

## WHITE PAPER, CRYSTAL BALLS

WE WENT to press before the publication of the Communications White Paper. All sorts of – often contradictory – reports have appeared recently, confidently predicting what the White Paper policy proposals will be.

The Media Guardian, 20 November, published what appears to be a well-informed trail for the government's forthcoming Communications White Paper.

David Teather indicated the key points:

- Out would go legislation restricting independent television companies (Granada Media and Carlton Communications) from merging. Legislation would pave the way for one owner
- The existing rules governing cross-media ownership to protect diversity and plurality of opinion would be changed. One option is the 'share of voice' which would enable media groups to straddle different media
- Regulation changes could sweep away the existing bodies, replacing them with one organisation, Ofcom
- The BBC governors are likely to be stripped of some power
- The privatisation of Channel 4 (or not). Tensions between the Department of Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) on the one hand who have vetoed this option, and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Treasury who are keen on it
- Restrictions on the radio market will be lifted. Currently no single company is allowed to own more than 15% of the share of commercial radio audience.

● ITN ownership. Presently no single company can own more than 20% of the news provider, but this restriction is likely to go

The Guardian report suggests that many of the proposals will be distinctly vague, conveniently putting off some decisions until after the general election. In the case of cross-media ownership, for example, ministers, worried about offending newspaper groups in the run-up to the general election, see no point in suggesting definitive policies.

Also it appears that there are tensions between the DCMS and DTI, with Smith's department fighting hard to uphold traditional public service values.

These may be small crumbs of comfort, but it means that this important piece of media legislation, which will affect the range and quality of what we watch, read and hear in the media, will now be decided, as the Guardian points out, by Commons committees and in the House of Lords. We believe there has to be a better way to develop media policy, and our conference on 24 November is one of a number of initiatives we are taking to open up public debate on this vital issue.

Tom O'Malley sent this letter to the Guardian on behalf of the CPBF National Council:

*There is a dismal ring of truth about the fact that the most important changes in our mass communications*

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## SHOCK! HORROR!

Express titles  
sold to porn king

To be indifferent to the fate of a newspaper is to be complacent about democracy itself

Guardian editorial 24/11/00

WELL, it could have been worse. Just. One of the stories circulating in the week when porn king Richard Desmond emerged as the victor in the auction for the Express titles was that another porn king, David Sullivan, owner of the Daily and Sunday Sport, was planning a bid for the Daily Star.

In 1990 Sullivan was blocked from taking over the Bristol Evening Post. The regulators said the character and content of the Post would be affected, following Sullivan's previous involvement with the Daily Star. The Star went so down-market that respectable advertisers pulled out as the sex chat lines moved in and the nipple count soared.

No surprises, then, that the one group of journalists who greeted the recent sale with delight at Ludgate House – the offices of Express Newspapers at Blackfriars – were

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### THE COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION – WHO BENEFITS?

Conference on the government's communications white paper  
organised by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom  
9.45–17.30 • Saturday 24 February

Britannia Street Conference and Meeting Centre  
27 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9JP

Register now on [www.cpbp.org.uk](http://www.cpbp.org.uk) or contact  
CPBF, 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF. Tel (020) 7278 4430

# Regulation: less is more

**Julian Petley takes a critical look at the PCC's performance**

HOW would you judge the success of an organisation whose job it is to regulate an industry whose products are increasingly widely acknowledged to be amongst the very worst in the world?

Presumably even your minimum criteria would include the following: the organisation's degree of independence from those whom it was supposed to be regulating, the toughness of the sanctions available to it, the number of complaints from aggrieved consumers which it not only upheld but acted upon, and finally, solid evidence of rising standards in the industry for which it was responsible.

Now consider the Press Complaints Commission. It is financed by the Press Standards Board of Finance (Pressbof), a body which, as the PCC states in its Review, 'collects registration fees from across the newspaper and magazine publishing industry' but which, it nonetheless insists, is an 'independent body' – just like the PCC itself, whose 'independence' is apparently guaranteed by the fact that 'all members of the Commission are appointed by an independent Appointments Commission'. Strange, then, that the 15-strong editors' Code Committee is made up entirely of journalists, and that of the 16 Commission members, six are editors (including such paragons of journalistic excellence as Paul Dacre of the Mail and Dominic Lawson of the Sunday Telegraph).

As for sanctions, you'll look in vain for any mention of these in the Review because, to all intents and purposes, the PCC doesn't have any. Indeed, the Review is a classic example of the shaggy dog story: it starts off promisingly enough with tough talk about 'investigations', 'adjudications', 'possible breaches of the Code of Practice' and so on, but just as one starts to look forward to the pay-off, it simply peters out into complete bathos. Because not only are there no effective sanctions – there are virtually no upheld complaints either!

Consider the Review's own figures. In 1999 the PCC received 2427 complaints. Of these, it immediately rejected a third as either coming from third parties or as falling outside its remit. It thus investigated only 1641 complaints, of which it found 942 involved no breach of the Code. A further 650 were resolved or 'withdrawn after explanation' (which sounds suspi-

ciously like the complainant being persuaded by a smooth-talking journalist, aided and abetted by the PCC, that they were making a silly, cry-baby fuss about nothing). Of the 49 complaints which the PCC actually deigned to adjudicate, only 26 were upheld – a minuscule 1.07% of the total received and 1.58% of those investigated.

Most organisations might be rather wary of publishing figures which suggest that they perform such a skimpy and meagre service to the public whose interests they're supposed to be representing. Not so the PCC, which clearly believes that the tiny number of adjudications 'underlines the strength of the Commission in resolving those cases where there is a prima facie breach of the Code'. However, since such complaints are, as the Review puts it, 'resolved directly between editor and complainant following the intervention of



the Commission', these are essentially private deals which are never subject to proper public scrutiny, and thus we have no idea if the complaints were really resolved properly, or if the complainant was effectively fobbed off or simply driven by weariness and frustration to abandon a wildly unequal struggle.

Thus, according to the PCC's topsy-turvy logic, the less it is seen to do, the more effective it feels itself to be. Whether the public would agree is another matter. But, of course, whatever the Review's fancy rhetoric about the PCC 'delivering a first class service to those with a grievance against a newspaper or magazine', the main purpose of the organisation is not providing a service to the public but persuading

governments that 'self-regulation' works and thus warding off demands for statutory measures such as the right of reply, legally enforceable conscience clauses in journalists' contracts, a privacy law, legal aid for libel victims, and so on. Indeed, in the course of just eight short pages, statutory regulation is compared unfavourably with 'self-regulation' no less than ten times!

And so to our final test of the PCC's success – journalistic standards. According to Lord Wakeham, one of the PCC's two central aims is 'continually to raise standards of reporting under the terms of the editors' Code of Practice', an aim in which the Report 'demonstrates our continuing success'. 1999, that splendid year of allegedly rising standards, included the following: the Mail on Sunday running an intrusive and inaccurate story about the Blairs' ten-year old daughter Kathryn winning a place at a Catholic comprehensive school; the Daily Star and Sport publishing intrusive pictures of David Beckham and Victoria Adams; in the space of four consecutive days in May various News International papers running lurid and intrusive splashes about Lawrence Dallaglio, Lenny Henry, Ian Botham and Sophie Rhys-Jones; and the Daily Telegraph publishing an article by the daughter of the convicted criminal Jonathan Aitken. Meanwhile the entire year was marked by the usual endless torrent of lies and distortions about 'Europe', racist filth against asylum seekers and 'immigrants' in general, and all the other populist, prurient and partisan horrors which have contributed to making British journalism, with the apparent blessing of the PCC, some of the most debased in the world.

## REGULATING THE PRESS

We're pleased to announce the publication of an important book, *Regulating the Press* by Pluto Press (£15.99). The authors are Tom O'Malley, who is a member of the CPBF National Council, and Principal Lecturer in Media at the University of Glamorgan, and Clive Soley MP whose Private Member's Bill, *Freedom and Responsibility of the Press*, was debated in Parliament in 1992-93. It was finally 'talked out' in spite of widespread support for its proposals.

The book explores a number of important issues, and we will be carrying a major review in the next issue of *Free Press*.

## LETTER

### Committee is independent

Jim Addington mentions the 'D-Notice' system in his article on the UNIIRC Report by Abid Hussein ('UN criticises government on news' – FP 118). Unfortunately Mr Hussein did not contact any of the media representatives on the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee nor me as the Secretary, to verify his facts before he wrote his Report. He has since undertaken to reflect corrections in his next report.

For the record, the Committee is indeed independent of politicians. It is true that it is not formally accountable to the public either, although its members individually are so accountable, four as civil servants and thirteen as media representatives, and I certainly consider myself to be a public servant.

The Committee most definitely does not (as Jim Addington alleges) 'represent the powerful government machine', nor the powerful media, but it does suggest a voluntary consensus between the two about reporting in very limited areas of national security. It saddens me, as someone with 'a more liberal attitude' (to use Stephen Dorril's words), when incomplete understanding of the DA-Notice system leads to misreporting about it and to setbacks in the campaign for press and broadcasting freedom.

Nick Wilkinson  
Secretary, Defence, Press and Broadcasting  
Advisory Committee

## NATIONAL COUNCIL SPEAKER

We have invited Nick Wilkinson to speak to a National Council meeting. The date, subject to confirmation, is 26 February, 2001 and the venue is UNISON, Mabledon Place. Please contact the National Office for final details if you are interested in attending the event.

## WITHOUT COMMENT

OUR reach is unmatched around the world. We're reaching people from the moment they wake up until they fall asleep. We give them their morning weather and traffic reports through our television outlets around the world. We enlighten and entertain them with such newspapers as the New York Post and the Times (of London) as they have breakfast, or take the train to work. We update their stock prices and give them the world's biggest news stories every day through such news channels as Fox or Sky News ... And when they get home in the evening, we're there to entertain them with compelling first-run entertainment on Fox ... Before going to bed, we give them the latest news, and then they crawl into bed with one of our best-selling novels from HarperCollins.

Rupert Murdoch, News Corporation 1999 Annual Report

# An appalling record

**Barry White on a new publication, Secrets, Spies and Whistleblowers**

THE British government has an appalling record of attempting to classify as 'top secret' mere political embarrassment. So wrote the spy author Nigel West in a letter to the Times on 5 June. He should know, for under his real name, Rupert Allason this former Tory MP for Torbay in Devon served as a senior intelligence officer.

His words appear in the preface to a new pamphlet 'Secrets, Spies and Whistleblowers' published by Liberty and Article 19 and launched at the Freedom Forum in London on 10 November.

Since taking office in May 1997 the Labour Government has spent thousands of pounds of our money pursuing more than a dozen individuals and publications in connection with allegations of incompetence or wrongdoing by the security and intelligence services. The pamphlet highlights the cases; David Shayler, Richard

Tomlinson, 'Martin Ingrams', Nigel Wyld, Liam Clarke, Tony Geraghty, Martin Bright, Julie-Ann Davies, Ed Moloney and James Steen, who are currently or have recently been subject to injunction and/or threats of imprisonment. They could also have added Annie Machon, partner of David Shayler, who also found herself under arrest during this time.

It also lists a raft of mechanisms invoked by successive UK governments to suppress information, obtain documents, force disclosure of sources and trace and punish those responsible for disclosure.

Finally the booklet lists a series of recommendations aimed at providing a better balance between freedom of expression and national security in the UK, compatible with international standards.

For more information or a copy of 'Secrets, Spies and Whistleblowers' call Ilana or Katherine on 020 7278 9292 or email [press@article19.org](mailto:press@article19.org). The full report is at [www.article19.org/docimages/791.htm](http://www.article19.org/docimages/791.htm).

# Weak and worthless

The government's controversial Freedom of Information legislation received final Commons approval on 27 November, as Free Press went to press. Far from creating legislation which would in the words of Tony Blair 'signal a new relationship between the government and the people' it has perpetuated the same old tired culture of secrecy that has been a prominent feature of the modern British state. Of course Blair was speaking in 1996 and it was Jack Straw (whose department snatched responsibility for the legislation from David Clarke) who in Cabinet remarked that freedom of information was something they only talked about when in opposition!

Up until its report stage in the Lords,

there was a feeling that a progressive alliance of peers could insert some backbone into the bill. The government had made minor improvements but it seemed there was now a majority in the Lords willing and able to put the government on the rack and force through major concessions. But leaping to their rescue came Lord Goodhart, the Lib-Dem's lead speaker on the bill. The government offered four minimal concessions, which no doubt they would have conceded anyway, had they 'gone to the wire'. But for Lord Goodhart and friends, the price was right and the government's bill was given a easy ride with the support of, yes you've got it, Lord Goodhart and the Lib-Dem peers!

Speaking at the end of the debate in the Lords, Lib-Dem Lord Tom McNally dismissed claims that they had 'blinked too early'. 'It is sometimes smart to know when to cash in your chips and we did it at the right time,' he explained, also adding that this was not a bill which the Liberal Democrats would have passed!

So that's all right then. For Sir Humphrey and friends, as well as the Millbank controllers – it's business as usual.

A full report on the implications of the new Freedom of Information Act (which comes into effect over the next five years) will appear in the next issue of *Free Press*.

Barry White

## White paper, crystal balls

### from front page

system are likely to be 'fought out in the Commons committees and the House of Lords' ('Great White Hope' 20 November), with the public on the sidelines.

If your reports are correct, then the White Paper on Communications due on 12 December shows how closely the government has listened to demands from the self-interested corporate media giants that seem so at home in the corridors of power. The government has, it seems, given up without much of a fight. It is allowing the demise of public service commitments across broadcasting, weakening the system of accountability in the media by destroying sector based regulation and creating the father of all regulators, Ofcom, and given the green light for a take-over frenzy across all the media. The outcome of all this will be to create a series of major commercial interests dominating broadcasting and the press, with the BBC the only significant, and increas-

ingly marginal, provider of anything resembling a public service media.

The DCMS, DTI and No 10, with but the faintest of gestures towards public consultation, have elegantly devised all of this. They have, in their consummate arrogance, refused to set up a properly resourced public inquiry into mass communications policy, so as to let the public have voice in this process. After all, unless there is some mistake here, it is the public who pay for and use these services, and it is public culture and democratic values which are at stake in questions of media control. Now is the time to take this out of the hands of the richly paid industry lobbyists and, for a time, away from Whitehall.

In the period after the White Paper, the government should establish a full public inquiry into mass communications policy with a brief to inform and consult the public because this issue is so central to the political and cultural well-being of society.

## Express titles sold to porn king

### from front page

the Star journalists. Plenty of pictures from Big Ones and Real Wives to fill the Star's pages.

This is probably one form of synergy that media analysts haven't considered before.

But this is a terribly sad moment for UK newspapers, especially for those with long memories who worked on the paper, or know its history.

Labour peer Lord Hollick wasn't the ideal custodian for the titles; he cut both budgets for promotion and journalists' jobs to boost profits. The combined editorial budget for the titles was £53 million (less than half the sum available for the Daily Mail), with £41 million going to the Express and Sunday Express. The paper under editor Rosie Boycott did, however, move away from the unstinting Tory line that marked it under previous owners and editors, but it is unlikely she will survive long under the new regime.

Its new owner has a reputation as a misogynist and bully, who allegedly neither respects nor admires journalists, and one of his first

### CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

WERE you puzzled by the attention the fuel protest convoy got? The agenda of papers like the Mail and Telegraph meant the truckers' views would be splashed over their pages. But the BBC Today programme carried full reports. The protest got wide coverage across the media.

The Morning Star (15 November) raised interesting questions about what merits a news report. Citing the Democracy Movement 'Stop the Eurostate' march in November (10,000 people according to the police) and a National Union of Students

rally, it asked, Why no coverage?

The BBC said it was not policy to report marches and rallies unless an 'incident' took place. The Star comments: "Does this mean that students marching to demand a reintroduction of education grants, an end to tuition fees and rejection of any plans to introduce top-up fees are wasting their time unless they trash a local outlet of a US fast-food chain?"

"Freedom of expression is meaningless if there is a conspiracy of silence operated by the media establishment, whether publicly or privately owned."

# Lies, damn lies and institutional racism

ROBIN RICHARDSON

ON TUESDAY 10 October, a few hours after falsehoods had begun to appear in certain newspapers about the Runnymede Trust's report *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, an anonymous voice called our office. "To show you," he said, "what I think of your report, I'm going to go out of my house right now, and I'm going to slit the throat of the first Paki I meet." As I think about this episode, and about the behaviour of various journalists in its background, I suggest it is useful to distinguish between five main forms of racism.

First, there is the racism of people who are mentally sick. Violent expressions of racism are a symptom of their illness, not its cause or core feature. Such racism is frightening and intimidating for those who receive it. It is also, however, relatively rare. Second, there is what is sometimes known as street racism – abuse, harassment and violence in public spaces. It is similar to the first kind in its impact, but its perpetrators are not ill and there are many more of them.

Third, there is the racism of what Home Office researchers have termed 'the perpetrator community'. The members of this group do not themselves engage in racist abuse or violence, but they give street racism their support through inaction and silence. They may be the parents, grandparents, elder brothers and sisters, girlfriends and neighbours of the people who, in that vile phrase, go Paki-bashing.

Fourth, there are opinion-leaders which similarly gives tacit support to street racism, but far more subtly and indirectly. They never meet the perpetrators of street racism face to face and would be indignant, even angry, at the suggestion that street racism is in any way their responsibility. But they express the same world-view as street racists, and use some of the same language – there are 'too many

10 NEWS

www.express.co.uk

THURSDAY OCTOBER 12 2000 DAILY EXPRESS

## Race report angers 'proud Briton' Straw

Government fury at criticisms on race and immigration

Straw launches scathing attack on 'Sun' article



immigrants' in this country, they ought to go 'back where they came from', those who are here should not criticise their 'hosts', the British are becoming 'strangers in their own country', and most attempts to prevent discrimination are 'politically correct nonsense'. It was out of this intellectual community that mischievous falsehoods about the Runnymede Trust's report were first published, written in language that was knowingly inflammatory.

Fifth, there is an intellectual community whose members do not share the world-view and rhetoric of the fourth group, but whose behaviour all too frequently reinforces it – and therefore reinforces street racism and the perpetrator community as well.

In this group I would include the journalists who on 10 October slavishly copied out the falsehoods in one newspaper without bothering to check the facts for themselves. They knew perfectly well that a press conference was scheduled for the following day. They had received a detailed press release and many relevant telephone numbers, and had access to the report itself. But virtually no one

bothered to discover whether the original mischievous story was correct and what our report had actually said. They simply repeated inaccurate and unfair quotations, and they added their own range of invented quotations for good measure.

The damage done by members of this fifth group, through negligence, carelessness and lack of professionalism, is arguably every bit as serious as the damage done by the fourth group. Their behaviour was a striking example of what Sir William Macpherson, in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report, called institutional racism. For they failed to provide 'a professional and appropriate service', to cite Macpherson's own words, to Britain's Asian and black communities.

In this failure, they helped to strengthen the forces in British society which act to the disadvantage of Asian and black people, and to weaken the forces committed to reducing discrimination and creating and sustaining race equality.

Specifically they helped to weaken the many measures in central, regional and local government currently under way to

implement the Macpherson recommendations.

There were three falsehoods in the coverage. Each was on its own serious. In combination, they were deadly and led to several further distortions. First, it was claimed that we want to drop the word British. Our report does recall the wholly obvious point that the word British cannot be used to describe all inhabitants of the British Isles, i.e. including the Republic of Ireland. This was twisted by the press into the absurd notion that the word British should no longer be used to describe the inhabitants of the United Kingdom. Second, it was claimed that we say in our report that the word British is racist. We do not say this, and it is extraordinary that so many journalists repeated this falsehood without bothering to find out what we in fact say.

Third, we were accused of advancing the absurd belief that the term 'Britain' itself should be dropped, and the term 'community of communities' should be introduced to replace it. Our concern rather is to picture the kind of nation Britain is becoming. The full term we use, by the way, is 'community of communities and citizens'.

Of course, there is a need for debate and dispute. We explicitly state this in the report. But we did not expect that newspapers across the whole spectrum of political opinion would dishonestly distort our arguments, and that they would give support and strength to street and institutional racism.

Robin Richardson was director of the Runnymede Trust, 1991-1996, and editor of the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 1999-2000. He writes here in a personal capacity and views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the Commission or the Trust. Further information about the report is available at [www.runnymedetrust.org/meb](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/meb). The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain is published by Profile Books and can be ordered by fax from 020 7404 3003.

## 'Journalists don't like being told about their responsibilities'

TIM GOPSILL

THE main author of the Runnymede trust report accused some newspapers of deliberately distorting their stories.

Professor Bikhu Parekh was speaking at an NUJ conference on race and the media just a week after the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain came out.

He said he had been sent 120 offensive and threatening letters and staff at the Runnymede Trust, which commissioned the report, had received abusive calls. "These were not reacting to the report but to the report of the report."

The conference was organised by the NUJ

Black Members Council, to debate how the handling of race in the media might have changed since the groundbreaking Macpherson Report into the killing of Stephen Lawrence.

Doreen Lawrence, mother of the murdered teenager, said the family were still subject to media hostility, particularly since they had been awarded compensation by the Metropolitan Police. Stories had accused them of just being after money.

"Journalists don't like being told about their responsibilities, but being a journalist does not mean you are not a citizen with responsibilities. It needs all of us to promote a

positive image of black people in the press."

Black journalists cannot be asked to represent all black people, any more than white journalists do, Guardian writer Gary Young told the conference in a discussion on national papers.

"If you are black and you do stories about race then you are a 'race journalist', but race is not a side issue. There are black people involved in all issues.

"Black people often ask me to take up an issue for them but I say, 'why me, just because I'm black'? If it is an arts story, talk to the arts editor!"

Gary Young, who is chair of the Guardian NUJ chapel, said there must be more black journalists, but the problem was that editors "hire people in their own image and there are no black editors.

"They hire people they hear about at dinner parties. We are not asking for access to dinner parties but for recruitment to be done in an open way."

Peter Victor, assistant editor of the Express said there was an assumption that black journalists must want to be radical. "I worked on The Times and someone said, 'you should be working for the Guardian'. Why?

# Auntie invades the classroom

**Rob Hamadi identifies causes for concern in BBC education plans**

ANY serious proposal to shut down the educational publishing industry and force schoolchildren to work from state-approved, state-funded texts would create a storm of protest in the media, uniting the libertarian right with the hard left, wouldn't it?

Apparently not. The BBC's plan to expand their remit to provide National Curriculum learning materials to schools, funded by the licence fee, has barely raised an eyebrow outside the trade press. This is despite protests from teacher, authors, publishers and academics.

Teachers claim that the BBC's consultation was inadequate. Many schools have complained about either not being aware of the proposals or the short time scale for consultation. At a Voice of the Listener and Viewer meeting on Monday 30 October the Daily Telegraph's Gillian Reynolds put these concerns to Michael Stevenson, Controller of BBC Factual and Learning. His reply, that the problem was in the education system not the BBC, smacked of arrogance.

Another concern is Stevenson's decision to abolish the Education Broadcasting Council, a politically neutral, comprehensive and strategic body which hitherto advised the BBC on its educational provision. There is no clear indication as to who or what will take over that role and how teachers will influence policy so that materials are produced which meet their needs.

So how do we get from here to a propagandist education system that would be the envy of any despot? Simple.

Given the financial pressures on schools, the availability of BBC material free of charge will, in practice, preclude alternative choice, and will lead to the collapse of the market for paid content. The important principles of pluralism and the freedom of teachers to choose materials best suited to their requirements depend on the existence of a competitive level playing field – which will no longer exist. The BBC will become the primary arbiter of how and what to teach. All this, remember, will be funded by the state through the licence fee.

In the longer term this will result in the exclusion of private sector companies from

the market and eventually closure of some. Setting aside the damage this will do to Mr Blair's aim of Britain becoming a leader in the new information industries, there will be a major impact on jobs. Writers, designers and printers planning to reskill and move over to the world of electronic publishing will find far fewer jobs awaiting them.

The damage has already begun. The British Educational Suppliers Association reports that three member companies, all small businesses with turnover under £1m, were negotiating to finance expansion into this market only to have the venture capital firms walk away the moment the BBC plans were announced saying 'Sorry, but you can't possibly compete.'

The BBC will publish the results of its consultation on December 5. The Communications White Paper is set to be published on December 12. The house rises on the 14th. In reply to a PQ from Steve Pound MP, junior minister Janet Anderson promised the Secretary of State would consult on the BBC's proposals. Whether Parliament will have a proper opportunity for scrutiny remains to be seen.

# Media diversity in the rainbow nation

**Jonathan Hardy reports on a recent conference on South African media**

IF YOU visit Cape Town, go to the District Six Museum. Collected up from the bulldozers which flattened this loud, poor, area of the city, the museum charts the vibrant mix of cultures and ethnicities which proved such an affront to apartheid.

I went to the city to share the Campaign's experience at an event on Information, Power and Democracy organised by IDASA, one of South Africa's leading NGOs. Here's some of the things I learned.

Post-Apartheid, there is significant and growing concentration in the press. Six groups own 17 daily papers and 11 weeklies, leaving only five newspapers in other hands. Tony O'Reilly's purchase of the Argus's 14 titles makes Independent Newspapers the largest group. The Competition Authority appears inactive, for instance, turning down an attempt to deconcentrate the Cape Town newspaper market which O'Reilly now dominates.

Black editors run about half of the country's major titles. There were none in 1994. But as journalist Ferial Haffajee puts it, 'black operational control is only nascent'. Advertising spending remains heavily

targeted at the affluent white minority, making it difficult to fund new commercial and community media ventures aimed at Black South Africans. This compounds the deeper-rooted and pervasive media 'disfranchisement' which persists for poor Blacks in a country with unemployment levels reaching 49 per cent in the Eastern Cape and 46 per cent in the Northern Province.

The sea of white faces along the magazine shelves is powerful enough testimony to the highly unequal and racialised allocation of advertising revenue.

So the SA Government's announcement of a Media Development Agency which will provide start-up funding for new media initiatives is most welcome. In the mid 1980s the cultural industries strategy of the GLC briefly realised on a local scale a key element of CPBF policy, the creation of a Media Enterprise Board. The MEB would, as our 1996 Media Manifesto put it: "provide start up and long term support for new media initiatives in all fields of the media [especially] media which served communities of interest not served by the mass media."

Perhaps the lessons we can learn from South Africa can help us put this essential measure back on the political agenda in Britain.

After two days of debate we hammered out the Spin Street Declaration, an irresistible title for an NGO based just there, close to the candy-white, stucco Parliament building.

The Declaration included the following statements on democratising media:

- Democracy requires a media that is free from state or corporate control.
- Throughout the 20th century it has been recognised that corporate control can pose as great a threat to media democracy as state control.
- The state has a duty to create conditions for a diverse and democratic media. One such measure is anti-monopoly controls. Another measure to correct structural inequalities in the market is to encourage and support new media.
- The initiative by the Government Communications and Information Systems (GCIS) should therefore be encouraged and supported.
- Dependence on advertising revenue that is highly unequal and racialised in South Africa presents a huge barrier to successful new entrants.

You can find out all about the event and read various speakers contributions at [www.pims.org.za/democracy2000/](http://www.pims.org.za/democracy2000/).



Robert McChesney, Free Press editor Granville Williams and CPBF chair Julian Petley at the meeting; pictures Andrew Wiard

# McChesney: read it here first

THE US media critic Robert McChesney spoke to a packed meeting organised by the CPBF on 14 November. We plan to produce a video of his talk, and to whet your appetite we print below extracts from 'Control the news and you control the views,' which appeared in The Independent's Podium section.

"We devour media at a staggering rate. The average American spent almost 12 hours a day with the various forms of media in 1999. We are also in the midst of an unprecedented technological revolution – based around digital technologies, typified by the internet – that looks to weave media and electronic communication into nearly every waking moment of our lives.

In conventional parlance, these developments are presented as benign; they are all about liberating individuals, investors and consumers from the constraints of time and space, while offering a cornucopia of exciting new options and possibilities.

That, however, is a superficial and misleading perspective on what is happening. Indeed, when one lifts the hood, so to speak, to see what is driving the media revolution, a very different picture emerges. It is instead a world where highly concentrated corporate power is pulling the strings.

Yet the issue of the media barely registers. The structures of our media, the concentration of their ownership, the role they play in shaping the lives of our children, in commercialising our culture and in warping our elections has been off-limits. When we examine the reality of the media in the year 2000, however, it becomes clear that this circumstance must shift.

All in all two dozen or so firms control the overwhelming percentage of movies, TV

shows, cable systems, cable channels, TV stations, radio stations, books, magazines, newspapers, billboards, music and TV networks that constitute the media culture of our lives. It is an extraordinary degree of economic and social power in a very few hands.

It has not always been this way. Much of this concentration has taken place in the past few decades, as technology and market imperatives made concentration and conglomeration far more attractive and necessary. Today it is impossible for the small independent firm to be anything but a marginal player in the industries mentioned above. In America the flames of media concentration were fanned by government 'deregulation', most notably the Telecommunications Act 1996.

Congressional approval of the Act, after only a stilted and disengaged debate, was a historic turning point in media policy-making in the United States, as it permitted a consolidation of media and communication that had previously been unthinkable.

Such concentration of media ownership is clearly negative by any standard that cherishes free speech and diversity in the marketplace of ideas. As massive media corporations commercially carpet-bomb society, their ability to create material with editorial and creative integrity declines.

It is not that the individuals who run these systems are bad people, but they do destructive things by rationally following the market cues they are given. We have a media system set up to serve private investors, first and foremost, not public citizens."

## SCHILLER'S LEGACY

Herb Schiller, the influential US media critic died in January this year. Schiller's last work, *Living In The Number One Country*, has just been published by Seven Stories Press. His other works include *Mass Communications and American Empire* and *Culture Inc*. The video of Bob McChesney's talk will also contain an interview with him on Herb Schiller's life, and the importance of his work.



# First steps towards a media commission

DURING the run-up to the publication of the White Paper on Communications, the Campaign has become increasingly concerned that those on whom the media ultimately depend for their very existence, namely viewers, listeners and readers, have to all intents and purposes been left out of the consultation process on the media's future.

On at least two occasions during the past year we have asked Chris Smith to set up a Royal Commission or Public Inquiry on the Media, but to no avail. Regretfully we have come to the conclusion that the DCMS and the DTI would prefer the future shape of our media to be decided largely by the

corporate media giants themselves.

That is why, in conjunction with our sister organisation Presswise, we have decided to investigate the feasibility of establishing an independent Commission of Inquiry into media freedom and responsibility within the changing media landscape. This would sit during the run-up to and passage of the Communications Bill which will emerge from the White Paper, and would very clearly be intended to influence the shape of the resultant Communications Act.

To this end we have established an advisory panel, whose members include Sir Louis Blom-Cooper QC, Michael Grade, and

Julian Petley and Granville Williams from the Campaign. Its job is to determine whether such a Commission is a practical possibility, outline its terms of reference, estimate its cost, and decide upon a suitable Chair. After the last meeting, on November 21, it was decided to approach three extremely high-profile potential chairs, to fix the budget at £1m., and to seek funding from a number of suitable organisations and individuals.

If the advisory panel decides that the Commission is indeed a practical possibility, then this will turn out to be one of the most significant activities in which the Campaign has ever been involved. Watch this space.

## OBITUARY

### Geoff Sheridan 1944–2000

GEOFF Sheridan has died of cancer just short of his 56th birthday. A socialist and a journalist, he was a key figure in the early days of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

Geoff began his journalistic career writing for the university student newspaper at Balliol College. He subsequently wrote for both the tabloids and the Guardian in the early 1970s.

Geoff was also an activist, campaigning as a member of the NUJ freelance branch and as a socialist linked to the left wing

Socialist Challenge. While working there, he broke the story about the then British Leyland boss, Sir Richard Dobson, making racist remarks at an after dinner speech. Dobson was forced to resign.

Geoff used his skill with words to tell people's stories and to fight for their rights. He rejected sectarian politics and was quick to seize the chance to set up broad-based campaigns. For example, when the Sun greeted the arrival of the Ugandan Asians at Gatwick with a barrage of bigotry, he set up the Campaign Against Racism in the Media.

Geoff also helped found the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. He was, by general consensus, the best ever editor of its bulletin, Free Press. He also co-edited its famous publication on the pros and cons of

a labour movement daily newspaper; and was for a couple of years its National Treasurer, helping to secure funding for two staff from the Greater London Council.

Geoff went on to work for the Labour Party in the 1980s, and as business manager helped to launch its magazine, New Socialist. It made a huge impact. New Socialist out-sold every magazine on the left, including New Statesman, and Geoff was immensely proud that it even made a profit.

For the last decade Geoff worked in local government fighting against privatisation of council services. Geoff was warm, compassionate and a wonderful story-teller. Without him, it is doubtful the CPBF would be as influential as it is today.

**Davy Jones**

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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# Campaign News from the CPBF



Welcome to issue 119...

## 'The Communications Revolution - Who Benefits?'

**CPBF conference on the communications white paper.** If the government's radical proposals for the future regulation of electronic and print media reach the statute book as they stand they could lead to a take-over frenzy by the media superpowers. We have invited Chris Smith to present the white paper. Then follows debates in workshops on the major issues; examination of global experiences and hammering out alternative strategies to defend diversity, accountability and public service broadcasting. **Saturday 24 February 2001, 9.45-17.30 hrs, Britannia Street Conference and Meeting Centre, (NATFHE) 27 Britannia Street, London WC1X 9JP. (Nearest station: Kings Cross/Thameslink.)** Details and registration see the current issue of Free Press; the Campaign web site at [www.cpbf.org.uk](http://www.cpbf.org.uk) or email CPBF at [freepress@cpbf.org.uk](mailto:freepress@cpbf.org.uk)

## Invisible minorities in broadcasting (also see Tim Gopsill's report on the NUJ Race and Media Conference in the current issue of Free Press)

The first ever broadcasting survey of the TV, radio and new media industries shows ethnic minorities very much in the minority. Overall 6.4 per cent of audio-visual employees and 5.6 per cent of freelancers are from minorities, with the highest number working in radio broadcasting and lighting. The ratio is very low in certain behind the scenes sectors such as post-production and special physical effects. Although these figures compare reasonably with the total of 6 per cent of the ethnic minorities among the working population, the situation is poor in London where just over half the entire industry is located. Just 8.7 per cent of employees and 7.7 per cent of freelancers are ethnic in spite of the fact that nearly 25 per cent of the population of working age in London is of ethnic origin. Bectu general secretary Roger Bolton described the figures as 'no better than the Metropolitan Police in its betrayal of minorities'. Disabled people make up 20 per cent of the working population and 12 per cent of all people in employment, less than one per cent of all employees and 0.4 per cent of all freelancers were disabled. In advertising production and cable and satellite companies there were no disabled employees, while radio, facilities and broadcast TV employed the highest number.

For copies of the report, contact Neil Flintham on 020 7534 5311 or [neil@skillset.org](mailto:neil@skillset.org)

Source **Broadcast 24 November 2000.**

## Smiths face anger over distribution changes

Main distributors WH Smith News, has been sacked by Associated Newspapers, publishers of the Daily Mail. Associated gave Smiths six months' notice on its contract with a turnover of about £100 million in late November. Loss of the contract could cut some £7 million from Smith's pre-tax profit. When Smith's launched their plan for revamping magazine distribution in October, some newspaper publishers were alarmed that they could lead to locations having few or no deliveries, more especially in the rural areas. The Department of Trade and Industry is currently observing the situation and will consider any evidence that suggests abuse of a dominant position or anti-competitive behaviour. Meantime it is reported that News International is considering developing its own Midland based distribution company.

## Finally...

A wonderful seasonal gift - **John Nichols and Robert W McChesney's *It's the Media, Stupid* £6.99** including postage and packing from CPBF national office (cheques payable to the CPBF).

