

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

STRAW'S 'BACK TO FRONT' BILL

THE Freedom of Information Bill now moves to the House of Lords, where the government expects strong opposition. Debate in the Lords will take place whilst concern about the bill's inadequacies continue to be revealed.

One attack has come from Elizabeth France, the data protection commissioner, and the very person whom the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, wants to appoint to oversee the new legislation.

In a speech to the Society of Editors she attacked the bill for being 'over-complex' and drafted 'back-to-front'.

She pointed out that even her own lawyers found the legislation difficult, and they had the job of providing her with expert advice on what to release to the public and the press. She also reiterated her concern that the bill should have a 'purpose clause' defining exactly what her new role should be.

The Home Secretary has refused to include such a clause because he does not want officials to have the power to overrule ministers on what can and cannot be published under the new legislation.

In her speech she also warned that she would have no truck with civil servants complaining they had to spend too much time drawing up codes of practice to allow the public the right to access government information.

One of the problems is that, as Jack Straw retreats from the firm commitments made by Labour to a strong and effective FoI Act, he encourages those who are unhappy with even the flawed proposals on offer to push harder for changes.

Elizabeth France revealed: 'There are people already lobbying the Home Office to

say that the NHS is going to grind to a halt if everybody has to produce publication schemes. That shouldn't be the case.'

A good recent example illustrates the impact the bill will have if it comes in to force without basic changes.

The government spends a good deal of public money on research, polls and focus groups to test out policy ideas. Since Labour assumed office in 1997 expenditure on market research has trebled in some departments. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Agriculture Ministry have, for example, polled to find ways of overcoming distaste for GM foods.

Lib Dem MP, Don Foster, after eighteen months of pressure, has got the Cabinet Office to issue fresh guidelines to civil servant. The results of such research are now to be made public, except in exceptional circumstances.

However this will only apply 'until the proposed Freedom of Information Act' is law. Then, as clauses in the bill stipulate, all factual information, including poll results, will be excluded from disclosure under a blanket ban on releasing advice to ministers.

So the sad fact is that the Conservative Code of Access, introduced in 1993, really is more useful and radical than the government's bill, to gain access to information.

What a grotesque situation!

Even at this late stage we urge all our members and supporters to contact their MPs to express their concerns about the bill. Unless major concessions are won, once the bill returns to the Commons, further actions are planned to stiffen opposition.

For full up-to-date information check the Campaign for Freedom of Information website: www.cfoi.demon.org.uk

COMMUNICATIONS WHITE PAPER

Let's get our concerns on the agenda

LEAKS about the Communications White Paper are turning into a flood. In the *Financial Times* (22 May) the story was that Trade Minister, Stephen Byers, wants a single regulatory body for broadcasting, telecommunications and the internet, called OFCOM, and also to change the broadcasting ownership rules to pave the way for a single ITV plc.

Meanwhile different media companies and industry bodies are lobbying energetically to make sure their business interests are protected. The Newspaper Society, for example, wants an end to the system which requires newspaper takeovers of regional and local papers to be cleared by the Competition Commission. For the CPBF the content of the Communications White paper is of crucial concern, and we have been invited to respond with our

We have to make sure media diversity and pluralism are at the centre of the bill

ideas to the joint communications team set up by the DTI and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

We have already got a group of National Council members working on this, but we'd welcome input and ideas from all our members and affiliates.

Our response has to be in by June 23, but we also intend to publicise and campaign widely on the issues raised.

We have to make sure that issues of media diversity and pluralism are at the centre of the bill, and that the purely business arguments, which have dominated discussion so far, are challenged. It will be a big job, so we really need all the support we can muster on this one.

Here is the news. Closing magazine is a blow for freedom of speech

Andrew Calcutt analyses the libel case against LM

'AS A result of the ITN vs LM verdict the contents of this page are currently not available'.

In order to research this article, I went to the LM website to read its account of the recent libel case which ended in the award of £375 000 damages plus costs to ITN, closure of the magazine, and likely bankruptcy proceedings against LM editor Mick Hume and co-publisher Helene Guldberg.

But my research was blocked by the effects of the verdict from Court 14. The unavailability, for legal reasons, of important information about the case, demonstrated the extent of the damage done to free speech.

In February 1997, LM published a front cover story, 'The Picture That Fooled The World', in which German journalist Thomas Deichmann claimed that ITN's award-winning pictures of refugees standing next to a barbed wire fence gave a misleading impression of conditions in the Serb-run camp of Trnopolje. Deichmann took particular exception to the way in which other news outlets interpreted these pictures as 'the proof' of 'Belsen 92', thereby equating Serbs with Nazis and likening a civil war in the Balkans to the Holocaust. Meanwhile ITN read Deichmann's article as an attack on its professional integrity, and warned LM's editor to pulp the magazine or face libel writs. Hume stood by his story and the case finally came to court three years later.

This is where I should declare an interest. I was a frequent contributor to LM and am proud to count Mick Hume among my personal friends. On the Sunday before he took the witness stand, my daughter attended his elder daughter's third birthday party, and I could not help wondering whether the Hume family would still be living in the same house a year from now. Mick had warned me that British libel law is no level playing field, but I was still surprised by how uneven it turned out to be.

First, the judge ruled that the evidence of LM's expert witnesses was inadmissible. We never got to hear what would have been said by BBC foreign affairs editor John Simpson, or by Phillip Knightley, author of the classic critical account of war reporting, *The First Casualty*. CPBF chair Julian Petley was silenced too. Justice Morland heard only

those witnesses who had been present at Trnopolje in August 1992, and Deichmann and Hume for the defence. In his summing up he told the jury he was not going to quote from them either, because they were not in Bosnia on the day.

In the rarefied world of libel law, the vindication of Deichmann's account of where the refugees were standing – in front of the barbed wire by which the ITN camera crew were themselves enclosed – turned out to be a further irrelevance. 'Clearly,' conceded Justice Morland, 'Ian Williams and Penny Marshall and their TV teams were mistaken in thinking they were not enclosed by the old barbed-wire fence. But does it

'Clearly,' conceded Justice Morland, 'Ian Williams and Penny Marshall and their TV teams were mistaken in thinking they were not enclosed by the old barbed-wire fence. But does it matter?'

matter?'. In Court 14, the only thing that mattered was LM's inability to prove the unprovable, namely that in their mind's eye ITN journalists harboured the intention to mislead. Deichmann's article had been a polemic against the effects of the ITN report, which were to have been analysed on behalf of the defence by those expert witnesses whom the judge ruled out-of-court. But the jury was obliged to direct its attention solely to the intention behind the story. Whatever the effects, regardless of the facts, without being able to prove the intention to mislead LM could only lose.

So where are we now? LM has been closed down, although Mick Hume is in the process of producing a valedictory issue. Various commentators, from Noam Chomsky to Auberon Waugh, have voiced objections to ITN's resort to libel law, but

editor-in-chief Richard Tait insists that 'by taking action against LM's lies, ITN has struck an important blow for freedom of speech'. The claim only makes sense if you substitute one preposition for another – insert 'against' where Tait has written 'for'.

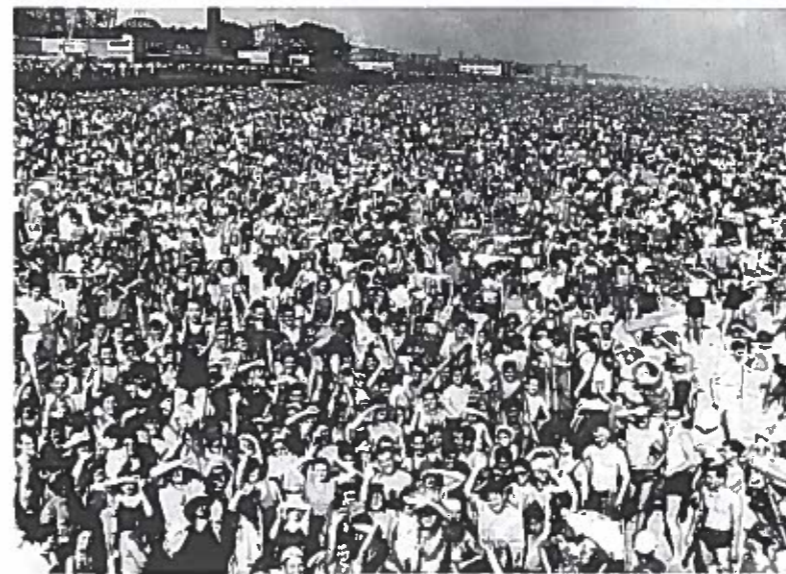
So keen is he to defend ITN journalism as 'the first draft of history', Tait would have it that the 'first draft' must also be the last. In Court 14, critical commentary on the effects of a news story was ruled inadmissible; credence was given only to eye-witness accounts, even though the court recognised that the eye-witnesses had misinterpreted the very ground on which they stood.

Tait advocates 'the front line of journalism' in preference to punditry and media studies. But the cause of truth will be hardly be served if frontline journalists become sacrosanct figures whose impassioned accounts cannot be subjected to cool, critical analysis offered by clear-sighted writers and editors such as Deichmann and Hume. Frontline journalism and critical studies of journalism are interdependent, not mutually exclusive as Tait seems to suggest.

Even my humble career path has been affected by the verdict against LM. The magazine I most enjoyed writing for no longer exists, while the boundaries of my teaching job may be subject to modification.

For five years now I have been involved in delivering undergraduate and postgraduate courses on the media. As I write, one of my key texts on the shelf above my PC is Cohen and Young's *The Manufacture of News*. In the seventies a whole raft of academics explored the effects of news stories, often unintended, and investigated the unconscious transmission of news values among professional journalists. According to the judgement of Court 14, these are potentially dangerous directions to go in. Even the core distinction in Media Studies between denotative and connotative meanings may be grounds for legal concern. Already I have been warned against using LM's original article in a you-the-jury hypothetical with journalism students. It is unlikely that this will be the only class curtailed by a culture in which critical commentary is increasingly inadmissible.

□ Former LM journalist Andrew Calcutt teaches Innovation, Media and Communication at the Docklands Campus of the University of East London.



Coney Island, July 22, 1940

Weegee is watching

DUNCAN FORBES

WEEGEE was one of photojournalism's most troubling practitioners. Haring to the scene of untimely death or bloody murder, he blazed away with his camera, reducing complex stories to the level of tabloid spectacle.

Born Usher Fellig into a Jewish family in what is now part of the Ukraine, Weegee's vision was informed by the tough immigrant cultures of New York's Lower East Side. Abandoning his job as a darkroom assistant, he turned to the more perilous practice of freelance photography, quickly earning a reputation for an almost supernatural ability to appear at the scene of the latest car smash or Mafia killing. But like many things in Weegee's career, this promptitude owed more to calculation than serendipity: in 1938 he had been granted a licence for a police short-wave radio.

Tearing the viewer this way and that, this exhibition emphasises our complicity in Weegee's – and to a lesser extent the camera's inherent – voyeurism. Dead or alive, Weegee showed no compunction in exploiting his subjects. An ambulance driver's corpse is dragged from his vehicle submerged in the East River; sleeping children, blind to the lurking photographer, escape the heat on the city's fire-escapes; couples are caught making love on unobtrusive infra-red film. All become victims of Weegee's invasive game. And most notoriously of all, bodies pile up on New York's street corners, watched over by a curious public, anonymous and, in death, suddenly fascinating.

Weegee's way of seeing was substantially informed by one of the most cut-throat tabloid cultures of the twentieth century. In a society obsessed by the mock heroics of

gangster criminality, the spectacle of death sold newspapers. Weegee quickly learned to take advantage of the public's excessive morbidity and as his confidence grew he worked hard to foster the myth of the tireless documentarist of the urban underbelly. (His sharpest testimony, *The Naked City*, was published in 1945.) Weegee 'the famous' was born, increasingly courted as one of photography's great primitives by the image-hungry in Hollywood and America's foremost galleries.

Weegee lived by his wits and his wakefulness produced some of the classics of street photography, infected – at their best – by an incipient surrealist strain. He had a sharp eye for New York's pervasive discrimination and revelled in the pleasures of popular culture – the cinemas, the circus, the concerts and clubs of Harlem and the Bowery. But Weegee's social vision is difficult to pin down. At once free of the paternalism of much mid-century documentary, his photography also slides insistently towards the apathy and cynicism of the tabloid snapper.

In some of his most famous photographs – those of a teeming Coney Island – Weegee finally faced up to his audience, capturing them with his camera whilst simultaneously becoming the object of their pleasure and scrutiny.

These images appear the very inversion of his intrusive nocturnal excursions. But in their grandiloquence, their awesome scope, their concern with a literally diminishing humanity, they also suggest the extent of the photographer's hubris.

Weegee is watching; be wary. Weegee continues at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford until 2 July. Weegee Re-viewed is on from 20 June – 5 August at Stills Gallery in Edinburgh.

In bed with Yahoo!

NEWS that BBC On-line will provide free news content to web portal Yahoo! may represent a small step further down the road to the end of public service broadcasting (Financial Times, 16 May 2000).

Yahoo! is one of the top ten sites on the web (and top in the UK market). Between them, the top ten account for around two thirds of all web accesses, according to A.C.Nielsen. Yahoo! already takes news feeds (like most of the other top ten) from AP and Reuters.

According to some, the deal supports the BBC's public service remit by increasing the corporation's reach. But critics have pointed out the effective public subsidy to Yahoo!, which is both anti-competitive and threatening to the BBC's independence.

BBC On-line has become the most popular news web site in Europe precisely because it is anti-commercial and, unique among news sites, carries no advertising. Yahoo! has promised to keep the BBC-supplied pages free of advertising. It remains to be seen how the BBC will square the circle of its public service obligation and someone else's commercial advantage.

Gary Herman

A TOWN NAMED SUE

Britain's Media and the Libel Laws

Venue: The Conference Hall, The London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road London N7

Monday 26 June, 7.30pm

THE libel laws are so plaintiff-friendly, compared to those elsewhere, that London is known as the 'libel capital of the world'. Do these laws have a 'chilling effect' on the media? Is there a place for defamation laws in a society which places a high premium, in theory at least, on media freedom? If so, what balance should be struck between the protection of reputation and freedom of expression?

Speakers include Tim Gopsill, editor The Journalist; Marcel Berins, The Guardian and Radio 4's Law in Action; Mick Hume LM magazine (deceased) and columnist, The Times; Julian Petley, chair of the Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom

Chair: Helene Guldberg, former publisher, LM magazine, defendant in the libel action brought by ITN.

Co-programmed by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and the Institute of Ideas. Tickets £7.00/£5 concessions Phone Helene Guldberg on 0958 600 366

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH MEDIA MERGERS

THE next couple of years will be decisive for the work of the CPBF. The Labour government wants a Communications Act on the statute book by 2002 – one which will determine the structure, media ownership and regulation of the media and communications industries for a decade ahead. Already the invitation has gone out to send comments to a ‘joint communications reform team’ from the Departments of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Civil servants will take these comments into account as they prepare a White Paper for Autumn 2000.

At the same time, at a European and global level, the relentless growth of media mergers has continued apace. The headline-grabbing AOL/Time Warner merger, announced in January this year, has been followed by other mergers, takeovers and alliances. Pearson, publishers of the Financial Times, merged with the TV arm of the giant German media group, Bertelsmann, and most recently, Terra, an ISP controlled by Spain’s former state telephone company, Telefonica, took over the American web company, Lycos, in a \$12.5 billion dollar deal. Terra has attracted millions of Spanish and Portuguese-speaking internet users in both Europe and Latin America, and the deal will give it access, through Lycos, to an estimated 35 million Spanish speakers in the USA.

These were some of the issues explored in a lively and stimulating CPBF conference, Media Mergers: Should We Be Bothered? on May 13 in London.

Dinosaurs mating

PETER Golding, Professor of Sociology at Loughborough University, opened the event with a clear, informative and comprehensive overview. ‘Should we be bothered by the spectacle of watching media dinosaurs mate, does it matter?’ he asked. His response was very definitely, yes we should. He identified the way massive shifts in control of the means of communication restricted the opportunity for social dialogue and the development of distinctive cultures. At the same time he firmly rejected the idea that such mergers had a deterministic inevitability – we had to do something to challenge the process.

The growing commercialisation of the media was illustrated by the Viacom-CBS merger, now agreed by the US Federal Communications Commission. It will be the second largest media company in the world, he said, spanning Paramount, Blockbuster, MTV, Nickelodeon, Simon and Schuster, the CBS TV network, and much more. An executive extolled the creation as a ‘cradle to grave one-stop shopping leviathan’.

Whilst media concentration is not a new phenomenon, there is a new phase which is about the integration of major content and distribution, and the convergence of the internet and ‘old’ media, symbolised by the AOL-Time Warner deal between the world’s largest media conglomerate and the leading ISP.

Peter Golding identified a number of particular consequences which cause concern:

- the sheer size and market power restricts choice, and can be used to undermine competition, as in Murdoch’s price war of attrition on UK newspapers

- mutual promotion (synergies) to steer people towards media conglomerate’s own products, so that Time Warner products (People, Sports Illustrated) are promoted on the AOL website

- market exclusion, so that small ISPs are not allowed open access to the AOL system

- interference with news which is detrimental to business interests. Disney has control of ABC news, and killed a programme

on employment practices at Disneyworld. Murdoch removed BBC from his Asian satellite system

- domination of information by entertainment – ‘dumbing down’ so that emphasis on crime, entertainment, celebrities rather than hard news. Journalism expensive compared to much entertainment, and less profitable.

- dominant media groups drive government policy. In UK the changes in ITV have been made by the companies lobbying for modification of ownership limits; in USA under Reagan anti-trust legislation scrapped and big media mergers resulted

- the growing US dominance is a form of cultural imperialism, as more European media relies on output from Viacom, Time Warner and Disney

- social fragmentation. Niche marketing, audience fragmentation and narrowbanding are all euphemisms for the destruction of a common culture or public sphere

The domination over the internet of the media giants was also analysed by Peter Golding. By 1998 over three quarters of the 31 most visited news and entertainment sites were affiliated to major media conglomerates, and they have the leverage to get premier locations from browsers and search engines. For example, the new version of Internet Explorer gives plum positions to Disney and Time Warner.

Whilst acknowledging the radical potential of the internet for campaigning groups, he pointed out that 80% of websites were invisible to search engines. There was also a wider problem of unequal access, which reflected broader social and income inequalities in society, so that a real digital divide does exist.

In suggesting actions to challenge these developments he stressed the importance of the CPBF and groups like it. He also thought the issue of restrictions on cross-media ownership had to be taken seriously at a national and European level, but pointed to contradictions between the Council of Europe, which wanted to protect diversity, plurality and European cultural identities, and the more market-driven priorities of the European Commission.

He identified the importance of protecting journalistic and producer independence from the commercial pressures increasingly placed on them by being part of huge media conglomerates. Finally he urged the importance of protecting and reinventing public service broadcasting.

Shrinking iceberg travelling south

STEVE Barnett from the University of Westminster linked arguments for pluralism in the media to questions of quality in broadcasting. Pointing out that a policy commitment to pluralism has been at the heart of government media policy since the 1960s, he now questioned whether this remained.

Taking the case of the ITV companies he identified the reasons they have put forward for the move towards a single ITV:

- Media companies present the case for mergers by arguing that rationalisation and cutting overheads will enable them to reinvest more in programmes and journalism. In fact mergers are about asset stripping and boosting shareholder value

- Size and the drawing together of different media groups will allow companies to exploit talent across different media and platforms, but the reality is that such cross-fertilisation doesn’t occur

- Finally, ITV companies argue they need to be bigger to meet the challenge of the global

multi-media conglomerates, but even a combined ITV and BBC would still be nowhere as big as the giant global media corporations.

The consequence of ITV companies insistently promoting these ideas was that their arguments have been accepted by government, and they have created a policy agenda which will make a single ITV company a reality after new legislation is introduced.

Steve Barnett pointed out a number of threats to programme quality if a single ITV company was created.

- Firstly, we could say goodbye to regional programmes under such a structure, but also a single ITV company would have a great deal more power to push for relaxing regulatory restrictions. Indeed would a new regulatory body have any effective power to tell a single ITV company what to do, or sanctions to impose if it transgressed, he wondered?

- Steve Barnett also highlighted the findings revealed in the report he co-authored, A

Shrinking Iceberg Travelling South, which analysed output in the fields of current affairs and drama and interviewed a number of producers working.

He identified two striking aspects. Firstly, how negative and pessimistic the responses of people were about the current and future prospects for their work.

In the past investigative journalism had the resources to explore topics which might not result in programmes, but now there was no latitude for it not working. The resources were so tight.

Secondly, he thought the most depressing thing was the impact of the increasing pressures on the people’s working lives as they struggled to deliver the programmes.

Steve Barnett also highlighted the importance of training. One consequence of the changes in broadcasting was that people weren’t acquiring the skills, experience and knowledge within an institutional structure which enabled them to learn their jobs.

Guiding principles for convergence

BETTINA Peters, Deputy General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, said owners argued that concentration of ownership guaranteed viability for media. They said regulations limiting concentration of media ownership should not go beyond anti-trust legislation in other sectors of industry.

Journalists’ unions and others challenged this, she said. ‘The media represent a special cultural and democratic resource upon which democratic exchange depends. If media are solely economic products, then they cannot fulfil wider cultural and social responsibilities which should not be defined only by economic criteria.’

The rise to dominance of the global commercial media system was more than an economic matter; it had implications for democratic and social values. Media concentration could impede the right to know because it led to a small number of corporations controlling most media outlets, thus restricting diversity and pluralism.

Some caveats were necessary when discussing the emerging global media system for journalism, politics, entertainment and culture. ‘Although fundamentally flawed, the

global media system can at times be a progressive force, especially as it enters nations that had been tightly controlled by corrupt administrations, as with nations that had significant state censorship over media,’ said Bettina Peters. ‘Also the development of new technologies does offer unprecedented opportunities for ordinary people to participate in the democratic process.’

But these progressive aspects should not be exaggerated, she said. The last thing media corporations wanted was to rock the boat as long as they could do their business. Nor was it their intention to enhance public access to information they believed they could sell.

‘When commercial interests are set against democratic or professional values, it is inevitable that the interests of the market take priority,’ she said. ‘The global media system can be best understood as one that advances corporate and commercial interests and values. They are not necessarily journalistic values.’

With commercialism and corporate control came political bias. While consumerism, the market, and individualism tended to be taken as natural and often benevolent, there was often a negative portrayal of politics, trade

unions, civic values and anti-market activities.

‘The global media system requires a global democratic response, not merely a series of national or local opponents,’ said Bettina Peters. ‘Global media organisations are unaccountable and serve the interests of a wealthy minority. For these reasons, the process of concentration of ownership and convergence within the media sector requires careful monitoring.’

Convergence could benefit the community and the private sector, but it would only do so if the guiding principles were:

- the right of journalists and other media creators to work in professional conditions that recognise the social and cultural value of information and the need for editorial independence

- recognition that media contribute to pluralism, diversity and quality of information and that they require a separate regulatory structure from that which governs other parts of the national and global economy

- the need for social protection at work and the rights of journalists to form independent associations, to bargain for collective social and professional rights and to express their professional independence.

What is investigative journalism?

Stephen Dorril considers some issues raised by a new book, *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice* ed. Hugo de Burg (Routledge)

I LOOKED forward to reading this book. Little of serious worth has been written on a subject which still fascinates practitioners, students, and, occasionally, the public. A history of the subject is long overdue, as is a study of the techniques employed and a look at the moral and ethical issues which arise during investigations. Unfortunately this is not the book I hoped it would be.

I recommend it only because there is nothing else but it is, sadly, a missed opportunity. Overall it is badly edited, appears to be hurried in execution and many of its conclusions seem perverse. Is it true that 'investigative journalism has been flourishing in the last three decades of the twentieth century'?

Is not the truth that newspaper investigative journalism had a brief bloom in the sixties, flowered for a short period in the seventies, badly wilted in the eighties and is now effectively dead. Yes, there are exceptions and the Guardian did extremely well with the 'Sleaze' revelations but the reality is that the newspapers, including the Guardian, do not like or encourage investigative journalism. The last significant investigative unit was on, of all papers, the Financial Times in the early nineties but it did not last long.

It is easier to say what investigative journalism isn't rather than what it is. What differentiates it from other kinds of journalistic practice is method, though they may

share some techniques. Invariably time is needed to develop an investigation, as is money, though not always. It is characterised by in-depth and near-obsessional research, dogged determination, accumulated knowledge, team-effort (though some of our best – Duncan Campbell, Nick Davies, Paul Foot, Michael Gilliard – have been loners), the crucial support of editors and the space to pursue stories not because of notions of the truth but because it might turn out to be interesting. Also essential is the support of legal staff and the willingness to push at the boundaries of the Official Secrets Act, and libel and numerous other laws which are in place to hinder the pursuit of truth.

The book's history of British investigative journalism over the past thirty years is welcome but its brief overview is inadequate and somewhat misleading. Most accounts concentrate, rightly enough, on the Sunday Times' ground-breaking Insight team, but they often miss out on its pre-history. If the genre has a specific origin it is probably in the expose journalism of Duncan Webb in the fifties and the almost forgotten Today magazine (set up by a group of men-about-town young Conservatives in 1960) from where the first members of Insight originated. No mention is made of the recently deceased Mike Randall, who became editor of the Daily Mail in 1963. The liberal-inclined Randall employed some of the best writers from the old News Chronicle, which had been taken over by the Mail, on investigative and campaigning journalism. In 1966 he joined

the Sunday Times where, as managing editor under Harry Evans, he helped develop the Insight team.

Unfortunately de Burg's account is much too uncritical, and the often bitter arguments which have broken out (particularly in the pages of British Journalism Review) between former Insight members about investigative journalism's true significance, relevance and success, are hardly touched on.

The book's index does not include an entry for 'Ireland' despite being (surely) the area on which claims to a tradition of investigative journalism should be tested. It is certainly true that some of the best journalists of the time went to Ireland in the early seventies and produced some excellent material – the Insight book on the Troubles remains a good introduction – but interest soon waned, and the last twenty-five years have been characterised more by evasions, disinformation and downright lies than the successes of investigative journalism. It was not until the late eighties that we finally saw what investigative journalism can achieve when a number of television documentaries by World in Action, Thames, First Tuesday and Panorama finally tackled Irish subjects.

What makes the subject interesting is not the few gems which have surfaced over the past few decades but the inescapable fact that investigative journalists have failed to secure a welcome place within journalism. The reality is that any book dealing with the subject must also be study of failure.

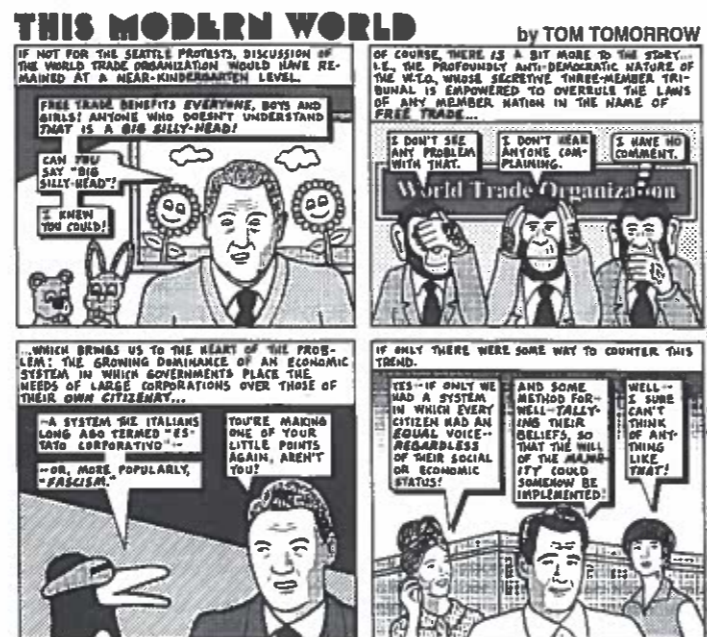
□ Stephen Dorril is the author of the recently published *M16: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (Fourth Estate)

Recognition at last

FOR the first time, to our knowledge, Project Censored (PC) has got some publicity in the mainstream media in the UK. The Media Guardian, May 15, carried a good, positive and informative report of the latest publication, *Censored 2000*, Seven Stories Press, £11.99, by the Guardian's roving US correspondent, Duncan Campbell. This year's publication is excellent and is given added value through the topical and biting Tom Tomorrow cartoon strips (right).

Over the years FP has publicised PC, and also the US publishers, Seven Stories Press, who play a key supporting role. Seven Stories also publish the excellent Open Media pamphlet series. The two most recent titles are: *The WTO: Five Years of Reasons to Resist Corporate Globalization* by Lori Wallach and Michelle Sforza; *Microradio and Democracy: (Low) Power to the People* by Greg Ruggiero. Both publications £3.99

If you have difficulty obtaining Seven Stories publications, the UK distributor is Turnaround Publisher Services, Unit 3, Olympia Trading Estate, Colburg Road, Wood Green, London N22 6TZ



Time to get angry, again

Overloaded – *Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* by Imelda Whelehan

The Women's Press, £11.99

SO ANNANOVA, the virtual newscaster, has begun delivering the news in cyberspace. Sara Cox has taken over from fellow ladette Zoe Ball as Radio 1 breakfast DJ. Posh Spice is the new Queen. And Bridget Jones is being turned into a film.

So the Feminist battle is won. Isn't it?

Imelda Whelehan doesn't think so. She has spent the last few years studying the growth of 'laddishness' and the cult of the 'girlie'. And she concludes that, far from soaring free in the new Millennium, women are as trapped as ever by man-made images of femininity.

Whether it's the cynically manufactured sisterly solidarity of the Spice Girls, the bursting Wonderbra, the blonde babe radio presenter with the loud mouth and hangover, or the anodyne TV presenter whose naked figure is projected by laser onto the Houses of Parliament. All are – in their different yet consistently shallow ways – objects of male desire, presented as shining examples of sexual self-determination.

Yet is the ability to surpass men in the drinking, swearing and lavatory humour stakes really a definition of equality and empowerment? Or is it just a manipulative ploy to persuade today's young women that sexism has been and gone?

To Whelehan, "a definable thread runs through the language of culture, politics

and the mass media that is quite simply anti-feminist and anti-equality."

So her analysis of the cultural experiences of women – and men – in contemporary Britain comes at just the right moment, as a reminder of what can happen if we forget or misrepresent our feminist past. Now, she believes, it is time to get angry again.

In this era of "retro-sexism", she looks at a whole range of images of women – from Barbie to Blair's Babes – and concludes that the enduring challenge to feminism is that "while the terms of oppression change, the ideological basis of their oppression – patriarchy – remains constant."

She dissects the idea of women taking control – of their image, their fertility, their



Ten years ago, the BBC had revenues of £1.5 billion (\$2.2 billion), Warner Communications, one of the largest private-sector equivalents, had a market capitalisation of \$9.2 billion. Last year the BBC's income was £2.8 billion, and the market capitalisation of Time Warner AOL, which is what the once-modest film-and-television company now finds itself part of, is some \$235 billion.

The Economist, 20 May.

relationships, their careers – and argues that, at the turn of the century, control seems to be more about "the right to consume and to display oneself to best effect, not about empowerment in the worlds of work, politics, or even the home."

At the same time, she traces the rise of the New Lad – "the antidote to effeminacy" – from the growth of the second wave of feminism and the subsequent backlash fear of emasculation. Nick Hornby may have started the trend with his ground-breaking Fever Pitch but, just for those more concerned about ball-breaking, here come programmes like Men Behaving Badly, The Frank Skinner Show and They Think It's All Over, to shore up the lads' belief in themselves and their (six)-pack.

The 21st Century's answer to the sabbie in the dirty mac fingering soft porn is, of course, the reader of Loaded or Front. Yet you question such images at your peril. Don't find the joke about George Michael funny? Frigid feminist. Find FHM narrow and trivial? Boring old fogey. The correct postmodern response, of course, is ironic laughter.

At one point, Whelehan quotes Virginia Woolf, writing in 1929 that after a cursory glance at a popular newspaper, "The most transient visitor to this planet... could not fail to be aware... that England is under the rule of a patriarchy." What, asks Whelehan, would a latter-day Martian make of our contemporary media?

Clare Jenkins

How Somalia intervention became a disaster

Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda by Scott Peterson

Routledge £14.99

SCOTT Peterson covered Africa, mainly for the Daily Telegraph, during the 1990s, and this book contains some powerful eyewitness writing of events during that decade. It also makes timely reading as, in Sierra Leone, another UN intervention fails and UK forces go in to restore order.

The most powerful section of this book deals with the reminder of another intervention which failed disastrously – Operation Restore Hope by the US in Somalia in 1993. In the wake of famine, and the depredations by the different Somali warlords of the relief supplies, the US intervention was meant to demonstrate the humanitarian impulse at the heart of the military might.

He chronicles a series of disastrous decisions by key US players. For example, President George Bush's special envoy, Robert Oakley, was a retired ambassador and veteran of the cold war and Vietnam years. He was more concerned about the safety of US troops than disarming the warlords. Peterson believes that it would have been possible to disarm them, if the action had been taken immediately and decisively. Instead Oakley took the decision to leave their arsenals intact. The one target, General Aidid, remained free despite relentless pursuit and a series of botched attempts to capture him. One raid, using anti-tank missiles, killed between 20 (official UN estimate) and 54 (Red Cross sources) Somalis. Peterson nearly lost his own life in the aftermath of visiting the scene – four other journalists who arrived later were beaten to death.

The sheer arrogance and stupidity of the US intervention, and the way they managed to turn the broad support of the Somalis into seething hatred is well described.

The book also has a telling set of figures. Of the billions spent in Somali in 1992-95 less than 4% found its way in to the local economy. The profits amassed by US defence contractor Brown and Root building facilities for UN staff exceeded the amount set aside to rebuild Somalia's shattered infrastructure.

The US experience in Somalia, and the images of mutilated US marines on prime-time television, shaped US policy in Rwanda where the fear of another Somalia enabled the genocide to continue. As Peterson comments, 'in Rwanda saving lives could often have been achieved by simply being present'.

CPBF NEWS

AGM RESOLUTIONS

NATIONAL Council member, Tim Gopsill, successfully moved a resolution arguing that 'the structure of the CPBF should be as flexible as is necessary to encourage the maximum participation.' He argued that the present structure was too bureaucratic, whereas we should look at means to involve people in the CPBF rather than have structures which limit the number of people taking part in Campaign activities.

The motion also urged the CPBF to use email more as a means of communication, and to open the National Council and other committee meetings to all members, and to

advertise them via email. Members should be asked to supply their email addresses so that they can receive notices of meetings and other documents central to Campaign activity, the motion suggested.

GET ON THE LIST

IF YOU want to be on our email list and be more actively involved in CPBF debate and activity send your details to the National Office, or email us at freepress@cpbf.demon.co.uk

The next two NC meetings are on Monday June 19 and July 24. They take place at UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1 from 6.15 pm. The nearest tube stations are Kings Cross/St Pancras and Euston.

SUPPORT FOR MARTIN BRIGHT

COURT orders against the Guardian and Observer and reporter Martin Bright were condemned in another AGM motion. It saluted the stand taken by Martin Bright and the editors in refusing to supply information and the NUJ's defence of Martin Bright.

The successful motion placed the action against Martin Bright in a broader context, arguing that this was done 'at the behest of the security services to intimidate journalists pursuing legitimate enquiries in the public interest.'

BRIGHTON NUJ

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION MEETING
21 June; 7.30 pm;
Sussex Arts Centre; Ship Street

Internet freedom debate rages at CPBF meeting

DEBATE at a London meeting on Press Freedom Day (May 3) jointly organised by the CPBF centred on who, if anyone, should attempt to regulate the internet: the law, or the industry through self-regulation.

Self-regulation was represented by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), which runs a hotline for people to report material they consider illegal or offensive. IWF chair Roger Darlington said reports were "overwhelmingly about child pornography, which is a criminal offence. If we consider that the material is criminal we inform the internet service provider (ISP) and they take it down. It has worked very well. No-one has challenged our decisions.

The IWF was formed in 1996 by the ISPs, after a threat from the Metropolitan police in relation to child pornography. Roger Darlington said its voluntary system "has avoided the prosecution of ISPs and the wholesale taking down of newsgroups.

Yaman Akdeniz of Cyber Rights Cyber Liberties UK said the IWF was "a private not a public body". There was a question of accountability: "How can you challenge its decisions?"

He said the system was not preventing censorship. "Censorship is becoming more and more visible, especially since the Demon case, which is censorship by the back door."

In February Demon Internet settled a libel case brought by Arthur Godfrey, a private individual who claimed that defamatory material about him had appeared on a newsgroup it carried.

Demon lost the case and the settlement came before an appeal.

The High Court decision was a shock to ISPs, for it apparently made them liable for everything they host.

Since then, a number of sites have been taken down after threats of legal action - sites that have nothing to do with crime or pornography, but contain material challenging powerful interests in different ways.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

JOIN
THE CAMPAIGN
FOR PRESS AND
BROADCASTING
FREEDOM

CPBF web site: www.cpbf.demon.co.uk
Email address: freepress@cpbf.demon.co.uk

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM

- | | |
|---|-----|
| a) Individual membership | £15 |
| b) Unwaged | £6 |
| d) Supporting membership
(includes free CPBF publications) | £25 |
| e) Institutions (eg libraries:
includes five copies of Free Press) | £25 |

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- | | |
|---------------------------|------|
| f) Fewer than 500 members | £25 |
| g) 500 to 1,000 | £30 |
| h) 1,000 to 10,000 | £50 |
| i) 10,000 to 50,000 | £115 |
| j) 50,000 to 100,000 | £225 |
| k) Over 100,000 | £450 |

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £..... FP116

Name

Address

.....

Postcode Tel.....

Organisation (if applicable)

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

Tel: 020 7278 4430