

FREE Press

No 204 Autumn 2015

Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

JEREMY IS NEW HOPE TO TACKLE BIG MEDIA

THE ASTOUNDING wave of public support for left wing Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn's candidature for leadership of the party is a great basis for keeping up the demand for curbs on media ownership.

Corbyn himself is a long-time fighter for true and independent press freedom, alongside the CPBF, the media unions and other campaign groups. He has signed the Media Reform Coalition's (MRC) public pledge to call Big Media to account and restrict the share of the industry the mega corporations can control.

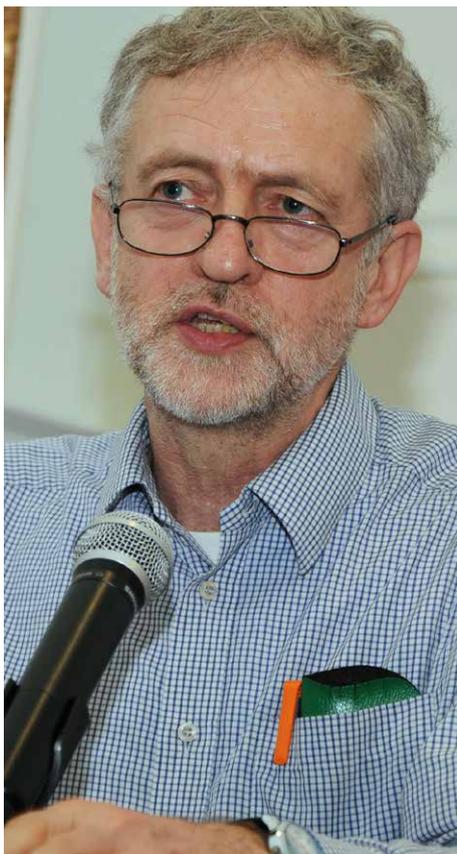
In August he was by miles the front runner in the leadership contest, and the leading candidate for deputy leader, Tom Watson, has signed it as well. He has a powerful record at defying the media barons, more so than any other MP in the way he took on the Murdochs over the phone-hacking scandal. The other Labour MP who came close was Chris Bryant, who is now shadow culture secretary, in charge of media policy.

And if Tom Watson does fail to be elected deputy leader, another candidate, Ben Bradshaw, a one-time BBC journalist, has also signed the MRC pledge.

The MPs have pledged to "take steps within Parliament and my own party to promote the growth of a more pluralistic media environment by pressing for legislation that will provide new funding for invaluable areas such as local news, investigative journalism, youth media and digital innovation, and that will temper the power of the largest media companies through the introduction of thresholds in specific media markets."

Jeremy Corbyn told the MRC: "A society in which 70% of UK newspaper circulation is controlled by three wealthy families is clearly unfair and undemocratic. The work being done by the Media Reform Coalition and others is vital in pushing for media plurality which this country is so desperately in need of."

Des Freedman, chair of the MRC, said: "This is a great boost for anyone who believes in a free and diverse media. The Labour Party had



Jeremy Corbyn has long supported the media unions and activists against the big corporations and spoke at the London rally to mark the 25th anniversary of the Wapping dispute in 2011.

put their money where their mouth was before the General Election with manifesto commitments for media reform, and the views coming from the top leadership candidates suggest that media reform still ranks as a priority for Labour's principles and policy direction."

2 THE BBC MUST BE DEFENDED ... as Tories plan its leaner future

BBC
LOVE IT
OR
LOSE IT

5 RUPERT COULD BE BACK FOR MORE Fox mulls fresh bid for Sky

8 FREEDOM OF INFO IN PERIL Yet another official bid to tighten the rules

For all campaign news go to cpbf.org.uk
Email: freepress@cpbf.org.uk

BROADCASTING

It's that time of the decade, when the BBC's Charter, granted by Parliament, comes up for review.

The BBC's enemies in government and the commercial media combine to throw at it everything they've got, and its friends — campaigning and consumer groups, representing the rest of the population — gather to try and defend it.

Not always easy given management's propensity to cave in to threats and accept too much of the enemies' agenda.

But there is much more at issue than the BBC's structures, budget and rules of operation. The whole future of public broadcasting would be undermined if the corporation loses its critical mass to function as a universal public service.

No-one wants to get rid of it completely; rather, commercial rivals want it reduced to an elite rump, serving only those parts of the community from which that they can't derive enough profit — an audience for top-quality programming rich enough to pay for it by subscription.

This is behind all the calls to stop its blockbuster entertainment shows, reduce its news operations and cut back its website. If these succeed, then the public will be failed.

BBC facing cutbacks, 'a victim of its own success'



DES FREEDMAN takes a searching look at the government's plans for the BBC and shows how dangerous they are



Broadcasting unions have launched a "Love it or Lose it" campaign which the CPBF and other groups are backing. Sign the petition at <http://bit.ly/bbc-lioli>

WHO WOULD have expected that one of the central debates about the future of the BBC would not be about its pro-business news coverage, its financial mismanagement or its alleged cover-up of the Jimmy Savile scandal but about whether it should show *Strictly* on a Saturday night?

The government's Green Paper on BBC Charter Review signals the latest stage of a scuffle with the Corporation about how big, independent and accountable it should be. Dressed up as a sober debate about the purposes, scale and scope of the BBC, the Green Paper consists of a series of proposals that, while drafted in Whitehall, could easily have been conceived by the Daily Mail.

Culture Secretary John Whittingdale insists that he is "committed both to the future of the BBC and to its underlying Reithian mission", but goes on to question the relevance in a digital age of the principle of universality, a founding principle of this mission. Instead of encouraging the BBC to reach out across all platforms and to serve the whole community, it should focus on "underserved audiences", that is, those that commercial broadcasters deem to be unprofitable.

It seems the BBC's very success is now its problem. The

Join the
campaign
for press and
broadcasting
freedom

Join online at
www.cpbf.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER YEAR

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

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 |

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Tel _____

Email _____

Organisation (if applicable) _____

Return form to CPBF, 23 Orford Road, London E17 9NL, 07729 846 146, freepress@cpbf.org.uk

Green Paper moans that the BBC is the dominant player in all the markets in which it operates, without acknowledging that it is, at least hypothetically, subject to public scrutiny, and secondly that it is not even the UK's largest broadcaster. Its annual income of £5.2 billion is dwarfed by Sky's £7.6 billion.

Nonetheless it is obsessed by the BBC's impact on the market and lists more negative than positive consequences arising from the fact that it reaches its impressive 96 per cent of the population.

But why should we measure the BBC simply in terms of its impact on the marketplace? Do we judge the NHS on the basis of whether it makes life difficult for Bupa?

This is an austerity-led consultation, obsessed (much like the BBC itself) by the pursuit of "efficiency" and "value for money". This applies even to those services where it would be hard to apply standard economic arguments such as the provision of different language services within the UK. So, for example, it notes that the cost of S4C in Wales and BBC Alba in Scotland is "considerably higher than cost per hour for English speaking content".

How could it be otherwise? The point of public service broadcasting is to reach out to minority audiences whatever the cost. But the Green Paper contradicts its own stated aim, to shift the BBC away from popular programming and to focus on content not provided by the market.

There is a restricted discussion of funding mechanisms with three options identified: a reformed licence fee (to allow for digital consumption), a household payment and a combination of public funding and subscription. Funding the BBC from general taxation is dismissed on the basis that it would "risk lessening the BBC's independence from Government".

Given that the last two licence fee deals took place behind closed doors and that the most recent deal forced the BBC to part fund the government's welfare cuts, this is far from a convincing argument.

The Green Paper does raise some important questions on underlying values and performance. It is true that the BBC has a poor record in both hiring and representing ethnic minorities. But how on earth will a smaller, narrower and more ghettoised BBC do better?

The BBC needs radical surgery but this skewed and partisan consultation will do nothing either to democratise the Corporation or to secure a more diverse media landscape. We need media outlets that are truly independent of vested interests and bold enough to challenge "common sense" arguments on, for example, immigration and austerity.

We need media outlets that look and sound like the audiences to whom they are supposed to be accountable. An ideological campaign fought on behalf of the BBC's commercial rivals really isn't the way to go about this.

THIS TORY DOESN'T TALK BUNK

NOT ALL Tories are out to get the BBC. In fact former minister Damian Green MP has come out strongly in its defence, in an article in the Daily Telegraph, arguing that "Britain benefits from a strong BBC, and we have the prospect of maintaining that in the years ahead. It is a great national prize."

Green, a former BBC and Channel 4 journalist who chairs the Parliamentary All-Party BBC Group, said: "The free market fundamentalists who want to destroy the BBC or weaken it so that it becomes unrecognisable are in danger of damaging not just our national culture but an important institution for transmitting it."

He went on: "The Reithian mission statement to inform, educate and entertain has stood the test of time extraordinarily well. There is an assumption that in a digital world with infinite choice we no longer need a broadcaster with broad ambitions funded in a universal way. This is not the view of the British people."



The inquiry they should be listening to

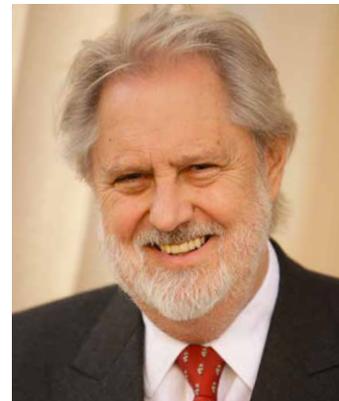
WITH THE ten-yearly ordeal of the renewal of the BBC's charter well under way there are numerous inquiries and consultations going on. The culture ministry and the Commons media committee have launched virtually identical operations, to which the CPBF and others are preparing identical submissions.

But an alternative forum is setting up, more likely to listen to media reformers and come to positive conclusions. The Inquiry into Public Service Television for the 21st Century is to be chaired by Lord Puttnam, the Labour-supporting film producer who fought the winning battle in the House of Lords to get a "public interest" test written into the 2003 Communications Act – a crucial check on the Big Media monopolies.

Project partners include the British Academy, BAFTA, Vice, the Guardian, Goldsmiths University and the Hansard Society. It will set up a website on which people can comment, and publish its findings next June.

The inquiry says its starting point is that "TV still matters in a digital environment: despite predictions that the internet would put an end to the dominance of TV, the average UK viewer still watches nearly four hours of television every day, a figure that has remained largely stable since the introduction of multichannel broadcasting. Even 16–24-year-olds are still watching some two and a half hours of TV a day.

"Yet TV is simultaneously being transformed with the emergence of more complex viewing practices,



Lord Puttnam: film producer with strong record of opposing media monopolies

new modes of production and distribution and a far more competitive and unstable economic environment."

It takes its inspiration from a previous landmark inquiry into UK broadcasting. In 1962, the Pilkington Committee recommended the adoption of colour TV licences and the creation of BBC2. But the Report was far more than a list of policy prescriptions, issuing a prescient warning of the direction of travel of British television under the influence of a growing commercial mindset and an increasing number of programmes imported from the USA.

It advocated measures to revitalise the idea of public service broadcasting and foster a more creative and robust public culture. The new inquiry plans a "Pilkington" for the 21st century, considering the role and responsibility of television in the digital world.

The BBC: Love it or Lose it

**OPEN MEETING IN LONDON
MONDAY SEPTEMBER 21**

6pm at the NUJ, 308 Grays Inn Road
London WC1X 8DP (Kings Cross)

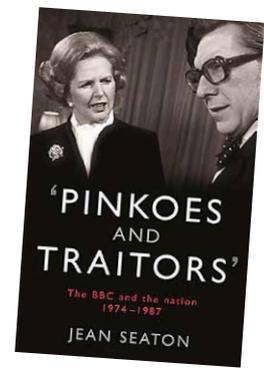
The fight for the future of the BBC is under way. And so are government attacks which threaten the public broadcaster's future. Even before public consultations could begin on the renewal next year of the BBC Charter, Culture Secretary John Whittingdale announced that the corporation had agreed to fund free TV licences for over-75s at a cost of £650 million a year and rising.

The CPBF is holding this open meeting to discuss the next stages in the campaign.

Come along with your ideas to build the campaign.



Don't get sentimental learn from the past



TOM MILLS reviews a new history of the BBC by a supporter who doesn't get to grips with the real problems

Pinkoes and Traitors; Jean Seaton; Profile Books

WE HAVE been here before – a Conservative government buoyed by an election victory and emboldened by the overwhelming support of the corporate media hopes to reshape British society and once again the BBC is in the firing line.

The arrival of *Pinkoes and Traitors*, an official history of the BBC from 1974 to 1987, then, is certainly timely. It covers the period of Murdoch's ascendancy in British public life, the rise of Thatcherism and the decline of social democracy – the vestiges of which the Tories are now determined to demolish.

Jean Seaton tells the story of government attacks on the BBC, the Peacock Inquiry into its finances and the public disputes over a number of political programmes, culminating in the dismissal of the Director General, Alistair Milne, in 1987.

These were significant moments in British political and social history, and their telling provides ample opportunity to examine the BBC's complex relationship with the state and

the broader Establishment, and its place in the hollowing out of our democratic institutions and erosion of independent journalism that we have seen since.

Pinkoes and Traitors, however, does not address these issues in any depth – and to be fair it does not attempt to. In style and substance it falls uneasily between social history and popular journalism.

Seaton's treatment of the BBC is more than a little sanguine and her account of its enemies is cursory at best. As a result *Pinkoes and Traitors* offers a sentimental defence of the corporation and surprisingly little sense of the principles at stake in the struggles it details.

Seaton's BBC shows "the nation to itself, with a dusting of the stardust of impartiality added". She writes of its "glory, its unique independence and its British integrity". In so far as she sees a problem with this almost magical national institution, it was in its "failure to understand the shift in ideas" in the period under examination.

This sort of characterisation is fine for the Daily Telegraph. But Seaton is an academic who must surely be aware of the now extensive of scholarly research on neoliberalism – all of which is overlooked in favour of vague references to the national mood.

Some figures within the BBC, according to Seaton, were quicker to recognise that this mood

"had shifted". Milne's successor, the accountant Michael Checkland, is praised as a quiet hero who "helped beat over mighty unions", whilst the Thatcherite BBC executive Patricia Hodgson, who now chairs Ofcom, emerges as the pragmatic saviour of the corporation.

The central problem is that Seaton's account is of the BBC as an institution. She has little sense of how its internal politics relate to broader social and political movements and interests. She celebrates its pragmatism as well as its idealism, whilst showing little interest in either the consequences of the concessions and compromises the BBC leadership has made, or the extent to which it has lived up to the laudable ideals it professes.

To be fair again, this is a weakness shared by most liberal defenders of the BBC, who respect the corporation as a purveyor of national culture and a bulwark against the crass commercialism of News International, but tend to give little attention to its actual record on reporting and the extent to which its capacity for independent journalism, always limited, has been further curtailed since Thatcher.

The BBC's well-meaning apologists find themselves defending a BBC that no longer exists, at a time when the democratic principles it is thought to embody are under serious threat from both without and within.

HOW THE BBC REALLY WORKS

THE BBC milks its claimed reputation as the world's leading news broadcaster, bringing Britain's envied and thorough standards to benighted foreigners. That's the theory. Two recent events might appear to belie it.

■ THE CORPORATION has been rapped by Ofcom for broadcasting on its World News TV channel (BBCWN) nearly 200 documentaries provided free by companies funded by special interests.

Ofcom said it "identified a number of practices that were at odds with [its] Code", though it "did not find evidence that the way programmes were funded compromised the broadcasters' editorial independence".

The half-hour documentaries were produced by FactBased Communications (FBC), which had been paid £12 million by the Malaysian government to promote the country. No reference was made in the programmes to

sponsorship, though much of their content related to Malaysia.

BBCWN told Ofcom: "We now know that FBC had a PR relationship with Malaysian clients and as such we fully accept that it was not an appropriate producer of the programmes it produced for BBCWN. We were not aware of this relationship when the content was broadcast We accept that this lack of knowledge may have given rise to the potential for BBCWN's independence of editorial control over the content to be undermined."

Ofcom also looked at a programmes supplied free by not-for-profit outfits. One, Architects on the Frontline, was paid for by the Aga Khan Foundation and included the boast that the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was "widely recognised as the most prestigious in its field". Stealing the Past, about antiquity smuggling, was paid for by UNESCO and featured an interview with that body's director general.

The BBC Trust said: "We welcome Ofcom's findings which found a number of these programmes to have been in serious breach of editorial and sponsorship guidelines. The Trust required BBC World News to broadcast a series of apologies to international audiences."

■ A BBC World Service radio journalist was sacked after he refused to put a report of the birth of Prince George out on a Sri Lankan news service.

Chandana Bandara was a senior producer on the Sinhala service. In July 2013, after birth of Prince George, he declined to run a news item because he considered the 30th anniversary of Black July, when thousands of Tamils were slaughtered in Sri Lanka, was a more important story. For this he was found guilty of gross misconduct and given a final written warning.

Four month later the Sinhala service broadcast a documentary called Sri Lanka's Unfinished

War that detailed human rights violations perpetrated by the government against Tamils. But while the BBC Tamil service broadcast it in full, the Sinhala service cut out an account of torture in rehabilitation camps and added false claims from a Sri Lankan military spokesman that the documentary had been made in league with a Tamil group.

Bandara was off work but on his first day back he shouted at several World Service executives, was disciplined and fired.

He appealed to the Employment Tribunal against the sacking on grounds of race discrimination. His mother is Tamil and he claimed to have been targeted because of his belief that the Tamil people of Sri Lanka have been persecuted by the Sinhala-dominated government.

In August the tribunal rejected his case because the belief did not fulfil the criteria for race discrimination, and the dismissal process was found to be fair.



OWNERSHIP

Get ready! Rupert could be back

POSTER SITES across the UK carry the message "Sky Sports and the Premier League 23 Years and counting".

Back in 1992 Rupert Murdoch paid £304 million for the five-year deal to broadcast the newly-formed Premier League matches on BSkyB. In February 2015 Sky paid £4.18 billion to retain five of the seven Premier League rights packages. BT got the others.

On 1 July this year James Murdoch became chief executive of 21st Century Fox. This move, and the election of a Conservative government anxious to build bridges with the Murdoch clan after the phone-hacking scandal torpedoed the Murdoch bid for full control of BSkyB in 2011, has led to speculation that 21st Century Fox will make another bid to take full control of Sky.

What are the chances of this? Look at the big picture.

In mid-November 2014 it was

announced that BSkyB was to drop the word "British" from its branding after almost 25 years as the company completed an ambitious transformation into a pan-European pay TV giant following the £6.88 billion buyout of its sister companies Sky Deutschland and Sky Italia.

The word "Broadcasting" was also jettisoned to reflect Fox's evolution into a multimedia content company.

The sales delivered £4.9 billion in cash to Murdoch's Fox group without diminishing its stake in BSkyB after the double takeover. It did this by buying up enough of the newly placed shares in BSkyB to maintain its stake in the new structure at 39.1 per cent.

BSkyB's original title was created in 1990 by the controversial merger, illegal under the then media-ownership rules, of Rupert Murdoch's Sky Television with British Satellite Broadcasting, as

Margaret Thatcher's government looked the other way.

A pan-European pay-TV giant has now been created with more than £11 billion in revenues and 20 million customers in the UK, Germany, Italy, Austria and Ireland. The enlarged business has a combined budget of £4.6 billion and will deliver profits of about £1.3 billion annually, most of which are generated by the highly successful UK operation.

Sky is the biggest international customer for Fox's programming and a useful source of cash for the group.

That's why the issue of full control of Sky will move sharply up the Murdoch's agenda. He has rejected two offers for the 39.1 per cent stake in Sky, from Vodafone and Vivendi, and it looks as if the next step will be a revival of the bid to take full control of Sky.

Granville Williams

WHAT THE FUCK?

OFCOM is investigating Sky News presenter Ian King's use of the word "fuck" on live TV. He uttered the dreaded expletive after a microphone lead fell out while he was interviewing economist Michelle Meyer about the US economy

King asked her about the "tepid" growth rate in the second quarter. Before she could answer, King, off-camera, shouted "fuck". He apologised on air and also on Twitter.

"Ofcom is investigating this programme, which included the most offensive language before the [9pm] watershed," said a spokesman for the media regulator. So at one minute past 9, when presumably fewer children are watching Sky business news, it would have been OK.

A sensational story by all accounts ...

Beyond Contempt, Peter Jukes, Canbury Press

Hack Attack, Nick Davies, Vintage

Hacking: the Untold Story, James Hanning and Glenn Mulcaire, Gibson Square

The Fall of the House of Murdoch, Peter Jukes, Unbound

IT IS NOT just Britain's vaunted national press that has managed to mess up the political story of the century, so far. The corporate publishing industry has as well.

The story – no not Jeremy Corbyn, though that might turn out to be a big one – concerned the very contempt for democracy among our rulers that generated the popular revulsion propelling Corbyn's campaign. It was of course the revelation of the corrupt relationships between politicians and the corporate media that emerged from the whole saga of criminal behaviour in the press and the contamination of political life that led to the Leveson and culminated in the disgrace and trials of some of the most powerful people in the country.

There can't have been many such devastating exposures of top-level corruption in history – dwarfing all the minor scandals and even the child abuse stories in its significance – but it's easy to see why it was so hard for the media to cover. Their conduct was at the heart of it.

There's no such excuse for the big publishers to avoid it, yet most of the print and ebook accounts have come from self-publishers or new one-person outfits.

They have discovered a readership that will pay, and more crowd-funded works are coming from the doughty band of journalists who are prepared to defy the paranoid defensiveness of the Big Media and get the story out. It is, after all, dramatic by any standards.

It is also notable that not one of the authors is a specialist writer on the media. The media correspondents, basically business reporters covering the industry, are too compromised by their employment to write freely, even if they had the inclination.

Even Nick Davies, whose new book *Hack Attack* is a comprehensive narrative of the whole phone-hacking saga, chronicles the industry from a background as a crime reporter with the

motivation of a concerned professional to clean up the dirty side of his trade.

Davies is actually published by a corporate publisher, Random House, but then he is highly bankable since the success of his groundbreaking account of rotten journalism, *Flat Earth News*, published in 2008.

His motivation is shared by the other authors, who include two former journalists on the *Independent* and a couple of freelancers. The star among them is Peter Jukes, whose background as a TV dramatist is evident throughout *Beyond Contempt*, the story of the sensational phone-hacking trial of former editors Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson and others from the *News of the World*.

The book is pioneering in a number of ways. It is the world's first tweeted history book. He covered the whole eight-month marathon in court to maintain a constant Twitter feed, and has written it up as kind of diary. He had to navigate the tortuous legal processes, under which there was always a mass of information

before him for inadvertently tweeting something obscurely erroneous.

Jukes writes telling portraits of all the participants, their court habits and their fuming rivalries, and though he does so even-handedly, well, if you really hate vain lawyers you'll love this book.

Also original about *Beyond Contempt* – he had to keep the title secret until the trial ended in case it prejudiced the proceedings – is its funding model. He started tweeting from the outset and, with no income, found himself broke after a few days. He launched an online appeal and raised all he needed in two days. That's the prospect the corporate publishers can't see.

His other offering, *The Fall of the House of Murdoch*, written in 2012, is less arresting. Again a narrative, of how the phone-hacking scandal brought the Murdoch dynasty to its knees, it has the misfortune of being overtaken by events, since they have with apparent ease been able to get up again. It is also tiresomely repetitive.

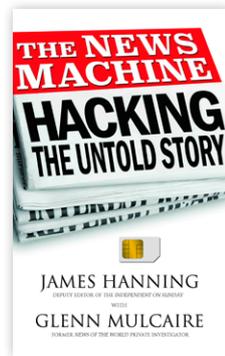
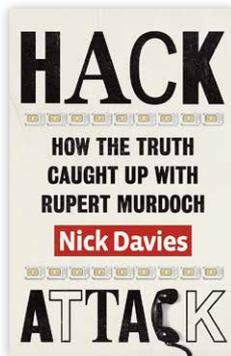
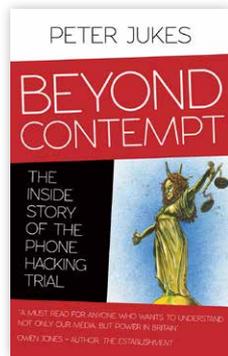
The hacking story is more vividly told in *Hacking: the Untold Story*, a strange collaboration between former *Independent* journalist James Hanning and the sleek-haired pantomime villain Glenn Mulcaire, the private eye hired for the purpose by the *News of the World*. Hanning is the only writer to get Mulcaire to talk freely, which is more than even Nick Davies could achieve.

As you might expect he emerges as a thoroughly mixed-up character, indignant at his treatment yet with the dignity of a devout catholic and family person. He rages at being accused of hacking murdered teenager Milly Dowler's phone, yet he did it in a confirmed belief that it was to help the police and rescue their incompetent investigation.

This is the puzzled guilt of the person caught up in an immoral exercise who half-knew it at time but can't face the awesome responsibility. A handful of journalists from the *News of the World* have come out with similar reflections in different ways, mainly, being journalists, through bravado. It would be instructive if the *News International* executives who were responsible were required to examine publicly their own consciences, but they have expensive lawyers to protect them.

■ Another book on the scandal, *Dial M for Murdoch*, was published in 2012, written by former *Independent* reporter Martin Hickman and Labour MP Tom Watson. It was positively reviewed in *Free Press* issue 188.

Tim Gopsill



that could not be published, with painful care. This punctiliousness is balanced by a ferocious sense of drama, with hours of tedious legalistics punctuated by moments of edge-of-the-bench tension and at times of humour.

"Feel a question coming on, do we?" the judge interrupts in full flow one of the vastly expensive array of QCs hired by Murdoch to defend his henchpersons, perforating the rhetoric as he is supposedly questioning a witness.

Appropriately, Judge Saunders is the star of the show, maintaining an even temper throughout the barely believable prevarications of the lawyers and stepping in to rescue witnesses under heavy defence fire. He was even kind to Peter Jukes when he was hauled

If you really hate vain lawyers you'll love this book

... AND MORE ARE ON THE WAY

ANOTHER FREELANCE who reported the hacking trial, James Doleman, is crowd-funding a further book on the story, taking it up from Peter Jukes' "downfall" of the Murdochs to argue why they still have so much power after getting away with "the greatest escape in legal history".

He will ask what would have happened if all the evidence in the millions of "disappeared" emails had been retrieved.

Through the crowd-funding journalism website Byline, James Doleman is trying to raise £3,200 to write the book in two months. Go to www.byline.com/project/8.

Byline has also launched a fund-raising campaign to raise £5,000 towards the costs of researching and publishing a biography of former News of the World and Mirror editor Piers Morgan, entitled *A Pretty Despicable Man*, by investigative freelance Paddy French. The title is apparently a self-description by the man himself.

French says: "Morgan's Mirror was hacking, blagging, lying and cheating its way to exclusives — just like the Sun and the News of the World.

"His editorship was the climax of a slow acceptance by leading Mirror executives that there was no way to compete with Murdoch except to use the same methods. Including all the illegal dark arts.

■ To support this crowdfunding effort, go to www.byline.com/project/11.

Now fake sheikh could face the music

SEVEN PEOPLE jailed after being caught in sting operations by the former News of the World "investigations" reporter Mazher Mahmood are to appeal against their convictions. Their lawyers argue that there are "serious concerns" over Mahmood's integrity as a witness and his journalistic practices.

The appeals are the result of statements made by Judge Alistair McCreath, when halting the trial of singer Tulisa Contostavlos last year, that there were "strong grounds for believing" Mahmood had "lied" on oath as a prosecution witness. Two of the seven are known to be actor John Alford and former boxer Herbie Hide, both jailed for supplying drugs to Mahmood.

The Crown Prosecution Service is still considering whether to charge him with perjury a year after the collapse of the trial of Tulisa Contostavlos, also charged with dealing drugs. The CPS abandoned three ongoing prosecutions in which Mahmood was to be a crown witness on the grounds that his evidence could not be relied on to guarantee a conviction.

The CPS also said it was re-examining 25 cases in which evidence had been given by Mahmood and people convicted.

In January it dropped the case against 13 footballers investigated over alleged match-fixing, saying there was "insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction".

After the closure of the News of the World

Mahmood went to work for the Sun on Sunday but was suspended after the collapse of the Contostavlos trial.

He has had a mysteriously charmed existence on Murdoch's London papers. With all the proceedings over phone-hacking and bribery, Mahmood's dubious methods of procuring stories — which involved close collaboration with police who were invariably tipped off and moved in to make arrests just as the NoW was about to go to press — somehow escaped scrutiny.

For years there have been questions about his entrapment of gullible people by means of his much-vaunted talent for disguise as the "Fake Sheikh" among other personages.

This mystique has been maintained by the entire press, with an effective veto on the publication of his image on the supposed ground this would put him in danger.

The obvious point that if he has been so good at disguising himself, then his real appearance would not be recognisable, was never raised. Even Lord Leveson, to the disappointment of many, ordered that cameras be switched off when Mahmood gave evidence to his inquiry.

Not all journalists are in awe of this taboo. Guardian media blogger Roy Greenslade, who worked with Mahmood on the Sunday Times in the 1990s, when Mahmood was sacked for falsifying computer records, and has maintained a campaign against him, has provided a witness statement for the appellants.

REVIEW

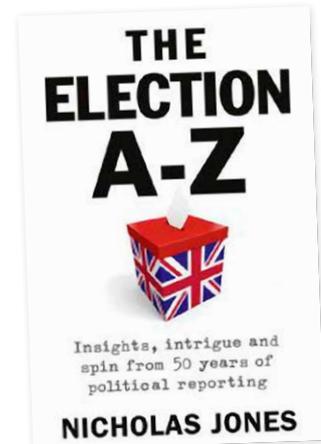
Labour's hateful days in May

The Election A-Z, Nicholas Jones, Urbane Publications

NICHOLAS JONES has drawn on his experiences of reporting 14 UK general elections and writing popular instant books on four of them. As the title suggests, his 2015 oeuvre has 26 chapters in alphabetical order.

Some are self-evident: A for Advertising; G for Gaffes; O for Opinion polls. For others he has had to work harder: K for Kitchens; Q for Queen; W for Wives; X for Xavier (Michael Denzil Xavier Portillo, to give him his full name and Z for...you will have to read the book to see.

J for Journalists highlights the impact of 24-hour TV news and the internet, with its social media and networking -- personal blogs, Twitter,



Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, BuzzFeed and other platforms — on the coverage.

Jeremy Corbyn might appreciate M for the Monsterring of Miliband to remind him of the savage treatment the press can dish out. "The pounding he (Miliband) would be subject to ... was as vicious as the treatment meted out to Gordon Brown, Neil Kinnock and Michael Foot, but the pre-election monsterring of Miliband went further than simply trashing of his personality and the ridiculing of his political credibility."

Jones puts this down to Miliband's opposition to Murdoch over the phone-hacking scandal, his support for Leveson's call for independent press regulation and the need to protect media plurality.

At the heart of this book is Jones's commitment to straight reporting which caused Blair's spin doctor Alistair Campbell in his diaries to describe him as a "tick" — "parasitic insect ... unpleasant or despicable person", Oxford Dictionary. High praise.

Barry White

Election not a total loss

THE TORY election victory did not mean that the fight for media reform was lost, speakers told the CPBF's annual meeting in June.

There was still a strong public opinion against the excesses of Big Media, and the post-Leveson process of introducing a stronger independent mean of regulating the press was still on track.

Evan Harris, executive director of the campaigning group Hacked Off, said: "After the election things are not hopeless at all. There are more MPs who share our views on the media than the total number of government MPs."

Jonathan Heawood, director of Impress, the prospective press regulator, said they were now able to register with the publicly-appointed Press



All is not lost: Jonathan Heawood (left) and Evan Harris at the CPBF's annual meeting in June.

Recognition Panel set up this year.

Impress has not yet announced any media subscribing to its service, but Heawood said this did not matter. Once a regulator had registered, he said, "the Leveson process will click into action." All the legal incentives and disincentives for publications to sign up with a recognised regulator will come into force.

Most national publishers have registered with IPSO, set up by the industry, which had said it would not apply to register with the PRP. They could face massive costs in libel cases as a result. But Heawood said: "Leveson should not be thrown out just because three or four big companies don't like it."

Freedom of info: one-sided inquiry

THE GOVERNMENT looks set to curtail the public's right to information following the announcement of a Commission to review the Freedom of Information Act.

The Campaign for Freedom of Information says it is particularly concerned by the commission's remit to reduce the "burden" of FOI on bureaucrats and protect the confidentiality of government discussions.

The commission, set up by Justice Secretary Michael Gove, is chaired by former Treasury mandarin Lord Burns and includes former Conservative Party leader Lord Howard, Labour ex-home secretary Jack Straw, Ofcom chair Dame Patricia Hodgson and the former reviewer of counter-terrorism legislation, Lord Carlile. None is associated with questioning official secrecy.

Gove told MPs there was a need to

"revisit" the act to ensure officials were able to speak candidly to ministers.

Cabinet Office Minister Lord Bridges said the commission would consider whether there was a balance between the requirement for transparency and the "robust protection" of sensitive information. It would examine the need to "moderate" the demands placed on public authorities.

Director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information Maurice Frankel said: "The government is clearly proposing to crackdown on FOI. Ministers want certainty that policy discussions will not only take place in secret but be kept secret afterwards."

"They don't like the fact that the Act requires the case for confidentiality to be weighed against the public interest in disclosure."

SCOTS FIGHT FOR INFO FREEDOM

THE CAMPAIGN for Freedom of Information in Scotland (CFOIS) has launched a crowdfunding drive to strengthen FOI laws in the nation. The campaign is a response to a Scottish government consultation paper.

Carole Ewart, convener of the CFOIS said: "It is hugely disappointing that the government has come forward with such feeble proposals. Pressure needs to be brought to bear to demand that the Scottish government reverses the erosion of FOI rights in Scotland."

The Scottish government had promised legislation to extend FOI to non-government bodies such as housing associations, arms-length companies set up by public authorities, voluntary-sector organisations and private companies. But the consultation paper failed to deliver these.

It said that housing associations and private schools for instance were already adequately regulated. It did suggest including a small number of other bodies, such as private prisons and grant-aided schools, but not private contractors that run schools, hospitals or other public services.

■ The CFOIS crowdfunding website is at <http://bit.ly/CFOIS-fund>.

MEDIA REFORM COALITION

CAMPAIGN THE FESTIVE WAY

A DAY of activity for media democracy is set for Saturday October 17 at a London college. The Media Reform Coalition, which includes the CPBF, is planning a festival with open spaces for discussion as well as expert speakers, plus, films, crowdfunding opportunities for now projects, and a party to round it all off.

The Media Democracy Festival will take place at Goldsmiths University in New Cross, London SE14, starting at 10am. It will be open to all who believe that media moguls have too much power and influence in our society, who want to protect and democratise the BBC, would love to see media co-ops in every community or just work as an independent journalist, photographer or film maker.

Speakers arranged so far include veteran radical journalist John Pilger and independent technology guru Aral Balkan.

But the bulk of the day will be a self-organising open space where everyone will be free to propose any session that answers our central question: how can we create media democracy?



**SATURDAY
OCTOBER
17
10am to
late**