

# FREE Press

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## Historic triumph for online campaigning

# THWARTED BY PEOPLE POWER

**T**HERE HAS just been an amazing event in Britain. The most powerful media company was stopped in its tracks, not by government, not by police, by the regulators or courts, but by popular protest – people power.

Two weeks in July brought a sudden nemesis for Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in the UK. Its subsidiary News International, the biggest national paper publisher, was forced to close its best-selling title, and its bid to buy up the most lucrative TV network in Europe collapsed in disarray.

And it was an internet campaign, led by the online pressure group 38 Degrees, that brought this about. This has been the most significant political victory for online activity to date (*see story right*).

It was able to harness a wider public distrust of the media to hold back the previously untroubled process of Rupert Murdoch winning government approval for his business expansion.

When journalists at the *Guardian* revealed that people working for the *News of the World* (*NoW*) had hacked into the mobile phone of a murdered teenager, there was a public outcry.

There followed the closure of the *NoW*, the departure of two of the most senior police officers in the country along with top News Corp executives and the arrest of a dozen *NoW* journalists, including two former editors.

News Corporation abandoned its bid to take over BSkyB, and the government was forced to set up a major public inquiry into the ethics and regulation of

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## THE COVER-UP FALLS APART

**T**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 forced to commission an

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

**Wanna make something of it? MPs might**

The March/April issue of *Free Press* predicted the outcome – the collapse of the *News of the World* cover-up, the crisis for the national press and the official inquiry.

## WE TOLD THEM SO

**THE CPBF has been a part of the popular coalition that fought the BSkyB takeover and resisted the power of the Murdochs from the start.**

**The campaign was headed by the online pressure groups 38 degrees in the UK and its American cousin Avaaz. They set up petitions on the internet and bombarded ministers and the regulator Ofcom with protest messages.**

**The CPBF made contact with 38 Degrees**

**– the name signifies the angle of slope at which an avalanche takes place – last autumn and helped compose and coordinate the first round of protests to Industry Secretary Vince Cable, urging him to refer the bid to Ofcom.**

**More than 30,000 people signed that e-petition – which was regarded as a coup. Vince Cable took note, referred the bid, told undercover reporters from the *Daily***

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## Murdoch

### PEOPLE POWER

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the press, the Leveson Inquiry.

The BSkyB takeover had been almost universally expected to succeed, such was the political power of News Corporation and its intimacy with government. It was on the verge of completion when the lightning struck.

Instead there was a political crisis that has rocked the media, police and political establishments.

This is hugely significant not simply for the media but for British democracy itself. Millions of people have had a shocking insight into how power works at the top of our society.

They are outraged by a newsroom culture that privileges profits over ethics, by the complicity between police and the press, and by the dozens of meetings between David Cameron and senior News Corp figures.

While the BSkyB takeover bid was going through the regulatory process there were regular contacts. David Cameron and his ministers had official meetings with News Corp on more than 60 occasions. If you add in social events there were at least 107 contact – one every four days.

How was Rupert Murdoch, who started to build his UK media empire with the acquisition of The News of the World in 1969, able to achieve not just such vast media power but such sway over politicians?

As he acquired more newspapers in Britain he used them to promote his views: pro-privatisation and ‘deregulation’, anti-EU, anti-union, anti-BBC ... anti anybody and anything that stood in the way of his commercial interests.

Politicians were in awe of such concentrated press power; in Mrs Thatcher he had a natural ally, but under Tony Blair Labour consciously tailored its media policies to suit Murdoch, in return for the support of his papers both at and between elections.

Suddenly everyone can see that something is wrong at the heart of British society.

But it has also presented an opportunity to open up the media to a wider range of voices and perspectives and to break the grip that media moguls have held for so long over our public information and discussion.

A lot will depend on how energetically campaigners for media reform seize this opportunity and press for structural reforms.

Whether it leads to the downfall of people at the top of government, as Watergate did in the US in the 1970s, or the prospect of wider political reform, is far from certain.

Either way, the corporate media are facing their most serious challenge to date.



Activists from 38 Degrees and Avaaz brought a giant puppet of Rupert Murdoch and his own puppets David Cameron and Jeremy Hunt, to a protest called by the CPBF and the NUJ outside the Culture Secretary's office in London on June 30, as Jeremy Hunt made what was thought to be the final announcement approving the BSkyB takeover. A week later the scandal broke.

JANINA STRUK

# Why 305 journalists should be worried

**T**he Leveson Inquiry is set to examine the practice of obtaining information illegally right across the media, not just at the *News of the World*, and a lot of journalists will be getting nervous.

The Information Commissioner's Office has already handed documents from its 2003 investigation into the use of private investigators across Fleet Street to the police team investigating press phone-hacking claims.

The Operation Motorman investigation into private investigator Steve Whittamore uncovered evidence of the

widespread blagging of private information but no-one was ever prosecuted.

Police seized a mountain of records from Steve Whittamore's home documenting 4,000 requests for information from journalists.

They had been made by 305 journalists from 31 publications. The list was topped by the *Daily Mail* with 952 requests from 58 journalists, followed by the *Sunday People* with 802 requests from 50 journalists.

The *News of the World* was only fifth, with 228 requests. Most other national papers also featured.

## WE TOLD THEM SO

From page 1

*Telegraph* that he was "at war with Rupert Murdoch" and was removed from the case.

The Prime Minister assigned it to the pro-Murdoch culture secretary Jeremy Hunt, and 38 Degrees organised a series of petitions and online letters to MPs. 38 Degrees and Avaaz joined the demos organised by the CPBF and the NUJ outside Jeremy Hunt's offices in London.

The final online protest, as he was on

the verge of making his final announcement, got an amazing 150,000 signatures. Jeremy Hunt himself said that dealing with the volume of protest had caused considerable delay, and this turned out to be crucial.

The effect of the campaign was to push back the decision for more than a year – the time it was to take for the *Guardian's News of the World* story to have a decisive impact. Had it not been for 38 Degrees, News Corporation would be in control of BSkyB today.

## Murdoch

This was a separate investigation from that into Clive Goodman and Glen Mulcaire at the *NoW* – which was undertaken because they had eavesdropped on princes William and Harry, and royal functionaries had complained to police.

At the time of the conviction of Clive Goodman and Glen Mulcaire in 2007 the ICO said it lacked the resources to bring so many cases, though the information “could only have been obtained via illegal or illicit means”.

This is an offence under the Data Protection Act. The maximum penalty is a fine, though the ICO wants a prison sentence to be introduced. There is a public interest defence.

Clive Goodman and Glen Mulcaire were jailed under a different law, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

Already editors and publishers have started to behave as *News International* did for four years while the evidence against the *NoW* emerged from the *Guardian's* painstaking investigations.

*Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre said in July that he never countenanced hacking or blagging on the paper.

At the *Mirror* group, chief executive Sly Bailey told shareholders that the company had received “written confirmation from senior editorial executives” that they had never intercepted phone messages or bribed the police.

There are civil cases pending against the *Mirror* for doing just that. Solicitor Mark Lewis, who is pursuing numerous cases against the *NoW*, said he had three or four lined up.

Claimants will include former Liberal Democrat MP Paul Marsden, who believes his phone was hacked for *Sunday Mirror* stories about his private life.

Singer Sir Paul McCartney and his ex-wife Heather Mills have said they believe the *Daily Mirror* had hacked into her voicemail for stories about their break-up.

Former *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan has written that he had listened to a recording of a message left by Sir Paul. He has been accused of acknowledging the use of illicit means to get information in interviews and in his autobiography, but has denied it.

# Last days of the PCC

**T**HE Press Complaints Commission is lined up to become another victim of the *News of the World* scandal.

Much of the disgrace falls on the PCC for its absolute failure to tackle the practices of the Murdoch press.

It is currently conducting its third pointless inquiry into phone-hacking, having given a clean bill of health to the *NoW* in two earlier exercises.

The point widely recognised outside its office is that as a supposed regulator it should not really have taken the blandishments of Murdoch editors at face value.

Chairman Lady Peta Buscombe is quitting in the wake of the scandal and the PCC is seeking a replacement with “no current or recent links with the newspaper or magazine publishing

business ... to lead a period of regeneration and renewal for the commission.”

This is a characteristically unrealistic, since the PCC is doomed following the announcement of the Leveson Inquiry.

In July Prime Minister David Cameron said the inquiry would look into press regulation because “the way the press is regulated today is not working”.

The PCC has set up yet another review into press regulation itself. It has issued a series of convoluted self-serving statements and utterances about “watershed moments ... moving and evolving ... “moments for change”.

Yet two years ago it conducted what was claimed as a thorough-going review into its practices, which didn't change anything.

## THERE MUST BE A BETTER WAY. THERE IS

Press regulation must be put on a much sounder footing in a system that covers all media, the CPBF will say in its contribution to the debate around the Leveson Inquiry.

Submissions to the inquiry are being prepared but the campaign has already produced a 24-page pamphlet, *People Power: Changing the media after Hurdock*, giving the background to the crisis and proposals for major change.

These include:

- setting stricter limits on media ownership to prevent the growth of such over-powerful groups as News Corporation
- requirements on the practice of media companies, and

- a new regulator for the industry.

To be effective the regulator must be independent of media owners as well as government, and it must have the power to enforce its judgements and levy fines if they are flouted.

- A podcast, *Leveson – a Chance for Change*, has been posted on the CPBF website. The future of the media is discussed by CPBF national organiser BARRY WHITE; professor of journalism IVOR GABER, former BBC producer and media chief for London mayor Ken Livingstone JOY JOHNSON, and former BBC correspondent NICHOLAS JONES.
- A new podcast is being uploaded on the way the urban rioting and looting was reported in August. Go to [www.cpb.org.uk](http://www.cpb.org.uk)

## NAMED, SHAMED, BLAMED

Usual suspects demonised after riots

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## After Murdoch...

The need to tackle monopoly power in the market

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## Riots

# NAMED, SHAMED /

● During the week of rioting in British cities in August, the *Daily Star* ran a phone poll, asking whether looters should be shot. According to the paper, 98 per cent of respondent said 'yes'.

● A group of TV reporters chased a 12-year-old boy and his parents down the street outside Manchester Crown Court. He had been convicted of possessing an offensive weapon and was clearly identifiable. When the mother remonstrated with reporters they chastised her on the way she raised their children.

● Former editor of the *Sun* Kelvin MacKenzie was invited on to the *BBC Newsnight*. He was asked whether he thought journalists should try to understand what motivated the rioters. He replied: 'No I don't think we should.' MacKenzie is the most influential journalist of the last 25 years and his approach set the tone for the way the turmoil was reported.

The grievances of participants in the riots were ignored or derided, in favour of righteous indignation and retribution. Most of the media took the lead from government, whose interest in revenge might have been more rigorously questioned.



STALINGRAD O'NEILL

Police in Birmingham guard as sports clothing store after the August riots

## 'A grim period for journalism'

**T**HE *GUARDIAN*'S Paul Lewis, who reported live from the streets for the five days of rioting, says journalists failed to get to the roots of what caused such large scale civil unrest.

He told at a special NUJ meeting that much of the journalism in the aftermath of the riots was "really quite bad".

"I haven't read a single good piece which has interviewed people who were involved in the riots.

"Reporters manage to interview the Taliban but not kids who were involved in the riots in the UK. It's almost incomprehensible.

"People were coming up with theories within hours of it having happened who hadn't been there.

"There won't be a government inquiry so journalists should step in and do it, but looking at the product of last week we haven't done it so far."

Tony Evans, football editor of the *Times*, echoed the point. He told the meeting it had been a "particularly grim period for journalism."

He said he came from a poor

Merseyside community and had taken part in the Toxteth riots of 1981. "I come from the underclass where you are written off by the media and the political class.

"I have kicked windows in and stolen from shops. It was 30 years ago but it is the same way young people are treated now. The media don't regard them as human beings."

He said Sky TV reporters had "behaved like headmasters by asking them, 'are you proud of yourselves?'. That's not journalism.

"I can understand it in TV, but newspapers have got the time to interview people and give them anonymity, but they haven't talked to those involved in the rioting about the reasons why they were doing it.

"It's all about punishment, it's all about victimisation and it's all about marginalising the people with the least voice."

Tony Evans said he believed some journalists were afraid to confront the preconceptions of the mass of the British public.

## Riots

# AND BLAMED

## The usual suspects

**D**EMONISING young offenders was the knee-jerk response of particularly the local press. While they threw all their resources at covering the dramatic events, many winning praise from their communities, they rushed to provide the evidence when the massive round-up began.

Local papers carried “rogues’ galleries” of alleged rioters – cheap images, many drawn from the bottomless well of CCTV footage – and they broke bounds in the extent to which those taken to court were identified.

It was not entirely the media’s fault: the lead came from government, and, shamefully, the judicial authorities.

While judges were handing down outrageous exemplary maximum sentences for relatively trivial offences, the Crown Prosecution Service relaxed the restrictions on identifying young offenders.

The updated guidelines were issued after Home Secretary Theresa May said that underage rioters should be named and shamed and urged prosecutors to ask judges to overrule the right to anonymity.

Laws protecting juveniles from identification

could be set aside where there is “a strong public interest in favour of lifting restrictions”.

Appropriate circumstances could include “significant public disorder” where the public should be “satisfied that offenders have been brought to justice and there is a need to deter others”.

Not all local media followed suit. The award-winning independent weekly *Camden New Journal* in north London conspicuously refused to join the witch-hunt.

Owner and editor Eric Gordon wrote: “Politicians in government, the Crown Prosecution Service, judges and newspapers and TV channels have taken leave of their senses.

“It is one thing for the police to have published the name and shame photographs of suspected rioters but did the media, including local papers, have to ape them?

“If you publish a picture of a “suspect” in the riots, in effect you are saying he is thought to have been committing a most serious offence of rioting.

You have already begun to put him on trial – though he has not yet even appeared in court.”

## REVENGE FOR ROGUES’ GALLERY

**WINDOWS** were smashed at the office of the *Bristol Evening Post* after it ran “rogues’ gallery” photos of people caught on CCTV during riots in the city.

A post attributed to “Anonymous Individuals” on the Bristol Indymedia website claimed it had carried out the attack. The group said: “We smashed all the front bottom windows and some of the higher ones at the *Evening Post* headquarters and decorated the front with paint bombs.

“The media demonises those who choose to resist and fight back, opening the way for more repression again us all. They attempt to divert our attention away from the real everyday thugs and looters – the cops and capitalists, who routinely get away with large-scale theft and murder.

*Evening Post* editor Mike Norton said: “This attack is not going to deter us from giving a voice to the majority of decent people in the city.”

# David Cameron, our own Big Brother

**GARY HERMAN** examines the way the government tried to put the blame on social media

**T**HE RESPONSE of the government and the establishment to the riots was, by turns, to ignore them, to panic and to overreact. It’s a trajectory that should be familiar from similar street disturbances throughout history.

Overreaction tends to produce stupid solutions to serious questions – solutions like evicting mothers from social housing if their children are found guilty of a riot-related offence.

One of David Cameron’s more disturbing half-formed ideas was to clamp down on social media like Twitter, Facebook or the Blackberry messaging service if the authorities think they’re being used to organise riots or looting.

Even the police are a bit wary of this – after all, they use social networks to take the steam out of over-heated events, not to mention as a wonderful mine of information. Everything posted is in the public domain so they don’t even have to snoop.

They are obviously heavily monitored, though. When two young men in the north west of England put up jokey “let’s start a riot” messages on Facebook – for which caper they were sent down for four years – the police had the pages very quickly taken down.

In the wake of the hype the Canadian company that makes Blackberry phones, Research In Motion, has announced that it is cooperating with the UK police – but this corrodes its already rusty image with businesses, which has been based on the security of its messaging services.

David Cameron’s threat to close the networks – unwisely supported, in another panic, by Tottenham MP David

Lammy – came to nothing, perhaps predictably, when ministers met the companies a fortnight later. But RIM would not say to what extent they might have agreed to hand over information on their customers.

In any case, how do you close down entire social networks, particularly when there are alternatives like ordinary texting, Google+, unencrypted messageboards – and the telephone?

And if they close the networks in response to a riot, won’t it be too late anyway?

And how will the authorities distinguish between a potential riot and a peaceful demonstration?

But like all authoritarians, David Cameron is likely to get worse if he doesn’t get his way. And his way seemed to be to stamp on freedom of expression and extend a system of censorship that would have to rely on effectively unlimited surveillance of the entire British population

# Cross-promotion a dangerous notion

**JONATHAN HARDY** says it's not just the moral argument that should have scuppered the abortive Murdoch buyout of BSkyB; the firm's ability to rig the market in its favour was the real danger

**W**ITH THE COLLAPSE of the BSkyB deal all eyes will be on the Leveson inquiry, but it is not only News Corporation's phone hacking that connects the two. Leveson's brief includes considering "press behaviour, media policy, regulation and cross-media ownership".

The proposed merger was the most significant invocation of the "public interest" test since it was established by the Communications Act 2003.

The test had not formed part of the Blair government's initial proposals but was added following concerns expressed in the House of Lords and beyond about the implications of the Government's deregulatory approach.

It was an important victory: the test invites consideration of issues that a strictly competition-based approach might discount, including the impact of a merger on plurality in the supply of news.

In the case of BSkyB the process worked, at least partly. Business Secretary Vince Cable referred the

bid to Ofcom, which concluded that News Corp would have 51 per cent share of the UK news market – a lack of pluralism that would operate against the public interest – and recommended a full Competition Commission enquiry.

The handling of the merger exposed the flaws in the process as well.

The power of the Secretary of State to determine the matter justified the fears of the House of Lords communications committee of a conflict of interest "if the same people who want, and need, to stay on the right side of a media company, have the final say on that company's business interests". Such people included Jeremy Hunt of course.

He exploited the strict legal framing of the test to eliminate consideration of "fit and proper" governance and a host of other concerns about the power and behavior of Murdoch's media empire.

Ofcom also narrowed its enquiry. The process proved inadequate to do what was originally intended – to address public interest considerations, such as how corporate power was exercised and might increase if News Corp was granted an even stronger grip across UK media markets.

One of the neglected issues was cross-media promotion.

Consolidating News Corp's control would allow more integrated promotion across its services, raising barriers for competitors and increasing corporate self-interest in editorial and advertising output.

Such concerns, raised by rival media firms, the CPBF and others, must be demonstrated, not merely asserted, of course, but that is precisely what a full investigation needed to consider.

Cross-promotion is only one illustration of how firms' behavior affecting media content, practice, consumer experience and public culture can be ignored in the narrowly drawn media merger rules. In fact, cross-promotion did feature in Jeremy Hunt's ill-fated deal with News Corporation, but only in a "positive" guise, in a proposed undertaking that Sky News, once

legally separated, would continue to enjoy cross-promotional support from Sky.

The public interest test was a rear-guard action to inject some democratic and cultural considerations into a narrow economic and competition law process. Nevertheless, the existing apparatus could be reconfigured to serve a more progressive media policy agenda.

Now we are challenged to find ways of promoting media pluralism when many schemes to identify and tackle concentration and cross-ownership appear outdated and insufficient.

We do need strong cross-ownership rules and clear upper ceilings on share across media markets.

This is also a key moment to flesh out what kinds of behavioural controls could be applied to media firms when they command a significant share of public media beneath those thresholds.

**'We need strong cross-ownership rules and clear upper ceilings on share across media markets'**

For instance, if 30 per cent was the maximum permitted share across a designated media market, any share, or merger, above 15 per cent could be subject to a public interest test by the relevant authorities.

Such a test could be much broader in criteria than the current one, which ignores newsgathering and investigative journalism, and largely ignores entertainment and cultural diversity issues.

For the approval of mergers, firms could be required to adhere to undertakings that included adherence to journalistic codes and standards and guaranteed investment or staffing levels.

Of course, Murdoch's disdain for such undertakings, from the *Times* acquisition to the *Wall Street Journal*, is well documented.

But this negative lesson only highlights the importance of a stronger legislative framework in the next Communications Act, including powers for Ofcom to initiate public interest tests.

Finally, taking another lesson from the News Corp-BSkyB debacle, it is not enough just to consult, or even to put citizen concerns first; applying public interest considerations requires public involvement and oversight throughout.

## NO LONGER TOP DOG

The closure of the *News of the World* has broken the Murdoch press's reign as the UK's biggest national newspaper publisher. Its share of the market has fallen from 35 to 29 per cent, allowing Associated Newspapers, publisher of the *Daily Mail* group, to take the top spot with 30 per cent.

In August Associated, which also own the *Metro*, had a weekly circulation of 21.4 million, compared with NI's 20.6 million.



# Journalists' strike of no return in south Yorkshire

**T**HE FIGHT by local paper journalists to stop the rot of job cuts is spreading to offices around the country.

Twenty five NUJ members at the Doncaster-based South Yorkshire Newspapers, part of the Johnston Press group, are six weeks into an indefinite strike – the union's first for 20 years.

They are trying to stop 18 jobs, including a management plan to bring three titles under one editor.

Their strike followed another success for local action. Following the journalists at the papers in North London owned by the Tindle group, where two spells of action stopped a programme of job losses (last issue), those on Newsquest's south-west London titles won back two jobs, with more staff replacements to come, after two days on strike.

Their colleagues on Newsquest's weeklies in the North West were holding a vote to strike as *Free Press* went to press. Seven posts are under threat.

In Doncaster managers have refused so far to negotiate and are bringing out the papers with the help of work experience teenagers, including a 16-year-old schoolboy and the student son of Managing Director John Bills.

Among the staff made redundant is the editor of the *South Yorkshire Times*, Jim Oldfield, who received a "four-figure sum" in compensation after 37 years on the papers and who joined the strike.



South Yorkshire journalists: on strike for six weeks to save local news.

He said: "The fact is Johnston Press has failed to treat its employees humanely, let alone decently, time and again."

The strikers are producing their own newsletters and have scooped the Johnston Press papers time and again, the stories turning up in them a week later. These included a crash at Doncaster airport that the *Doncaster Free Press* missed. One striker said:

"The quality of this week's newsletters should give SYN pause for thought as they show our commitment to our readers and our communities and to quality journalism.

"That we've managed to give the 'official' papers such a thrashing over the real news this week just goes to show the power of creative journalism. Loads of people have told us they're a much better read than the JP titles."

STALINGRAD O'NEILL

## 'AFTER MURDOCH, OUR TIME HAS COME'

THE CPBF must intervene forcefully in the national debate on media regulation in the wake of the News of the World scandal, the campaign's annual meeting agreed in July.

The disgrace of the Murdoch press and the collapse of the News Corporation bid to buy out BSkyB vindicated everything the campaign had been fighting for over the past 25 years, the meeting was told by Labour MP John McDonnell.

He said the events of the past few weeks had proved that "our time has come". But he warned that the establishment was could very easily allow the waters to close over issues. "Media reformers have a window of opportunity of between six months and a year to get our case across."

John McDonnell, who is secretary of the NUJ Parliamentary Group, said the Leveson Inquiry could drag on and finally produce a report which would only suggest modest reform. "We must get our concerns into the Inquiry's agenda and force a wide ranging discussion about media policy.

"We can't allow monopoly and oligarchy ownership in the media any more. We also need to re-open the BBC licence fee debate."

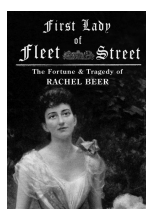
He said the departure of News International's former chief executive Les Hinton showed how important it

was that evidence to the inquiry must be given under oath. "Mr Hinton's recent statements on media ethics were in direct contradiction of what he told the Commons media select committee in 2007. He was left with little choice but to go."

Brian Cathcart, professor of journalism at Kingston University and founder of the Hacked Off campaign website, told the meeting: "I expect that Rupert Murdoch will close down phone tapping complaints with money. If there are any trials, you can expect guilty pleas followed by short sentencing hearings."

## Reviews

## The very first lady of the Sunday press



**FIRST LADY OF FLEET STREET**  
Éclat Negev  
and Ehud Koren  
JR Books £20

ONLY TWO women have edited two British national papers. They shared the initials RB, but there comparisons end. One had H G Wells and Arnold Bennett as her associates; the other had to make do with Rupert Murdoch and Andy Coulson.

A century ago Rachel Beer, famed editor of both the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times*, was an advocate of women's rights. Her present-day equivalent was

more associated with page 3 girls.

Born into one of London's leading Jewish families, Rachel Sassoon married Frederick Beer, a Jewish convert, in 1887 and was ostracised by her family. Frederick Beer had inherited ownership of the *Observer* and installed her as editor.

In 1894 the Beers bought the *Sunday Times* and for a time she edited both.

Rachel Beer believed the press should be free of political affiliation and the formerly conservative Sunday Times became recognisably independent. She interviewed politicians, social activists, artists and feminist pioneers.

Rachel Beer was deeply affected by the death of her husband in 1901 and her decline was remorseless. Her vindictive estranged brother got two surgeons to declare she was of unsound mind, took over her affairs and sold the papers.

This is a well-written and extensively researched biography of a brilliant woman who did much to introduce quality Sunday newspapers to the British public, a legacy often disregarded in recent times.

John Bailey

## SIX BRAVE LIVES GO INTO ONE GREAT STORY

### ON THE RECORD

IceandFire

Arcola Theatre, Dalston

THE "reluctant hero" is a great journalistic cliché, a role in which they love to cast individuals who dive into raging torrents to save children, or pets. It is also a role that journalists quite enjoy themselves, being famously self-deprecatory about far more heroic exploits than recurring dogs and cats.

This might explain what made *On the Record*, playing at a fringe theatre in Hackney, such a sudden hit among London journalists in August.

The play by Christine Bacon and Noah Birksted-Breen of the iceandfire company tells the story of six contemporary investigative journalists in countries around the world who have defied harassment and death threats from governments, police and criminal gangs – often all of them in concert - to expose crime, state violence and corruption, at risk to their lives.

One, Sri Lankan Lasantha Wickramatunga, lost the battle and was assassinated last year. The others, from Mexico, Israel, Russia and the USA, are still going strong.

Based entirely on lengthy interviews with the five and with Lasantha Wickramatunga's surviving brother, still working on their paper, the *Sunday Leader*, the play skilfully interweaves their cases without losing track of them, the six-strong cast doubling up in supporting roles in each others' stories.

The effect is harrowing, the more so because the audience knows that every word is from the journalists' mouths.

The play's run has finished but a UK tour and a DVD are planned for next year; worth looking out for.

Tim Gopsill

Free Press is edited by Tim Gopsill on behalf of the National Council. This issue went to press on August 26.  
Send letters, comments, articles and ideas to [freepress@cpbf.org.uk](mailto:freepress@cpbf.org.uk)

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- a) Individual membership £15  
b) Unwaged £6  
c) Supporting membership £25  
(includes free CPBF publications)  
d) Institutions (eg libraries) £25  
(includes 10 copies of *FREE Press*)

#### AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- f) Fewer than 500 members £25  
g) 500 to 1,000 £30  
h) 1,000 to 10,000 £50  
i) 10,000 to 50,000 £115  
j) 50,000 to 100,000 £225  
k) Over 100,000 £450

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