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STEFANO CACNONI

An outstanding success – the CPBF conference on the Communications White Paper – pages 2–5

EDITORIAL

Don't leave it to the experts

WHENEVER the election is called, one of the first items with a starring role in the new government's Queens Speech will be a Communications Bill. Drafting work on the Bill proceeds apace, and the proposal to create Ofcom, a pan-communication regulator, is at the centre of it.

According to Ian Hargreaves, in a well-informed piece in the *Financial Times* (20/3/1), the current draft of the front section of the Bill, which covers the 'primary purpose' of Ofcom, has some alarming omissions. Gone are the culture department's suggestions for wording covering references to freedom of speech, fairness and privacy. "They have been ditched in the interests of keeping Ofcom focused on the core economic task of regulating price and market abuse," he writes.

He also points out that there has been no "serious inquiry into the vexed subject of cross-media ownership ... the working assumption is that ministers are intending to handle this matter in a below-stairs fix with individual media companies."

These points should give us cause for serious concern. Our conference on 24 February was an outstanding success, but it also revealed the need for a broad information campaign around the contents of the Communications Bill. People just aren't aware of the implications of the policy proposals.

We have argued that many people and organisations may feel that debates about convergence, tiers of regulation, and so on, are such complex matters that it is better to leave policy making to the 'experts'. That would be a dangerous approach because the media industry and its lobbyists will call the shots.

There is a big job to be done. We are organising an ambitious range of activities in England, Scotland and Wales – public meetings, lobbying, a pamphlet, video – and planning a high-profile campaign drawing in people from the media, arts and academic life to spread the message. Please do all you can to help.

Dot.con, dot.gone

WHAT a difference a year makes! The top man at Time Warner, Gerald Levin, must be feeling slightly bruised as he ponders the changed media scene. Back in January 2000 the planned merger of AOL Time Warner seemed like a dream wheeze. A year and a day later, 11 January 2001, with all the regulatory hurdles cleared, the deal was sealed.

The conventional wisdom then was if you're not in the net business you're yesterday's news. Now all the media companies in the US are cutting back on jobs and spending, from News Corporation to Walt Disney. In the UK Pearson and Trinity Mirror are also cutting back. There's no money in it.

Since January specialist business publications, TV news bulletins, even the tabloids, have been full of share price charts showing the sudden and precipitous collapse of internet, media, computer and telecom shares.

However, we need a sense of perspective on all this. The fantasy world of inflated share values has been punctured. What it means is

that they are returning to the valuations they had in 1998. This is true for the Techmark index, covering British technology, media and telecommunications (TMT) shares. It is down by 64% from its peak a year ago but still higher than any time since the summer of 1998.

But who was trying to boost share prices in the period after that? Investment managers, stockbrokers, the managers of technology companies, and, of course the media. Remember the *Time* cover with Jeff Bezos of amazon dot.com as the man of the year? Endless hype and the suspension of critical judgement characterised media coverage of the dot.com phenomenon.

Now suddenly it seems like the media will play its part in accelerating the downward share price plunge. It's a painful predictable feature of capitalism that bust follows boom, but it would be deeply ironic to see the very media which boosted net speculation now speeds recession through its doom-laden coverage.

The communications revolution: who benefits?

The verdict was unanimous. Our conference on 24 February was an outstanding success. It alerted people to some of the dire policy proposals in the government's Communications Reform White Paper, and motivated people to get involved in the work we now need to do.

IT'S IN THE MAILS

A few months ago we went to talk with the Media Minister, Chris Smith, and express our concerns about some of the policy ideas shaping the White Paper. It was all very polite, with a great emphasis on consultation and the need to hear the widest range of views. We also asked whether Chris Smith could speak at our conference on the White Paper on the 24 February.

Time dragged by and finally we were told that the minister had another engagement so we asked if someone else from the DCMS could put the government case. A fortnight before the conference we sent a snotty letter saying we hadn't heard anything, and it really wasn't good enough. Finally a day or two before the conference we were told that Ruth Mackenzie, one of the DCMS special advisers would speak.

After the conference we scooped up all the paper left around on the platform and took them back to the office. A couple of sheets containing an intriguing series of emails between people in the DCMS Special Advisers Office were amongst them. We print them below. The contents speak for themselves, we think.

23 February 2001 13.51

Ruth has asked me to contact you about the CPBF conference on Saturday. Ruth thinks that this is something she has to do but if you think she doesn't need to and you can get her out of it then that's great. Otherwise would she be able to have a copy of the twenty-minute speech that you would be drafting for her as soon as possible

23 February 14.39

Since Ruth appears from the Post-It to have told them she'll do it and all officials declined (without knowing she'd agreed) I think she had better do it.

23 February 15.55

Attached a revision of the VLV speech the S of S gave which I hope now presses most of the necessary buttons for the CPBF. We'll bring down copies of the responses to the White Paper from the CPBF and the NUJ and the presentation Diana gave to the CBI, which may have some useful factual bits, though obviously the tone is about opposite that needed for the CPBF! As Ruth will see, the CPBF are quite a demanding lot, but she'll just have to take note of views expressed at the conference and say she'll report them back at the ranch. I've tried to take note of their particular beef about the length of the consultation process.

The DCMS view



"THE White Paper seeks to address the challenge of fast-moving technological developments and convergence," Ruth Mackenzie (above), a DCMS special adviser, argued. She pointed out in 1980 there were three television stations in the UK; now there are 250, and the pace of development and change will, if anything, increase.

"The volume of data traffic over traditional telephone lines is doubling every ten months and new devices such as Personal Video Recorders are appearing on the market which may entirely change the way we use our television," she said. "The challenge is therefore to reap the benefits of new technologies and minimise any threats to the things we value. That is why we set out to modernise the framework of regulation for all electronic communications."

Responding to the CPBF concern about the model of Ofcom proposed she said, "The more we examined the state of broadcasting and telecommunications and the pace of change, the more we were convinced that the creation of a single converged regulatory body was the right course."

Ruth Mackenzie clarified the notion that Ofcom would also regulate the internet. "The internet would not be subject to a broadcasting licence. Protection from harmful content, about which there is legitimate public concern, is better tackled through co-regulatory approaches, such as the Internet Watch Foundation," she said.

She also said, "Some parts of the White Paper have evident green edges" and looked forward to contributions to this process from the CPBF and its constituent bodies.

Unfounded assumptions

Tony Lennon probes some of the arguments in the White Paper

IT WOULD take a brave UK government to crack down on the nation's media barons just a few weeks before a General Election – especially if, like Labour, you had been given such warm support by editors and owners last time round.

This may explain why the Communications White Paper, which will pave the way for new media regulation in the next Parliament, could make it easier for media giants to merge newspapers and build up ownership mountains that span print, broadcasting, and new media including internet content outlets.

Ownership regulation, a CPBF rallying point for the last five elections, is to be redirected towards improving competition, and no longer used as a means to tame multi-national monopolies.

Newspaper mergers are to be treated with a "light touch", while in ITV a raft of ownership rules is to be eased: the ceiling on market share of Channel 3 may be raised to allow the emergence of a single operator in all 15 licence areas, and the maximum 20% that any shareholder can have in ITN could be relaxed.

All this is to be overseen by a single regulator, OFCOM, already dubbed "Big Brother" thanks to its alarmingly wide-ranging control of ownership and content rules

Nobody can deny that it's about time the increasing convergence of telecommunications and broadcasting was fully acknowledged by government – even in 1996, when the last significant new laws on broadcasting took effect, it seemed myopic to re-jig one sector's regulations without thinking about the other.

With the enormous growth in telecoms and broadcasting over the last two decades, and a worldwide retreat from public ownership of the two sectors, questions have been raised about the old bargain between governments and regulated monopolies like telephone companies and broadcasters.

The bargain used to be a straight deal whereby operators could enjoy the fruits of a monopoly market – like ITV once being the sole vendor of TV advertising airtime – in return for a promise that they would deliver services motivated by public interest, and not just profit.

These ranged from public 'phone boxes



Tony Lennon: Why no mention of BSkyB?

outside lone crofts in the Highlands, to educational or minority TV programmes being made with proper budgets, and transmitted while the audience was still awake.

By decree, governments were able to resolve the traditional conflicts between the economic and content interests of commercial companies, as well as the struggle between concentration of ownership and maintenance of service standards.

Now, say the reformers, this nanny approach is all old hat – private enterprise has encroached so extensively on the regulated telecoms and broadcasting sectors that consumers are spoilt for choice. With the public need being met more and more from private sources, they claim that the old bargain is off.

In broadcasting particularly, the end of "spectrum scarcity" due to digital technology is supposed to open the way for new entrants to the sector. These, it is said, will bring new quality and choice of programming, and turn the existing tightly-regulated public service broadcasters into dinosaurs. Apparently, the only thing that has held them back so far is lack of bandwidth.

However, a quick tour of two other media sectors which have never suffered scarcity suggests that this analysis is wrong, throwing doubts on the underlying premise

of the White Paper that the media business is just like any other business and should be covered by normal competition laws.

Newspaper publishers have never suffered a scarcity of newsprint – the price of paper may well have yo-yoed over the years, but it has always been obtainable by anyone wanting to start a new publication.

Yet, the state of the UK daily newspaper market, a "post-scarcity" industry, speaks for itself – in effect sewn up by four major companies, and, incidentally, two wholesalers.

More topically, look at the internet, the ultimate example of publishing opportunities being open to all. After only four years of growth and consolidation, the content market on the internet is dominated by household names like Yahoo, Netscape, and Microsoft Network. This, remember, is an industry where all you need to publish are modest technical skills which seem to have been mastered by millions of teenagers across the world, and an investment which, by Western business standards is miniscule.

Both these examples support a long-held CPBF view – even in media sectors where scarcity is not an issue, dominant, monopolistic, operators will always emerge unless ownership is regulated. The real factors in their growth are start-up costs, marketing – admirably demonstrated by the dotcoms – and enough funding to see you through the lean times when your competitors fall either aside, or into your ownership.

Much of the White Paper's optimism about the "light-touch" world where competition will solve problems like guaranteeing universal access to services, or maintaining the breadth, quality, and impartiality of information, could turn out to be unfounded.

Whether or not time proves the assumptions about "life after scarcity" to be wrong, there are many aspects of the White Paper which are causing concern at the moment.

The creation of a single body to regulate economic and content issues, previously kept well apart, could sideline the UK's historic willingness to put a heavy burden of public service obligation on broadcasters and others. These have always been at odds with the economic interests of commercial companies, and OFCOM, with its remit to focus on competition, might be tempted to give in to the accountants. This leads to the first big question posed by the White Paper: will OFCOM manage to treat content issues with the importance they deserve?

Another concern is OFCOM's proposed three-tier system for broadcasting regulation, which obliges all operators to observe minimal rules on taste and decency, impartiality of news, and advertising standards, but imposes explicit demands for public service content only on a limited number of broadcasters. These are BBC, ITV, Channel 4, S4C, and, for the moment, Channel 5, although it might be relieved of its obliga-

tions once more competitors appear.

This puts ITV companies in a position where they must still observe costly public service obligations, while in direct competition with other commercial broadcasters who don't have to. Something eventually must give way – probably the range of regional and minority programming currently produced by ITV. The second big question is: how long will it be before ITV is allowed to leave the family of public service broadcasters?

All current restrictions on ITV companies taking a lion's share of the network, or increasing cross-ownership with newspapers, are to be reviewed. These include the 20:20 rule which restricts the percentage of an ITV company that can be owned by a national newspaper, and the 15% limit on ITV audience share that any one company can control.

Both the BBC and Channel 4 come off lightly. Channel 4 will definitely not be privatised by Labour – in contrast to the Conservative's pledge to sell-off the publicly-owned broadcaster. The BBC remains self-regulating, and there are no ambitious plans to overhaul its system of governance, a missed opportunity in many commentators' eyes.

Another positive aspect of the White Paper, as far as public service broadcasting goes, is OFCOM's right to insist that PSB channels are prominently displayed on electronic programme guides, the TV screen gateways to digital services already appearing on set-top boxes.

There will also be a continuing requirement for cable and satellite operators to carry the PSB channels, although the whip hand in negotiations to determine a fair price for these transmissions will pass from the public service broadcasters to BSkyB and the cable companies.

Despite being intended to coordinate regulation of several converging industries, the White Paper says surprisingly little about the telecommunications industry, and even less about the internet, posing the third big question: even if the government achieves universal access to internet services, how will it ensure that public service values are migrated into the new media sector?

One organisation that features nowhere in the document is the UK's leading digital TV operator BSkyB. References to other named communications operators and content providers are sprinkled liberally throughout a document which is heavily weighted towards broadcasting.

Yet an organisation which is by far the major provider of digital TV to UK homes, and through Rupert Murdoch is closely tied to four national newspapers, merits not one mention.

With an election looming, I wonder why?

Only in America?

The Government White Paper proposes a single super regulator – OFCOM. The model is the US FCC. Jonathan Hardy analyses its role.

WHY a single regulator? Well, the US Federal Communications Commission demonstrates the need to bring together the levers of economic and content regulation. So said Chris Smith at a recent VLV meeting. Sounds tough? Anything but, if the FCC's actual record is considered.

The FCC began life in 1934 favouring, if not championing, diversity of ownership and a presumption against media concentration. Already, by the 1970s the FCC had acquired a reputation as "Reluctant Regulators" as one account in 1978 was titled. But during the Reagan presidencies, deregulation was driven forward by FCC chairmen Mark ("television is just a toaster with pictures") Fowler and Denis Patrick. The FCC used its powers to roll back rules on media concentration and cross-ownership, for instance increasing TV station ownership from seven to 12 and then 21. But just as important, inaction or non-enforcement of its own rules gave the intended signals to the communication industries. In the 1970's the FCC had pressed the television industry to draw up self-regulatory guidelines on advertising and began formal investigation of commercial time on children's programmes.

Under Mark Fowler's chairmanship in 1983-4, the industry received the green light for such programme length commercials as He Man and the Masters of the Universe, which have led to ever more ingenious forms of promotional programming. As one branch of US competition law, the FCC was also part of the move away from vigorously pursuing anti-trust cases, the action against Microsoft, begun in 1998, being a notable exception.

US experience provides the basis for testing empirically neoliberal claims that less regulation and self-regulation by the market best safeguard the public interest. First, a single regulator, as we've argued, is vulnerable to 'regulatory capture' by the industry; the FCC being 'a classic case' (McChesney). In the US, the pattern is set by prior industry capture of Congress. For instance, the FCC dropped a proposed investigation into Murdoch's empire in 1988, when Murdoch's friend, Senator Jack Field, the ranking Republican on the relevant House committee, threatened to conduct a thorough "review" of the FCC. Since then, periodic threats to review or even abolish the

FCC have demonstrated the power of the corporate communications lobby, described as one of the most formidable in Washington.

The second is the lesson of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The Act effectively dismantled barriers to convergence, and endorsed the notion that telecoms and other companies should be allowed to advance into neighbouring businesses. Communications companies lobbied fiercely to secure that result with the minimum of public scrutiny and debate. The lessons Labour is willing to learn from the US are almost exclusively the same corporate mantras of market competition that shaped the 1996 Act. But since the Act came into force, there has been considerably more, not less, consolidation in telecommunications and broadcasting. The Act itself removed many limits on ownership but also set a path to 'convergence' and concentration that the FCC is continuing to deliver through periodic 'reviews', although by no means fast enough for its new Chairman.

It's a fine time, then, for Chris Smith to champion the FCC. In January President Bush promoted Michael Powell as Chairman. Powell, a republican, has been a commissioner since 1997, and was formerly Chief of Staff at the Antitrust Division in the Department of Justice. He has a long track record promoting deregulation. "The oppressor here is regulation", he recently told a conservative think-tank, "We must foster competitive markets, unencumbered by intrusions and distortions from inept regulations." Powell, as his 'statement' to the FCC Biennial Regulatory Review in 1998 makes clear, opposes almost all the principles traditionally governing communications such as regulation for pluralism and diversity, arguing that firms should be permitted to respond exclusively to market forces. Not surprisingly, his appointment was loudly endorsed by senior industry figures.

Preaching the neo-liberal word, does not, however, require addressing either such uncomfortable facts as the huge wave of mergers and consolidation which followed the 1996 Telecommunications Act, or supporting measures to open genuine competition, such as the 1,000 low-power radio broadcasters which the FCC planned and Powell, together with the National Association of Broadcasters, opposed.

Powell also stood out against setting conditions to the AOL-Time Warner deal approved in December. His father is Bush appointee Colin Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs, who owns about \$6 million in AOL stock and has been a board member since 1998. But as Robert McChesney notes, 'by today's standards of corruption, this barely registers a blip on the radar. So Powell did not reclude himself, and he strongly advocated the case for the company in which his inheritance is located.'

Only in America?



Speak up!

John Pilger on the threat to media freedom

JOHN Pilger (above, left) was withering about the White Paper, speaking of the "lying and deception" in relation to the government's promotion of its policy, and "the compliance and silence of many of us in the media in the face of perhaps the greatest single threat to press and media freedom in our lifetime." We print below extracts from the article based on his speech, which appeared in the *New Statesman* (5/3/1).

THE government's white paper on the media, *A New Future for Communications*, was announced in December by the Culture Secretary, Chris Smith and the Trade Secretary Stephen Byers with these words: "Rules governing all British broadcasting and communications industries will be radically modernised to ensure that citizens, consumers and the media industry are to be winners in the new communications revolution." There was the need, they said, to give broadcasters "lighter touch regulation so that they have the freedom to operate effectively."

It was a brilliant new Labour policy statement. Almost all of it was the diametric opposite of the truth. Legislation rushed through parliament, probably in the autumn, will begin the conversion of British broadcasting to the ultra-commercial American

model, which has long ceased to be a medium of free expression. The BBC will be forced into direct competition with huge commercial interests, "creating for the first time", say the ministers, "a level playing field for British broadcasting".

Rupert Murdoch must feel his long campaign to "open up" television in Britain is approaching its triumphal end.

That is, unless broadcasters wake up. For too long, senior journalists, editors and producers have promoted, via a consensus of spurious assumptions, and language deemed "objective", the corporate state as an economic necessity. The privatisation, or theft, of communal services – water, power, telecommunications, transport and now, by stealth, education and health services – has proceeded thanks in no small part to the media. Legislation that will finally add public broadcasting to the list is the result of this long collaboration between corporatism and journalism. For example, the incessant hyping of technological advance as an empowering "freedom" has masked the takeover of much of cyberspace by multinational corporations.

Read between its jargon, the white paper is a warning that for the first time since broadcasting began in Britain, legislation will take away a universal public service obligation, and commercialism will be unleashed, bringing standards crashing. It will be a drip-drip process. Limp words about support for public service broadcasting are there to distract those co-opted by new Labour.

All this will be overseen by an Office of Communications, or Ofcom, which will be entirely undemocratic and as supportive of the

"consumer" as is the rail regulator. It will be responsible for everything from mobile phones to commercial television, and its main function will be to make broadcasting a commodity, to be bought and sold. The BBC will fall under the Competition Act and be forced into marriages of survival. Before giving his approval, the Secretary of State will judge BBC services for their "market impact". Demanding this of a genuine public broadcaster is like feeding cattle with offal. Its very nature is denied and corrupted.

This white paper should be opposed by all journalists and broadcasters. It is about a seizure of power, and it is our job to warn the public. We might also begin to debate seriously how to break the monopoly of ideas that already exists, especially in the press. Remember the campaigns of Murdoch's *Sunday Times* against the BBC, the British film industry and anything else that got in the way of his voracious appetite.

Long before it converged with the Tories, the Labour Party used to publish thoughtful discussion papers on the media. Several referred to an imaginative, state-supported scheme in Sweden. This is a statute body that provides seed money for independent publications and other media that cannot survive by advertising alone. It works, and endures, in spite of the rise of Swedish Blairism. The public likes it and wants it left alone.

That is what we need here. We need a media that reflects the complexion and complexity of this society, that report human beings in terms other than stereotypes and their usefulness to the rapacity of western economic power. Some freedoms can be lost without anybody noticing until it is too late. This is one of them.

The 'blight' paper

Danny Schechter (left), Executive Director of The Media Channel (www.mediachannel.org) provides a US perspective

BLAIR'S White Paper might be more appropriately called a "Blight Paper" because it could blight or undercut the strong, publicly owned but independently run public service broadcasting tradition exemplified by the BBC.

The British government is not proposing to sell off the BBC – far from it. There would no doubt be a national revolt if they tried that. Nevertheless, "it is increasingly clear that the knives are out for the BBC," Steven Barnett writes in *The Guardian*. "The BBC is in severe danger of being caught between the self-interested animosity of commercial rivals and the less self-interested but equally threatening moves towards government intervention." That intervention would be facilitated by the creation of a new oversight body called Ofcom, a pan-industry regulator that ostensibly has no oversight of the BBC but will be used by media industries to restrain the growth of public service broadcasting.

The White Paper is built around a blind faith in the magic of market forces and competition. Its proposals will strengthen the power of commercial networks in the name of offering more consumer choice, which will inevitably weaken the power of the BBC. Despite reservations about the effects of consolidation, it will promote mergers in the same way that the US Telecommunications "Reform" Act of 1966 did. A year after its passage, the US Government Accounting Office reported that a bill sold to the country as a way to protect consumers through more competition resulted in more concentration of media ownership.

Opponents of the White Paper have a persuasive critique. Now they need an effective outreach effort to build political support. They need to create a media presentation to bring their case to the country. The challenge facing the CPBF is how to use the media to fight this assault on media and to organise the many people – professionals and consumers alike – who want to save what quality media they have left.

Activists need to learn how to fight fire with fire. New Labour could win on this crucial issue unless its many opponents are as adept at disseminating their analysis as they are at making it. As one activist said at the close of conference, "Once something like the BBC is lost, it's almost impossible to get it back."

FOI IN SCOTLAND

The Campaign for Freedom of Information in Scotland has broadly welcomed the Scottish Executive's draft Freedom of Information Bill, published on 1 March. The Scottish bill would impose a stricter "harm test" for refusing disclosure, meaning that public bodies could withhold information only if its release would cause "substantial prejudice" to public affairs, law enforcement, security or defence.

This contrasts with legislation south of the border which requires only the demonstration of "prejudice" to avoid disclosure. Another stronger aspect to the bill is that it proposes an independent watchdog with greater powers to enforce rights of access to information from Scottish public bodies.

However the Campaign expressed concern over some broad exemptions, including "formulation or development of government policy", the existence of a ministerial veto and the potential for high charges for information.

Consultation on the draft bill ends 25 May

PARLEZ-VOUS PREJUDICE?

Gay Paris? You expect the tabloids to make a song and dance about the fact that the new Mayor of Paris might be gay but not the Guardian and certainly not the BBC. Yet there it was in the Guardian in the opening paragraph on the Monday after the first round of elections with correspondent Jon Henley

spelling out the fact that Bertrand Delanoë was a 'declared homosexual'. And of course he couldn't resist using the phrase 'Gay Paree.' Radio Five similarly couldn't get away from the fact. Was it an issue? asked a news presenter. Absolutely not, was the answer from Paris where a BBC correspondent had even canvassed voters outside an election centre. Not one person he had spoken to mentioned that it was issue, he told us. And nor, he reported, had the French press had anything to say about it. It just was not an issue in France. But still the BBC persisted with their line of questioning, desperately trying to make a story out of it. It simply did not seem to make any sense to the BBC that Delanoë's sexuality could not have played some part in the election and media coverage.

ROUND AND ROUND

John Prescott was at the centre of a furious row over his decision to use private-sector lobbyists working for the transport industry to advise him during the general election. Mike Craven, chief executive of lobbying firm Lexington, will be his speechwriter and conduct research.

Nothing new here, however. Back in 1993 the British Media Industry Group (a group of newspaper publishers comprising Pearson, the Guardian Media, Telegraph and Daily Mail groups who wanted media ownership rules changed) hired the lobbying firm Market Access International to do the business, with Mike Craven taking a prominent role. Later on the Labour Party had a glossy, high-profile conference, 21st Century Media, which signalled the softening in Labour policy on media ownership. Organised by, yes, you've guessed it, Mike Craven.

When journalists have complimented us on the book, it's an unexpected bonus! (Stephen Dorril's review appeared in FP116)

CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT

Mick Pitt writes: Your comments on KID'S TV in FP120. You have omitted two other factors that should be considered. In the UK we have only recently provided for parts of the UK to pursue their own paths. This is not just for economic reasons but to create a more inclusive society.

Just as in biological systems we will become extinct without DIVERSITY so too in our society and culture we need CULTURAL DIVERSITY. For this reason alone we cannot tolerate a system that will ultimately create a single culture for everyone on this planet. As Chris Smith is culture secretary he should be defining cultural diversity as a positive policy. This

Murdoch's mouthpiece

To those of you foolish enough to believe that Dr Irwin Stelzer, bespectacled professor and Sunday Times columnist, is just some freelance scribbler, let me set you straight.

Dr Stelzer is the most powerful lobbyist in Britain bar none. He is Rupert Murdoch's policy adviser, but no lowly retainer on the payroll.

A multi-millionaire without Murdoch's help, Stelzer has become a sculptor of the thought and conduit of the wishes of the planet's most powerful men. 'Lobbyist' describes only one of Stelzer's functions and certainly does not do justice to his authority.

To my knowledge, Stelzer is the only policy adviser who can walk into the Prime Minister's office at will ...

Last month, Stelzer took the message against regulation of media to the Commons Culture Committee where, on behalf of News Corp, he warned the government against maintaining restrictions on cross-media ownership.

*Greg Palast
Inside Corporate America
The Observer, 25 February 2001*

has nothing to do with economics, marketing, trade, etc.

But the other aspect that does have an economic impact is the employment of UK actors, actresses, producers, writers and technicians. When everything comes from abroad where is the employment for these people? How will they develop their skills and what point is there in a policy that aims at far more going through university?

So we have Stephen Byers on the basis of employment. David Blunkett on the basis of education. Chris Smith on the basis of Culture (not media). And Gordon Brown on the balance of payments - The Treasury. That gives four Cabinet Ministers who should be supporting this proposal.

How then can it ever succeed - WHO IS BEING BOUGHT - WHO IS SUPPORTING THE OBJECTIONS?

Many thanks for the good work and keep at it

FEEDBACK

UNFAIR

Hugo de Burgh writes: Stephen Dorril was rather unfair about the book I edited, *Investigative Journalism: Context and Practice* (Routledge 2000), to the extent that I wondered if he'd even read it. It's not just that he spelt my name wrong, but that in suggesting that I'd no evidence for saying how much investigative journalism there had been in the 1980s and 1990s, he ignored chapter 3 with its many references as well as the 8 case study chapters.

The book has defects, I'm sure. There was little to build on, for, as he himself writes, it's the first. But don't attack us for omitting details of intra-profession debates: In the intro I state that this is a book for Media Studies students, not experts such as he. The objective is to tell young people about a tradition which is important to society and to get them to recognise it as such, even as they analyse it and criticise it.

Picturing innocence

DUNCAN FORBES

THE decision by the Crown Prosecution Service not to pursue a case against either the Saatchi Gallery or the photographer, Tierney Gearon, marked another humiliating defeat for the News of the World and its editor Rebekah Wade. The innocuous character of Gearon's photographs and the extensive efforts made by the paper - through cropping and blocking out - to stigmatize them served only to emphasise its hypocrisy. This affair had nothing to do with protecting children and everything to do with inciting populist sentiment to sell newspapers.

It would be easy to dismiss this as yet another sign of a diminished and tawdry tabloid news culture, which indeed it is. But the episode also points to mounting anxieties about the way that children and childhood are represented in our culture, especially in visual form. Photographs of children continue to be society's most valued and yet most controversial images, at once the common currency of daily photographic practice as well as the focus of intensified public scrutiny and legislative concern. Experience from the United States, where growing numbers of artists and amateur photographers have been subject to prosecution, suggests that the arguments marshalled against censorship in the Gearon case need to continue to be refined.

Ever since the eighteenth century European adults have invested hugely in the ideal of childhood innocence, projecting adult myths and fantasies onto the body of the child. During the Victorian period especially childhood innocence became an object of desire, expressed most powerfully in visual form. The camera's apparently 'objective' eye (itself a myth) has lent photography a particularly potent and problematic role in the history of images of children, not least when child nudity is involved. Some of the most famous practitioners in the history of photography - Julia Margaret Cameron, Edward Weston, Dorothea Lange and most recently Sally Mann - have photographed the naked child's body, often in a highly sensualised form.

Significantly, it is only in the last two decades or so that images of naked or partially clothed children have garnered extensive public controversy. This is in part a reaction to the increased public awareness of issues around child sexual abuse, issues that remained largely submerged in Britain until the 1960s. But the moral panic around representations of children has also been



accompanied by the overt sexualisation of children for commercial ends, most particularly in popular culture, sport, the fashion industry and advertising. There are numerous examples: the career of Brooke Shields; the fashion for waif-like models; controversial advertising campaigns like that of Calvin Klein; the 1990s film re-make of that icon of infant sexuality, Lolita; Madonna's use of child-like imagery to sell her sexually charged books. With almost half of all advertisements using children, the myth of childhood innocence is becoming strained. That which once protected the child's body from controversy is fast vanishing.

Both children and sex sell products, and it is likely that the two will continue to be entwined. Indeed, it is possible that children are just as sexualised by consumer culture as they are by pornography. This raises some very complex questions, especially when legislative intervention is concerned. What exactly constitutes 'indecent', the key and notoriously vague term of the 1978 Protection of Children Act? What is the relationship between the fabricated photographic image and the real action recorded? Should not the focus of legislative prohibition always be on abusive acts, or the abusive use of photographs, rather than their subjective interpretation? The startling aspect of the Gearon affair was that the police were enticed to intervene on the grounds that Gearon's photographs might possibly induce a depraved thought or action. Is it right that prosecutions should be begun with the interpretation of photographs?

These questions need wider debate and

more thoughtfully drafted legislation. There are ways of protecting both children against abuse and adults' rights to free expression. The two are not necessarily mutually incompatible. But the focus of the law and public policy more broadly should always veer towards intervening against abusive action rather than the interpretation of images. This is not to suggest that the circulation of child pornography should cease to be countered. It should. However, the targets of criminalization should be the abusers themselves and their actions, rather than the possibility that an image might just happen to become the substance of warped fantasy.

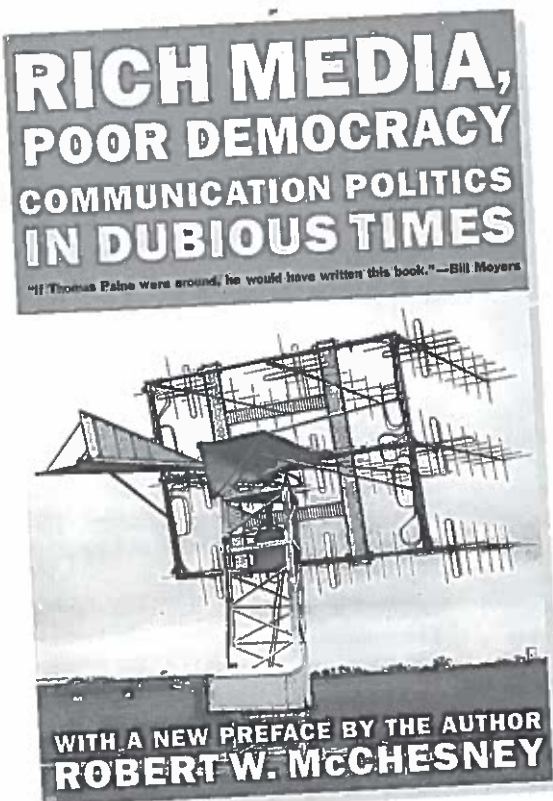
This, in the end, is to pinpoint the News of the World's real hypocrisy. The reality of sexual abuse in Britain today has in comparative terms very little to do with child pornography. It has very little to do with a tiny number of paedophiles spreading their noxious material through the internet. It has nothing to do with artists like Tierney Gearon who photograph their children. The vast majority of child abuse occurs in the home and is perpetrated by men who are known to the victim. The factors involved in the perpetration of abuse are poverty, poor education and drug addiction. Such abuse is best counteracted by supporting and properly funding agencies in the public sector, eradicating poverty and channeling much-needed resources to children and those who care for them. Doubtless these are unpalatable political realities for the News of the World and its owner. But the paper can never pretend to have the interests of Britain's children at heart until it begins to address them.

7.30 pm Thursday 19 April

David Shayler and Friends
public meeting and rally –
Friends House, Euston Road,
London (opposite Euston
Station).

10.00am Saturday 23 June

CPBF Annual General Meeting
Friends House, Euston Road,
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This is edition is only available in the UK through the CPBF so also make sure that your library orders a copy, too.

MCCHESENEY VIDEO

An interview with Robert McChesney. This is a twenty minute interview with Robert McChesney made during his visit to the UK in November 2000. It covers the life and work of Herb Schiller, the significance of the AOL Time Warner merger, and ideas for media reform. The video costs £4.99 + £1.00 p&p

Highly regarded and principled journalist

THE piece in *The Observer* by Jonathan Fenby was headlined "Tony Bevins: fighter for the truth". Anthony Bevins died on Friday 23 March from a virulent strain of pneumonia. He had been working as a freelance political journalist following his decision to quit the *Daily Express* immediately after its purchase by Richard Desmond.

He knew his trade from spells on the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*, as well as working on *The Independent* and *The Observer*.

He mainly stayed with political reporting, but sometimes he could write scathing pieces of a more general nature. I still remember a powerful article prior to the 1992 election in the *Independent*, "Cometh the election, cometh the smear". He wrote about the way the *Daily Mail*, in the run-up to the 1979 election, put together a devastating front page – "Labour's Dirty Dozen" – based on his time at the paper. A powerful *British Journalism Review* article from one of the early issues, "The Crippling of the Scribes", also drew on his rich experiences.

He was a highly regarded and principled journalist. He will be missed.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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