into the stone age", as they did in 1991. The 'smart bombs' sent to Iraq in 1991 hit 28 hospitals, 52 community centres, 676 schools and 56 mosques. 400 civilians were burned alive in a bomb shelter in Amiryia. Now who was it that can't be trusted with 'weapons of mass destruction' again?

There is growing opposition throughout the world to US and British war plans. The idea that a country should be bombed into oblivion for breaching United Nations resolutions is viewed with interest by Cubans, who have seen the UN pass five resolutions in the last five years calling for the US to end its crippling embargo against Cuba only to see the US ignore them all. A clear majority of Americans oppose military action. Explaining France's opposition,

Senior Editor's Preface to *IRAQ ATTACK* (SchNEWS is published in Brighton by Justice?)

### Protest free-sheet SchNEWS is a prime mover in the campaign to free the three editors

over a five year period, akin to a gagging order on journalists working in a similar field. This clear case of denial of free speech was not lost on Index on Censorship which reprints samples of the 'offending' copy, from the radical journal *Green Anarchist* (GA) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) supporters, on its website. It was a widely under-reported case, despite the £2m cost and the three-month trial, perhaps due to the obscurity of the magazines. But it sent shockwaves through the alternative media, which has been galvanised into action to free the so-called GAndALF 3.

One of the prime movers in the campaign is SchNEWS, the national protest free-sheet who've just published their third anthology under the shadow of the conspiracy trial. Spokesperson Jo Makepiece

their foreign minister said, "That is not just the French position. It is the position of all Europeans apart from the British. Obviously it is also the position of the Arab world, the Russians, the Chinese." One lot of people still keen to go to war, however, are own politicians - in a vote on Tuesday less than 4% of MPs voted against the government's plans for war. Opposition is strongest, of course, in the Middle East. Last Sunday, Palestinians in the Deheishe refugee camp took to the streets to oppose US and British war plans. Referring to continuing US support for Israel's illegal occupation of south Lebanon for the last 20 years, one of the protesters said, "The US is pulling out all the stops to make Saddam comply with UN resolutions, yet could you imagine the difference it would make if the US applied the minimum of pressures on Israel to comply with UN resolutions?"

The current attack against Iraq is the latest chapter in the long history of the carve-up of the Middle East by the superpowers. The United States, with its ally Britain, maintains its dominant position by arming countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey so they can suppress popular, democratic movements in the region. From the Palestinians and Kurds denied their right to a homeland, to the Iraqi child dying for a lack of medicines banned by sanctions, the peoples of the Middle East suffer poverty, displacement and war as a result of this continuing carve-up.

Before sanctions were imposed, Iraq was one of the most developed countries in the Middle East. For years, Saddam Hussein was supported by Britain and the US in order to 'contain' Iran, the threat to 'stability' at the time. Up until February 1996 British taxpayers paid £696m to arm Iraq. Things only changed when Iran became less anti-American and Saddam Hussein showed signs of independence from the US. The 1991 Gulf war took place to ensure that an autonomous, oil-rich Iraq did not emerge to challenge US and British dominance of the oil market.

Since the war, sanctions have cost

While the media would have us believe that the country backs another Gulf War, people have been demonstrating. On Valentine's Day anti-war protesters encircled the Ministry of Defense in Whitehall, whilst on the following Monday, protesters blocked Northwood Joint Deployment Force HQ.

Rapid Response: If an attack is launched by there will be demos at noon on the day, and room every Saturday @ Downing St. The National Peace Council have set up an emergency response network 0171 354 5200 npc@pac.org. In Brighton there's a series of meetings against the drive to war. The first one on Monday (23 Feb) 7.30pm. The Cricketers Black List St. For details of other meetings contact the Peace Centre (01273) 620125. Faslane Peace Camp, protesting outside the home of Trident for the past 15 years, have been given an eviction date 1st April Ring 01436 820901. \* ARROW (Active Resistance) and openly breaking the sanctions by taking medical supplies directly to Iraqi hospitals. 0171 607 2322.

There are more nuclear waste transports planned at Ahaus in Germany. The country is due to arrive between 23-26 March. The nuclear mafia hope the half-forgotten Ahaus site will attract less protest than Gorleben, scene of massive protests last year with a 20 year history of resistance. Spread the news: 001 (0) 4645 24803 (Rampenplan) or 0049 (0)2651 9617-91/92 (Ahaus activists)

Iraq over \$90bn in lost oil revenues. Iraq currently owes Russia \$7bn and France \$4bn, money that these countries can only recoup if sanctions are lifted. An independent Iraq trading its vast oil reserves in alliance with France or Russia or any other European power would undermine US dominance of the region. This is why the US and Britain are so keen to decimate Iraq, whatever the human cost.

Last week 7,000 Turkish troops, backed by US-made Cobra attack helicopters, invaded the Kurdish part of northern Iraq killing around 20 PKK guerrillas. On Monday Israeli troops evicted dozens of Bedouin families from their homes on the West Bank, where they have lived since the 50s, to make way for the expansion of a Jewish settlement. Iraqi children continue to die from sanctions and next week could be dying from missile attacks on their homes. If they do, it will be one more chapter in the superpowers' war against the people of the Middle East.

said, 'This ludicrous sentence is just trying to scare us into silence, but the last thing the defendants would want is for people to stop taking part in, or writing about direct action. As far as we are concerned, it's business as usual.' The prisoners, Saxon Wood, Steve Booth and Noel Molland have applied to Amnesty International for recognition as prisoners of conscience, while Green Anarchist continues without them, publishing a new issue in April.

SchNEWSannual, featuring full coverage of the GAandALF case is available £6 (cheques to justice?). Send an sae to PO Box 2600 Brighton BN2 2DX or check weekly updates on the website: www.cbuzz.co.uk/SchNEWS Copies of the offending publications are available from: Green Anarchist, BCM 1715, UK WC1N 3XX The ALFSG Newsletter, BCM 1160, UK, WC1N 3XX Or visit the Index on Censorship solidarity site: www.oneworld.org/index\_oc

Secret State, Silent Press

by Richard Keeble 1998

University of Luton Press/John Libby Media (£14.95)

THE recent build-up to the possible bombing raids on Iraq once again saw the majority of the British press banging the drums of war, preparing us for yet another media spectacle. With a few honourable exceptions, the media repeated the claims that the time had come to 'teach Saddam a lesson'.

In his book Richard Keeble argues that since the 1980s high profile warfare by the US and the UK has had little to do with military action. Major conflicts have been transmuted into media spectacle and myth. They were 'manufactured crises'. He also argues that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West has been driven to invent a series of enemies to satisfy the needs of the vast arms industry.

Keeble traces the media's role from Britain's venture in the Falklands, (where media control by the British military had a profound effect on the US) through the US attacks on Grenada, Gaddafi in Libya and Noriega in Panama. Each adventure enabled

the military to refine its relationship with the media to ensure uncritical coverage.

The bulk of the book is devoted to media coverage of the Gulf War and the events leading up to Operations Desert Shield/Storm. Keeble goes on to expose the myth of the clean war, the equivalent of Peter Snow's bloodless sandpit seen night after night on BBC2. And of how the media functioned as patriotic propaganda, whilst reserving its venom for those who questioned the war and the slaughter.

At the time of writing, there appears a lull. Saddam is still the bogey man and the Arabian Gulf remains a sea full of military hardware awaiting for the off. No better time to get the situation in perspective by reading Richard Keeble's landmark publication. It may make uncomfortable reading for some, but it will give us a better understanding of events passed and to come.

Barry White

### The Universal Journalist

by David Randall

1996 Pluto (£12.99)

This book slipped through our net when it was first published. Belatedly, I want to

## Not as green as it's pear-shaped

from page 4

of the European agenda, despite the increasingly apparent emergence of a handful of vast US-dominated media-communications-IT conglomerates all pursuing the goal of a global market in lowest-common-denominator information and entertainment.

This may be the fast lane, but it's hardly heading in the direction of a better world. Addressing the issue of 'Securing public interest objectives in the light of convergence', for example, the Green Paper asks only two-and-a-bit questions: does convergence support or challenge the way in which public interest objectives are achieved, should these objectives 'be more clearly identified' and, where the objectives translate into particular obligations - such as universal service in telecoms or public service in broadcasting - should these obligations be placed on 'a wider group of actors'? These questions rather limit the debate to two possible scenarios: leave things as they are, or replace statutory with self-regulation.

'The global nature of the platform and the difficulty of exercising control within a given Member State are leading to solutions which draw on self-regulatory practices by industry rather than on formal regulation,' the Green Paper confesses. Yet this is a counsel of despair. Globalisation and the new media challenge all our conventional wisdom about values, rights, quality and

content, and they allow transnational corporations to use market power to wipe the floor with their competitors.

The hope of an information superhighway leading to freedom will be illusory, as long as the issue of regulation is sidestepped in the attempt to liberalise markets and investment opportunities. And this applies to content as much as infrastructure. When companies like IBM begin to develop a global strategy for selling education on the Internet, and governments like the UK's show them an open door, it is time to think seriously about controlling the information superhighway before it becomes little more than an information supermarket offering up bland and processed product. The Green Paper ignores the real issues of convergence - that new media and new media companies subordinate considerations of content to market, and that the market is increasingly dominated by US companies who control the fabric of the information society. The fast lane looks like it's taking us right into the grip of a new breed of imperialist.

Gary Herman is a member of the CPBF National Council, and specialises in media policies and training issues associated with the information superhighway. The consultation process lasts until April 1998, when a major conference on audiovisual policy, under the joint sponsorship of the British Presidency and the Commission, will be held in Birmingham. The Green Paper is available from the European Commission and on the Internet (<http://www.ispa.ec.europa.eu/convergencepp>).

recommend it for its insights into the principles, pressures and practice of journalism.

The author, formerly assistant editor on *The Observer*, manages to draw together his firm knowledge and grasp of newspaper history, both in the UK and internationally, and combine it with a very modern and specific treatment of the skills which today's journalists need.

The range of the book is impressive, with chapters on 'The Limitations of Journalism' and 'Technology and the Future of Newspapers' as well several dealing with the practical aspects of the craft of journalism. I particularly liked the book for its sharp and gritty approach - it avoids a glossy or romantic treatment and is written (as you would expect) in a lively, direct style. He stays near to journalists' experiences and writings but is sufficiently critical of them as sources. In recommending a bibliography he writes, 'There are few books on journalism worth reading ... editors' memoirs seem often to be written to settle old scores, drop names or justify expenses.'

GW

WITHOUT COMMENT

"IT'S porkey-pie time in Washington, and the Littlefields are baking them in abundance. The Littlefields are offspring of Howard Littlefield PhD, publicity counsel of the Zenith Street Traction Company in Sinclair Lewis' novel *Babbitt*: 'He could, on ten hours' notice, appear before the board of aldermen or the state legislature and prove absolutely, with figures all in a row and with precedents from Poland and New Zealand, that the street-car company loved the Public and yearned over its employees; and that whatever it desired to do would benefit property-owners by increasing rental values, and help the poor by lowering rates.' The Littlefields have been working overtime since Kofi Annan's return from Baghdad ... The New York Times published a classic Littlefieldism that I hope Philip Knightley will include in the next edition of *The First Casualty*: 'MiG fighters, each carrying 250 gallons of microbes, were to be flown by remote control to release anthrax over Israel.' Anyone who has seen a MiG flown by remote control, please contact the editors of Jane's Weapons Systems, who have no record of one. Makes one wonder how that military and technological genius Saddam Hussein managed to lose two wars."

'The art of hypocrisy' Charles Glass

New Statesman, 13 March 1998



## UNISON FUNDING

Free Press readers will be very aware of the financial pressures on the CPBF. At a time when some aspect of the media is in the news nearly every day we are often frustrated at our lack of time, staff or money to respond effectively.

The good news is that we have been able to secure funding of £20,000 from the General Political Fund of the public service union, UNISON. This funding is for the CPBF to employ a Parliamentary Co-ordinator and to begin to develop support for our ideas on media reform both at a UK and European level.

We are extremely grateful to UNISON for this funding. It is a big step towards raising the target of £30,000 we have set ourselves to fund our Parliamentary work over this and the next Parliamentary session. Over the years at branch and national level UNISON has been a strong supporter of the CPBF, and this latest generous funding support will help us enormously.

## CHRIS SMITH MEETING

National Council members Tom O'Malley, Tony Lennon, Julian Petley, Granville Williams and Barry White met Chris Smith, Minister for Culture, Media and Sport, on Friday 6 March. It was a friendly and open exchange of views covering issues of press regulation and the PCC, ways in which media policy issues could be opened up to wider public debate and consultation, and the development and regulation of digital TV.

We also emphasised our policy difference with the Labour government on the need to act on the issues of media concentration. The Minister in turn assured us that there were no plans to adopt the policy of his prede-



cessor, Jack Cunningham, to lift the 20% limit on newspaper circulation, which would enable Mirror Group and News International to take over ITV franchises.

## PRIVACY SEMINAR

A seminar for the CPBF National Council was held in London on February 21 to sharpen up awareness on policy issues behind the privacy debate. Invited speakers included Clive Soley MP, Professor Eric Barendt, and John Wadham of Liberty.

The event, held at the Freedom Forum in London, was informative and stimulating. Papers for the seminar were prepared by Mike Jempson, Julian Petley and Tom O'Malley.

If Free Press readers would like copies please send a cheque for £2.00 to cover

photocopying and postage to the National Office.

## CPBF AGM AND CONFERENCE

This year our AGM and Conference will be held on Saturday 6 June at the LVS Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA. The AGM is in the morning. Registration 10.00am. AGM 10.30- 12.30. In the afternoon we will be holding our annual conference which tackles media policy issues. This will run from 1.30 to 4.30pm Both events give CPBF members an opportunity to get involved with and shape the direction of CPBF activity. We'd urge members to make a note of the date so that they can attend. The venue is a modern and comfortable conference centre, easily accessible.

Also we'd like members to consider nominations for our National Council. There are a number of different categories so if you are interested please contact the London office for further information.

## BBC governors: Where's our vote?

WHAT are we to make about the decision to advertise for BBC governors? Not a lot, really. The present system was based purely and simply on political patronage, so that worthy and safe pairs of hands became governors. What is being proposed doesn't move us far away from that secretive process.

This is not a public process of appointment because we are excluded from it. Candidates can apply but the reasons why they want to be a governor, including their own vision of the BBC's future, cannot be

promoted and publicised. The public who pay for the BBC will have no say in who gets appointed.

The Institute of Public Policy Research have come up with the idea that the BBC board of governors should be accountable to licence fee-payers through a ballot. The report's author, Gerry Holtham, argues, based on the idea of mutuality, 'Payment of the licence fee could constitute membership of the BBC and the right to take part in elections to its board.'

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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