

Media North

CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM (NORTH) • Issue 4, September 2019 • £1

Art: Luca Bertolli / 123.rf.com

Stephen Dorril on the fear of 'left-wing media bias' by spooks

RECENTLY discovered files in the National Archives at Kew that were once considered 'ultra-sensitive' reveal that during the 1960s the Security Service (MI5) was concerned by alleged 'subversion' not only in the BBC but also in ITV. A particular target was Granada's award-winning investigative documentary programme *World in Action*.

Interest in Granada began in the mid-fifties with the launch of commercial television. Its founder, Sidney Bernstein, was smeared as a communist, and right-wing Tory MPs aligned with commercial television interests tried to stop Bernstein's creation of a Northern franchise based in Manchester.

A 1962 study by the Official Committee on Communism concluded that there was 'no evidence to suggest that Independent Television

Files show how MI5 spied on World in Action

programmes were unduly slanted towards communism or that the companies were excessively open to communist penetration'.

Despite this, zealots inside MI5 continued to monitor the company for communist infiltration and, in 1969, in the wake of the student revolt in Western Europe, MI5 extended its remit to include the 'far and wide left'.

MI5 and Special Branch officers were initially confused by the numerous socialist groups and political factions

that sprang up. Traditionally they focused on the Communist Party of Great Britain and its ties to the Soviet Union. However, by the end of the decade they concluded that the CPGB influence had 'much diminished' and that Trotskyists were more influential, though 'too disunited' to cause much disruption.

This did not stop the Service from monitoring left-wing journalists who were seen as part of the alleged long march of the left through the institutions with particular em-

phasis on 'subversives in the Media'.

In 1969 Whitehall had instructed MI5 to maintain 'an attitude of relaxed vigilance' on 'this enormously influential medium', but inside the Service a key hard-liner in F Branch dealing with subversion, Charles Elwell, set up a special unit in 1975 to keep surveillance on journalists such as Anna Ford and Jon Snow. This included buggings, telephone tappings and the recruitment of Special Branch informants.

Elwell was an early proponent of left-wing bias in the media, but research on journalism in that decade shows that the majority of journalists tended to be politically on the right. The popular and vibrant investigative programmes of the period were hated by gov-

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Why we must fight to defend Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

By Barry White

A FULL extradition hearing to decide whether WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should be sent to the USA will be held next February. Assange is accused by US authorities of conspiring to hack US government computers and violating the 1917 Espionage Act. He is currently in Belmarsh prison, London, after being jailed for 50 weeks for skipping bail after fleeing to the Ecuadorian embassy seven years ago to avoid extradition to Sweden to face further questioning in a sexual assault investigation.

Meanwhile Chelsea Manning is now in prison for a second time for refusing to testify to a US federal grand jury investigating WikiLeaks. She continues to object to the 'secrecy of the grand jury process' and faces a fine of \$1,000 for every day she refuses to testify.

The then Home Secretary Sajid Javid (now Chancellor of the Exchequer) agreed to Assange's extradition proceedings a few days after an attempt to extradite him to Sweden failed. The district court ruling prevented Swedish prosecutors from immediately applying for an extradition warrant for Assange to face an outstanding allegation of rape, which he denies.

Julian was dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy in

London in early April and arrested. Shortly after his arrest, NUJ assistant general secretary Seamus Dooley commented: "The UK should not be acting on behalf of the Trump administration in this case. The NUJ recognises the inherent link between and importance of leaked confidential documents and journalism reporting in the public interest.

"It should be remembered that in April 2010 WikiLeaks released *Collateral Murder*, a video showing a 2007 US Apache helicopter attack upon individuals in Baghdad. More than 23 people were killed including two Reuters journalists. The manner in which Assange is treated will be of great significance to the practice of journalism."

At the International Federation of Journalists Congress held in June the NUJ supported an emergency motion highlighting the severe dangers to journalism posed by the recent indictments filed by the US government against Julian Assange. Congress called for this to be resisted by the governments of UK and Australia, highlighting how the decision to prosecute,

Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. The media seized on Assange's dishevelled beard when he was hauled out of the Ecuadorian embassy on 11 April. No mention that his shaving kit had been deliberately taken from him three months earlier.

for the receipt and publication of information clearly in the public interest, is at odds with previous decisions of the US Supreme Court to protect First Amendment rights.

More recently Julian scored an historic yet little publicised victory when a New York federal judge dismissed a lawsuit by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) over WikiLeaks' publication of DNC documents in 2016. The case sets an important precedent for freedom of the press.

In his ruling, the District Judge John Koeltl emphasised the 'newsworthiness' of WikiLeaks' publishing activities, describing them as "plainly of the type entitled to the strongest protection that the First Amendment offers."

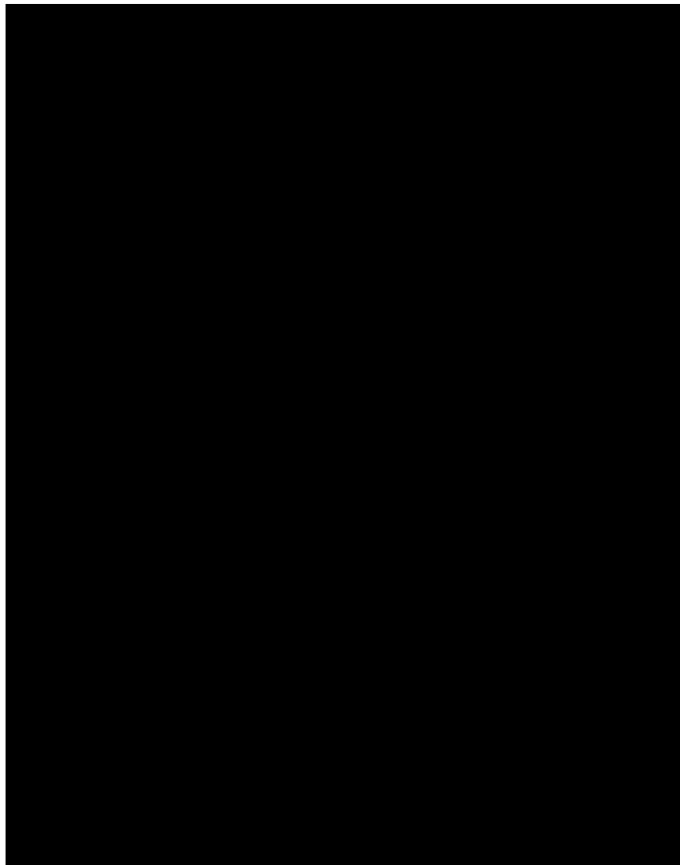
He went on, "Journalists are allowed to request documents that have been stolen and to publish those documents." The Judge also observed that such journalistic collabora-

tion with sources is "common journalistic practice." That principle is important for investigative journalists who often receive information from whistleblowers.

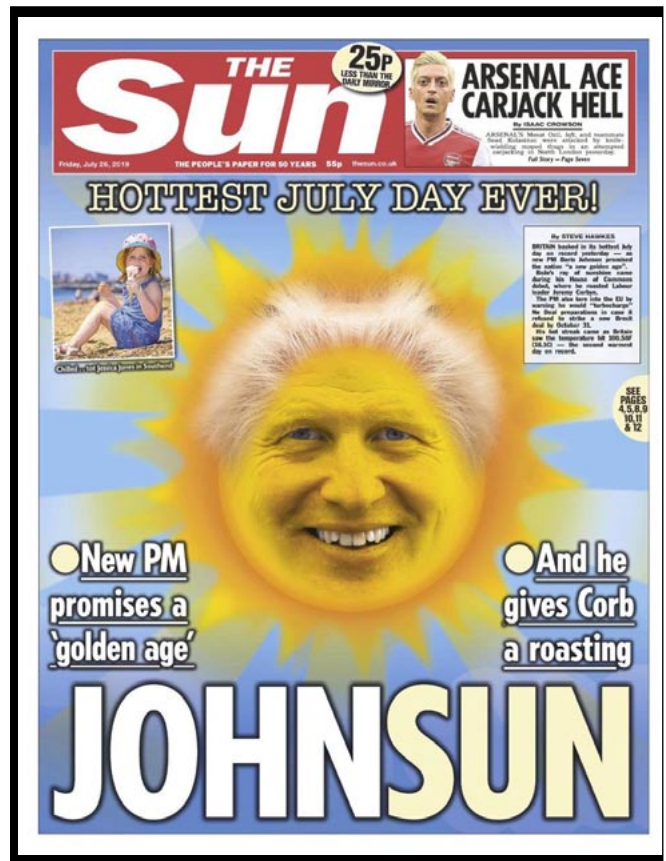
The judge drew a comparison to the Pentagon Papers case of 1971, where the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to publish secret documents on the Vietnam War provided by whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg. In that case the Nixon administration attempted to prevent the newspapers from publishing and threatened them with criminal prosecution.

These are solid foundations to strengthen the international campaign to get the charges dropped against Julian and strike a blow for press freedom and the right to report in the public interest. In the meantime the plight of Chelsea Manning must not be forgotten. Let us do our best to make sure both of them are freed. As the campaigning journalist and film maker John Pilger says: "Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange are as brave and principled as any who struggled for historic rights of freedom for all."

"Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange are as brave and principled as any who struggled for historic rights of freedom for all"



The *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* welcome Boris, their saviour of Brexit



BORIS'S BREXIT MEDIA BACKERS

Nick Jones tells how right wing mainstream media proprietors used new Prime Minister to spearhead their campaign to take Britain out of Europe

THROUGHOUT the political chaos of Theresa May's repeated failure to gain approval for her agreement to leave the European Union, Brexit-supporting newspapers never wavered in their support for Boris Johnson's hard-line approach. He was the ever-present cheerleader, a backstop for the pro-Brexit press, waiting in the side-lines, ready to step into the breach to lead the final assault on Brussels to deliver the freedoms promised in the EU Referendum.

In the opinion of most Conservative Party members, Johnson is an all-powerful Prime Minister, safe in the knowledge that he and his closest aides were starting out with every chance of being able to command the news agenda and manipulate friendly media outlets.

Leaving the EU became a crusade for the dominant British press proprietors decades ago, and their achievement in helping to deliver the

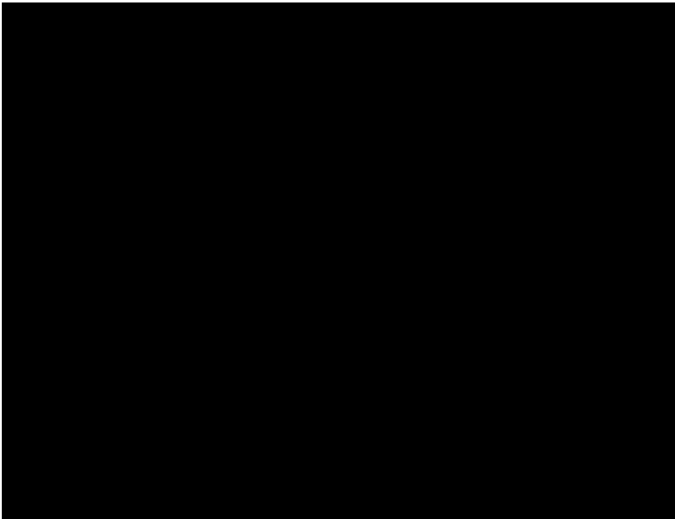
2016 vote to leave was hailed by the *Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* as the ultimate victory for their brand of campaigning journalism.

Their determination to own and deliver Brexit has been resolute. Johnson's two-to-one victory in the Tory leadership election and his confirmation as Prime Minister was greeted with special editions and headlines that echoed the tabloids' celebrations for the Referendum result.

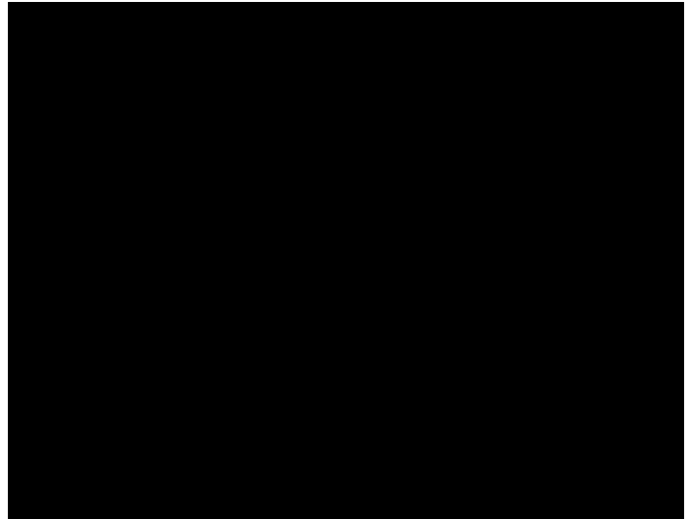
They have seized on every opportunity to promote and protect "Boris, the Brexit Saviour". "Johnsun" was the one-word on the *Sun's* front page (26.7.2019) below an image of Johnson's face superimposed on the sun on what was the "hottest July day ever".

The *Daily Mail's* banner front-page headline the day before, "All Guns Blazing" (25.7.2019), picked up on "Boris's bloodbath" cabinet reshuffle.

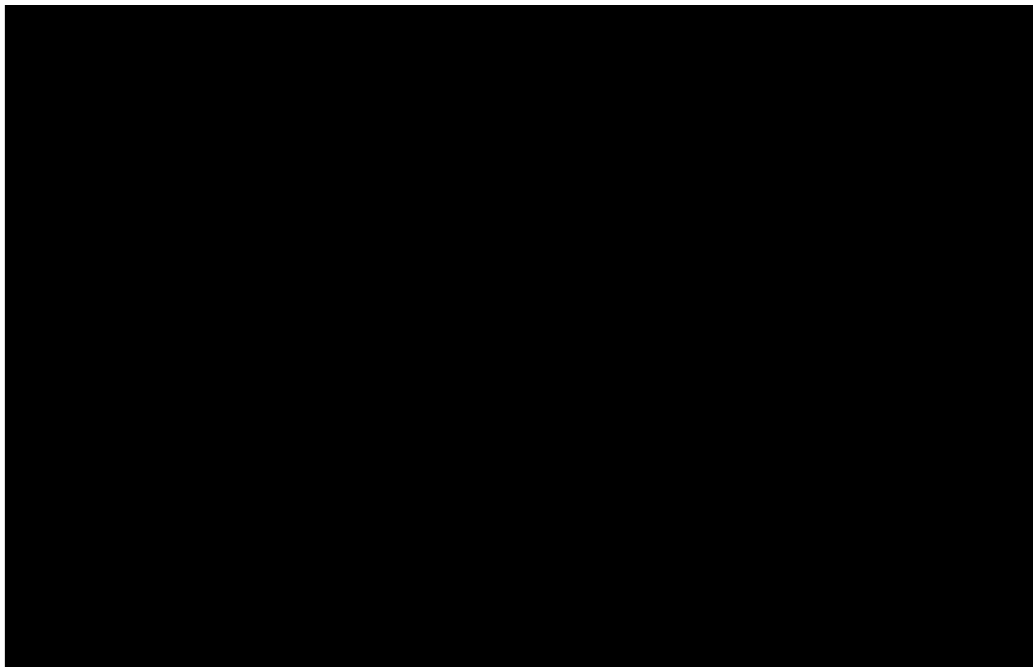
Editorial executives, sym-



Daily Telegraph abuses poll results.



The *Sunday Times* reveals the real costs of a Brexit no-deal.



The *Daily Mail* gives a thumbs up to Boris's girlfriend.

pathetic journalists... message commentators... faith with the original... tect of the Brussels-based... coverage that became the tabloids' stock-in-trade.

In a media blitz backing an August bonanza of spending pledges, the pro-Brexit press adopted ploys as ruthless as their tactics in 2016, when they first stoked fears over immigration and then neutralised the Remainers' fightback as Project Fear.

No trick in the media play-book has been off limits in support of the fresh objective of convincing the public that a no-deal departure might be-

come the only sure way to get Brexit over the line.

Johnson's long-standing and most brazen mouthpiece, the *Daily Telegraph*, was only too ready to abuse opinion poll findings to deliver the headline, "Public backs Johnson to shut down Parliament for Brexit," (Camilla Tominey, 13.8.2019).

"Why so sad on Planet Remain? We're loving it on Planet Brexit" (Brendan O'Neill, 24.8.2019) was the *Sun's* verdict on polling evidence that showed "ordinary people" wanted the UK to "say adios without a deal".

Any reservations about

Johnson's tangled personal life have been obliterated amid gushing coverage for his girlfriend Carrie Symonds. Her treatment in the *Daily Express* has been akin to that of a minor royal: "Why Carrie's the first lady of ethical fashion" (Karen Kay, 24.8.2019).

Despite the *Sunday Times'* exclusive (18.8.2019) on the secret "Yellowhammer" report on "Operation chaos: Whitehall's secret no-deal plan", the coverage remained relentlessly upbeat.

Johnson's double act with Donald Trump at the G7 summit in Biarritz was a master class in news management,

ending with the US President's promise of a "fantastic" trade deal for the UK.

Dominic Cummings, the Prime Minister's top media strategist has launched what in effect has become the equivalent of a three-month election campaign.

Pro-Johnson story lines have influenced, indeed dominated, much of the mainstream coverage with ease, not least because of the strength of the pro-Brexit commentariat.

Press reviews and debates on television and radio have been over-run by pro-Leave commentators, from the tabloids, Conservative-leaning think tanks and like-minded websites.

They have outnumbered and outgunned voices representing a pro-Remain and Left perspective and, unlike the build-up to the Referendum, Johnson's first month in office passed by with no sign of a cohesive, co-ordinated fightback.

No wonder Cummings and Johnson's other long-standing adviser, Lynton Crosby, have advised the Prime Minister that he has nothing to lose by steering clear of potentially hostile broadcast appearances.

Nicholas Jones is a journalist and former BBC industrial and senior political correspondent

“Scotland will be reborn the day the last minister is strangled with the last copy of the Sunday Post”.

I WAS reminded of Tom Nairn’s celebrated observation when I returned to Scotland after 21 years’ absence, to discover that *The Sunday Post* was named Scotland’s Newspaper of the Year. There is no quibble: this is a very different paper from the one of my youth that sold almost three million copies each week.

The landscape of the Scottish press has similarities with England’s, but also, considerable differences. JPI Media, Newsquest and Reach own the bulk of the daily and weekly titles. Rounds of redundancies have cut staffing levels to the bare minimum; some titles have closed; and some of those extant are teetering precariously.

Falling sales

The Press & Journal in Aberdeen, Scotland’s oldest newspaper, sells around 48,000 copies. Although this is a dramatic fall from the days when the P&J sold more than 100,000 copies, it is more than the print sales of *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* combined.

In Scotland, though, there is a further reason for a decline in circulation of the national titles: The Referendum Effect. During the 2014 Independence Referendum, many supporters of the Yes campaign concluded that the mainstream media were partisan

The old and the new

John Toner on the challenges and changes facing Scottish media

towards the Union, and that scepticism has not abated.

Newsquest saw a niche, and in November 2014 launched *The National*, the first daily newspaper in Scotland to support independence. Initially sales were above 40,000 but have now dropped below 10,000.

The BBC was also subject to criticism for pro-Union bias, and Yes supporters continue to be highly critical of its output. The new BBC Scotland channel began broadcasting in February 2019, with the creation of 80 journalists jobs. A major part of its remit is to attract younger viewers.

On the other hand, Scottish Television (STV) emerged from 2014 with its reputation for impartial news enhanced. A new CEO has given the sta-

tion a more digital focus as it, also, pursues younger viewers.

Alternative media have proliferated. Online magazine *Bella Caledonia*, launched in 2007 and run as a collective, concentrates on political and social commentary. Since March 2017 it has produced a 24-page supplement that appears monthly in *The National*.

The Ferret, a non-profit media co-operative, was launched in May 2015. Its remit is to investigate stories in the public interest, and it is a member of IMPRESS. Its commitment to accuracy and the highest ethical standards has earned it awards. In April 2017 *The Ferret* launched a fact-checking service.

News website *CommonSpace* was launched in January 2015 by the Common Weal think tank.

A forerunner to these publications is the *West Highland Free Press*, established in 1972 and, since 2009, the only employee-owned newspaper in the United Kingdom

There are others, of varying degrees of quality and influence, but it would be impossible to list them all.

And just when it looked as though the death knell is sounding for local print media, along comes *The Hawick Paper*. Now three years old, the title is owned and edited by Jason Marshall, who took redundancy earlier in 2015 from the *Hawick News*, then owned by Johnston Press. The first issue sold out, and the title has not looked back. Content is provided by a team of freelance reporters and photographers, and circulation is thriving. In contrast, *The Hawick News* was closed by JPI Media in June this year.

Titles up for sale

And speaking of JPI Media, the phoenix that emerged almost instantaneously from the ashes of Johnston Press, the titles are up for sale. At the time of writing, there appears to be interest from Reach, although it is not clear whether they want some or all of the titles. If Reach succeed, there are likely to be concentration of ownership issues in several parts of the UK, but probably more so in Scotland. It would be unconscionable for one publisher to own the *Daily Record*, *Sunday Mail*, *Scottish Daily Express*, *Scottish Star*, *The Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday* and the *Edinburgh Evening News*.

John Toner is the NUJ Scottish Organiser. He worked as a sub-editor on the Paisley Daily Express and other Scottish and Universal Newspapers titles until he became an NUJ official in 1996.

Redundancies have cut staffing levels to the bare minimum, and some titles have closed

REVIEWS

Thatcher's role in an aggressive war of attrition revealed

THIS new edition of *Shafted*, composed almost entirely of new material, is a painful but enlightening collection of articles about the corrosion of rights, the tightening of state and business control and manipulation of UK society as well as aspects of the Great Miners' Dispute of 1984/5.

Linking three anniversaries – the Peterloo Massacre, the 1984/5 miners' strike and the Hillsborough tragedy – the 1979 scene is set with a Tory government determined to settle scores using anti-union and repressive laws and tougher policing supported by a vicious right-wing media.

The outcome is highlighted in Yorkshire but mirrored everywhere in the former UK coalfields: the so-called gig economy, zero hours, poverty pay, trade union decline; the likes of Amazon, ASOS, Sports Direct replacing pits and factories.

Campaigns for justice at Orgreave and the tragedy of 94 deaths at Hillsborough exposed the role of the police in both events and during industrial disputes. Hillsborough highlighted 'how powerless people felt to challenge the

Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath (new edition)
Granville Williams
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2019

lies printed about Liverpool supporters and to prevent the gross intrusion into peoples' grief. It took over 30 years. Revelations arising from the Independent Panel Report in 2012 resulted in the inquest verdicts in 2016.

Also in 2016 the Tory government floated the possibility of a limited enquiry into police violence at Orgreave, deciding against it after test-

ing media reaction.

A regular theme throughout the book is that "mainstream media all follow the same agenda – anything which doesn't fit that agenda becomes 'invisible'; attempts to challenge or correct the balance are condemned as bias or baseless".

Elsewhere, former BBC industrial reporter Nick Jones underlines the "inherent dangers in being caught up in the type of agenda-setting that the combined forces of the state are only too happy to manipulate".

Public order policing had been strengthened (corrupted) by the police in collaboration and in secret with the Home Office in 1981 after the Brixton riots. Giving police powers to incapacitate, it enabled "...peaceful demonstrators ...to be attacked without provocation by mounted and foot police".

Documents released under the 30-year provision revealed government lies, and denials of an extensive pit closure programme; Thatcher's role; an aggressive war of attrition to drive the miners back to work; that chief constables adopt more "vigorous action"

by police forces against pickets. Thatcher ordered a review of police tactics and criminal law enforcement, to counter the spread of mass picketing. There were so many cases, concern mounted as to the quality of the evidence. The 95 pickets arrested at Orgreave were all acquitted after evidence was shown to be fabricated.

125 pits closed between 1985 and 1992; by 1994 there were none left in public ownership, and the last deep mine closed at Kellingley in 2015. In 1993 there was a huge demo in London and two 24-hour stoppages. Protest camps and sit-ins organised by Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) at seven of the pits gained widespread support. Sheffield WAPC members describe the national civil defence organised by miners' wives, family members and supporters which gained widespread recognition for the key role of women in the 1984/5 strike and again in 1993.

This book conveys a powerful message and delivers a searing condemnation of 40 years of neo-liberalism - Tory and New Labour.

– Ann Field

Internet warriors needed to combat the right

PHIL Hearse provides a useful survey of the extreme right's successful engagement with social media to peddle lies, racism and hate globally. His concern is for what European and, in particular, British 'socialists and radicals' should do to counter this success.

Hearse argues that the left is rooted in the past; preju-

Full Spectrum Mendacity
Phil Hearse
Public Reading Rooms
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2019

dicted against 'internet warriors' and believing in the superiority of traditional media. We need more internet war-

riors and a coordinated approach to media platforms to 'combat the right [and] promote progressive causes.'

But conservatism isn't the only problem. The truth is that the left remains as divided as ever, despite an evident desire for unity. The extreme right has a simple technique: lie unashamedly and very

publicly. It's the technique favoured by Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and their advisers: spread confusion and demoralise the enemy.

To resist it the left certainly needs more internet warriors, but we also need better leadership and a simpler, more coherent message.

– Gary Herman

Boycott of *Sun* on Merseyside pays off

THE *Sun* has faced a boycott in Merseyside ever since its coverage of the 1989 Hillsborough Disaster, when it carried the despicable front page wrongly claiming fans of Liverpool FC had behaved appallingly during the crush that claimed 96 lives. Sales fell by more than 40,000 a day and have never recovered.

The paper has twice apologised for its coverage under former editor Kelvin MacKenzie, but continues to face a city-wide embargo in Liverpool while *Sun* reporters are banned from Anfield,

the home of Liverpool FC.

A new academic study by Florian Foos of the London School of Economics and Daniel Bischof of Zurich University has revealed one surprising consequence of the *Sun* boycott. People in Merseyside have more positive attitudes towards the European Union, because they have not been exposed to the *Sun*'s incessant Europhobic front pages.

Most readers switched from the *Sun* to the *Daily Mirror*, the only one of the popular papers to support Britain's EU membership.

The report claims the boycott cut Euroscepticism in the county by more than ten per cent. Liverpool, The Wirral and Sefton in Merseyside all voted Remain.

It provides further evidence, if it were needed, that sustained year-on-year media campaigns on issues like immigration or Europe by the UK's incredibly partisan right-wing press can have profound and lasting effects on public opinion and public policy.

We are living with the ugly consequences of that today.

They still think it's grim Up North!

LEEDS will become the new regional headquarters for the broadcaster Channel 4, with hubs also being established in Glasgow and Bristol.

Around 200 - 250 jobs are moving directly to Leeds. In June *MediaNorth* reported that 70 to 90 per cent of staff working in London, whose roles are being moved to Leeds, will choose to leave the company rather than move to the city.

To try to change that, eligible workers are now being offered five days' paid leave and £350 to cover travel, accommodation and meals while visiting Leeds with their partners. This rises to £500 for people with children.

Channel 4's news boss stirs things up with lecture at Edinburgh Festival

DOROTHY Byrne, Channel 4's head of news and current affairs, didn't pull her punches when she gave the MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh television festival, and one was aimed at Boris Johnson.

She said: "In honour of Scotland, I've brought along a herring to rival the kipper Boris Johnson produced in the leadership election. He said that Brussels bureaucrats had demanded that each kipper had to be accompanied by a plastic ice pillow. That was simply untrue.

"Going back decades, Johnson has lied about the EU.

"1991 - EU bureaucrats

reject Italian demands for smaller condoms. Rubbish.

"The EU set rules on the shape of bananas. Nonsense

"More recently, he claimed he was resigning from Theresa May's government partly because the EU had prevented the UK from passing a law to save the lives of female cyclists.

"Here is what we all need to decide: what do we do when a known liar becomes our Prime Minister?

"I believe that we need to start calling politicians out as liars when they lie. If we continue to be so polite, how will our viewers know that politicians ARE lying?

"And several of us have excellent online fact-checking services - we need to put more of that information into our broadcast programmes to help viewers spot the porky pies".

One result of her blunt comments was Channel 4 News was frozen out of a planned interview at the G7 summit.

A team of journalists had flown to Biarritz after being invited but Downing Street advisers then said Dorothy Byrne's criticism of the prime minister had resulted in access being denied.

One of her punches seems to have hit the target!

New Edition of *Shafted*

You can buy *Shafted* from CPBF(North). Send cheque for £11.00 (inc P&P) to CPBF(North), 24 Tower Avenue, Upton, nr Pontefract, West Yorks WF9 1EE