

# FREE Press

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## EDITORIAL

### Cash for influence

THE fall-out continues from the collapsed US energy company, Enron. It is a tale of high drama, with the trail leading to the global accountancy company Arthur Andersen and politicians in the White House (past and present). In this country awkward questions and new concerns about the unhealthy link between New Labour and big business are surfacing again.

And where was the media in all this? Whilst Enron has been peddling cash for influence one or two warnings were publicised. Remember Greg Palast back in 1998 exposing the former aide to Gordon Brown, Karl Milner, hired by Enron to oppose the moratorium on gas fired power stations? Palast recorded Milner boasting: 'We have many friends in government. They like to run things past us some days in advance to get our view.'

In the States journalists completely failed to investigate the company's finances. With one exception. Whilst the rest of the business press were in awe of the company's power Bethany MacLean, a young reporter on Fortune magazine, and an expert on reading balance sheets, saw some numbers that didn't add up, and asked the question 'How does Enron make its money?'

Here in the UK, Enron's links with New Labour have now been well publicised but we should point out the Murdoch connection yet again. Irvin Stelzer, Murdoch's adviser and confidant, served on Enron's advisory board and has with remarkable consistency now written a piece praising Enron's chief executive, Kenneth Lay, for 'leading a revolution in two of the nation's key industries, electricity and gas — a revolution replacing government regulation with effectively operating free markets'. No surprise, then, that News International's response to the government's consultation on media ownership argues for a wholesale shake-up of the rules on cross-media ownership, ending outdated rules of foreign ownership, and lightening the regulatory burden.

This repetitive mantra of the virtues of the free market betrays its own kind of fundamentalism, one which can lay waste to people's jobs and the environment just as surely as other varieties.

#### THANKS, ALAN

Alan Slingsby has done the layout and design of Free Press since 1995. He's done it as a favour, and we want to thank him for the generous donation of his skills and time. His talents have made the publication a quality product. A hard act to follow, but a sincere thanks to you on behalf of the CPBF for your support.

## FAREWELL, LORD WAKEHAM

Can he fix it this time?

AS CHAIRMAN of the press complaints commission, charged with upholding its code of conduct, Lord Wakeham received an annual salary of £156,000. Apparently he will continue to be paid for a job he is no longer doing. He was on the audit committee of Enron's board, charged with scrutinising those accounts that proved so unreliable. Last year he was paid \$122,000 for his services. In total he earns more than £1 million a year from seventeen directorships.

Mrs Thatcher in her memoirs praised his ability as a qualified chartered accountant — he made sense of 'British Leyland's elliptical accounts'.

Lord Wakeham has the reputation of a

political fixer — skills deployed effortlessly for Tory and New Labour governments, and a range of other corporate interests. But this time, after a period of silence, he has decided to stand down from the PCC chair to clear his name.

The US trade union body, the AFL-CIO, points out that he received a consultancy fee of \$72,000 from Enron and therefore shouldn't have been on the audit committee because he was supposed to be independent. They have now written to every company on which he holds a board position asking them not to reappoint him.

Will Lord Wakeham be able to fix it this time?

## YOU COULDN'T MAKE IT UP



## The Sun and the Euro

There may only be 107,000 Irish readers of the Sun but they got a different view of the Euro from the 3.4 million British readers. We always knew Rupert could change his political colours depending on his commercial interests, but this is ridiculous!

# Suspicious incidents

**Steve Dorril on disinformation in the 'war on terrorism'**

ALTHOUGH in the wake of the 'defeat' of the Taliban US attention has moved from a possible strike on Iraq to sponsoring covert operations in Somalia, we should not be surprised if at some stage in the near future, an 'incident' hits the headlines which promotes Saddam Hussein to the top of a 'hit list'.

If the history of the media teaches us anything it is that the 'war on terrorism' is a ripe opportunity for disinformation and the creation of provocative incidents which the press reports with casual disregard for truth.

In the aftermath of the disastrous Bay of Pigs operation, in 1962 the US Joint Chiefs of staff put forward an illegal and secret plan, Operation Northwoods, which proposed the creation of terrorist 'co-ordinated incidents' which would provide the excuse for another invasion of Cuba (see James Bamford, *Body of Secrets*, 2001). The most famous of these 'incidents' was the second Tonkin Gulf episode of 1964 which led to the massive escalation of the war in Vietnam (see Peter Dale Scott, *The War Conspiracy: The Secret Road to the Second Indochina War*, 1972). In the weeks after September 11, old-style Cold war 'hawks' in the US administration aligned to the Deputy Defence Secretary, Paul Wolfowitz, desperately sought a pretext to launch the next stage of the anti-terrorist war against an old enemy – Iraq. They very nearly succeeded.

Within days of the attack on New York, it was reported that one of the pilots who flew a hijacked plane into the World Trade Centre, Mohammed Atta, had met previously with a low-ranking Iraqi 'diplomat' in Prague. It was obvious to anyone who has studied disinformation techniques that this was an intriguing story that was destined to flourish.

Gradually, the story developed as the rank of the diplomat was inflated until he, inevitably, was revealed to be a senior intelligence officer. Finally in the Observer, David Rose, who really should have known better, informed us that Mohammed Khalil Ibrahim

al-Ani, was a special operations officer. Added to this – in a classic example of a psychological warfare technique known as 'surfacing' – were stories originating in the German newspaper Bild that al-Ani had handed over to Atta a vacuum flask containing anthrax. The link between the events in the US and the 'hidden hand' of Iraq were starting to harden, much to the satisfaction of Wolfowitz and his allies in the CIA.

However when the various stories were traced back to their original source, it soon became apparent that they relied on the dubious briefings of members of the exile Iraq national Congress (INC), a body almost totally reliant on the CIA for its funds. Not only were they the source for much of the information, the INC, in various guises, was also the confirming agency. This was an example of the intelligence operation known as 'the loop', whereby all the sources have a single disguised origin – a technique much used by the disinformation 'paper mills' of exile groups.

The story rumbled on with the release in the New York Times (2 December, 2001), and duly reported in the Observer and Telegraph, of a secret US plan to launch war on Iraq. It was not until 18 December that the story finally collapsed. Strangely, it was the Telegraph – the most hawkish of pro-American newspapers – which reported that the Czech police admitted that they had no evidence that Atta had met an Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague. It seems that the story of the alleged meeting, which was a convenient case of mistaken identity, had originated with an unidentified 'informer' – presumably Iraqi – and not Czech intelligence.

Three days later Foreign Secretary Jack Straw admitted that there was no link between Iraq and the events of 11 September. There was no Iraqi 'smoking gun'. But it had been a close run thing. We should be aware that during this long-running 'war on terrorism' similar incidents will be manufactured and may not be disentangled so easily or as quickly. Stephen Dorril is the author of *M16: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (Fourth Estate)

# The gaps in the reports

**MEDIA LENS (www.MediaLens.org) has highlighted major gaps in the reporting of Afghan civilian casualties by UK new organisations. This is an edited version of David Cromwell's report and the BBC's response**

MARJAN the one-eyed lion is getting "better day by day" according to the latest ITN TV news report – the third so far this year – from Kabul zoo (ITN Evening News, 22 January, 2002). Also doing well is an Asiatic black bear, "the other main casualty of the fighting", suffering from a wounded nose. ITN reassured viewers that the bear was being fed antibiotics as part of a "balanced diet", which should help the nose heal.

ITN's extraordinary indifference to the plight of human victims in Afghanistan, however, persists with literally no news reports on the mass starvation and death of refugees this year.

By contrast, on 18 January, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported one of the many catastrophes afflicting the Afghan population – US-dropped cluster bombs: "Many bombs were dropped in residential and other populated areas and the Mine Action Centre is doing their best to deal with all the emergency cases. However, they do not have enough human, logistical and other necessary resources to clear the region effectively within an acceptable period of time." (Médecins Sans Frontières website

www.msf.org, January 18, 2002, 'Cluster bombs the legacy to Afghan population').

MSF continues: "In its field operations in Herat, Médecins Sans Frontières comes across many civilians who have been injured by mines or UXOs (including cluster bombs).

"During the recent US air raids over Herat, western Afghanistan, several cluster bombs have been mistakenly dropped on residential areas causing a large number of civilian deaths and casualties ... According to official data of local de-mining organisations and the Regional Hospital in Herat, 38 deaths and an unknown number of injured people due to cluster bombs have been registered so far.

"However, some doctors in Herat Regional Hospital believe this number is much higher. In the village of Qala Shaker near Herat city alone, 12 people died and more than 20 were injured due to cluster bombs." (ibid)

Each cluster bomb contains 202 sub-munitions, of which approximately 20% do not explode upon impact. The sub-munitions consist of three kill mechanisms: anti-armour, anti-personnel and incendiary, comprising a lethal "combined effects munition". Anti-personnel fragments weighing 30g can penetrate 6.4mm of steel plate at a distance of 11 metres. The anti-armour sub-munitions can penetrate 19 cm of steel, and injure a person at 150 metres

Bomblets can be detonated by tiny changes of temperature – when a person's shadow falls across a bomblet lying in the sun, for example – by small vibrations, and even by the energy from a passing radio transmitter

According to the Mine Action Centre, US food packages and cluster bombs were dropped in the same areas. Although different in shape and size, both are yellow in colour and "many children pick up... [the bomblets] thinking they contain food or other interesting items". (ibid)

Again, to our knowledge, not one word of this has appeared on either ITN or BBC TV News this year

On January 17, 2002, Media Lens issued a Media Update: The BBC Responds On Mass Death In Afghanistan. The update concerned whitewashing replies received from the BBC in response to many Media Lens subscribers asking why minimal coverage is being devoted to the plight of bombed and starving Afghans

We took our concerns directly to Richard Sambrook, director of BBC news. To his credit, Sambrook responded immediately, citing *The Dispossessed* (BBC2, 20 January, 2002), a Correspondent programme, describing the plight of Afghan refugees in Makaki, a refugee camp near the border with Iran. Mr Sambrook also referred to a number of other BBC reports in support of his claim that "we have not ignored the suffering of Afghan civilians."

## THE OTHERS

HOWARD Zinn provides another powerful and moving perspective on 'the human beings who have died because they happened to live in an Afghan village in the vicinity of vaguely defined military targets.'

In *The Nation* (11 February 2002) he praises the way the New York Times has given us miniature portraits of the human beings who died on 11 September. Instead of statistics there are 'names, photos, glimmers of their personalities, their idiosyncrasies, how friends and loved ones remember them.'

In contrast with the vignettes of the victims featured in the New York Times, there are few details about the dead men, women and children in Afghanistan.

To begin to compile such information

'we would need to study the scattered news reports, usually in the inside sections of the Times and the Washington Post, but also in the international press – Reuters;

**With no access to alternative information, it is not surprising that a majority of Americans have approved of what they have been led to think is a war on terrorism**

the London Times, Guardian and Independent; and Agence France-Presse.

These reports have been mostly out of sight of the general public (indeed,

virtually never reported on national television, where most Americans get their news), and so dispersed as to reinforce the idea that the bombing of civilians has been an infrequent event, a freak accident, an unfortunate mistake.'

Zinn then presents a number of news items to remind us of the scale of the civilian casualties. He concludes, 'Yes, these reports appeared, but scattered through the months of bombing and on the inside pages or buried in larger stories and accompanied by solemn government denials.

With no access to alternative information, it is not surprising that a majority of Americans have approved of what they have been led to think is a war on terrorism.

Full report in [www.thenation.com](http://www.thenation.com)

## WITHOUT COMMENT

If one American dies the whole world hears about it. But Afghans die everyday and nobody pays any attention. No one will ask who was killed and how. Look at me; I have lost my wife and my child and now live in dirt, and no-one cares.

Abdol Sattar Sharifi  
in *The Dispossessed*, Correspondent  
BBC2 Sunday 20 January

On today's Lunchtime News, ITN again gave extensive coverage to bushfires in Australia. The fires are widespread and 6,000 people have been driven from their homes, but not one person has so far been killed. The BBC's One O'Clock News also focused on the same story. Both channels have repeatedly shown dramatic footage of the fires over the last few days, often using the exact same footage on consecutive days. During this time neither channel has made any mention of the refugee crisis in Afghanistan.

David Edwards and David Cromwell  
ZNET: [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org)

## Access denied

**'JOURNALISTS have been denied access to American troops in the field in Afghanistan to a greater degree than in any previous war involving US military forces. Bush administration policy has kept reporters from combat units in a fashion unimagined in Vietnam, and one that's more restrictive than the burdensome constraints on media in the Persian Gulf.'**

That's the opening paragraph from Neil Hickey's report in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (January/February 2002) which provides a clear analysis of the way control over information was central to the Bush administration and the Pentagon's operations. 'Defense Department spokespersons spoonfed correspondents a calibrated daily ration of news about the military operations,' Hickey asserts.

You can read the full report: [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org)

# Culture Minister promises wide consultation on bill

CONTROL of the giant communications regulator OFCOM – one of the cornerstones of the upcoming communications bill – will not be concentrated in the hands of an unrepresentative few. Neither will Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland be left out in the cold in discussions on the government's upcoming communications reforms.

Culture Minister Tessa Jowell gave these assurances at a meeting with CPBF on 23 January when the Campaign presented its response to the government's consultation paper on media ownership rules.

Tessa Jowell said the eventual 'fully fledged' OFCOM would have to be bigger than the one envisaged in the paving bill currently before parliament. She agreed that the voices of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland needed to be heard on their specific cultural and communications concerns and promised consultations with 'devolved institutions' on the communications bill.



Tessa Jowell: consultations with devolved institutions

## OFCOM role to include the BBC?

The possibility of the BBC coming under the regulatory control of OFCOM came a step closer in the House of Commons debate on the bill setting up the new super regulator on 14 January.

Broadcasting minister Kim Howells indicated as much in reply to former culture secretary Chris Smith who called for the BBC to come under the scrutiny of an 'independent regulator' rather than the Secretary of State.

Dr Howells told MPs: "We will take that suggestion very seriously, and I am sure it will be debated when we discuss the main Bill –

the communications Bill."

The OFCOM Bill is expected to complete its committee stage early in February. In addition there are strong rumours that the government might be prepared to give OFCOM the powers to issue 'statutory advice' to the BBC, Channel 4 and S4C.

The advice could be rejected by the companies if they saw fit, but it would put pressure on them and would be seen as a halfway measure to full accountability to OFCOM and would no doubt be reviewed in the light of experience.

## COMMUNICATIONS BILL – CAMPAIGN ROUND-UP

AS THE bill to set up OFCOM reached the committee stage in the House of Commons, CPBF has been in Westminster lobbying MPs on the need for the communications regulator to be both transparent in its operations and accountable for its action.

A letter was also sent to all Standing Committee members dealing with the bill. Among its arguments it made the case for an OFCOM ruling body representing wider national, cultural and social interests than those of the communications industry and for a Select Committee of MPs to have the final say on who should be appointed as

Chief Executive and to the OFCOM board.

The CPBF has published its response to the government's consultation paper on media ownership rules.

These are expected to form a central part of the forthcoming communications bill. In the 17-page submission, presented to Culture Minister Tessa Jowell on 23 January, the CPBF underlines what it sees as the risks for pluralism and diversity in evolving communications systems in the UK.

The Campaign argues that rules governing media concentration and cross-media ownership should be enforced more

effectively and that public interest considerations should remain central in any changes being drafted in the communications bill.

"The continuing significance of mass media in people's lives as well as the growing importance of new media, justify and require effective regulation of communications in the public interest."

We print here some points from the document – for the full text of the CPBF response see [www.cpbp.org.uk](http://www.cpbp.org.uk) Figures in [ ] refer to sections in the government consultation document

## Response to consultation on media ownership rules by DCMS and DTI (November 2001)

**1** We recognise that media markets are evolving, influenced by technological changes arising from digitalisation and by convergence. However, we challenge the basis of arguments that regulation is either no longer necessary, or desirable, or feasible due to 'convergence'. We argue that the continuing significance of mass media in people's lives as well as the growing importance of new media, justify and require effective regulation of communications in the public interest.

### 2 REGULATING FOR PLURALISM AND DIVERSITY

We believe that the Consultation Paper does not adequately identify the purposes of regulating for plurality and diversity in the media, nor the risks to pluralism and diversity in evolving communication systems in the United Kingdom.

We think that the government should be concerned with preventing a concentration of ownership and using its legislative and economic power to promote plurality of outlets. The media should be an arena in which a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints can be encountered. This means that governments have to take action to encourage participation in the media by the range of different communities in our society and also enforce, across the media, obligations on providers of services to promote key values of accuracy, impartiality and public service principles. As we have argued in our main submission on the White Paper, we do not think that diversity is served by encouraging the spread of market-driven services and leaving public service and community media on the margins of the system.

Communications regulation needs to be

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

### CPBF RESPONSES TO SOME DETAILED OPTIONS [6]

The consultation document outlined fifteen options on aspects of media ownership. We have responded to them all, but at some length in many cases, and it is not possible to summarise the points adequately. Please consult the web site or if you want the print version of the CPBF response (17 pages) contact the CPBF National Office

### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Once powerful media groups have established themselves it is extremely difficult for governments ever to envisage policy proposals that might weaken or limit their economic or political power. In the UK we have seen how such a powerful group, News International, was allowed, and indeed encouraged, to grow. In part this was a reward for the support Rupert Murdoch gave to successive Conservative governments under Mrs Thatcher through his newspapers (the acquisition of the Times and the Sunday Times was not the subject of a referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, for example). Also the satellite service, Sky, was exempted from regulatory and other limits placed on other UK broadcasters and newspaper publishers under the 1990 Broadcasting Act and then allowed effectively to take over its rival BSB.

We mention this case to underline our concern that media ownership does have a

direct and vital impact on the democratic process, and changes in media ownership laws should therefore be very carefully considered. We welcome the opportunity to respond above to the options presented in the Consultation document and wish to conclude with some general points.

Previous government documents – *Regulating Communications* (1998) and the White Paper *A New Future for Communications* (2000) – were more insistent on the relentless march towards convergence, whereas there is a recognition in the Consultation document that media policy shouldn't be formulated on the assumption that ownership and regulation of the media become less central in a multi-channel, digital world with a plethora of news sources, entertainment and information. [3.10] and [6.0.7.]

However these statements do conflict with others [1.8] on the commitment to a deregulatory approach to media markets.

Our views on the Consultation Paper are shaped by the conviction that the defence and protection of a diverse and high quality media system requires positive regulation and controls. Those who argue that choice and diversity can flourish only through deregulation, or that to develop 'a more significant international presence' requires 'further deregulation' are, we believe, either mistaken or arguing from purely self-interested commercial perspectives. Indeed, making it easier for UK media companies to merge could simply create handy, bite-sized snacks for global conglomerates to swallow up. Furthermore, British television has proved to be at its most successful on the export market when it is most distinctive, not when it is at its most blandly international or mid-Atlantic.

## ITN NEWS PROVISION

# ITC is no guarantee of quality

ONE of the issues raised in the Consultation on Media Ownership was that of the ITN News provider. In the process which led to ITN being awarded the ITV news contract the annual value of the contract has fallen from £80 million a year in 1991 to £33 million now. In real terms it has been a slashing of revenue by two thirds, and the effect on ITN as an operation has been shattering.

This revenue cut has gone on at the same time as ITV has been demanding more 'lifestyle news' and less 'Westminster trivia'.

In December we wrote to the Independent Television Commission, in the light of these developments, to seek their views on whether ITN is fulfilling its obligations under the current broadcasting legislation to provide high-quality national and international news to Channel 3 (ITV).

The letter from Chief Executive Patricia Hodgson says: 'The provision of national and international news is one of the key public service obligations placed on the Channel 3 licensee. We are determined to do all we can to ensure that ITV fulfils its this obligation and offers a news service which competes effectively with the BBC.'

However, she points out that whilst the ITC has to assure itself that anyone wishing to tender for the ITN news contract must be 'effectively equipped' and 'adequately financed' the ITC can play no part in the subsequent tendering process. The letter finishes by stressing the importance of 'reinforcing the importance of news provision in the context of the forthcoming Communications Bill'.

In our response to the Media Consultation document we argue that there has to be a change in the system. We point out: 'There was much comment on the intervention of the Chrysalis/BSkyB consortium, but in truth we believe this made little difference: the ITV network would have driven down the price anyway; indeed the price did come down during negotiations after the competition had been eliminated.'

We conclude: 'It is clear that the ITC's role in the process is no safeguard of quality and the system must be changed before the contract is next due for renewal. The solution must be to place the decision to award the contract in the hands of the regulator itself, rather than in the hands of the broadcasters whose sole interest is to lower the price.'

## PUBLIC MEETING

'Wales and the future of mass communications' was the title of a public meeting on the Communications Bill held in Cardiff on Thursday 7 February. The event in Cardiff City Hall was jointly organised by CPBF, the NUJ, the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and BECTU. Speakers included Rhodri Glyn Thomas, Chair of the Welsh National Assembly Culture Committee; Tina Fleming of the community organisation Black Light; John Foster, NUJ General Secretary; Geraint Talfan Davies, Radio Authority Member for Wales; Tony Lennon CPBF and President of BECTU and Kevin Williams, Professor of Media Studies, University of Wales.

## WYATT, MURDOCH AND THATCHER

JOHN Newsinger has a sharp analysis of Woodrow Wyatt's three volumes of memoirs in *Lobster* 42 (Winter 2001). Entitled 'Confessions of a Crawler' Newsinger quite rightly reacts against the details of 'a career of arse-licking sycophancy ... He was a power and wealth fetishist and these are the diaries of a pervert.'

But his review is very interesting on Wyatt's connection with Murdoch. Newsinger points out that Wyatt boasts on a number of occasions in the three volumes about his role in persuading the electricians' union to provide Murdoch with blacklegs (his word) at Wapping.

The print workers walked out on 24 January 1986 but as early as the 18th Murdoch showed Wyatt around his Wapping plant, telling him the police were ready for pickets and had riot shields stored in a nearby warehouse. Murdoch observed, 'I feel really secure.'

The third volume documents the fall-out with Major and Murdoch's embrace of Tony Blair. Early in 1995 the Murdoch press carried a story about Major's son James and an affair he was having. 'If I had a majority of a hundred and fifty, Major told Wyatt, I would crush Rupert Murdoch and make sure he had no newspapers at all.'

Some (including Wyatt) believed it was the 1996 Broadcasting Act which was the decisive factor in Murdoch's decision to back New Labour – the Act excluded him from the ownership of terrestrial television.

What was more important was the role of Irwin Stelzer who had privileged access to Blair and Gordon Brown before and after the 1997 election (and since then too).

He persuaded Murdoch that Blair would win. Of course the Broadcasting Act served a symbolic purpose – New Labour was prepared to be more accommodating to Murdoch's interests than the Tories. As Virginia Bottomley, the then Heritage Secretary, put it, Labour had 'lurched from paranoid terror of large media groups to sycophantic devotion to them.'

*Lobster* is published in June and December. One year's sub £6.00 UK; £8.00

**The print workers walked out on 24 January 1986 but as early as the 18th Murdoch showed Wyatt around his Wapping plant, telling him the police were ready for pickets and had riot shields stored in a nearby warehouse. Murdoch observed, 'I feel really secure.'**

## MEDIA MONITOR

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www.lobster-magazine.co.uk

### WHY MEDIA MERGERS MATTER

There's been a lively debate on the topic of media mergers on the highly recommended open democracy website: www.opendemocracy.net

First off was a combative piece by Robert McChesney. Readers of his *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* will be familiar with the arguments and evidence he deploys to demonstrate the distorting impact on democracy of mega-media corporations.

His views were challenged by a champion of the free market, Benjamin Compaine. It has been a truly international debate with views from Europe and elsewhere.

Most recently William Hoynes has entered the debate with a fine piece which focuses again on the democratic issues: '...it behoves us to recognise that the growth of global media conglomerates poses a new challenge to those concerned about promoting cultural and political democracy'. He points out how pervasive are the products of the media conglomerates, quoting AOL Time Warner which boasts that its 'brands touch consumers more than 2.5 billion times each month'. Chilling thought but it bears out one comment made at the time of the merger when one commentator used the phrase 'hypercommercialism' and predicted that US citizens, and now people throughout the world would be 'carpet-bombed' with advertising and promotional material for AOL Time Warner products.

### BLOODY SUNDAY

On 30 January 1972 paratroopers shot dead 13 unarmed Catholic men when rioting

broke out on the fringes of an illegal but relatively peaceful civil rights march in Derry. Two programmes – *Bloody Sunday* on ITV, a film by Paul Greenglass shot like newsreel footage, and *Sunday*, a drama-documentary by Jimmy McGovern on Channel 4 – are both to be praised for their attempts to recreate the events surrounding that awful day. Why nothing from the BBC, though?

At a recent meeting to plan our response to the government's consultation document on media ownership National Council member Steve Peak casually mentioned that he was there in Derry, and witnessed the shootings. He showed us a front page of the sadly short-lived paper, *7 Days*, with a dramatic photo of him amongst the marchers, stooped down as the shootings started. He also has photos of the marchers that day, but his roll of film ran out before the shooting started.

Steve has been called as a witness by the Saville inquiry, which began in March 2000.

He told us that back in 1972 his ambition was to be a social worker but his experience that day, and the lies and distortions in the media that followed the shootings, as well as the Widgery report which exonerated the paratroopers who opened fire, pushed him into a career in journalism.

### NEXT ISSUE

National Council member Pat Holland is researching the archive of the Thames TV current affairs series, *This Week*. She will be writing a piece for the next issue of *Free Press* on the two programmes dealing with *Bloody Sunday* and discussing issues raised by them.

### VIVENDI'S DEALS

Vivendi's Chief Executive, Jean-Marie Messier, has been on the acquisition trail. In Italy Vivendi owns the pay-TV platform, Telepiu and it recently acquired its competitor, Stream, from News Corporation in a deal worth £137 million.

In the US Vivendi made a £1.5 billion purchase of a 10% stake in pay-TV group, EchoStar, followed by \$10.8 billion acquisition of USA Networks. In the last eighteen months Messier's deal making has seen Vivendi acquire media businesses in the USA worth \$50 billion.

All this activity has elicited mixed reactions in France. Some see this as the creation of a global media group by a French company, whilst others fear the further Hollywoodisation of French popular culture. Indeed he created political storms with his pronouncement that 'the French cultural exception is dead'. Messier now lives with his family in a \$17 million Park Avenue apartment in New York.

# Attacks on the media in Zimbabwe

THREE Zimbabwean journalists were arrested in Harare on 30 January as they protested at a draconian media bill which will restrict their ability to report, and also limit the freedom of foreign journalists to stay in the country and report on the developing crisis.

The journalists, carrying placards demanding freedom of expression, were assaulted by the riot police as they broke up the protest. The Presidential election on 9 March is the focal point for a sustained attack on the ability of the independent media to print stories critical of President Mugabe and his government. The controversial Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Bill will give the Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, power to deal with critical reporting and suppress dissent.

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) points out, 'Over the past two years, freedom of expression and freedom of the press have come under an ever-tightening siege, that has often spilled over into open violence and acts of sabotage against the media' and sees the latest legislation as

putting in place 'a complete management system to deal with dissent, whether expressed in the media or the political activities of the opposition'.

MISA is urging people and organisations to support its initiatives and protest against the latest clampdown on the media. Contact www.misa.org/zimprotest/ for details.

### BLACK HAWK DOWN AND SOMALIA

We wanted to say something about the very partial and incomplete piece of history which is represented in Ridley Scott's new film about US troops in Somalia in 1993, but George Monbiot has done it for us. In *The Guardian* (29 January) he gives a full account of the real sequence of events which led to the debacle on 3 October 1993 which led to the destruction of two Black Hawk helicopters and the deaths of 18 American soldiers.

There is a full account of the episode, and the broader detail of the US involvement in Somalia which was, we need to remind ourselves, to do with peace enforcement, in

Scott Peterson's marvellous book, *Me Against My Brother*, published by Routledge in 2000.

Monbiot points out that the attempt to capture the warlord Aideed's lieutenants is portrayed 'as a battle between good and evil, civilisation and barbarism'. The film gives no sense of the strained situation which developed in the previous months and the mistaken strategies developed since a 30,000-strong US task-force was sent to Somalia in the last day of George Bush's presidency in an attempt to cow the warlords sufficiently to enable food and medical aid to reach the starving population beyond Mogadishu. It was called *Operation Restore Hope*. The huge US force withdrew in March 1993 and responsibility passed to a UN force under US leadership.

The significance of the events in Ridley Scott's film was that it brought to the end the American belief that it could sweep aside venal dictators and terrorists. Now, post-11 September, the film constructs a story with, as Monbiot accurately points out, America casting itself simultaneously as the world's saviour and the world's victim'.

## BOOK REVIEW

# Incalculable damage to the culture ...

**The Business of Books**  
*Andre Schiffrin; Verso; £10*

WE GAVE a very positive review to this book when it came out a year ago in hardback. In his preface to the new edition Schiffrin points out, '... the trends I have tried to analyse have continued unabated. In country after country, the few remaining independent publishers have decreased still further in number.'

He points out, 'In Great Britain, where there were only four important independent publishers, one of the most promising, Fourth Estate, was bought up by HarperCollins, part of the Murdoch empire. Consistent with events described in the chapters on censorship that follow, one of the first decisions taken after the merger was to cancel the contract for a biography of Murdoch, which the publishers realised would be critical of its subject.'

The impact of Fourth Estate's sale negatively affected other independent publishers who relied on Fourth Estate's sales force to represent their books to the bookstores.

Nicholas Lezard chose this book for his *Pick of the Week* in *The Guardian*, commenting 'Schiffrin makes a very good

case for the proposal that concentrating on numbers and profit margins at the expense of quality is doing literally incalculable damage to the culture'.

The problems of book publishing in the age of media conglomerates are profound. This book diagnoses the causes and consequences, and deserves the widest possible readership.

**GW**

## More anecdotes, less jargon

**Making Sense of Men's Magazines**  
*Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson and Kate Brooks; Polity; £14.99*

THE birth of lad's mags and 'ladesque' culture can be seen as one of the most significant changes in men's identities since David Beckham wore a sarong. And, depending on which side of the fence you sit on, lad's mags are either responsible for the destruction of, as my father would say, the real man, or as my mother would say, the rise of a new nice lad.

It cannot be denied that the impact has

been phenomenal.

This book looks at men's lifestyle magazines and attempts to deconstruct them and place them in the arena of public knowledge.

The authors look at the question of sales, content, editorial and advertising influence as well as carrying out focus groups in order to, as the title suggests, make sense of men's magazines.

The book's main focus is to emphasise the changing shift in "contemporary masculinity" from the new lad to the new man. Is there a difference? Well according to this book there is. In following this path the authors try to tie every piece of research they do to this one point and in doing so miss the bigger picture of why men read magazines in the first place.

The impact of the magazines is largely ignored in favour of sociological discussion and this makes the book very heavy going in places.

I think the fact that a lot of the major editors at the time of the research declined to be interviewed speaks volumes. More anecdotes and less jargon would increase the book's appeal immensely.

**John Cowan**

CPBF  
NEWS

## NEWCASTLE PUBLIC MEETING The Communications Revolution: Who Benefits?

Hosted by Newcastle Branch NUJ  
Saturday 23 February  
The Ouseburn Watersports Association,  
Spillers Quay  
Speakers: Rory MacLeod President NUJ  
Granville Williams CPBF  
Paul Atkinson BECTU

The meeting will start at 12 noon, followed by a buffet.  
Contact NUJ NEC member George Macintyre, chair of the  
North-East Press Club – covering NUJ branches and  
freelances in the North East, for further information.  
Tel 07950 154852 (mobile) or  
email: geomactg@onyxnet.co.uk  
Directions to the venue are as follows:  
By car: Turn off Walker Road on to St Lawrence Road and  
down to Spillers on the Quayside.  
By bus: Nos 34/35/35A/35B from outside Gotham Town  
pub, opposite Newcastle Central Station. Buses every 20  
minutes or so. It is a 10-minute trip. Fare: 55p. Ask for  
the Free Trade/Fighting Cocks pubs on Walker Road. Look  
out for fleet of small boats. Club is 90 seconds walk from  
bus stop.  
On foot: 40 minutes from Central Station. Down to  
Quayside, 300 yards past the Gateshead Millennium bridge  
(Blinking Eye Bridge).

# Why, O Lord, Why?

## Tom O'Malley on Lord Wakeham and the unanswered question

LORD Wakeham addressed a seminar of campaigners, academics, journalists and politicians at the Labour 'think tank' the Institute of Public Policy Research on 23rd January, just a week before he stepped down as chair of the PCC.

He followed on from contributions, one by Professor Eric Barendt, which supported the desirability of providing some form of legal protection on matters of privacy.

John Wakeham brushed aside the possibility of any such law and proceeded to mount a defence of the PCC, which he chairs.

Asked why a properly framed law promoting press freedom and providing a speedy remedy for complaints on topics like privacy, would constitute a form of government control of the press, he was taken aback.

The question, he thrust in reply, with a sense of humour of dazzling unoriginality, was 'academic'. Why? Because, it was asked by an academic! Not good enough! He was pressed. Well, the answer went, there would be a problem with pre-publication injunctions issued by judges under any such law.

It was pointed out that, undesirable as this was, it did not undermine the general case for a properly framed law.

'Why' the questioner asked again, 'would such a properly framed law constitute a form of government control of the press?' 'Why?' came the reply, as the wily Lord turned the question on the questioner.

It was pointed out to the evasive Lord that, like many a politician before, he was refusing to answer a direct question. After further fruitless exchanges, all variants on the question 'Why?', it became clear that the, by now, positively slippery Lord would not answer the question.

Yet, why the unusually reticent Lord could not answer a question touching on the reasons why statutory measures, which he soundly denounces as a potential threat to press freedom, would constitute such a threat must, if we want to be charitable, remain a mystery.

If not, we might speculate that Wakeham's motto is, when asked a question you cannot answer, avoid it, or, as in the case of Enron, keep silent as long as possible.

Now a number of newspapers and journalists are raising critical questions about Lord Wakeham's role as chair of the PCC, and about the effectiveness of the body itself.

Why not just abolish the PCC anyway, and put something more efficient, representative and effective for journalists and citizens in its place? Why, O Lord, Why not?

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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