

## COMMUNICATIONS WHITE PAPER

THE response to the Communications White paper published in December was curiously muted. One reason, we suspect, is that there are so many complex issues covering regulation, ownership and access in the document that the average citizen's eyes will just glaze over as the topic is discussed.

It's an understandable, but unfortunate, response because the policy proposals, although in some areas left vague, will have a major impact across all the media once they are implemented.

Consider ownership, for example. The green light has been given for the consolidation of the old 15 franchise system into a single ITV company with Granada in pole position to run it. Commercial radio too is likely to consolidate – and more quickly than ITV. The Daily Mail and General Trust through its regional newspaper group already has effective regional monopolies over local newspapers in the East Midlands and the South West. It is likely to consolidate its hold over radio stations through its stake in GWR in the South West. And the rule changes could enable Mr Murdoch to acquire terrestrial television stations if he wants.

OFCOM, the mega-regulatory body that is proposed also gets a nod of approval. Interestingly, The Economist thinks it imitates the US model of the Federal Communications Commission which the magazine praises for its "understanding of the effects of technology-driven convergence and its ability to join up the dots of the big picture." Fine, if you are a broadcaster or net merchant who wants to expand, but what about voices raising concerns about pluralism and diversity? How will they be heard?

There are lots of issues in the White Paper that need much more consideration. We have already expressed our unhappiness at the ridiculously short timescale for consultation – responses have to be in by 12 February. We are preparing our response and some of our recommendations are in this issue of Free Press. For the full document visit our website after mid-February.

However the vital task for the CPBF now is to kick-start a debate in the trade unions and a wide range of other organisations on the policy implications of the White Paper. Our conference on 24 February is a start. Please do all you can to support it.

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

# NOT SO AWFUL, NOT SO CLEAR

**Maurice Frankel** assesses the value of the new  
**Freedom of Information Act**

THE Freedom of Information Act is now on the statute book. It will probably come into force for central government in April 2002, and be phased in for other bodies over the following 3-4 years. So what is the final balance sheet? How useful will this much criticised measure actually be?

The Act has some positive features. Its scope is wide. It applies across the whole of the public sector: to central and local government; schools and universities; quangos; the police and armed services, publicly owned companies like BNFL; and the NHS, down to the individual GP. A few bodies, like the security services and the courts, are outside its scope. But even private bodies with public functions, or who are carrying out an authority's functions under contract, could individually be brought under the Act.

The right of access will apply retrospectively, to information obtained in the past. People will be able to apply for old government files, waiting their 30 year release date in the Public Record Office.

Fees for information are likely to be modest. Authorities will be able to charge requesters no more than 10% of their costs of locating and retrieving the information – but cannot take account of the time spent assessing documents against the Act's

exemptions, usually the most expensive element. But if the costs come to more than £500, they won't have to supply the information at all.

Some of the original bill's truly awful features have been dropped. Authorities will not now be able to insist on knowing why applicants want information, or release information on condition it is not passed to journalists. The power to create instant new exemptions to block difficult requests has gone. But the Act still has other failings, particularly the exemptions.

Some are extremely broad: most information supplied in confidence to public authorities will be exempt, thus protecting lobbying activities from scrutiny.

Other exemptions apply only if disclosure would 'prejudice' particular interests such as defence, international relations or commercial interests, and even then allow disclosure on public interest grounds. These provide a reasonable chance of access.

But in several crucial areas, entire classes of information are exempt. Anything relating to the formulation of government policy, including the background information on which decisions are based, falls into this category. Here the Act makes it easier to withhold information than the current open government code, introduced by the Conservatives in 1994. Other class exemp-

■ **continued page 2**

## 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

## THE MEDIA AND THE NEXT ELECTION

TWO stories in the press suggest the eagerness of New Labour to square the media (or at least the sections they think are winnable – forget the Mail and Telegraph groups) takes priority over policy and principles in the run-up to the next election.

Richard Desmond, the porn baron who now owns the Daily and Sunday Express, was a welcome visitor at No 10 shortly before Christmas. The acquisition of the newspaper group may have been one way to acquire the respectability he appears to crave; it has certainly opened doors for him Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell. The message Desmond got from Blair was how much he valued the support of the Express newspapers.

The following week, however The Guardian (22 December) revealed that Desmond is the owner of websites involved in hard core pornography promising live heterosexual sex, live lesbian sex and more on the fantasy.121.com site. The Guardian pointed out that the sale of the newspapers, with a combined circulation of 1.6 million, had yet to be referred to the Trade Secretary, Stephen Byers. The paper argued that there was no reason to block the merger on competition grounds, but cited the precedent of public interest. When David Sullivan, publisher of the Daily Sport and owner of a chain of sex shops, wanted to take over the Bristol Evening Post, the then Monopolies and Mergers Commission blocked his ownership on the grounds that it "could harm the standing of the paper in the community".

The Guardian urged Stephen Byers to refer the sale of the Express papers to the Competition Commission, but don't expect any action on this as the months tick off to a spring election.

The other story was the report in Sunday Business (6 January) that Tony Blair had given an assurance to "a very key figure in the media whose opposition to the single currency is well known" that he would not use the period after an election victory to force through a referendum on the single currency. The figure was Rupert Murdoch.

It is disturbing that, instead of the five tests, which are endlessly reiterated, for Britain to join the Euro, it comes down to bartering with a media baron to win his papers' support at the next election

## Commercial lobby against BBC's two new channels for children

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

THE first muted protests began at the Edinburgh TV festival when BBC Director-General Greg Dyke announced his plans for a raft of new digital channels, paid for out of the licence fee. The channels will launch this summer on BBC 3 and 4, free-to-air digital channels for customers with digital access. They will run programmes for children during the day, and BBC 3 will focus on the youth market, BBC 4 on arts and culture, in the evening.

Now several commercial broadcasters are lobbying fiercely to block the launch of the two kids' channels into what is already a competitive and lucrative market.

The first channel, aimed at pre-school children, is promising to screen at least 90% UK output, while the second for older children, will show 78%. The pre-school service, expected to be launched in July, will feature Teletubbies, Tweenies, Postman Pat and Fireman Sam, as well as new programmes based on storytelling, music, puzzles and natural history. The second service, to be launched shortly afterwards, will have a twice-daily topical Newsround programme, a daily Blue Peter, interactive elements, and the best of programmes from the BBC archives such as The Tales of Narnia.

These will compete against Disney Television UK, Fox Kids Network and Nickelodeon, all respectively part of the three giant global media groups, Disney, News Corporation and Viacom. They have a dominant stake in the multi-million pound business of children's programmes and advertising, as well as the proceeds generated from spin-off products such as toys, books,

games and other merchandising. There are other channels providing children's programming, and the protest against the BBC initiative raises some important issues about the future of one important aspect of public service broadcasting.

It's also something which Media Secretary, Chris Smith, will have to make his mind up about soon. Commercial broadcasters think that he should block the two channels. Paul Robinson, Managing Director of Disney's UK operations argues, "It is not acceptable to siphon off part of the licence fee into new channels when the market is already providing a more than adequate range."

The point, however, is that much of programming on the commercial channels is American. Nothing wrong with that, but if the argument is about choice that surely means having channels dedicated more to home-grown British programmes, and not requiring subscription fees, or be clustered around advertising and sponsorship for a range of products targeted at kids. In other words, a space where children can watch TV without being under incessant commercial bombardment.

The classic public service broadcasting function of information, education and entertainment applies to children. The BBC has a role to provide a range of factual, arts, science, drama and animation programmes which have been created in the UK specially for children, and not imported.

Let's hope Chris Smith sees the action by the commercial broadcasters for what it is – an attempt to prevent the BBC stepping on the commercial toes of some very powerful global media players.

## Freedom of Information Act

from page 1

tions apply to safety inspectors' reports; information obtained during police investigations and information whose disclosure authorities claim would 'prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs'. There won't be total secrecy in these areas, because the Act's public interest test will still apply.

But any order which the Information Commissioner makes against a government department on public interest grounds can be vetoed by ministers.

So the value of the Act will depend on two so far unpredictable questions. How bold will Elizabeth France, the first

Commissioner, be in asserting that disclosure is in the public interest? And how willing will ministers be to accept her rulings, without exercising their veto? If the Commissioner is robust, and ministers are fearful of being seen to challenge her authority, the Act could work well. But if ministers feel the Commissioner is pushing too hard, the veto could cut the ground from under the public's new right of access.

Outside central government, the Act should make a greater impact. Bodies like local authorities will have no veto, so the new law is likely to bite harder on their files than on Whitehall's.

Maurice Frankel is director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information.

## PRODUCT PLACEMENT

"Only five years ago, people were hiding. They thought what they did was wrong and that the public was against it. They found out that the public is actually for it. The production people are for it. The companies are for it. There is really only a very small segment of people who are opposed to product placement." Dean Ayers Director of Entertainment Marketing, Anheuser-Busch

How far do have to go to make people believe that a film or soap opera takes place in the 'real' world? US producer for a CBS network soap, Stephen Strohnm, defends the 350 brand names in his production. "If people are going to believe they are inside a Canadian shopping mall, they're not going to believe it unless there are real companies and real brand names around," he argues.

According to Alex Abramovich, in an informative piece in the American online magazine Feed (www.feedmag.com), a whole swath of US media companies employ product placement or production resources executives to consult with hundreds of companies seeking to place their brands in pictures.

It also works the other way. Companies look at scripts to decide whether they meet their placement guidelines, and may suggest improvements or modifications. Which brings us to the new film Cast Away starring Tom Hanks, who plays a FedEx worker washed up on a desert island and obeys company rules not to open the packages washed up with him until his plight is desperate.

Cast Away received no money from FedEx. Instead the screenwriter, William Broyles, worked with FedEx "managing director of global management" Gail Christensen on the script for two years. "As we stepped back and looked (at the script) we thought it's not product placement, we're a character in this movie. It's not just a FedEx product on the screen. It transcends product placement," she says.

The economics of filmmaking mean that more and more projects depend on funds from product placement. This in turn eliminates scripts which don't centre on a time period when the corporate brands and logos existed.

There's a kind of insidious market censorship going on here. Cast Away may be product placement gone crazy, but it demonstrates how cross-merchandising, synergistic promotions and million-dollar placement deals now dominate the Hollywood production process.

## TIGHT FISTED HOLLICK

People used to complain about how mean Lord Hollick was when he still had the Express titles. There was precious little



Cast Away, starring Tom Hanks and FedEx

money to promote the papers, and budgets were carefully watched.

Now the same habit seems to have been transferred to Channel 5. The two shareholders of the company are the media group RTL, the broadcasting arm of Vivendi Universal, which has a 65% stake, and Lord Hollick's United Business Media with 35%.

The two sides ended up in court before Christmas after attempts by United to prevent Channel 5 buying rights to a package of Warner Brothers movies led to acrimony. The source of the dispute is the plan to increase C5's annual programme budget from £120 to £180 million a year, and the Warner Brothers deal was worth £10 million.

United refused to back the investment, but Channel 5 chairman, Remy Sautter, argued this was against the company interest and carried the motion to proceed. United's action also frustrates attempts to move Channel 5 more into the mainstream and away from the reliance on cheap imports and late-night soft porn.

The time is approaching when Lord Hollick's media interests will shrink even more – RTI wants to purchase his stake in Channel 5, worth around £350 million.

## AOL-TIME WARNER

On 11 January 2001, a year and a day after the announcement that Time Warner, the world's largest media group and the ISP with over 20 million US subscribers, AOL, planned to merge, it's finally happened.

But things look rather different one year on. A year ago Time Warner Chief Executive, Gerald Levin, was confident that the merger raised no regulatory problems. Indeed, soon after, the announcement was made that the

new group planned to take over the UK music group, EMI.

However, a gruelling year later, the EMI takeover has been blocked by Mario Monti, the EU Competition Commissioner, because it would have given the group a dominant position in the music industry. Also the company had to sever its AOL links with Bertelsmann in Germany and Vivendi Universal in France.

Two US regulatory bodies have examined the implications of the merger. First, the Federal Trade Commission passed the merger on 14 December 2000, after Time Warner agreed to open up its cable lines to internet service providers that compete with AOL. The Federal Communications Commission took much longer to review the transaction than the company had anticipated. It too imposed conditions, requiring the company to open up its popular instant-messaging system to three rivals.

The result is a company which in the US will have the largest share of internet service providers (46%), entertainment (23%), consumer magazines (39%) and the second largest in cable (19%). AT&T is the largest cable company with 22%.

The deal, when first announced, was worth \$165 billion but has since dropped in value to \$105 billion.

Allan Sloan commented in The Washington Post, 16 January, "So this isn't a merger. It's a takeover by the incredibly prescient – or incredibly lucky – people at America Online. In return for shares that, absent this deal, would probably be trading roughly at the level of whale droppings, AOL gets to own some of the most valuable media properties on the face of the planet."

## Auntie

IN THE last issue (119) under the heading 'Auntie invades the classroom' by Rob Hamadi, it has been pointed out that in addition to being a Campaign supporter, Rob is also the Head of Communications to the Publishers Association.

## HEAR ALL ABOUT US!

You can now receive Free Press on tape. Just contact the national office and we will do the rest.

# Mail to protesters: We're not racist, you've just misinterpreted our stories

TAMMY SPEERS

WHEN the Daily Mail led with the headline '1 million refugees are on their way here' (7 December 2000) once again they demonstrated their commitment to making asylum seekers the most vilified group in the UK.

The article was just another in its "drip-drip" anti-refugee campaign. However it prompted an overwhelming response from exasperated supporters of refugees and asylum seekers.

The article concerned a letter in the Law Society Gazette from a solicitor complaining, amongst other things, about the numbers of asylum seekers and their 'stench'. As a result of the letter he was dismissed from his London firm, something the Mail includes, alongside seven paragraphs of his original letter.

The Refugee Council, the Welsh Refugee Council and Student Action for Refugees (STAR) took action, asking supporters to write to the Daily Mail and the PCC.

Letters to the Mail's editor highlighted the misleading headline, along with the inclusion of so much of the solicitor's offensive and inaccurate letter.

Letters to the PCC made formal complaints about the headline and the language pandering to prejudice and ignorance.

Faxes were not responded to but Robin Esser, Executive Managing Editor of the Daily Mail, did respond to a written letter. He stated that 'it is possible you have misinterpreted our news story as some form of editorial endorsement of the extreme views of this person ...

our report was thorough and meticulous.'

The article contains no 'report', only a rehash of an article found in the Guardian two days earlier and the letter itself. Esser ends 'The Mail is not a racist paper, nor is it against the granting of asylum to genuine refugees.'

On 1 January the Mail again demonstrated its lack of racism against refugees when it dedicated two pages to Michael Heseltine's views that there were 'too many' refugees in the UK. He also tells us he too is not racist. Research from Oxfam finds this focus on numbers of asylum seekers is a constant discourse when reporting refugees. Journalists often use the numbers of asylum seekers coming the UK as a reason not to grant refuge.

When journalists write in-depth pieces they fail to report why people are seeking refuge in Britain and instead papers compare the amount of benefits European countries provide. The Sun did travel to Romania, but only to beg for money, in response to the so-called "Gypsy invasion" of the London tube.

The Guardian sent a journalist pretending to be a refugee to get inside the Red Cross Calais waiting camp, but instead of hearing why people felt forced to leave their countries the reporter wrote about the long wait they all had to endure in France.

Tammy Speers is the Media Officer for the Asylum Seekers and Refugees Media Working Group based at the School of Journalism, Cardiff University

## REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND THE MEDIA

THE PressWise RAM project organised a forum on 1 February at the Abbey Community Centre, Great Smith Street, London. The forum had five one-hour sessions examining the ethical, journalistic and social issues raised by media coverage of asylum-seekers and refugees.

The sessions addressed the questions: **WHO** sets the tone of the debate? Does the media lead or follow pundits, politicians or public opinion?

**WHAT** can stop us? The role of the regulators

in public debate on controversial issues **WHEN** will it end? Will it take a major tragedy to end the damage caused by the 'new racism' of hostility to refugees? **WHERE** do we fit in? Refugees and asylum-seekers on the impact of media coverage on their lives.

**WHY** do sensational stories appear? The conflicting priorities of journalists and press officers

■ Presswise can be contacted at 0117 941 5889 or email ram@presswise.org.uk

# A tale of two watchdogs

JULIAN PETLEY REVIEWS AN IMPORTANT NEW BOOK ON PRESS REGULATION

*Regulating the Press*  
Tom O'Malley and Clive Soley; Pluto Press; £15.99

REGULATING the Press is both a history of the Press Council and Press Complaints Commission and an analysis of the issues involved in press regulation. As rich in historical details as it is lucid in its arguments, it succeeds admirably on both counts.

The General Council of the Press (as it was then called) was established by the newspaper industry in 1953 as an extremely belated response to one of the main recommendations of the 1947-9 Royal Commission on the Press. Equally grudging were the minor changes which it made to its procedures and composition in 1963 – when it changed its name to the Press Council – after being criticised for its ineffectiveness by a second Royal Commission. In 1991, amidst widespread public and parliamentary disquiet at plummeting press standards, it was replaced by the Press Complaints Commission.

However, as Tom O'Malley, who wrote the book's chapters on the history of press self-regulation, points out, the story of the Council and its successor is best viewed as a 'continuous history, with each reform producing some changes in constitution or procedures, but with the central features of self-regulation remaining intact, most notably the dominance of the proprietors in the organisation and the absence of any effective method of enforcing its rulings'.

## And for the rest of us?

JUST before Christmas the court of appeal made a landmark ruling that a right of privacy exists in English law. The decision came about when the court gave the all clear for Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas to sue Hello! magazine for publishing 'surreptitious' photographs of their New York wedding.

The couple had signed a £1 million deal with OK! magazine, but their rivals scooped the event with pics taken by a hidden camera.

For the first time judges have used the 1998 Human Rights Act which covers a privacy right and freedom of expression. Giving his judgement, Lord Justice Sedley said that: 'What a concept of privacy does,

The chapters on the Council itself contain a wealth of information illustrating just what an awful organisation it was. For example, until 1961 its modus operandi was so casual and amateurish that it kept no proper records of the complaints it received, nor of any actions taken as a result. Until as late as 1989 it stubbornly refused to produce even a code of journalistic practice, preferring instead to fall back on mystical mumbo-jumbo, as in the words of its chair in 1965, Lord Devlin: 'the British mind has always been allergic to written codes. It prefers to work by means of a general understanding about the sort of conduct that is to be expected'. Its composition was overwhelmingly white and middle class, and of its 247 members throughout its life a mere 28 were female.

Given all this, it's probably fair to assume that when the Council's rebarbative chair Lord Shawcross delivered his Olympian judgement in 1975 that 'most complaints whilst naturally of great importance to those who make them (and we deal with them on that basis) are usually of little significance from the point of view of public interest', he was expressing a view widely held within the organisation as a whole.

Paradoxically, however, by the end of the book one is almost nostalgic for the Press Council era! There are a number of different reasons for this.

Firstly, from the early 1980s to 1994 Labour was considerably less enthusiastic about press self-regulation than it is today,

even supporting the right of reply.

Secondly, the Press Complaints Commission, which is significantly smaller than the Press Council, is even more exclusive and industry-dominated than its predecessor; as headed by the wily and well-connected Lord Wakeham one of its chief functions is high-level public relations: ensuring that the relationship between politicians and the press remains as unruffled – and, of course, as advantageous to the latter – as possible.

Thirdly, the Council was eventually pushed, however unwillingly, into a remit which went beyond that of merely handling complaints, whilst that is all the PCC does (apart from carrying out its PR role), although very much in the manner of a private company's customer complaints department as opposed to that of a genuinely independent body such as the Broadcasting Standards Commission.

Which brings us on to the fourth and final point, namely that the PCC adjudicates upon and upholds even fewer complaints than its predecessor (which, unlike the PCC, would at least entertain third-party complaints). Between 1975 and 1990 the percentage of cases dealt with but not adjudicated by the Council never fell below 83%; of those adjudicated, never more than 15.6% were actually upheld in any one year, with the figure more usually being in the 4-6% range. However, between 1995 and 1998, the percentage of cases not adjudicated by the more complaints-oriented PCC never fell below 96%; in the same period, of those

Between 1995 and 1998 the percentage of cases not adjudicated by the PCC never fell below 96%

## Rags rage at ruling

THE decision of Judge Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss to grant life anonymity to Robert Thompson and Jon Venables – the killers of young James Bulger, has shown sections of the British press at their worse. The reason, as she made very clear, was that the two stand in grave danger of their lives if their new identities are revealed after they are released.

Hiding behind cries of press freedom and the right to know, the Sun, Daily Mail and The Times went on the offensive. The Sun ran a front-page story headlined 'Bulger killer up for Diana award' and launched into a five page expose of the two boys' lives since they were sentenced eight years ago. In

complaints which managed to reach adjudication, between only 0.98% and 1.56% were actually upheld!

The evidence presented by O'Malley and Soley leads to the inescapable conclusion that the PCC, like its predecessor, is a variant on Dickens' famous Circumlocution Office: a system for discouraging, filtering out and redirecting complaints, and not one for actually addressing, still less remedying, them. As O'Malley concludes: 'self-regulation became an elaborate mechanism designed to avoid systematic consideration of cases brought by the public'.

Given the sorry history of self-regulation outlined here, O'Malley and Soley conclude that there is a pressing need 'to create an effective statutory framework that balances the right of journalists to investigate and publish, with the reasonable expectation of citizens that the press should act fairly and responsibly'. To this entirely reasonable end they propose both a statutory right to correction of factual inaccuracies and the enactment of laws that would promote greater press freedom in matters which are currently hedged around with restrictions, such as libel, official secrecy, contempt of court, confidentiality and so on. The explicit model which they have in mind is contained in the Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill (reprinted as an appendix), which Clive Soley presented in 1992 and which numbered one Chris Smith amongst its enthusiastic sponsors.

Clive Soley concludes his section of the book by arguing that: 'by the end of the 1990s, there had developed an urgent need for a radical overhaul of the system of self-regulation of the press in the UK'. Perhaps he'd like to remind Chris of that.

reality most of the redtops don't care about press freedom. Their only concern is boosting their circulations and profits.

The newspapers concerned may appeal. In addition the judgement only applies to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are not covered. It's also possible that the new identities could be revealed on the Internet.

As Roy Greenslade pointed out in The Guardian, 11 January: "Editors bleating about it (the judgement) being an affront to the principle of press freedom should think again. In the light of their own past crimes, did they not bring this on themselves?"

# Workers force out Czech TV chief

CZECH TV chief Jiri Hodac resigned on 11 January, ahead of a move by the Czech parliament to dismiss him and after a campaign by striking journalists which attracted massive union and public support. Next day 50,000 protesters gathered in Prague to applaud the decision and call for an end to political meddling in state media.

Hodac's appointment in December was brought about by a deal involving the minority government and the opposition. Journalists saw his appointment as a threat to press freedom and an attack on their political independence. They started occupying the studios on Christmas Eve and supporting demonstrations were the biggest seen in Prague since the collapse of the former communist regime.

However the resignation failed to resolve

the three-week crisis. Protesting journalists also want the removal of three other television executives appointed by Hodac.

The crisis led to an emergency session of parliament. The government wants parliament to enlarge the television council, which appointed Mr Hodac, from 9 to 14, and legislate for its members to be nominated by non-government bodies and approved by parliament. This is one of the journalists' key demands. However it will take several weeks to enact the amendment.

The International Federation of Journalists General Secretary, Aidan White, said: "The message from Prague is that politicians must not play games with public broadcasting. The strike victory will be an inspiration to journalists to redouble their efforts to defend public service broadcasting.

# Turkey's media defy clampdown bid

ATTEMPTS by the Turkish government to muzzle the media and intensify repression against journalists have failed to stop news getting out of an unprecedented hunger strike by 1,200 Turkish political prisoners.

The hunger strikers – many of whom have been tortured – are being kept in the notorious 'F-type' isolation cells that sparked their protest. More than 50 are reported to be near death.

The State Security Court has ruled that any mention of the isolation cells and death fast would be prosecuted under anti-terrorist laws.

A British-Irish human rights delegation, including CPBF conference coordinator Kathy Lowe representing the NUJ, Scottish CND Secretary Brian Quail; executive member of the Transport and General Workers' Union Jimmy Kelly from Waterford, Ireland and human rights lawyer Jim Nichol visited the country 17-20 January. The visit came in response to a brutal military assault on 20 jails on 19

December which left 30 hunger strikers dead and hundreds more severely injured.

All the journalists, writers, former political prisoners, lawyers, and human rights organisations interviewed by the delegation saw the silencing of the media as central to the government's efforts to keep the lid on the crisis. Turkey, as a candidate member of the EU soon to receive a three-year £80 million EU grant for economic and social development and \$10 billion from the International Monetary Fund, does not want the world to be reminded of its human rights record.

TV and radio in Turkey are tightly controlled by the state and many of the country's 40 newspapers in the hands of private companies close to the government. Thus the task of covering the plight of the fasting political prisoners and the demonstrations supporting them has fallen in the main to the smaller papers of the left.

At a special meeting the human rights delegation held with the journalists from six of these papers two reporters told how

Every country in the region must now act to ensure that they create structures for public media that are completely independent."

In Slovakia a change of government gave rise to a fierce struggle in the state television station and journalists who supported the authoritarian leader, Vladimir Meciar, were dismissed. In neighbouring Hungary government critics have accused it of packing the board of directors responsible for public broadcasting.

■ For an in-depth study of the Czech media crisis visit the Media Channel web site. You can reach it through the CPBF site at [www.cpb.org.uk](http://www.cpb.org.uk). Alternative accounts of the reasons behind the strike by Czech broadcasters, and worth consulting to get the full picture, can be found on [www.ce-review.org](http://www.ce-review.org)

they had attempted to go to the prisons on the night of the military assault and had been beaten by the police. Others had been harassed while covering street protests.

The Turkish Human Rights Association, which has had five of its branches closed, said any press conferences on the isolation cells issue would be broken up by police. The association cited the example of two mothers of political prisoners who dared to hold a press conference in an Ankara community centre on 13 January after visiting their sons on hunger strike and who were themselves arrested.

Hundreds of journalists are among the country's 10,000 political prisoners. Says Kathy Lowe: "the reporters we met were incredibly resilient – playing a continual cat and mouse game with the authorities. But they badly need the help of fellow journalists outside the country to publicise the appalling human rights abuses going on in the prisons and across the opposition movement as a whole in Turkey."

Kuchma's voice says on the tape: "I say take him [Gongadze] out, throw him away. Give him to the Chechens." Other voices on the tape apparently include those of internal affairs minister Yuri Kravchenko and presidential administration chief Volodymyr Lytvyn.

The incident has given rise to a political scandal in which parliament has demanded measures against the security services and ministers responsible for them.

Simon Pirani

# Ukrainian journalist: political assassination charge

UKRAINIAN president Leonid Kuchma is fighting for his political life as anger mounts over accusations that he plotted the murder of an opposition journalist. In Kiev, a 24-hour demonstration outside parliament demands "Ukraine without Kuchma".

Last September journalists at the Ukrainskaya Pravda internet site ([www.pravda.com.ua](http://www.pravda.com.ua)) reported their colleague Georgy Gongadze was missing. Gongadze, 31, carried out investigations

into Kuchma and the powerful business "oligarchs" who support him.

On 14 November, a decapitated and decomposed body was found at Tarashcha outside Kiev – and on 10 January public prosecutor Mykhaylo Potebenko said he was "99.6 per cent sure" it was Gongadze's.

On 28 November a tape recording of Kuchma chatting about the need to do away with Gongadze, was played in parliament by Socialist party leader Oleksandr Moroz.

## The Business of Books

Andre Schiffrin, Verso £16.00

THERE are so many passages in this book which give striking insights into how much the priorities and values of book publishing have been transformed in the USA and globally. The author describes the world of publishing when he joined its ranks in 1956, one where a plethora of small but prestigious publishing houses often put ideas before profit.

That world has disappeared, ruthlessly transformed by the acquisition and submergence of publishing houses within media conglomerates. Now six behemoths share 80% of the US book market, and profit is all.

What is remarkable about this book (it is also, as a piece of book design, a joy to hold and look at) is that it is an insider's account of the destructive dynamics that are an inevitable part of the growth of corporate publishing. The book stands in sharp contrast to a strand of uncritical, celebratory memoirs, and is instead stamped with a sense of honesty, real experience and the desire to describe the damage to the publishing industry he has witnessed.

In 1961 Andre Schiffrin joined the publisher Pantheon, just after it had been bought by Random House, and he was to remain with it until he was forced out after the head of Random House, Bob Bernstein, a protector of the Pantheon publishing imprint, "resigned". His replacement, selected by S.I. Newhouse, the media mogul who then owned Random House, was Alberto Vitale and this extract from the book tells it all:

"One crucial meeting in January demonstrated how far apart we were. Vitale looked through the books we were about to publish for spring 1990, a list we were particularly proud of. 'Who is this Claude Simon?' he asked disdainfully, having clearly never heard of the Nobel Prize-winning novelist, 'and this Carlo Ginzberg?' probably Italy's best-known historian. I then noticed that he would begin reading on the right side of the page, where the print runs were listed, and only then moved to the puzzling titles. For him it was as if we were a shoe manufacturer, making shoes too small to fit most customers. 'What is the sense of publishing books with such small printings?' he shouted."

There is something of a happy ending to this part-memoir, part-history. Schiffrin went on to found The New Press, a not-for-profit publishing alternative to the dominant commercial publishing houses in the USA. Meanwhile this excellent book deserves to be on the shelves of every public, college and University library and publicised as widely as possible.

Granville Williams

## Media: The Impact On Our Lives

Julian Petley

Hodder Wayland; 21st Century Debates Series; £11.99

THIS book is a slightly unusual project for Julian Petley, Chair of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. Normally his writing grapples with the vagaries of the Press Complaints Commission or the dismal annual record of censorship in the UK.

Media: The Impact On Our Lives has a different emphasis. It is aimed at schoolchildren, around the ages 13-15, I would guess, and is very much a short introduction to some of the key issues and questions about the media. If its purpose is to stimulate debate and to open up discussion in schools then it deserves to succeed.

Apart from a clear and accessible text the book is also attractively illustrated with a range of posters and photos – there's even one of Steve Case and Gerald Levin announcing the AOL Time Warner merger.



My favourite (above) is a sequence of four photos where a contestant on a US television quiz show from the 1950s, Charles van Doren, pretends to consider a question to which he has already been given the answer.

The eight chapters cover topics such as Media Ownership, Advertising and How It Works, The Influence of the Media and the Media in the Information Society.

The merit of the book is also it takes an international view, drawing on global issues and events. This approach is one that works

## SPECIAL CPBF BOOK OFFER

You can get a copy of Robert W. McChesney's *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* for £12.00 inc p&p. The book is the paperback edition, with a new preface by the author. To order your book send a cheque for £12.00 made payable to CPBF to the London office.

well especially in the chapter, Regulating the Media. Finally there is also a device, Viewpoints, that is interspersed through the text of quotes, often of opposing views, on the same topic are presented. There's plenty of material here to start school students thinking and discussing the issues. So for those Free Press readers who teach in schools this is worth ordering, or indeed, worth purchasing if you're a parent with children in the age group the book is aimed at.

GW

## SITE FOR SORE EYES

<http://www.officialsecretsact.org>

ON 1 January 2001, Jeff Jenkins, Kevin Williams and I launched a website. We hope it will help to draw public attention to the inadequacies of the Official Secrets Act. The heart of the site is an online petition demanding reform of the OSA.

For far too long investigation and exposure of wrongdoing, illegality and incompetence within the Security Services and Government have been suppressed by the draconian nature of this outrageous piece of legislation. The term of this Government has seen a spate of arrests and charges under the OSA, as well as the use of production orders and heavy-handed requests for information held by journalists. We have also seen attempts made to gag the media endangering the press freedom, which is a cornerstone of any democratic society.

Whilst in opposition the current Government was opposed to this Act, once elected their stance quickly changed. On 6 March 2000, I became one of those to pay the price of Blair's change of heart. I was called out of a lecture at Kingston University and arrested under section 5 of the OSA by armed Special Branch Officers.

It was a shattering experience with dreadful repercussions. I was held on police bail for six months without charge, re-interview or explanation. It was only when I started legal proceedings that I was to receive any official confirmation as to the exact nature of my "crime".

My arrest under the OSA led to me losing my home, place at university, privacy, job, and anonymity. It is my hope that this site will help to ensure that I will be one of the last victims of abuse under this Act, and that national security will no longer be used as an excuse to avoid accountability by those in positions of power.

Julie-ann Davies

## GOVERNMENT GAG

FOREIGN secretary Robin Cook and Home Secretary Jack Straw have signed gagging orders preventing the disclosure of what former MI5 officer, David Shayler, claims was a state-approved plot to kill Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi. This is in preparation for the trial in which Shayler is accused of breaking the Official Secrets Act.

# CPBF's key recommendations

THE CPBF maintains its central criticism of the policy-making process in the development of this important document

We recommend that the next step for the government, prior to drawing up legislation, should be the establishment of a year long, high profile public inquiry into the future of mass communications, which is designed to solicit the widest possible degree of public involvement in the policy making process

## PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

We recommend that any legislation should assume that public service media and values will expand in the future and that the expansion of commercial services should not be to the detriment of the public interest in mass communications.

We recommend that public service providers of mass communications should not be subject to the same competition regime as private companies and that the Competition Act should be amended accordingly.

We recommend that in future approval of new commercial services should occur only after an assessment has been made of their likely impact on public service broadcasting so as to ensure that both public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters are subject to the regime outlined in the White Paper

## REGULATION

We recommend that the various functions recommended for OFCOM be broken down, and a more diverse set of accountable regulatory structures should be put in place, which rationalise current provision but which do not allow for concentration of

regulatory power in one arena.

We recommend that the central aim of regulation should be the promotion of the public interest in mass communications and not the promotion of competition or the mere protection of consumers.

We recommend that a structure for democratically constituted citizen involvement in the regulatory process be built into legislation, taking account of the need for structures that relate to the national assemblies and the English regions.

## OWNERSHIP

We recommend that new legislation includes provisions to ensure plurality of ownership across the communications industries by placing clear disqualifications on concentration of ownership within and across sectors.

We recommend that current rules on media ownership and cross ownership should be retained and strengthened to ensure diversity of provision and regionalism in commercial TV and radio, and to prevent the dangers posed to the provision of diversity of opinion by the growth of cross media ownership in the UK. As a first stage we would recommend immediate percentage increases in the thresholds governing permitted take-overs and in the second stage the development of new system of ownership rules which have, at their heart, the promotion of diversity of media outlets and the principle that companies should not be allowed to operate in more than one media market on one platform unless there is an overriding public interest. We believe that this should be one of the key areas discussed in public inquiry into mass communications.

## THE INTERNET

We recommend that there should be a much more wide-ranging debate about the future regulation of the internet, one which considers a mix of voluntary and national and internationally applied sanctions, plus one which integrates discussion about internet use into wider concerns about the restrictions on individual privacy and journalistic freedom posed by current laws and government surveillance of the Internet.

## ALTERNATIVES AND ACCESS

We recommend that there should be a democratically constituted community media council, funded by a levy on the industry and European grants which has the central obligation of establishing and sustaining local media initiatives over a long period of time. We recommend that the government commission research on how best to set this up and consult widely with interested parties and the public before drafting legislation.

We recommend that a separate, independent, democratically constituted media complaints body should be established, covering all media. It should draw up enforceable codes of conduct with all media operators and be empowered after all voluntary mechanisms have been exhausted to use limited statutory powers to enforce its rulings.

■ This is only a selection from a number of recommendations made in the CPBF response. The full text, and recommendations, will be on our web-site from mid-February.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

**JOIN THE  
CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS  
AND BROADCASTING  
FREEDOM**

CPBF web site: [www.cpbf.org.uk](http://www.cpbf.org.uk)  
Email address: [freepress@cpbf.demon.co.uk](mailto: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 £..... FP120

Name.....

Address.....

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

Organisation (if applicable).....

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

Tel: 020 7278 4430