

DIGITAL TV A phoenix rising from the ashes?

TONY LENNON

WHEN DIGITAL Terrestrial TV (DTT) is relaunched this Autumn by the BBC and transmitter company Crown Castle, commentators will no doubt hail the new service as a phoenix rising from the ashes of ITV Digital, which collapsed in March.

In reality it will be more like Icarus dusting himself off after his fall, and vowing to give up aviation in favour of jogging or cycling.

From the day it was launched in 1998, OnDigital, renamed ITV Digital in 2001, was seen by industry experts as a good idea that would probably never fly.

The good idea was the roll-out of DTT, digital TV through existing aerials, a technology ideally suited to continue the free-to-air traditions of UK public service broadcasting once the current analogue transmitters are turned off. Its fatal flaw was the pay-TV model that won Carlton and Granada, sole shareholders of ITV Digital, the licence to operate three of the six DTT frequencies available around the country. The other three frequencies were allocated in 1997 respectively to the BBC, ITV/Channel 4, and Satellite Digital Networks (SDN)/Channel 5. Each frequency carries a coded digital data stream mixing together a number of TV channels - multiplexing in technical speak.

Carlton and Granada set out to create a digital pay-TV service that would rival BSkyB's satellite package, then available only on old-style analogue technology, to be based ironically in Battersea's Marco Polo House, once the home of British Satellite Broadcasting which had challenged Sky TV a decade before - and lost.

ITV Digital's ambition to fly close to

Murdoch's sun with high-cost sports programming and other subscription channels was always going to be an uphill struggle. BSkyB was on the brink of launching its own digital satellite service with hundreds of channels versus roughly 30 on OnDigital - a no-brainer for the early adopters of multi-channel TV who craved more choice. OnDigital was also starting from a subscriber base of zero, compared to BSkyB's 3 million in 1999, all of whom were converted to digital satellite by the end of 2001 - in other words many potential customers for multi-channel TV had already been mopped up by Murdoch before the Granada/Carlton venture hit the marketplace.

In 2001 OnDigital was rebranded as ITV Digital and limped above a subscriber base of a million customers - a landmark for the company, but not enough to support the cash drain of the Nationwide League football deal that was credited with taking the company down. However, the football contract was just the straw that broke the camel's back - the greater cause of ITV Digital's downfall was the box war that broke out more than two years

earlier when installation charges, and then the cost of set-top boxes themselves, were cut to nothing by BSkyB and ITV Digital in a bid to win market share. This put the "cost of acquisition" for each new customer at more than £300 for the Carlton/Granada venture, leading the newly-installed Chief Executive Stuart Prebble to complain in 2000 that "the more new subscribers we win, the more money we lose". The company's debt began to accelerate, hitting £800m in 2001.

A now-creaking business model was further strained by the high turnover of ITV Digital customers, many of whom signed up for subscriptions but found that the technology couldn't deliver a reliable service. Problems caused by limits on transmission power imposed to prevent interference with existing analogue TV channels, and too many channels being squeezed onto the multiplexers, cut the national reach of DTT from an expected 70-90% of homes, to as few as 40% of customers being able to receive a full service from ITV Digital.

In hindsight the DTT technology should have been tested and refined more thoroughly before launch, but ITV Digital was in a start-up race against BSkyB's digital system, which it still lost, despite all the technical corner-cutting and compromise. BSkyB

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Visit the CPBF Website

WE SOMETIMES have to edit material for Free Press, but put the full, unedited version on the website. In this issue both the PLATFORM piece by Williams Cole and Julian Petley's dissection of the PCC's effectiveness were edited for reasons of space.

In addition, our full response to the government's draft Communications Bill is on the website, including evidence presented by US academic and media activist, Bob McChesney, on the devastating impact of deregulation on the US media.

Another good reason for visiting

our website is the links to other organisations sharing our concerns. For example, if you want to know more on the background in Canada to Graham Knight's report in this issue, Muzzling Local Voices, there's another excellent piece, Canada's Media Monopoly, in the June, 2002 issue of Extra!, the magazine of the media watch group, FAIR (www.fair.org) which the CPBF site links to.

Spread the word. Help us to develop and use our website (www.cpb.org.uk) more actively.



News Blackout. Trafalgar Square, London, April 1997. A police officer's hand covers David Hoffman's lens during a joint demonstration of striking Liverpool dockers and Reclaim the Streets protesters. Police also prevented TV crews from filming police actions against the demonstrators. During the event police attacked and injured a number of accredited press photographers.

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also had much healthier cashflow thanks to its millions of analogue satellite customers, and with deeper pockets was better-placed to cope with the cost of handing out free boxes.

For a government committed to shutting down the current analogue transmitters so that the frequencies can be sold to telecoms companies - fools' gold in the view of most pundits - the bankruptcy of ITV Digital posed a dilemma. It would either have to hand the responsibility for transmitting UK television exclusively to two subscription operators - BSkyB and the still-disorganised cable industry - or someone would have to rescue DTT, the obvious free-to-air technology.

Step forward the BBC, broadcaster of last resort with an interest in maintaining free delivery of its expanding licence-fee funded TV and radio channels, and Crown Castle, a company which had invested in the DTT transmitter but was staring at the possibility of no one wanting to use it.

When the Independent Television Commission invited bids for the three frequencies that ITV Digital had vacated, a joint application was made by BBC/Crown Castle to run an

integrated free-to-air service of 24 channels across all six national DTT frequencies. There was no room, they said, in the UK market, for DTT to continue offering viewers a third pay-TV platform competing with satellite and cable, but the system could run economically if a range of free channels, some funded by advertising, agreed to share the transmission costs between them.

Branding of DTT as a free system would also ease confusion among consumers - although ITV Digital, and for that matter BSkyB, could serve up free-to-air channels from the BBC and ITV, it wasn't in their commercial interest to do so, and few viewers ever went to the trouble of paying full price for the set-top box and obtaining a subscriber card that gave access to free public service channels.

Other bids were made to the ITC - Carlton and Granada, a tad optimistically given their recent failure, teamed up with Freeview to propose so-called "pay-TV lite" with 20 free channels and 7 subscription services, and there was a similar bid from SDN. A venture capital group Apax proposed a free-to-air service of 40 channels, without offering to solve the technical problems that had dogged ITV Digital.

Underexposed: "Pictures Can Lie and Liars Use Pictures" Edited by Colin Jacobson. Published by Vision On in association with Index on Censorship £35

THIS IS a very powerful book, combining a selection of over 170 photographs with good critical commentaries placing the photos in context. Underexposed has seven major themes: *Don't look now* - images that were banned or suppressed; *Restricted vision* - the observation of censorship in action; *Avoiding the issue* - controversial pictures that present the viewer with a moral dilemma; *Image control* - photographs analysed for PR spin; *Recovered memory* - history revisited through photographs with the stories behind them; *Relative values* - photographs that show the shifting nature of cultural values and attitudes; and *Getting it wrong* - the misinterpretation of images.

Jacobson's selection of images is excellent. Highly recommended.

Granville Williams

The winning BBC/Crown Castle bid combined a completely free proposition with a technical solution - more transmitter power and only 24 channels in total which should offer a reliable service to at least 80% of homes. BSkyB had a limited involvement in the bid because it plans to offer three of its free-to-air channels on the new system.

Set-top boxes, or "adapters" as they will be called, are due to appear in the shops this Autumn, priced at £99 initially, but expected to become cheaper with time. Most old ITV Digital boxes will pick up the new service, although in theory they still belong to the company's liquidators.

To the relief of the government, and the BBC, the battle of the boxes is over, but we have still to see how many punters are willing to pay even a modest one-off price to watch extra channels. For those who don't want to switch things won't necessarily be the same for ever - one day the analogue transmitters will be turned off, and much sooner than then we will start to see the effect on ITV programme quality of the £1.2bn lost by its two biggest producers in the failed digital venture. In Carlton and Granada the job cuts have started already.

An American view of UK terrestrial TV

WILLIAMS ROSSA COLE was a 1995-96 Fulbright Scholar at the London School of Economics. He is now an independent documentary producer and freelance writer in NYC.

I OFTEN find myself searching for a satisfying night of television not overrun by ads: maybe a well-produced, compelling documentary, a drama that is not sanitized, a few long news segments, perhaps an uncensored film and some frivolous but titillating late-night half-hour. Sometimes, between a Sopranos episode, a PBS documentary and a late-night sit-com it might work. But more often than not in America this can often be a mind-numbing endeavour that can lead to a state of ennui, head bent back, mouth slightly agape, too enervated to even hit the mute button when a litany of loud ads erupts from the set. All this for more than \$700 per year in cable costs.

Television can be a powerful medium to present daring, creative and investigative programming and that it has a duty to inform a democratic public. Especially in the realm of news and documentaries, the UK terrestrial television I got to know while living in London for a year in the mid-1990s was the best television in the English-speaking world.

Just as the 1990 Communications bill seemed to bring UK television one step closer to the commercially saturated US model, the ideas bouncing around for the next highly significant Communication Bill, give me cause for concern. Like a favourite novel that is purloined and made into a sappy Hollywood film written by committee, the proposed further deregulation of UK terrestrial channels will change the unique content of broadcasting built on a public service ethos into a paltry shadow of itself. The key to sustaining consistency, quality and the all-important leashing-in of commercials is found in that one word: regulation.

Without publicly-orientated regulation, programming content inevitably falls under the nebulous idea of the marketplace, a system that tends to

treat media products as it might treat produce, though broadcasting far from fills the requisites for effective competition and a well-functioning market. When combined with deregulation of public service commitments and a heavy reliance on ratings, the bottom line calls the shots and content becomes more bland and formulaic.

The regulated UK model represents an alternative system of disseminating information and entertainment quite separate from the naturalised market-based system that dominates the US. While government involvement in content regulation comes with its own set of problems, the US-style commercial system tends to obfuscate its own "market censorship" with a rhetoric of "freedom of choice." While Murdoch has used such language to criticise UK terrestrial TV, history shows that without this regulation programming will become less risk-taking and controversial, more soaked with ads and eventually slip over the edge of no return. A study by the Third World & Environment Broadcasting Project found that after the 1990 Broadcasting Act documentary and current affairs programming significantly reduced on all the British terrestrial channels including a startling 80% drop of ITV of documentaries on "international issues."

The US system does produce a few gems in the area of entertainment-orientated sit-coms and dramas (it's interesting that the commercial-free premium cable channels are where one will find the closest approximation to the kind of compelling documen-

taries and original dramas that are consistently on C4 and the BBC). But in the realm of news, documentaries and current affairs it has been downhill for quite some time.

US government regulation of content for the public interest has been diminishing consistently over the last decades. The Federal Communication Commission is so passive in the realm of television content and ownership that it might as well shut its doors to save the taxpayers some money. The new FCC chair Michael Powell, son of Secretary of State Colin, is thoroughly pro-deregulation and pro-market and even sarcastically stated after his first day in the position that he "had waited for a visit from the angel of public interest...but she did not come."

I look back with great envy to the time I lived in the UK. These days I find myself watching hours and hours of inane movies on the premium pay channels solely because there are no commercials. This privilege, by the way, costs me many times the cost of a license fee in the UK.

Deregulation of television towards the market is a political act. It will change the content and scope of programming and inevitably move toward more formulaic entertainment, less challenging news, documentaries and cheaply-made fillers. The change may not happen overnight but as the system that rules television around most of the world descends on the UK you too might find yourself, much like this American, remote in hand and looking back longingly.

WITHOUT COMMENT

PUBLISHING IS now dominated by six huge media groups, one indigenous, two German, one French and two American. The largest, HarperCollins, is owned by Rupert Murdoch, which is why he has a monopoly on British prime ministers' memoirs - when the time comes, each is handsomely rewarded for leaving News Corp alone. Penguin belongs to Pearson; Time Warner UK is part of the ill-fated conglomerate that so unhappily merged with AOL; Random House belongs to Bertelsmann of Germany, one of the world's largest but least visible media groups; Holtzbrinck own Macmillan; and Orion belongs to Hachette, which in turn belongs to Lagadère Media, which is linked to Vivendi, the company that also owns Connex South East trains. These six groups now control more than 80 per cent of all books sold through bookshops. And the percentage is inexorably rising. **Andrew Franklin, New Statesman, 27 May 2002**

PAINTING A ROSY PICTURE

JULIAN PETLEY on the press 'watchdog'

THE PRESS Complaints Commission has just published its Annual Review 2001 - and a very glossy and expensive-looking document it is too. On its black front cover are four coloured boxes enshrining the PCC's main aims: raising standards, protecting the public, helping the vulnerable, and delivering swift justice. The fifth - ensuring the continuance of the present system of self-regulation - is strangely absent, though its spirit permeates almost every one of the Report's 18 pages.

So, how well did the PCC meet its stated aims in 2001? Unsurprisingly, the answer which emerges from this saga of self-congratulation and complacency, is: 'magnificently'. However, it's possible to reach a rather different conclusion.

In 2001, the PCC received a record 3,033 complaints - 36% up on the previous year and higher than the previous record of 1996. The Commission 'interprets this increase not necessarily as a sign of falling journalistic standards - but far more likely one of the increasing visibility of the Commission' as a result of its 10th Anniversary and a number of high-profile complaints'. However, as it undertakes no research into public opinion on the press, this in the end is pure guesswork and little more than wishful thinking.

Unsurprisingly, 56% of complaints concerned the national daily and Sunday press, a slightly higher proportion than in previous years which is 'substantially accounted for by a significant increase in complaints against national newspapers under Clause 13 (Discrimination) of the Code of Practice following the appalling events of September 11th 2001'. These actually made up 13.5% of the total number of complaints received.

In other words, although the PCC Review is too coy to spell this out, these were complaints about the way in which a significant number of newspapers turned the Twin Towers tragedy and its aftermath into yet another opportunity to indulge in some of the most revolting examples of Islamophobia and refugee-baiting yet seen in the British press. Nor does it reveal that one of these complaints was actually brought, in an unprecedented step, by the NUJ itself against the Express, many of whose employees were becoming increasingly sickened at being forced by its owner and editor to run such hate-fuelling garbage. Hardly surprisingly, given its long and dishonourable history of refusing to take seriously both press racism and undue proprietorial/editorial pressure on journalists, the ever-reliable PCC merely side-stepped the issue, claiming that the complaint had been brought under the wrong section of its Code.

As always, the majority (58%) of complaints concerned accuracy. One third of all complaints received turned out to be outside the PCC's conveniently narrow, self-imposed remit; inevitably these included the numerous third party complaints from which the PCC has always been so keen to protect itself - it would, of course, be entirely unreasonable for a body dedicated to upholding 'the highest possible standards of newspaper reporting' and 'raising standards of journalism' to have to entertain complaints from pesky, interfering busybodies with the temerity to complain that those standards are not being upheld in the cases of stories in which they themselves are not directly involved. In the case of a further 30% of complaints: 'either no breach of the Code was established, or no further action was required by the Commission after an appropriate offer by an editor



to remedy any possible breach'.

In the end, the Commission issued a full adjudication on only 41 complaints, upholding 19 and rejecting 22. Thus - and these, of course, are the figures which the PCC Review doesn't actually spell out - it adjudicated only 1.4% of the complaints it received, and upheld a mere 0.6% of these. Small wonder, then, that the PCC can boast that it's the 'quickest of any of the media regulators' since the greater part of its job appears to consist of refusing, in one way or another, to deal with large numbers of the complaints which it receives!

Furthermore, since the PCC is funded by newspapers themselves, and thus can never take a pro-active role in censoring, let alone raising, press standards in any meaningful way, it can only ever be reactive, thus effectively placing the burden of spotting and complaining about breaches of its Code on members of the public. Given the onus which the PCC puts on complainants in the first place, and the efforts to which it goes in those cases which it hasn't already rejected to effect some sort of agreement between editor and complainant (the PCC is 'a body with dispute resolution at its heart' as

WITHOUT COMMENT

SIR CHRISTOPHER MEYER, the new PCC chair.

“He is a suave figure from inside the beltway, a safe pair of hands, who is unlikely to disturb the peace. What could be better for those owners and editors who wish to maintain self-regulation in its present form? As with all the products of the Foreign Office, he is a smooth operator, couched in those diplomatic arts which require of their practitioners the ability to skate round conflicts rather than confront them.”

Roy Greenslade in The Media Guardian, 15 July, 2002.

the Review inimitably puts it), it is also nonsense to claim that 'it costs nothing to complain'. As I know to my cost, complaining to the PCC is an extremely time-consuming business, and time, for most people, is money. There are also other kinds of costs to bear in mind: one of the journalists about whom I complained threatened to sue me, and after the unfortunate Anna Ford had complained to the PCC about the Mail's intrusive (though not, naturally, in the PCC's view) shots of her on a beach, she had to put up with a boorish piece in the Independent in which Lord Wakeham effectively told her that the pictures were all her own fault and that if she didn't like being photographed then she should have kept off the beach in the first place; meanwhile a Mail leader denounced her as 'not a proper journalist'. But, there again, one of the foremost members of the PCC is a certain Paul Dacre

As always, the PCC Annual Review never misses an opportunity to praise self-regulation and to criticise any alternatives. In past years, the dreaded alternative has been statutory regulation, but this year it's the Courts and, in particular, the threat of a privacy law which some have claimed could be created via the Human Rights Act. This idea, according to the Review, is 'based far more on myth than reality', and it goes on to argue that the Anna Ford, Naomi Campbell and Gary Flitcroft cases have all, in fact, had the effect of 'buttressing self regulation', the judgements in these cases building on 'the PCC's common sense law ... that celebrities who court publicity can undermine their long-term rights to personal privacy'. Indeed, according to Robert Pinker, the acting Chairman of the PCC, it is up to the organisation to 'show that we will,

in many ways, be tougher than the courts in defining and outlining legitimate areas of public interest', although just how this is to be achieved remains a complete mystery.

However, for all its presentation of bad news as good, and for all its talk of being 'unashamedly dedicated to some of the good news about the PCC that people hear about too little', even this Candide-like document can't altogether hide the fact that the PCC has been having an increasingly rough ride of late. Thus it coyly admits that: 'it would be folly to seek to pretend that the months since the publication of the PCC's last Annual Review have been straightforward ones', hints mysteriously at 'turbulent times', and complains that the PCC's work is 'sometimes misunderstood, appreciated too little' and dogged by 'ill-founded misconceptions'. The truth of the matter is, however, that the year which began with the a star-studded Tenth Anniversary bash ended with the PCC at one of the lowest ebbs in its history.

Things began to go wrong when more liberal-minded newspapers criticised the Ford adjudication; then unease was expressed in various press quarters over what appeared to be the 'brokerage' role which the PCC played in the story of the Countess of Wessex's interview with the News of the World's fake sheik. Nor could all of this simply be explained by the usual ill will which rival newspapers and press groups habitually bear each other. As early as April, Peter Preston in the Observer was noting that: 'whatever success Lord Wakeham of the PCC claims for his efforts, the greatest sceptics are the ones emerging from inside the industry he serves... Slowly, inexorably, journalism seems to be splitting between the gentlemen and the players. That was the divide the PCC was invented to bridge'. Further consternation erupted in July when the PCC refused to censure the Sun for paying money to the family of returning bank robber Ronnie Biggs, the Independent heading its stinging editorial: 'This spineless regulator has let down itself, the press and the public'. In October the Sunday People published photos of Radio 1 DJ Sara Cox which quite clearly drove a coach and horses right through the PCC Code of Conduct - even though a prominent member of

the committee which oversees the Code is People editor Neil Wallis - causing the Guardian to run an indignant leader entitled: 'Self-regulation pays - and how!'. It's also worth noting, in the light of our earlier discussion, that Cox is suing both the People and paparazzi agent Jason Frazer under the Human Rights Act. Then the Telegraph joined the fray, which increasingly looks like splitting the press cleanly in two. And so it goes on - once again leaving one to question the PCC's veracity - not to mention its grip on reality - when its acting Chair claims apropos his predecessor, who, after all, departed under somewhat inauspicious circumstances, that: 'when he left, the PCC was in a strong, robust and authoritative state - its existence beyond question, safe' - although he did have the sense to add: 'at least for the time being'.



PROFESSOR ROBERT PINKER, Acting Chair PCC, since January 2002.

THE SCARGILL SMEARS

It was all lies admits Roy Greenslade

BARRY WHITE

ON 27 MAY Roy Greenslade penned a piece for the Media Guardian. In it he admitted that a major smear campaign run against miners' leader Arthur Scargill was a pack of lies. Twelve years ago, The Daily Mirror, owned by pension's crook Robert Maxwell and edited by Roy Greenslade, claimed that at the height of the miners' strike in 1984/85 Arthur Scargill, NUM president, had taken money raised for striking miners. The paper ran a six-month campaign against Scargill, and Peter Heathfield the union's general secretary, who retired from his position ten years ago. The Mirror's campaign brought back memories of Fleet Street 'coverage' of the miners' dispute which consisted in vitriolic attacks on the NUM and especially against Scargill and the whole sale ignoring of key issues in the dispute.

Media coverage of the miners' strike was analysed in the CPBF pamphlet *Media Hits The Pits*, published shortly after the NUM returned to work. Discussing suppression and news management the pamphlet explained, "If courageous correspondents did attempt to open up some of those areas, then stories were deliberately suppressed. Mark Hollingsworth pointed out in *New Socialist*, April 1985, that 'industrial correspondents have confirmed that

articles have been withdrawn just before publication; sections of stories cut between editions; paragraphs altered and reordered; stories completely removed after the first edition and interviews published without even consulting Labour staff'. In at least two cases such editorial interference has been at the instigation of senior Tory ministers, most notably energy secretary, Peter Walker."

The Mirror's 1990 smears were an attack on all those who took part in the miners' strike. In particular the paper accused Scargill of corruption, taking money from Libya to pay off his mortgage and lining his own pocket during the year-long dispute. Scargill, the Mirror claimed, had counted out £70,000 from money earmarked for striking miners to clear his £25,000 home loan from the NUM, along with those of two other officials, Peter Heathfield and the then chief executive, Roger Windsor.

The Tories hoped the media campaign would finally sweep away Scargill. They were supported by the Labour leadership, despite the findings of an independent report by Gavin Lightman QC, which cleared Scargill. In 1991 the three Mirror journalists who made up the story received Reporters of the Year Awards at the British Press Awards. Neil Kinnock, then Labour leader handed

out the award and congratulated the three.

In response to the smears, a defence campaign was launched with petitions and public meetings in support of the NUM leadership. The weekly paper, *Socialist Worker* began to unravel the lies and ran a special edition in defence of Scargill and the NUM.

Greenslade explains that Maxwell's *Mirror* paid £50,000 to Windsor and Parker (Scargill's former driver/minder). Windsor, now living in France, demanded a further £30,000 (which he eventually got). Today he faces ruin (he claims insolvency) while the NUM estimates it has cost them £750,000 to fight court battles since *The Mirror's* damaging lies.

Greenslade concludes his piece by saying: 'I am now convinced that Scargill didn't misuse strike funds and that the union didn't get money from Libya. I also concede that given the supposed wealth of Maxwell's *Mirror* and the state of NUM finances, it was understandable that Scargill didn't sue. Nothing I have said should be taken as criticism of the *Mirror* trio: (the three journalists who wrote the stories) we were taken in. I can't undo what has been done, but I am pleased to offer the sincerest of apologies to Heathfield and Scargill, who is on the verge of retirement. I regret ever publishing that story. And that is the honest truth.'

Details of Roy Greenslade's article and relating material may be found on Guardian Unlimited/Archive website: www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4421870,00.html

It was appropriate that Peter Lazenby wrote the front-page story in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (YEP) on the planned closure of the Selby mining complex. As an Industrial Reporter he was there covering the bitter battles of the 1984-85 defence of jobs and communities which was at the heart of the year-long dispute.

When the Tories announced 31 pit closures in October 1992, middle England, along with the trade union movement, rose up in anger. Peter produced an excellent YEP supplement drawing on his rich knowledge and range of contacts in the industry.

When the pits were privatised only two dozen remained. Now, apart from Selby and the Prince of Wales colliery in Pontefract which closes in August, only four pits remain in Yorkshire. They are Kellingley at Knottingley in West Yorkshire, and Rossington, Maltby and Hatfield in South Yorkshire.

On the new road through the Dearne Valley in South Yorkshire, put through as part of the regeneration of coalfield communities, the only trace of the former pits, including Cortonwood, whose threatened closure triggered the 1984-85 dispute, are the names on the roundabouts.

MUZZLING LOCAL VOICES

CanWest and corporate editorial control

GRAHAM KNIGHT

IT IS hard to imagine that David Asper, a senior executive at Canadian media conglomerate CanWest Global, had any inkling that he was about to put corporate control of the media squarely on the public - and media - agenda when he fired Russell Mills, publisher of *The Ottawa Citizen*, on June 16. Mills, who had been at the *Citizen* for over thirty years and publisher since 1986, had offended his boss by running an editorial without prior approval from corporate head office.

The editorial had called on Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien to resign over questionable patronage deals in his parliamentary constituency. Chrétien, a Liberal, is known to be a close friend of the Asper family - Izzy Asper, founder of CanWest Global and David's father, was once head of the Manitoba Liberal Party - and the immediate fallout was the charge that Chrétien had had a hand in the firing.

The Mills affair, however, was the tip of a much bigger iceberg. The *Citizen* was part of the Southam newspaper chain that CanWest had acquired from Conrad (now Lord) Black's Hollinger Group in late 2000 for \$3.2 billion (Canadian). Soon after, the Aspers announced that the papers, which, with the exception of the *National Post*, are published

locally, would be required to run national editorials produced by head office. Locally produced editorials would also have to conform to corporate editorial policy, viz. avoid criticism of the Chrétien Liberals or Israel.

CanWest's editorial policy was a radical departure from the convention of local editorial - and journalistic - autonomy. A number of Southam's senior employees left the company or were fired, and less than two weeks before Mills' firing 40 former publishers, directors, and editors published a signed statement criticising the policy as a threat to the "diversity of voices" necessary for a free press (www.diversityofvoices.ca). Two days before Mills' firing a CanWest spokesman had called the statement an "overreaction."

Once the Chrétien connection began to fade - predictably the prime minister denied any involvement - attention turned to the bigger issue of ownership and its impact on press freedom with calls from opposition political parties for an independent inquiry into media concentration.

But ownership concentration is only part of the picture. Newspaper ownership in Canada has been concentrated for some time. A royal commission investigated the issue back in the early 1980s, making various recommendations which were

subsequently ignored. Since that time government policy has been designed to create an oligopoly of large media corporations capable of competing on an increasingly neo-liberalised global stage.

What this has meant is the rapid growth of cross-ownership. Major Canadian newspapers, with some exceptions, are no longer controlled by corporations whose main business is newspapers. CanWest Global is first and foremost a broadcasting entity. The Aspers made their money showing popular American entertainment programmes on their TV stations. They have no roots in newspaper culture. News, for them, is a simply a commodity, and deciding how to produce and market that commodity is the sole right of the proprietor. They saw Mills' firing as purely a private, internal corporate matter.

Fortunately, very few others saw it that way. The outcry from the public as well as politicians and other media was overwhelming. Three thousand subscribers have reportedly cancelled their subscriptions to the *Citizen* in protest, and other Southam papers have also lost subscribers. But whether this will be enough to keep media concentration, cross-ownership, and corporate control on the issues agenda, especially now that the summer lull is in full swing, remains to be seen. Public debate is badly needed and there are strong signs that it is also wanted - at least by the public. All the more reason, of course, for the politicians to try to help the issue quietly fade away.

Fifteen year sentence for Turkish journalist

THE JOURNALIST Memik Horuz has been sentenced to 15 years imprisonment by the National Security Court of Turkey. The prosecution based its case solely on the statements of Erol Cetin, a spy of the Turkish state, that Memik was a member of an illegal organisation. Memik has been detained in an F-type isolation cell in Ankara since his arrest in 18th of June 2001.

Memik Horuz was working for the

newspaper "Isci-Koylu" (worker-peasant) and is the vice chair of the International League of People's Struggle (ILPS).

The ILPS and several delegations of experts including lawyers, journalists and doctors have visited Turkey on behalf of the International Campaign to Free Memik Horuz. They believe that his trial and this sentence are a huge miscarriage of justice.

International Campaign to Free Memik Horuz

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CPBF NEWS

UPDATE ON THE COMMUNICATIONS BILL

THE CPBF presented written and oral evidence to the joint Parliamentary Committee chaired by Lord Puttnam considering the draft Communications Bill. We are also putting the final touches to our response to the government on the Bill. It is a lengthy document, dealing with a range of issues covering regulation, media ownership, and much more. We will put the final version of the response on our website for people to consult.

A NEW THREAT TO DIVERSITY

ORGANISATIONS AND individuals are beginning to wake up to yet another threat to cultural expression and diversity.

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), one of the agreements of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), came into force in January 1995. The objective of the ongoing GATS negotiations - a new round of negotiations was launched at the Doha Ministerial Meeting in November 2001 - is to achieve

'a progressively higher level of liberalisation' in services trade.

Governments of all political stripes and all regions of the world intervene in the market to support local cultural expression and media. By doing so they promote diversity and choice. Whilst a number of countries have refused to make commitments to apply GATs in the cultural field, some have.

Significantly the GATS rules will come increasingly into play as the convergence of media, computers and telecommunications continues. Telecommunications and computer services are more likely to be listed, and as the internet and other computer networks become a global marketplace for cultural and entertainment works, negotiations taking place in the WTO on electronic commerce could have a profound effect on cultural policies. As negotiations proceed on GATS, cultural issues will play a much larger role.

Useful website: International Network for Cultural Diversity: www.incd.net

PROTECTING SOURCES

FOUR UK national newspapers and the world's biggest news agency are facing court actions for contempt that could bring them huge fines or even sequestration of their assets. The Times, Guardian, Financial Times and Independent, together with Reuters, have defied High Court orders to hand over the original of a leaked document relating to a financial story published in 1999. The demand for its return comes from Interbrew, the Belgian-based combine that brews Stella, Becks and other beers. The NUJ has weighed in with complete support for the journalists involved in all the cases. General Secretary Jeremy Dear said they constituted "the most serious threat to press freedom for years." As we went to press Interbrew announced it was abandoning its legal action against the media organisations. The brewing giant has indicated that it will take no further action to enforce the judgements, which would leave the papers still in contempt following a ruling that the documents should be handed over. The matter is now in the hands of the Financial Services Authority who are in talks with the media organisations.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council



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