

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION SETBACK

### MAURICE FRANKEL

The prospects of a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act are suddenly looking poor. David Clark, the minister responsible for the well received FOI white paper, had hoped to see an FOI Act in the next Queen's speech.

But Mr Clark was sacked in the July reshuffle. Responsibility for the measure has been put in the hands of the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, a leading critic of the white paper.

Now ministers have provisionally decided to drop FOI from the coming legislative programme. This doesn't just mean another 12 months of delay; it means a year during which ministers' enthusiasm for the reform – already low – is likely to dwindle further.

This is depressing news, but it does not mean that the cause is lost. FOI has been a Labour commitment for 25 years. It remains a manifesto commitment and one to which Tony Blair has pledged himself in unequivocal terms. So it cannot be abandoned. But it can be blunted.

The white paper proposed a fully retrospective right of access to information across the whole public sector. Information could be withheld only if disclosure would cause either harm or in some cases 'substantial' harm – a tough test – and the Act would be enforced by an Information Commissioner with the power to order government to disclose. However,

the security services and the law enforcement functions of the police were to be excluded from the Act altogether – a serious flaw. And there were concerns that charges for information could be high.

Since then there have already been signs of retreat. The privatised utilities, which were to have been covered under the original proposals, have largely been dropped. A new right of appeal against decisions of the Information Commissioner, to a Tribunal, is to be created making it easier for government to question decisions it does not like. Further backtracking could be in the pipeline.

The Labour backbenches have begun to express concern at the foot dragging. Some

200 MPs, including the chairs of 12 select committees, have signed a Commons motion calling for FOI to be included in the coming Queen's speech.

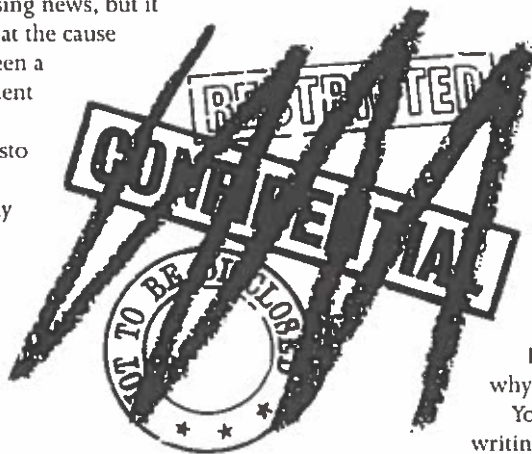
Labour promised FOI in its manifestos in 1974, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997 – so why are we waiting?

You can help by writing to your MP, urging him or her to press for

immediate legislation. For further information see the Campaign for Freedom of Information's web site

<http://www.cfoi.org.uk> or write to it at Suite 102, 16 Baldwins Gardens, London EC1N 7RJ

Maurice Frankel is director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information



### EDITORIAL

## The challenge for Labour

THE two main stories in this Free Press should concern all our readers as we approach the Labour Party conference. There are clear signs that the Labour government is retreating from its commitment to introduce a Freedom of Information Act.

We have always argued that the longer a government is in power the less likely is it to introduce effective freedom of information legislation. There were flaws in the White Paper, *Your Right to Know*, but it now appears that even this will not be taken forward.

Our other concern is the relentless rise in Rupert Murdoch's media power, which enables him to use his global financial clout to gobble up the top English football club. More directly it's do with the key role of Peter Mandelson, the industry secretary, in deciding whether the deal should be approved. Whilst he can refer the issue to the Office of Fair Trading or make it the subject of a full investigation by the Monopoly and Mergers Commission, he is not bound by their verdicts or recommendations.

There are a number of intimate links between key Labour figures and Rupert Murdoch. BSKyB is a sponsor of the Millennium dome (still part of Mr Mandelson's responsibility). Tim Allan, BSKyB's head of corporate communications, was a former aide to the prime minister, and Mr Mandelson is a friend of Elisabeth Murdoch, managing director of BSKyB.

Finally, the close links between Mr Blair and Mr Murdoch were publicised when the phone calls to the Italian prime minister by Mr Blair over a possible deal by Murdoch with Berlusconi were revealed.

How the Labour government deals with the two issues will signal either its commitment to an open society and a diverse media, or that it is in thrall to vested interests which it is unwilling to challenge.

# Murdoch and United

STEPHEN KELLY

IT COULD hardly have been clearer. 'We have the long term rights in most countries to major sporting events. We intend to use sport as a battering ram in all our pay TV operations.'

That was Rupert Murdoch back in 1996. Well, at least the man was honest about his intentions. You can't even argue that there is an hidden agenda. Murdoch's audacious £62.5million bid for Manchester United amounts simply to a pre-emptive strike, aimed at securing the next contract(s) to televise live football.

Ultimately it's all about pay-TV, and the European Soccer League. The Premiership may soon be a thing of the past; the future is about European football and digital television. Murdoch, currently without a place at the European League negotiating table, can guarantee himself a say if he owns Manchester United. His vision of the future is

Manchester United v AC Milan on pay TV at £10 or more a view. There are rich pickings to be had that will eventually outshine our domestic Premiership. Murdoch is already the biggest player in world sport, owning the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team, with hefty stakes in the LA Lakers and New York Knicks basketball teams as well as the New York Rangers ice hockey team. Back in 1992 he hijacked English football with a £140 million a year deal until 2001 and then went on to take over rugby league.

What Murdoch wants is to sit on both sides of the table and there is surely a case for investigation by the Office of Fair Trading. But why should it concern journalists? Well judging by the Sun and The Times' coverage of the deal, the threat is there for everybody to see. How much longer before the Murdoch stable of newspapers become as much the mouthpiece of Manchester

United as they are of Sky.

On the morning after the rumoured bid (Monday 7 September) the Sun was devoting most of its news coverage to backing the deal, while Oliver Holt in The Times was claiming that it was a truly wonderful opportunity that should be a source of rejoicing. On Wednesday, when the MU directors confirmed acceptance of the Murdoch offer, the Sun splashed across pages one to three with puffery about 'why football's the big winner'. The Times City Editor wrote that fans were 'unlikely to share in the hysterical opposition that has been voiced by politicians' and proclaimed 'Sky's the limit for Man U'.

**Murdoch's vision of the future is Manchester United v AC Milan on pay TV at £10 or more a view**

If Sky do get United you can be sure that there won't be much criticism of the club or their manager unless Murdoch himself sanctions it.

So far Labour has made the right sounds but whether or not they will ever defy the man they have been

chumming up to for the past year is debatable. One thing's for sure, the fans on the Stretford End won't be heard singing. 'There's only one Rupert Murdoch, one Rupert Murdoch ...'

## WITHOUT COMMENT

'A NATION that neglects sport at grass roots because it is obsessed with the commercial gains from sport at the top is a nation set for sporting and cultural decline ...'

Tony Blair, *Mail on Sunday*, January 15 1995  
after the purchase of Andy Cole from Newcastle United by Manchester United for £7 million

# Fleecing the fans

Martin Cloake is a member of Tottenham Independent Supporters Association

FANS who grudgingly accepted Sky's growing influence, and the increasingly commercial emphasis in football, are strongly opposed to Rupert Murdoch's take-over of Manchester United.

Football is a lucrative business because fans spend money on it. Having been priced out of the grounds many fans now contemplate being priced out of their armchairs as pay-per-view becomes the only option.

The costs aren't only financial. A full football programme is now stretched over five days to suit TV, blunting the competitive edge a full Saturday programme used to provide. Fans who still attend live games often have to travel long distances to catch kick-off times dictated by TV.

A European super league would make matters even worse, demanding greater expenditure and effort to follow a team in a competition where the risk of losing and the glory of winning was minimised.

Clubs inspire loyalty, and in turn generate cash, because they are not simply brand names that can be tinkered with at will. They have connections with localities, albeit tenuous in many places, and specific histories. Turning them into just another brand and removing the competitive heart of the sport they are involved in will lead eventually to a loss of interest.

Just look at Rugby League, which sold its soul to Murdoch. If football lets TV call the tune it will be ruined when TV follows dwindling audiences away. For football fans the end of the sport they love will be the biggest price to pay.

# Copyright concerns

Gary Herman highlights some important issues behind European Commission copyright proposals

ON 10 December 1997, the European Commission (EC) quietly published its 'Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive on the Harmonisation of Certain Aspects of Copyright and Related Rights in the Information society (COM(97) 628 final) - available, for those with the inclination, from the Commission's web site: <http://europa.eu.int>.

This proposal, when suitably amended and accepted, will lead to the rewriting of copyright law throughout Europe. The trail which has led to the directive started with the publication, in 1995, of a Commission Green Paper on copyright and, in 1996, of two international treaties on intellectual property rights (IPR) framed by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). The deadline for the introduction of national measures complying with the directive is 30 June 2000. But that is unlikely to be the end of the matter. The Commission draft includes a provision for reviewing the application of the directive every three years, with a view to amendment if it should be necessary 'to ensure the functioning of the Internal Market'.

The Internal Market is the nub of the matter. By now, everyone with an interest in the media will know that IPR is both problematic and a potential source of great wealth. In the knowledge economy of the future, content will be king. Who controls the content controls the medium. And when the medium is a zillion digital TV channels and interactive global web sites, it can add up to mountains of money.

For WIPO and the EC, the problem is simple. Existing copyright law is unclear about the status of publication on the new media. It is even uncertain about whether some publications (for example, web-sites) are things or acts. This is particularly problematic when it comes to cross-border publication and the question of so-called 'neighbouring rights' (for example, the rights that directors or performers may have arising out of their involvement in a copyright work such as a movie). Nobody is sure whose legislation to apply in the case of a web-site originating in one country but accessed in another. And while international agreements protect

primary rights holders such as authors, they gloss over the situation of neighbouring rights holders. Things are complicated by technological innovations such as the use of 'temporary' copies of web-sites or digital broadcasts to speed up access. These 'caches' may be found in devices everywhere along the line from the originator of a programme or publication to its eventual end-users. They may even be unwittingly stored on the end-user's own computer, and they can be very long-lived indeed.

The result of this confusion, says the EC, is to slow down the development of new media, internationally and particularly in the fragmented European market. Harmonise copyright laws and you stimulate growth.

This argument might just work if the proposed directive was a specifically European measure. Alas, despite months of loudly trumpeted consultation, the proposed directive is actually little more than a slightly modified version of the 1996 WIPO treaties which takes none of the opportunities that a revision of copyright laws offers for radically recasting our notions of intellectual property. The proposed directive boasts of striking balances between the interests of different rights-holders and service providers - it says precious little about access to information, skimming over issues like private copying and exceptions relating to libraries and educational institutions. It dispenses with the notion of 'fair dealing', which is so important to British copyright law, and does nothing to affirm the importance of creativity or the fundamental rights of authors. In fact, the directive clings to the notion of subsidiarity, arguing that it will have only a superficial impact on copyright regimes.

In one sense, this is true. The draft ignores or brushes over any areas of difficulty or possible contention. It resolves some issues, like cache storage, by turning them into exceptions - with potential disastrous effects for any legislation. It excludes consideration of liability - which some may think is critical to the harmonisation of copyright legislation - by arguing that it is 'a horizontal issue' covering several important areas of the new media (for example, defamation and privacy). It doesn't address the scope of conventional copyright - that is, the right to reproduce a work - and fails

to clarify the disparate approaches to authorship in national laws, which means, for example, that a screenplay writer in British law is legally not an author. It fails to define 'public' while following WIPO in introducing an entirely new right called 'the right of communication to the public'.

This new right illustrates all that is worst about the directive. The right of communication to the public is designed to clarify the position of web-sites and other interactive or 'on-demand' forms of publication. These are now classified as acts of communication and subject to the new right which - and this is important - is a general right, not specifically directed at a particular medium or situation. It applies to all means of communication. The implications are staggering.

To put it simply, a right of communication to the public will bring the greatest rewards to organisations controlling the means of communication to the public. Moreover, it establishes a mechanism for controlling access to new media by turning even the possibility of communication into product. The directive notes that, 'the critical act is the "making available of the work to the public", thus the offering of the work on a publicly accessible site, which precedes the stage of its actual "on-demand transmission"'. It is not relevant whether any person actually has retrieved it or not. A web-site, then, would not be able to include hyperlinks to another web-site without permission; libraries and schools would not be able to offer general access to new media (since each act of communication would have to be licensed); and those countries whose legal systems have traditionally considered telephone lines to carry private communications may have to think again.

Of course, the world will not grind to a halt because of stupid copyright laws (or it would have done so long ago), but this new right is one more example of how copyright legislation seems more concerned to sustain the economic basis for concentration of ownership than to reward content creators or promote the social benefits of new media.

Gary Herman represents Labour Telematics on the CPBF National Council. A Europe-wide campaign has been launched in Finland to raise awareness about the implications of the proposed copyright directive. Contact CPBF National Office for more details.

# Coverage lite for McLibel issues

JULIAN PETLEY

DO YOU know that Helen Steel and Dave Morris, the McLibel Two, are scheduled to start their appeal on 12 January?

Did you realise that the trial judge ruled in the defendants' favour in the case of two-and-a-half of their seven groups of allegations against McDonalds, and that these concerned cruelty to certain animals, exploitation of children via advertising, and low pay?

Were you actually aware of the trial throughout its record-breaking 314 day run? And finally, have you heard that both the BBC and Channel 4 refuse to show the independently-produced documentary McLibel: Two Worlds Collide?

If the answer is 'no', it's not surprising. Although at the climax of this legal blockbuster the media were temporarily awash with 'David and Goliath' stories, all too often laced with unnecessary and patronising 'human interest' angles, the vast majority of this crucial libel trial received remarkably little coverage. As the McLibel Support Campaign state on their McSpotlight website: 'You would've expected the entire media to line up behind the defence, if only out of pure self-interest. But the media seem to treat McDonalds either with awe and sycophancy, or else as daft and jokey, a well-loved service organisation'. It was, to quote Michael Mansfield QC, as if a 'cordon sanitaire' had been placed around the whole subject. It is still in existence.

Admittedly, McDonalds is a potentially tricky media subject. Firstly, as the McLibel case itself proves, the company is notoriously litigious, or at least it was until this catastrophic legal own-goal. Secondly, McDonalds' global advertising and marketing budget is colossal (\$1,800m in 1995), and media which are financed even partly by advertising risk the company's wrath at their peril. It is alleged, for example, that when the Independent carried a front-page story about McDonalds' secret attempts to negotiate a settlement after only six weeks of the case, the company withdrew £80,000 of advertising from the Independent on Sunday. In 1989 Channel 4 was forced to apologise in court, and pay McDonalds' costs, after showing Jungleburger, in which the sales director of one of McDonalds' Costa Rican suppliers appeared to admit that beef which he supplied to the company had been farmed on ranches created by deforestation. But mystery surrounds another McDonalds film which was supposed to be shown on the Channel but was never transmitted: One Every Mile. A persistent suggestion, however, is that the Channel felt that the film-maker had been pushed into ceding too much editorial control to McDonalds.

Both of these films are briefly quoted in

Dennis Woolf's exemplary dramatisation of highlights of the trial, the three hour-plus McLibel, which was shown on Channel Four just before the verdict was announced. But even this has now run into problems, since the Channel is refusing to sell it to overseas buyers unless they indemnify the Channel against possible libel action by McDonalds. Apparently at least one foreign sale has thus been lost.

All this is as nothing, however, compared to the problem's faced by McLibel: Two Worlds Collide, although only the Guardian has seen fit to cover them. Franny Armstrong set up her company, One-Off Productions, specifically to make this film, and she was amongst a number of independent producers who tried during the trial to interest the broadcasters in it. However, she was told by ITV that there was 'not enough action', the BBC didn't feel 'sufficiently enthusiastic' and C4 decided to put its resources behind Dennis Woolf. Nothing daunted,

**McDonalds' marketing budget was \$1,800m in 1995**

Armstrong carried on filming. She wrote to McDonalds' witnesses, asking to interview them, but the refusal letters came from the company's press office. So she persuaded Ken Loach to direct dramatised reconstructions of some of their courtroom evidence. She also interested Jane Balfour Films in the idea of distributing the film world-wide. Then, with media interest finally growing as the trial neared its climax, Armstrong struck lucky with the BBC's Heart of the Matter and, although no written contract was signed, the film was scheduled for June 30 1997. The series editor, Anne Reeve, was clearly aware that the film posed certain problems: 60 minutes had to be reduced to 40, Helen Steel and Dave Morris' clandestine recording of McDonalds' abortive settlement attempt almost certainly infringed BBC guidelines, the use of McDonalds' advertisements raised copyright issues and, last but not least, there was the question of libel. However, neither the BBC's lawyers nor Alan

Yentob seemed to think the problems intractable, and Armstrong and Reeve worked together to try, in the latter's words, 'to turn the film into something the BBC could transmit'. In the end, however, she had to admit that 'it proved impossible to broadcast'. According to Armstrong: 'she kept having to send reports to Yentob and await his replies, it was all dragging out, the verdict was getting nearer and nearer, and when it was only ten days away Anne felt that she just couldn't go on with it'.

When the trial finished there was a brief but unproductive flurry of interest from Channel 5 and World in Action; then, two months later, Armstrong met Alan Hayling, commissioning editor for documentaries at C4, at the Sheffield Documentary Festival, and interested him in seeing the film. Hayling says that he thought it 'a strong piece of work for a first-time filmmaker, and I wanted to be able to do something with it', but adds that 'right away I could see there were clear legal difficulties. The secretly recorded conversation with McDonalds' lawyers was an obvious problem, but there was also the question of libel. Anyway I showed it to our legal department and their decision was very clear: nothing resembling this programme could be broadcast in Britain because it was repeating allegations that had already been found to be defamatory in the High Court. Therefore, if we showed it, McDonalds was highly likely to sue us - and win. Under such circumstances nobody would insure the programme against libel, and every C4 programme has to be insured against that'. Dennis Woolf got round this problem by sticking rigidly to quoting verbatim courtroom testimony, but what appears to have swayed C4's lawyers (more than the BBC's) is that certain allegations found libellous by the trial judge are repeated outside the courtroom context by some of the participants in the programme. What Armstrong calls C4's

'absolute categorical no' then put the wind up Jane Balfour, who regretfully decided that she couldn't sell Two Worlds Collide abroad in case foreign tv showings led to her being prosecuted by McDonalds under English libel law.

According to One-Off's legal adviser, Robin Lewis of Bindmans: 'Franny has produced a film in which she has reduced the libel risk to the minimum that is compatible with the kind of programme which she wanted to produce. But when you're trying to assess libel risk you have to take into account not only the wording of an item but also if it is about the sort of person or organisation likely to sue for libel'. On the first point Lewis feels that 'the broadcasters seem to be arguing for a total elimination of all libel risk as opposed to eliminating the irreducible minimum compatible with a programme communicating what actually took place'. And on the second he says that 'one has the distinct feeling that if the programme were not about

**It's just the audience that's the loser**

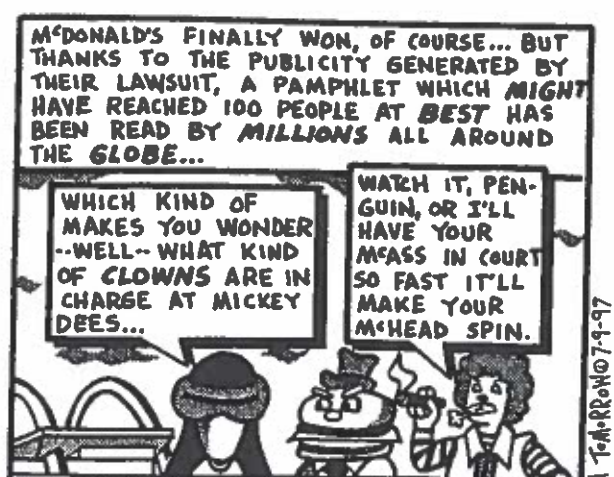
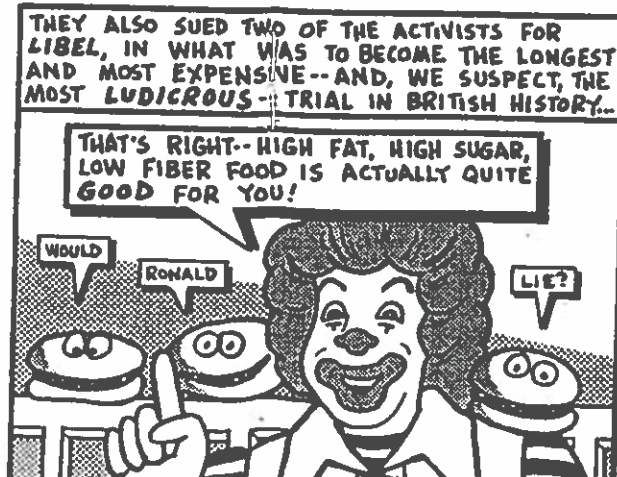
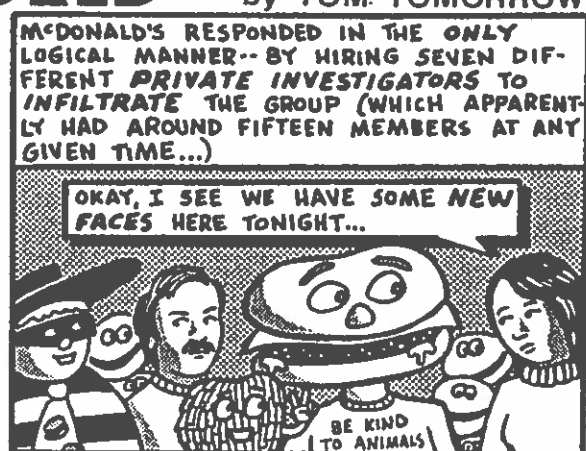
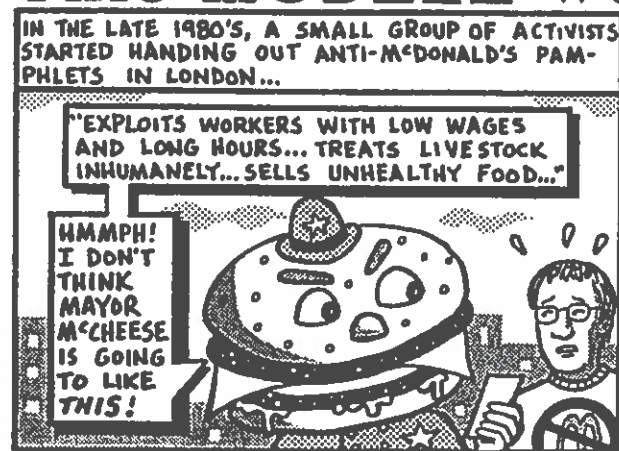
McDonalds but Joe's Cafe, the broadcasters' editorial courage might return'. However, he also believes that the company is less litigation-prone given the consequences of its 'barely rational' decision to sue Steel and Morris. On the other hand, as long as broadcasters continue to show themselves to be intimidated by McDonalds' fearsome past record, the company has little to fear - it's just the audience, hungry for knowledge about a company whose global activities raise some of the most important issues of our time, that's the loser.

This article appeared in the September/October issue of Index on Censorship. Subscriptions (six issues £39) from 33 Islington High Street, London N1 9LH

If you want to buy the video of McLibel: Two Worlds Collide send £14.99 to One-Off Productions, BCM Oops, London WC1N 3XX. It can also be viewed at [www.spanner.org/mclibel/vdo](http://www.spanner.org/mclibel/vdo). A veritable feast of McLibel-related information also awaits at [www.mcspotlight.org](http://www.mcspotlight.org), which has to date received over 40 million visitors.

## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



# Censored USA

EACH year Project Censored publishes its annual analysis of the top 25 stories that didn't make it into the mainstream news media, and Censored 1998 is the best and most informative survey produced to date.

There's something contradictory about that opening statement, because it's clear that the Project hasn't been successful in rolling back the various pressures which encourage the particular forms of censorship which it seeks to challenge.

But Project Censored has been successful in raising its profile and alerting a growing body of people to the particular pressures which confront the American media. The people who run the project aren't directly concerned with overt censorship - zealous governments and faceless officials who seek to prevent publication and squash freedom of expression - but the latent forms which emanate from the clash of interest between freedom of expression, investigative journalism and the needs for an informed citizenry on the one hand, and corporate and commercial pressures on the other.

Censorship is discussed in terms of the specific and detailed hard hitting stories that have been 'ignored, under-covered, or diminished by the main stream media'. In their place audiences are treated to what they call 'junk food news' - stories and spectacles that 'are grossly over-reported, sensationalised and hyped out of all proportion to their significance'.

Peter Phillips, the project's director, argues that 'a massive merging and buy-out process' means 'values such as freedom of information and belief in the responsibility of keeping the public informed are adjusted'. The results are, he says, 'an expansion of entertainment news, infomercials and synergistic news - all aimed at increased profit taking'.

Apart from the top 25 censored stories the book has chapters by a range of media analysts (Danny Schechter, Norman Solomon, Robert W McChesney), a detailed analysis of the top media corporations and the interlocking between their directors and the boards of other US corporations, a chapter by Randy Baker and Beth Sanders on the making of their documentary, Fear and Favour in the Newsroom, and a directory of alternative and independent organisations. Plus the distinctive, wry comments in Tom Tomorrow's cartoons.

Censored 1998 by Peter Phillips and Project Censored Seven Stories Press £11.99

# For more voices, not choices

DANNY SCHECHTER

'Never have so many been held incommunicado by so few'

Eduardo Galeano

I CAME to the Edinburgh TV Festival from the United States of Choice, one Nation Under Television, which not that long ago decided to wean its tube-addicted populace off the 'free' networks and fragment it into the pay (and pay!) for TV niches of an increasingly vacuous but profitable multi-channel environment. I travelled to hear about the dawn of digital nirvana in Britain from a land whose national poet-laureate Bruce Springsteen sings of '57 Channels/Nothing On'.

Hoping to encounter a brave new world of future-orientated public service broadcasting, I found instead an unbrave flirtation with the American present, our market-driven, unregulated, commercialised electronic wasteland which has become, in the words of one of TV's most successful writers, Larry Gelbard of M\*A\*S\*H fame, a 'weapon of mass distraction.' I heard TV producers and broadcasters announce that their greatest goal now is to serve the audience, to maximise profits whilst privatising and depoliticising the viewing experience.

I participated in a discussion of the news agenda which was more obsessed by when bulletins are scheduled than what is in them, or why young people no longer seem to be watching. I walked through a gaggle of paparazzi and TV crews feverishly lying in wait for Louise Woodward who had come

## PLATFORM

to plead with the press to respect her privacy, a media that had been more preoccupied with what she looked like during her trial than the scientific evidence that ultimately freed her.

Look out Britain: please take a close look at television's impact on America's democracy before you rush headlong into emulating it here. We live in the time of globalisation where multi-national corporate power conglomerates daily at the expense of national political decision making, where mesmerising the populace



Is there an alternative? You bet. You can find it in your own creative public service broadcasting traditions.

through TV grows increasingly functional for shadowy elites who have little interest in an informed public mucking about in their policy planning or wealth accumulation. They operate by a market logic which, in turn, breeds an often unexamined media logic. It takes us into what some scholars already see as a 'post-journalism era' of docu-soaps and dumbed down news where amusing story-telling supplants hard-hitting

whistle-blowing, where news stories focus on individuals more than institutions and celebrities more than anyone else. As global issues become more important, they are covered less. African animals, for example, get on TV far more than African people while reporters increasingly turn into lap dogs rather than watch dogs. Instead of colonising countries, the media powers colonise consciousness, boosting a culture of marketing, not mission; branding not empowerment. Interactivity is all too often a code word for consumers buying products, not citizens participating in a national discourse.

Is there an alternative? You bet. You can find it in your own creative public service broadcasting traditions as well as in new ideas to bring more bottom up energy onto the airwaves. Instead of offering more passive choices — how about more diverse voices? Let civil society be heard as often as the predictable soundbites of the political governors and chattering classes. Let the people in — not as discombobulated vox pops, but as individuals whose thoughtful ideas are worthy of being heard. Preserve programme quality and content in this age of fluff and image overload. Resist the merger of news biz and show biz which is sweeping the world. Entertain us, yes, but inform us more. That's the only way to insure that the more we watch the more we know, and not the other way around. Danny Schechter, the executive producer of the American TV company Globalvision, was a speaker at the Edinburgh TV Festival and hopes to win a BAFTA for best questions from the floor. He is the author of *The More You Watch, The Less You Know* (Seven Stories Press). You can E-mail him at dschechter@globalvision.org

# The more you watch ...

WE enthusiastically reviewed Danny Schechter's book, *The More You Watch the Less You Know* (Seven Stories Press) in a recent Free Press. Danny was at the recent TV Festival in Edinburgh (see above) where he made a number of effective interventions in debates, drawing on his experiences in the US media.

He also gave me a CD, *News Goo*, and the promotional poster for it, which we've reproduced here. The CD title is also the opening track, a rap by Peter Levine and we quote a few lines to give you the flavour:

Who's funk'n who and OJ in court  
News is not supposed to entertain  
to drug the soul and kill the pain  
But it all adds up to someone's capital gain  
News goo ... no explanation  
and we're lost in the fields of information  
plantation

We'll be back after this station identification

Other tracks include Bruce Springsteen's 57 channels (and nothing on). If you want to find out more or order the CD from Mouth Almighty Records they are on:

www.mouthalmighty.com

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- THE NEWS GOO CD FEATURES THESE MEDIA-UNFRIENDLY HITS:
1. news goo - POLARITY 1
  2. i ed gore guy - WAMMO
  3. demou acy - LEONARD COHEN
  4. pariter - THE LAST POETS
  5. bombs from babat - SEADOU SUNDATA
  6. news/ news/ up off an on and words wet - MENADIBACH
  7. what washington? what order? (excerpt) - WILLIAM BURROUGHS
  8. anything grace - ALLEN GINSBERG
  9. for the little guy - MARC DARTH
  10. evulsh in evulsh in - BOB HELLMAN
  11. 57 channels (and nothing on) - BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
  12. the clay my table was on - WILSON MICHELLE SERRIOS

GW



Ambulance drivers — Cassino December 1943 — January 1944 Robert Capa/Magnum Photos

# Capa's world

Duncan Forbes celebrates an important exhibition

THE current wave of interest in the history of photojournalism continued this summer with a stunning retrospective of work by one of the trade's founding practitioners, the Hungarian-born photographer, Robert Capa. A selection of 160 stills of the Spanish Civil War, China, Israel, and war-ravaged Europe provided compelling monochrome accounts of histories we dare not forget.

Almost alone, Capa invented the persona of the hard-bitten photojournalist, travelling incessantly in order to capture stories for Europe and America's increasingly popular illustrated press.

His passionate commitment to the plight of individuals caught up in terrifying conflicts was matched only by a love of good living that bordered on the reckless. Capa's gambling, womanising, and a compulsive desire to embellish his adventures, made him one of the most picaresque figures in artistic circles in Paris and New York.

But there is more to Capa's work than the force of his extraordinary personality. Growing up in avant-garde circles fascinated by the revolutionary potential of photography, Capa's realism is informed by a social commitment that gives real urgency to its function as reportage. (His influence continues in a fragile form today in the work of photographers like Don McCullin and Sebastiao Salgado.) With the mass production of photography, representations of the lives of ordinary people assumed

heroic status for the first time in human history. New lightweight camera technology — the Leica first appeared in 1925 — aided the photojournalist in the surreptitious capture of the everyday.

The diminished status of 'concerned' photojournalism in today's media culture means that we have become used to viewing such images only in the limited context of the gallery exhibition. Inevitably, Capa's work suffers from this isolation and it is easy to forget that most of his published images originally formed complex photo essays, sometimes covering up to ten pages in magazines like *Life* or *Picture Post*. Similarly, we should not ignore the function of his photography as well-intentioned propaganda (either that of the magazine proprietor or Capa himself). For contemporaries the power of his imagery was its immediacy; for us it offers a more convoluted guide to the past.

Capa was killed, camera in hand, in Indochina in 1954, the victim of a Vietminh landmine. His best work, shot under the dark cloud of European fascism, gives a voice to those who would otherwise be forgotten, simultaneously recasting the codes of photographic practice. An appeal to the emotions lies at the heart of most good documentary, and this is a profoundly moving exhibition. It also forms a strong antidote to our amnesiac culture's persistent eradication of the past.

Robert Capa: Photographs was at The Photographer's Gallery (London) 1 August — 12 September and continues at the Mead Gallery (Warwick), 12 January — 20 March 1999, admission free.

# Democracy and the media

Capitalism and the Information Age: The Political Economy of the Global Communication Revolution

Edited by Robert W. McChesney, Ellen Meiksins Wood and John Bellamy Foster Monthly Review Press £13.95

THERE are a number of important writers in the United States and Canada, who have over the years developed powerful critiques of the dominant and expanding commercial media based in the USA, but now operating on a global scale. One or two, like Noam Chomsky, are familiar to audiences in England but this book is extremely useful, timely, and important because it brings together some of these writers whose research and ideas should be more widely known to UK audiences. (The book also includes valuable chapters by UK-based writers Peter Golding, 'Global Village or Cultural Pillage', and Jill Hills, 'The US Rules. OK? Telecommunications since the 1940s').

The collective stance of these writers is to challenge the heavily promoted idea that a corporate-dominated, profit-motivated media system is an inevitable, natural and benign development. In addition, they relate this concern to the information superhighway and the Internet, questioning the futuristic visions associated with these technologies.

Robert W McChesney's opening chapter, 'The Political Economy of Global Communication', is a clear and effective dissection of the workings of global media and their impact on the range and quality of journalism and entertainment.

Other chapters analyse the impact of computerisation on work and society. There's a particularly powerful example of the 'benefits' of this in the chapter by Heather Menzies. In a telling insight into the 'virtual workplace' she cites the example of a woman who works for the Pizza Pizza chain processing orders from a computer and modem hooked up in the bedroom of a one-bedroom flat on the edge of Toronto.

The other important point about this book is that the authors are not writing from the perspective of passivity, but rather grasping and analysing developments in the media in order to change them for the better.

Granville Williams

## MEDIA MONITOR

### CONVERGENCE AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Back in December 1997 the European Commission published its Green Paper on Convergence of the Telecommunications, Media and Information Technology Sectors.

It set a tight deadline for responses to the Green Paper, and now it has published a summary of the results of the public consultation.

It also identifies 'areas where further reflection is needed and poses additional questions in these areas'.

When the Green Paper was published many MEPs expressed concern about implications for media policy and regulation, and the European Parliament will produce its opinion in October.

The deadline for views and responses to the questions the Commission have raised in the document is November 1998. The Commission Summary is available on the web: <http://www.ispo.cec.be>.

### KEEP THE BRITISH LIBRARY FREE

A campaign has been launched to defeat a proposal to charge an annual fee of £300.

The proposal by the Library's management board was made just as Culture Secretary Chris Smith announced additional

funding for national museums to abolish admissions charges.

Free access to public libraries has been traditionally regarded as a democratic right. Access to knowledge should not be restricted to those who can pay, and admission charges would bear heavily on students and many other readers on low incomes.

The British Library faces a £20 million deficit and admission charges could bring in between £3-6 million in a year – small change to the government, who have to approve the charges.

You can support the campaign by writing to your local MP and to Chris Smith, Culture Secretary, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Trafalgar Place, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH. The campaign contact is Keep the British Library Free c/o 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QJ TELS 0171 249 9592 or 0181 986 0762

### THE GLOBAL JOURNALISM REVIEW

Those of you with long memories will remember the Media Reporter, run by James Brennan from 1976-85. It was a lively and informative magazine, sadly missed. But take heart. James has now launched his online journal, The Global Journalism Review.

Readers are encouraged to try his web site: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/pagrosse/brennan.htm>

## CPBF NEWS

### LABOUR PARTY FRINGE MEETING WHO'S RUNNING THE COUNTRY?

Is the Blair-Murdoch Connection a Cause for Concern?

Tuesday 29 September 1.00pm  
Claremont Hotel  
270 North Parade  
Blackpool

Speakers: Lord Hattersley  
Joy Johnson Broadcaster  
Bob Franklin Media academic and author  
Chair: Linda Quinn CPBF National Council, Head of Communications CWU

### LEEDS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

#### PUBLIC DEBATE

Brave New World?  
The Future of Broadcasting  
What Will We Watch –  
How Will We Watch It?

Thursday 8 October  
7.30pm Leeds City Art Gallery  
Digital TV, pay-per-view, films being cabled into cinema – part of a growing list of technological advances, but what are the implications for film and tv.

Speakers include: Guy Phelps – ITC,  
Katherine Everett – BBC Choice,  
Tony Lennon – CPBF and President BECTU  
To book a place or for further information contact 0113 247 8389

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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