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THE COVER-UP FALLS APART

HE MURDOCH press is pitching
Britain's national newspapers into
their biggest political crisis for 20
years, as the cover-up of the News
of the World phone-hacking scandal engineered by News International,
the Metropolitan Police and the Press
Complaints Commission is ripped apart.

Government minister Lord Wallace of Saltaire said in April the government would be prepared to commission an inquiry into the regulation of the press that might lead to statutory controls.

He told peers: "I will take the strength of feeling in this house back to ministers. There are many aspects of concern."

The inquiry proposal had come from Lord Fowler, chairman of the Lords communications select committee.

Asked whether it should consider the replacement of the PCC with a statutory body, Lord Wallace replied: "That is very much one of the larger issues which I think it would be appropriate for the sort of general inquiry which Lord Fowler is calling for."

It's looking like a repeat of the crisis of 1990 when an inquiry conducted by David Calcutt QC recommended statutory regulation. The industry escaped by setting up the PCC, a trick it would be difficult to carry off again.

Opposition leader Ed Miliband has become the first party leader to back the idea of an inquiry. He said it was "in the interests of protecting the reputation of the British press that these matters should not simply be left to rest.

"The press itself will want to look at how self-regulation can be made to work better because it clearly did not work very well in relation to these issues here. I don't think the Press Complaints Commission has covered itself in glory."

The PCC, chaired by Tory peer Lady Buscombe, has tried to hold the News International line that editors were unaware of the phone-hacking and the

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Wanna make something of it? MPs might

TO MAKE matters worse for News International, police are now investigating whether its journalists have been paying police officers for stories.

It was eight years ago that Rebekah Wade (now Brooks), editor of the Sun who had recently been promoted from editing the *News of the World*, blurted to the Commons culture committee that they had.

Chris Bryant MP, now one of the MPs leading the Labour backbench charge against the Murdoch press, asked her whether police were ever paid for information. She replied: "We have paid the police for information in the past." (What of it?)

Chris Bryant asked: "And will you do it in the future?" Rebekah Brooks began to reply: "It depends ..." when Andy Coulson, her successor at the NoW, sitting alongside her (what happened to him?), cut in smartly (shut yer mouth slag) to point out: "We have always operated within the law."

Footage of the exchange stirs nationwide jollity every time it is shown. But, though some eyebrows were raised at the time, nothing came of it. Everyone shut their eyes and pretended it never happened.

In March, with a new police team probing the NoW and MPs with the scent of Murdoch blood, the Commons

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Murdoch

COVER-UP COLLAPSES

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practice had been stamped out.

In April the *Guardian* reported that Gordon Brown, when Prime Minister, had wanted to set up a judicial inquiry but had been talked out of it by Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell, on the grounds that it would be too sensitive before last year's general election.

The political moves followed the humiliating admission by News International that the allegations against the *NoW* have been true all along. It issued an "unreserved" apology to eight of the long line of public figures bringing legal action and published the apology in the paper itself.

Preliminary hearings for the cases were held in the High Court in April. Mr Justice Vos said he would take four sample cases. So far 24 individuals have launched High Court privacy actions against the paper, and as more and more material seized but ignored by the Met comes to light the list can only get longer.

Three senior *NoW* journalists have been arrested, following the dismissal of two and the suspension of another over phone-hacking allegations. Chief reporter Neville Thurlbeck, former assistant editor (news) Ian Edmondson and veteran reporter James Weatherup were interviewed by police conducting the Met's new investigation.

Another former *NoW* executive, Alex Marunchak, who headed the Dublin office, has been accused by a BBC Panorama programme of hiring a computer hacker to access the emails of a former British Army intelligence officer.

At the PCC, Lady Buscombe has declared that phone-hacking is "a deplorable practice, and an unjustifiable intrusion into an individual's privacy. The commission has always said that it is a breach of the Editors' Code"—though it has never taken any action over it.

MPs consider action

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home affairs committee asked Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner Cressida Dick, heading the team, for information about research into the "historic claims".

Cressida Dick wrote that police were investigating Rebekah Brooks's comment, to establish whether there were grounds for a criminal investigation.

The committee wrote to ask Rebekah Brooks how many police officers received money from the Sun, which she edited until 2009, and when the practice ceased. Rebekah Brooks replied that she had "no knowledge of any specific cases". Just like ... what's that geezer's name again?



Buyout of BSkyB to get green light

UPERT MURDOCH'S buyout of BSkyB was expected to be cleared by Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt in late April despite a rising tide of opposition.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Lord Prescott joined the chorus of campaigners demanding that the matter be set aside until police completed their inquiry into the phone-hacking scandal.

Lord Prescott, who believes he was a victim of the scam, said it was "totally unacceptable for a company like this that is actively involved at all levels in criminal acts to be given control of BSkyB."

Jeremy Hunt responded that he was prevented by law from taking the scandal into account. It might have formed part of a "suitability of persons" test under the Enterprise Act into whether News Corporation bosses were appropriate individuals to own BSkyB but lawyers had advised him it was no longer possible.

The Act allows referral on only one set of grounds, and the takeover had been referred on grounds of media plurality. It was not possible to consider both.

Meanwhile the campaign went on. The CPBF and NUJ held a demonstration (above) outside Jeremy Hunt's office in central London the day he announced that he was accepting a convoluted formula for the independence of Sky News in a Murdoch-owned BSkyB and was ignoring Ofcom's rec-

ommendation to refer the matter to the Competition Commission (last issue).

The CPBF was planning a similar event, together with the NUJ, on the day Jeremy Hunt was to announce he was giving the takeover the green light after the Easter recess.

SON AND HEIR

RUPERT MURDOCH'S current favourite son and heir apparent James, News Corp's European chief executive, is moving to New York to become number three in the News Corp empire.

As deputy chief operating officer and chairman of the group's international division he will be below only his father, the chairman, and Chase Carey, chief operating officer.



Defence in the public interest

ONG-AWAITED reforms to Britain's archaic and unfair libel laws and to no-win-no-fee arrangements that force publishers to settle questionable claims were announced by Justice secretary Ken Clarke in March.

Most important is the proposal for a "public interest" defence that will clear journalists who have made every effort to research a story that the public should be told. The truth of allegations and the expression of honest opinion will also be statutory defences for the first time.

Stricter rules on the admissibility of cases should cut back on the scourge of libel tourism, in which foreign citizens have used the London courts over publications hardly seen in Britain.

Ken Clarke said the Defamation Bill would "ensure that anyone who makes a statement of fact or expresses an honest opinion can do so with confidence."

The draft bill does not address the high costs in cases brought under nowin-no-fee "conditional fee" arrangements, which have brought what Ken Clarke called "an explosion" in legal fees, but he said the measures would reduce costs anyway and he is tackling CFAs through different regulations.

The reforms are the result of years of campaigning by the CPBF and other free press groups, and while they have welcomed them they still say they do not go far enough.

The Libel Reform Campaign led by English PEN, Index on Censorship and Sense About Science, welcomed the bill as "a great starting point" but called on Parliament to go further in key areas.

The government has launched a consultation on further reforms, and a group of MPs has tabled a Commons motion to strengthen the bill. The motion, sponsored by Cambridge LibDem MP Julian Huppert, says companies should be stopped from suing for libel to reduce "the chilling or censorious impact of bullying behaviour". ISPs and webhosts should not be liable for defamation over material over which they have no control.

And John Kampfner, chief executive of Index on Censorship, said: "Without action to reduce the cost of a libel trial, reform will protect the free speech of some, but costs will silence others."

WHAT'S IN THE BILL

Substantial harm Stronger test for damage to reputation will make it easier for judges to throw out trivial or vexatious cases

Public interest defence Protection for investigative journalism which is responsibly carried out.

Statutory defence of truth Will replace the common law defence of "justification".

Statutory defence of honest opinion Replaces the nebulous common law defence of "fair comment".

Privilege Extends absolute privilege to reports of court proceedings outside the UK, and qualified privilege to reports of scientific or academic conferences and material published by them.

Single publication Applies the present one-year limit for print to online articles.

Libel tourism Courts will only hear cases in which England and Wales is the most appropriate place.

Presumption of trial without jury Will reduce costs for all parties.

WHAT'S STILL MISSING

Public interest Should be strengthened to properly protect citizen critics

Internet There should be more protection for web-hosts and ISPs from liability for the words of others, to stop libel claimants threatening the hosts of allegedly defamatory material with further actions.

Companies There should be limits on the ability of corporations to bring defamation actions, to stop them bullying critics by threatening actions.

Courts Procedures need to be streamlined to reduce delays and the costs of libel actions.

NOT JUST FOR VERY RICH MEN

HIGH COURT super-injunctions, through which super-rich celebrities and business people can suppress any knowledge of allegations against them, became a major issue when Prime Minister David Cameron criticised the judges who granted them.

David Cameron said the development of a privacy law by judges based on European rights made him feel uneasy: "There is a question here about privacy and the way our system works. The judges are using the European Convention on Human Rights to deliver a sort of privacy law without parliament saying so."

His motive may have been to undermine the Human Rights Act, which the government wants to get rid of – and judges have always made law: that is the whole foundation of English Common Law. But the effect has been to boost press freedom campaigners who want an end to the protection awarded to the already privileged.

There was outrage in April when the High Court granted super-injunctions to a Premier League footballer and a person in the entertainment industry, both of whom are said to have had extramarital affairs.

Super-injunctions can even, as with one of the recent ones, decree that information about claimants must be suppressed forever, and everywhere.

It is believed there are between 20 and 30 of them, though no-one can be sure, since the fact of their existence cannot be published, but some claimants have been identified, including Sir Fred Goodwin, the disgraced former chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland, and the journalist Andrew Marr.

A committee established by the master of the rolls, Lord Neuberger, to examine the use of injunctions and super-injunctions to suppress reporting is due to report in the summer.



Protest

STILL BAD NE

It's back to the 1980s in the workplace, on the streets – and in the press. The more resistance there is to the government cutbacks, the more the media portray it as irresponsible and violent. The biggest protest so far was the half-million-strong march in London in March and the media responded as expected.

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS reports on an analysis of the coverage by a team of journalism students in Sheffield

HE TAXI driver's comment was revealing. We were on our way home from the TUC March for the Alternative on March 26 and had a Coalition of Resistance placard and an NUJ flag with us. As we clambered in with them he said, half-jokingly, "I hope you aren't going to wreck my taxi".'

The sad fact is that the impact of media coverage of events in London means it will be remembered for the mayhem in Oxford Street and the police action in Trafalgar Square, rather than the massive mobilisation of half a million trade unionists and supporters.

The big battalions from Unison, PCS and Unite were marching, but the significant story about who else was on the march – the people from all walks of life with their home-made banners and costumes angry about the impact of the cuts on their communities, who may never have been on a demo in their lives – got minimal coverage. Instead what people got from some sections of the media was incomplete, partial or inaccurate information about what happened in London that day.

Put bluntly, the separate events on March 26 got coverage in inverse proportion to the number of people involved.



IGNORED: some of the half million marchers

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THE BUILD-UP

The usual suspicion

IN THE weeks before the march, attacking trade unions came back into fashion with the language of the 1980s ("trade union barons", "militants" and "wreckers") resurrected. The BBC was reported to be pressing reporters and editors to use the word "savings" for the government's cuts; the words "cuts" would be "too negative".

In the days before the march the TUC was clearly in the business of managing expectation, saying they expected around 100,000 people — a low figure considering that 580 coaches and a number of specially chartered trains were already full. Police predicted much larger numbers and publicised plans for more than 4,000 officers to be deployed.

The threat of violence became more prominent with the apparent leaking of police intelligence. London's *Evening Standard* (25 March) was typical. The headline was "Extremists vow to hijack march and bring chaos to the streets"; the report named five anarchist groups that would be involved.

On the Saturday morning only four papers carried positive coverage, with lots of background reporting: the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Morning Star*. The *Financial Times* was broadly neutral with "Extremists told not to spoil TUC demo". Both the *Express* and *Mail* – "Anarchists: We will unleash hell in London" – had lurid headlines; the *Sun* warned: "The danger is that Left-wing thugs and anarchists will hijack today's events". The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times* were also, predictably, hostile.

DAY OF THE MARCH

No sense of balance

AS THE day unfolded, TV news coverage was sharply divergent, with the performance of the 24-hour news channels, BBC 24

BBC journalists have been asked by the Metropolitan Police to hand over footage of the events to help their investigation into violence. Police said they were "considering" asking for unbroadcast footage but contact has already been made. The NUJ has called on Directorgeneral Mark Thompson to protect the confidentiality of journalists' material.

Protest

WS

and Sky News, the most lamentable. Both seemed to lose any sense of balance once the trouble started in Oxford Circus and shops on Oxford Street.

The violence dominated Sky's coverage. On BBC 24 News a reporter challenged Mark Serwotka, the PCS General Secretary, as he stood in Hyde Park, probably totally unaware of the events, to condemn the violence. The channel carried disproportionate live footage of the action in Oxford Street, while the speeches challenging government policy in Hyde Park, half a mile away, were ignored.

The big march was pushed to the margins as reporters and cameras moved in to report on two separate actions. One was the UK Uncut initiative. Supporters had leafleted the march, asking people to "Occupy for the Alternative" and "take action against the tax dodgers and the banks directly". Probably about 2,000 people were involved with this non-violent direct action protest and they made their intentions quite clear. In the end, of course, as they left the Fortnum and Masons luxury food store they had occupied peacefully were arrested.

Then there were the dramatic windowsmashing, paint-daubing activities of a well-



THAT'S MORE LIKE IT: police and anarchists fighting

organised mobile group of anarchists who probably numbered under 500. Hooded and masked people throwing "light bulbs filled with ammonia" (whatever happened to that story?) at police and their confrontational tactics made dramatic images and stories for the reporters, camera crews and photographers clustered around them.

All this, as the evidence from students monitoring TV news coverage demonstrated, led to widely different coverage on the main news channels. The ITV early evening news devoted the first five minutes of its report to the violence and this also dominated the late news, although footage pointed to the difference between the peaceful TUC march and events elsewhere.

In contrast the main BBC News empha-

sised that the violence was unconnected with the main march. Channel 4 got top marks when it led with an informative report solely on the march, followed by three other segments, again clearly differentiated, and one specifically dealing with the violence.

It's so predictable

THE SUNDAY press went to town, with the exception of the *Observer*, *Independent on Sunday* and *Sunday Mirror* which balanced their reporting. The *Sunday Telegraph* went completely over the top: a front page headline "Britain's face of hatred" and picture and a report and pictures spread across pages 10-11 with the headline "The march for families that became an orgy of violence". Even the business section had pictures and "Retailers' fury over mob".

The Sunday Express chose the ludicrous headline "Violence at march sparks new fears for Royal Wedding", while the Mail on Sunday had the front page "RITZKREIG". It was all pretty predictable stuff with the TUC march either invisible or linked inextricably to the violence on Oxford Street.

Of course cynical observers will say: "Not much change there, then." But why was there such a failure of judgement on the part of the media, particularly sections of the broadcast media, to skew their coverage to the actions of the anarchists?

What were the judgements which made the media focus on the violent behaviour of a tiny minority? What was the basis for all those predictions about possible violence? And what were 4,000 police doing that day? They weren't needed for a march which was peaceful, non-violent and self-stewarded.

• Many thanks to lecturer Tony Harcup and three of his journalism students from Sheffield University, Ella Brough, Caroline Canty and Erin Cardiff, for their help in monitoring TV news coverage of the march.

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SAME STORY IN THE STATES

MEDIA REFORMERS in the USA debated the slanted coverage of labour protest at the National Conference for Media Reform in April.

More than 2,500 grassroots activists, policymakers, journalists and scholars from across the United States gathered in Boston, Massachusetts to discuss such topics as media regulation, Wikileaks and

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS: spoke at the Boston conference

online
organising. There
was also a
session on
reporting labour
and the unions.

The organisers had thought the issue merited only a small room and minimal publicity. But earlier his year, with the crisis over the state budget in

Wisconsin, there was an amazing national mobilisation in support of the unions and event was upgraded the event.

More than 300 people turned out to hear speakers including John Nichols, the leading radical American journalist who headlined at the CPBF's international conference on media ownership in London in October 2009. He is Washington correspondent for the Nation, a major political weekly – and also editor of the Madison Capital Times in Wisconsin whose family goes back five generations there.

He provided a devastating account of how the New York Times had published a report based on interviews with a former UAW member from a General Motors plant which had closed in Wisconsin. The man bitterly attacked the action in Madison and the value of trade unions in general, but the NYT had to later apologise: the man had never worked at the GM plant nor been a UAW member.

Granville Williams

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History

STRIKE THAT MADE THE MODERN MEDIA

Twnety-five years ago thousands of trade unionists took part in a historic strike whose repercussions are still felt today. The Wapping dispute marked the end of Fleet Street – London's traditional home for national newspapers – and the dawn of the age of the corporate media.

These words and pictures are from an exhibition commemorating the strike, organised by members of the unions that took part and the CPBF, which opens at the Marx Memorial Library in Clerkenwell, London on May Day and runs to May 31

RUPERT MURDOCH bought the Sun and News of the World in 1969 and the Times and Sunday Times in 1981 and merged them into News International (NI).

The print unions – the NGA, representing compositors, proof readers and machine managers, and the much bigger SOGAT, representing nearly 5,000 staff in all areas – wanted to negotiate the introduction of computer technology.

In 1983 talks began for production of the Sun and News of the World at a new factory in Wapping, east London, but in early 1985 managers broke off negotiations.

News filtered out that workers were being recruited to work in Wapping. The company said it was for a new evening paper, The London Post, which never appeared.

Talks resumed in the autumn. Managers tabled a series of non-negotiable demands. They gave notice of ending all agreements and refused to offer Wapping jobs to all staff, leaving the unions little option but to strike.



THE SACKED WORKERS' FIGHT

NEWS INTERNATION-AL began sacking 5,500 staff as soon as the strike started on January 24 1986. The sacked workers began to picket the fortified Wapping factory with its coils of razor wire and cameras (and a plant in Glasgow).

Mass picket demonstrations were organised to try to stop the speeding TNT trucks bringing papers out of the plant. Hundreds and sometimes many thousands of supporters turned out on Wednesday and Saturday nights for the whole year.

Workers at wholesale distribution depots in

London refused to handle the papers. Flying pickets descended on wholesalers and depots to stop the trucks delivering the papers.

News International secured court decisions forbidding all solidarity action. Both SOGAT and NGA were fined, and SOGAT's funds were seized until it formally instructed members to cease these activities. But picketing continued until, faced with threats of further legal action, the unions called off the dispute in February 1987.



LAWS ON MURDOCH'S SIDE

THE CONSERVATIVE government of Margaret Thatcher, which came to power in 1979, adopted a series of employment laws that put severe restrictions on picketing, outlawed "secondary" or solidarity action (even by workers for the same company at different workplaces), empowered employers to obtain injunctions against unions and sue them for losses caused by strikes, and gave the courts powers to seize unions' assets.

Rupert Murdoch cultivated Margaret Thatcher and turned the Sun, formerly an ailing Labour paper, into a strident Tory one. These laws enabled NI to carry out its plans.

During the strike a letter from the solicitors Farrers was leaked that advised NI how to get rid of its staff: "the cheapest way would be to dismiss employees while participating in a strike."

NI set up new companies with strikebreaking workforces. The existing staff were manoeuvred into striking and duly sacked.



TRAITORS AT THE GATE

THE STRIKEBREAKING Wapping workforce was recruited through the electricians union, the EETPU, in one of the greatest acts of betrayal in trade union history.

The EETPU claimed there was no written agreement with the company, but General Secretary Eric Hammond boasted about its role in his autobiography.

Despite pressure from the print and other unions the TUC failed to expel the EETPU for these activities – though it was thrown out a year later for negotiating single union deals elsewhere.

THE BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN

THE UNIONS arranged benefit and moral support for members and ran a campaign to boycott the papers that won widespread support. Print workers' support groups were set up around the country.

Public libraries and colleges cancelled the four newspapers; some newsagents and news-stands refused to stock them; Labour politicians refused to talk to Wapping journalists. Many in the labour movement still won't buy the papers to this day.

The strikers' own newspaper, the Wapping Post, became a popular tabloid, as did Picket, the underground bulletin of picket activities.

During the year negotiations brought offers of compensation but no reinstatement or union recognition. The offers were rejected: the fight was for jobs and union rights, not compensation.

WHEN THE POLICE RIOTED

THE WAPPING strikers were subjected to a year-long ordeal of police harassment and attacks. Around 1,500 pickets and supporters were arrested and four were jailed.

The unions' rallies opposite the plant were heavily policed. On many occasions police in riot gear charged into the crowds – some of them on horseback – swinging their batons and grabbing people at random. Hundreds were injured.

There were so many complaints that a special inquiry was held by an outside force, which concluded that some officers had acted in a "violent and undisciplined way", but none were ever tried and convicted.



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

WAPPING residents had severe restrictions placed upon their freedom of movement by police determined to get the newspaper trucks on the road, at great risk to safety: one local man was killed by a speeding TNT juggernaut.

Road blocks were set up under police powers invoked before the dispute started. Residents were stopped and asked to prove their identities and say where they were going and why.

Throughout the dispute residents held demonstrations to protest about the restrictions and the dangers they faced. Many were arrested.



MURDOCH'S RISE

BRITAIN'S media are coming increasingly under the control of big corporations, especially multi-nationals like News Corporation that care more about money and power than about news and journalism.

Newspapers are declining into celebrity-led consumerism and empty sensationalism, and sales slump as the public goes elsewhere for its news. The Murdoch press has led this trend and has dragged the rest of the press down with it. News Corporation controls 37 per cent of national paper circulations and the biggest commercial TV operation in Europe – BSkyB.

The investment required to launch Sky came from the profits of Wapping. Now, thanks to a new Tory government, it is about to finalise its outright ownership of BSkyB.

Digital radio

Switch over or switch off?

OST people probably know that television is in the process of going digital. Ask them about radio, and they're less likely to know. Yet plans set out by the government suggest that in 2015, three years after TV, radio could follow suit.

That is the date by which the government's Digital Radio Action Plan anticipates that all BBC radio and main commercial stations will migrate to digital-only transmission.

There has been little public debate about this – including within the CPBF. Radio is frequently overlooked in cultural policy debate despite rising listening figures.

When the Digital Britain White Paper set out switchover proposal in 2009 there was some press reaction, but as it was rushed through parliament in the Digital Economy Act last year debate focused on other provisions such as illegal music downloading.

Digital radio has grown slowly: around a third of homes has a DAB receiver and DAB accounts for 16 per cent of listening; other digital listening, via TV or the internet, makes a further 9 per cent.

Many in the industry favour the switch. They want the deadline to catalyse the industry and, they hoped, consumers, in the way that digital TV

sales have been boosted by the switchover.

The date is subject to the proportion of digital listening reaching 50 per cent – double the present rate – and to signal coverage be comparable to existing FM. Few actually believe either criterion can be met by 2015; even so, the dominance of radio industry interests leads many to believe that it will be pursued come what may.

Listeners have been represented by the Consumer Expert Group (CEG), made up of Voice of the Listener and Viewer, RNIB and others. The CEG encouraged TV switchover and supported schemes to help those who might have difficulty making with it.

On radio, in contrast, it has urged delay and a higher threshold than 50 per cent. The government rejected most of its recommendations.

• Switching off analogue: digital radio policymaking and the public is a one-day seminar on Monday June 6 at the Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds. Go to www.digitalradiopolicy.leeds.ac.uk, or call Liz Pollard 0113 343 5805.

Stephen Lax

WHAT'S OUR NAME?

The CPBF annual meeting in July will consider whether to change the campaign's name to reflect changes in the media landscape. A decision to investigate a change was taken last year and the national council has drawn up a shortlist of three:

- Campaign for Media Democracy
- Action for Media Democracy
- Open Up: Campaign for Media Democracy
 We would like comments to be reported to the meeting. Email freepress@cpbf.org.uk
- The 2011 annual meeting is on Saturday July 16 from 10 am at the NUJ head office, 308 Gray's Inn Road, Kings Cross, London WC1X 8DP. It is open to all CPBF members and affiliates.

Free Press is edited by Tim Gopsill on behalf of the National Council. This issue went to press on April 23. Send letters, comments, articles and ideas to freepress@cpbf.org.uk

(includes 10 copies of FREE Press)

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k) Over 100,000

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