

Editorial

Covid's grim legacy

IT'S a grim picture. In September the radio company Bauer will fold almost 50 local stations into a national radio network branded Greatest Hits. Stations like York's Minster FM will close.

To meet licence requirements some regional content will be produced, but will cover large areas such as north-west England rather than be produced by individual local stations.

In July the BBC confirmed it was cutting 450 jobs from its regional news operations. This will hit BBC local radio stations and television news bulletins in the regions hard. 29 jobs will go from the award-winning current affairs *Inside Out* programmes. They will be replaced by a new current affairs strand produced from regional hubs in Newcastle, Yorkshire, Norwich, Birmingham, London and Bristol.

And the hollowing out of local newspapers continues. Reach, the largest publisher of local and regional newspapers, is cutting 550 jobs. The latest ABC figures reveal the Reach-owned *Manchester Evening News* daily print circulation dropped by 53% from 29,613 to 13,993 from January to June.

Newsquest's *York Press* fell 16% to 8,257, JPI Media's *Sheffield Star* dropped 8% to 9,740 and the *Yorkshire Evening Post* fell 19% to 6,351. The *Lancashire Post* fell 10% to 5,907.

We are moving into a period of post-COVID dislocation and the run-down or closure of local and regional media means the capacity to describe the impact of these changes to communities and hold those responsible to account disappears. Misinformation and chatter fill the gap.

Government failure? Just blame someone else

By Granville Williams

PRESS coverage of the refugees risking their lives to cross the Channel to the UK in small inflatable boats has been deplorable. If we need a reminder of what is at stake remember the young Sudanese man, Abdulfatah Hamdallah, whose body was washed ashore on 19 August.

The tragedy has also revealed the dishonesty of the version of events of this 'crisis' being peddled by ministers. Their desperation to blame anyone but themselves for the present situation has resulted in an overemphasis on the role of smugglers and alleged failings by the French.

A recent poll found that 49% of British adults had little or no sympathy for Channel migrants. This is the result of the deliberately inflammatory politics pursued over many years, reinforced and amplified by sections of the national press, with a view to attracting voters hostile to immigration. Priti Patel's recent

efforts in this vein won praise from Nigel Farage.

Patel's actions are part of a wider pattern. When things go wrong, whether it's the response to COVID-19 or the unfair and discriminatory English exam results algorithm fiasco, this government relies on blame, fear and prejudice.

We also have a government ruled by cronyism and arrogance.

Dominic Cummings drove through, without consulting the Ministry of Defence or other senior recognised scientific advisors, a £500 million deal for the bankrupt OneWeb satellite business. The UK Space Agency had warned that OneWeb would need more cash and that the government could lose all its money on the deal.

Public First, a company run by long-term associates of Dominic Cummings and Michael Gove, worked with Ofqual on the algorithm and were also awarded

an £840,000 contract, without putting the work out to tender, to research public opinion about government policies. A Conservative peer, Dido Harding, who has no public health experience, will run the new quango which will replace Public Health England.

What a government!



In contrast to most press coverage, this front page conveys the human tragedy

Tabloids excited by plan to launch rivals to BBC TV

Media moguls Malone and Murdoch want to challenge BBC

By **Granville Williams**

THE *Mail* and *Express* love to publish polls about how much their readers loathe the BBC. The polls are normally linked to the latest manufactured controversy about the broadcaster that they have splashed across their pages.

Now they have greeted with glee the news that two media groups plan to launch opinionated Fox-style current affairs stations in Britain to rival the BBC.

One is GB News. Co-founder Andrew Cole sits on the board of John Malone's Liberty Global and tells his LinkedIn followers that the BBC is 'possibly the most biased propaganda machine in the world'. Theresa May's former head of communication, Sir Robbie Gibb, has emerged as a prominent figure with GB News. He worked as head of the BBC's political programme output until leaving to work at No 10 in 2017.

In a recent opinion piece for *The Telegraph*, he claimed the BBC had been 'culturally cap-

tured by the woke-dominated group-think of some of its own staff'. He added, 'There is a default left-leaning attitude from a metropolitan workforce mostly drawn from a similar social and economic background.'

One of his former colleagues Gavin Barwell, Theresa May's former chief of staff at No 10, was among those who voiced concern that the new channel could further polarise British politics. He tweeted, 'Do you think a polarised broadcast media to go with the polarised print media we already have will change our politics and country for the better?'

Ofcom granted a television broadcasting licence to GB News in January 2020. All Perspectives, the limited company granted the licence, was set up last September, according to Companies House listings.

Speculation is that it will be a Freeview channel with a link to Discovery, but a licence does



Another day, another attack from BBC-bashing tabloids

not mean that the channel will definitely make it to air.

The rival project is being devised by Rupert Murdoch's media empire which has already launched Times Radio and now has the former Fox News executive David Rhodes heading up this scheme.

Murdoch, when he had a stake in Sky News, was dismissive of it as 'BBC lite' because it had to operate under UK broadcasting rules on due impartiality. Both projects come at a difficult time for the BBC as the government is intent on destabilising the broadcaster financially.

BBC Director delivers upbeat farewell speech

OUTGOING BBC Director General Tony Hall gave the keynote speech opening the Edinburgh Television Festival on 24 August.

He was in a strong position to give his valedictory address, citing the role of the broadcaster during months of lockdown.

'Audiences came to us in their millions – for news and information they could trust, for educational support they could rely on, for world-class content, culture and for respite from the worries we all were experienc-

ing,' he said.

He argued, 'The forces of disinformation and social media tend to feed on fracture and drive polarisation.'

In contrast, he said, 'What we do, as a PSB, is a force in the opposite direction. Impartiality is the keystone of broadcast journalism in this country.'

The problem, of course, is the way BBC applies impartiality to its news coverage. It's an issue which won't go away after Tony Hall departs.

Broadcaster pulls no punches in powerful Bristol speech

BROADCASTER, historian and writer David Olusoga in his MacTaggart lecture struck a different tone to Tony Hall. In a powerful speech on race and the television industry he didn't pull any punches.

In the speech broadcast from Bristol City Hall, Olusoga told his (virtual) audience:

'I stand here today not as one of the TV industry success stories, but as a survivor.

"I am one of the last men standing of TV's lost generation.

The generation of black and brown people who entered this industry fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years ago with high hopes. I'm a survivor of a culture within TV that failed that generation. I'm here because a handful of people used their power and their privilege to help me,' he said.

Watch the speech here

The full speech is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XALf10024r8>

Stephen Dorril on the long-delayed report into Russian interference in UK politics

UK's Russia report is a damp squib

DURING the 2016 Brexit Referendum campaign, Russian arms dealer Alexander Temerkon, who has given more than £1.3m to the Conservative Party, donated £100,000 to a dozen Conservative MPs. His largest single donation – £31,300 – went to Yorkshire MP, Nigel Adams, one of the Prime Minister's key supporters.

Boris Johnson, too, has been a recipient of Russian largesse. He jetted off to a holiday with the son of the Russian owner of the *Evening Standard*, Alexander Lebedev, a former KGB officer who bought the loss-making newspaper in 2009. A one-time friend of Putin, Alexander has complained about a 'biased' western media. His son Evgeny, who retains dual-nationality, was recently awarded a peerage by Johnson.

There is nothing illegal here but Russian billionaires have used large party donations to gain access to the highest echelons of UK public and political life. Was this why Johnson blocked for so long the release of the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) report into Russian interference in British politics?

The 50-page report, finally published in July, is something of a damp squib. It is banal, heavily redacted – secrecy really is the British disease – and generally unrevealing.

Compare that with the 1,000 page 5th report from the US Senate Intelligence Committee on Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election, which is a remarkable document. Three year's work, based on a million

documents, confirms that there was, indeed, substantial interference through money, hacking and use of agents of influence.

So why the delay and why is the UK report, despite reservations, highly significant? The content is not controversial but the absence of any sign that the British government did anything to counter the perceived threat is.

Ten years ago the ISC was asked to redact mention of Russian cyberattacks on 'diplomatic grounds'. The question is why, when the evidence is overwhelming that Russia did intervene in



the democratic process, the Security and Intelligence Services (MI5, MI6 and GCHQ) did not do more to monitor or combat what Putin's pals were up to.

The reason is that the Government has deliberately 'not sought evidence of successful interference in UK democratic processes'. Prime Minister May and then Foreign Secretary Johnson deliberately side-lined intelligence that



ABOVE: Prime Minister Boris Johnson at a dinner with Alexander Temerkon. BELOW: Metro front page when the report was published.

the Russians had compromised Trump and 'indications' that Moscow had 'covertly contributed funds' to the Brexit campaign.

On interference in the Brexit Referendum, the ISC noted that MI5's evidence to them, which appeared to be based on limited open sources, was 'inadequate' and consisted of just six lines.

The Conservative Party has welcomed Russian money but no attempt has been made to discover the provenance of it, partly because the City has not wanted to undermine its importance as essentially an off-shore tax haven which channels dark money into the financial system.

The recent evidence on Russian interference in the US, which the Senate report concludes was sanctioned by Putin, suggests that the objective is to suppress the vote by discrediting the act of voting and not necessarily to change votes. Transparency campaigner Gavin Sheridan argues that the tactic is to 'create a worldview in which it becomes increasingly difficult for voters to know what is believable and what isn't. And politicians don't want to seriously ask what's going on, because they don't think it's in their interests to know – or worse, they want to use those techniques themselves.'

Facebook has not been cooperative about revealing the use of closed groups by pro-Brexiteers ahead of the Referendum. The May government did not want to

pursue this angle, while the National Agency investigation into funding was so narrowly defined that it never really took place.

The weakness in the law with regard to funding of political campaigns is deliberately so as it serves the main political parties well. The ease with which dark money can be concealed has proven to be the main obstacle for journalist investigations. Again and again, they encounter a thick wall of non-disclosure.

There have been several well-researched investigative books published recently – Peter Geoghegan, *Democracy for Sale: Dark Money and Dirty Politics* (Head Zeus), Luke Harding, *Shadow State: Murder, Mayhem and Russia's Remaking of the West* (Guardian Faber), Glen Simpson & Peter Fritsch, *Crime in Progress: the Secret History of the Trump-Russia Investigation* (Allen Lane).

Each contribution is worthy but only by reading them all do you begin to understand the scale and nature of what has been going on with regard to the undermining in the UK and US of democracy in elections and referendums.

But it is only the investigatory power of state organs that can really reveal the true sources of the money, the channels through which it has gone, the role of key individuals and the nature of Russian influence.

.....
 Stephen Dorril has written a number of books about the UK's intelligence services.

Journalists condemned as newspapers and TV channels bombard nation with ‘dehumanising’ coverage of Channel boat people

Tabloids whip-up migrant scare stories

By **Nicholas Jones**

FEARS over immigration re-entered the list of voters’ top ten concerns in August – an all-too-predictable response after weeks of scare stories about ‘an invasion of illegal migrants’ arriving along the English Channel coast.

Alarmist coverage in newspapers such as the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* encouraged broadcasters to follow suit. Radio and television crews headed out to sea from Dover to intercept inflatable dinghies and other small craft.

Live reports filming the migrants’ boats – and snatched shouts and answers between reporters and those heading for England – were condemned by several MPs as being dehumanising and tantamount to voyeurism.

The *August Issues Index* compiled by the pollsters Ipsos Mori (11.8.2020) put ‘immigration/immigrants’ in eighth place (9%) when people were asked, “What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?”

Although well below ‘unemployment’ on 16% and ‘Brexit’ on 30% – and with ‘coronavirus’ way out in front on 75% – the re-entry of this issue to the top ten mentions was a notable change.

Throughout the early months of the pandemic, fears about immigration had fallen well down the list and had failed to make the top ten.

Perhaps this shift in people’s anxieties was only to be expected given the blanket news coverage for the impact of Covid-19 and the imposition of lockdown.

Another factor that might well have helped to lessen such



Biased, emotive, one-sided reports fuel immigration scare stories

showed that just under half of all adults had ‘not much’ (22%) or ‘no sympathy’ (27%) for migrants crossing the channel from France.

Expressions of sympathy were lower by comparison: ‘a great deal’ (19%) and ‘a fair amount’ (25 per cent).

From the start of lockdown in March there were news reports of a surge in small boats being intercepted in British territorial waters.

Initially newspaper reporting was restrained and factual, reduced to a few paragraphs on inside pages as most press coverage and broadcast output was dominated by the mounting

fears was the extensive media coverage of the exceptional contribution made by BAME staff in the NHS during the pandemic, and their disproportionate loss of life.

While the re-awakening of

concerns over ‘immigration/immigrants’ in the August figures – up 3% in a month to 9% – might seem a small increase, it should be seen alongside a YouGov survey, also published in August (11.8.2020), which



HELP US BLOCKADE THE CHANNEL

Priti issues migrant ultimatum to French – and threatens to withhold cash if they refuse

Boris could toughen up laws on seeking asylum

‘We need to make “border workable”

‘Bordering on Madness’



Newspaper reports whip up siege mentality

Covid-19 death toll and the repercussions of life being reduced to a standstill.

However, by late April, with more frequent publication of pictures of boatloads of people crossing the channel in inflatable dinghies and other assorted craft, the tone of the coverage began to harden.

‘The new Battle of Hastings’ (*Daily Mail*, 23.4.2020) gave an alarming account of the challenge facing Border Force officers: ‘Boatloads of desperate migrants have now been landing around the genteel Sussex resort – some even chased across the cliffs by barefoot officers.’

As the numbers of migrants

being processed at Dover steadily increased during May, the Home Secretary Priti Patel faced calls from Conservative MPs to do more to return them to France and Belgium.

Brexit-supporting newspapers added their weight to the clamour. Failure to stem the flow was increasingly being viewed by press commentators as a test of the ability of a post-Brexit Britain to ‘Take Back Control’.

By late June, Ms Patel was left under no illusions by the *Sun* (29.6.2020): ‘Priti: Europe must do more to halt influx.’

She met her French counterpart in mid-July and the *Times* (13.7.2020) reported that the

two countries had signed a new agreement to create ‘a joint intelligence cell’ to interrupt the people smugglers.

Briefings to staunch Conservative newspapers told a different story: Ms Patel was said to have blamed Paris for failing to get to grips with the crisis. In response, the UK was planning military-style tactics. ‘Navy testing nets to snare migrants’ (*Daily Mail*, 16.7.2020).

By the end of July, over 3,000 migrants had entered since the start of the year, compared with the 2,000 who made it in the previous two years. The *Sun* mocked the effectiveness of the Border Force: ‘Illegals’ pedalo bid

Given the way the story had been ramped up by the tabloids, broadcasters responded by sending television crews to join the cat-and-mouse hunt off Dover

to reach UK’ (20.7.2020).

When over 200 migrants crossed in a single day – setting a new record – the *Daily Mail* was incandescent about Britain’s border force: ‘Bordering on Madness’ was the headline across a two-page spread (31.7.2020).

With the interceptions increasing and the daily records tumbling, the House of Commons Defence Committee chairman, Tobias Ellwood, demanded action. He told the *Sun* that the Royal Navy should be deployed (‘Dover and Out’, *Sun*, 6.8.2020).

Ellwood’s headline-grabbing intervention was the trigger for a flurry of Sunday exclusive stories about new counter measures. ‘The Interceptor: Priti appoints Marine to combat migrants’ (*Sun on Sunday*, 9.8.2020); ‘Ex-Royal Marine signs up to protect Channel’ (*Sunday Express*, 9.8.2020).

A *Mail on Sunday* exclusive claimed Home Office officials were preparing at least five prisons to provide short-term accommodation for record numbers of arrivals. ‘Secret jail plan to house migrants’ (9.8.2020).

Given the way the story had been ramped up by the tabloids, broadcasters responded by sending television crews to join the cat-and-mouse hunt off Dover. There were live reports on Sky News and BBC *Breakfast*. Dinghies were filmed approaching the coast with the migrants on board being asked which country they were from.

When the coverage was condemned for being dehumanising, the BBC insisted that the number of Channel crossings was ‘a topic of huge importance’. Reporters

Labour MP slams ‘grotesque reality show’

● From page 5

had endeavoured to cover the story ‘sensitively’.

This defence did little to reassure the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants which argued that journalists should not be ‘making a spectacle out of people’s trauma’.

Several politicians went further. Labour MP Zarah Sultana accused broadcasters of participating in ‘a grotesque reality show’. Stephen Farry, deputy leader of the Northern Ireland Alliance Party, said journalists

should be holding the Home Office to account rather than engaging in ‘voyeurism and capitalising on misery’.

The Sun’s attempt to lead the pack in what it dubbed ‘Channel War’ (13.8.2020) has coincided with the BBC series *The Rise of the Murdoch Dynasty* which explored Rupert Murdoch’s predilection for ‘shaking up the establishment’ by using his newspapers and television stations to ‘heat up the temperature of a country, to hot things up’.

David Yelland, a former Sun editor, described how in the

immediate lead-up to the 2016 European Referendum, Murdoch had been at the Sun’s office ‘day after day, marshalling the coverage’.

‘The Brexit vote was Rupert Murdoch’s finest moment, the moment he achieved most power, his greatest moment in British newspapers ... without Rupert there would have been no Brexit.’

No mention was made of the fact that immigration scare stories were the Sun’s weapon of choice in campaigning for a ‘Yes’ vote. Day after day its front page

focussed on demands for tighter immigration controls that the Sun said could only be delivered by Brexit.

As Britain enters the final straight before the end of the EU transition period on 31 December, ‘immigration/immigrants’ – the issue that had the greatest influence on Brexit voters – is again rising up opinion polls and the news agenda, and seems destined to become a flashpoint for Conservative-supporting tabloids as they strive to demonstrate that Britain has ‘taken back control’.

Culture makes a difference

Arts boost Yorkshire region’s economy

By Granville Williams

THIS piece is prompted by the death of John Scully (1939-2020). My bet is that not many people in Yorkshire will recognise his name, even though they benefit enormously from his inspiration and work for a relatively brief period as chair of the recreation and arts committee of West Yorkshire County Council (1981-1986).

John was one of a number of people who have had a lasting impact on the cultural fabric of Yorkshire life. On my list would also be Alfred Bradley, a Leeds-based producer for the BBC North region, a key figure who through his radio programme, *The Northern Drift*, nurtured Northern writers like Barry Hines. Bradley was based in Woodhouse Lane in Leeds between 1959-1980. Another would be Alex Clegg, inspirational Chief Education Officer for West Riding County Council from 1945-1974 and author of *The Excitement of Writing* and *Children in Distress*.

John Scully believed firmly that investing in leisure facilities brought economic regeneration. His role on West Yorkshire County Council enabled him to become a driving force in the restoration of the Rochdale and



Joana Vasconcelos’ Pop Galo at Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Huddersfield Narrow Canals. He also saw the potential of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and offered a larger grant than requested to create it. It is now a renowned international arts venue and currently has the stunning work of Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos.

When the metropolitan councils were abolished by the Thatcher government in 1986

the money in the council’s reserves, unless spent, would go back to central government.

John proposed £4m for a new playhouse in Leeds. He won agreement by persuading committee members that it must be called the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

It opened in 1990 and CPBF (North) has used its facilities regularly since then for meet-

ings, book launches and, most impressively, in February 1992, an event coinciding with the play by Trevor Griffiths, *The Gulf Between Us*. The play was inspired by the Iraq war, which began in January 1991. We filled the Courtyard Theatre, jam-packed with over 350 people

We have a government which is characterised by bungling and indifference as arts organisations take the hit from the pandemic. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport doesn’t inspire confidence. There is a £1.57bn rescue package but a lack of clarity about how it will be allocated.

The Yorkshire and Humber-side TUC’s culture sector unions think priority must be supporting smaller, regional outfits that add value to local communities. This follows discussions between unions and the tourism body, Welcome to Yorkshire, about the future of the industry and the imminent danger of closure for many smaller cultural organisations.

The tourism and culture sectors are jointly worth £21bn per year to Yorkshire’s economy, according to recent figures, and unions urgently want to avert job losses among the quarter of a million people employed in the sectors in the region.



Another newspaper group in trouble

LOCAL newspaper group Archant is the latest victim of the crisis in local newspapers. The company publishes *The New European* and the *Eastern Daily Press* as well as a number of local weekly news titles and monthly magazines.

Archant's chief executive Simon Bax said, "The impact of the downturn on our advertising and circulation revenues due to Covid-19 has been profound."

In a move which mirrors the action by Johnston Press in November 2018, the UK's fourth biggest local newspaper publisher has been bought out by a private equity firm in a deal which leaves shareholders with nothing and the company's pension scheme, which is believed to have deficit of around £50m, will be taken over by the government's Pension Protection Fund.

'PromGate' was another stick to beat the BBC

THIS was the headline in a *Sunday Times* story on 22 August:

'Rule Britannia faces axe in BBC's 'Black Lives Matter Proms' The BBC is agonising over 'de-colonising' the Last Night's traditional bill

The report said 'The BBC is discussing whether to drop *Rule Britannia* and *Land of Hope and Glory* from the Last Night of the Proms in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement'. It suggested that, 'Dalia Stasevska, 35, from Finland, who is conducting the Last Night, is among those said to be keen to modernise the evening's repertoire and reduce the patriotic elements.'

It was an inaccurate, kite-flying piece, a manufactured story. And, of course, it worked with all the BBC-bashing papers piling in to attack the broadcaster, calls to defund it, and Boris Johnson stirring the pot. "I think it's time we stopped our cringing embarrassment about our history, about our traditions, and about our culture, and we stopped this general fight of self-recrimination and wetness," he proclaimed in his best blustering manner.

Dalia Stasevska was forced to issue a statement: "This false



Made-up nonsense appeals to these papers' ageing readers

speculation has led to abuse and threats towards me and my family which is why I am speaking out.

"For the record I have played no role in deciding the traditional elements of the programme. I recognise these are an important part of the event."

The real facts of the story are simple. As there will be no live audience in the Royal Albert Hall to sing along, and the number of musicians and singers will be reduced and dispersed around the hall because of social distancing for this year, the viewers watching this year's Last Night of the Proms will still hear both *Rule*,

Britannia! and *Land of Hope and Glory*, played by the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

The only difference is that viewers will hear both works performed as instrumental pieces for the first time since 1905.

It has to be said, though, that the BBC's response to this manufactured outrage was slow-footed and defensive and allowed its enemies to have a field day.

Make no mistake – there will be much more of this as the Johnson-Cummings campaign to castrate the BBC by making the licence fee optional ramps up again. The BBC needs to fight these attacks more robustly.

BOOK REVIEW

US news deserts undermine democracy

WE give a lot of space to the threats to UK local and regional newspapers in *MediaNorth*. This is a powerful book which gives us the lowdown on what is happening in the States, and much of its content echoes our own grim experience.

Between 2008 and 2017, American newspapers cut 45 percent of their newsroom staff. From 2004 to 2015, the United States lost more than 1,800 print outlets – some because of

GHOSTING THE NEWS
Local Journalism and the Crisis of American Democracy

By MARGARET SULLIVAN
Published by Columbia Global Reports
Price £11.99



corporate mergers and others because of simple closures.

This book also does something which is very important. It places newspapers within the communities they try to serve.

What newspapers have been consummately good at – and what TV news and radio news, even at the local level, have not been as focused on, traditionally – is the kind of watchdog

reporting that holds public officials to account. As the papers fall away, news deserts are created. Sullivan shows how corruption flourishes and government efficiency plummets as a result.

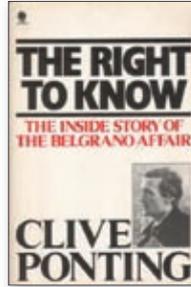
It is not all grim news. She provides positive stories and her message is clear: local news can be the glue that connects people in a given community, and newspapers tie a region together, helping it make sense of itself. – GW

Remembering Clive Ponting, Falklands War whistleblower

By Barry White

CLIVE PONTING (1946-2020) was a civil servant, Falklands War whistle-blower, writer and historian. He died aged 74 on 28 July. He was one of the outstanding 20th century campaigners against official secrecy.

In 1984 he leaked documents to Labour MP Tam Dalyell about the sinking of the Argentinian cruiser General Belgrano and the following year was sensationally acquitted by a jury (against the wishes of the judge) despite breaching the Official Secrets



Cover of *The Right To Know*, Ponting's book on the Falklands campaign.

Act. His trial was described by his counsel Brian Raymond as 'the most political trial of this century'.

He subsequently wrote *The Right to Know: The Inside Story*

of the Belgrano Affair (1985).

He was a high-flying civil servant, previously awarded an OBE and, at the time of the Falklands War, head of a naval department at the defence ministry, where he clashed with Michael Heseltine over the Belgrano affair.

After his Old Bailey trial, Ponting made a new career as a historian and writer with a post of reader at Swansea University where he wrote *1940: Myth and Reality* (1990), exposing the myth of Britain's finest hour, and a biography of Winston Churchill (1993).



Call for media reform

CPBF(NORTH) has just published *Fix the Media: What You Can Do*. The 60-page booklet argues that the prospects for media reform under the hard-right Tory government now in power are minimal. Instead Tory hardliners want their own destructive 'reforms' – and one target of these is the BBC, which it is actively destabilising.

This situation makes it all the more urgent for media reform campaigners to clarify what can be done. This spurred a working group to draw together their ideas to promote a wider discussion.

Fix the Media focuses on some key policy proposals and argues that the media reform movement needs to move quickly and get organised to build wide support for them.

The publication is available in both online and print versions. You can read it on line at www.coldtype.net/MediaNorth.html

For details on how to purchase a print copy (£4.00 inc P&P) go to <http://coldtype.net/MediaNorth.html>



Buy the book

YOU can buy *It's the Media, Stupid! The Media, the 2019 Election and the Aftermath* directly from CPBF(North). Here's how you can do it.

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Strike action is 'last resort'

STRIKE action at Bullivant Media Limited highlighted the grim state of affairs in local journalism as NUJ members took action to save local jobs and quality journalism. All 18 members of its editorial staff formed a National Union of Journalists chapel earlier this year.

The company runs weekly free newspapers and websites with titles including the *Coventry Observer*, *Leamington Observer*, *Rugby Observer*, *Stratford Observer*, *Solihull Observer*, *Redditch Standard*, *Bromsgrove Standard*, *Worcester Observer* and *Evesham Observer*.

The Bullivant Media NUJ chapel said: "Strike action is a last resort and we continue to invite the company to respond to our reasonable demands for fair pay and decent working practices.

"Working non-furloughed staff, many already on the bread-line, have considered using food banks after getting to the end of each month and discovering they have been underpaid, or there has been a 50 per cent deduction from their wages."

The dispute also concerns non-editorial staff taking on journalistic work, which the NUJ said could have a negative impact on editorial quality and standards.

In a message of support, Louis Stephen, Green Party Councillor on Worcester City Council, makes the crucial point about the role of quality local journalism: "The *Worcester Observer* plays a vital role in local democracy – letting local people know what is going on and holding to account our elected politicians."

MediaNorth

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