

## Clive Soley MP argues that we still need a Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill

# DANGERS ARE REAL

THE agenda on the British press seldom stands still but recently it has been difficult to keep up. Diana's death did produce a change in attitude by editors and owners even if they tried desperately hard to pretend that her death had nothing to do with them.

Then the adoption into British law of the Human Rights legislation introduced a new dimension into the privacy/press freedom debate. It is far too early to know how this will be interpreted by the courts but in effect there will now be legal redress for invasions of privacy, balanced against a press freedom requirement.

The Competition Bill now going through Parliament will also provide a tougher check on monopoly ownership although it will not in my judgement stop the predatory pricing by the Times against the Telegraph and Independent.

Finally and probably the least noticed of these changes is the Data Protection Bill also currently going through Parliament. This interesting bit of legislation renews the old Act with a variety of changes. It includes the right of anyone to see the files that newspapers hold on them, with a let-out clause that the paper may refuse access if they are holding the files for publication. But where there is inaccurate information a correction can be enforced and this should at least help deal with inaccuracies that are stored on files and repeated time and time again because they are never corrected after the first mistake.

These developments make it difficult to predict future problems and possibilities. My own preference is still for a Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Act which would have clause one as a clear defence of



Clive Soley: Freedom and Responsibilities Act unlikely in the near future

press freedom. This could then be followed by clauses dealing with privacy, harassment, accuracy and ownership.

I think it is unlikely we will get such a law soon, but if the changes referred to above still result in the gross abuses we have seen from the press in the recent years then the argument will continue to run. Past experience suggests that the press will not easily change its behaviour and the problem will become increasingly internationalised. The growth of multi-national media groups appears irreversible and the dangers are clear.

Failure to deal with monopoly ownership will result in just five or ten media conglomerates controlling news production and distribution by the early part of the 21st century, and that poses a real challenge to democracy. The Internet is a great safeguard at the moment, but it does not mean we should be complacent about the dangers. They are real and are unlikely to diminish.

## EDITORIAL

### The Sun, Murdoch and Blair

THE Sun did it again on 24 June. It launched a front-page attack on Tony Blair's stance on the European single currency, and followed it up the next day with the results of its poll a responding 'NO to the Euro'. On the inside pages was a nasty piece about 'Windbag Kinnock' reminiscent in its language and approach of the assault the Sun led on Labour in the 1992 election.

The public attack on New Labour takes place barely a year after the decision by Murdoch to push support for Tony Blair in the run-up to the 1997 election. Of course, it was conditional support and now Murdoch has decided to fire a warning shot across Blair's bow.

The CPBF doesn't take a view for or against UK entry into the single currency, but what we are concerned about is that the electorate does have access to a range of views which will enable it to reach informed decisions when there is a referendum. And therein lies the problem. The bulk of the UK press is hostile to Europe, and projects that hostility in different ways. Rupert Murdoch's News International titles typify this. The Sun wraps itself in narrow nationalistic rhetoric, whilst The Times (26.6.98) urges in more measured tones, 'the Prime Minister must be made to clarify and justify his policy on monetary union. And the time to apply the pressure is now'.

Add to this the shadowy influence of Murdoch's chief adviser, Irwin Stelzer, who in a Spectator article suggested Blair's dalliance with Europe heralded a return to the bad days of old Labour. Stelzer also visits Number 10 regularly. And Mr Murdoch's loathing for Europe isn't just personal – it's about business and the fact that his operations would

CONTINUED PAGE 2

# Sir David English — another view

LADY Thatcher wasn't at the memorial service for Sir David English held on 22 June at St Brides Church, London. She was off on another lucrative lecture tour, but the great and the good who paid tribute included Tony Blair, Rupert Murdoch and the Mail proprietor, Lord Rothermere.

The sudden death of Sir David English produced a stream of tributes and eulogies. Roy Greenslade's obituary in *The Guardian* heaped praise on him — 'the greatest influence on popular daily journalism in the last quarter of a century', 'nothing but deep admiration for the man' and as editor of the *Daily Mail* and later chairman of Associated Newspapers, he ran 'a harsh, but ultimately fair regime'.

Well, up to a point ... Of course the revival of the fortune of the *Daily Mail*, the launch of the *Mail on Sunday* were success stories. When Vere Harmsworth, later Lord Rothermere, gave him the editorship of the merged *Daily Mail* and *Daily Sketch* in 1971, the *Express* was selling 3.4 million and the *Mail* struggling to hold on to 1.7 million. The story of the transformation is well known, but we think there should be a reminder of what kind of paper was created out of this success, and what it meant for some of the people who worked for this 'fair regime'.

In 1990 the National Union of Journalists was derecognised at the *Daily Mail* and Dave Wilson was one of the 13 *Mail* journalists who refused to sign personal contracts and became known as the 'saints' — as opposed to the 'signers'. He then launched his legal case, claiming discrimination for being robbed of a pay rise and after a long battle was sacked by the *Mail* in 1995 after the government rushed through a change in the

law which allowed employers to penalise union membership.

Journalists had no space on the *Mail* for any kind of reporting which deviated from the hostile anti-Labour stance which characterised it through the Thatcher years. Before the 1992 election English excelled in mixing fact with comment in a seamless robe of bias. For example, a reasonable report of John Smith's tax plans 'to help the poor' in the first edition was swiftly changed in the second edition, and read 'to savage higher earners'. One journalist described his regime as one where 'people, often highly talented, are kept on the edge of ritual humiliation'.

And we should not forget his role as the 'fixer' for the Code of Conduct for the Press Complaints Commission. His death occurred just before the revelation that the *Mail* had paid £40,000 to the family of Louise Woodward — surely an action which he must have known about, if not sanctioned? We should also remember that under the previous Press Council it was its report into the chequebook journalism surrounding the Yorkshire Ripper case which found the paper 'guilty of gross misconduct'.

And finally, the paper which gained a reputation for its *Femail* section, and attracted thousands of women readers, saw no problem in delving into the private lives of left-leaning women in an attempt to discredit them in the run-up to the 1997 general election. Polly Toynbee, Liz Forgan, Tessa Blackstone and Anna Coote were all the subjects of unwelcome attention by *Mail* journalists.

So let's put those eulogies in perspective.

## WITHOUT COMMENT

### Rupert bears it all for us

Terry Burns, permanent secretary at the Treasury, who has just been ousted by Gordon Brown, attended one of his final meetings in Brussels last week. When, asked his colleagues from the finance ministries of Europe, will Britain join the single currency? Oh, not until 2006, said Burns. But, cried the Eurocrats, Brown wants you in by 2002! It won't happen for two reasons, said Burns, 'Rupert' and 'Murdoch'.

I think we should just dispense with general elections. They're expensive and give the common herd ideas above its station. Far better to let an ageing, American, tax-dodging, God-bothering monopolist run the country.

Nick Cohen

**The Observer 14 June 1998**

### FROM FRONT PAGE

be challenged by greater European integration.

Conrad Black's Telegraph group, which also own *The Spectator*, is unremittingly hostile to Europe, as are Lord Rothermere's titles, *The Mail*, *Mail on Sunday* and *Evening Standard*. Lord Hollick will presumably bring the *Express* 'on message' under its new editor Rosie Boycott, but the fact remains that a formidable chunk of the UK media will seek to portray the EU and the single currency debate in negative and hostile terms.

And what about the response of Tony Blair? Well clearly the *Sun* attack left him more cautious and chastened, but let's hope that's temporary. He has a massive majority behind him, and he should strike at Murdoch by opening up the issue of cross-media ownership, both in Britain and Europe. Otherwise the perception will be strengthened that decisions are taken based on what plays well with the media barons, rather than the best interests of the country.



## Labour rebellion over newspaper pricing

AS PREDICTED in FP104, Labour MPs defied Government whips in a Commons vote on the predatory pricing of newspapers.

Twenty three Labour MPs backed an amendment to the Competition Bill moved by Chris Mullin, Chair of the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, aimed at making it easier to take action against predatory pricing.

Although the government won the vote by a majority of 233, sixty eight MPs voted for the amendment during a debate on the bill on 8 July. It was one of the biggest revolts against the government and serves as a reminder of the considerable disquiet over Tony Blair's close relationship with Rupert Murdoch.

The predatory pricing report in FP104 had the figure of £375 million. It should have been £75 million.

# The turning of the 'Spar'

JUNE 20 was the third anniversary of Shell's decision to bow to public opinion and turn the Brent Spar drilling platform around in mid-Atlantic. In FP 104 we picked up the story of the efforts of the oil industry to alter public perceptions about dumping oil installations at sea, and also reported on worrying signs that Environment Minister Michael Meacher may be back-tracking on the 'no more Brent Spars' pledge he gave at the 1997 Labour Party conference.

A new book just out gives us the blow-by-blow account of the environmental campaign by Greenpeace, and some of the important consequences of the victory. For example, it tells how the Spar campaign 'rewrote the book' of British environmental politics by overwhelming the Whitehall system of official science serving commercial interests.

*The Turning of the 'Spar'*, written by Chris Rose, the Campaigns Director of Greenpeace, is very relevant, both as a record to help us understand the details of the campaign, but also for the details of how the government sought to mobilise against Greenpeace, and the way the media reported (and misreported) environmental



Sea. The Environmental Ministers from 15 countries and the European Commission will decide whether to:

- ban the dumping of decommissioned offshore oil and gas installations at sea
- ban the discharge of radioactive wastes into the sea, such as those from Sellafield (UK) and La Hague (France)
- phase out by the year 2020 the disposal of toxic waste into air and water

We can be sure that an intense amount of lobbying will be going on behind the scenes by the oil and other industrial interests to ensure that the principle that 'the polluter pays' isn't enforced too strin-

gently. Watch this space. The book is available, price £5.00 including P&P from Greenpeace, Canonbury Villas, London N1 2PN. Cheques payable to 'Greenpeace'.

gently. Watch this space.

The book is available, price £5.00 including P&P from Greenpeace, Canonbury Villas, London N1 2PN. Cheques payable to 'Greenpeace'.

### CONFERENCE AND AGM ACTION POINTS

It was agreed that the CPBF should strengthen its work and liaison with environmental groups who are concerned about many of the same media policy issues as the campaign. At the June National Council a working group was established to plan a public event either in Oxford or London in October 1998 on the theme of the Media and Environment. If any CPBF members would also like to be involved in the planning and organisation of the event contact the National Office.

**PR WATCH Net Site.** Jonathan Hardy (national secretary) took up some of the points raised in the feature on public relations in FP 104 and suggested the CPBF could launch a UK version of the successful US web-site, [www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org) so anyone with enthusiasm or expertise who wants to move this idea forward, get in touch, please.

## TAKING THE LID OFF PR (PART 2)

# Payola hits the editorial department

The revelations in *The Observer* of the movers, shakers, fixers and fakers associated with New Labour's lobbying and PR activities gives added relevance to our feature in FP104. We return to some of the issues here. John Rose publicises an insidious development, and actions by the National Committee on Editorial Independence to combat it.

PUBLISHERS are allowing businesses to buy their way onto editorial pages, and replace copytasting with an entirely commercial process tied to charging for the publication of news releases.

Charges come in a variety of guises — as fees for typesetting, colour separations, pictorially supported editorial, as free space for advertisements placed or copies of client's lists of suppliers (to be hounded for

advertising), or charges for a visiting 'editorial team' — and now web authoring rates!

Experience and expertise in editorial departments is now needed less; these are being replaced by youngsters touting for cash from press release sources. PR concerns who do not pay the cash demanded will not, in most cases, see a release published. Some so-called editors rely for their incomes solely on commission earned from the sale of editorial space.

Many journalists hate the system but are told that they can leave their jobs if they don't like it. Job prospects and decent standards in both journalism and public relations are now on the slide. Readers' interests are being bypassed in the rush for profits and the concept of press freedom is disappearing in the dust left behind.

Combating this threat is the National Council of Editorial Independence formed by representatives of the Chartered Institute of Journalists, the Institute of Public

Relations, the National Union of Journalists and the Public Relations Consultants Association. 'To place a price on editorial exposure is the basest form of press corruption,' says the committee.

'That this should be brought about by publishers deliberately ignoring their own industry's self-regulatory codes compounds the corruption.'

Editorial charging — and payment — is in conflict with the professional codes of practice of each of the four member bodies of the national committee, although they recognise that their own individual members are being coerced by clients and employers to breach these.

The committee has a number of activities — seminars, a parliamentary campaign, a national website, and a workplace initiative aimed at journalists and PR people caught up in the practice — to advance its cause.

Further information from John M. Rose The Old School Dunwich Suffolk IP17 3DU. Tel 01728 648570.

# Normal service won't be resumed unless we do something about it

## UNITED STATES

PUBLIC service broadcasting is in retreat across the globe. In some countries – the USA for example – broadcasting funded through a licence fee and delivering a range of educational, informational and entertainment programmes has never had a central role. Yet even there the attack on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) has undermined the democratic and independent nature of the medium.

Originally set up as an alternative system to the three powerful commercial TV networks, NBC, ABC and CBS, after a commissioner of the regulatory body, the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minnow, described US television as a 'vast wasteland', public broadcasting was designed to reach out to reflect the energy and diversity of the United States, and present it to the TV viewers.

When it was launched in 1967 the United States was immersed in the Vietnam war, and the Carnegie Commission report, *Public Television: A Programme for Action* declared simply in its introduction: 'Public Television includes all that is of interest and importance which is not at the moment appropriate or available for support from advertising.' It echoed a sentiment widely held that Americans were poorly informed because commercial television made them that way.

Indeed the volume and sheer financial clout of television advertising was often used in the 1960s as evidence of the desperate need for an enlightened non-commercial television network. In 1968, veteran CBS broadcaster Fred Friendly complained, 'Three soap companies account for about 15 per cent of the nation's total television sales. This is one reason why we Americans know more about detergents and bleaches than they do about Vietnam or Watts.'

But the brave hopes of the launch of PBS have long since been squashed. Almost from the outset the assault on PBS by the political

right started. In the early seventies controversial documentaries (for example, a highly critical programme on US foreign policy, *Inside North Vietnam*) and dramas fuelled the assault by first Nixon, then Regan, and more recently Newt Gingrich on both the staff running PBS and its funding sources.

Two things happened. Politically safe shows replaced the challenging programmes, and in place of funding cuts PBS was forced to turn more and more to private sponsorship. A recent book by Charles Ledbetter, *Made Possible By ... The Death Of Public Broadcasting in the United States* (Verso) goes into the detail. The charges of liberal bias and elitism were deployed to undermine the aspirations of PSB, and Ledbetter argues it is as much in the pocket of US corporations as its commercial rivals.

But Ledbetter's final chapter addresses the key issue Can It Be Saved? And his answer is that it has to be. He quotes the media scholar, Robert McChesney: 'On occasion stories slip through and programs get produced that would never clear a commercial hurdle. This is especially true on public radio and some of the

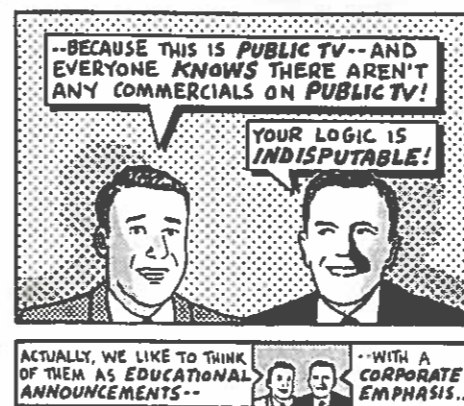
more progressive community stations that would suffer the most without any federal grant money. And this is precisely why it is so important for those who believe in journalism, free expression and democracy to fight on behalf of public broadcasting.'

It is the central idea of treating audiences as partici-

pating citizens instead of mere consumers which needs to be rejuvenated. Ledbetter argues. As the public broadcasting system enters its fourth decade in the USA it will have to struggle to survive in what is the most powerful and aggressively commercial broadcasting environment in the world. But there is an emerging coalition of interests who see more and more clearly that that it must survive and recreate the original role it was designed to fulfil.

## THE BBC AND BIRTISM

TWO entries from the Oxford Dictionary of



TOM TOM RROW93

New Words (1997)

### Birtism

The principles and practices of John Birt, deputy director-general of the BBC, 1987-92, and Director-General from 1992. Formed from the name of John Birt (b. 1944) and the suffix -ism.

Birtism is recorded from 1988 as a term for the policies introduced into the BBC by John Birt. These are characterised by an emphasis on the explanatory function of broadcasting, particularly in the area of current affairs ... and a market research approach to the elements of programme-making.

### Producer Choice

The policy known as Producer Choice was introduced within the BBC in 1993, under the Director-Generalship of John Birt. It initiated a system, based on the principles of the market place, in which BBC departments compete with each other and with external agencies to provide services to programme-makers. The policy has been controversial, many feeling that budgetary constraints have had an adverse effect on innovation and creativity.

### DOWNGRADING THE DRAMA

SOME years ago the CPBF ran a public event in Manchester at which Michael Wearing spoke on the topic of Television Drama: An Endangered Species? At the time he was concerned with the various pressures which were undermining creativity and innovation in drama. For the record Wearing has been associated over the years with BBC drama as various as *Boys From the Blackouts*, *Edge of Darkness*, and much, much more.

The television critic, Sean Day-Lewis, explained the departure in February 1998 of Michael Wearing from his post as BBC television head of serials in these terms: '... after a

long struggle against the odds (he) departed in frustration and resignation at being rendered impotent through Birtist managerialism.'

What happened was a project on which he staked his reputation was thrown back by BBC1 Controller Peter Salmon. Wearing's reaction was, 'The talent now knows that I cannot make the programmes they want ... I have no choice, it is creatively impossible for me to remain.'

Sean Day-Lewis in his book *Talk of Drama* argues there is much less space for scriptwriting originality and that commissioning producers, able to cultivate writing talent, have disappeared. 'Centralisation of power throughout British terrestrial television means all decisions are made by channel controllers lacking any drama background. They look for known market appeal, 'drama demographics' as pointed out by 'focus' groups, not writers' visions,' he argues.

His solution to this creative crisis is that the BBC and Channel 4 are required as a charter or licence condition to set aside a regulation number of slots per year for the ideas and visions of new and established writers.

It's an idea worth backing. Sometimes the imaginative impact of original writing can be so powerful – Peter Flannery's *Our Friends in the North*, for example. We need more of the risk-taking and innovation which has disappeared from TV drama.

### HIS MASTER'S VOICE

THE new Sun editor, David Yelland, is assiduously demonstrating his loyalty. Hot on the

heels of the Blair Euro attack, the Sun (6.7.98), for some peculiar reason decided to launch an attack on the BBC out of the blue.

Why, the paper asked, when there are hundreds of channels available should 97 per cent of the population pay a compulsory tax to just watch two. The article rubbished the BBC's claim to produce the best television in the world, citing a host of US hits like *Friends*, *The Simpsons* and *ER*.

Of course, we can safely assume there's nothing accidental about this sort of item. FP readers with long memories will remember the role of the News International press in the assault on the BBC in the mid-80s – before Sky had even launched. More recently Rupert Murdoch used the Birmingham audio-visual conference in April to launch an assault on the BBC. Certainly the BBC is going to come under increasing attack as it moves further and further into commercial activities, and that is a problem.

But the Sun is economical with the truth. The BBC licence fee is £97.50; the lowest price for BSkyB is £179.88 a year, rising to £350 a year or more when you add on the sports and movie channels. And isn't it just coincidental that the programmes the Sun selects to praise just happen to appear on BSkyB first?

The future of the BBC, and its funding, will loom larger in public debate as the review of BBC funding due in 2001 approaches. We should remember that the News International press has a vested interest in seeing a shrunken and marginal public broadcasting space in the UK. After all, the growth and profitability of Murdoch's soon to be launched UK digital media depends on persuading people to sign up with him. And so far BSkyB, whilst enormously profitable, hasn't broken through to the broader audience which still stays with the terrestrial channels, particularly the BBC.

### THE BBC – MAKING IT OR BREAKING IT

THE news was announced in an exclusive front-page story in *The Independent* on Friday 30 August 1996: 'Birt begins the BBC break-up'. The details were accurate then and have remained so. The BBC had drawn up plans to spin off the largest directorate – which runs studios, outside broadcasting facilities and editing suites into a separate wholly-owned company – BBC Resources. At the time there was speculation that the Resources Unit would be privatised as John Birt moved towards what he has described as a 'virtual corporation' only making programmes but discarding the accumulated skills of programme makers and dismantling the infrastructure of the BBC.

Nearly two years after this announcement the broadcasting union BECTU had been involved in a bitter action, including a one-day strike on 4 June and lengthy negotiations

with the BBC, to prevent this. In addition they put their case to the Media Minister, Chris Smith, arguing that it will mean the break-up of the BBC and ultimately the end of public service broadcasting.

On the same day that the dispute with the BBC was settled with several major concessions for BECTU BBC Resources staff in terms of employment rights protection, Chris Smith announced his approval of the creation of BBC Resources Ltd. At the same time he asked the BBC to appoint financial analysts Ernst and Young to calculate the BBC's brand value if BBC Resources exploits it commercially.

BBC Resources is the second commercial company to be created by the BBC. The first, BBC Worldwide, is responsible for the commercial exploitation of programmes, licensed magazines, books and merchandise. In March 1998 it set up the £340 million venture with Discovery in the US to create and market branded material produced by the BBC.

The deal was praised by many media commentators but there are worrying questions.

Discovery isn't just a single cable channel in the USA – it's part of John Malone's enormously powerful US cable group TCI which is just in the process of merging with telecoms giant AT&T.

Also the deal now gives Discovery unprecedented access to archives, as well as involvement in future joint productions.

The branding exercise and the Discovery deal give a strong boost to the creeping commercialism in the BBC, and undermine the strength of the case for the BBC to continue to be funded by the licence fee. In other words it takes the BBC one more step down the road to privatisation.

### CPBF ACTION POINTS

- The CPBF is preparing a letter, signed by a wide range of prominent public figures, urging the need for the widest possible public debate on media policy issues, including the future of public service broadcasting. The key issues were outlined in a letter by CPBF National Council member Tom O'Malley published in *Press Gazette* (26.6.98):

'Policy-making should not be conducted by consultancy reports, low profile conversations between people 'in the know' and referrals to bodies like the OFT.

'It is time for an independent public inquiry into the future of mass communications. This would give the public time to reflect and intervene into an area that is central to our lives.'

**The CPBF is planning a major conference in the spring of 1999 to stimulate debate on up media policies issues, including public service broadcasting and media ownership.**

Discovery is part of the powerful US cable group TCI

# Campbell – lightly grilled or fried?

## Pay your money and take your choice

THE Select Committee investigating the role of the government information services trundles on, hearing evidence from Bernard Ingham, who accused Alastair Campbell of destroying the impartiality of the service. Allegations of politicisation surfaced in the wake of eight key civil servants either resigning or being sacked.

Campbell was defended by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, who also gave evidence. The government's new, more centralised, communications strategy, instigated by the Prime Minister's press secretary was part of a 'systematic and determined effort to co-ordinate the presentation of government policies and messages in a positive light,' he said.

But when it was Campbell's turn before the select committee, he received, depending on which paper you read, either an 'unprecedented grilling' in which he gave an 'authoritative and confident performance' (Daily Telegraph) or he 'looked nervous and shaky' like 'some character hauled up before the police' (The Express).

But one thing the Select Committee didn't do was get answers to its questions, except in the most evasive terms. 'Was the press secretary at No 10 not able to control more than his predecessor?' 'Co-ordination, not control,' he replied. 'Did he not overstep the mark, and stray into politics?' 'No, he needed the ability to operate at the margins, in a political context.'

### NEWS MANAGEMENT AND NEW LABOUR

A DIFFERENT and much more robust treatment of New Labour's approach to news management is contained in Bob Franklin's *Tough on soundbites, tough on the causes of soundbites*. This is the third in a series of pamphlets produced by the Catalyst Trust, a left-of-centre grouping whose launch is to be welcomed.

The pamphlet draws on exclusive private interviews with senior civil servants – mainly those working in the Government Information Service (GIS), and it argues that a new model regime is being installed by New Labour which means that news management now extends beyond party press officers into the GIS. Existing departmental Heads of Information have been replaced by new appointees expected to be more energetic in pushing the government agenda.



Alastair Campbell at work

Picture Courtesy John Harris/Report Digital

Almost twice as many special advisors were appointed in the first six months of the new administration as were appointed during John Major's term of office. 'This almost inevitably leads to a blurring of boundaries between government and party interests, between information and propaganda. The fourth estate risks being overrun by a "fifth estate" of public relations and press officers,' Bob Franklin asserts.

The pamphlet is also concerned about the implications for democracy – it will lead to 'an increasingly depoliticised and passive political culture'. It also creates a new type of politics – decisions are reduced to market decisions based on testing public opinion to see what the public response may be.

The pamphlet deserves to be widely read, and most importantly, the trends which it highlights and criticises, challenged. The pamphlet is available, price £5.00 from the Catalyst Trust, PO Box 17729, London N5 2WN.

### INTERNET FREEDOM UNDER ATTACK

LAST August the German Federal Parliament passed a new multi-media law, the effect of which was to accept that Internet service providers (ISPs) could only be held accountable for illegal material on their services if they knew about the content and blocking it was technically possible. This news was rather slow in reaching a certain Judge Wilhelm Hubbert, who some nine months ago sentenced Felix Somm, the head of Compuserve Germany to a two year suspended sentence and a 100,000 DM fine.

At the end of 1995 the Munich police

raided the office of Compuserve Deutschland on the grounds that the company was disseminating pornography and hate literature banned under German law. Compuserve argued that it had no control over the contents of the sites, which in most cases were not located in Germany. This cut no ice with the authorities who argued that the company was liable as they provided connection to the sites.

Some 200 internet discussion groups were then banned, including ones dealing with issues like Aids and breast cancer. All but five of the groups were reinstated and a content blocking programme, Cyber Patrol, was installed.

None of this impressed the Bavarian authorities who last April hauled Felix off to court. The charges, trafficking in pornography and neo-nazi propaganda, were serious stuff and could have resulted in a five year sentence.

After 'due process' the judge announced his verdict. It was no surprise that Somm lodged an appeal. What was surprising was that the prosecution is also putting in an appeal on the grounds the sentence was too harsh. In fact they wanted the conviction quashed!

Chris Ellison of Internet Freedom believes that the case will set a precedent and spur ISPs around the world to take increased precautions to screen and censor material to which their subscribers have access. Meantime Somm claims to be '100 per cent confident' that the decision will be overturned.

Internet Freedom can be found on <http://www.netfreedom.org>

# A little local difficulty

Tom O'Malley reviews a new book on local journalism, *Making the Local News*

DURING the 1960s and 1970s there was a widespread interest in local media. An alternative local press mushroomed; campaigns for local and community radio paralleled demands for access to and accountability in the local media. Campaigners for a more democratic media have always recognised the importance of local media.

This book does not directly deal with these issues, save in one essay on the alternative press. Nonetheless it stimulates questions. What is meant by 'local' in commercial or BBC local radio, if the bulk of the output is music or cheaply produced phone-ins and news bulletins? Now that community radio is on the margins of mass commercial 'local' radio and few would argue that there is anything to match the alternative press of twenty years ago, is there any meaningful sense in which local news and communications are subject to democratic accountability?

Making the Local News is a mixed collection which uses academics, journalists and industry figures to produce essays that illustrate how questions of democratic reform must be viewed within an increasingly market-driven context. It covers the paid-for and freesheet press, local radio, cable, regional TV, the internet, industrial relations, journalists' training, local government publicity officers and the Press Complaints Commission.

The editors argue that the dominant tendency over the last 30 years 'not simply in the local press but in the local media, has been the constant, apparently remorseless advance of the market as the arbiter of the nature, the content, the form, the labour relations and mode of production and the ownership of the local media' (p22).

The book contains lots of evidence to support this judgement. Concentration of ownership in the press, TV, cable and radio, aggressive anti-trade union management practices and cost-cutting are all documented. Local freesheets live up to

their reputation as safe outlets for almost unrewritten press releases; press coverage of crime and entertainment is up, whilst coverage of local politics and elections has declined.

The coverage of race remains a big problem, and Andrew Leather demonstrates the 'depressing' treatment of local economic issues. Professor Pinker provides evidence of the PCC's weakness by showing that between 1994 and 1996, the PCC failed to adjudicate on around 87 per cent of the complaints received, and upheld only 6.4 per cent.

The book needed a longer, more sustained, overview of the political and cultural dimensions of localism, an essay on readers, listeners and viewers and a piece on strategies for reform. But, if you are a student, teacher, trade unionist, or local activist concerned about your local media, then you should read this collection. Bob Franklin and David Murphy eds, *Making the Local News: Local Journalism in Context* (Routledge 1998) £12.99.

# Here it is in white and white

### Black Journalists, White Media

Beulah Ainley, Trentham Books; 1998; £13.95

THE thesis of this book is based around the startling fact that in a workforce of about 3,000, only between 12 and 20 black journalists are employed at any one time on national newspapers. The figures for provincial newspapers are even more startling; there are only 15 black journalists out of 8,000.

The reason for this, according to the author is unequivocal: endemic racism – racism in schools, in higher education, among teachers at all levels, in schools of journalism, among the staffs of national and provincial papers, in broadcasting (with the possible exception of Channel 4), in the staffs of magazines, and the population at large. Another problem for blacks wanting to enter journalism is that they are not helped by fellow-blacks. Ainley reports that the Black Media Workers' Association closed down after five years because by 1985 its key members had got jobs with Channel 4 and were no longer interested!



While racism clearly exists in most walks of life in this country, Ms Ainley does her argument no service by the many generalisations this book contains. Writing of grammar schools, she says that black pupils

often failed to gain entry "... not because ... children were not bright but because schools prefer white pupils." Teachers in schools who treat children equally, will find such remarks insulting.

On a less serious note she claims that for most whites "... the idea of a beautiful African woman seems to be a contradiction in terms." Has she ever looked at a catwalk?

Comprehensive schools are regarded as the most racist educational institutions by Ainley, and perhaps unexpectedly "... the experience of private schools was positive. They (blacks) were treated equally and were expected to achieve educationally."

The book is based around interviews with blacks who have tried to, or succeeded in entering journalism. For virtually all, it

has been a struggle with lack of success or promotion the keynote.

Perhaps what Ainley doesn't acknowledge is the difficulty for anyone of getting jobs in the media. She cites the case of an Asian who was advised by his careers teacher to go into the retail trade rather than aim for a career in television. Perhaps the teacher was being realistic. I was reminded by this story, as a teacher in media, of seeing three ex-students, all of whom had got good degrees. One was working in MFI, one in the Co-op and one in W. H. Smith. All, of course, had tried to get jobs in the media.

There is undoubtedly a problem for blacks in journalism. This is a necessary book; it could have been a better one.

Colin Bulman

### TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

PRESSWISE organised a day conference in November 1997 as part of a series of events during the 1997 European Year Against Racism. The report of the event, *Telling It Like It Is ...* has just been published. Copies are available (price £12.50) from Presswise Ltd, 25 Easton Business Centre, Felix Road, Bristol BS5 0HE. Tel 0117 941 5889.

# Green paper back to front

AS WE went to press the government issued its green paper *Regulating communications: approaching convergence in the Information Age* on 21 July.

The following is a summary of a press statement the CPBF issued the same day.

'The CPBF today criticised the government's green paper *Regulating communications* for prioritising economic and technical issues and downgrading the public service role in mass communications. The paper approaches

the issues back to front. Instead of focusing on how citizens' needs can be served by increasing the level of public service requirements in the media, it put great emphasis on how to promote market competition so as to sell more goods to consumers.

The consultation period of only four months, suggests the government wants to keep the lid of public debate. The issues involved are complex and the government should change course and let the public

have a say in these matters by setting up up high profile public inquiries into the future of broadcasting and media regulation. Otherwise only those who already have money and influence will get the chance to make their voices heard.

The CPBF will be producing a detailed response to the green paper and campaigning for public inquiries into the future of broadcasting and media regulation.'

## AGM REPORT

THE following members were elected to the National Council, and the officers elected at the June National Council.

### CPBF National Council 1998-99

**Chair** Tony Lennon

**Vice Chair** Julian Petley

**National Secretary** Jonathan Hardy

**Treasurer** Geoff Mason

**Membership Secretary** Turlough McDaid

**National Council Members:** Yossi Bal, Kathy Darby, Mike Jempson, Tim Gopsill, Steve Peak, Linda Quinn, Chris Wheal, Granville Williams, Sandra Satterlee, Tom O'Malley, Chris Frost, Robin Groom, Barry White, Gary Herman, Vi Scotter, Bill Ash, Chris Connolly, Brian Willoughby.



The AGM also discussed the difficult financial situation which the CPBF is in, and agreed to a new scale of affiliation fees to take effect from January 1999.

We should point out that the last increase in fees was five years ago and in that time the costs of everything – printing Free Press, postage, and the rent for the National Office in Cynthia Street – have gone up sharply.

We will be producing a new membership leaflet to incorporate the new fees, and also to launch a new membership drive with it.

The new annual membership rates are:

Individual from £12 to £15

**Unwaged** £6 – no change

Delete **household** category

**Supporting membership** £25 – no change

**Institutions.** No change in fees;

reduce copies of Free Press

from 10 to 5 per issue

**Affiliation by organisation**

Fewer than 500 members £20 to £25

500 to 1,000 members £25 to £30

1,000 to 10,000 £45 to £50

10,000 to 50,000 £105 to £115

50,000 to 100,000 £200 to £225

Over 100,000 £400 to £450

The cover price of Free Press will go up to £1.00 at the same time as the fee changes.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council



### 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 £ ..... FP105

Name .....

Address .....

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

Organisation (if applicable) .....

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

Tel: 0171 278 4430