MEDIA VALUES

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Inspired by Bill Porter,
Founder of the
International Communications Forum

EDITED BY
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Dedicated to the memory of Bill Porter's wife Sonja
who challenged him to "do something about it"

CONTENTS

Introduction

Richard Lance Keeble

The last 18 years of Bill Porter's life were remarkable. In 1991, he set up the International Communications Forum as a body to campaign for higher ethical standards in journalism. By his death in April 2009 the ICF had become a major international organisation, having held 27 conferences around the world, involving more than 2,500 media professionals and politicians from 114 countries. As Michael Smith commented in his *Independent* obituary reproduced in Chapter 5:

> He founded ICF out of his passionate concern about the media's influence on society for good or ill – and a conviction that he had been too often motivated by personal success and the bottom line...In many ways, the ICF was for Porter the crowning fulfilment of a distinguished publishing career.

During Bill Porter's last visit to Canada, Roger Parkinson, who was the chairman of the World Association of Newspapers and a publisher of the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, suggested the publication of a book in which colleagues could highlight in many different ways the fundamental principles of the ICF. *Media Values* is that book, drawing together 29 chapters inspired by Bill Porter. Since it appears sadly following his death, it can now serve as a timely celebration of his life and his inspirational campaign.

JOURNALISTS' BASIC RESPONSIBILITY: TO INFORM THOROUGHLY AND WITH BALANCE

The text begins, appropriately, with a piece written by Bill Porter in which he set out his creed – in simple, powerful language. He wrote that the basic responsibility of journalists was "to inform thoroughly and with balance, our audiences of what is happening in their localities, communities, nations, regions and the world; to encourage and help them to cope with the

situation, as it realistically exists; and to work with them for the good to triumph".

This did not mean the imposition of morality or belief or dogma, but rather an honest presentation of the issues, "plus an encouragement to participate and a pointing of ways in building a better society. Each individual in an audience is free to form his or her opinion and to take or not to take any action that might be indicated, There will always be an indifferent majority, but the future will belong to a motivated, creative minority".

In the next three chapters, William Stainsby, Michael Henderson and Bernard Margueritte pay tribute to Porter, describing the particular impact his campaign and beliefs had on their own lives. For instance, Margueritte, the current chair of ICF, places Porter alongside Hubert Beuve-Méry, the founder of *Le Monde*, and Marvin Kalb, his director at the Shorenstein Center, Harvard, as the most important influences on his career. He talks of the "prodigal son" syndrome at the Initiatives for Change Center, in Caux, Switzerland, where you are particularly appreciated if you have done many foolish things for many years in your life and then find the light and get "born again". If you have modestly tried from an early stage to do the right thing, you are not a truly interesting person. Margueritte continues:

> Bill Porter was a great Caux man. He was "born again" and after a successful business life decided at the age of 70 to devote the rest of his life to restoring the dignity of the media. His charisma was so intense, the feeling that he was his own man, sincere to the core, so obvious, that his words managed to inspire and convince even media people.

This opening section concludes with three obituaries – from *The Times*, *Independent* and *Sydney Morning Herald*.

THE WORK OF ICF

The second section looks in more depth at the work of the ICF. John Carlisle, Visiting Professor at Sheffield Hallam Business School, discusses with Hugh Nowell, a Director of ICF, the fascinating origins of the organisation – and its substantial achievements under the inspiration of Bill Porter. Grigory Gundarin describes his unforgettable experience of attending a conference organised by the International Communications Forum that highlighted the role of the journalist in ethnic conflicts.

Henry F. Heald argues that the ICF presents a challenge to all

communicators to face the impure motivations in their lives and practise the moral values necessary to root out greed and hatred in the world. And John Munro stresses the many reasons why ICF's Sarajevo Commitment of 2000 remains so relevant in today's world of information overload. The commitment itself is reproduced at the end of this chapter in its entirety.

In the third section, nine writers provide a fascinating range of insights into the contemporary international media, highlighting in the process the principles of the ICF. Firstly, John B. Fairfax, a director of Fairfax Media, traces the impact of proprietors on newspaper history – and stresses the role of the "fourth estate" as a crucial part of the checks and balances of a robust and dynamic society.

Robert Webb, the distinguished US journalist who worked for more than 30 years on the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, argues that the media's potential to help leaders and ordinary people of every colour, race and ethnicity usher in a new age of harmony has never been fully tapped. The time to start, he says, is long overdue. Webb quotes a 2009 survey in which the majority of the African-American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American and Latino respondents said the news media ranked "fair" or worse in covering issues of interest to people of colour. "Nearly all – 90 per cent – said mainstream media is not doing an adequate job covering race relations."

WHY THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS HAS TO BE FOUGHT FOR DAY AFTER DAY

Carol Goar stresses Bill Porter's belief that any person in the communications business can help make it a force for good – and that the freedom of the press has to be fought for day after day. A journalist for 35 year in Toronto, Ottawa and Washington, she concludes with a series of tips for young journalists "about how to survive as a sheep that parts company with the herd". For instance, she suggests: "Strive not to sound preachy or look self-righteous. People don't respond well to lectures and sermons. They don't want to be told how to live. But they do yearn for a less cynical, more equitable, society."

Next, drawing on his experience as a film director, Alan Channer argues that documentaries can serve as a force for good since they can often inspire both individual action and social change. Simon Cohen argues that the Personal Relations approach to PR upholds the integrity and dignity of every human being while being both collaborative and affirmative. Too often PR is associated with spin, dodgy dossiers, late lunches and lipstick. It's "dressing things up, applying sequins and glitz, pushing dirty news through a spin cycle, coming out even dirtier when it meets the public". But

for Cohen, a new PR, with moral, social, spiritual and commercial values at its core, is emerging on the horizon.

According to Gordon Graham, in the next chapter, the increase in volume and accessibility of words has led to a decline in the art of readership. Millions of readers are oblivious to both their power and their responsibility. So, argues Graham, founder and now Honorary President of the Kohima Educational Trust, we need a movement for more responsible readership. He writes:

> Reader responsibility is not dependent on education or intellect. Everyone reads, and everyone can exercise responsibility according to his will and capacity. Responsible reading is in the end the only way to filter the best out of the computer-generated mass of information, to discipline distorted reporting, careless reasoning, special pleading, tendentious arguments and vulgar expression, all of which are more common in communications today than they were twenty or thirty years ago.

Michael Smith dissects the art of the obituary while Hugh Steadman Williams, author of fifteen stage plays, argues that the theatre can offer a "glimpse of something beyond our humanity, a transcendence that enables ordinary human beings like ourselves to do extraordinary things".

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONAL EDITORIAL PRIORITIES

Martyn Lewis, the former television presenter, returns to his controversial argument, launched as far back as 1993, over the media's distorted news priorities. "When television journalists come to decide the editorial priorities for each day's news they should be more prepared than they have been in the past to weigh the positive stories – not artificially created, but as they *naturally* occur in the news agenda – on the same set of journalistic scales on which they assess the negative stories." He says that when he first raised the issue he was perhaps asking for too much too soon – challenging deeply entrenched journalistic attitudes and systems of judgement.

He now suggests a "half-way house" in which journalists try to incorporate somewhere in every negative story a few lines on what some people or organisations are doing to tackle the problem that has given them the negative headline. He concludes: "I can but hope that some of the old war-horses of the profession which was my life and love for so many years will be adventurous enough to give it a try."

The next section looks at media values in a global context. Fabrice Boulé

describes his work promoting the journalism of reconciliation in the Great Lakes region of Africa, devastated over recent years by years of civil war and famine. Angolan activist, writer and organiser Rafael Marques de Morais examines in detail the response of the Angolan media to the deadly attack on the Togolese football team in January 2010 – and highlights the serious threats to freedom of expression in the country. Shifting the focus to Australia, John Bond, from 1998 until 2006 Secretary of Australia's National Sorry Day Committee, argues that the Australian mainstream media deserves credit for the part it played in bringing about a major shift in national attitudes towards the Aborigines.

According to Charles Chasie, an experienced reporter in Nagaland, India, a reporter of conflict is always in danger of becoming cynical in the face of tragic events. Here, he offers advice on how journalists can cope with some of the many dilemmas of reporting conflict – without ending up cynical. And in another chapter looking at the reporting of conflict, Faustina Starrett looks back at the coverage of the Northern Ireland "Troubles" and finds in Bill Porter's message an inspiration to work for global justice – and a responsible media.

In the next two chapters, the focus shifts to Eastern Europe. In the first, Natalya Skvortsova argues that the media in the Russian Federation are "dumbing down" with their constant focus on celebrities. So journalists, she argues forcefully, must work all the harder on correcting their mistakes. Then Tomáš Vrba traces the history of the Czech media under communist rule and, while celebrating the new freedoms, warns in a timely fashion that politicians (even in democratic countries) are always likely to want to threaten the independence of journalists.

JOURNALISM ETHICS IN THE FACE OF THE INTERNET AND 24/7 MEDIA OPERATIONS

The final section concentrates on the new ethical dilemmas facing journalists in the age of the internet. Magnus Linklater argues that, while the advent of the internet and 24/7 news operations are changing the face of journalism, there is no reason why the industry should abandon the principles on which it is founded. It remains, he says, the responsibility of individuals who belong to it to maintain the standards of what is still, at heart, an honourable profession.

In the next chapter, "How professional journalists can meet the challenges of the web", Malgorzata Bonikowska sums up the issues in this way: "How can we be sure that what we find in the internet is true? Professional journalists, editors and publishers are still needed to help select

information for consumer – and help them to understand it. So, in conclusion, it is crucial for the mainstream media to find somehow a balance between its socio-political role and its need to survive in the market."

In a brief but theoretically wide-ranging contribution, Danko Plevnik, award-winning columnist on the Croatian daily newspaper, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, examines the influence of the internet on the media landscape. And finally, Olga Noskova considers the impact of the internet on mainstream journalism in the Russian Federation – and calls for legislative regulation.

NOTE ON THE EDITOR

Richard Lance Keeble is professor of journalism at the University of Lincoln. He previously taught in the journalism department at City University, London, for 19 years. He has written and edited 16 publications (some of them translated into Chinese, Ukrainian and Romanian) including *The newspapers handbook* (Oxon, Routledge 2005 fourth edition) and *Ethics for journalists* (Oxon, Routledge 2008, second edition). He edited *Print journalism: A critical introduction* (Routledge 2005), co-edited *The journalistic imagination: Literary journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter* (Routledge 2007) and *Communicating war: Memory, media and military* (Arima 2007) He is also the joint editor of *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. He has given talks in a range of countries including Malta, Germany, India, Egypt, Montenegro, the United States, Hungary, Ukraine, Israel, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Bosnia.

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PART I

BILL PORTER, JOURNALIST AND CAMPAIGNER FOR HIGHER MEDIA STANDARDS

1

From "If it bleeds, it leads" to "If it answers needs, it leads"

Bill Porter

Bill Porter highlighted the role of the media in promoting the values of Civilisation (with a capital C) in this celebrated article – reproduced with the permission of the World Association of Newspapers

Those of us who work in the media did not come from another planet to report on the dying days of the earth's civilisation and then to return from whence we came. We are part of this society with children, grandchildren and loved ones for whom we would like to see a more secure and fairer world.

The earth's population seems to consist of two groups, the concerned and the indifferent. It is probable that within the ranks of media professionals there is a big percentage of the concerned. Many came into it with a sense of idealism and others developed a high degree of social responsibility as they reacted to the needs and shortcomings of the people whom they were meeting. A few acquired a hardened cynicism that tainted their colleagues and corrupted their audiences.

What is the role of this privileged and intelligent group of humanity in what Samuel Huntington has described as "the clash of civilisations" and in what he goes on to call "the remaking of world order"? In the context of my essay it is important to understand what is meant by "Civilisation". It is not just Western culture rising from the Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian traditions, although they are an important part of it. It is the sum total of the strivings of humankind to find stability, purpose and satisfaction through the emergence of faiths and structures and systems that enable its creative and social aspirations to be achieved. It is rooted in the cultures and religions of Asia and the Arab World. It owes much to the customs and spirituality of the tribes and villagers of Africa, the Americas and Australasia. It has

never achieved its objectives in totality and it is constantly under threat. That it should achieve those objectives and overcome those threats is the prime purpose and destiny of human life.

THE GREED AND AMBITION OF MEN AND WOMEN

Unfortunately, one of the greatest dangers to this Civilisation is the conflict between the smaller civilisations, often religions, ethnic groups and national and regional cultures. The other, more subtle danger, is the greed and ambition of men and women, often manifested through political ideologies, selfish capitalism, the struggle for market domination and international crime. Rajmohan Gandhi, newspaperman and a grandson of the Mahatma, said:

> Class hate as an ideology is behind us. But ethnic hate is with us and ahead of us. Who will now expose the illogicality of ethnic enmity? Who will disentangle the love of one's own people, which is a great quality, from disliking of another people? Who will report and interpret reconciliation and forgiveness? Ethnic enmity wins applause and votes and prime ministerships. Many so-called patriots or nationalists say that you cannot love your own people, unless you hate other people. It is an obvious folly. Part of the role of communications is to unseat this folly from the minds and hearts of the millions of the world.

Vaclev Havel, surely one of our best political thinkers of today, wrote: "I think that there are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Today many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble."

Much earlier the Canadian statesman, Lester Pearson, said: "The future of both peace and Civilisation depend upon understanding and co-operation among the political, spiritual and intellectual forces of the world's major civilisations. In the greater, global 'real clash' between Civilisation and barbarism, the world's civilisations with their rich accomplishments in religion, art, literature and philosophy, science, technology, morality and compassion will hang together or hang separately."

If these assessments are true, and I believe that they are, then the media should be interpreting them to their audiences. A leading, world-level, woman business leader, interviewed on BBC World Radio, said, doubtless

under some provocation: "Most journalists cannot tell the difference of significance between a bicycle accident and the decline of civilisation."

THE GREAT NEWS STORY OF THE MILLENNIUM

Professor Grigory Pomerans, one of Russia's few respected philosophers of today, is convinced that our present bevy of civilisations are in decline and that we have to create a new Civilisation. Personally, I am not sure whether we are in the business of saving a Civilisation or creating a new one. No matter which way, this is the great news story of the millennium, if we have the wit and the prescience to see it.

I am now going to make the comparison of the situation in time of conventional war, when we know who is fighting who and where are the lines of conflict. Today we are concerned with what can be called the Battle Line of Civilisation in which the adversaries are the constructive and the destructive forces at work in the world. There are those striving for good and those who consciously or unknowingly promote evil. Those who are architects and builders and those who are destroyers and underminers. And where are the lines of conflict? Huntington talks about the "fault lines" between religions and national interests and historical legacies. They also run through the hearts and mind of all men and women whenever they are faced with a moral choice.

There is always excitement in war situations. But now we have a situation of even greater excitement, in which we can be reporting and interpreting all news in relation to the destiny of humanity. We would have to ask ourselves the question about all hard news. Is what is happening contributing to the undermining of Civilisation or to the building of a new and just society? Every government action, every multi-national company decision, every new book or film, every television programme, every environmental issue could be assessed for their relevance to this basic confrontation.

It should be possible to introduce this element of confrontation and of effort, ground lost or gained, into modern news writing and broadcasting. How can we define this supreme conflict of our time? "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, in the fight twixt truth and falsehood, for the good or evil side." Every journalist will understand that. But it can be further defined as between freedom and bondage, between fairness and injustice, between peace and war, between honesty and lies, between caring and indifference, between wholesomeness and decadence, between family unity and breakdown, between ... the list could go on, and most of us know darned well the right choice to make. In each case a line is

drawn on either side of which victory or defeat can be signalled.

Walter Cronkite, the great American newsman, wrote in the concluding chapter of his autobiography, *A Reporter's Life*: "The new technologies give proof of the human being's intellectual capacity. Can we really believe that we are incapable of applying that same intellectual power to solving the great problems the world faces, overpopulation, pollution and poverty chief among them? Can we believe that the beleaguered peoples of the world will long be tolerant of those who possess the tools, but who can't make them work for the good of humankind everywhere?"

REVOLUTIONARY FORCES AT WORK TODAY

"There is going to be social and political and economic revolution, which will explode with such suddenness as to have the character of revolution. The revolutionary forces are already at work today, and they have humankind's dream on their side. We (the media) don't want to be on the other side. It is up to us to assume leadership of that revolution, to channel it in a direction that will ensure freedom's future," Conkrite concluded.

The response of the media to this challenge is to inform thoroughly and with balance, our audiences of what is happening in their localities, communities, nations, regions and the world; to encourage and help them to cope with the situation, as it realistically exists; and to work with them for the good to triumph. This concept does not mean the imposition of morality or belief or dogma, but rather an honest presentation of the battle and its issues, plus an encouragement to participate and a pointing of ways in building a better society. Each individual in an audience is free to form his or her opinion and to take or not to take any action that might be indicated, There will always be an indifferent majority, but the future will belong to a motivated, creative minority.

I am thinking here of bringing an element of purpose and excitement into the whole field of news and current affairs reporting and presentation. Of course, there are some areas that will not lend themselves to this type of treatment, and they should be handled in accordance with traditional practice. This is also true in times of war, when not all news is related to the conflict. A big problem with most news treatment today is that it is without any context other than its effect on circulation and audience size, and I am not underestimating the importance of that, but, even then, it needs some kind of yardstick against which to make judgments. How is news value estimated today? At its worst by the blood and guts on the floor. At its best by its human appeal, and even that, usually on a sentimental basis, as with Princess Diana or the behavioural idiosyncrasies of celebrities.

CARING ABOUT THE SUFFERINGS OF OTHERS

In the recent prominence given to attacks on refugees in prosperous Western countries there was the cry of appeal from a Glasgow housewife: "I wish the media would listen to the decent people, the ordinary people, who so care about the suffering of others."

I think that most of my colleagues in the media will understand what I am getting at, in spite of my struggles to express it. And the concept of a Battle Line of Civilisation gives us a reasonable and purposeful basis on which to work. From "If it bleeds, it leads" to "If it answers needs, it leads" may seem a long way off, but I believe that it is a road we have to take.

This article was written by Bill Porter, for the World Association of Newspapers. It appeared as a guest column on their web site at http://www.wan-press.org/ and is reproduced with WAN's permission. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of WAN.

2

Bill Porter: Creating a climate of confidence in the media

William Stainsby

William Stainsby draws an affectionate portrait of Bill Porter and celebrates his unique and inspirational contribution to the crucial debate on improving global media standards

THE MAN

Change – personal transformation – was perhaps Bill Porter's greatest achievement. He was a "character" in every sense of the word. Bill believed it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness. History records that change starts with small steps and that every righteous protest begins with the lonely voices of a minority. Thus Bill's pioneering involvement in diverse international media reminds me of a small stone falling into a pond. The influence he exerted has rippled out in ever widening media circles.[1]

One could sum up Bill as someone who had a heart as wide as the world and the vision to see it as it is. He understood that at the personal level objective knowledge is fundamental because one must know before one can choose. Likewise, the more "globalised" our world becomes, the more we need accurate information. Here was someone who took a resolute stand against the prevailing media tendency towards extremes, in particular, to focus exclusively on doom and gloom and crass sensationalism.[2]

Nor did he stand merely for a one-sided good-news-policy. The public need to be informed with what was going right in the world, too. One individual who profoundly impressed Bill Porter and who together campaigned as friends to readdress the imbalance was the popular BBC presenter, Martyn Lewis.[3] He was someone who put his job on the line by

challenging the prevailing emphasis on reporting what was going wrong in the world. In his efforts to establish a more just equilibrium, Bill Porter and the ICF unreservedly supported Lewis.[4]

Humour was intrinsic to Bill Porter's *modus operandi.* He possessed that rare ability to "bring the house down" through his infectious humour and anecdotes. He once told me that the closest he could get to Rupert Murdoch was to spend a delightful afternoon with his elderly mother. The two of them passed one sunny afternoon on a buggy driving around her golf course on her estate in Australia. Typical of Bill Porter was the time he disarmed an audience of hardened media professionals gathered in the Renaissance Hotel at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, in Denver 2000. Among them was Roger Parkinson, President of the World Association of Newspapers, and one of those who did much to encourage Bill's work. Many of those present had been involved in reporting the Columbine school tragedy several years previously. Those listening were becoming increasingly depressed as one serious speech followed another.

Bill Porter took the floor and within minutes the atmosphere had tangibly changed. Those present were feeling more refreshed, refortified and much more receptive to his more critical thoughts. He knew from much experience that the shortest distance between strangers and pilgrim souls is a smile. He referred to the scene of the Pope and the journalist being allotted their rooms by St Peter in the heavenly Jerusalem. The journalist is at once surprised and delighted to receive a palatial suite in contrast to his Holiness the Pope. Bewildered and confused the Pope quietly questions St Peter's judgement on being escorted to such humble quarters: a room of modest proportions with simple furnishings, a sink, a bed, a chair and a small table. "Yes, all is in order, your Holiness," responds Peter, the Prince of Apostles. "To date we have had 264 Popes here but only one journalist."

HIS CHARISMA

In a word, Bill Porter was someone who possessed charisma. Who inspired and influenced those he came in contact with by the quality of his thoughts, the sincerity of what he said and the honesty of his actions. He knew what one had to say was the critical core but also the importance of how it is given expression. Bill was a master communicator in showing how substance, sincerity and style can sit in each other's presence very comfortably and effectively. At the same time, one never had the feeling of being judged or looked down upon for he was someone only too ready to share his own failings and fallibility.

One has only to read his autobiography, *'Do something about it!' – A*

Media Man's Story, to appreciate how painfully aware he was of his own shortcomings and struggles.[5] He occasionally, for instance, over-reacted to those negligent of appointments or latecomers. With unfeigned affection he remembered the rock from which he was hewn, the old school where one's word was one's bond and where punctuality is the courtesy of the kind. On a few occasions I personally experienced his low tolerance level for those infringing basic boundaries. Afterwards, he would miss no opportunity to undo any offence taken ... justice tempered by mercy was his benchmark in such matters.

Bill Porter was the kindest of men and expressed it often in the form of compassion and solidarity. He possessed that most disarming and charming of all qualities: the ability to make light of one's own personal sufferings. Several years ago he was hospitalised during a long and painful illness far from his family, friends and colleagues. His forbearance was nothing but heroic without any trace of self-pity. I was curious how this self-confessed "lapsed agnostic" filled those long hours and days convalescing. His response to my question has always stayed with me, revealing as it does the kind of person he was; his positive attitude, his solidarity and, in a word, his humanity.

"In the locker beside my hospital bed I kept a box of index cards. They contained several thousand names of those whom I have met in many countries during my work and travels with the ICF. During the day and often during the night I searched my memory for the faces of those recorded there. Failing that I tried to remember some other detail in my efforts to recall each one. Those that flashed back to mind and those forgotten I wished good things for their life and hoped that the influence of the ICF continued through their work. Good will towards others heals one's spirit and helps others. Attitude is everything."

A HUMANIST TO THE CORE OF HIS BEING

One of those who gathered to remember him at his beloved Mountain House at Caux in August 2009 expressed it well when he said that Bill Porter was a humanist to the core of his being. He was someone who worked to nurture the positive potential in those whose lives he touched. He was someone who had gone beyond purely sacred or secular points of view taking what was best in both. He believed that such a synthesis is imperative for living in a world deeply divided by the increasing clash of secular and religious mindsets.

With his mind ever on the bigger picture Bill, however, never lost the personal touch. Years ago he took time out from a busy conference schedule to listen to someone who recently had lost his job and whose marriage was

in trouble. At one point his friend seriously expressed the idea of writing down his story under the heading, "Finished at Forty". Bill would have none of it. He pressed him "to push on to higher ground, to let the past bury the past. And remember, learn from the past, don't repeat mistakes, because no one is rich enough to buy it back". One was always impressed not only by his conversation but the personality of the man.

His impeccable taste percolated down into his personal preferences. Once after several demanding wintry days travelling around Scotland speaking at different venues the various speakers ended up in a castle near Aberdeen. Bill was offered a glass of Scotch whiskey insisting it come from the nearest, local distillery. This subtle, seemingly insignificant distinction captured something of the culture of the man.

A year or so before his passing in 2009 I visited him at his home in Le Touquet near the Channel Tunnel on the North West coast of France. His fluent French and the cultured fineness he brought to everything he touched made being in his company educational. We spent many hours together chatting in his apartment and on café terraces. I can see him resting heavily on his cane as he insisted on taking me out to the historic beach head where the Allied troops came ashore. The price paid for the preservation of democracy and its fragile survival was a reality which permeated his understanding of the media.

To uphold democracy, to protect it and to communicate its core values, he believed, is crucial for the creation of a vibrant, culture of communications. Its survival depends on the centrality of truth, proceeding from the personal through to the professional to the institutional. Creating a climate of public confidence in it depends on living, working and implementing this order. Where there is truth there is trust and where there is trust confidence increases. Personal, professional and corporate relationships grow or diminish accordingly.

BILL PORTER'S MESSAGE

Our paths first crossed in Vienna in July 1994. He spoke passionately, not in a spirit of fanaticism but openly and with humility, about his experience and efforts to open up a debate on the kind of media society needs for the twenty-first century. His thoughts were very much fixed on a new beginning promised by the Third Millennium. His focus was the formation of a new media culture, one which would help renew the foundations of the media enterprise and its service in the good of humanity. Several weeks later I joined him at Caux overlooking Montreux on Lake Geneva in Switzerland. This was my first encounter with the International Communications Forum

(ICF) founded in 1990 and of whom Bill was the founder President. Shortly before, he had just celebrated his seventieth year.

Mountain House in Caux was the centre around which those who made up the ICF – journalists, broadcasters, publishers, actresses and other media professionals – gathered annually. From here international conferences were planned for the coming year. In its totality the ICF represents and expresses Bill Porter's vision and those values at its core. Years ago, at a conference launching a media institute in 1999 in Ireland, I remember his observation that it takes only one step to start a tradition. In March 1999, Bill accompanied a sizeable group of ICF members to conferences in Northern Ireland and the Republic.[6] Painfully aware of its fractured history, he encouraged media there to promote every form of positive co-operation. An important role of the media in divided societies was to foster the good of everyone. Significantly it was there in the Everglades Hotel in Derry, Co. Londonderry, that Bill wrote what has come to be called the *Sarajevo Commitment.*

Bill's insights into media ethics derived from his deep understanding of human nature. He was someone in whom was concentrated, like the roots of a dense forest, memories and traditions, intellectual and cultural experiences. From his years working as a journalist and publisher in Britain, Asia, Europe and America he recognised a moral patrimony common to all cultures. It was upon this basis, his own humanity, that he developed his understanding of what morality means. Bill analysed human behaviour and media issues from within this tradition, commonly called the Natural Law. A tradition encapsulated by those primordial moral platitudes recognised by reasonable people always, everywhere and at all times.

Thus, for example, in the East one finds the *Tao*[7] and the West the *Golden Rule.* Positively the addressee is enlightened by reason: do to another what you would want them to do to you. And negatively the moral agent is reminded: do not do to another what you would not want done to you. For millennia this tradition informed and underpinned the ethical codes of institutions concerned with the administration of justice and the medical profession. The *Hippocratic Oath* taken by doctors, for example, expresses it succinctly: do no harm. Or as Bill would say with the media in mind, "do no more harm".

BILL PORTER'S CHALLENGE TO CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Bill Porter was only too aware that the term morality had developed a "bad press". It suggested to moderns something imposed upon them rather than something grounded in human nature, springing from human freedom. Presenting morality with a view to its importance for human flourishing was

an important part of Bill's challenge to contemporary culture: in particular, the communications media through which it finds expression. Morality required a new marketing strategy! Ethical reasoning for him was founded on a basic understanding of what it is to be human and if we are to be morally good persons our actions must conform to human nature.

Reason enlightens human beings to know the good that should be done and the evil to be avoided. From this it can be induced that morality unites human beings in their solidarity to build a better, more humane world. The role of the media is fundamental in nurturing a society based on the solidarity created by truth, justice and mercy. Protecting and promoting this noble purpose animated the humanism which shaped Bill's efforts to advance human culture through the media. Informed by this perspective Bill believed in going straight to the "heart of the matter". He passionately believed in right and wrong, that the light was on or off, and that what one said or wrote was either true or false.

Of course, he knew from long experience, including active service with the Eighth Army in Italy during World War Two, that life is full of grey areas, bright spots and shadows. That one's personal circumstances can increase or diminish one's responsibility. Fundamentally, however, he understood that a person's thoughts, words and deeds reveal a particular orientation towards truthfulness or falsehood. A standard of truth existed which was non-negotiable. It was an absolute standard against which each human being can measure the uprightness or downright wrongness of their attitudes and actions.

Unlike personal taste in food or fashion, truth could not be twisted or turned to accommodate one's personal agenda or corporate advantage. Bill always spoke from experience which explains why others were willing to listen to him. As someone exercising a position of influence, he decided to change his own life first. He put what he regarded as the leftover years – and what years they turned out to be – at the service of shaping a more responsible media; to use whatever time remained to raise awareness of its call to higher standards.

BILL PORTER AND THE FOUNDING OF ICF

From the moment of the ICF's conception in Bill's mind he was determined that its *modus operandi* would be a "conscience to conscience" one rather than an organisation exercising corporate or financial power. He invested much of his personal savings in its initial and developing stages. Other monies were forthcoming as its international infrastructure developed through conferences and forums. It is to the credit of those who continue

the work of the ICF that in ethos and orientation it has remained faithful to its founder's original inspiration. One thinks especially of Bernard Margueritte, who succeeded Bill as President of the ICF, Robin Williamson, Hugh Nowell and Mike Smith. The emphasis remains on its ethical influence rather than effecting change through institutional means. Thus when it comes to titling the balance, Bill firmly believed that one word of truth outweighed all other considerations.

NOTES

1 Roger Parkinson, one time President of the World Association of Newspapers, stated that the International Communications Forum – founded by Bill Porter – "had put the issue of the effect of the media on society on to the world's agenda". Its agenda was effectively to shape media that merit public confidence by focusing on its positive potential. To highlight the need for objective standards that inform how those in the media report and express the aspirations of humanity. To promote democratic intolerance for violence, moral confusion, inequality and lies. To encourage and support those in the media committed to raising awareness and developing a public conscience towards social, moral and ethical issues of critical importance. And in doing so to expose the great evils threatening the future of humankind.

2 After speaking at the prestigious Wan Congress in Dublin in 2003, involving 200 delegates from 85 countries, Ireland's largest daily – the *Irish Independent* – reported Bill Porter's presentation with the headline: "Industry warned of 'insidious' threat of sensationalism."

3 For a comprehensive treatment of Lewis's position see his article, "The 'real' news: Balance in news reporting and presentation", in *Creating a Climate of Confidence in the Media*, 77-89, Mayo: Nova et Vetera, 2000.

4 This depressed, sceptical and negative attitude informing the direction of BBC news reporting was captured by the BBC's most prominent war reporter, Martin Bell. Bill repeatedly quoted his observation about his posting to South Africa by the BBC during the years of apartheid: "They sent me to report the war but would not let me stay to report the peace."

5 Published by John Faber, Arundel, in association with Caux Books, Switzerland, 2005.

6 The proceedings from both conferences were published in *Creating a Climate of Confidence in the Media*, edited by William Stainsby, *Nova et Vetera*, 2000.

7 The ancient message of the Tao – the principle of living in balance with the wisdom of the cosmos.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Dr William Stainsby is a lecturer, editor and Director of the Centre for Faith and Culture, Inch Island, County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. His books include *Forget Not Hope* and he edited *Creating a Climate of Confidence in the Media*, a compilation of papers presented by media professionals engaged with the ICF at a forum in Newman Institute, Ballina, Ireland, in 1999.

3

Making the positive as gripping as the negative remains the challenge

Michael Henderson

Michael Henderson tells of how both Bill Porter and Peter Howard inspired his journalism – and argues that "making what is positive as interesting, gripping and readable as the negative remains the challenge"

I did not always live up to Bill Porter's expectations. I had a high regard for his work and was amazed what one person with a deep conviction could achieve when so many media forces might seem to be arrayed against him. There was no holding back on his part. He always liked to use what I was doing with my books as an example of writing to motivate people for a bigger purpose.

My holding back came from the fact that I did not feel that I was in a position to give advice to journalists who were in the employment of others and depended entirely on them for their livelihood. I have fortunately always been free to write what I want or refuse to write what others want me to write – a freedom not enjoyed by all. I have been fortunate to be able to stick to my deepest convictions.

I have just been looking through my bulging file marked ICF, recalling the letters from Bill Porter and the conferences in different parts of the world. I attended the launching of ICF in Switzerland and also events in the United States and Britain. I was even asked to "pinch hit" for Rajmohan Gandhi at one conference. I say "pinch hit" since I lived many years in the United States and coming home to live in England I have noticed that everyone seems to be "stepping up to the plate" without probably knowing that this expression, too, comes from baseball.

I notice that I ended one article I wrote about Bill Porter fifteen years

ago when I lived in the United States: "Certainly this Englishman's integrity and purpose is an encouraging contrast to some of the images of the British press that reach these shores. Was it a certain professional jealousy, however, rather than a mature perspective that caused a writer, profiling Tina Brown, editor of the *New Yorker* in *The New York Times Magazine*, to attribute her success to 'an importation of British standards, which is to say hardly any at all'"?

BILL PORTER'S CAMPAIGNS FOR STANDARDS

As a member of the Chartered Institute of Journalists for more than 45 years, I have always appreciated Bill Porter's campaigns for standards, and for the personal responsibility of journalists. When I sat in for Gandhi I described how, when I first went to Oregon more than thirty years ago, I noted on the wall of the main paper, the *Oregonian*, a copy of the Oregon Code of Ethics of Journalism. After the building was remodelled it was taken down and never went up again. It said among other things: "It is not true that a newspaper should be as advanced in its ethical atmosphere as it conceives the average of its readers to be. No man who is not in ethical advance of the average of his community should be in the profession of journalism."

I am doubtful that Bill would subscribe entirely to such a lofty requirement but he was passionately concerned about journalists holding themselves accountable for what was happening in society. I don't quite know with modern hiring practices how you would ensure such high standards.

I had also just been interviewed by what was then the world service of the *Christian Science Monitor* whose sentiments, I think, tie in well with Bill's concerns. I asked my interviewer if I could see a copy of the guidelines they supply to their reporters. This is a quotation from those guidelines: "A story dealing with a problem or a tragedy should at least report the basic changes of action or thought required to deal constructively with a current situation or to prevent a similar problem in the future. Thus, a reporter needs to be expectantly alert to finding sources who are bringing a constructive approach to any given problem."

If this advice were followed more generally there would be fewer people like the lady I sat next to in a plane who, on discovering I was a journalist, said, "I haven't subscribed to a newspaper in months and I feel so much better. It's like when I gave up smoking."

Both Bill Porter and I were much inspired many years ago by the same British journalist and author, Peter Howard, a man whose professionalism

and integrity was an inspiration to us both. At a time when he was one of the highest paid political journalists in Britain, writing at the same time for the *Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express* and the London *Evening Standard*, he chanced on a story that changed his life. Forbidden to write about politics because his boss Lord Beaverbrook had joined Britain's wartime government, he looked around for juicy targets. At that time Moral Re-Armament (MRA), now known as Initiatives of Change, had lurid rumours circulating about it, some of them fostered by his *Express* colleague, Tom Driberg.

HOWARD'S "REMARKABLE CONVERSION"

Howard investigated MRA thoroughly, found the allegations against it unfounded and did not write the story but, as he said, "became the story" and lost his job. The *Daily Telegraph* wrote later: "There seems to have been few more remarkable conversions since Paul of Tarsus set off for Damascus." His dramatic change of lifestyle sent shock waves through Fleet Street. "Who will be next?" worried Percy Cudlipp, editor of the *Daily Herald* (1940-1953).

Over the next twenty years his thirty books and plays helped give faith and purpose to millions. In a preface to one play, he wrote that his purpose was "to encourage men to accept the growth in character that is essential if civilisation is to survive. It is to help all who want peace in the world to be ready to pay the price of peace in their own personality".

In his autobiography, *Do Something About It*, Bill Porter writes of Howard's courageous efforts and his fight for moral values in the highest circles of British and international life. But admits he didn't accept his personal challenge. Bill Porter wrote: "I still remember his saying, 'You are meant to be a mighty tree, under whose branches many people can find shelter and purpose' but I didn't grasp his vision for me." After Peter's death Bill renewed contact with his widow, Doe, and could write: "She has helped me to feel that I have tried to pick up the baton which fell from Howard's hands in his fight for a positive media."

I worked closely with Peter Howard for more than ten years and I think he would have been delighted with the mighty tree that Bill Porter became. As Bill hints, and I discovered working with Peter, life with him could be uncomfortable. He demanded of us some of the same disciplines Lord Beaverbrook demanded when training him. I learned from Howard lessons of all kinds, whether it was the importance of meeting deadlines and being punctual, of checking facts, of using short sentences and few adjectives. "Some chapters of the Bible," he would point out, "hardly have an adjective in them."

WHY AVOIDING CLICHÉS IS SO IMPORTANT

In one letter encouraging me to avoid clichés, and incidentally mentioning someone well known in public life today, he wrote: "If you look at the article by XXXX in last week's *Evening Standard* (for which he was paid a chunk of bullion) you will see more clichés to the square millimetre than you have accomplished so far in a short lifetime. It is a fabulous demonstration of how not to write." He also constantly asked whom I had written an article for, meaning not which media outlet but "which particular person are you speaking to?"

Other Howard sentences come to mind: "Go through, and strike out, with a blue pencil, all the passages that are simply an expression of your own emotion rather than an arrow aimed at a particular point in a particular heart. Acquire the discipline of simplicity. Don't try to decorate the body and excite the senses without having first built the framework, the skeleton. Like a Christmas tree, writing comes alive when less is hung upon it."

In addition, Howard expected from me as from Bill spiritual disciplines of a challenging kind. Bill writes about this aspect in his autobiography where he reproduces an interview with his granddaughter, Natalie, and answers her question about what he means by inner compulsion: "It must be a major factor in having an effective purpose. Some think that it is the spirit of God working in a person's heart and mind. I often describe myself as a lapsed agnostic, because this experience has given me a sense of faith, which had long ago deserted me. I believe it is possible for each one of us to find his or her sense of destiny. Conscience plays a big role. I had to look squarely at it, and put right, the moral compromises in my life. As you peel off the often deeply encrusted layers of wrong doing, you get a greater sense of reality and purpose and become a human being whose life matters. I strongly recommend this purpose to all."

With the democratisation of the media with blogs and podcasts and all sorts of online opportunities the younger person coming along now has far more opportunities than we ever had. The traditional entry points are no longer as important. But the old disciplines and professionalism still apply. Also the determination to persevere in the face of rejections of which I had many. Op-ed page editors are looking for pieces that highlight conflict while I was always looking for things that bring people together. One editor who liked my pieces, for that reason rationed me on how many he would print. Making what is positive as interesting, gripping and readable as the negative remains the challenge.

As the final statement of the Oregon Code of Ethics of Journalism challenges us: "We affirm the printed word, medium of global communications, is a means to the end of freeing the human mind from

bigotry, hate and intolerance and for the establishment of better living, international peace and justice to all."

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Michael Henderson is an English journalist and broadcaster and author of eleven books including *No Enemy to Conquer – Forgiveness in an Unforgiving World, Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate, The Forgiveness Factor, See You After the Duration – the Story of British Evacuees to North America in World War II* and *Experiment with Untruth – India Under Emergency.* He has been a member of the Chartered Institute of Journalists since 1965 and has worked all over the world including 25 years in the United States. He has been associated for more than 60 years with Initiatives of Change

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New media and new civilisation

Bernard Margueritte

Bernard Margueritte outlines the current crisis facing journalism and argues that the moral leadership provided by men such as Hubert Beuve-Méry, Pope John Paul II, Marvin Kalb and Bill Porter can inspire us all to work for higher standards in the media

At the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Caux the syndrome of what I call the return of the prodigal son is highly regarded. You are highly appreciated particularly if you have done many foolish things for many years in your life and then find the light and get "born again". If you have modestly tried from an early stage to do the right thing, you are not a truly interesting person. I know this is the teaching of one of the Gospel readings at Easter time. Nevertheless, I must confess I have some bone to pick with this conception.

Bill Porter was a great Caux man. He was "born again" and after a successful business life decided at the age of 70 to devote the rest of his life to restoring the dignity of the media. His charisma was so intense, the feeling that he was his own man, sincere to the core, so obvious, that his words managed to inspire and convince even media people. I remember on one occasion hearing a Scottish professor of journalism telling him at a conference in Glasgow: "We media people cannot stand it when some elderly gentlemen, who until 70 did whatever they wanted, come along to tell us near the end of their life how we should behave." Bill was astonished and didn't say a word.

Indeed, Bill Porter had everything to make working journalists mistrust him. He was a freelance correspondent in India in his young days, but after

that had not much to do with journalism. Usually journalists are fed up with people who have never experienced the heat, the stress, the deadlines of the newsroom, telling them how they should practise their job. We journalists have to deal with the pressure of the editor, of money-making priorities, of time constraints on a day-to-day basis, until somebody comes along and tells us how we should behave ethically!

I recall how an excellent Brazilian journalist told me in Sao Paulo, after listening to my presentation of the principles of the International Communication Forum: "All that is beautiful, but if I try to implement what you tell me I will not last a day on the job, my boss will call me and kick me out – and there are 50 jobless journalists waiting to take over." Even the remarkable "Sarajevo Commitment" written mostly by Bill Porter, if it has been widely appreciated in the media world, has also been met by disbelief or even irritation by many journalists. "We are not here to educate, our duty is simply to serve," some commented while others added: "Our role is not to put right all the wrongdoings or sins of the world, it is simply to try to be as honest as we can under a lot of pressures."

That, in spite of all this, Bill Porter's words resonated deeply in the media world show how desperately we need to hear the clear sound of the trumpet of the righteous, how intensely we strive to regain a sense of vision, of purpose, of dedication in what we – people of the media – are doing. Indeed, as Saint Paul wrote: "If the *trumpet* does not *sound* a *clear call*, who will get ready for *battle*?" (1 Corinthians 14: 8).

As far as I am concerned, a clear view of the mission of the media was given to me, with God's grace, by great people I have had the privilege to meet and listen to. The first one was my old master, Hubert Beuve-Méry, the founder and director of *Le Monde*, then Pope John Paul II, not only, of course, by what he said to me in person but by his teaching in general; later on Marvin Kalb, my director at the Shorenstein Center at Harvard, and finally Bill Porter. Let me tell you how my view of the media was carved, along all my life, by these great people.

BEUVE-MÉRY, MY MASTER

I was lucky to have started work as a journalist at 27, fresh out of university, under the leadership of Beuve-Méry. He was an exceptional media man, arguably the greatest of the 20th century. He taught me everything I needed to know about my job as a journalist and everything I consider up to this day as relevant in our vision of the media. He was linked with the personalist Catholic movement, illustrated among others by Emmanuel Mounier. Therefore no wonder that for him the media – albeit with the necessity to be

profitable – was not a mere business. "Never forget," he kept saying, "we are there as human beings and citizens addressing other human beings and citizens. This is a blessing. We ought to be up to it." For Beuve-Méry, entering the media was, therefore, comparable to entering the Church. It was an ordeal. Indeed, we had to pay for this privilege, or more precisely not be paid, since for the first three years the director of *Le Monde* made sure that we got extremely low wages, just to show that we are here out of a sense of devotion.

I have never forgotten what Beuve-Méry told the young man entering the paper: "I don't ask you to be objective; this is a dull notion and, besides, there is no such thing as 'objectivity'. So be passionate on the job, but I want from you more than objectivity, I want 'honesty', intellectual honesty." Obviously this is much more demanding. For my old master the fundamental role of the media was twofold:

> ...*first*, to inform correctly and thoroughly your reader, listener, viewer about what is happening in his or her community, city, country, world, in such a way that he/she will be able to make up his/her own mind. Then he/she will be fully a citizen and, therefore, my friend, we will live in a democracy. *Secondly*, your role is to inform the audience in your own country about the way-of-life, the culture, the problems, the dreams, the religion of "the other", of far away people, so that they can understand and, hopefully, respect them.

He called me to his office after one of my first articles (he never did that, except to approve the unsigned editorial of the paper). He was not happy. He thought I presented there too much of my own views and he told me with great passion: "You want to know what journalism is? It is very simple. Something is happening, you go there and you report using what the Americans call the five "ws" (where, who, what, when, why). But this is not enough! You have to present the historical, political, sociological, economic background to what happened. Then you have to tell your reader what Mr X or Y or the party A or B suggest to do about it. And so, my friend, your reader will have all he needs – and not only all he wants! – to understand the matter, to think about it and to make up his own mind." And he concluded: "Then, my friend, he will be a citizen and we will live in a true democracy!"

A CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE MEDIA: TO PROMOTE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Therefore, the role of the media is to move from information to inter-formation, from understanding to mutual understanding. We are a pillar of

democracy and we are aiming at building a new covenant in the world. We should never forget that in "communications" there is "communion". For Beuve-Méry the role of the media was extremely noble, precisely because he was humble: we were not there to "educate" the public nor to change the world. We were there to be the voice of the voiceless, to empower people, to allow them to understand what is going on, not by expressing our own opinions but by giving them all the needed background and presenting a variety of views voiced by those who were supposed to be well-informed. We were there to serve our audience, to allow those, who were reading us or listening to us to make up their own mind – in other words, to allow them to be truly citizens. Indeed, there is no living democracy without honest media.

Moreover, there cannot be peace in the world without honest media. That was for him the second part of the equation. Prophetically, he stressed: "If we don't allow our audience to know and respect the 'other' (and that was the work of foreign correspondents), we will have a world not of understanding and peace, but of hatred and violence." Now, 50 years later is there anything that is missing from this vision of the media? Maybe simply the willingness to put it in practice.

THE LESSONS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

The Polish Pope added for me another dimension to the teachings of Beuve-Méry, not merely by welcoming Bill Porter and me on 25 May 1999 in the Vatican, giving his blessing to our work within the ICF, but by his spiritual but also very practical vision of the media.

John Paul II was fascinated by the media. No pope, nor even many experts in journalism, have written so extensively about the media, which His Holiness did more often than every year on the occasion of the World Communications Day. But, beyond that, John Paul was himself the greatest "communicator" – much more, one can say, than even Ronald Reagan. Albeit John Paul II himself wrote that "through the history of salvation, Christ presents himself to us as the 'communicator' of the Father...The eternal word made flesh, in communicating himself, always shows respect for those who listen, teaches understanding of their situation and needs, is moved to compassion for their suffering and to a resolute determination to say to them only what they need to hear without imposition or compromise, deceit or manipulation"[1] And the Gospel itself is news, it is the *eu-angelion*, the good news. And one can say that the apostles were the best foreign correspondents of all times. In fact, Pope Paul VI wrote that Saint Paul, whose Letters to the Corinthians are a brilliant media job, would probably be a journalist, if he were around today![2]

The great power of the media, for good or ill, was certainly recognised by John Paul II. And it is a particular responsibility for us, Christians, to use this power properly. Indeed our duty is to show our faith in action, in dealings. "This is the great task for our generation, for all Christians of our day: to bring the light of Christ into daily life. To bring it into the 'modern *areopagi*', into the vast territories of contemporary civilisation and culture, of politics and economics. Faith cannot be lived only in the depths of the human soul," John Paul stressed.[3] Moroever, "the first *areopagus* of modern times is the world of communications...The communications media have acquired such importance as to be the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial, and social behaviour".[4]

Indeed, the role of the media is permanently growing: "The constant development of the means of social communication has a growing influence on people and public opinion and this increases the responsibility of those who are directly involved in the sector, because it induces them to make inspired choices in the search for truth and in serving the common good."[5] The Holy Father could not accept the current situation of the media and made it known. Visiting Poland in 1991, he said: "Haven't the principles of freedom been uprooted from our land by the Evil hiding under different covers? Haven't they been pecked out by a variety of birds of propaganda, publications and programmes which play with our human weakness?" Three days later in Wloclawek, he said:

> Do not let us become embroiled in this whole civilisation of lust and abuse that grows unrestrainedly among us, taking advantage of the various means of communication and of seductive perversion...Is this civilisation or anti-civilisation? Culture or rather anti-culture? We ought to go back to basic notions: culture can only be what makes the human being more human and not what simply "consumes" his humanity.

MARVIN KALB AND THE SHORENSTEIN CENTER AT HARVARD

Another milestone was for me my stay as a fellow in 1994-1995 at the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School. First of all, the founder and then director Marvin Kalb, one of the most prominent US journalists-turned-Harvard professor, was and is the embodiment of the best qualities Beuve-Méry would have loved to see in a media person. Marvin has strong convictions but they do not surface during any interview. Always polite, always trying to help his

interlocutor better formulate his/her views, always hoping that a new light will shine that will serve the audience. Service and intellectual honesty, such important values for Beuve, are the trademarks of Marvin Kalb. It was a joy to learn from him.

But the stay at the center was also painful in a way. I went there with all the due reverence a Frenchman should have for the country of the First Amendment. And I was shocked. Dan Rather, the famous CBS anchor (now retired), expressed his dismay to see American television, in spite of its enormous means, going from bad to worse and US journalists not being able to fulfil their mission. "Our reputation," he said, "has been reduced, our credibility cracked, justifiably; this has happened because too often for too long we have answered to the worst, not to the best within ourselves and within our audience." He added: "We have allowed this great instrument, this resource, this weapon for the good to be squandered and cheapened...The best among us hang our heads in embarrassment, even shame."

Another celebrated anchor at that time, Ted Koppel, expressed similar concerns and saw in the decay of journalism "the inevitable consequence of the marketplace bringing its economic forces to bear on journalism". R. W. Apple Jr., the Washington bureau chief of *The New York Times*, said that "much of American journalistic resources and energy is today devoted to unserious work" adding that, as bad money drove out good money, so "bad journalism is driving out good journalism", concluding that "we are increasingly in the hands of people who don't share our values and who don't think what we do is important".

HOW TO AVOID THE "SHOWBIZZIFICATION" OF INFORMATION?

According to all those remarkable journalists, we are now reduced to "infotainment" or even "showbizzification" of information. When the situation is perceived that way in the country of the First Amendment, what can we hope to have elsewhere?

And the center was an excellent place to begin to analyse the reasons for this decay of the media. One is certainly linked to globalisation. As Pope John Paul II said, "globalisation is neither good or bad; it will be what the people will do with it."[6]. Unfortunately, so far globalisation is not showing a too friendly human face. In *Le Monde Diplomatique*[7] Ignacio Ramonet has shown how the industrial giants, from the utilities, electronic activities, telephone, water or armament sectors have jumped into the media world. America Online is controlling Netscape, Time, Warner Bros and CNN; Bill

Gates is the king of software but also of the press photography through his agency Corbis; Rupert Murdoch owns a variety of British and American papers, such as *The Times*, the *Sun*, the *New York Post*, a satellite network Sky and also a major film production company, 20th Century Fox.

Some proprietors are trying in Europe to follow the model. Bertelsmann owns a lot of papers, radio and televisiopn channels; the same is true with Sergio Berlusconi in Italy. In France, our two biggest groups are controlled by Serge Dassault and Jean-Luc Lagardère, both involved in the armaments industry. As Ramonet comments: "All those concentrations represent a threat to the pluralism of the press and for democracy. Moreover, they put the emphasis on profits, instead of quality." The former president of *Le Monde Diplomatique* continues:

> One of the precious rights of the human being is the right to freely communicate one's thoughts and opinions. In democratic societies, the freedom of speech is not only guaranteed, it goes together with another fundamental right: the right to be well informed. But this right is endangered by the concentration of the media, by the merging of once independent newspapers into hegemonic groups. Should the citizens accept this hijacking of the freedom of the press? Can they tolerate that information be reduced to a banal commodity?

THE GLOBALISED CONCENTRATION OF MEDIA

Paul Krugman, who recently received the Nobel Prize for economy, expressed similar concerns in *The New York Times*. He says, almost jokingly, that in the United States you get almost all your news, day in and day out, from what he calls "AOLTimeWarnerGeneralElectricDisneyWestinghouseNewsCorp". He adds: "The handful of organisations that supply most people with their news have major commercial interests that inevitably tempt them to slant their coverage, and more generally to be deferential to the ruling party." He concludes: "For the time being, blatant media bias is still limited by old rules and old norms of behaviour. But soon the rules will be abolished, and the norms are eroding before our eyes. Do the conflicts of interest of our highly concentrated media constitute a threat to democracy? I've reported; you decide".[8]

This globalised concentration of media is also bringing about a dull uniformity of the media. Here we are faced not only with a world-wide domination of American-made media where, for example, 70 per cent of all the film series presented on television screens in Europe come from

Hollywood. Indeed, this "uniformisation" is taking place in the United States as well, with media people in Colorado or South Carolina complaining – as I witnessed personally – that they are not able to address topics important for the local people, since they are channelling what is presented by their main company based in California or New York.

With this is linked a very strange phenomenon: we claim to live in an era of globalisation, yet we know less and less about each other! The superficiality of our media is such that the French know very little about the American way of life and vice-versa, not to mention, of course, that the Muslim does not know much about the Jew and vice-versa. The consequences are grave: instead of building mutual knowledge, we are responsible for a world-wide lack of mutual understanding.

THE RULE OF CONSUMERISM, GREED AND MONEY-MAKING

The rule of consumerism, greed and money-making is certainly another culprit. The goals are profits and ratings. If there is a feeling that sensationalism, pornography and violence are leading to those goals, let them be used! We can only see in all this what John Paul II called, in the same address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences already quoted, *"the intrusive, even invasive character of the logic of the market"*. At the end of the day we have what was expressed openly and cynically by Patrick Le Lay, when he was the president of the French television TF1. Describing his company's mission he said: "The job of TF1 is to help Coca-Cola to sell its product. What we sell to Coca-Cola is availability of human brain-time." [9]

I also remember that at some point in my career the director of a big newspaper of which I was the correspondent for Eastern Europe asked me to indulge more in sensationalism: "Your analyses are fine," he said, "you are probably right. But you are taking it easy being in Warsaw. My task is different: I have to sale a product every morning. Today it's a newspaper, maybe tomorrow it will be soap; no difference." I had a hard time trying to explain that the difference is huge and that, while the media are businesses, they are not typical businesses since we journalists, as Beuve-Méry used to say, do have a particular responsibility as human beings and citizens.

Another cause of the media crisis is the trivialisation of our agenda. We are presenting on our screens or newspapers news that is irrelevant, sensationalist, superficial...and depressing, instead of addressing the topics truly important to society. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu noted that: "putting the emphasis on events of little significance, filling the limited time we have with nothing, or almost nothing, we eliminate relevant topics that would be needed for the citizen to exercise his democratic rights".[10]

This obsession with "ratings" leads us also towards the presentation of more and more violence and sex on our screens but also in tabloids. Instead of educating the people, we are becoming a tool for depraving our audience and particularly the young!

OVER-EMPHASIS ON BAD NEWS

We do have as well the tendency to overemphasise the bad news. If it bleeds, it leads. Today's journalist is the opposite of the *eu-angelos*. Indeed, when we watch our television news, we have 90-95 per cent of bad, dramatic news, showing all the dark aspects of human behaviour. Violence, killings, suicides, corruption, mafia, you name it. However, as the success in France of an organisation called "Reporters of Hope" demonstrates, there is among the public a desire, not for a rosy approach to the reality, but for a much more balanced presentation of the realities of our world, where we still have many people working to bring about good. Indeed, as Pope John Paul II reminds us:

> In a large strata of today's society there is a strong desire for good which is not always adequately acknowledged in newspapers and radio-television news bulletins, where the parameters for evaluating events are often marked by commercial rather than by social criteria. There is a tendency to favour "what hits the headlines", what is "sensational", instead of what would help people understand world events better. The danger is the distortion of the truth.[11]

Another difficulty is, paradoxically, linked to technological progress. We can now report immediately from any part of the world. Ted Koppel said that the fact that he is able to comment on events live from anywhere is a "technological *tour de force*", but at the same time he is conscious that his work is not as good as it was, since he has no time to prepare, to reflect and to edit his programme. Similarly, we now have all the facts we could possibly want, but for what? We have everything on the internet and on 500 television channels. We are flooded by news, everywhere and every minute. As we have fast-food, we are getting accustomed to "fast-news". Therefore, we have the information, but we don't know the meaning of the news. As John Paul II wrote:

> This is certainly not an easy mission in an age such as ours, in which there exists the conviction that the time of certainties is irretrievably

> past. Many people, in fact, believe that humanity must learn to live in a climate governed by an absence of meaning, by the provisional and by the fleeting.[12]

GROWING IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNET

Let us consider, finally, the growing importance of the internet. This is a fabulous tool, not only allowing us to get access to all possible news and topics, but also giving all citizens the chance to get his/her message across. At the same time, however, it is difficult to assess the credibility of the news and to know how reliable the source we are taking our news from is. John Paul II addressed this topic as well:

> The essence of the internet, in fact, is that it provides an almost unending flood of information, much of which passes in a moment. In a culture which feeds on the ephemeral there can easily be a risk of believing that it is facts that matter, rather than values. The internet offers extensive knowledge, but it does not teach values; and when values are disregarded, our very humanity is demeaned and man easily loses sight of his transcendent dignity. Despite its enormous potential for good, some of the degrading and damaging ways in which the internet can be used are already obvious to all, and public authorities surely have a responsibility to guarantee that this marvelous instrument serves the common good and does not become a source of harm.[13]

Yet another reason for the decay of journalism is very simple: the natural laziness of journalists. To write a sensational piece attacking someone is easy: you sit at your computer and put it on the screen. On the other hand, if you want to write about a serious matter, you have to do your home work, do intensive research and at the end, you need more skills to present this "serious" reporting in an attractive way. Laziness is pushing media people toward bad journalism.

MEDIA AND CIVILISATION

Certainly much can be done and is being done to correct the sins of the media. The International Communications Forum, founded by Bill Porter, contributes modestly to the task. First, each of us working in the media, has to be convinced that he/she should work to serve honestly the people if

he/she wants to realise him/herself as a human being. Secondly, we ought to reanimate the flame among our community, to rebuild the dignity and credibility of our trade. This is a person-to-person and conscience-to-conscience work.

We need also to persuade people that they have the final word and by choosing to buy the honest newspaper and not the tabloid, by watching the serious television programme and not the sensationalist one, they decide which media we will have tomorrow. Finally, we have to convince media owners that they can continue to indulge in the trivialisation of the media agenda. Furthermore, we will not have any living democracy in our countries nor peace in a world of mutual understanding.

Indeed, we are not campaigning merely for better media. We are aiming for a better civilisation. For a better world! In fact, more and more media people realise that we have to change. But, as John Paul II said, "the positive development of the media at the service of the common good is a responsibility of each and every one".[14] Our campaign to restore the dignity of the media, to have media fulfilling their mission, serving the people, being a pillar of democracy and mutual understanding, is only a part – and it was certainly seen as such by John Paul II- of a global movement to build the civilisation of love, to move from the civilisation of materialism, hedonism, consumerism, hatred and violence to the civilisation of respect for the human person, the civilisation of life, yes and the civilisation of love.

And this is why I feel so blessed to have met Bill Porter in 1994 in Cambridge, Mass., during my stay at Harvard. He was a man of great charisma, and obvious, total sincerity. He did not know much about the day-to-day work of a newsroom, but maybe it was better so. He was there to confront us with what was really the essential, connecting beautifully with what I learned from my master Beuve-Méry, from the teachings of Pope John Paul II, from the living example of Marvin Kalb. A few years ago I made a tour of some of the best journalism schools in America, Columbia, Maryland, Missouri, Poynter Institute. After presenting the views of the International Communications Forum, I heard regularly from the remarkable professors there: "You know, we believe that we are a great school, that our students will know everything they need to be good journalists, they will know how to be journalists; but maybe we forgot to tell them in the first place why they should be journalists."

Happily, from time to time, there are people, who come to remind us, why we are here, what is our mission on earth. Bill Porter was one of those exceptional persons and the clear sound of his trumpet will continue to be heard for years to come.

NOTES

1 Apostolic Letter to those Responsible for Communications, *The Rapid Development*, 24 January 2005
2 Pope Paul VI, speech to the International Union of the Catholic Press, 1 December 1963
3 Pope John Paul II, speech in Legnica, Poland, 2 June 1997
4 Apostolic Letter to those Responsible for Communications, *The Rapid Development*, 24 January 2005
5 Message to the Catholic Union of the Italian Press, 1999
6 Address to the Academy of Social Sciences, Vatican, 26 April 2001
7 Médias concentrés, *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 2002
8 In Media Res, *New York Times*, 29 November 2002
9 In *Les Dirigeants face au Changement*, Paris, 2004
10 *Sur la Télévision*, 1996
11 Message to the Catholic Union of the Italian Press, 1999
12 Apostolic Letter to those Responsible for Communications, *The Rapid Development*, 24 January 2005
13 Message for the 36th World Communications Day, May 2002
14 Apostolic Letter to those Responsible for Communications, *The Rapid Development*, 24 January 2005

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Since 1966, Bernard Margueritte has been an Eastern Europe correspondent based in Warsaw or Vienna for successively *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and French television and French-speaking radio channels, including Europe1. He continues to write for various Polish publications such as *Tygodnik Solidarnosc* and to take part in Polish television and radio programmes. He also still contributes to radio Europe1 in Paris. He was a Fulbright Fellow at Harvard University in 1976-1977 and again a Fellow at the same university in 1990 and 1993-1994. From 1996 to 2001 he was Vice-President of the ICF, before becoming its President.

5

Obituaries

BILL PORTER: JOURNALISM STANDARDS CAMPAIGNER

Not many people can claim to have discovered their true vocation at the age of 70, but Bill Porter's conviction that he should devote his life to campaigning for higher standards in journalism came late. As a reporter he travelled the world, and as a publisher he helped the industry into the electronic era, but it was not until after his retirement that he wondered whether his work had been about anything more than making money. One day his Yugoslav-born wife Sonja said to him: "If you are thinking that way, why don't you do something about it?" Three weeks later she died unexpectedly, and Porter, remembering her words, launched the mission that was to dominate the last years of his life.

He founded the International Communications Forum, a global media think-tank devoted to the concepts of integrity and honesty – neither of which are universally recognised in the world of modern journalism – and set up a series of worldwide conferences and seminars to discuss the issues that he felt so passionately about. By the time of his death, the ICF had held 27 conferences around the world, involving more than 2,500 media professionals and politicians from 114 countries. A defining forum came in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo in 2000, held at the instigation of a television journalist Senad Kamenica, who had been deeply disturbed by the bias in local media reporting. He maintained that journalists had contributed to ethnic tensions and so had been more responsible for deaths than weapons had during the Balkan conflict.

The conference marked the birth of the Sarajevo Commitment, a statement of professional and ethical practice that journalists were

encouraged to sign. It carried the proclamation: "We shall combine freedom with responsibility, talent with humility, privilege with service, comfort with sacrifice and concern with courage . . . We realise that change in society begins with change in ourselves."

Jay Rosen, Professor of Journalism at New York University and the father of what has come to be known as community journalism, described the Sarajevo Commitment as "a document of historic importance", while Roger Parkinson, president of the World Association of Newspapers, said the ICF "put the issue of the effects of the media on society on the global agenda".

Porter was more modest about its achievements. He simply wanted journalists to think more about the wider impact of what they wrote and how they wrote it. But there was no doubting his commitment. Describing himself as "a lapsed agnostic", he said: "When I decided to take this road, I experienced a sense of inner compulsion that has never left me. Where does it come from, if not from some superior guiding force in the universe?"

William Erasmus Porter was born in the Essex village of Chapel, the son of a farmer who later became a postman and baker. He studied social science at the University of Liverpool, completing his degree after the war in which he served as a lieutenant, first in North Africa, then in Italy with the Eighth Army and finally in India, an experience that led to a lifetime love of India and its people.

At the end of the war Porter was about to take up a job with a regional daily paper when he joined a distant cousin from Lancashire who was involved in the postwar reconciliation work of Moral Re-Armament (MRA, now Initiatives of Change). He worked to improve industrial relations, particularly in the French textile industry and became a close friend of Maurice Mercier, a former militant communist and leader of the wartime French resistance who helped to found France's democratic trade union movement Force Ouvrière.

Porter's work with MRA took him back to India for four years, from 1955 to 1959, where he freelanced for newspapers such as the *Scotsman*, the *Indian Express* and the International Labour News Service in the US. Returning to Europe, he broke with MRA over a disagreement about its aims and tactics. It was to be 35 years before Porter revisited the MRA centre in Caux, Switzerland.

His years as a freelance journalist took him to Tito's Yugoslavia, where he ended up in Rijeka, a key port on the Yugoslav (now Croatian) coast. His city guide and interpreter was an attractive red-haired woman, Sonja Aleksic. "My priorities steadily shifted away from the pursuit of the story to the pursuit of the lady," Porter recalled. They married in 1962.

Sonja had twice been sentenced to death in her late teens and early

twenties, first under the occupying Nazis, and then under the Yugoslav communist regime for being "an enemy of the people". Porter later paid tribute to her fierce independence of spirit. He said: "To survive such an experience without bitterness, to keep an open heart and a positive and cheerful outlook is a triumph of the human spirit."

Porter brought his new bride and son to London, where he became the marketing director for John Grant's Eurobooks Ltd, travelling to bookshops and university libraries all over Europe. Then, at the age of 50, he was taken on by the Dutch publishing multinational, Kluwer, Europe's largest law publishers, who were looking to expand into Britain. In 1984 Porter became deputy chairman of Kluwer UK.

The following year, he was appointed chairman of the Law Panel of the (UK) Publishers Association and deputy chairman of Publishers' Databases, a company set up to pioneer and encourage electronic publishing. Porter retired from Kluwer in 1988 and set up his own publishing consultancy, before founding the ICF in 1991.

It was not just the media's obsession with sex and scandal that worried him, but also a conviction that the media had a crucial role in building a free and just society, yet rarely turned the searchlight on itself.

At conference after conference, he stood up and voiced his thoughts, in the simple and unpretentious language that came naturally to him, expanding on his ideas in his autobiography, *Do Something About It – A Media Man's Story*. He was a listener as well as an advocate, and keenly interested in what practising journalists – particularly young ones – had to contribute. He managed to combine the seriousness with which he viewed his mission with a wry sense of humour. He is survived by his adopted son.

Bill Porter, reporter, publisher and campaigner for higher standards in journalism. He was born on July 21, 1920. He died on April 1, 2009, aged 88.

BILL PORTER: PUBLISHER AND MEDIA ETHICS CAMPAIGNER

Michael Smith

While many retired business executives might take to the golf course or join bridge parties, Bill Porter found his life taking off in an altogether different direction. He was already 70, and with a lifetime's career in journalism and publishing behind him, when he launched the International Communications Forum, a global media ethics campaign, in 1991.

He founded ICF out of his passionate concern about the media's influence on society for good or ill – and a conviction that he had been too often motivated by personal success and the bottom line. He chaired ICF for the next 14 years, as it gained a global following of over 2,500 media professionals from 116 countries. In many ways, the ICF was for Porter the crowning fulfilment of a distinguished publishing career.

Porter had founded the British arm of the Dutch legal publishing multinational Kluwer in 1970, heading its expansion into Britain as managing director of Kluwer Publishing. It eventually widened into 14 companies and imprints and in 1984 he was appointed deputy chairman of Kluwer UK.

Elected as chairman of the Law Panel of the Publishers Association in 1985, he supported Salman Rushdie's freedom of expression during the furore surrounding *The Satanic Verses*. But the panel also urged publishers to be more careful in the future. Porter agreed with Zaki Badawi, then chairman of the Imams and Mosques Council of Britain, who said he would not oppose Rushdie's book if some pages were expressed in more moderate language. Had senior executives at Rushdie's publishers taken heed, the whole affair might never have arisen, Porter believed.

It was issues like this that led Porter to launch ICF, three years after his retirement. Another impetus was an article in the *Financial Times* stating that communications was the largest industry in the world. Yes, Porter reflected, but are we the most responsible?

"If you are thinking that way," his Yugoslav wife, Sonja asked, "then why don't you do something about it?" Three weeks later, Sonja died tragically young due to undiagnosed hepatitis, and this also spurred Porter to act in her memory. *Do Something About It!* (2005) became the title of his autobiography.

ICF was launched in Caux, Switzerland in 1991 and has since held nearly 30 conferences at venues around the world. Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, of the University of Illinois, wrote that Porter "loved the media but demanded high standards from it...with such charm that editors the world over thanked him for his pressure".

The ICF is most noted for its Sarajevo Commitment, a statement of best practice which media professionals are encouraged to sign. It was launched in 2000, after a Bosnian Muslim radio journalist invited Porter to organise an ICF event in the Bosnian capital. Senad Kamenica had been incensed by the reporting bias of local Bosnian Serb and Croat journalists, which had whipped up ethnic tensions before the outbreak of the Balkans war of 1992-95.

The document, translated into 17 languages, has made a considerable impact. Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University, compared it with Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. The former BBC newsreader Martyn Lewis became another keen advocate, while *The Times* columnist Magnus Linklater now chairs ICF's British chapter. Others were more sceptical about its overt idealism. But Roger Parkinson, president of the World Association of Newspapers, said that the ICF "had put the issue of the effects of the media on society on the global agenda".

Martin Bell, the former BBC war correspondent, wrote: "Bill Porter was an inspirational figure and the moving spirit behind the Sarajevo Commitment of September 2000, which set out a much-needed declaration of principles for journalists. It was in that city during the Bosnian War that we came to understand that we did not just reflect, but affect, the world around us. We had responsibilities as well as rights. The Sarajevo Commitment is the best statement of those realities that I know."

Porter was always keen to avoid calls for censorship, but liked to describe the ICF as a "conscience-to-conscience" activity. Media professionals were encouraged to exchange experiences and reflect for themselves on the balance between freedom and responsibility in the media. The conscience, Porter maintained, was the best guide to professional responsibility. "[It is] that remarkable piece of high technology that is inside us," he said, "albeit often covered over with the compromises of a lifetime, but which enables us to choose right from wrong, truth from falsehood."

Bill Porter was born on a farm in East Anglia in 1920 and grew up in Lancashire. At Liverpool University his search for a spiritual base in life was "backed into second place by my devotion to worldly success and pretty girls". He served as a lieutenant during the Second World War, in North Africa, Italy and India, where he was a signals officer with the 17th Indian Infantry brigade.

After the war, Porter worked for a spell with the Moral Re-Armament movement, but broke with it over a disagreement about aims and tactics. But he also admitted that he found MRA's emphasis on sexual morality "very restrictive – I was looking forward to my freedom in that respect". Peter Howard, a Beaverbrook columnist who became MRA's leader, told Porter: "You are meant to be a mighty tree, under whose branches many people can

find shelter and purpose." It was to be 35 years before Howard's vision for Porter was realised through the ICF.

Porter spent three years as a freelance journalist, reporting on Tito's Yugoslavia. His city guide and interpreter in the Croatian port of Rijeka was an attractive red-haired woman, Sonja Aleksic. "My priorities steadily shifted away from the pursuit of the story to the pursuit of the lady," Porter wrote. They were married in 1962.

Porter brought Sonja to London, where he became the marketing director for John Grant's Eurobooks Ltd. This involved travelling to bookshops and universities all over Europe. When Grant gave Porter the sack, largely over a misunderstanding, he was taken on by Kluwer.

Large, bluff and jovial, Porter described himself, on his journey towards a faith, as a "lapsed agnostic". Reflecting on the ICF, he said, "When I decided to take this road, I experienced a sense of inner compulsion that has never left me. Where does it come from, if not from some superior guiding force in the universe?"

William Erasmus Porter, publisher and campaigner: born Chapel, Essex, 21 July 1920; married 1962 Sonja Aleksic (one son, one daughter); died Le Touquet, France 1 April 2009.

From the *Independent*, Friday, 10 April 2009 – reproduced with kind permission of the *Independent*.

CHAMPION OF MEDIA ETHICS

John Farquharson

Bill Porter founded the International Communications Forum, a global media ethics campaign, out of his passionate concern about the media's influence on society for good or ill.

Porter, who has died in France at 89, founded the ICF in Switzerland in 1991, after a career in journalism and publishing. He chaired the forum for 14 years, as it gained a following in 116 countries.

Porter had founded the British arm of Kluwer, the Dutch legal publishing firm, in 1970 and led its expansion into Britain. As chairman of the British Publishers Association's law panel, he supported Salman Rushdie's freedom of expression during *The Satanic Verses* affair, although the panel urged that publishers be more careful. Issues like this led Porter to ICF.

The ICF has held 30 conferences around the world, including one in Sydney in 1997, in conjunction with the Australian Press Council. Its Sarajevo Commitment, a declaration of media ethics, was launched in the Bosnian capital in 2000. Porter emphasised the balance between media freedom and responsibility. He opposed censorship, and maintained that conscience was the best guide to responsibility.

After reading that communications was the world's largest industry, Porter had asked whether it was the most responsible. His Yugoslav wife, Sonja, suggested he do something about his concerns. She died three weeks later and he launched ICF in her memory. *Do Something About It!* became the title of his 2005 autobiography.

William Erasmus Porter, born on a farm in East Anglia, England, grew up in Lancashire. At Liverpool University his search for a spiritual base in life was displaced by devotion to worldly success and pretty girls. He was an infantry signals lieutenant during World War II.

Afterwards, he worked as a journalist reporting on Tito's Yugoslavia, where he met red-haired Sonja Aleksic. They were married in 1962. Large, bluff and jovial, Porter described himself as a lapsed agnostic. He regarded ICF as his career's crowning fulfilment. Bill Porter is survived by a son, a daughter and their families.

From the Sydney Morning Herald of 9 April 2009 – reproduced with kind permission of John Farquharson

PART 2

BILL PORTER AND THE WORK OF THE ICF

6

How it all happened: The phenomenon of the ICF

John Carlisle

John Carlisle, Visiting Professor at Sheffield Hallam Business School, in conversation with Hugh Nowell, a Director of ICF, about the fascinating origins of the organisation – and its substantial achievements under the inspiration of Bill Porter

JC: Somewhere along the line you had to state your goal for the organisation, which started out as Bill Porter's idea. He was concerned that the media were not taking seriously their responsibility to society?

HN: Bill's autobiography recounts this succinctly. On page 131, he writes: "We decided to act with the intention of building up a world-wide network of men and women in the media, who believed in ethical values and applied them in their lives, and so would naturally impact their companies and audiences." He wanted to find colleagues who felt the same way as he did, but who up to that point at least had not expressed it or done anything about it – senior people.

He wrote many letters; but with some anxiety in case he got turned down or was laughed at. Four recipients came back and said: We will support you. One was Gordon Graham, formerly President of the Publishers Association in UK. A second was his long-time friend Armand de Malherbe, Vice-Chairman, European Advertising Tripartite.

The first initiative took place at the Caux Conference Centre, Switzerland in 1991. He had just retired in his late sixties as Deputy Chairman of the Kluwer Publishing group, when he was invited to attend a Caux industrial meeting in Switzerland. This was 1989. In the course of this

conference something stirred his imagination. He began to feel that the media in general of which he had been a part, ought to face up to new responsibilities.

On a return visit to Caux in August 1990, he decided to get some friends together who were attending the conference. He outlined his thinking to us, asked our reactions and whether we would give him support. He had come to Caux with his wife, Sonja, who was very ill. While there, he had had this crucial conversation with her in which she challenged him: "If you are thinking this way about the media, do something about it." Tragically, she died within the month and he had to decide whether he would give up this idea or move forward. He told us: "I made a promise, so I will keep my promise."

THE FIRST MEETING IN CAUX

In holding the first meeting in Caux, Bill had the support of Gordon Graham; Rajmohan Gandhi, journalist and biographer of Mahatma Gandhi, his grandfather; and Graham Turner, well-known for his investigative features in the *Daily Telegraph.* In addition Toshiaki Ogasawara, publisher of the *Japan Times*, and television representatives from Russia and Lithuania, gave the first session a wide perspective. It was a fine initial conference at which the International Communications Forum was launched.

One of the outcomes was to have an international event in Le Touquet, Bill's hometown in France. The Mayor of the town, Leonce Deprez, was enthusiastic. It was our job to organise it. Bill wrote out 20 points of needed action – all essential to run an international conference. The Mayor got behind financing the Forum. The Town Hall paid the bills. Bill got use of the Casino, various other facilities and secured a simultaneous translation system. It was a great success – about 70 people came from all over the world. That was February 1992, within a few months of the first Forum in Caux.

Hans van den Broek, Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, sent a message and Olivier Giscard d'Estaing, Vice-Chairman of the European Movement, attended the conference. It was launched as a European-wide movement within the media.

Bill always gave chapter and verse as to why he was doing it. He would explain how he had worked to make himself and his company important and to make money. Whereas these things were valuable, they lacked responsibility for the impact on society. He accepted the fact that this was something where he had failed. He would also submit that he had been

dishonest in a number of practical ways in his handling of affairs. He had passed accounts that he knew were inaccurate. He had allowed false advertising. In describing the purpose of the ICF, he always told this story. It wasn't principles so much as a moral challenge – conscience to conscience. He wanted to encompass the entire media in this change, from music, drama, journalism, television, everything. But journalism became the focus.

JC: What was it that Bill had his finger on?

HN: I think from the very start, he felt that the person who creates and projects a message to society has got a responsibility for its impact on its quality of life, on its thinking. There is the battle for freedom to express what you want, but at the same time there has to be that underlying sense of responsibility. It doesn't matter which area you are talking about; if it is in your heart to do something creative for society then that will show in your work.

CHALLENGE TO ALL PEOPLE IN THE MEDIA

So I would say that Bill at no time decided that he would concentrate on one field rather than another. The challenge was to all the people in the media and we would work with those who came forward and responded. A typical example is the Forum at the *Financial Times*, which led to the most significant action undertaken in the UK in 1999. Under the chairmanship of Lord Nolan, who had headed the commission for standards in public life, a day conference was held at the *Financial Times;* its title: "Public Confidence in the Media". It was attended by 100 senior media leaders in UK, including eight editors of national papers/journals.

It arose out of a series of providential steps. John Albert, an experienced PR consultant, was aware of the concern felt by David Bell, chairman of the *FT*, regarding media accountability in the life of Britain. David arranged a series of luncheons at the *FT* where a dozen or so well known personalities in the media could discuss relevant ethical issues in a discreet ambience. It became apparent that there were grounds to have a wider public conference on these matters. David offered the superb facilities of the *FT* overlooking the Thames for such an event.

At that moment, Lord Chalfont, a former Minister of Defence, had tabled a debate in the House of Lords on the theme of the impact of the media on democracy. This led to a luncheon with John Albert and Robin Williamson, Deputy Chairman of Context Ltd, informing Lord Chalfont of David's offer to sponsor a conference.

An evening meeting took place in the home of Lord Chalfont in Ashley Gardens, with an invited group of veteran journalists known to him. A committee was formed and met on several occasions to plan the conference. Six sessions of one hour were identified. Each session had four panellists and a chair. The time frame was adhered to strictly. Participants stayed to the end. A BBC Commissioner commented that she had no idea that so many senior people shared this concern. Those wishing to take the matter forward met on several occasions after this.

Two material developments can be cited. David Bell later founded the Media Standards Trust. The ICF have developed a productive co-operation with the Next Century Foundation. The latest joint action has been a conference on "The Middle East Peace Process" held in Caux 2009.

BILL PORTER'S APPROACH

John: How did he work with those who stood out and who were his fellow travellers? How did he stay in touch with them, how did he get them to carry on?

HN: Initially in the first years, people who said to him: 'We like what you are doing." "Right," he would say, "and how about having a conference where you are?" And then they were faced with the question of raising the money, because all the Forums would have to be supported by local cash. We were not in a position to sponsor any conferences within the country or within the city. The most we could do was to assist speakers to get to the conference possibly with a fare but even that was marginal. On the whole, the people who undertook the conference had to shoulder the whole load and that was a major, major, challenge. A lot of Bill's time was spent on imaginative thought as to how that person could get their mind around all that had to be done, like raising the money and the organisation.

JC: And running a good conference in other words. Not just getting the money, but making a good conference.

HN: Bill often gave a good steer for the conference title, as he had a good sound-bite type of mind. He could encapsulate in a few words the different themes. Each conference had a different theme. In the first ten years we had at least 24 international conferences – more than two a year.

JC: Where did you have your conference in Russia?

HN: Nizhni Novgorod in 1993. It was old Gorky, the hidden city. It

happened through the good offices of an academic, Dr Bella Gribcova, who came to Caux. She invited us. We got to know her through a chance meeting at the Moscow Book Fair in 1989. We formed a friendship.

SPONSORSHIP OF NEW DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

On the strength of it she decided to visit Caux several times. I remember having a meeting with her in the Caux Renoir Salon together with Bill Porter, and Jean Jacques Odier, publisher and ICF Joint-Secretary. She said you must come to Nizhni Novgorod. We will arrange it. I know the Mayor and the Governor. And so she did and that's how we went to Russia – under the sponsorship of the new democratic leadership.

JC: It's very interesting, so you had your conference, and did anything come out of that conference which has kept the links with Russia?

HN: Yes. One person was Natalya Skvortsova, chairman of the local Union of Journalists covering the Nizhni Novgorod Province. She decided that this was what she wanted to see for her union and her profession in Russia.

JC: In effect, the NUJ of Russia.

HN: From that point on, she started putting the principles and the concepts of ICF into all the training programmes that she was doing in the area. So began our friendship with her which has carried on to this day. She then rose to the national executive of the RUJ as secretary for the country. She would travel abroad arranging conferences and training programmes.

JC: So one of the things that has emerged from this is that Bill was a man of discipline. He had these two attributes: he was a senior executive who knew how to plan, set goals, follow them through and ensure that people also followed them through. But the other side of him began to develop: the pastoral side, the caring for people. The same discipline applied there as well because he would be punctilious in the letter writing and responding.

Underpinning both of those was his other discipline, the inner discipline of a quiet time in the morning, when he'd sit down for ten or fifteen minutes just to get inspiration and that was the man. But to the person who had known Bill before, he hadn't changed much in a sense; he just had a different objective, different goals. He'd still enjoy his food, a good glass of wine and he was very convivial and congenial.

HOW THE ICF ORGANISATION DEVELOPED

So it seems to me that somewhere along the line, the organisation itself had to develop into something slightly bigger, slightly more organised. Can you take me through how that began to take shape? Because initially it was you and Bill if my memory serves me right. Then it began to develop. So how did that actually manifest itself?

HN: Jean Jacques Odier from Geneva was also a team-mate from the very start. He was Joint Secretary for the French-speaking world. Bob Webb, editorial writer for the *Cincinnati Inquirer*, joined us early on. Bill also counted many friends that he knew as his advisors and helpers – Armand de Malherbe in France, Gordon Graham in UK. He would seek their advice at all times, writing them and getting their minds. At one point, Gordon Graham said to him: "I think you will have to regionalise your work, enabling others to push forward the ideas in their areas." These actions later came to be known as chapters. At the same time some more senior figures who were interested became vice presidents responsible for furthering the concepts of ICF in different parts of the world.

JC: All this was unpaid, volunteer activities.

HN: Yes and it was basically Bill's concept. It was around 2000, as you will read in Bill's book, that Bernard Margueritte was becoming increasingly part of the picture. He is French, a journalist, married to a Pole, living in Warsaw; he was there for 35 years covering the life and the ending of the communist state in Poland.

Bernard recalls that around this time, Bill spoke to him at some length to convince him that he should continue his work. It was agreed that Bernard should become the president and Bill would be called the founder president. Bernard has made a significant contribution to the action of ICF action by engaging the enthusiastic support of senior media leaders world-wide, particularly in America, India and South Africa. Through him the Soros Foundation supported Forums in Sarajevo and South Africa. The foundations for a Forum were also laid in Lebanon, only to be thwarted by the assassination of key figures in the country. Bernard continues to be our lead figure attending world journalist conferences.

Also at this time Robin Williamson offered to assist us. He was in the publishing world; particularly in databases, recording European Law on CD-ROM. He built up Context Ltd, becoming deputy chairman of the company. And he said to Bill one day: "Maybe I could take over some of the work that Hugh's been doing." So he then became Executive Director and I

was quite happy to be a team member with him in our London office.

That was the structure that began to develop with Bernard as the president, Bill as the founder president, a series of vice presidents, a number of representatives around the world and an office here in London. For the first ten years, John Rose, a chartered accountant in a well established company here in London, did all our accounts without charge. A very big service. However, by 1999 it became clear that we'd simply had to have our own company; so we set up ICF Ltd.

LAUNCHING OF THE SARAJEVO COMMITMENT

JC: ICF now had a presence, an identity, which was vital for the launching of the Sarajevo Agreement. How did you manage to get the Sarajevo Agreement and where did it start?

HN: It started in 1999 at a Forum in Ireland. One speaker who came to it was journalist Senad Kamenica from Bosnia. Senad expressed the wish to have a Forum in Sarajevo. Sarajevo had been a dark spot on the continent of Europe during the war. He believed that it could become a beacon of hope for Europe. There was another colleague there from Poland, Jan Pieklo, a journalist, who had been running supplies into Bosnia during the war. They felt that together they could mount an effective Forum in Sarajevo, possibly in the Holiday Inn, the base for foreign journalists during the conflict. I remember seeing Bill and Senad sitting down together sketching out a statement of how journalism should develop and be a beacon for the journalists of Central and Eastern Europe.

The statement was brought to Sarajevo with the specific intent of getting the affirmation of all those who came from Central and Eastern Europe to it. It was carefully planned that the draft should be available to everybody at the start of the conference. Participants gave their input, the document was refined and presented to everyone on the last session. The Sarajevo Forum took place in September 2000.

JC: Senad, like Bella Gribcova, was central to this It was proof of Bill's method/concept.

HN: Bernard went with Senad to Sarajevo and together they got the Forum organised. They secured the venue and got the backing of the Bosnia Herzegovina government. The government offered services as did many others to make it possible. The invitation was then sent to all media outlets likely to be interested in Central and Eastern Europe. That brought 189 people together,

the majority of whom were from Eastern and Central Europe.

JC: The final version of the Sarajevo Commitment was completed and signed by all present including journalists from many continents.

HN: Yes. The head of the Bosnian Independent Journalists Association was the first to sign it at the last meeting.

MORE THAN JUST A TICK-BOX EXERCISE

JC: Following that, I come to my next question, my reservations. As an academic observer of industry, some of the things that I have great reservations about are corporate governance statements and the round tables. As honourable as they are, my experience has been that they are very much tick-box exercises that gives the executive board a feeling of comfort but nothing really changes because there has been no change in the leadership. Now what was your strategy after that to deploy the Sarajevo Commitment to create real change? You have now put the message out, you have now raised consciences, you have now touched hearts. What was the strategy or was there one?

HN: We had a clear direction, but it would be right to say that the task has only just begun. We took comfort from the words of Roger Parkinson, who was the chairman of the World Association of Newspapers and a publisher of the *Toronto Globe and Mail.* He said: "In my view, the first ten years of the ICF have put the issue of media responsibility on the world agenda." We considered that to be a considerable achievement in itself and one mark of success.

JC: That was nearly ten years ago.

HN: It was. In the past years the emphasis has been in two directions: expanding geographically the reach of the ICF to Asia and Africa before moving into South America and secondly to help build chapters to decentralise the work of the ICF such as in UK, Poland, India and shortly South Africa and others. In this period, I can highlight several actions:

THE GLOBAL REACH OF ICF

There was a major Forum in South Africa in 2003. We had valuable sponsorship from SA Telkom, and the Soros Foundation. Media

professionals came from 17 sub-Saharan countries. A big advance was made in India in 2006, partnering with the Foundation for Good Governance in New Delhi. This has been followed in Panchgani, India, by participation with the Caux Initiatives of Business in 2006 and 2007. Action is in process in New Delhi to start an Indian chapter. ICF America is now a registered not-for-profit company with significant action in Washington, in co-operation with the National Press Club's international representatives and freedom of the press committees.

Over the last decade, Bob Webb has had repeated meetings with Ukrainian journalists and leaders of Schools of Journalism both in their country and Washington. A Polish chapter is developing subject to financial support. Building the confidence and strength of fellow thinkers has been a continuing aim. Bill's constant stream of letters to colleagues has played an important role as we can now see from the 50,000 sheets in Bill's archival files.

The travelling seminar programme started in UK to Schools of Journalism has a clear aim. It opens the minds of another generation of media professionals to hear from veteran journalists the challenges of implementing ethical principles. It will continue.

We are finding partnership with other organisations. With the Next Century Foundation under the leadership of William Morris, we have been able to support the role of the media in encouraging conflict resolution. This book, *Media Values*, was originally suggested by Roger Parkinson during Bill Porter's last visit to Canada. Bill mapped out the contents a month before he died. In this book, the experience and conviction of Bill's many media colleagues are now permanently available and can remain a continuing inspiration to the media world into the future.

7

Lessons learned at the Sarajevo congress

Grigory Gundarin

Grigory Gundarin describes his unforgettable experience of attending a conference organised by the International Communications Forum that highlighted the role of the journalist in ethnic conflicts

I first participated in the activities of the International Communications Forum (ICF) in 2000 when a group of journalists from Nizhny Novgorod was invited to take part in one its events in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia.

The congress proved to be an unforgettable event for me, both in terms of being able to communicate with my colleagues from other countries and in terms of understanding the profoundness and complexity of the problem of ethnic conflicts in different parts of the world and, in particular, in Russia.

In those days, Sarajevo was much talked about. It was not by chance that the congress was held in the capital of now independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, which then was a destroyed city: discussions about ethnic conflicts became more acute and tragic against the background of bullet-ridden houses, the burnt and destroyed building of the local parliament.

For us Russian journalists, those talks were of special concern as we considered the unstable situations in a number of former republics of the USSR, fruitless attempts to establish a constructive dialogue for dividing power between territories and the centre – and the need for a new concept of the role of man in a multi-cultural society.

Much in the city was shocking; some of the most striking and horrible things we still remember were the so-called "Sarajevo roses" – scarlet spots on the grey asphalt pavements marked places where people had been killed during the Sarajevo conflict. It did not matter whether the killed man took

part in fighting or happened to be a victim of terrible circumstances: man's life was the price paid because people and authorities failed to set up a constructive dialogue, and the mass media only helped fuel the conflict...

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MASS MEDIA

What lessons did we learn and what conclusions did we draw after several days of communicating with our colleagues, listening to reports and discussing acute problems behind the scenes of the congress? We understood that the role and responsibility of the mass media in general and of the journalist in particular have never been so big: journalists may often incite ethnic conflicts: quite often hot debates on newspaper pages and lively discussions in TV studios provoke aggression in the streets. The requirements of journalists set out in the Sarajevo Commitment are still relevant to the present day.

The journalists' congress left many issues unresolved: we often failed to find a common language, to agree on a uniform approach to the problems under discussion or to simply understand one another. Most importantly, however, is that all, or almost all, participants were sincere in their attempts to find solutions to the complex conflicts between people of different nationalities, cultures and faiths. That was the most important achievement of the organisers of the event, a lesson for all to learn.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Grigory Gundarin is a professional journalist, editor-in-chief of the publishing house Gazetny Mir (Nizhny Novgorod) and a member of the Union of Journalists of Russia. The publishing house issues more than a hundred newspapers and magazines to all regions of Russia and in Belarus. Newspapers and magazines from the publishing house cover a wide range of topical issues: such as the family, women's problems, design, fashion, health and life-style. Many publications are aimed at children.

8

How the media can be the heralds of a "new world order"

Henry F. Heald

Henry F. Heald argues that the International Communications Forum presents a challenge to all communicators to face the impure motivations in their lives and practise the moral values necessary to root out greed and hatred in the world

I grew up in a literary family. My maternal grandmother wrote short stories and poetry. My mother was a voracious reader and surrounded herself with the best of classical and contemporary literature. Her diary entries and the hundreds of letters she pounded out on her little portable typewriter were works of literary merit. My eldest brother became a high school English teacher. My widowed grandmother lived with us for a few years when I was a child. On rainy days we would play a game she called "Post Office". Every family member would write a letter to every other member. Grandma's were often in verse.

In my mind I automatically assumed that one day I would become a writer. English was my favourite subject. I wrote stories and poems for the *Oracle* – the High School year book – and was the editor in my final year at school. My goal was to become a newspaper reporter.

Fate took an interesting turn, however, and my journalism training took place over almost ten years of public relations work for an international non-governmental organisation. During those years I had the opportunity to write for magazines and newspapers, and to compose press releases about international conferences and activities, all under the mentoring of some very dynamic and professional journalists, including Peter Howard, of England, and Adela Rogers St. John, of the United States. I was also

challenged by the vision of Dr. Frank Buchman who saw the press as "heralds of a new world order". Buchman's "new world order" was not cast in the frame of propaganda for any particular political or religious dogma. Rather he saw the role of the media as presenting the world news in the context of moral values that were essential for global society to mature in freedom and dignity.

BUCHMAN'S VISION FOR THE MEDIA

When the time came to move into the world of public mass media, I found I was adequately trained for the job as a newspaper reporter and Buchman's vision for the media stayed with me as a bulwark against pressures to compromise that all young journalists face.

My career included several years as city editor of the *Evening News*, a daily newspaper in the Niagara Peninsula based in the industrial city of Welland, Ontario, four years with Canada's national news agency, the Canadian press, as a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery in Ottawa, and eight years with the *Ottawa Journal*, one of two dailies in the national capital. There were a few interruptions as I undertook various government public relations jobs. One was to head a team of four trained journalists writing communications for the federal Department of Agriculture. Another was to edit the rules and regulations for Canada's wage and price controls under the Anti-Inflation Board.

When the *Ottawa Journal* died in1980 I spent a year writing speeches for the Minister of Agriculture and then established my own freelance reporting business. That, too, was interrupted in 1985 when I was invited to join the Public Affairs Branch of the Canadian International Development Agency where I spent six years before going back to freelance writing.

My experience in the Parliamentary Press Gallery led me into agriculture reporting, a field I found so fascinating that I made it the major focus of my career for the rest of my life. I joined the Eastern Canadian Farm Writers Association (ECFWA) and the Canadian Farm Writers Federation and served as president of both. I am now an honorary life member of the ECFWA and the Ontario Institute of Agrologists.

So it was near the end of a long career that I bumped into Bill Porter and the International Communications Forum (ICF) and offered to serve as the Canadian representative. Bill's challenge paralleled that of Frank Buchman which I had accepted some 40 years earlier. I not only had the opportunity to take part in several of ICF's international forums, including one in Canada, but I also was privileged to host Bill on several personal visits to Canada. He came to Canada twice in the last two years of his life, invited by

Canadian Muslim leaders who saw in his message and in his life, strong support for inter-cultural unity and cooperation.

THE EXPERIENCE THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

It was also near the end of my career that I had an experience that changed my life. One day I wrote something that was deeply hurtful to two very dear friends. One of them challenged me on it and I had to sit back and ponder how I could have done such a hateful thing. I was forced to admit that it was sheer, naked arrogance. I had to recognise that I was not God's gift to journalism and I did not have free rein to write whatever I felt like regardless of who got hurt in the process. I apologised to my friends who graciously forgave me and our friendships were restored.

I've had to learn all over again that words are powerful, and none more powerful than the written word. They need to be treated with care. I had to think more carefully of the potential impact of the words I use. Much of the reason why the media has contributed to the disruption of society in the world is not evil intent, but simply ignorance and arrogance in the use of words.

All kinds of writing are necessary in a mature society – investigative reporting, commentary, analysis, humour, satire – there is even room for some tastefully presented erotica. But the corner stone of the mass media must always be honest, responsible balanced reporting of hard news. That is the foundation of democracy; the bricks and mortar of a healthy, sustainable society. How can people know how to interact with their fellow human beings if they don't know what is going on in the world, in their nation, in their community?

When I joined the *Evening Tribune* in 1959 it had been recently purchased by Thomson Newspapers. The original managers were still there, however, with their strong ethic for community service. We covered Welland City Council and several municipal councils in surrounding townships, along with school boards, service clubs, Chambers of Commerce, unions and other organisations – anything that was of interest for a reasonable segment of the population. We would even cover church services if a popular preacher was in town. A network of part-time stringers kept the paper supplied with news of bridge parties, Scout and Guide meetings and all sorts of social events.

Court sessions were held once a week in Welland and neighbouring Port Colborne. They were open to the public and we covered them even-handedly. Anyone who appeared to answer charges got his/her name in the paper. The paper played no favourites. The loudest complaint I received was

from an irate gentleman whose son had appeared on impaired driving charges. My reporter had neglected to include the offender's age and the caller wanted to make sure the readers knew it was his son and not him.

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE OF THE COMMUNITY

The role of the social conscience of the community has fallen by the wayside for many newspapers, particularly in the larger cities. Big city dailies have chosen instead to play the role of Leader of the Opposition to all levels of government and to supplement that with entertainment-style features – favourable or unfavourable – on socialites and the rich and famous.

Where a three paragraph story used to be adequate to inform readers of the conviction or acquittal of a minor criminal, today that gets expanded into a full page feature complete with biography, quotes from family and lawyers, baby pictures – not to mention a measure of psychological analysis. The reason seems to be the perceived need to compete with radio and television for audience entertainment. The written equivalent of watching a TV reporter stick a microphone in the face of a mother whose child has just been killed by a drunk driver and ask "How do you feel?"

Keeping the local citizenry informed of the nuts and bolts of what is happening in their community – amateur sports and entertainment, construction projects, activities of service clubs, school and churches and so on – has fallen to a loose network of regional free handouts, sometimes circulated by the major daily or more often in pickup boxes on street corners and bus stops.

Is it any wonder that many young people today have given up on the print media and rely on their computers, their cell phones or their Blackberries for the news they want to read? My years of covering the food and agriculture sector gave me a good opportunity to experience the failure of the mass media to present balanced news coverage for the general public. Until a century ago primary food production was the major industry in virtually every country in the world. As late as 1940 in Canada 60 per cent of the work force was involved in primary agriculture and forestry. That is still the case in many poorer countries in the world. Today in North America that has dwindled to about 3 per cent, due to revolutionary advances in technology.

WHY URBAN MEDIA LARGELY IGNORE THE FARMERS

The result is that farmers have become too small a voice in politics to capture

the attention of most of the urbanised population. There was a time when nearly everyone living in a city could point back to a farm connection within one or two generations. Country folk were often favoured for leadership positions because of their commonsense approach to problems and their strong moral ethics. That is no longer the case and the urban media ignore the farmers unless farmers get frustrated enough to drive their tractors and combines onto Parliament Hill to demand help.

A small cadre of specialty magazines and newspapers serve the farm community but they have become more and more isolated from their urban counterparts. The processing, handling and marketing of food beyond the farm gate have been taken over by a handful of multinational corporations and has become part of the urban industrial complex.

Farmers scratch their heads and wonder how a journalist who consumes 2,000 to 3,000 calories of food every day can be so blasé about where it comes from. Even the Minister of Agriculture, no matter how sympathetic he or she may be to the needs of farmers, becomes isolated in the midst of a Cabinet full of ministers with other issues on their minds. When the Minister of Transport has a problem, he can find allies in the Minister of Industry, the Minister of Labour and the Finance Minister, but the Minister of Agriculture is alone.

Nowhere is the need for honest, balanced reporting and intelligent commentary and analysis more necessary than in the rural communities. Farmers rely on the media for the facts that guide them in their production decisions. They also rely on thoughtful interpretation of local, national and world events to be able to play their part in sustaining a sound political and ecological environment.

The explosion of mass media from the weekly newspaper to today's 24/7 flood of information from print and electronic sources, has been the promoter of all the revolutionary changes in society. But the media has failed to do the analysis – even the self-analysis – to warn of the dangerous and risky side effects.

BILL PORTER'S CONCEPT OF MEDIA RESPONSIBILITY

Bill Porter's concept of media responsibility parallels Frank Buchman's vision of "the press as heralds of a new world order". Greed has become the chief motivator for business and international affairs with blame as the standard response when things go wrong. It is clearly unsustainable for a global society as philosophers from Plato to Jesus to Nelson Mandela have been telling us for centuries. Cooperation, compassion and humility are the road to a sustainable planetary environment and society. How will people

ever learn that if the media don't tell them? Frank Buchman discovered that when he realised that hatred of the men who flouted his aims was controlling his life. Bill Porter discovered it when he realised that success and money had been the motives of his business activities for most of his life.

The International Communications Forum was a challenge to communicators of all types of media to face the impure motivations in their lives and practise the moral values that are necessary to root out greed and hatred in the world.

Good news stories are just as important as bad news stories. Reports of the good that creative people are doing are just as newsworthy as reports of the evil being done by the bad guys. A news report highlighting a problem is never complete until it includes information about what is being done to solve the problem.

Everyone is shocked when a journalist is killed for telling the truth. But how much truth dies at the hands of wealthy advertisers, backroom politicians, the personal peccadilloes of media owners and the petty prejudices and fears of individual journalists? Freedom of the press makes a good rallying cry. But the press can only be as free as the men and women who work in it.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Henry F. Heald was a journalist from 1959 to 1965 on the *Evening Tribune*, Welland, Ontario. From in 1966 he was a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, for the Canadian Press, Ottawa, moving in 1970 to the *Ottawa Journal*. In 1975, he moved to the Anti-Inflation Board, Ottawa, where he was Editor for English Regulations and Chief of Media Relations. From 1976 to 1980, he was a district reporter for the *Ottawa Journal*. In 1981, he was appointed speech writer for Agriculture Minister Eugene Whelan. Then, from 1985 to 1991 he worked at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) as Information Officer responsible for Western Canada and the Asia Branch. Since 1991 he has been a freelance writer and Canadian representative for the International Communications Forum (ICF).

9

Why the ICF's Sarajevo Commitment of 2000 remains so relevant in today's world of information overload

John Munro

John Munro looks back on his long and varied career in communications and stresses how he has always pushed against the old Fleet Street tag: "Anything positive is propaganda; anything negative is news"

Looking back, I think I was always interested in communication, and my first lesson in ethics came from the Scout Law, summed up in the jingle: *Trusty, loyal, helpful, brotherly, courteous, kind; obedient, cheerful, thrifty, pure in body and mind.* I seem to have had a passion for producing magazines – my first at age 12 was for my Swift patrol in the Scouts.

I was catapulted into advertising at 14, whilst the war was still on. I'd won a scholarship to Epsom County School at ten, and expected to stay until 18, and then go to university. But payments to my foster mother ceased, and she told me: "My son had to start work at 14, so I don't see why you shouldn't." So I went to the Labour Exchange and said I wanted to be a commercial artist. They fixed me with a job as a routing boy at JWT in Berkeley Square, in London – the best ad agency in the world! I learned my trade, becoming an assistant production controller before being called up into the RAF.

My first wage was £2 a week, and 25 bob went for my keep. Most of the rest went on fares. Lunches at the British Restaurant cost 10d for the main meal and 4d for pud, when I could afford them. At 17 I launched *Chinwag* for our youth club. In the RAF I designed posters for the camp cinema. On demob I became a layout artist with Grant Advertising. After 18 months I was invited to go around the cities of UK with *The Forgotten Factor*, a play that helped bring solutions to the increasing industrial strife around in the

early fifties. I asked myself, "Am I going to spend the rest of my life struggling to sell more Gold Flake cigarettes and Palmolive shampoo? Or does MRA offer me a way to make a difference in the world?"

That eventually led to a job with Blandford Press, designing publicity, books and jackets, as well as ads for their trade magazines. A wonderfully rich six years followed. Then I moved on to OUP as production manager for their Overseas Educational department. After a year and a half I escaped London to Edinburgh, to *sell* the wares I'd been making. I felt there was a glut of books, but not enough effort made to market them. However, after six months I joined Thomas Nelson, to produce publicity for their primary schoolbooks.

One morning the radio told me that Lord Thomson had bought Nelsons. He moved us down to London; I hated the idea, but succumbed to the offer of a 50 per cent rise and promotion to editor. But after three years back in the capital I finally decided that I was struggling to turn third-rate manuscripts into at best second-rate books, to pour on to an already saturated market. Schools no longer wanted to see reps; they were overwhelmed with burgeoning series.

"I WANTED TO WORK WITH PEOPLE RATHER THAN PAPER"

I wanted to work with people rather than paper, and went off to a teacher training college, to teach the kids I'd been making books for. I ended up looking after mentally-handicapped children (in the terminology of the day), and that led to formal training in social work at Ruskin College, Oxford.

Now, to cut to the chase. After three years training, followed by five years intensive work with clients from cradle to grave with W. Sussex Social Services, I found on my desk one morning a letter from the deputy director asking if I could start a house journal. We had 2,500 staff scattered in 125 locations, and needed to meld them together, giving information, aiding involvement and their sense of identity. I jumped at the chance, on one day a week, and later it won "Best House journal" award. But after three years I was besieged with requests for brochures and booklets for clients. So, I became full-time Publications Officer, and my fourth career was a totally unexpected combination of my first three. I was publishing information for the public which had often been withheld to assist in rationing scarce resources. I pioneered a department with staff taken on under the Community Programme, which won national awards. We set up SSIN, the Social Services Information Network, to assist the other 42 local authorities in the developing need for professionally produced client information across the nation.

Back when I was 22 I had reluctantly surrendered control of my life to God, and he told me that night that I would have "a life of iron discipline yet deep contentment". Not a rosy future for a lad to look forward to, but ever since I've made time before breakfast to pray and listen for his direction. It's been rocky at times, with much stress untying the tangles my birth and childhood produced. But though I haven't made a lot of money I do feel I've been guided at crucial times by a hidden hand, as my working life and relationships bundled along. And no way could I have planned my fourth career – the most satisfying of all.

BECOMING EDITOR OF THE PARISH MAGAZINE

At my local church I naturally became editor of the parish magazine. After ten years the thought came to me one morning: "You and your communications team are the 'elite preaching to the elite'. Why not drop the magazine (we sold about 350) and produce one for all three churches in the town, with one third devoted to matters spiritual, and two thirds to matters temporal, and distribute it free to every home and business (about 3,500)?"

I approached the other two churches. The editor of one replied: "My magazine either needs the kiss of life or a coffin." He came on the editorial board of what became the *Bell.* The mayor paid for a page each quarter, as did the District Council, who told me they were glad to be able to communicate directly to the public. To my surprise, the County Council also wanted a page, and when my advertising manager sold all the allotted 20 per cent of space for the whole year ahead of publication (a record, with 44 advertisers in the first issue) I knew we were on to a winner! It's still going, 15 years later.

After I retired I was asked by our local newspaper to write a weekly diary for the town. I enjoyed that for seven years. It often presented me with a challenge to report the town council's doings fairly, keeping my own prejudices and preferences in the background – especially during the five-year campaign to re-open our Lido. I had to resist the temptation to sensationalise, to titillate, or attract approval for my writing.

I recall making a wish not so much to produce new publications, but to change the content of what people already read. In that I have failed miserably; I never got to edit the *Mirror* or the *Sun*! Piers Morgan once told an interviewer how he hated waking up each morning thinking "What can I be outraged about today?" I've always pushed against the old Fleet Street tag: "Anything positive is propaganda; anything negative is news".

MEETING BILL PORTER AT THE SARAJEVO CONFERENCE

I was lucky enough to be asked to photograph a conference of media professionals in Sarajevo in 2000. I first met Bill Porter there, and was impressed by the way he gathered the disparate speakers together. Out of that "bruised and beautiful" city came the Sarajevo Commitment, signed by most of the journalists and broadcasters who attended. I particularly remember: "*We shall be working to raise up and not to drag down. We shall challenge our politicians to work for the next generation and not the next election, encourage our governments to make agreements which are effective in people's hearts as well as on paper; and stimulate our business, industrial and labour leaders to meet the material needs of humankind with fairness and equity.*"

Now ten years on, the internet runs riot over so many good intentions. It also adds a colossal addition to the outpouring of news and views. I suffer from info-overload, and have to be careful not to explode. I'm so sorry for the people who pour out their hearts and minds to produce the plethora of publications that inevitably reduces the readership of each contribution. The scramble for attention tempts us all to push the boundaries; I have to work hard to stick to the ethical standards that I committed myself to in Sarajevo.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

From 1950-1951, John Munro worked for Grant Advertising. After two years with Moral Rearmament, he worked for a number of publishers up until 1966 including Blandford Press, Oxford University Press and Thomas Nelson. From 1968 to 1970 he was involved in social work training at Ruskin College, Oxford. After three years with West Sussex Social Services, he was publications officer for WSCC, editor of the *Bell*, Arundel, and from 2003 to 2009 production manager of John Faber Books.

THE SARAJEVO COMMITMENT

At the beginning of the 21st Century men and women of the media register their commitment to integrity and public service.

We, men and women of the media – professionals at all levels, from publishers and producers to cub reporters and students of journalism; from the print and digital media, television and radio, book publishing, cinema and theatre, advertising and public relations, music and the performing and creative arts – met here in the bruised, historic and beautiful city of Sarajevo, pay our homage and respect to the millions of humanity whom we inform, entertain and educate.

We look back on a century of brilliance and bloodshed, of amazing technological advance and distressing human misery, of mobility and isolation and of healing and hatred. A century in which two world wars emanated from the so-called advanced and civilised continent of Europe. A century in which we split the atom, but left families, communities and nations divided. A century which ended with some 30 unresolved major conflict situations.

We accept that we in the media, whilst talent and technology enabled us to reach the lives of almost every last person in the world, were not able to create the climate in which problems were solved, conflicting groups and interests reconciled, and peace and justice established.

Now that we confront a new century, many of us, hoping that we interpret the views and feelings of the vast majority of our colleagues, would like to establish a commitment, an undertaking, a pledge, to all those who will live and love and work in these coming hundred years.

We shall inform you to the best of our ability, with clarity and honesty, with independence of mind, of what is truly happening in the world at the level of the individual, the family, the community, the nation and the region. We shall present the facts and explain the facts, and some of us will aim with modesty to interpret them. As we succeed in doing this, we believe that you, the people, will be enabled to make the right decisions, to elect and appoint the best leaders and to build a fair, just and compassionate society.

We seek a world in which everyone cares enough and everyone shares enough so that everyone will have enough; a world in which the work and wealth of the world are available to all at the exploitation of none.

We shall provide the art and entertainment which will inspire, arouse and give hope and a sense of direction to all humanity.

We shall be working to raise up and not to drag down. We shall challenge our politicians to work for the next generation and not the next election, encourage our governments to make agreements which are effective in people's hearts as well as on paper; and stimulate our business, industrial and labour leaders to meet the material needs of humankind with fairness and equity.

We shall work to educate, through all the means of communication, generations who will be able to confront the challenges of their age with competence and vision.

We shall combine freedom with responsibility, talent with humility, privilege with service, comfort with sacrifice and concern with courage. We realise that change in society begins with change in ourselves.

We undertake to apply and demonstrate in our own lives the values that we hope for, and often demand, in others. We shall confront hypocrisy, oppression, exploitation and evil, firstly by our own clarity and straightness and then through the means by which we reach our audiences. We are unlikely to be perfect, but we shall aim to be truthful and free of guile, selfish ambition, perverted behaviour and deception.

We shall not cease to strive until every gun is silent, every injustice righted and every human being enabled to live a life of satisfaction and purpose.

To all these intentions and obligations, we commit ourselves at this time of beginning. May the higher aspirations within us all, be they spiritual, moral or humanistic, enable us to fulfil this commitment.

This document was launched at a World Media Assembly, Sarajevo 2000, and signed by participants on 30 September 2000.

PART 3

ICF PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

10

The press: Providing the protective shield to community interests

John B. Fairfax

John B Fairfax, a director of Fairfax Media, traces the impact of proprietors on newspaper history – and stresses the role of the "fourth estate" as a crucial part of the checks and balances of a robust and dynamic society

By way of background, I am the fifth generation of a media family which had its origins in Warwickshire, UK, in the early part of the 19th century. The John Fairfax, who sailed from England with his wife Sarah and children to arrive in Sydney in 1831, did so because he had been declared bankrupt following a defamation action in the *Leamington Chronicle*, which he owned. He successfully defended the action, but the financial consequences were such that he decided to seek a new life in Australia ultimately becoming the sole proprietor of the *Sydney Herald* (subsequently to become the *Sydney Morning Herald*) in 1841. Although there was no legal requirement to do so, he returned to England in 1852 to repay his creditors – perhaps the first identifiable ethical act by a member of the Fairfax family.

It is not appropriate to trace the ethical credentials and performance of my family, but I will simply say that Bill Porter's inspiration in trying to retain and improve the quality of journalists and journalism around the world and his ingrained ethos of ethics, has left an indelible mark on me. It is a bit like trying to overcome poverty in the Third World. It seems hopeless, but every little bit helps and encourages others.

Australia is a relatively young country, but quite early in our development we established the importance of freedom of the press. On 14 October 1824 when only the *Government Gazette* was published, as a

biased journal of the colonial authorities, the *Australian* newspaper was launched. Amidst the advertisements for West India rum, the editorial stated: "A free press is the most legitimate and ...powerful weapon that can be employed to ... frustrate the designs of tyranny."

And so began what has become a constant within our democracy – a belief that a free press is an essential component of effective government, where the "fourth estate" becomes part of the checks and balances of a robust and dynamic society.

CHANGING MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

One of the very real concerns about the changing media environment is the question of the fourth estate and the part it will play in a democracy. How can the media continue to keep governments and institutions accountable? Imagine there being no newspapers at a time when you have an irresponsible government and a weak opposition. Who applies the pressure? Only newspapers have the resources to do the big stories and provide a protective shield to community interests. (It is estimated that about 85 per cent of the news people receive originates from newspapers.)

Our society, our civilisation, cannot afford to abandon newspapers. The number of closures in the United State over the past two years is disturbing. As Alex Jones, of Harvard University, says: "It's hard to calculate the damage that will be done to society by stories that aren't done." Similarly the economics of the industry have declined substantially making it less attractive to owners with a more commercial philosophy rather than the more traditional one of power and purpose. Circumstances may force this to change.

We all have a conscience and if we see governments acting in a cavalier or abhorrent manner, as citizens and individuals, we react. While ethical standards are often questioned, it was Bill Porter's philosophy that there are enough good people left in the world to want to rectify wrongs; put right what is abused. So a newspaper remains important. If, however, the newspaper is no longer purchased and therefore read, how will we get the message across to a broad spectrum of the population? Who will be society's guardian?

PROVIDING A DIVERSITY OF INTERESTS AND VIEWS

Newspaper ownership has declined. This is not only because of the difficulties of the last few years, both economic and transitional, but also due

to acquisitions by larger companies. This has been a world-wide trend, especially in developed countries. And while governments have been concerned about this concentration of ownership, there is little evidence to indicate that it has been detrimental to communities in providing a diversity of interests and views. Indeed, because of the internet and its reach, there are more views available than ever before. But there remains a question of trust.

So what of media ownership? When we want to make a point, we take someone to lunch, we telephone, we write a letter or now increasingly, we send an email. This is an individual action with a view to making our position clear to a defined audience. The media exists to get messages across to a large section of the population by way of advertisements or editorial. No-one has to be told that there is confusion about the future of getting messages to specific groups of people.

The fact is that while in many ways the impact has been reduced, the internet with all its marvellous technology has enabled messages to be communicated at lightning speed to millions of people who would not otherwise have had access to the information. So from a news and message point of view, this has rendered traditional media, but particularly newspapers, redundant when it comes to breaking news. The computer screen or mobile telephone is taking over, and it is probably naïve to think that this is going to be subject to the pendulum theory, where things go so far and swing back.

Undoubtedly the media industry is undergoing monumental change due to the internet and its associated technology. It is hardly surprising that virtually all media owners are in a quandary about the future. Similar concerns about newspapers were expressed when the telegraph was introduced to communications in 1845. We have to work out new ways of commercialising our assets and determine just why we are in media. We will need to recognise that the margins and returns will be nothing like the past unless we can provide a product that appeals to the changing habits of consumers. And nobody knows what that is. It may still be newspapers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUSTING INFORMATION SOURCES

Today most people lead lives that revolve around communities, many of which are quite small, but which are nonetheless important to our lives. While we have seen the expansion of globalisation, we have also seen a reversion to our tribal instincts; back to our comfort zone, where we deal with people we know and people we trust. This then is where our information sources become important. We need to know them, understand them and above all trust them.

Cities are the classrooms of humanity with all its complexities. Rural and regional Australia is the playground of goodness brought to fruition through hardship and perseverance that so characterises our country's legendary identity. The relative ethics and decency of country people was a major reason for my family investing in Rural Press in 1988, a company which was subsequently merged into Fairfax Media.

Those 20 years of my involvement in regional and rural media gave me a sense of purpose; a feeling of being a part of each of those communities – and there were, and are, many. Today, so much has changed. We cannot deny that information delivery is in transition while at the same time there is a significant amount of advertising gravitating to the internet. This is adding intrigue to an expanding cake, not eliminating any of the ingredients.

If we acknowledge that much of the content for what generates interest on television, on radio and on the internet, comes from newspaper stories, it is hard to imagine an informed world without newspapers and the journalists who write for them. Quite clearly all of this media is going to co-exist and if some of the existing media owners also get revenue from the new media channels, that will be a healthy outcome.

But who will have the power?

It has been remarked that newspapers were acquired for many reasons but rarely for the business of running them and making their owners rich. As Simon Jenkins says in his book, *Newspapers: The Power and the Money*, ownership has a ticket to the front stalls of public affairs but not to the stage itself. "Once we have disobeyed this rule they have had to retreat to their seats bruised and disillusioned," he says.

SOME HIGH-PROFILE PROPRIETORS

There are many names that come to mind where high-profile proprietors should have been more content to sit and eat their popcorn than be exposed to the spotlights of the world. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Harmsworth, Cecil King, Robert Maxwell and Conrad Black are just a few personalities who have utilised their own power and the power of the press to also unintentionally bring about their own demise.

I well recall when in London, sitting in Robert Maxwell's office after being kept waiting for over an hour. I had come to see if he was interested in buying a magazine from us. At the time he seemed to want to buy anything and everything and I thought I had a fair chance of success. Eventually he turned up, the champagne was brought, as was one of his sons, and he began telling me about one of my less attractive relatives. Half-

way through our discussion, he summoned his secretary to alter the blinds on the windows and then asked her to get the editor of the *Mirror* on the phone. He then proceeded to dictate editorial policy on the Middle East for that day's paper. It was pompous showmanship at its worst. This was power in the hands of an obsessive megalomaniac. And yet, Maxwell owned the newspaper. He had every right to dictate policy. He used his power, but also abused it. It may not have pleased his journalists that he was interfering to such a large extent, but no-one should have questioned his right to do so.

Many owners and proprietors have "interfered" with editorial policy. But for what it is worth, there have been others, like myself – if, indeed, I am an owner – who have not interfered and allowed editors to be the sole arbiter on virtually all issues.

My simple ethos is that newspaper proprietors should remain aloof from political influences so they can, without taint, comment objectively on issues of political and economic significance. The waters have become muddied because newspaper companies have expanded and overlapped into areas where government decisions can affect their other commercial interests. My concern is that owners and publishers might forget their obligations of responsibility for the public good.

LORD NORTHCLIFFE – THE MEGALOMANIAC

Lord Northcliffe, when he owned *The Times* newspaper, was nothing short of a megalomaniac, giving the editorial staff constant nightmares. His vanity was to be his undoing, and although he had helped Lloyd George to political elevation, the Prime Minister failed to respond in kind. Northcliffe was determined to bring him down. However, Lloyd George called his bluff and with some scathing remarks in Parliament, virtually ruined the newspaper proprietor.

Lord Rothermere, proprietor of the *Mail* and *Mirror* in London, had a similar fate dealing with the Conservative Party leader Stanley Baldwin. When Rothermere opposed Baldwin, the latter brought it to an end with a knockout blow: "What the proprietorship of this newspaper is aiming at," he said, "is power and power without the responsibility, the prerogative of the harlot down the ages."

Max Aitken who became Lord Beaverbrook, was quite clear that he wanted the *Express* to be a propaganda sheet. Beaverbrook also ended on a sad note: "I was unworthy. I thought I could carry on the great policy of Joe Chamberlain but I failed." And Beaverbrook was the man who for 50 years had run Britain's most successful and profitable newspaper.

So important were newspapers to the political life of Britain that when Associated Newspapers decided to close the *Chronicle* there was a Royal Commission. To demonstrate the complete ineptitude of the *Chronicle's* management, one member of the *Chronicle's* controlling trust, Sir Geoffrey Crowther, said: "I suspect that had we chosen to go in for pinup girls, they would not have been good pinup girls." A few years later Rupert Murdoch, having purchased the *Sun* in London, showed the world what a good pinup girl could do on page 3.

CECIL KING – THE TOUGH OPERATOR

Cecil King was a successful chief executive of the *Mirror*. He was revered as a tough operator in a highly competitive world and, indeed, he made the *Mirror* a leading power in the world of tabloid journalism. However, he had been slighted by Prime Minister Harold Wilson and he convinced himself that Wilson was no longer fit to run the country. The *Mirror* had been a staunch Labour Party supporter.

King wrote an editorial on 11 May 1968 calling for the resignation of Wilson in the paper and signed it himself. While it had the agreement of his deputy chairman Hugh Cudlipp, it was not until after it appeared that King bothered to ask his editors if they agreed with it. In fact, they did but the action signalled the beginning of the end for King. Eventually his fellow executives, who for years had lived under the shadow of his overbearing personality, summoned up the courage to fire him.

The Astor family were ideal newspaper proprietors. They sat in a separate classroom to some of these other people. Their proprietorship of *The Times* was distinguished and at no time did they seek power for themselves. They were all living in a time when advertisements completely covered the front page. It was not until 1966 that this was changed with the immediate rise of 10 per cent in circulation. But under Gavin Astor the financial burden of the paper was too much and he had no alternative but to look for purchasers, with it ultimately falling into the hands of Roy Thomson, the dominant Canadian publisher, in 1967.

In Australia we have had similar personalities. Apart from Rupert Murdoch, today an American citizen, we have had his father, Sir Keith Murdoch; Sir Frank Packer; members of the Fairfax family; at one time Robert Holmes à Court; Esra Norton, and Ranald McDonald, a member of the Syme family, the early long-time owners of the *Age*.

One part-time participant was Conrad Black. Black is in gaol but perhaps a quote from Shakespeare's *Henry V* is appropriate: "But if it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive."

DISTASTEFUL PUBLIC BATTLE

Sir Warwick Fairfax also brought about his own demise when he abused his power as the John Fairfax Ltd chairman and Committee of One. Indeed, a little later in 1987, it also triggered the demise of the company as we knew it. My own family in 2009, as the major shareholder of Fairfax Media (almost 10 per cent), after gauging the feelings of institutional shareholders, went through a distasteful public battle in persuading a reluctant chairman, Mr Ronald Walker, that he should not stand for re-election at the company's Annual General Meeting. But this was only one of many board and management upheavals in those 22 years.

Generally Australian proprietors have not met the same fate as some of their overseas counterparts and to some extent their reputation was enhanced by the calibre of editors of the day. People such as Graham Perkin at the *Age*, McClure Smith and John Pringle at the *Sydney Morning Herald* and before them the Reverend John West, one of the early editors of the *Herald* who had been a co-founder of the *Launceston Examiner* in 1842.

So undoubtedly there has been power in the press and people have owned and utilised the press for their own purposes. The extent of this power has never been overlooked by politicians at all levels of government. The number of calls to newspapers signifies how important they are to their image and their prospects for re-election, particularly prior to an election.

THE AUSTRALIAN PRESS HAS ACTED RESPONSIBLY

Overall, it can be said that the Australian press has acted responsibly. I well recall Neville Wran, the Premier of New South Wales, being displeased with some of the words being written in the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald.* He carried through his threat to withdraw virtually all government advertising from the paper. This lasted several months during which time, the paper never changed its attitude. This was a clear case of a disgruntled politician trying to manipulate the press and in doing so showing an absolute abuse of power.

A government figure is in a position of power. And as I hope I have demonstrated this power has been abused by political and newspaper leaders alike. But there is a difference. Should readers not agree with the opinions or behaviour of those writing for and running their newspaper, they can stop buying tomorrow. With political leaders, we may have to wait years before we as citizens, can show our displeasure.

So where does this leave our rhetorical question in relation to the power of the press, ownership and even the future of our civilisation? What we are

seeing within all realms of the media is a fragmentation. We are no longer waiting on a carrier pigeon or a ship to come in to get our news from overseas. We get an alert on a computer screen that tells us instantly of some major event anywhere in the world. But if we contemplate how we might influence our communities, it is hard to think of anything more powerful than the newspaper.

Newspapers have traditionally been integral to the improvement of community life by holding those elected to represent us, accountable. But the demise of newspapers, particularly those of quality, must be of concern to us. As Albert R Hunt wrote: "That (the demise) may not matter much to a vibrant economy. It matters a lot for a vibrant democracy."

Finally, in the image of Bill Porter, we can all take something from the textbook of US politician Robert Kennedy who said: "Each time a man stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope."

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

John Fairfax has been Chairman, since 1988, of Marinya Media Pty Ltd, a company formed following the takeover of John Fairfax Ltd by Tryart Pty Ltd in December 1987. Following the merger of Fairfax Media with Rural Press Ltd in 2007 he was appointed a director of Fairfax Media after being Chairman of Rural Press since 1990. He is President of the Girls and Boys Brigade, Chairman of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW Foundation, Patron of the Red Room Company Limited and is actively involved in organisations representing rural Australia and youth. John Fairfax is a Councillor of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW and has rural interests in country NSW. He began his career in 1961 as a cadet journalist at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, then worked in management positions throughout Fairfax before joining the board in 1979.

11

Why challenging racism is a mission for all journalists

Robert Webb

Robert Webb argues that the media's potential to help leaders and ordinary people of every colour, race and ethnicity usher in a new age of harmony has never been fully tapped. The time to start, he says, is long overdue

For most of American history journalists generally paid scant attention to blacks and other minority groups. It was almost as though they didn't exist. But thankfully that's changed. Blacks, Asians, Hispanics and other minority groups today are not only covered but also help staff newsrooms from coast to coast. Many rise to the top.

Much of the credit must go to the Civil Rights movement, which the late American journalist Al Kuettner covers marvelously in his 2006 book, *March to a Promised Land.* The non-violent campaign for racial equality led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and major new federal civil rights laws were forerunners of changes in newsrooms. Even those reluctantly slow to change doubtless began more coverage of minority communities.

But for all the gains in the hiring of minority journalists, a 2009 survey by UNITY: Journalists of Color and Loop 21, an online community geared to African-Americans, shows we still have a long way to go to ensure fair and adequate coverage. "Overall, the results paint a bleak picture," says Pointer Online's *Diversity at Work* report. "The majority of the African-American, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American and Latino respondents said the news media ranked 'fair' or worse in covering issues of interest to people of color. Nearly all – 90 per cent – said mainstream media is not doing an adequate job covering race relations."

With its more than 4,000 members, the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) is the largest of the minority journalism organisations. But the nation's largest minority group by population is the more than 46 million Hispanics. That compares with 41.4 million African-Americans, 13.5 million Asians and 4.5 million Native Americans. Estimates range from 5 to 8 million the number of Muslims in the country. All remain under-represented in American newsrooms.

ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST

In a 2001 Nieman Fellows report, Cecilia Alvear, then president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, wrote: "Media companies have to develop a well thought out, long-term strategy for courting the mushrooming Latino market...enlightened self-interest would dictate the recruiting of people who are part of and familiar with the Latino community. Hire the right people, nurture them, retain them. Cover Latino issues well, report on stories Latinos are interested in, and they will respond."

That philosophy could be applied to other minority groups, including Muslims. At the 2009 convention of the Islamic Society of North America in Washington, D.C., Muslim families were asked at one panel session to encourage at least some of their sons and daughters to go into mass media. I was struck by the brilliance of the three panelists – Asma Khalid, Wajahat Ali, and Aman Ali. Like most North American Muslims, they represent the world's moderate majority.

As a producer for National Public Radio's *Morning Edition*, Khalid, an Indiana University journalism graduate, starts work at midnight. She secured her job by surprise after receiving her Master's degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Cambridge University. NPR took her as an intern and was so pleased with her work it hired her. By contrast, Wajahat Ali is a California native lawyer-journalist and associate editor of AltMuslim.com. Aman Ali is a mobile-journalist with Gannett's the *Journal News* with 150,000 circulation in suburban New York City. Before that, he was a multimedia producer for the *Hill*, a Capitol Hill newspaper in Washington. The panel was sponsored by the Muslim American Journalists Association (MAJA) whose goal is "to encourage Muslim Americans to enter the ranks of journalism and improve standards of journalistic coverage of Muslims." But significantly, MAJA says it is "open to individuals of any race or ethnic background with a strong interest in promoting fair and accurate coverage of Muslims in the media".

Minority racial and ethnic groups are not alone in their disdain for much media coverage. A 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press shows 69 per cent of Americans believe news stories are often inaccurate, according to an Associated Press story in Editor and Publisher online. "Pew also found that 74 per cent of respondents believe stories tend to favor one side of an issue over another, up from 66 per cent two years ago." Surveys in many countries show public trust in media low.

STAFFING NEWSROOMS WITH MINORITY JOURNALISTS

With minority communities, this distrust is multiplied. So what is to be done? Staffing newsrooms with minority journalists is crucial, of course. One of the world's largest media groups, the suburban Washington, D.C.-based Gannett Corporation has been a leader in this respect. But Al Neuharth, the former CEO who built Gannett into a major media organisation, resists efforts to brand him a kind of journalistic saviour. At the 25th anniversary celebration of *USA Today*, he said to diversify Gannett newsrooms was "a business decision". He said it was good business to have newsrooms look more like the communities they cover. (Full disclosure: I worked more than 30 years for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, a Gannett newspaper since 1979).

But Gannett is only one of many media organisations where minority journalists have proved they can "run with the best". They are assets not only for covering needs and wants of their race or ethnic groups. They have proven themselves on many beats and as editors, TV news anchors, online multi-media producers and broadcast executives. An example is Shanghai-native Elizabeth Jia who moved with her family to America when she was six. She won a Gannett internship while in the University of Maryland journalism programme and at graduation in 2007 was snapped up by Gannett's CBS Channel 9 (WUSA) Online in Washington, D.C. as a multimedia producer. She is also active in the Washington chapter of the Asian-American Journalists Association (AAJA), headed by Hanah Cho, business writer for the nearby *Baltimore Sun*.

"Like many minority communities, Asian Americans are diverse," Cho says. "We are not monolithic as some may falsely believe. That misconception is often portrayed in the news media, confusing Korean Americans with Chinese Americans, and vice versa. Each community is distinct. The news media needs to do a better job of not only recognising this fact but also understanding the various communities that make up 'Asian Americans'. This is the case for other minority groups."

A TINGE OF "OTHERNESS" IN THE COVERAGE OF MINORITY GROUPS

"Often the coverage of Asian Americans and other minority groups carry a tinge of 'otherness' For instance, the coverage of the Virginia Tech massacre, in April 2007, seemed to imply the shooter was foreign – the first cycle of articles and broadcasts cited the shooter's last name first followed by his full name, as the naming norm in Korea. But I believe the shooter was born in the US and was an American citizen, yet the incorrect naming convention implied that he was "alien". In short, Asian Americans are part of the fabric of American life, and it should be reported as such."

So, too, are the Native Americans and their Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), headed by Ronnie Washines of the Yakama Indian Nation. NAJA says it "serves and empowers Native journalists through programs [sic] designed to enrich journalism and promote Native cultures...NAJA encourages both mainstream and tribal media to attain the highest standards of professionalism, ethics and responsibility".

At their best, minority journalists help non-minority media practitioners and news consumers understand people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. Some of the nation's most outstanding journalists are from minority groups – for example, these African-Americans: syndicated columnist Clarence Page, *Washington Post* columnist Colbert King, and Gwen Ifil, of the PBS *News Hour* and moderator of *Washington Week.* Other top minority media professionals include Cecilia Alvear, who was the first female bureau chief of NBC News in Mexico City, later Miami-based senior producer of the network's Latin America programme, and a current member of the board of the International Communications Forum – America. Also, Kathy Y. Times, an Emmy award-winning investigative reporter and co-anchor for Fox 40 TV News in Jackson, Miss. and president of the National Association of Black Journalists. Founded in 1975 in Washington, DC, the NABJ wants more African-Americans in the nation's newsrooms so they more accurately reflect the communities they serve.

SURVIVING THE INTERNET AGE

In his online column, JOURNAL-ISMS, on the Federal Trade Commission's 2009 workshop tackling whether journalism can survive the internet age, Richard Prince quoted Kathy Times as saying: "The opportunities are endless and solutions can be found...NABJ is laying the foundation for an interactive online network. It will engage the public and serve as a forum for all our members." He said she also praised the

Washington Post's African-American themed web site, The Root.com as an example of what is needed. Clearly anything interactive or otherwise that strengthens the voice of African-Americans or any other minority journalist group also strengthens democracy.

Another top journalist and book author, Peruvian native Marie Arana, former editor of the *Washington Post*'s Book World and now *Post* writer at large, has written about journalists from Latin America, Central America, Mexico and the Carribbean: "Language holds us together." In a resource guide for Hispanic journalists she raised five questions: "What are our various histories? How wide are our racial, social and religious diversities? What sensitivities should we bring to the task of reporting on our communities? What are the pitfalls? What organisations can we look to for help? This is a difficult enterprise, but a worthy one." Surely these are questions journalists of whatever background might ask themselves, especially if they cover racial issues.

All too many of us lack sensitivity. We think we can cover any story and some of us have fallen far short of the mark. I was once one who in the racial hotbed that was Mississippi seldom displayed that sensitivity. As associate editor of the *State Times* in Jackson in the early days of the Civil Rights movement, I wrote editorials and columns defending racial segregation after the US Supreme Court outlawed it in public schools on 17 May 1954. That ruling shook the South as an emotional earthquake. But thankfully I changed long ago.

FEW JOURNALISTS PREPARED FOR THE ERA OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Reporting and commenting on race dominated much of Southern journalism after the high court's blockbuster. In retrospect, few Southern journalists, almost all white, were adequately prepared for that era of demonstrations, sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, Freedom Riders, school closings and horrific loss of lives as the nation turned a page in its history. But Al Kuettner, who was bureau chief of the UP (now UPI) in Atlanta and later its roving Southern correspondent, was one of the best. He epitomised the hard-working, deep-digging, truth-telling objective reporter. He was sensitive in a way so critical to reporting fairly on racial issues. He covered Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on many occasions. He was on flights with King when some passengers refused to fly with him. Racial tensions were such "some passengers would get off after he appeared on board, and ask for a different flight", Kuettner recalled in *March to a Promised Land.* "They didn't mind riding with him: they were afraid the plane would be

blown up." Fear was pervasive. Journalists preparing to cover racial issues might well read Kuettner's book (he died in May 2009 aged 95).

I was born and reared in Mississippi. While I had known and liked many blacks – picked cotton with some – segregation was all I knew. I can only imagine and deeply regret how I must have hurt many people of colour with what I wrote. It took the 1957 conference of Initiatives of Change, then known as Moral Re-Armament, on Mackinac Island, Michigan, to drive a stake through my racist heart. But I had much restitution to make, including apology for the way we in the South had treated blacks. One of the first things I did was write to Dr. King about my experience. He replied quickly with a beautiful letter (I later covered him for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*).

As I began to listen daily to my inner voice and write down the thoughts that came, I also began to reach out to African-Americans in a different way. I began to write to heal rather than hurt, to unite rather than divide, and to bring people together rather than drive them apart. I believe that is the mission for all journalists, at least all who want a part in making their communities, nations and the world better for not only our own but also future generations. Journalism has been rightly labeled "a glorious calling". It is, indeed. But the media's potential to help our leaders and ordinary people of every colour, race and ethnicity usher in a new age has never been fully tapped. The time to start is long overdue.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Robert Webb worked for more than 30 years on the *Cincinnati Enquirer* as Washington Bureau Chief, News Editor, Night City Editor, Education Writer, Politics Writer and for 17 years as a Senior Editorial Writer and twice-weekly columnist. He also chaired the *Enquirer*'s middle management board. During his earlier career on newspapers in the South and Southwest he was Associate Editor of the *State Times* in Jackson, MS. During his career there and with the *Cincinnati Enquirer* he covered 12 national political conventions. Among his major awards are the George Washington Honor Medal from the Freedom Foundation at Valley Forge for excellence in editorial writing; an award for distinguished public affairs reporting from the American Political Science Association; a special citation from the American Society of Planning Officials as lead writer-researcher for the *Cincinnati Enquirer* project, The Crisis Where We Live.

12

How I learned that some risks are worth taking

Carol Goar

Carol Goar stresses Bill Porter's belief that any person in the communications business can help make it a force for good – and that the freedom of the press has to be fought for day after day

The paper is yellow with age, its corners curled. But I cannot part with the poster given to me by a protective editor in my early days as a newspaper columnist. It depicts a lone sheep fighting its way back from the cliff's edge while the rest of the herd surges forward. The non-conformist is polite, but resolute: "Excusez moi...excusez moi...excusez moi."

At the time, I thought my colleague was encouraging me to think for myself, hold fast to my principles and be fearless. I later learned he was trying to warn me I was badly out-of-step with the newspaper's editorial policy and it had been noticed in high places. But even when I knew the truth, I kept the poster as a reminder that some risks are worth taking. Twenty-five years later, it still hangs above my desk. More by luck than skill, I survived my first brush with authority. Eventually I acquired a more sophisticated understanding of the limits of press freedom. But every so often, I needed a tangible source of support.

The poster did the trick until something better came along. In 1998, I met Bill Porter on one of his North American visits. He welcomed me into the global network of journalists, broadcasters, publishers, filmmakers and media executives he was building. Through the International Communications Forum, I became connected to members of the media in many countries who put integrity ahead of financial security. The forum made my choices clearer, my path less lonely.

My career would never be featured in big-screen drama. I haven't faced gunfire nor received death threats. I haven't paid an onerous price for my convictions. I'm not brave nor prominent. I'm an ordinary journalist who has found ways to stand my ground, to do what my conscience requires. But I share Bill Porter's belief that any person in the communications business can help make it a force for good. I hope the lessons I've learned will honour his memory and make it easier for others to follow his example.

JOURNALISM AS A WAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Like many baby boomers, I saw journalism as a way to make a difference. Growing up in the Watergate era, I watched newspaper reporters expose wrongdoing and precipitate change. I saw women breaking into the profession. I dreamt of following in their footsteps. But I realised I needed experience first. So I took the assignments I was given, followed the instructions of my editors and became a fast, accurate, dependable reporter. Occasionally moral issues would arise – whether to use unnamed sources, whether to report unsubstantiated allegations, whether to publish information that could hurt innocent people – but for the most part, the daily scramble to beat the competition and make the front page was exhilarating and uncomplicated.

It wasn't until I was offered the position of national affairs columnist at the *Toronto Star*, my country's largest newspaper, that I had to think hard about what ethical journalism meant. My job as a political commentator began just as Canada embarked on one of the most divisive debates in its history. The Prime Minister of the day, Brian Mulroney, had decided to lead the nation into a free trade arrangement with the United States, reversing a century of economic sovereignty, protected by tariffs and other trade barriers.

Dismantling these barriers, Mr. Mulroney argued, was a reasonable price to pay for privileged access to the world's most dynamic market. His political adversaries accused him of selling out the country. My newspaper was firmly against the initiative. It published editorial after editorial denouncing free trade and exhorting voters to stop Mulroney from implementing his ruinous scheme.

I respected the *Star*'s editorial position. But I believed a parliamentary columnist had to do more than pick sides. My job, as I saw it, was to provide readers with by the best information I could get on the closed-door negotiations, coupled with an independent analysis of the costs and benefits. I also believed it was my responsibility to put the policy in context. There

were strong signals, at the time, that that trade barriers would soon start toppling around world, launching an era of fierce global competition. Seen in this light, a trade partnership with the US could strengthen Canada's position.

PROVIDING FIRST-HAND INTELLIGENCE ABOUT CANADA'S DAY-TO-DAY TACTICS

Rather than echo the *Star*'s editorial voice, I resolved to become the most knowledgeable journalist in the country about the bilateral negotiations. Thanks to excellent sources, I knew what was on the bargaining table, what concessions Canada was prepared to make and how the talks were progressing. I provided readers with first-hand intelligence about Canada's strategy and day-to-day tactics. My columns kept the *Star* one step ahead of the competition, signalled to the negotiators that they were being watched and thoroughly exasperated the government. After months of this, the Prime Minister's top aide, recognising I wasn't going to back off, briefed me on the details I didn't have.

Although I was providing a useful public service, I wasn't toeing the newspaper's editorial line or using my position to discredit what the publisher saw as a wrong-headed policy. He never confronted me directly, but there were rumbles of dissatisfaction from head office. I don't know how close I came to losing my job. I haven't tried very hard to find out. According to newsroom lore, the publisher consulted John Kenneth Galbraith, whom he admired greatly, about the *Star*'s role as a champion of Canadian autonomy. The influential Harvard economist, who grew up not far from Toronto, applauded him for taking a strong editorial stand, but cautioned him not to stifle other voices. That, he said, would cost the newspaper its credibility.

Mid-way through the free trade saga, I felt the pressure ease. For the next three years, I stayed on top of the story, giving readers an advance look at the agreement, pointing out the winners and losers and highlighting the provisions I believed were bad for Canada. But I never wrote a full-throated rant against free trade. The *Star* never let up in its efforts to rally Canadians against the initiative. In the end, voters settled the debate. They gave the Mulroney government a strong mandate to press ahead. A deal was signed, then re-opened to bring in Mexico. Trade liberalisation quickly spread beyond North America, setting the stage for globalisation.

I learned a lot about newspaper politics in that episode. It steeled me for the tougher battles that lay ahead. Those came in my five years as editorial

page editor. I considered it the best job at the newspaper. A century before my tenure, a larger-than-life publisher named Joseph Atkinson set out to make the broadsheet a "paper for the people". He enjoined his successors to continue the fight for social justice, economic equality and liberal values. The mission was a perfect encapsulation of my values. But upholding it, without ruffling feathers in the newsroom, running afoul of powerful interests in the community, upsetting advertisers or alienating the managers of other departments, proved to be a challenge.

CHALLENGING THE STAR'S POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

I had run-ins with my superiors over irreverent editorial cartoons and columns that challenged the *Star*'s political ideology. The publisher was openly critical of editorials I wrote or approved on issues ranging from tax cuts to social policy. Eyebrows were raised when I invited a group of homeless people to come to the *Star* to give our writers a personal look at life on the streets. Ripples of unease shot through the newspaper's executive ranks when word got out that I'd given back my stock options. My performance reviews noted that I wasn't a good team player. My priorities kept diverging from those of the people around me.

That chapter of my career came to an unhappy end when I failed to heed suggestions from the chief executive of Torstar, the *Star*'s corporate umbrella, that the editorial board adopt an overt pro-Israel stance, rather than the even-handed approach it had traditionally taken. Citing my poor management skills, the publisher removed me from my position.

Hurtful as the demotion was, it gave me back my freedom. I returned to column-writing, where I could shine a light on the plight of those politicians don't want to talk about. I could highlight the remarkable work being done by volunteers, community groups and non-profit organisations. I could write about the widening gap between rich and poor, the weakening of Canada's social safety nets, the stigma surrounding mental illness, the prevalence of elder abuse, the minimal support for people with disabilities and the exploitation of foreign guest workers.

I've done that, as a columnist, for the past seven years. It's been the happiest interlude of my career. I hope I'm making a difference, but I can't say with any confidence that I am. Judging by the public opinion polls and priorities of government, my voice is too small and too marginal to matter. Judging by the emails I receive from people who have been invisible and powerless for too long, I'm at least telling their stories. All I can say unequivocally is that it's a privilege to practise the kind of journalism I've always wanted to do.

TIPS ON SURVIVAL "AS A SHEEP THAT PARTS COMPANY WITH THE HERD"

Having spent most of my working life in a world of mass-circulation newspapers, I am unqualified to offer young journalists much advice about practising their craft in the internet era with its fractured audiences, proliferating platforms, shrinking attention spans and still-unclear economic rules. But I can, perhaps, pass on a few tips about how to survive as a sheep that parts company with the herd:

- Learn to use your journalistic skills proficiently in whatever medium you choose. These days, anyone with a cell phone can take a newsworthy picture, anyone with a computer or hand-held mobile device can write a controversial blog and anyone with an opinion can disseminate it. But amateurs aren't trained to dig up new information; put it in perspective, present it in a clear, compelling way and offer people informed analysis.

- Try not to personalise issues. Maligning an individual's character, intelligence, appearance or morality is easy, but not terribly useful. Change happens when people are motivated to do something.

- Strive not to sound preachy or look self-righteous. People don't respond well to lectures and sermons. They don't want to be told how to live. But they do yearn for a less cynical, more equitable, society.

- Push yourself out of your comfort zone. Talk to people you wouldn't normally encounter. Find out what matters to them. Try to see things from their perspective. Reach beyond your natural tendency to assume everyone thinks the way you and your friends do. Be open to possibilities that never would have occurred to you.

- Be aware that one bold departure from conventional wisdom or one brilliant piece of writing, won't turn the tide. Readers, listeners and viewers need time to figure whether to trust you, see if you are consistent and credible and decide whether your ideas make sense.

- Pay attention to what's going right. People have an appetite for positive news. Editors, producers and managers – accustomed to delivering a daily diet of conflicts, tragedies, scandals and ominous trends – need to be convinced it's real journalism.

- Be prepared to face criticism, to be unfairly labelled, to be ignored by the too-busy-to care majority.

- Decide which is more important to you: your moral compass or your financial security. People in the media who question its practices or challenge those around them, usually pay a price.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IS NOT AN INVIOLABLE RIGHT

Looking back, I could have been smarter. Had I taken a hard look before I leapt into journalism, I would have known freedom of the press is not an inviolable right, it that has to be fought for day after day. Had I done more research, I would have realised my journalistic heroes ran into all kinds of roadblocks. Had I made a more deliberate effort to learn from each ethical dilemma, I would have handled subsequent ones better.

But if I could go back, I wouldn't change any of my fundamental decisions. In every career, there are times when you have to put your job on the line. There are situations that force you to choose between your principles and your paycheque. There are moments when you have to ask yourself: Is this the legacy I want to leave? Bill Porter had the courage to do it. Journalists in parts of the world where the risks of independent thinking are dauntingly high, are doing it. Writers who will never be recognised are doing it. Young people entering the media are prepared to do it.

We are a minority, it is true. But it is the committed few, not the complacent many, who keep hope alive.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Carol Goar has been a journalist for 35 year in Toronto, Ottawa and Washington. She began her career as an economics reporter at *Ottawa Citizen*, then moved to Parliament Hill as a reporter for the Canadian Press and the *Toronto Star* and *Maclean's* magazine. When the *Star* invited her back to be its national affairs columnist, she leapt at the opportunity and has stayed at the newspaper ever since. She enjoyed 10 years of writing political commentary from Ottawa, then moved to Washington to become the *Star*'s bureau chief in the United States and finally returned to Toronto as editorial page editor. She has now returned to her first love: writing. Her column runs three times a week on the opinion page. She tries to bring attention to issues that are too often neglected and highlight the efforts of people and organisations striving to make a difference. She considers it a privilege to work for a newspaper with a 120-year tradition of standing up for the underdog, fighting for social justice and shining a light in dark corners. She is also a trustee of the Atkinson Foundation, which supports non-profit organisations working to create a fairer and more resilient society.

13

The documentary film as a force for good

Alan Channer

Drawing on his experience as a film director, Alan Channer argues that documentaries can serve as a force for good since they can often inspire both individual action and social change

Speaking in Cannes, in 2007, at the launch of the Cinema Verité film festival, Queen Noor of Jordan said: "Cinema plays a pivotal role in shaping our values, our behaviour, our understanding of the world, even our understanding of ourselves...Films [are] an extraordinary catalyst for change. Thankfully we're seeing a groundswell of interest in the role that [film] can play in addressing some of the most critical challenges of our world."

One documentary which Queen Noor singled out for its beneficial impact was *An Inconvenient Truth* on climate change, presented by Al Gore and directed by David Guggenheim. Winner of two Academy Awards, the film is one of the highest grossing documentaries of all time.

An Inconvenient Truth portrays climate change as "the biggest moral challenge facing our civilisation today". It succeeds as a campaigning film partly because scientific issues are shrewdly interspersed with the human interest of Al Gore's own personal story. *An Inconvenient Truth* has been incorporated into the secondary school curricula of several countries. A 47-country survey conducted by Oxford University concluded that 66 per cent of viewers who claimed to have seen *An Inconvenient Truth* said the film had "changed their mind" about global warming, whilst three out of four viewers said they had changed some of their habits as a result of seeing the film.

ACTION ON GLOBAL WARNING

The website of *An Inconvenient Truth* claims that the film "has helped to galvanise governments, leaders, organisations and individuals worldwide to take action on global warming...More than a billion people are now aware of the issue and have been motivated to act...Over 106,000 tons of carbon were offset in the year following the film's release...Over 150 climate change bills have been introduced in Congress..." These claims stretch the imagination because of the implication that without the existence of the film, these benefits would not have accrued. In fact, it is virtually impossible to quantify the impact of one film. A film that claims to change public opinion or behaviour is often a manifestation of a trend that has already started.

In the case of *An Inconvenient Truth*, the situation is further complicated by the on-going debate as to whether all the science featured in the film is correct. The British High Court upheld nine points in the film which were felt to "depart from mainstream scientific positions on global warming". Moreover, two films – *An Inconvenient Truth: Or Convenient Fiction* and *Not evil, just wrong* – were produced specifically to counter the allegations in Al Gore's film. Although one might disagree with them, the producers of these films would argue that their work too is "a force for good".

Another example of documentary work that had huge social impact is *African Calvary* and the BBC news reports that preceded it, presented by Michael Buerk and filmed by Mohammed Amin and Mohinder Dhillon. All of a sudden, the ghost-like victims of the 1984 famine in Ethiopia came to haunt living rooms in the West. Stark global disparities became inescapable, consciences were set alight and there was a tipping point in collective awareness. Their reports alone triggered contributions for famine relief amounting to more than £10m. A mass response was then triggered by Bob Geldof who, together with Midge Ure, wrote the hit single *Do they know it's Christmas?* This led to Band Aid, Live Aid and Live 8.

The release of the single together with the Live Aid concerts in July 1985 raised between £50m and £70m. In the words of one aid worker: "Humanitarian concern is now at the centre of foreign policy...Bob Geldof deserves a lot of credit for that" (quoted by David Rieff in the July 2005 issue of *Prospect* magazine).

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDS ETHIOPIAN RELIEF OPERATION

Michael Buerk's reports were undoubtedly a force for good. The Ethiopian relief operation that resulted was the largest ever conducted. The final benefit,

however, remains controversial, with contentions that some aid was channeled away from famine victims, furthering the military operations of the Ethiopian regime. A senior Oxfam official observed that it was only much later that they were aware of "the readiness of regimes to manipulate famine and abuse aid". The seemingly incontestable assumption that "a starving child has no politics" was put in doubt. (see Suzanne Franks: You can't take the politics out of humanitarian aid, the *Independent*, 12 March 2010).

What is not in doubt is the ability of the documentary team who created the initial reports that sensitised the world. Amin's and Dhillon's documentary camerawork, and Buerk's reporting, represents the genre at its most powerful. Here is both sensitivity and courage; a readiness to live into another reality and let that reality speak directly. The effect is that it brings into the open what was hitherto unrecognised.

Dhillon, who was knighted for brilliant service in the field of documentary film-making across Africa, told me that he found depicting the 1984 Ethiopian famine more challenging than depicting war. "Amidst the tremendous suffering, there was great dignity and civility amongst the Ethiopian people at that time. There was no scrambling for food supplies...The dying children and their lamenting parents kept me awake at night for years afterwards."

The integrity of Dhillon's approach is illustrated by his experience in Afghanistan, during an assignment for a Western television station. Dhillon arrived shortly after the controversial bombing of a wedding party by US forces. He began his own recce for the bulletin, ahead of the programme presenter, who arrived several days later. Dhillon's approach was to "get to know a family and feel for their loss".

Part-way during the shoot, Dhillon realised that the presenter was not going to let the facts on the ground inform a pre-written script. He stopped the camera and insisted on a more honest approach. When the presenter refused, Dhillon walked away from the assignment. He received an apology, some months later.

BREAKING ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

In this sense, the impact for good of documentary work is directly related to the moral agency of the documentary-makers. One of the great strengths of the documentary film is its power to break assumptions and stereotypes about "the other" and thereby to build understanding and diffuse conflict. CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour puts it like this:

> As an international reporter for the last 18 years, I have witnessed

> firsthand the destructive power of fear and ignorance of people and cultures who are different. But, I've also seen the possibility and the power when people choose to overcome the impulse to dehumanise the other...I have witnessed the power of let's call it the Pangea Day principle when even for a few minutes or a few hours human-to-human contact can triumph, where people-to-people diplomacy can cut through and show our leaders and all of us what really is possible and that there is another way.

The inspiration for Pangea Day came from documentary maker Jehane Noujaim, winner of the TED prize and director of *Control Room*. Her vision was to overcome the divisions of border, difference and conflict by creating a simultaneous global event in which people all over the world "could see themselves in others through the power of film".

The first Pangea Day, which took place on 10 May 2008, in Cairo, Kigali, London, Los Angeles, Mumbai, and Rio de Janeiro, was broadcast in seven languages to millions via television, the internet and mobile phones. As Noujaim put it: "By sharing stories, we've started the process of turning strangers into friends."

A feature of the day's festival was a live interview conducted by Amanpour of two Lebanese former militia-leaders, who had been on opposing sides in Lebanon's civil war. Eric Trometer's film, *Two Men, One War, 33 Years On*, one of the films in the festival, describes how the two men found reconciliation and forgiveness. Trometer told me that he was inspired to make this film by the late David Channer, cameraman, producer, founder of FLTfilms and my father. The obituary of David Channer (the *Independent* of 29 September 2006) commented:

> FLTfilms, derived its initials from one of Channer's most enduring films, *For the Love of Tomorrow* (1986), about the life of the French Resistance leader and post-war parliamentary deputy Irène Laure. She had "willed the total destruction of Germany" because of her son's suffering at the hands of the Gestapo, but went on to work for Franco-German reconciliation after a profound experience which enabled her to forgive. The film was dubbed into 17 languages and broadcast in countries as diverse as Lebanon and the United States.

One person who was profoundly touched by *For the Love of Tomorrow* was Renée Pan, widow of Pan Sothi, Minister of Education in the Lon Nol Government, who disappeared in the Khmer Rouge killing fields. "After seeing *For the Love of Tomorrow* in the US, she contacted Channer and

urged him to make a Khmer version to help foster reconciliation in Cambodia at the time of the UN-sponsored elections in 1993" (ibid).

It was at that point that I began working with my father and together we made *The Serene Smile* (1995) and *The Serene Life* (1996), on the role of Buddhism in Cambodia's post-genocide and post-war recovery. *The Serene Smile* was broadcast repeatedly on Cambodian television and more than 1,000 video copies of the films were distributed by international donor agencies throughout the country (*Cultural Survival Quarterly* 2001).

King Norodom Sihanouk wrote to us: "These two very beautiful films show that Cambodia is not only a country prey to war and unending violence, but also a place where the great virtues of Buddhism – tolerance, non-violence and compassion – are practised."

A CATALYST FOR PEACE IN NIGERIA

The apogee of our father and son collaboration was *The Imam and the Pastor*, narrated by Rageh Omaar, which was launched at United Nations headquarters in New York and the House of Commons in London in 2006. This film was made, first and foremost, to serve as a catalyst for peace in Nigeria – and during editing, that objective was prioritised over and above audience appeal in the West. Even the publicity surrounding the international launch of the film was partly designed to create interest in the film within Nigeria.

The Nigerian launch consisted of a high-profile premiere in the International Conference Centre, Abuja; further screenings in Jos and Kaduna, supported by the state governments; nationwide and state broadcast of the film and prime talk talk-show interviews with the film's protagonists and producers. Four months later, in June 2007, I returned to Nigeria specifically to evaluate the film's impact there. I found that a small but significant proportion of Nigerians had seen the film.

One pastor told me: "[For us], after the Devil, the next enemy is a Muslim. That thinking is gone. For anyone who watches this film, there is something in them that is bound to change." A hotel manager said: "I still have some hatred in my heart. During the crisis I had to walk 200km to safety. I take love and forgiveness from this film. I bought my own copy and I have shown it in our hotel."

The response of people who had seen the film was overwhelmingly positive; it was clearly the right message at the right time. Yet what became apparent is that too few people were seeing it. As Izam Azi, then Permanent Secretary for Security in Plateau State, told us: "Most of the people who should watch it and learn lessons are unable to do so...They have no access

to DVD or CD players. What this means is that the message is yet to reach the target audience."

We were warned by Dr Bawa Abdullahi Wase, Chairman of the Christian-Muslim Dialogue Forum in Plateau State, that "all that was gained since the film was launched could be lost in one swoop", because of unresolved tensions in and around the capital, Jos. Sadly, as the 2010 killings in Jos have demonstrated, the battle for peace in that part of Nigeria is yet to be won. Nevertheless, the Inter-faith Mediation Centre of Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, the protagonists of the film, is active, albeit under-resourced, in Jos, and one of the tools they are using is this film.

FILMS WITH A SOCIAL MESSAGE

Clearly there are lessons here for the film-maker – films with a social message may need to be integrated into an effective campaign of advocacy if they are to be of widespread and lasting benefit.

The impact of *The Imam and the Pastor* was felt way beyond Nigeria. It is being used by chaplaincy services inside British prisons; the French version was rushed to broadcast in Switzerland after the referendum banning the construction of minarets; a Somali version has been broadcast across Somalia; the Arabic version was launched in a series of high-profile screenings in Lebanon, Egypt and Sudan and broadcast by Al-Jazeera.

All this contributed to raising the international profile of the film's protagonists and their on-going peace work. In December 2009, Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, were awarded the Chirac Prize for Conflict Prevention at a ceremony in the Sorbonne, Paris, in the presence of Jacques Chirac, Nicholas Sarkozy and Kofi Annan. A 10-minute extract of *The Imam and the Pastor* was shown at the ceremony.

Whenever I am asked what made for the success of *The Imam and the Pastor* – I remember the one minute's silence requested by Imam Muhammad Ashafa, after the premiere of the film in the House of Commons. Speaking of David Channer, Ashafa said: "I would like us to remember in this place, an Englishman, who at the age of 79 was on his hands and knees filming inside a mosque, who was stooping in the streets to get a good picture, who came down to the villages and rural areas of Nigeria. That is the spirit of commitment to humanity."

A key to the success of this film was the strength of our relationship with its subjects. When there is pain after war or communal killings and when there are sensitivities around religion and culture, people are often disinclined to tell their stories to outsiders. Our commitment to represent

Imam Ashafa and Pastor James accurately was paramount. A father and son team together with a Palestinian Muslim film producer, working with a non-profit company independent of television or governments – all this fostered the necessary trust.

A second key was our participatory approach to the production of the film. I went twice to Nigeria to show draft edits of the film to Nigerian focus groups. This is the hardest stage of this type of film-making, requiring a readiness to change weeks of work! All points in the film which were felt to be cultural misconceptions on our part were eliminated.

It is likely that the BBC or Channel 4 would not have wished to spend significant amounts of time and money incorporating cultural and religious sensitivities into a film, where these are not relevant to the home audience. FLT*films* could do it as a charitable operation. This type of work is a vocation as expertise is given at *pro bono* and heavily discounted rates.

PROMPTING THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE

Can documentaries be a force for good in the world? Of all the broadcast media, it is often a documentary that issues the wake-up call or prompts the collective conscience. A few documentaries may have helped to alter the climate of public opinion and even modified the course of events – but ultimately, the extent to which any film can be said to have fostered the good remains a subjective opinion.

During the launch of *The Imam and the Pastor* in Lebanon, I asked one of our hosts what he would regard as a sign of success in terms of fostering Lebanese Christian-Muslim relations. He replied, enigmatically: "One person completely transformed." One can certainly claim that documentaries change people's lives. In the words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "one word of truth outweighs the world".

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Alan Channer makes documentary films that focus on inter-cultural understanding and reconciliation. His film, *The Imam and the Pastor* (2006), was launched at UN Headquarters, New York and the House of Commons, London. Narrated by Rageh Omaar, it won First Prize in the Short Documentary Section of the Africa World Documentary Film Festival, USA and Nigeria (2007) and was part of the Official Selection at Cinema Verité, Paris (2008) and the International Festival of Muslim Cinema, Kazan, Russia (2009). He was born in London in 1964 and spent his early childhood in India. It was here that his late father, veteran cameraman and producer David Channer, began making films. After a spell of agricultural research in China, Africa and the South Pacific, he teamed up with his father in 1994. They

received an award from the Cambodian government and a commendation from King Norodom Sihanouk for *The Serene Smile* (1995) and *The Serene Life* (1996) for their contribution to cultural and social renewal in Cambodia. Dr Alan Channer is co-director of *For the love of Tomorrow Films* together with Palestinian academic and film producer Dr Imad Karam. His latest film, *An African Answer,* is about a bid to bring healing and reconciliation following communal killings in Kenya.

14

Why heart-focused PR – Personal Relations – is the future

Simon Cohen

Simon Cohen argues that the Personal Relations approach to PR upholds the integrity and dignity of every human being while being both collaborative and affirmative

Public Relations (PR) is associated in many people's minds with spin, dodgy dossiers, late lunches and lipstick. PR is dressing things up, applying sequins and glitz, pushing dirty news through a spin cycle, coming out even dirtier when it meets the public.

The virtues of trust, integrity, honesty and transparency would seem to be a distant cry from this "Absolutely Fabulous" industry. In short, PR has bad PR. Change is in our midst. A new PR, with moral, social, spiritual and commercial values at its core, is emerging on the horizon. But why should we care? PR may be perceived as shallow, but it doesn't have the ability to harm. Or does it?

Back in the 1960s, before the age of globalisation and the World Wide Web, Malcolm X said: "The media's the most powerful entity on Earth. It has the power to make the guilty innocent and the innocent guilty. And that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses." Now substitute "the media" for "PR" and read Malcolm X's statement again. You may now have some sense of the modern PR professional's power in society. Glamour and glitz fail to bare witness to the true story of PR; a story where ethics and rigour can mean the difference between life and death.

SO WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD FOR PR?

We are in the midst of a tidal wave of virtues. The global recession has

dragged dialogue about integrity, short-termism, and global responsibility into the forefront of the public psyche. People want to know about other people's values, their humanity (not, necessarily, about their personality), in order to know that they can trust and empathise with them. Candid values and virtues were once considered liabilities in the PR person's armory – signs of going soft or not willing to get the job done. The reality is that with new media tools such as Twitter, honesty and vulnerability are valuable assets. Virtues aren't something you do, they are something you are – and this time, there's no faking it.

PR Week magazine hosted a debate in February 2007 on "Do PR professionals have the duty to tell the truth?" When the debate finished, a majority of PR students and practitioners present voted that they did not have the duty to tell the truth. When we consider the debate results alongside the massive proportion of news originating from PR practitioners, this is a snowball that desperately needs stopping – for all our sakes. While the lies, misinformation and smiling spin continue, PR will neither gain the trust of the public nor live up to its role or responsibility as the most powerful entity on earth. Damningly, the snowball of lies and mistruths is hopelessly stuck in a past era, out of touch with the values of transparency, integrity and honesty that are so important to today's astute consumer.

Humanising, heart-focused PR – Personal Relations – is the future. When global tolerance first managed the PR for 22-year-old HH Karmapa Thaye Dorje, the disputed head of one of the four strands of Tibetan Buddhism, for his first visit to the UK, controversy beckoned. For tens of thousands of people around the world, including the Sharmapa, (the person with the traditional right in the lineage to establish the identity of the Karmapa), Thaye Dorje is a living Buddha. But for even more people, including HH Dalai Lama, the real living Buddha is a man named Urgyen Trinley. Buddhist monks' blood has been spilled on the streets and international court cases rage on over this contentious issue. The UK media received letters in advance of the visit suggesting that an imposter was coming to the country and that he should be rejected. The reality is that, politics aside, Thaye Dorje is a remarkable young man who wishes peace and enlightenment to everyone.

A GOOD DOSE OF CONTROVERSY FOR THE MEDIA

The "old PR" approach would have been to use this controversy to generate a platform for global media coverage. The media, after all, like a good dose of controversy. This, however, would have failed to capture the constructive nature of Thaye Dorje's message, and fuelled an already distasteful rift at the

heart of Tibetan Buddhism. In other words, it would have been wrong.

The media doesn't have an agenda for controversy – it has an agenda to be competitive. global tolerance instead focused the campaign on Karmapa as a 22-year-old man who played cricket with his (human) lamas, played Playstation and liked eating pizza. We set up a MySpace page for him where he blogged, posted pictures of himself as a child with his parents, spoke of his love for music, his heroes and, of course, his spiritual views as a respected spiritual leader. By opening up his heart and showing the boy behind the Buddhist badge, the Personal Relations approach built empathy and compassion, disarming his detractors and arming the media with a fresh and fascinating story. The media coverage reached 200 million people, all media outlets choosing to go with the positive, "human interest" angle of his visit to the UK. *Metro*, the UK's second largest national newspaper (distributed in special, localised editions across the country), covered the story on its front page on 9 August 2005, as well as on pages 2 and 3.

Thaye Dorje is no anomaly. Who do you know that is ordinary? Who do you know who doesn't have surprising stories or different sides to their lives? The Personal Relations professional's challenge is to find the appropriate, authentic, human stories to be the lens through which you can communicate. In the era of Twitter, people engage directly with brands through people, rather than faceless corporations. These days, if you wish to successfully PR a product, you start with the lens of the human hearts involved in the product: those who use and endorse it, those who developed it. If these people build compassion, warmth, and engagement with their desired audiences, the product /brand they advocate receives associated kudos.

STRIPPING DOWN TO THE EMOTIONAL AND HUMAN TRUTHS

The Personal Relations approach is also ethical. It doesn't seek to dress up, instead it seeks to strip down to the emotional and human truths – warts and all. Personal Relations upholds the integrity and dignity of every human being, it is collaborative and affirmative – there is no need to knock someone down when you can lift your own head up to be counted!

The key to Personal Relations is the authenticity of the sharing, and not mistaking humanity for personality. Organisations and leaders who strategise the use of Twitter or other social media miss the whole point, the whole essence of what it means to really share. President Obama didn't dress himself up to be perfect or say that the task would be easy should he be elected President. After all, life's not easy. New PR is about going back to basics, where being vulnerable, being imperfect, being able to suffer, is perceived to be what it really is: a strength and not a weakness.

Obama's "Yes we can" slogan and presidential campaign point to another important characteristic of new PR – it focuses on solutions and not problems. As President Bill Clinton recently said: "We are now in the age of how." In this age, we know problems exist: the task of our age is how to tackle them. In the UK, the political messaging is still stuck in the old PR rut: "No he can't." The world of technology and communication is moving inexorably in the "Yes we can" direction – open-source, shareware, freeware, online collaboration. (It is ironic that many leading news media are stubbornly swimming against the tide of this movement by charging for online content, but that's another article!) New PR is about collaborative, hope-filled solutions. In this sense, new PR is not that new: it's identifying patterns in changing tides of communication, and changing with them.

THOSE WHO FAIL TO CHANGE WILL STRUGGLE TO STAY AFLOAT.

Newspaper circulations are plummeting in many countries. In the USA alone, the average daily newspaper circulation plunged 10.6 per cent in the April-September 2009 period from the same six-month period the year before, according to figures released by the Audit Bureau of Circulations. This trend is mirrored in other (though not all) countries around the world. Yes, the fragmentation of the media, the exponential growth of the internet and the global recession have not helped the mainstream media's fortunes, but there is only so long external factors can be blamed. Fewer people are buying certain newspapers because fewer people are demanding them. Sooner or later, we all need to look at ourselves. Media and PR professionals could point to external factors all they like, but it's tantamount to pointing at a tidal wave as it crashes down on top of you.

Let's focus on one of the numerous notable exceptions of media bucking the trend of the recession. Bill Porter often cited the example of *Ouest France*, and it wasn't just because it originates from the country where he resided. *Ouest France* (literally *West France*) is a regional newspaper, yet has a circulation higher than any of the national newspapers in country. Its readership has been unaffected by the decline of newspaper reading in France (blamed on the recession, the internet and other external factors), unlike most other dailies.

With 2.5 million daily readers (and a circulation of almost 800,000), it is the most read francophonic newspaper in the world. The striking thing about *Ouest France* is that is has a strict ethical editorial guidelines. The paper does not print pictures showing suffering on people's faces, nor ones of people in handcuffs or other embarrassing situations. All material is

checked against the standards of "say without prejudice", and "showing without shocking". It is not a fluffy, worthy newspaper, it is a responsible paper that respects human dignity and strips down stories to the essence of the news – it doesn't dress things up to distress.

If more newspapers took the collaborative, dignified, solutions approach of their ethical counterparts, they would see a rise in their fortunes. It is true that spending on PR increased 4 per cent in 2008 and almost 3 per cent in 2009. But what kind of growth could PR experience if it embraced the ethics of *Ouest France*, the positivity and collaboration of Obama, and the sincerity and humanity of the living Buddha?

Values, virtues, human rights, compassion are no longer the confines of a woolly world of worthy people – they are the energy behind a tidal wave of hope. And they make good business sense. Whether we consider the MPs' expenses scandal in the UK, and the questions of trust and public confidence that arose from it; the Twitter traction around the disputed Iran election; the public apologies of Tiger Woods, John Terry and others in the public eye for cheating on their partners; we see a pattern emerging where values and virtues are right at the heart of the public psyche. And it makes good business to be in the values business.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MORAL FRAMEWORK

Klaus Schwab, Founder of the World Economic Forum, says: "The current economic crisis should warn us to fundamentally rethink the development of the moral framework and the regulatory mechanisms that underpin our economy, politics and global interconnectedness."

Positioned in the positive, there are real commercial, as well as social and moral opportunities for revisiting and integrating values into the heart of PR. New PR, as such, has more of a social entrepreneurship model; it recognises that its health as an industry (the most powerful industry) is inextricably linked with the moral and social health of the world. If ethics or virtues are something it was to do on the side, like Corporate Social Responsibility, how would it successfully engage with the consumer who yearns for empathy, trust, and mutual collaboration?

We only need to look at the meteoric rise of the social enterprise sector (where commercial motives are coupled with a core social drive) in recent years, to recognise that we are all now playing in a different arena. Since the economic downturn began, 56 per cent of UK social enterprises have increased their turnover from the previous year. Perhaps a new PR, grounded in values, solutions and communicating stories through the lens of a human heart, may not just mean a new approach, it may mean new business.

Old PR differentiates between the public face and the private life. Today, there is little distinction in the public's minds – you are a good, trustworthy person or you are not. Today, there is a brave new vision of PR, Personal Relations. In this world, ethics are not only desirable – they are the necessary foundation for PR to fulfil its social, ethical and commercial potential.

Let us start by adopting this Personal Relations approach with the PR industry itself. Only by being the PR we want to see in the world can we begin to rebuild trust. By sharing the human stories of the people in this great industry, and integrating our personal moral compasses and hopes into our profession, we can strive to make working in PR a badge of honour, serving with humility and dignity, the most powerful entity on earth.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Simon Cohen is founder and managing director of global tolerance. He has worked directly with HH Dalai Lama, HRH The Prince of Wales, Desmond Tutu, Karen Armstrong and even Wallace and Gromit to fulfil his vision of global tolerance through positive communications. He is an international speaker and trainer on communications and ethics, having spoken and run workshops at international organisations such as the World Economic Forum, UNESCO, Parliament of the World's Religions and TEDx. A staunch advocate for media ethics and a freelance journalist, he is a regular commentator in the international media, and has written for *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post*, *The Times*, the *Guardian*, and the BBC. *Media Week* and *PR Week* have named Simon numerous times as one of the top young media and PR professionals in the UK. He has received multiple awards from UnLtd and the Millennium Awards Trust as a leading social entrepreneur. In 2009, he was included in *PR Week*'s Powerbook of the most influential people in the PR industry. He can be followed on twitter at http://www.twitter.com/globaltolerance.

15

"We need a movement for responsible readership"

Gordon Graham

According to Gordon Graham, the increase in volume and accessibility of words has led to a decline in the art of readership. Millions of readers are oblivious to both their power and their responsibility. So, he argues, we need a movement for more responsible readership

My grandson-in-law surprised me a few months ago, in response to an invitation to say what he would like for a Christmas present, by requesting a copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I was surprised because Steve, although a master of many things which I shall never understand, is not literarily inclined. For the previous Christmas he had asked for a book on bodybuilding.

I was embarrassed as well as surprised, because, while I consider myself a serious reader, I have never read Dante. In my ignorance, I thought that his major work was *Inferno*, which I have now learned is the first part of the *Divine Comedy*. "Dante," I would say grandly, "is on my mental list of 'Books I Plan to Read One Day'. Like Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, I am keeping them for contemplative reading in my old age." (I recently decided it was time I started and am now reading de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America.)*

When Steve thanked us for the book, my wife said how much we admired his ambitious choice and ventured that it would take him a couple of years to read it. "No, I am going to read *Inferno* right away," he said. "It's background for a computer game that is coming out shortly." Again my ignorance was exposed. Computer games, Steve patiently explained, are a serious hobby, played by millions, whose average age is thirty-five.

I think Dante would have been pleased. All authors are grateful to be read and are more concerned with how they are read than why. Steve was obviously going to read *Inferno* with close attention, illustrating my frequent assertion that digital and print media are allies. The common enemy is cursory reading. No danger in Steve's case; he wants to win that game.

As a book publisher for most of my professional life, I used to say that the publisher's responsibility ended when a book was sold, a cynical commercial view of which I repented when I graduated from corporate publishing in 1990. For the following nineteen years I published a quarterly journal called *LOGOS*, one of the tenets of which was that the reader was an equal partner with the author and that the publisher served them both. The purchase of a book is obviously not a guarantee that it will be read. We all have books on our shelves waiting to be read. But only when they are read will we fulfil our partnership with the author, the author's courtship of us and the publisher's role as a matchmaker. And not only read, but read responsibly, which means that the reader should both absorb and react somewhere in the gamut from indignant rejection to unqualified praise.

WHEN THOUGHT FRAGMENTS INTO BITS AND BYTES

I have long claimed that the computer is the enemy of creative reading, corrupting the language with acronyms and coinages, fragmenting coherent thought into bits and bytes and progressively taking control of the readers' mind, eroding their independence and fulfilling McLuhan's prophecy that the medium is the message. The assumption that any writing is complete without deliberate perusal by an independent mind aids the confusion of knowledge with information which has accompanied the development of the computer.

Equal partnership between writer and reader is not a daring theory. In pre-digital days, it was a fact. Now the vehicle is seen as more important than the journey. The fear of Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics, that the computer would progressively take control of the human mind is in danger coming to pass, and one sign of this danger is superficial reading. The creed of the digital age is that only communication matters. The internet poses a prospect of informational surfeit in which everybody communicates with everybody, substance and understanding being minor considerations.

As a result, the reader has power which he is losing by default. Every writer needs the reader for his own fulfilment – which writer wishes to blush unseen? – but is led into the delusion that communication, measured by the

number of "hits", is fulfilment. If the reader has this power which he is losing, it can only be his own fault. How can the reader safeguard this power and fulfil his responsibility?

The fact that reading and writing have both been fundamentally changed by the computer could be seen as an opportunity for the reader. Writers used to be a creative minority; now everyone "writes", i.e. keys words into email, text messages, websites and blogs. The reader used to be a desirable majority wooed by writers. Between them stood the publisher, master of the magical metamorphoses of manuscripts into print, for which the reader paid the price of admission. Sales measured the writer's success.

CHEAPENING OF INFORMATION

The cheapening of information has been accompanied by the decline of copyright, the symbol of the writer's ownership and instrument of his and the publisher's protection. Readers are no longer wooed so much as assayed. This should give them more power. However, the increase in volume and accessibility of words has led to a decline in the art of readership. Millions of readers are oblivious to both their power and their responsibility. We need a movement for more responsible readership.

One of the positive qualities of the computer is that it facilitates response. However, response by screen and keyboard is so easy that it is often dashed off without deliberation, substance or style. The result is that many opportunities for the writer to influence the reader are missed. Mass communication is not going to create millions of new talented writers. What it should do is encourage more careful readers.

A first step in this direction is for the reader to read more selectively. This requires not only rejection of spam and frippery, but of worthwhile material which does not fit our needs or desires of the moment. The urgent need in reading today is not voracity, but restraint. Eaters learn to reject not only junk food, but also good food which does not suit the moment or because we are replete. The reader, like the careful diner, has to beware of over-indulgence.

The pre-computer age's compartmentalised definitions of reading and writing, with the publisher as intermediary, assumed that creative writing was an adult skill to be studied and polished, while the art of reading was assumed to have been mastered in childhood. As a result, many textbooks were written, and are still written, about writing (and publishing), but few about reading. In the past twenty years, more books about reading have begun to be published, perhaps in reaction to the decline in the quality of reading and to the vast increase in the quantity and accessibility of writing.

Both are inescapably linked with the weakening of the concept of intellectual property manifested in so many ways, for instance. by publications such as Google and Wikipedia and by the e-book.

Among distinguished voices raised to deplore the decline in reading is Sven Birkerts who wrote in his book *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1994):

> Cowed and intimidated by the availability of texts, faced with the all but impossible task of discriminating among them, the reader tends to move across surfaces, skimming, hastening from one site to the next, without allowing the words to resonate inwardly.

He develops this by observing:

> What is most conspicuous as we survey the general trajectory of reading across the centuries is what I think of as the gradual displacement of the vertical by the horizontal – the sacrifice of depth to lateral range ...

He concludes:

> The explosion of data ... has all but destroyed the premise of understandability. Intimidated by perspectives, by lateral vistas of information that stretch endlessly in every direction, we no longer accept the possibility of assembling a complete picture...The Computer, our high-speed, accessing, storing and sorting tool, appears as a Godsend. It increasingly determines what kind of information we are willing to traffic in; if something cannot be written in code and transmitted, it cannot be important.

Another acute observer, Richard Hoggart, author of many books on literature and society, wrote in *The Way We Live Now* (1995):

> It is not accidental that we use the word "reading" as a metaphor for "to understand"...Such a truth needs stressing today, when even highly educated people are often willing to wave goodbye to reading...on the grounds that we are now reading within the post-Gutenberg visual revolution.

HOW READERS CAN DODGE, DUCK AND WEAVE

Readers are an inchoate constituency. While both writing and reading are

vulnerable to downgrading, writers are by definition active, while readers, underestimating their power and their responsibility, can be too passive. Readers can exercise their power by being elusive. They can dodge, duck and weave. They can ignore, skim or discard. They can preserve, praise or criticise. Publishers are often called gatekeepers. Readers should be doorkeepers of conscience and consciousness. To read garbage, or to submit without resistance to the thrusts of invasive media, are acts of irresponsibility. In the end, readers are responsible for what is published, and their responsibility becomes more onerous as the role of the publisher recedes. But, seduced by the low cost, casual ease and ubiquity of recorded information, we tend too often to ignore, or at least be unconscious of, our responsibility.

In sum, readers have to be more pro-active, more critical, tougher, if the act of reading is to make its full contribution to human progress. This pro-activity is fourfold – seeking, finding, using and understanding. *Seeking* is where selectivity comes in – the power to reject, the option not to read. *Finding* is the decision to read. *Using* requires the reader to exercise critical faculties. *Understanding* leads to response, which is the justification of the exercise. It takes many possible forms – rejoinder, cogitation, criticism, praise. Through them all should be the feeling of having been gripped, entertained or enlightened. Otherwise, why read?

Reader responsibility is not dependent on education or intellect. Everyone reads, and everyone can exercise responsibility according to his will and capacity. Responsible reading is in the end the only way to filter the best out of the computer-generated mass of information, to discipline distorted reporting, careless reasoning, special pleading, tendentious arguments and vulgar expression, all of which are more common in communications today than they were twenty or thirty years ago. In simple terms, there is a need to increase quality and reduce quantity. The reader has power to influence this. The computer has not changed the nature of communication. It has only provided a more facile vehicle in connecting one human mind with another.

POSTCRIPT

Steve has now read the whole of Dante's *Inferno* and is eagerly anticipating the date of publication of the game with that name. He tells me that a special paper edition has now been published. So he is not alone. Through thoughtful serious reading, he is preparing himself to win the game against the ingenious minds who have devised it. "Steve," I told him, "this makes you a responsible reader."

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

After graduating from Glasgow University in 1940, Gordon Graham saw six years of war service in England, India and Burma. He returned to India in 1946 and spent the next ten years as a freelance newspaper correspondent and publisher's representative in South East Asia. This was followed by eight years in New York as International Sales Manager of the McGraw Hill Book Company. In 1963, he returned to the UK and for the next twelve years ran McGraw Hill's book business in the UK, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. In 1975, he became Chairman and Chief Executive of Butterworths, the legal and scientific publishers from which he retired in 1990. That year he founded *LOGOS*, a quarterly journal about the international book business. He has written four books, of which the most recent is his military memoir *The Trees Are All Young on Garrison Hill.* He is the founder and now Honorary President of the Kohima Educational Trust.

16

The art of obituaries: What will they say when I die?

Michael Smith

Michael Smith draws on his considerable experience as an obituarist to outline some of the skills required to capture a life in words

"What will they write about me when I die?" The question from Bunny Austin, international tennis star and matinée idol of the 1930s, wasn't just whimsical musing. It was a pragmatic one, which he asked me one Saturday afternoon at a party in Wimbledon. "I don't know, Bunny, would you like me to find out?" I replied. "Yes, please," he said.

I realised what was on his mind: a chance to set the record straight, even posthumously. He admitted as much. He had been accused of all sorts of nonsense concerning his war record – a draft dodger and pacifist during World War II, according to some British newspapers – and subsequently blackballed by the All England Lawn Tennis Club after he allowed his membership to lapse in the 1960s. His was, undoubtedly, a fascinating life worthy of a substantial obituary.

He and Fred Perry had been the last great British men's tennis players, not even matched in recent years by Tim Henman or Andy Murray. Perry and Austin had helped to win the Davis Cup for England four years running. For more than 70 years Austin remained the last Briton to reach the Wimbledon Men's finals, back in 1938. And as for his war record, he actually served in the US army but was diagnosed with a liver disease which barred him from active war service. So much for the accusations against him!

I phoned the newspapers and made inquiries. Most of them already had something about him on file or would get their sports correspondents to write his obituary. But the *Independent*, a comparative newcomer to the

quality end of the newspaper spectrum, had nothing and commissioned me to find someone.

I reported all this back to Austin, who promptly replied: "I'll write it myself!" Indeed, he did send me a rough outline. I followed this up spending a morning with him at the retirement home where he lived in Coulsdon, Surrey. He gave me privileged access, and a wonderfully entertaining morning, recording his whole story.

When Austin died, on 26 August 2000, three years after our initial conversation, the *Independent* ran the 1,600-word obituary across two pages. Meanwhile I telephoned the UK broadcast media and his death was reported on the main television and radio news bulletins as well as in *The New York Times*.

As a freelance journalist, I have written obituaries of sports stars and artists, politicians and diplomats, business leaders and trade unionists, campaigners and war veterans for the *Independent*, *The Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Scotsman* and the *Herald*, Glasgow. My subjects have included Frits Philips, Chairman of the Philips Electronics multinational, who escaped through his office window and went into hiding, on the run from the Nazis in occupied Holland; Les Dennison, a communist trade union leader from Coventry who fought the Japanese and was a prisoner of war on the infamous Burma railway – yet years later found the capacity to forgive his Japanese captors and was welcomed to their country; and Melville Carson, violinist, accountant and World War Two pilot, who was shot down by the Luftwaffe and was involved in preparing the Great Escape from Stalag Luft III PoW camp.

I've written about the great Czech surgeon, diplomat, playwright and presidential candidate Jara Moserova, who as a burns specialist treated the Prague student dissident Jan Palach who was to die after setting himself alight in Wenceslas Square; and I've recorded the life of Alec Smith, the rebel son of Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith – a drug runner who underwent a profound spiritual transformation and became a friend of black African nationalists. I also wrote the obituary of Bill Porter who at the age of 70, following a life-time in publishing, founded the International Communications Forum as a media ethics campaign for integrity in journalism. The next 14 years became the crowning fulfilment of his life.

VERY DIFFERENT FROM NEWS REPORTING

Obituaries are not like news reporting. They just don't follow a linear time-line in answering the questions – who? what? where? when? why? – though these do need to be addressed. For the obituary writer, "Who?" is the most

important question. Who is this person? Why should anyone take any interest in her or him? What have they done with their lives? What is their most significant achievement? Where and when did they do what they did? And why did they do what they did? The story of a person's life and achievements doesn't just run from A to Z – born, lived and died. What interests the obituary writer and the reading public is the person's main achievements and how and why they came about.

Bill Porter's most significant achievement was towards the end of his life. Therefore start the obituary there and not with his earlier career. The most significant achievement of Bunny Austin's professional tennis career was his four Davis Cup victories and his Wimbledon record, both early on in his life. What he went on to do, motivated by his religious convictions, when his tennis career was over was also of great interest, because it created public controversy. But that would not have been the place to start the story.

Having established the subject's significant record of achievement, then one goes back to their early life, their family background and upbringing, their education, the influences on their life, the journey that led them to their achievement, and then fill in the after story – their later years and cause of death if known. And each newspaper has its own formula for covering the particulars of a person's death. The *Guardian*, for instance, always writes "who has died aged..." in the opening sentence. The *Independent* always has an italic footnote giving the person's full name, his job, date of birth, marriage, number of children and date of death. *The Times* and the *Guardian* have a similar approach in their footnotes.

For some of my subjects, I have recorded their stories, at their request, years before their death. (*The Times* has about 5,000 lives prepared in advance on file, lugubriously called the "morgue".) I have written others' in the days and weeks after their death, when family and friends seem to have instant recall of the fullest and most fascinating details, like so much treasure trove that has lain dormant for years and is now freshly discovered by the metal detector of their memories. They are only too happy to talk about their loved one in the hope of recording their lives for posterity. And one is always surprised by how much one didn't know about the life of a friend, an acquaintance or a public figure – which of course is what makes obituaries so compelling. As the prize-winning historical novelist Hilary Mantel observes, we are all connected with the dead: "The dead live in us. We are genetically connected to them. Their genes live on in us."[1]

A FIRST TAKE ON HISTORY

Obituaries are micro-biographies and can be regarded, like much

journalism, as a first take on history. They are snapshots of extraordinary or unusual lives that have helped to shape history. Obituaries act as shorthand for historical record. As the philosopher and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson asserted: "All history is biography." It is individuals, after all, who shape history.

Obituaries, therefore, chronicle "what people were really like through informal anecdote, description and character sketch", in the words of the late Hugh Massingberd, the celebrated obituaries editor of the *Daily Telegraph* from 1986 to 1994. Massingberd has been called the father of the modern obituary who "reinvented the whole concept of the form, substituting for the grave and ceremonious tribute the sparkling celebration of life", as his own obituary in the *Telegraph*, following his death on Christmas Day 2007, put it[2]. In his approach an obituary that provoked laughter – subtle or even irreverent – "would be by no means out of place".

This "first stab at biography" as James Fergusson puts it[3], may be the only one that some subjects will receive. They may not, unless they were particularly famous, have featured much elsewhere during their lifetimes. The obituary then is "a first, brisk judgment in the heat of news", writes Fergusson. As such, the obituary "has importance in the historical record; it is part of that 'newspaper of record' tradition to which newspapers and periodicals...aspired".

For others, who have lived in the limelight, there are probably acres of press cuttings, biographies and other sources – including online such as Wikipedia – readily available to the obituarist. But nothing beats the first-hand interview and I have been surprised and honoured by those who have asked me to have the record of their lives prepared in advance.

In Britain, the *Independent* and the *Guardian* carry signed obituaries, whereas *The Times* – "for many years the only place to be seen dead in", as Fergusson puts it – and the *Daily Telegraph* publish theirs unsigned, on the grounds that they are part of the papers' editorial comment. They can, therefore, lay claim to a degree of objectivity which signed obituaries do not necessarily have. It is a nice distinction, as unsigned obituaries are also sometimes written by those who knew their subject personally. Not that obituaries need much editorialising. My approach is to let the story of a person's life stand without much comment. The outcomes of their lives speak for themselves.

THE ADVANTAGE OF ANONYMITY

The Times' obituaries editor, Ian Brunskill, writes in his introduction to *Great Lives – a century in obituaries* (2005), about the advantage of

anonymity: "An unsigned piece is much more likely to be read – and written – as an account of the subject's life, and not of his relations with the author. There are practical merits too. *Times* notices may be elaborate composites, updated over many years, sometimes by more than one hand."[3] And precisely because *The Times* treats its obituaries as editorial comment, it does not reveal the names of its obituary writers until 70 years after publication. The *Daily Telegraph* has a similar approach of never revealing its authors.

"Who merits an obituary in a national newspaper?" asks Fergusson and answers his own question: "Anyone who is important and anyone who is, in some way, interesting." In a sense there is potentially an obituary in everyone – and the skill of the obituary writer is to draw out what makes a person's life fascinating enough for others to want to read it. On this basis, some newspapers, such as the *Guardian*, have introduced much shorter "Other lives – written and signed by family members or friends – of people who do not warrant full-blown obituaries but who nonetheless deserve public recognition perhaps for a particular achievement. Not only the famous but the humblest of lives can be brought to life after death by a skilful writer. But they must be sufficiently interesting to engage, inform, entertain, and surprise the reader.

This can lead to complications: a great danger for known obituary writers is that they all too easily find themselves cast as grim reapers by friends, colleagues and associates. The simple question "How are you?" can elicit sideways glances. The one time I took part in a conference of obituary writers, in the salubrious city of Bath (which must surely induce longevity), our name badges all had pictures of the grim reaper carrying his scythe next to our names.

THE DANGER OF WRITING HAGIOGRAPHY

Another danger is the temptation to write hagiography: to paint a saintly or overtly rosy picture of the person who has died, ignoring realities and glossing over defects. There is an old saying that one should not speak ill of the dead. But where there have been struggle, ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, set-backs and victories, all can and should be recorded, even if with a respectful tone. And if the person has been a complete rogue then the obituary should say so. The criminal, the demagogue and the crook should be recorded as such.

I personally am not in the business of writing derogatory obituaries. I have only written about the lives of people whom I have known personally, had an acquaintance with or known about through their family or friends.

However, another temptation is to self-edit, to pull one's punches. Bunny Austin made one particular confession which I couldn't bring to put into his obituary. Was this undue self-censorship on my part or more a question of protecting family sensibilities? Perhaps I'll never know.

For myself, I am inspired and humbled by the quality of the lives of those I have written about: their sense of purpose, vision, faith, tenacity and moral commitment, their calling to a role over the long haul, their setbacks and triumphs over adversity. The constraints of space sometimes make it difficult for the obituary writer to record the inner struggles of their subjects in any great depth. Nonetheless I always hope to capture something of their inner lives and motivations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us."

Of course if one has any notion of a heaven or hell in the afterlife, then what lies before us becomes all too pertinent! As Oscar Wilde wrote, in his play *Lady Windermere's Fan*: "Every saint has a past; every sinner has a future." The obituary writer has the chance to capture both sides of a person's life. And if we write about sinners, then perhaps we also record the lives of saints – ordinary mortals not without fault but who have lived heroic lives – without even realising it.

Once I won a competition run by a newspaper which asked readers to write what inspired them in life. I said that writing obituaries for that newspaper was a source of inspiration for me: the quality of the lives which humbled and inspired me. I was surprised to receive a book token for £50. I promptly spent it on an anthology of obituaries.

NOTES

1. Hilary Mantel was speaking about her Man Booker Prize-winning novel *Wolf Hall*, in an interview with Kate Adie, London Book Fair, 19 April 2010
2 *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 December 2007
3 James Fergusson, founding obituaries editor of the *Independent*, from its inception in 1986 until his retirement in 2007, writing in *The Penguin Book of Journalism* (1999)

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Michael Smith is a freelance journalist and author whose articles have appeared in the *Guardian*, *Guardian Weekly*, *The Times*, the *Financial Times*, the *Independent*, the *Herald*, Scotland, and the *Pioneer*, New Delhi. He is not to be confused with the *Sunday Times* journalist of the same name. He worked for three years in the 1970s as production manager of *Himmat* newsweekly, Mumbai, under its Chief Editor Rajmohan Gandhi, a grandson of

Mahatma Gandhi. Smith has returned 10 times to India, reporting stories of business ethics applied in practice. His latest book is *Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy* (Caux Books 2008, published in India 2009), a collection of stories of business and social entrepreneurs around the world who are making a difference through their personal integrity. He has been associated for more than 40 years with Initiatives of Change International (www.iofc.org), based in Caux, Switzerland, where he has taken part in almost 40 annual Caux conferences that aim to "build relationships of trust across the world's divides" (www.caux.ch). His booklet, *The Sound of Silence: How to find inspiration in the age of information* (translated into six languages) is used as resource material at the Caux conferences. Smith has written nearly 30 obituaries for the *Independent*, *The Times* and the *Guardian*, and is an honorary member of the Texas-based International Association of Obituarists. He is the editor of *UK Initiatives*, the newsletter of Initiatives of Change UK (www.uk.iofc.org), and is the online editor of the website of the International Communications Forum, the media ethics think-tank (www.icforum.org). He is also the joint coordinator in the UK of Caux Initiatives for Business, which has run a series of forums on London on the banking crisis.

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The theatre – introducing us to ourselves

Hugh Steadman Williams

Hugh Steadman Williams argues that the theatre can offer a "glimpse of something beyond our humanity, a transcendence that enables ordinary human beings like ourselves to do extraordinary things"

The theatre is unusual in that to produce its life-enhancing impact on its audience, it can only do so through the talents and efforts of a wide spectrum of artists of different disciplines – writer, producer, director, designer (set, costume, light and sound), musical director, actors, musicians, technicians.

Although the theatre is a highly artificial medium ("whose art is to conceal art"), for each the challenge is to match talent and imagination with integrity and through integrity to arrive at a truth about our human condition – to introduce the audience to themselves. And it means teamwork – all striving for the same end – the best possible production. There are a lot of egos around in the theatre, but they have to be subsumed into the one single objective. "The play's the thing." If this vision is blurred or lost, then disaster looms.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

For the writer the challenge is to create characters that are believable and consistent. It also means developing a story into a plot that holds the attention of the audience with all its twists and turns and climaxes. Yet it also involves something more. When I was a young and very green writer, just

starting out, I was fortunate to be taken under the wing of an experienced playwright, old enough to be my father. He said to me: "If you want to write for the theatre, you have got to learn to love your characters and love your audience." A challenge, indeed. But what did he mean by that?

First of all, "love your characters". I suppose this means respecting them, not using them, but giving them their own voice, their own life, listening to what they are telling me and not being just intent on what I am asking of them. In his book *Grace and Necessity*, Archbishop Rowan Williams writes of "dispossession" as being one of the marks of the true artist. Having created his work the artist renounces control of it – presents it to the public to be accepted or rejected. The Archbishop likens this to God's act in creation. In the Genesis story God created man and woman and then gave them free will, allowed them to go their own way, without trying to control their every move. In other words He created living, breathing, rounded human beings, sometimes rebels, never robots. There is a great truth here for the playwright. To ring true, characters in a play need to be people, not puppets.

Secondly "love your audience". Again respect is at the heart of this concept. Respect for their intelligence – and for their emotional intelligence. It means giving them their money's worth – a cracking good evening in the theatre. It means giving them a glimpse of what it means to be truly human, whether through comedy or tragedy. Laughter is a great restorer – "the shout of joy with which we recognise ourselves" as one person put it. Confronting horror, despair or evil can be a wake-up call. It can bring out the best and the worst in each of us. "There but for the grace of God go I." But to leave audiences wallowing in evil or drowning in despair without a glimmer of hope is hardly to love them.

THE DIRECTOR

The primary task of the director is to interpret honestly the intentions of the author. This does not mean that the director cannot bring his or her own fresh creativity to the piece. There is nothing wrong with Shakespeare in modern dress, with changing the time and place in which a play is set. This can often be very arresting and bring fresh understanding to a well-known work. But if the director imposes his/her own views as to distort the art of the writer, then that is nothing short of vandalism. Writing in *The Times* a few months ago, the critic Benedict Nightingale said of one director: "For him freshness is too often imposing his own clever-clever ideas on plays, not in discerning and fulfilling an author's aims and intentions."

I have experienced this myself, both in my capacity as producer and as

writer. What can be done about it? It is a bit like the principle of editorial freedom in the news media. A director is appointed on the basis of his or her record. But once appointed they have artistic freedom and artistic control. The only sanction a producer has is not to appoint that director again. Sometimes a living author and a producer can be present at rehearsals and see which way the production is developing. Depending on their relationship with the director they may be able to discuss the author's intentions, provide some necessary input, a nudge to the rudder. But not always. I am thinking of one occasion when the author lived in another country where he had responsibilities he could not leave and when I as producer was so busy raising investment, negotiating contracts, organising publicity and doing the hundred and one things a producer has to shoulder, that I only got to the final dress rehearsals just before the opening night. I realised then that the director had pursued his own agenda. He had a point to make and he made it. That was not why we appointed him. But by then it was too late. A lot of investors' money had been spent and tickets sold. We just could not afford to sack the director – break his contract – and start again. So the production went ahead, with disastrous results.

THE ACTOR

The actor's craft, under the guidance of the director, is to breathe life into the character created by the playwright. What was a name on a page becomes a living human being. There must be truth in an actor's performance just as there should be truth in the writing and the direction. When there is truth we recognise the character, it becomes believable. The actor may draw hugely on his or her own experience, as well as their observation of others. But the actor's character, his likes or dislikes, his moods and vanities, should disappear and be subsumed into the character he is creating. It is the ability to become someone else, to walk in another's shoes. People are often surprised when they meet an actor off stage, just how shy and reserved they can be, often lacking in confidence and "social skills". Such sensitive, talented people only seem to come alive on stage, when they can rake refuge in adopting another persona, in clothing and immersing themselves in the character they are portraying.

When this truth in the actor's role is missing the whole production can be thrown off kilter. I remember many years ago a play I had written suffering from this missing truth and the consequent imbalance in the production. I had written a part of a fiery young woman, a real tigress. In the German production, which preceded the English one, we were fortunate to have an actress who fulfilled this role to perfection. She breathed fire and

fury and her energy drove the production forward with tremendous pace. She heightened the drama of conflict with her husband, which was at the core of the play. Her opposition and resistance to his idealism, made that idealism and his courage in pursuing it, all the more believable. Thus it brought out a really strong performance from him also as a result.

For the English production we had a young and relatively inexperienced director who assembled what looked on paper as a very impressive cast. And impressive they were, with one exception – the actress playing the fiery wife. She had been a very pretty starlet who had featured in quite a number of films. Now, approaching middle age, she was still strikingly beautiful, but she just did not seem willing or capable of giving the part the force and scorching energy it needed. Offstage she was a very nice and likeable person. But on stage that was not what was required. She seemed not to want to be forceful or belligerent or difficult to handle. She wanted to be nice and look pretty. And the whole production suffered for it. There was softness at its core instead of strength. The sheer force of the clash and conflict was lost, so that the play was weakened. Luckily it was a limited run.

THE EXPERIENCE

What distinguishes the theatre from other media is the live audience. People sometimes wonder how a cast can perform the same roles, speak the same lines, eight times a week for months and months, sometimes for years and years. They forget that what changes at every performance is the audience. Actors to my mind are heroes. They go out there night after night, blinded by powerful spotlights, to face hundreds or even thousands of people they have never met before.

The audience comes with their own preoccupations. They have had a difficult day at work or a disrupted journey to get to the theatre. They are hot or they are cold. They may be wet. What the cast have to do in the space of a few minutes is to build a relationship with that audience, to set up an electric ring circuit that runs from the stage into the audience and back again. The more the audience responds – not just with laughter or applause, but often more importantly with dead silence, created by tension or emotion, when not a cough or a fidget is heard – the more the cast can crank up the power in that circuit. The audience become part of the play, an essential ingredient in the whole experience.

And what are they experiencing? The power of story, the power of art, the power of movement and performance – all leading to one end. And what is that end? The truth of our condition. What it means to be truly human, when so many de-humanising forces are at work around us. And sometimes,

just sometimes, all too rarely, a glimpse of something beyond our humanity, a transcendence that enables ordinary human beings like ourselves to do extraordinary things.

But these moments are only possible when a team of extremely gifted and talented and imaginative people work together and pool their talents to create something that is infinitely greater than the sum of its parts. This is why the attitude of the whole creative team to the audience is so important. If they feel superior and despise or patronise their audience, regarding them as ticket-fodder or "bums on seats", you can be sure that this will show in what they produce. But if they respect their audience, if they want to give them the very best that they have to offer, if – dare I repeat what my mentor said to me? – if they can learn to love their audience, then that will also communicate itself and lead to that experience which can make a visit to the theatre so memorable, satisfying and uplifting.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Over a period of forty years, Hugh Steadman Williams has worked in almost every area of the theatre – stage manager, actor, literary manager, producer, director – even press officer! As a playwright he has written fifteen stage plays and two radio plays, including the first ever stereo drama production on Radio 4. Since his retirement he has produced three Shakespeare comedies in the open air and a series of "drawing room dramas" all in private homes in his local village in Kent. His late wife was a graphic designer and illustrator. One of his sons is a painter, the other a photographer.

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Solutions-driven journalism

Martyn Lewis

Martyn Lewis returns to his famous "good news" argument and concludes that he was perhaps asking for too much too soon – challenging deeply entrenched journalistic attitudes and systems of judgement. Here, he suggests a "half-way house" in which journalists try to incorporate somewhere in every negative story a few lines on what some people or organisations are doing to tackle the problem that has given them the negative headline

In 1993, I put forward what became misleadingly known as the "good news" argument, suggesting that when television journalists come to decide the editorial priorities for each day's news they should be more prepared than they have been in the past to weigh the positive stories – not artificially created, but as they *naturally* occur in the news agenda – on the same set of journalistic scales on which they assess the negative stories. And the balancing factor on those scales – the main criteria for commissioning and including stories – should not be the degree of violence, death, conflict, failure or disaster they encompass, but the extent to which those stories shape or change, or have the potential to shape or change, the country or the world in which we live.

I argued that those criteria would not only allow the exposure of injustices and the tragedies, but also give proper weight to achievements, successes and triumphs. So that those who regarded television news as their primary source of information, shaping their view of their country and their planet, didn't feel as often as they do that the entire world was falling apart but were also kept more fully aware of the changes that offer hope, that

uplift the human spirit, that mark mankind's continuing achievements in all walks of life. I was simply asking television news editors everywhere to start resisting the pressure to reduce or abandon the positive stories, which, in my experience over three decades in television journalism, were usually the first to be demoted or dropped when pressures began to mount.

That is what I said – and it triggered some misleading distortions of my argument by a few fellow journalists. They claimed that I wanted a Soviet-style sanitisation of the airwaves where journalists were in the pockets of public relations spin doctors from politics and business; or bulletins perpetually packed with trivialities; or that I wouldn't cover major wars. Had those critics had the time or opportunity to read my speech in full they would have found that I specifically raised each of those bizarre interpretations of "good news" – and clearly and roundly rejected them!

Some of the distortion was a product of that gut journalistic instinct to see an argument in terms of black or white – a commendable approach on some occasions, but not when the heart of understanding the point being made actually involves several important shades of grey. And other distortions were based on a genuinely felt belief in some quarters of the journalistic profession that "news consists of things some people do not want to see reported". It is that long-standing but narrow concept which I was seeking to challenge, for I believed – and still do – that daily news reporting can and should be about so much more than that.

JOURNALISM: A HYPOCRITICALLY PROTECTIVE PROFESSION

The question is how do you achieve that? And I have come to the conclusion that, perhaps, I was asking for too much too soon – that challenging deeply entrenched journalistic attitudes and systems of judgement was unlikely to succeed – given the almost fanatically protective attitude in many corners of the media. I've always thought it strange that a profession that demands the right to analyse and criticise every other sector of society should become so hypocritically defensive when someone dares to suggest that it should turn that same probing spotlight on itself. So occasional thoughtful questioning of today's journalism by eminent editors such as Richard Lambert (ex-*Financial Times*), Alan Rusbridger (the *Guardian*) or John Lloyd (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism) is either largely brushed aside or attacked by the rest of the pack.

So let me suggest a possible way forward, which would apply across all media – a kind of half-way house which would continue to give editors and proprietors the negative stories and headlines which they judge to be

essential for maximising audiences – and, at the same time, bring a more rounded and balanced perspective to those stories.

Why not try to incorporate somewhere in every negative story a few lines on what some people or organisations are doing to tackle the problem that has given you that negative headline? It won't be appropriate for every story, but journalists should at least be challenged – perhaps even required – to make the search for such antidotes part of their natural professional behaviour and instincts. A drugs bust in Brixton might lead you to an organisation that is working in that area to try to combat the drugs problem. Reporting of crimes committed by young people might include details of the work of one of the many charities successfully helping to rehabilitate deeply deprived and disadvantaged youngsters in all kinds of interesting ways.

Some years ago, pupils in a London secondary school (where availability of alternative images is, in fact, considerable) were asked for a list of images they associated with the Third World. These were their answers: "poverty, babies dying, monsoons, war, devastated crops, starvation, disease, drought, refugees, flies, death, Oxfam, dirty water, India, Cambodia, clothing, bad teeth, kids with pot bellies, mud huts, injections". The origins of these images were given as: " TV news, special programmes about war and famine, children's news programmes and disaster fund-raising appeals."

WHY UNBALANCED MEDIA DIET IS INSIDIOUS

The effect of this unbalanced media diet is insidious, and not confined to children. A UNICEF "State of the World's Children" report argued that the cumulative effect of the media's largely negative coverage of the developing world is grossly misleading, resulting in "deeply held public misconceptions that are ultimately damaging to the understanding they seek to promote". Its regular surveys showed that most people believed that between 50 and 75 per cent of the world's children are starving – yet the actual figure is between 1 and 2 per cent. People also believed that only 20 per cent of all 6 to 12-year-olds start school. The real figure is almost 90 per cent. And UNICEF concluded that that "many people derive their mental and emotional images of the developing world exclusively from the reporting of its exceptions".

A later UNICEF report developed the argument further: "The lens of history, rather than the lens of news, may see what is now happening in the developing world as the beginning of a final offensive against some of the oldest and most common enemies of the world's children. Those enemies include five diseases that today kill over 8 million children a year, and the malnutrition which holds back the mental and physical development of one child in three in the developing world. Also in retreat are some of the most

common causes of childhood disability, the viruses and micro-nutrient deficiencies which every year leave hundreds of thousands of children permanently deaf, blind, mentally retarded or paralysed. These", it noted despairingly, "are largely untold stories in the midst of the many well-publicised disasters."

Where there is disaster, there are people trying to recover from it. Where there is suffering, there are people trying to help. Where there is conflict, there are people trying to end it. Where things go wrong, there are people trying to put them right, and trying to make sure they don't happen again. And where there are mistakes and misjudgements, there are lessons being learnt – paving the way for success and achievement. That needs to be infused into the DNA of journalism; too often it is not.

Take a story on BBC television and radio from March 2010, headlined: "Cases of young people self-harming rise by 50%." The internet was blamed. But hardly anywhere did you see any specific mention of the internet sites devoted specifically to helping young people who self harm. I declare a personal interest here – I chair a charity, YouthNet, dedicated to helping young people in a wide variety of ways. Through the feedback from their discussion boards, they had identified the growth of this problem many months earlier, and had carefully crafted a much acclaimed new section on one of their websites (thesite.org) offering comprehensive and highly responsible help, advice and information for young people who self-harm. Not hard for any journalist to find. If you tap the words Self Harm into Google, the url for that section of thesite.org is the first one to appear. Yet little mention of that on BBC television or radio – and bypassed by most journalists in their quest for graphic gory images on YouTube of cuts and scars. How many parents worried about their children self harming would have been hugely grateful to have been told about that? Or maybe Google is providing those parents with all the help they want via the internet – thus reducing the relevance to them of a national media which highlights the problems, but seldom the solutions.

SOLUTIONS DRIVEN JOURNALISM EMERGES ON THE INTERNET

So it is no surprise that we see solutions-driven journalism starting to emerge on the internet. The Huffington Post, a widely read liberal US news website, has said it now aims to include tips for how readers can take action on stories. It is a development that clearly holds much promise for re-engaging disillusioned and apathetic voters by showing that they really can do something to tackle problems affecting their lives and their country.

It is entirely possible – given the changing moods of readers and

audiences – that this solutions-driven journalism could become a money-spinner, challenging the conventional commercial view that it is negative headlines and stories that maximise the number of readers and viewers. This appeal to both principle and pocket could be a winning combination for news organisations seeking new ways of funding their journalism in the age of the internet. Faced with largely declining audiences and sales, the conventional news outlets have nothing to lose – and potentially a great deal to gain.

TRIGGERING CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Such a change could, in time, lead to reporters, as a matter of routine, going back to the scenes of negative stories to show how those negative stories had triggered change for the better: e.g. massive reconstruction after a country had been almost laid waste by war, irrigation schemes to help those who had been hit by famine, new techniques and medicines to tackle diseases and, in general, stories of human endeavour, courage and achievement in the face of different kinds of adversity. In the UK, according to the Charities Aid Foundation, more than 20 million people – almost a third of the population – volunteer regularly to help others in a whole variety of ways. The many annual awards such as the Beacon Prizes, the Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service (part of the Honours system), the Young Achievers Awards and the Charity Times Awards offer powerful testimony to the imaginative ideas and people who drive progress at grassroots level in our communities. I estimate that between them these largely unreported award ceremonies could provide several really attractive stories every single week for the national media.

I once attended a conference in America of representatives of some 150 television news organisations from around the world. It was chaired by the former Beirut hostage Terry Anderson. After listening to a long and fiery discussion in one debate, he intervened to ask two questions. The first was chastening – is violence your only criteria in television news? And secondly, he told the story of how, when he was reporting from a foreign bureau for Associated Press, his editor would call him back once a year, ask him to re-read a file containing every story he had sent from that country, and then ask if he thought he had, overall, presented a fair picture of that country to his readers. Terry Anderson asked for any of the delegates whose television newsrooms undertook similar reviews of their reporters work to put their hands up. Not a single hand in the room was raised. Perhaps we could learn from that.

Such a sensible sense of perspective is what some major areas of

journalism need. My suggested "halfway house" could begin to help to achieve that. I can but hope that some of the old war-horses of the profession which was my life and love for so many years will be adventurous enough to give it a try.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Martyn Lewis, CBE, as a television journalist for more than 32 years, presented every mainstream national news programme on Britain's two main terrestrial channels. Ten years ago he moved into the world of business when he co-founded Teliris Inc., a company which is the major global pioneer and technology leader in a new "realtime" communications business space known as telepresence. He is Chairman of NICE TV which works with ITN Consulting to provide high quality news videos for industry-wide conferences, exhibitions and events. He is, also, the Founder and Chairman of YouthNet, the award-winning charity which, since 1995, has been providing a comprehensive internet site signposting 16 to 24-year-olds to every conceivable form of help, information or opportunity they might need – www.thesite.org. It is accessed by more than half a million young people every month.

PART 4

MEDIA VALUES IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

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For the journalism of reconciliation and peace

Fabrice Boulé

Fabrice Boulé is developing a programme promoting the journalism of peace and reconciliation in the Great Lakes Area of Africa. Here, he describes a harrowing visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2004 – and how journalists from the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda moved from scepticism to enthusiasm for the programme

It's April 2004 and I'm staying in the Democratic Republic of Congo: first in Kinshasa, the capital, and then in Kisangani and Goma. My objective is to recruit and start training the journalists of Syfia Grands Lacs, a press agency aiming to cover the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda (see: http://syfia-grands-lacs.info). It's motto: "Mieux informer pour mieux réconcilier" ("To inform in order to reconcile"). As it so happens, it's the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

At Goma, I hear every morning on the radio the reports of the memorial ceremonies which are taking place in neighbouring Rwanda. Every day I also hear the life stories of many local residents and every day someone stands out because of their violence and hatred.

In such a delicate situation, in a town half buried under the lava from the eruption of the Nyirangongo volcano on 17 January 2002, there is the constant search for scapegoats. The supporters of Rwanda are the first targets. Whether it's the state of the crops, the recent nomination of the governor of the province, the irregular times of the shuttle boat on Lake Kivu – everything is the fault of the neighbours who infiltrate. The image of the cockroach is still very present. Several members of the civil society of North-Kivu, who claim to belong to human rights organisations, now say:

"We did not kill them all in 2004, I am now ready to re-start the killing tomorrow." One of the people I'm speaking to has bloodshot eyes when he makes these threats.

It's dusk and like every night since my arrival a storm is about to break. The volcano is surrounded by its usual cloud of smoke – as if it is in hiding. The atmosphere is electric.

One day when I am actually discussing the merits of collecting reliable information in front of a gathering of local journalists only half listening, a shooting breaks out in the building next to the hotel where the training session is being held. For several minutes there's an exchange of fire. I will never know exactly what happens. Apparently there were no dead nor wounded. Therefore, to the locals there was nothing to write about. On the other hand, the owner of the hotel with whom I spoke every day will actually be shot a few months later. Revenge, jealousy, collaboration will be the words used by my local colleagues to explain the shooting.

THE RIVER OF HATRED

On my return to Switzerland, I am actually sick. I believe I've had a serious attack of malaria. Doctors are telling me that none of their analyses are supporting this diagnosis. But I have not been dreaming this terrible fever, this exhaustion lasting several weeks. Time passes slowly. Every day I see again the blood in the eyes of this angry man. He says: "I am ready to start again to finish the job. This time we shall kill them all." Slowly, I realise that this river of hatred for me much heavier to digest than the sting of a mosquito.

It is my first conscious experience of this kind: an unhealthy spirit has spread right into my body. My own spirit could not stop it. It was my guts which absorbed it. Quite by chance, during the summer, a friend comes back from Caux. He has been impressed by what he has heard. The following day I telephone and invite myself to this place above Lake Léman. We clicked immediately. From November 2004 with Thomas Ntambu, Bonaventure Nkeshimimana and Michel Kipoke, already in charge of the programme, "Réconciliation dans la région des Grands Lacs Africains" at Initiative for Change, we invite four journalists to Caux to test the concept of journalism of peace and reconciliation.

Over four days, our four "guinea pigs", who come from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, move from scepticism to enthusiasm. It is, indeed, possible to connect with journalist first of all as individuals who may carry fears and wounds. We encourage these journalists to speak of their wounds, resentments and hatreds – and to try to

define their origins. These are the first steps to defuse violence to which the media can contribute. Then we identify some journalistic ways of addressing sensitive, almost taboo, issues to contribute towards better understanding between peoples and peaceful cohabitation.

Since 2004, 100 journalists from the Great Lakes Area of Africa have been trained in the skills of journalism for reconciliation and peace. We keep in contact: local initiatives have been started. In Burundi as well as in the east of the RDC, journalists are continuing to contribute positively to their societies, practising their journalistic skills under difficult conditions. But they find in themselves that extra spark which gives them their pride of being journalists.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Fabrice Boulé has reported extensively for Swiss and international media on Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, India and Central/West Africa. He was in charge of new projects at InfoSud press agency between 1998 and 2008. Co-founder of the Media21 Global Journalism Network Geneva (www.media21geneva.org), he trains journalists on global issues, including human rights. He has conducted programmes of reconciliation and peace journalism in the Great Lakes Area in Africa as well as in the Ivory Coast.

This article has been translated from the French (*Changer international*, May/June 2007, No. 325 pp 12-13) by Richard Lance Keeble and Maryline Gagnère.

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Assessing media standards in Angola

Rafael Marques de Morais

Rafael Marques de Morais examines the response of the Angolan media to the deadly attack on the Togolese football team in January 2010 – and highlights the serious threats to freedom of expression in the country

On 8 January 2010, Angola made worldwide headlines when gunmen attacked a convoy escorting the Togolese national football team to the African Cup of Nations. The team was travelling inland from the Congolese border town of Pointe Noire to Angola's northernmost province of Cabinda to compete in Group B which included Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire and Burkina-Faso.

This tragic event, which cost the lives of a Togolese coach and the team spokesman, provides the backdrop to assess freedom of press, professionalism and ethical standards in the Angolan media.

CONTEXT

On 28 April 2006, a new media law came into effect in response to the political and social pressure brought by independent journalists in favour of freedom of expression and a free press. A previous media law had been passed in 1991 as part of legal reforms to move the country from Marxism-Leninism towards democratisation following a cease-fire with the former rebel movement, UNITA.[1] But the attempt to end the civil conflict through multi-party elections failed. And war resumed a month after the September 1992 general elections, continuing until 2002.

In terms of the new legal framework, the media profession is governed by the Statutory Law of Journalists as well as a Code of Ethics. According to Article 21 (2) of the Media Law, the Statutory Law of Journalists "defines who is a journalist, the incompatibilities, rights and duties, the conditions for the issuing, renewal, suspension and revocation of professional certification of a journalist".

By law, the government has the responsibility to approve the statutory law, while the media watchdogs, under the auspices of the National Council of Media, have the task of producing the code of ethics. This government-funded body is also responsible for issuing the certification for professional journalists.

To date, after four years, neither the government nor the National Council of Media has produced the three documents as required by law. Thus, apart from the general law and common sense, there are no defined criteria for professional journalism or for ethics in the media.

As a result, media standards in the country are generally low. Many journalists hold two jobs, by openly working as press officers for government officials and institutions, foreign embassies, multinationals and private companies. Another compounding factor is the lack of professional training for journalists in the country. Universities have introduced undergraduate media degrees only in the past few years, but the poor quality of the curricula and teaching adds to the chaos in the sector.

Hence, the introduction of basic standards of professionalism is the most pressing priority. In its January 2010 deliberations, the National Media Council noted the poor writing skills of journalists which quite often made it difficult for readers to make sense of the news they read. The council used such a public complaint to pressure for the urgent approval of the statutory law for journalists, and the consequent adoption of professional certification and a code of ethics.

THE TOGO ATTACK: STATE MEDIA CLAMPDOWN

At around 1.30 pm on 8 January, Angolan officials, headed by the vice-governor of Cabinda, Mr Macário Lemba, and other high-ranking provincial officials and top police officers, welcomed the Togolese team at the neutral zone between the two checkpoints at the border between the Republic of Congo and Angola. The football delegation was transferred to an official bus provided by the government. It was heavily escorted by ten vehicles, including two more buses, and more than 30 members of the special police force, colloquially known as "Ninjas". There were also regular police officers, and security agents.

Minutes after the visa formalities, at 2.16 pm, the convoy came under fire for about half an hour, at a bend near the town hall of the communal administration of Massabi. Stanislas Ocloo, 35, a sports reporter for Togo's national broadcaster Télévision Togolaise (TVT), and assistant coach Hamelet Abulo were killed.

Two combined factors made the attack more shocking to those with the knowledge of the area. It is an open area offering little cover for a hit and run attack, especially because there are several military garrisons in the area, and the government has set up military encampments in all villages along the way to control people's movements. Thus it is a heavily militarised region.

As part of the measures taken by the provincial authorities of Cabinda to make the Togolese trip as comfortable and secure as possible, the police had cleared the usually busy traffic on the 132 km journey between the border and the city centre of Cabinda, which takes between an hour and an hour and a half.

Nevertheless, the attack on the Togolese bus, in which the driver was hit in the abdominal region, also targeted the state newspaper *Jornal de Angola*'s vehicle. It had its tyres flattened. The car was transporting local state journalists from the newspaper, the national radio and public television; Orion, a PR company owned by government officials; and an independent journalist, Cristóvão Luemba, working for the Catholic-run Radio Ecclésia, who had hitch-hiked a lift.

Those journalists witnessed the tragic event that made one of the top international headlines that week. Yet, the state media was only allowed to broadcast the government's official statement condemning the attack, and not once were the journalists' insights used to help audiences understand what really happened. On the other hand, Cristóvão Luemba reported exclusively from the scene to Rádio Ecclésia, describing in detail what happened, with the shooting in the background. Yet the Catholic broadcaster's management immediately stepped in to black out the news. According to editor Tomás de Melo, he received orders to wait for international media to report the attack and then broadcast only news from the wires. But no outside journalists were at the scene.

Another editor from Rádio Ecclésia, who requested anonymity, provided three arguments for the censorship decision: national security concern, lack of confidence to report solo on the events, and strict orders from the management to hold until the Presidency of the Republic reacted to the events.

To defend his decision, as director, Father Maurício Camuto, said: "Rádio Ecclésia has been labelled as the opposition radio. Thus, we had to wait for the official statement. Right away, I called the Ministry of

Information to obtain an official version of the event. Unfortunately, they [the authorities] did it too late."

Yet, some Ecclésia editors took advantage of Cristóvão Luemba's censored report, and used the information to string for international broadcasters. "We alerted the world about the event, but could not inform our own people about it. This is, indeed, sad," said the editor.

Nevertheless, on the same day, Radio Ecclésia director Father Maurício Camuto called Cristóvão Luemba to congratulate him on his brave reporting. "The priest told me that they liked my work a lot and that thanks to it the world learned about the tragedy," Luemba told me on 20 February 2010. But Luemba cannot listen to his own radio station, for it only broadcasts in FM to the capital Luanda. So I gave him the news that his coverage had been censored, having checked this fact with the editor, Tomás de Melo.

"I risked my life on that coverage. How could they have lied to me in such a way? This is unethical," responded Luemba.

As a result of censorship both in the state and in the only private media outlet present at the scene, most international coverage relayed only the following: the minutes of horror the team endured on the bus, while it was under fire, as described by some players; and on statements by the Angolan government and by purported separatist groups claiming responsibility for the attack.

The Togolese players could only describe their ordeal on the bus, and had no further idea of the realities surrounding them in that foreign territory. The government's statement sought to garner international sympathy on anti-terrorism grounds, and to tacitly lay the blame on the Togolese team for crossing the border without the government's knowledge. Also, the claim by a so-called FLEC-Military Position[2] leadership that it had staged the attack grabbed international media attention.

Cristóvão Luemba's reportage and the state media witness accounts would have compensated for the dearth of knowledge with which the media worldwide handled the case, and its consequences. They had the local knowledge, and the professional responsibility to report the facts as they happened.

On 20 January, the head of the Angolan host committee and president of the Angolan Federation of Football, Justino Fernandes, blamed Togo for the incident at a press conference. He stated that the Togolese team neither informed the Angolan authorities nor CAF officials about its road trip from Congo, where it prepared for the competition.

Justino Fernandes, who, at the time was the President of the Republic's adviser for social affairs, said: "If we had been informed, surely, we would have sent an aeroplane to bring [the Togolese] from Pointe Noire, in Congo, to Cabinda province. We had no knowledge that Togo had chosen to travel

by land to Cabinda." The statement contradicted a January 8 *Journal de Angola* print edition story reporting the departure of an official delegation, including Alberto Macaia, deputy to the director of the Cabinda organising committee, to welcome and drive the Togolese national team inland.

Neither the state media nor Rádio Ecclésia, who covered the press conference where Justino Fernandes made this remark, made use of the material evidence to question him. This constitutes a violation to the media law, which states in its Article 11 (b) that "journalists must inform the public with the truth, independence, objectivity and impartiality on all national and international events, guaranteeing the right of the citizens to correct and impartial information".

Thus, besides the loss of lives from its team, the Togolese national team received a ban from the African Confederation of Football, barring it from participating in the next two cups for failure to participate in the Angolan tournament, while the host country received only praise.

In this situation in which there is no institutional respect for the law, how is it possible to guide the media activity with ethical standards? One way to do it is through individual responsibility of a journalist in the upholding of values that dignify the profession. The next case provides one such example, and its limitations.

ETHICS VERSUS CENSORSHIP AT RÁDIO ECCLÉSIA

On 8 January 2010, the same day of the attack on the Togolese national team, there occurred an incident at Rádio Ecclésia, which is generally regarded as the most independent of the media outlets, and as the voice of the voiceless, which highlights the struggles for an ethical and professional journalism in the face of censorship.

At 10.30 am, editor Tomás de Melo went on air, as usual on Fridays, with the programme, *The citizen and justice*. The subject of the day was the constitutional process taking place in the country, and it had two guests: political figures João Kambwela and Lisete Araújo, to discuss their views with the listeners. The guests criticised the elimination of presidential elections in the new constitution. The radio station's director, Father Maurício Camuto, sent a note to Tomás de Melo, through his secretary, for the programme to go off air immediately arguing that it was inconvenient to raise negative issues that could affect the government's image while it was hosting the African Cup.

Tomás de Melo, as he explained to me, threw out the note and continued to moderate the debate, as professionally required. By 11.10 am, Father Camuto went personally to the studio to demand that the journalist stop the

programme immediately, and to make up a story to justify this to listeners. The journalist stood his ground and remained on air until the end of the programme.

On the incident, Father Camuto justified his decision with these words: "Because many people confuse freedom of the press and libertinism they are losing the spaces available to them for public intervention. I have told the journalists [from Rádio Ecclésia] that we will exclude those who seek to use our airwaves only to vilify the authorities." Ecclésia's director further stressed: "The country is undergoing a process of national reconciliation and reconstruction, and all of us must support this process. This is not a place for people to speak nonsense, and sow more discord."

Article 17 of the media law guarantees the independence of the journalist and his or her freedom of conscience, as well as insisting on respect for the code of ethics. In the absence of such a code, it is common sense that a journalist must not lie to his guests, on a live programme, in order to cut them off air for respectfully voicing opinions different from those of the ruling elite. Furthermore, the media law require journalists to defend public interest and the democratic order (Article 7c) to ensure freedom of expression (Article 11c).

Tomás de Melo told me: "The programme is an initiative of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Angola and São Tomé Episcopal Conference, the bishops' council, and it is funded by the Irish NGO Trocáire. I had received no indication from the council nor from the Irish to introduce any censorship on the constitutional debate."

The priest warned the journalist that any further attempt to defy his orders would bring an end to the programme altogether, and extended the warning to other journalists to prevent them from broadcasting issues that could damage the government's image. "This is a radio that belongs to the Catholic Church, and it must be in accordance with the way the church evangelises. There are Catholics in power as there are in the opposition, and we are set to have a radio for all," said the director of Rádio Ecclésia..

This case highlights the ease with which a media manager can abuse his authority, and impose an environment in which professionalism and ethical values are arbitrary concepts depending on his whims. It also exposes the vulnerable position of journalists: Tomás de Melo had no recourse to challenge this interference with his duties.

THE PHONEY BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT

In November 2009, National Radio of Angola (RNA) made extensive primetime headlines with an exclusive interview with the President of Brazil,

Lula da Silva, by RNA's popular sports presenter, Vaz Kinguri. The public television, TPA, and the state-owned and only daily newspaper in the country, *Jornal de Angola*, also featured the interview prominently. Vaz Kinguri asked about Angola's hosting of the Cup of Nations and its economic growth, and the interviewee responded with great praise for Angola. The state media exploited the interview as evidence of Angola's growing prestige abroad. It used also the image of Lula for internal propaganda.

Later, international media outlets revealed that the interview was a hoax by a Brazilian comedian from the Metropolitan Radio of São Paulo. A purported adviser to President Lula had contacted RNA management, by email, to offer an interview with Lula. Those in charge did not think twice about the improbability of a foreign president's office contacting the sports channel of RNA, known as Rádio 5, for the dignitary to lavish praise on a friendly country for hosting a football tournament.

When the hoax eventually came to light, the state media did not offer an apology nor did they distance themselves from the broadcast. The Ministry of Information, which directly controls state media outlets, remained silent while the National Council of Media lamented, on its blog, such "a great stain on the credibility and seriousness of the Angolan media in 2009", and criticised National Radio for failing to apologise to the public for its extensive coverage of a prank.

Because National Radio is the only national media outlet that reaches all corners of Angola, the unwillingness to acknowledge the hoax meant that most listeners remained under the impression that the broadcast was genuine. This represents a failure by the government to respect basic ethical concerns in its total control of the only media outlets with nationwide reach.

Where political propaganda and censorship effectively dictate the *modus operandi* of the state media, both the law and ethical values become mere formal tools in the hands of arbitrary power, as is the case in Angola, to be used only when convenient for the status quo. Furthermore, it also creates a space in which the independent media can partake in such arbitrariness to discredit freedom of press and of expression. The next case shows how the lack of regulation serves such a purpose.

ABUSING PRESS FREEDOM

The weekly newspaper *Folha 8*, the longest serving independent media outlet in the country since the introduction of democracy in 1991, printed in its 7 November 2009 issue an article headlined "Meet the Thieves", with a caption beneath the drawing of a T-shirt with the Angolan flag that read: "I

don't need sex". Another caption below a similar image stated: "The government f... me everyday."

The authorities, who have already flooded the newspaper with tens of lawsuits, filed a formal complaint to the National Council of Media against the article. In its deliberation, the council publicly chastised the publication for using language that is offensive to public morality, and for lowly and unethical behaviour. In turn, the newspaper replied with a salvo of insults against the council, as a government mouthpiece, even though it had been notified in advance to respond to the accusations made by the government.

The council further noted that the newspaper engages in "bad journalism, grounded on the systematic lack of rigour, seriousness and editorial responsibility". It recommended the newspaper comply with the appropriate ethical standards and obey the law.

Usually, National Media Council decisions tend to be biased and mostly against private media outlets. However, in this particular case on *Folha 8*, they made a fair and just assessment. *Folha 8*'s negligent conduct nowadays is detrimental to journalism that ought to contribute to a better informed society.

CONCLUSIONS

The four case studies analysed highlight a context in which freedom of press and independent media remain elusive in Angola. While the ruling MPLA party abuses its control of state media for censorship and crude political propaganda, at the same time private media outlets also engage in censorship and the abuse of free press. Political and private interests take over the need to provide society with access to information concerning the country's affairs.

Journalists in Angola remain deeply divided and unable to set a common agenda for promoting professional journalism. However, there are still a few journalists and editors who endeavour to serve journalism in an ethical fashion and with professionalism. These individuals ought to persevere in demanding the regulation of the sector, and in being proactive in raising the standards of reporting in the country.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Assembleia Nacional (2006) Lei No 7/06 de 15 de Maio: Lei de Imprensa. Available online at http://www.cne.ao/pdf/lei07_05.pdf

Conselho Nacional de Comunicação Social (2009) Deliberação Genérica Novembro/Dezembro 2009, 28 de Dezembro. Deliberação sobre a Queixa

Apresentada pelo Ministério da Comunicação. Social Contra o Semanário Folha 8, 28 de Dezembro. Available online at http://cncs angola.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2010-02-11T12:46:0008:00&max-results=7

NOTES

1 UNITA is the Portuguese acronym for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

2 FLEC is the Portuguese acronym for the Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave, a guerrilla movement established in 1963 to fight for the independence of the territory. Nowadays, FLEC has become a political franchise, bearing out multiple splinter groups, mostly nominal and vying for the Angolan government's patronage in material benefits and, when more influential, political accommodation as well

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Rafael Marques de Morais is currently researching Angola's political economy as a freelance. Throughout his career as a journalist, writer, organiser and activist he has promoted peace, democracy and press freedom in Angola. He has also researched, written and publicised a series of reports on military abuses in the oil-rich province of Cabinda – *A Year of Pain (2004)* and *Terror in Cabinda (2003)*] – and three reports on human rights abuses and corruption in the diamond trade – *Harvesting Hunger in Angola's Diamond Fields (2008), Operation Kissonde: The Diamonds of Misery and Humiliation (2006)* and *Lundas: The Stones of Death (2005)* – co-authored with Rui F. Campos. He has worked to expose human rights abuse and corruption in Angola. As a freelance journalist, he regularly contributed to mainstream international media, including the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, BBC, SABC Africa, and the *Star* in South Africa. He has addressed Angolan issues, particularly on democracy, human rights and corruption, at various prestigious institutions, such as New York University, Harvard Law School, Oxford University and the University of London. He has received the Civil Courage Prize from the Train Foundation (US), the Percy Award for Outstanding Courage from the National Association of Black Journalists (US), and the Freedom Passport from the European Parliament. Mr. Marques has a BA in Anthropology and Media from the University of London and an MSc in African Studies from the University of Oxford.

21

Saying Sorry to the Aborigines: How the media played such a crucial role

John Bond

John Bond argues that the Australian mainstream media deserves credit for the part it played in bringing about a major shift in national attitudes towards the Aborigines

When the Australian Prime Minister made a wholehearted apology on 13 February 2008 to his country's Aboriginal population, the story received vast coverage across the world. The developing world was especially interested. News of a Western leader apologising for cruel past policies was music to many who still bear scars as a result of Western domination of their countries. How that apology came about is a story worth telling. It is a story of a government constantly wrong-footed by the media.

Let us go back to 1996, when national elections saw Labor defeated after 13 years in office, to be replaced by a government led by John Howard. In the election campaign John Howard made one view clear. It was that Aboriginal interests had won too many concessions thanks to an undue sense of guilt among white Australians and, if elected, his government would "swing the pendulum back". He intended to get rid of the "black armband" view of Australia – the excessive focus, in his view, on the ugly side of the nation's history, the treatment of the Aboriginal people.

Then a report landed on his desk. It was called *Bringing Them Home*, the results of an enquiry into the policies which created the Stolen Generations – the tens of thousands of Aboriginal people who were removed from their families as children, until the early 1970s, with the aim of assimilating them into the white community.

THE AGONY ENDURED BY ABORIGINALS

The 680-page report told in heart-rending detail of the agony endured by Aboriginals as a result of the removal policies.[1] It called for an apology, measures to heal the harm done, and reparations. This was precisely what the Howard government did not want to hear. So they tried to ignore it. For eight months they made no response except to say that there would be no apology, and no compensation would be paid. Several government ministers attempted to discredit the report.

But the chair of the inquiry, Sir Ronald Wilson, had been powerfully affected by conducting this inquiry, and his eloquence matched his depth of feeling. As he said: "Children were removed because the Aboriginal race was seen as an embarrassment to white Australia. The aim was to strip the children of their Aboriginality and accustom them to live in a white Australia. The tragedy was compounded when the children, as they grew up, encountered the racism which shaped the policy, and found themselves rejected by the very society for which they were being prepared."[2]

The media thrives on conflict. The conflict between Sir Ron's passionate concern and the PM's awkward silence made a powerful story. TV, radio and the main newspapers took it to the country, with graphic accounts of those who had been removed. As a result, *Bringing Them Home* sold in far greater numbers than any comparable report, and letters columns in newspapers showed that many people were horrified by their government's cold-hearted response. They may not have understood much about Aboriginal people, but everyone could understand the pain of a mother whose child has been forcibly removed. Speaking a few weeks after the release of the report, Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner Mick Dodson told an Aboriginal conference:

> We have seen a most extraordinary turn of events in this country. Day after day and week after week the newspapers and airwaves have been jammed with talk about our families and children. Day after day the letter pages in the papers are filled with the reactions of ordinary Australians who are horrified at the truth that they never knew. Never before have so many Australians turned their attention to our families. Never before has Australia really known or cared about our children, children taken from the arms of their mothers, taken from their culture.[3]

As community concern welled up, the tone of official pronouncements softened. Eventually the government announced that they would put $63 million into adopting a few of the report's recommendations. Link-Up

services – which bring together Aboriginal families separated by the removal policies – received government funding, as did counselling services for those who had been removed.[4]

This did not satisfy Sir Ron. As he said at the time: "I came to this inquiry with fifty years behind me as a hardboiled lawyer, mixing it with all sorts of antagonists, and yet this inquiry changed me. And if it can change me, it can change our nation."[5] At the age of 75 he stumped the country, drawing crowds in their hundreds. The result was immense media coverage for him and for the stories of the Stolen Generations – as those who had been removed came to be called.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH APOLOGISES

He asked for apologies from Australian governments, churches, the police and all who had been involved in implementing the removal policies – and led the way himself. "I was a leader of the Presbyterian Church in Western Australia at the time we ran Sister Kate's Home, where removed children grew up," he said. "I was proud of the home, with its system of cottage families. Imagine my pain when I discovered, during this inquiry, that children were sexually abused in those cottages." He and the Presbyterian Church apologised wholeheartedly to the Aboriginal people.

His actions struck a chord. In the following months, most of Australia's State parliaments and churches held formal ceremonies to hear from representatives of the Stolen Generations, and to apologise for their role in this tragedy.[6] They were profoundly moving events, which sent a burst of hope through the Aboriginal community that perhaps a new day was dawning. All this kept the issue in the headlines. And prepared the nation for a bigger step.

One recommendation of *Bringing Them Home* was that a Sorry Day be held annually to commemorate the tragedy. This had been proposed by several of those who gave evidence to the inquiry, when asked what could help the healing process. The federal government was not interested. But could a Sorry Day be held on a community basis? Sir Ronald consulted spokespeople for the Stolen Generations, and they jointly launched the idea. The government ignored them. But the media was intrigued, and took the idea to the nation.

The response exceeded all expectations. Perhaps it was the government's intransigence that galvanised so many Australians. But it was also because ordinary Australians could relate to the people featured in the newspaper stories. Stolen Generations people live in every town, and in many suburbs of our cities. But, alienated as they are by traumatic experiences in

childhood, they are often unable to make friends with their neighbours. And their neighbours, having no concept of what they have endured, cannot bridge the gulf of misunderstanding. As the stories of the Stolen Generations circulated, fresh understanding grew. And Sorry Day gave them the chance to express this new understanding.

NATIONAL MOVEMENT GROWS TO SAY SORRY

Across the country, people organised events. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians met to plan. Artists painted, musicians composed, writers and playwrights wrote. A well-known actor created Sorry Books – manuscript books in which people could express their apology. More and more books were produced as demand grew from schools, public libraries, and town councils. Soon several thousand books were in circulation, and nearly a million people wrote messages, many of them telling of personal experiences which prompted them to contribute.

When the day arrived, it was commemorated by hundreds of events. There were theatrical presentations, cultural displays, and town barbecues. Universities, government departments, local councils, churches held gatherings to hear from stolen generations people. In many of them, the Sorry Books were ceremoniously handed to local Aboriginal elders. Over half of the 30-minute national TV news that evening was devoted to Sorry Day events, and to the heartfelt response of Australia's best-known Aboriginal leaders.[7] And local newspapers, radio and regional TV carried stories of the local events.

The Federal Government was taken aback by the strength of the day. They had no idea how to respond to a campaign which included many people active on their side of politics. So they stayed practically silent. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs appeared uncomfortably on television. "Sorry won't do anything for anyone's health," he told the interviewer, but then adding – as his medical experience as a surgeon got the better of his political instinct – "unless it is their mental health."

Some of the Stolen Generations sought redress through the courts. The government paid expensive lawyers to oppose them, and eventually won the case on technicalities of law.[8] So widely did this case attract attention that when the eventual judgement was presented, ABC TV interrupted a programme to carry it. Meanwhile, the local press was focusing on a different story. Following the Sorry Day, many of the Stolen Generations had met together, and decided to launch a Journey of Healing, inviting the whole Australian community to join them in initiatives towards healing the harm caused by the removal policies.

HEALING THE DEEP NATIONAL WOUND

The Journey of Healing's underlying concept is that, if the wounds are to be healed, both government and the community, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have a vital role. It offers every Australian the chance to be part of healing this deep national wound. And many have responded. Hundreds of events are arranged each year, principally on the anniversary of Sorry Day, bringing together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. In many places, radio stations invite Stolen Generations people in the neighbourhood to tell their stories. All over the country, ordinary Australians are learning what many of their Aboriginal compatriots endured, not in the abstract but through people they bump into in the supermarket. People who have felt alienated for years are experiencing the welcome of their local communities. In a supportive environment, they can begin to heal.

The huge response to Sorry Day persuaded the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to launch a major initiative. They invited all who wished for reconciliation to join them in a walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. A quarter of a million people came. It was the largest walk in Australian history. Many carried placards with the word "Sorry". And it appeared in the sky too, thanks to participants who had paid for a sign-writing plane to write the word Sorry in the sky above the Bridge – which was also above the PM's home where he sat, refusing to join the walk. The national paper *The Australian* headlined its front-page story "The People's Apology".

Much of the media coverage of the Stolen Generations resulted from the government's ham-fisted attempts to get rid of the "black armband" view of Australian history. In 2000, the Senate inquired into the implementation of the government's response to *Bringing Them Home*. The Minister tried to play down the impact of the removal policies, arguing that because, in his judgement, only 10 per cent of Aboriginal children were removed, "Stolen Generation" was a misnomer. This was immediately ridiculed by the media as a ludicrous attempt to diminish the tragedy. Once more, the feature pages were filled with stories of the Stolen Generations.

"THE IMPORTANCE OF RECONCILIATION"

The government could not ignore the Sydney Harbour Bridge walk, especially as it was replicated in all Australian cities in the following months. Prime Minister Howard announced that a central area in Canberra would be set aside "to perpetuate in the minds of the Australian public the importance of reconciliation, and will include a memorial and depiction of the removal of children from their families".

This soon became a subject of media controversy when it emerged that the government had designed the memorial, and refused to let the Stolen Generations have any say. There were demonstrations, and even people prominent on the Government's side of politics, such as former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, ridiculed the exclusion of the Stolen Generations from the design of their own memorial. Eventually the government climbed down. The National Sorry Day Committee consulted Stolen Generations people across the country and those who had staffed the institutions. Agreement was reached on the text of the memorial. It was unveiled in 2004 to the acclaim both of the Stolen Generations and of the wider community.

By this time a film about the Stolen Generations had appeared. *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) told the story of three stolen children who escaped from the institution to which they had been taken, and walked 1,500 miles back to their family. A million Australians saw it. Here was the media, opening the eyes of a nation to the uncomfortable side of their history. A few newspaper columnists tried to argue that the film was inaccurate, but it was close enough to the actual truth for convincing rebuttals.

Even their attempts to discredit the Stolen Generations misfired. On one occasion a *Daily Telegraph* columnist, Andrew Bolt, interviewed a prominent Stolen Generations woman, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, and used her words unscrupulously to suggest that she regarded the term "Stolen" as unjustified. The Prime Minister took up the cry immediately, despite Dr O'Donoghue's protests, saying that it was "time we stopped this business about who was to blame". Again the issue filled newspaper columns. "The deeper Mr Howard digs the trenches against an apology," wrote the *Canberra Times*, "the more likely it is that his assailants will take the hill as well."

REMOVAL POLICIES "REPUGNANT"

Gradually it became clear that John Howard's colleagues were drifting away from his stance. This was apparent at a Sorry Day event in the Great Hall of Parliament in May 2007. The Minister of Health, Tony Abbott, was regarded as a close ally of the Prime Minister. But he came to the Sorry Day event, and surprised everyone with his speech. "The forcible removal of Indigenous children is an episode in our history of which we are rightly ashamed," he said. "The premise on which it was based – that children were better off away from their Aboriginal families – was wrong, indeed repugnant. We should have known it then. We certainly know it now, and we do have to atone for it."

So when the new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, announced that he would

make the apology which his predecessor had refused, and invited the Opposition to join him, Abbot and others argued that they should join. This provoked a vigorous debate in the Parliamentary party, and eventual agreement. So the apology was supported unanimously by all members of the Australian Parliament. And polls showed that 70 per cent of Australians supported the apology. The issue had become an issue of national concern, rather than a political football.

But not entirely. In his speech, the Prime Minister committed his government to transform the condition of Aboriginal Australia, setting ambitious benchmarks. Within five years every Aboriginal child would have the opportunity to receive pre-school education. Within ten years the employment rate among Aboriginal people would be halved, and educational opportunities vastly increased. Within a decade, the 17-year gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians would be bridged.

This timetable has given the Opposition an issue on which to challenge the government, an incentive to keep them focused on the task. At last, the question of how well the government is doing in improving conditions for Aboriginal people has become a political issue. Hundreds of millions of dollars a year are going into setting up primary health care centres in Aboriginal communities, improving housing and schools, and much else.

REBUTTAL OF AN ATTITUDE OF MORAL SUPERIORITY

But even more important is the Aboriginal response to the apology. For 200 years Aboriginal people have been denigrated. Their achievements have been ignored, and no group can flourish in such an atmosphere. The apology was a rebuttal of an attitude of moral superiority.

Two years after the apology, Tom Calma, the then Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner, said: "A marked shift in the Indigenous policy landscape since the National Apology continues to gain momentum and signals a more inclusive and promising future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."

There is still a long way to go before Aboriginals are playing their rightful, creative role in the life of Australia. But the media can take credit for its role in bringing about a major shift in national attitudes.

NOTES

1 The full report can be read at www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/

hreoc/stolen/

2 Speech at Old Parliament House, Canberra, 28 October 1997

3 M. Dodson, *Proceedings of Second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Survival Conference*, Townsville, June 1997 pp 24-5

4 Information about the Government response can be read at www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/health-oatsih-pubs-bth.htm

5 Speech at Old Parliament House, Canberra, 28 October 1997

6 These events are detailed in a booklet edited by Senator Margaret Reynolds and published by the Australian Senate, 1998. Details also appear in the 1999 Report of the Indigenous Social Justice Commissioner. Available online at http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport98/index.html

7 For further information, see /www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/media.html

8 The transcript and conclusions of this court case can be read at www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AILR/2001/36.html

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

From 1998 until 2006 John Bond was the Secretary of Australia's National Sorry Day Committee, which enlisted almost a million Australians in an apology to Aboriginal Australians for cruel and misguided past policies, and in initiatives to overcome the harm caused. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the Australian community through the National Sorry Day Committee. He has worked with the NGO Initiatives of Change for many years, including eight years in Zimbabwe and three years in Ethiopia. He is now coordinating the Caux Forum for Human Security, which brings together several hundred people active in human security at all levels from diplomats to grassroots activists at the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Switzerland. He is also a writer, and has worked with several well-known Australians to tell their stories, most recently *Father of the House*, the memoirs of Kim E. Beazley, former Federal Minister for Education, published by Fremantle Press in January 2010.

22

Reporting conflict: how the correspondent can avoid becoming cynical in the face of tragic events

Charles Chasie

Charles Chasie, an experienced reporter in Nagaland, India, offers advice on how journalists can cope with some of the many dilemmas of reporting conflict

I am from Nagaland in India's North East, right on the border with Burma/Myanmar. My people, the Nagas, live on both sides of the international border as well as in four states in India. The Naga political issue pre-dated Indian independence and it is today, perhaps, the longest unsolved armed conflict in the world[1]. It was in January 1929 that representatives of the Naga people presented a memorandum to the Simon Commission to either keep the Nagas under the British or to leave them on their own but not to make them part of India when the British left[2]. Several parleys took place between Naga and Indian leaders, including with Mahatma Gandhi, before India became independent. Even a Nine-Point Agreement[a] was signed on the eve of India's independence. But this did not work. Talks continued into the early 1950s. But nothing was resolved and violence started in late 1952 while full-scale conflict started the following year.

As often happens in prolonged conflicts, splits appeared in the Naga leadership over use or avoidance of violent means during the mid-1950s. Gradually, those who wished to use peaceful means in their fight, often aroused by the extreme actions of those who believed in violent means, either came "overground" or abandoned the fight for Naga independence. They were instrumental in ushering in statehood within the Indian Union in 1960 under a 16-Point Agreement[b] which initially placed Nagaland under

the Ministry of External Affairs along with other special constitutional protections – Nagaland became a state within the Indian Union through an agreement. But violence continued. After several ceasefires and accords with the government of India, which did not finally lead to lasting peace, there are, today, several Naga factions all claiming to be fighting for the Naga people but often inflicting more damage on Nagas and Naga society. At the same time, the Naga people's search for permanent peace continues.

India, in many ways, is an amazing country. The best is simply awe-inspiring – its history, civilisation, cultures, the warmth of the people and so on. All religions of the world have found fertile soil here. Take recent examples such as the Right to Information Act, the Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Right to Education Act. This is legislation the developed West is scared to even contemplate. These things inspire you.

INDIA – A COUNTRY OF CONTRASTS

But India is also a country of contrasts and "opposites" exist side by side all of the time. For instance, there are several extra judicial and undemocratic laws[3] which continue to this day. The infamous Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which has become known to many people the world over, and which allows the armed forces of India to kill people with impunity, on mere suspicion, is one of them. The Nagaland Security Regulation Act (NSRA) is, in many ways, even worse as it allows the same powers to civil police and withholds the right to private property. All movements of the people are regulated under this law which also allows for "concentration camps"[4].

Any police or army personnel (even administrator below the rank of a district collector) acting under these Acts become immune to any act of wrong-doing and the judiciary has no authority to intervene or entertain a complaint unless so authorised by the Indian Parliament in case of AFSPA or the administrator concerned in the case of NSRA.

I have given a longish introduction because my situation may be unknown to many and some basic understanding of ground realities is required. Secondly, one keeps hearing about "Asia's hour" and that India and China are the world's future power-houses. Although very small, Nagaland is at the junction where the two Asian giants meet without natural barriers. India's "Look East" policy also seems to be in place after so many years and Nagaland is an integral part if the policy is to succeed. And unless our people prepare themselves they may again be swept off by the current of events.

CRUCIAL TO ENSURE PERSONAL WELL-BEING

Now I come to actual reporting in a conflict zone. Firstly it is crucial to ensure the personal well-being of the journalist and their family. Unless this is secured, the journalist will become pre-occupied and will not be able to focus fully on their work. And a major part of this is to help the overall situation through accurate and fair reporting and providing openings for possible solutions to issues.

In 1978, I became a newspaper journalist with a lump sum monthly salary of Rs 500/-. It was a one-man weekly newspaper – I was reporter, editor, typist, proof reader, manager, distributor, publisher, bill collector and so on. I was also doing my college studies. By 1987, after graduation and with a law degree under my belt, I launched my own weekly newspaper which became a daily a few years later. Late 1980s and early 1990s were difficult times for journalists who were targeted – shot, abducted and threatened. Even I was once told by a One-Star Indian general that it would not be difficult to "stage an encounter" at my newspaper office premises. Various Naga factions would come with their press releases demanding that they be published as they presented them, complete with letter heads and on definite dates. In my case, I managed to ward off such demands although we did publish their main points. Others published as demanded and got into trouble with state authorities.

The second issue is about what the journalist faces in the course of carrying out his or her duties. Many dilemmas confront the reporter in a conflict zone and especially when it concerns the future of the person's children and people. Over half a century of violent conflict also means that the main structures of society have broken down, most people have become "wounded" and are suffering from fatigue syndromes of one kind or the other; mistrust has replaced trust in society. Low-key, intensive conflict, even without actual conventional warfare, usually involves psychological warfare and mind games. In such situations journalists try to perform their duties to the best of their ability. To date, they have performed their functions admirably.

From my own experiences and observation of colleagues, I have found that most journalists in Nagaland are not really concerned about their own personal safety and are willing to go the extra mile to expose the truth as they see it. But frequently they are untrained and lacking in experience. Being part of a society that has come to recognise wealth, status and their symbols often put a lot of strain on the journalists. Traditionally, wisdom was treasured most. But in an age when wisdom can apparently be bought, it has become down-graded.

THE READERS' REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

This brings us to another important part of successful reporting – the reactions and responses of the readers. A reporter usually gets the chance to have a personal by-line through good reporting or long years of faithful service. It then becomes possible for the readers to begin to form their opinions about the reporter. This is possible when you have a literate and discerning readership and with whom you slowly begin to build trust over many years. What happens when your readers are possibly first-generation literates whose main concern is to know what is happening so they can ensure their security, having lived under concentration camp-like situations most of their lives, and are full of distrust?

Most of the newspapers in Nagaland have been owned, published and edited by the same person. (A few years ago, there was no exception but now Naga politicians and businessmen are beginning to realise the importance of owning or being part-owner or in control of a newspaper.) Newspapers and magazines in Nagaland were often started by poor people with ideas and convictions – I started my own with the princely sum of Rs 10,000/- gifted to me by my father, out of his pension. On the whole, they stayed the course and served society with distinction.

This brings us to the third issue. Being editor and publisher at the same time demands both roles being successful. Sadly, they are often in conflict. The editor wants to publish what is true and what he understands to be right; but the publisher is interested in revenue and how to keep the business going. And in Nagaland, where there is no industry worth the name and without commercial advertisements, newspapers depend almost totally on government advertisements to keep running. This is not only a business dilemma but also presents an identity crisis to the journalist. The editor/publisher/owner is confronted with issues such as:

- do I write and publish what I know to be true and face whatever consequences that may come my way, which could even be the closure of my newspaper?[c]
- do I water down my reports so that my publication does not have to face closure through lack of revenue?
- what is my duty to society and family?

NO EASY ANSWERS

There are no easy answers. I myself left the business although I kept writing. I know I turned grey prematurely! But what are the main issues I have had

to confront during my years of reporting armed conflict?

- Mostly in conflict situations, the flow of events carries journalists along. There is often little time to reflect. They become "victims" of the happenings around them. How does the reporter keep focused and find perspective?
- When you have been exposed to shocking incidents time after time, you become "hardened" and, someday, you may find that something has died in you. How can you avoid that?
- When you meet a grieving person after a tragic event, what do you say to such a person? Do you just get the basic information (such as relating to the how, when, where and how many?) and leave?
- Anger and frustration at what seems to be patently unfair can lead to cynicism. When this happens, the reporter can begin to go about their work like a zombie, unwilling to contemplate the painful reality all around. The experience can become traumatic for the journalist.

In response to these issues, I would argue war correspondents need to do the following:

i) refuse to become a victim of the flow of events;
ii) spend enough time in reflection and solitude;
iii) reach out to others;
iv) keep reading – books and analytical articles and so on;
v) maintain a passionate interest in at least one field;
vi) get together with others in the profession from time to time and share perspectives. Such meetings could have specific themes and focus on possible answers to burning issues in society;
vii) take part in social events not as "reporters" but as full-fledged members of the community.

A journalist's most sacred duty is to see how he/she can help bring solutions to the problems of his/her nation. In doing this, the journalist should keep two things in mind: to be on the look-out for trends, as opposed to events, and also stories of hope and to report on these responsibly.

NOTES

1 Government of Nagaland (2002) *Vision Nagaland: Towards Positive Changes*, Kohima
2 Chasie, Charles (1999) *The Naga Imbroglio: A Personal Perspective*, Standard Printers and Publishers, Kohima

3 Chasie, Charles and Hazarika, Sanjoy (2009) *The State Strikes Back: India and the Naga Insurgency*, Washington, East-West Center
4 ibid: p 22

EXPLANATIONS

a The Nine Point Agreement was signed towards the end of June 1947 between Sir Akbar Hydari, then Governor of Assam, and the Naga leaders in Kohima. Controversy arose over the 9th Point which said that the agreement would be reviewed after a period of 10 years. The Naga leaders interpreted this clause as meaning that they would be free to become independent if they wished while the government of India assumed that after 10 years the Nagas would become part of India.

b The 16-Point Agreement was signed in 1960 and an interim provincial government was established in Kohima. Full statehood was inaugurated on 1 December 1963. Initially, Nagaland was placed under the External Affairs Ministry but in 1972 the government of India unilaterally transferred Nagaland to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Naga leaders protested but their objections fell on deaf ears. Nagaland also has special protection under Article 371A of the Indian Constitution.

c On the whole, the state government did not discriminate in the issue of advertisements and there were times when it even made conscious efforts to give support to the fledgling newspapers in the state. There were, of course, some unpleasant incidents when some individuals, including ministers, tried to "bully" certain newspapers.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

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23

Looking beyond the "Troubles" and towards a commitment to global justice

Faustina Starrett

Faustina Starrett looks back at the coverage of the Northern Ireland "Troubles" and finds in Bill Porter's message an inspiration to work for global justice – and a responsible media

I am part of the first generation who grew up in "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland. It is difficult not to use personal experience as the filter mechanism for understanding that situation. If that constitutes a prejudice then I own it. Regarding the media coverage, we were presented with a set of "givens", ways to understand what was happening that were actually at loggerheads with what we felt and knew was happening.

I went to university, which was a novel idea for my family. It was here that started to think about the media. The real crisis in the media, then and even now, is still one of representation. Everything in the media seemed to be one-dimensional, black and white. A bit like the cowboy and Indian films that we flocked to see on Saturday mornings.

At some point, every side in Northern Ireland got to be the Indians, demonised by association, and labelled. So all Catholics seemed to be Irish Nationalists and Republicans who were probably in the IRA. And all Protestants were Unionists and loyal to Ulster and Britain, who secured them a "Protestant State for a Protestant People". And they were probably in the RUC or some other paramilitary loyalist organisation.

Of all the passions, it is said that fear weakens judgement most. And after Bloody Sunday (on 30 January 1972 when 27 civil rights protesters were shot by the British Army Parachute Regiment in the Bogside area of Derry), most people were afraid of what would happen next. Those closest in

witness to the worst injustices were very angry. We were all participants now. Moreover, fear distorts perceptions, creating obstacles and monsters where none exist. It would have been safe to take refuge in some of the media explanations, but really they were second-hand opinions for me.

I recall standing with my father on Remembrance Sunday, in 1982 when I was 22 and thinking of those who had died in the Second World War but also those who, at that time, were on a hunger strike. We were a decade into "the Troubles" then and protest marches were trying to highlight the demands of 13 young Catholic men who were demanding political status as "prisoners of war", and who were starving themselves to death in "hunger strikes". Mrs Thatcher wore her "iron maiden" pose and I was no longer wondering whose side I should be on.

THE APPEAL OF NATIONALISM

The hunger strikers did die, the dock's work dried up, the bombing campaigns intensified on all sides, media coverage was censored and people worried how it would all end. The appeal of nationalism persisted. I guess when even your basic human rights are under threat and you have no constitutional means of redress, nationalism can look like a palpably rich solution.

I think this is because it draws on aspects of cultural identity that are real as well as great sweeping myths that exploit highly emotional values about freedom, justice and identity. And people under siege – such as the Irish, Bosnians, Serbs – become very vulnerable to easy solutions to complicated problems. That is how we fall into prejudice so readily. It gives us a hook to hang all our problems on.

The slogans went out, we painted the streets, we hung the flags, and we all retreated behind the barricades. Some of these barricades have a long history – the Berlin Wall, the Irish Partition – and some are relatively new. Moreover, the media love it. It has a bracing simplicity, war reporting. It was all so one-dimensional, seemingly. The Northern Ireland reports could be reduced to a simple formula: "Catholics and Protestants hate each other's guts. They always have. They always will."

And so, we all clung to the dogma and to hell with the faith. The facts, depending on how they were applied, gave whatever side justification for just about any and every dastardly deed. In addition, we learned to live without hope. And that is a godless state. Moreover, we lived out these "Troubles", in the eye of the media.

We have had some very courageous journalism outside of Northern Ireland, which challenged prevailing media myths and laziness, campaigning

investigative work to effect profound and meaningful change. But journalists in Northern Ireland mostly bought into press release stuff, especially the "official information" sources, such as the Northern Ireland Office.

NO REAL EXPERIENCE OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

They had no real experience of investigative journalism because the nature of the "Troubles" was such that they never did have to go out and investigate stories. As the Editor of the *Derry Journal* told me: "The stories walked in here on legs," not to mention the fact that newsrooms retreated behind the editorial politics and policies of their respective owners. It is still, therefore, a process of learning to think, to reflect, to reason and to refine our capacity for judgement and evaluation and news making processes.

The media landscape looks very different today. The biggest and ongoing change in the media in the last ten years is the sudden and dramatic move away from traditional formats and the change in story type.

All journalism is driven by what is relevant to readers, viewers and listeners. It was only right that during "the Troubles", political stories which broke every day were the most important since these had greatest impact on people's lives; they dealt with matters of life and death. Now 15 years after the second IRA ceasefire, what matters to people, for the greater part, are bread and butter issues. While the growth in dissident activity has raised the old type of story up the agenda slightly, it does not have the all-important value it once had. The move away from "Troubles" stories is reflected in the growth of consumer journalism – coverage of education, health, the environment, finance, travel – as these appear to matter most to readers.

In newspapers it is a given now that the politics story must be very important (such as the scandal that enveloped the First Minister, Peter Robinson, and his wife, Iris, or the possible collapse of Stormont over the Policing Bill, or an election) before it makes it on to the front pages. If an editor attempted to move everyday politics on to the front pages, he or she would notice a definite fall in sales that day.

HOW TO THRIVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

Traditional media owners are still trying to work out how the digital age will pan out. At present the best bet is Rupert Murdoch's view that newspapers will move to online to be delivered on mobile devices such as e-readers and ipads. The development of mobile technology is still ongoing. Murdoch also

believes that the old method of newspapers making money out of a "cornered" advertising market is gone in the new online era. He believes that it is by charging for content that money will be made. He has already started charging for access to some of his online newspapers.

The other big difference is the fact that the younger generation access their news through new outlets and youth-orientated media such as Radio 1 and online tabloid newspapers. Maybe because of a media saturation with "the Troubles" that pre-occupied their parents, most teenagers are turned off by the constant drip-drip of the past raining down. A crude reminder of the past and its "politics of despair" casting a dark shadow over the present revealed itself in the ominous news events of February 2010 attributed to an outlawed breakaway group opposed to the 1997 peace agreement. These included a car bomb that exploded outside Newry Courthouse, County Down, and a man found shot dead on the outskirts of Derry.

But there is no going back now. And there is no doubting that life has improved materially in Northern Ireland and most people are aspirational for a future Ireland free from bigotry and prejudice. However, the dangers inherent in war have cast their shadows and a new gang culture of lawlessness fuelled by a loss of purpose and direction and challenging economic circumstances has channeled the positive energy for change for some into a vacuous search for meaning through and in the media.

Little wonder that combined with the distractions of new media there has been a move away from traditional formats among the youth – one cannot imagine any teenager turning to the more mainstream traditional local or regional radio, television and print as a matter of choice. The youth market is driven by identification with mainstream celebrity culture. It has been X factored to distraction with the multiple platforms and gismos for participating and receiving stuff.

RIDING ALONG THE INFOTAINMENT SUPERHIGHWAY

How anyone navigates their way through all this is difficult to imagine. So where is the compass on media values and how is education coping? The truth is – it's not. Cynics were once characterised as "knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing". A values driven agenda has been phased out of the infotainment superhighway. It is hard for most of us in this brave new world to steer with a clear sense of purpose and direction.

I met Bill Porter as part of an International Communications Forum in Vienna which travelled the globe participating and hosting events to engage with the media and its publics asking challenging questions such as: "What kind of journalist does society need for the 21st century?"

I was at the time and still am a Lecturer in Media Education in Derry, Northern Ireland. My work makes me very aware of the fact that journalism is perceived as a business and a profession. Indeed, in 1997 the Department of Education and Learning (DEL) published a new directive for further education training titled *FE means Business*. In the twelve years since I have noticed that professional values and ethics, in education and in media industries are too often compromised by our global obsession with worshipping at the altar of commerce.

So when asked the same question: "What kind of journalist does society need for the 21st century?" Bill Porter answered without hesitation (and I paraphrase him): "We need the same kind as we needed for the 20th century – honest people who report the facts." When queried "What else?" He would say: "Everything follows from that. It's that simple and that hard."

BILL PORTER'S MESSAGE

Bill Porter knew instinctively that facts require a clear head and common sense but also that they usually end up being affected by reason, instinct and conscience. The latter qualities are nurtured, or not, by the entire journalistic environment of the political, legal, cultural and commercial landscape in which we live and work.

The esteem in which journalists and journalism are held is low in the UK. Journalism is certainly not an easy occupation. It is about finding things out and telling people them. It is about representing those without power and monitoring those with power. The important journalistic standards are relevant to all cultures and all technologies. They are truth, accuracy and fairness.

The culture we have created for ourselves reflects our own pre-occupations: egotism, materialism and individualism. Pick up any newspaper, look across scheduling and audience ratings to see what we pay attention to and we can predict the future from that. So there is a need to engage with the media in a meaningful way because it does matter. This was what Bill Porter was about. This is what I learned from him in the ten years I have been actively involved with ICF: that we have to accept the double nature of journalism as a business and the fact that journalistic integrity is always under fire.

Bill Porter will be much missed. He campaigned endlessly to make journalism better. He believed that we should be challenged in our professional and personal lives to be better people. Our mission statement should not be "to fill the whole world with noise", until it drowns out any connections or meaningful purpose. I am grateful to Bill Porter for

connecting me to a bigger world in a way that expanded my empathy and understanding of others. He never preached about fixing broken things but about using media creatively to create a dialogue about what is happening in the world, starting with our own world and using it to connect you to what matters in the bigger picture.

He always said the media was a barometer of our moral compass. He encouraged media professionals to bring a consciousness to their work. He knew that "bad news sells" but that the format was changing. If we want the relationship of the media and its publics to change and the news to change then we need to change focus. Sure, bad things happen and will continue to happen. But we need to provide hopeful, helpful, positive information based on truth, accuracy and fairness and honouring a commitment to justice, equality and humanitarian concern to provide a full account of the problems but also a dialogue of hope about how we can be part of the solution. That is what he taught me about "media values" and those are the values I try to live up to in my own professional and personal life.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

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24

Now's the time for professional journalists to work at correcting mistakes

Natalya Skvortsova

Natalya Skvortsova argues that the media in the Russian Federation are "dumbing down" with their constant focus on celebrities. So journalists must work all the harder on correcting their mistakes

Among the disciplines on which I lecture at the Faculty of Journalism in Nizhny Novgorod, I consider the course on professional ethics to be one of the most important. And each time, when delivering an introductory lecture, I try to explain to my students that there is nothing more important in our profession than the *byline* – the name of the journalist who, by his or her reputation, guarantees the accuracy and trustworthiness of the information given.

In the modern world, when traditional values are constantly under threat, it is not easy to become a professional – but it is crucial to become a professional by all means possible. That is the reason why we speak with students about the special place of journalism in modern society. We need to study ethical codes for journalism in different countries, thoroughly read newspapers, watch television programmes critically – and discuss, discuss, discuss the experience of older colleagues, starting with their experience from student days.

I consider it very important that young journalism students should develop their own professional standards, as very soon they will be in our editorial offices and television studios both entertaining the public but also educating them about responsible civic action.

We live in an age of great changes. The early 1990s have been dubbed a period of "information explosion" in journalism: tens and hundreds of new

periodicals appeared. If in Nizhny Novgorod, the city where I live, there were three newspapers, one radio-station and one broadcasting company at the end of the 1980s, now there are more than 800 different kinds of mass media registered in the region. Most of these new newspapers and television companies emerged at the beginning of the 1990s. Then the need for new journalists increased dramatically in Russia. Journalists were also changing: to the editorial offices, there came philologists, engineers, physicists and political scientists – young ambitious people very critical of dominant routines and ready to carry out their professional duties.

THE AUTHORITY OF JOURNALISM GREW SWIFTLY

Journalists bravely opened up topics which had been "closed" before. The authority of journalism grew swiftly and the profession became ranked amongst the most popular. The old mass media were collapsing – and everybody believed that that process would lead to a new, improved kind of journalism.

But, then things changed. Journalists began to intrude far too much into people's lives, wrote irresponsibly, and too often sensationalised their reports. These worrying developments thus became the focus of debates among the participants at the International Communications Forum conference in Nizhny Novgorod in 1993. Perhaps not surprisingly during the conference, the discussions led by the President of ICF, Bill Porter, and his colleagues often got out of hand since so many of the participants wanted to express their opinions and to defend their point of view. But during these heated debates it became abundantly clear to me that the global journalistic community needed new ideas and new professional standards. Along with trying to change the profession and society, I realised that journalists also had a responsibility to change themselves for the better.

In 1994, the Congress of the Russian Union of Journalists approved the Code of Professional Ethics of the Russian Journalist worked out by various groups of journalists. Any journalists ready to follow its rules could sign. And in 1999, a "Grand Jury" institute was formed to examine some of the many ethical dilemmas which arise when the journalist carries out his or her professional duties.

Individual journalists, periodicals and other people and organisations willing to investigate ethical conflicts and defend their position can now apply to the institute. Well-known journalists, lawyers and public men are members of the Grand Jury; and they have been making important rulings. Having started its work in Moscow, the Grand Jury has now set up regional branches in the Russian Federation.

JOURNALISM'S LACK OF INTEREST IN REAL PEOPLE

What concerns me in modern journalism? First of all, it is the lack of interest in real people. If the interest in the *event* is strong, the interest in the *person*, it seems to me, is very weak (unless, of course, that person is some celebrity!). I am also worried by the harshness of the assessments made by the modern mass media. Moreover, I'm disturbed by the abundance of "bad" news in television programmes – and the excessive interest in people's private life across all the media. "The level of cynicism of TV should correspond to the level of cynicism in society," said the head of a television channel, summing up this state of affairs. Here are just a few examples of intrusive coverage:

- Some years ago, a festival of youth music was taking place at a big stadium. It so happened that a terrorist act occurred that day at the stadium which took the lives of several participants of the festival. The next day, in one of the mass-selling newspapers, there appeared horrible pictures of a killed girl and underneath there was the caption: "She came here to dance..."

- A large family died in a fire. Only one child, a boy, escaped as he had been at school at the time. The department dealing with emergency situations sent a special psychologist to the school to support the child. But journalists were quicker than the psychologist and informed the little one about the terrible news, shot his reaction on video and showed it on television.

- A well-known actor died. A selection of photographs appeared in the newspapers where there was the wife of his first family, and a little daughter from his second marriage and in the centre, in an oval frame, the actor's face lying in the coffin. Under the pictures, the caption went: "Who will get the actor's inheritance?"

WHY HAVE YOU JOINED THE PROFESSION – THE CRUCIAL QUESTION

At the entrance to the editorial office of the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* there is a big poster on which only one word is written: Why? A large question mark follows this word. The management of the newspaper believes that journalists should answer this simple question every day: Why have you come into this profession? I think this is a fair challenge. The

professional should not be afraid to ask himself or herself simple questions and answer them in a simple and honest manner.

The process of the formation of democracy is complicated. Some 15 years ago it was impossible to imagine the great changes which have taken place in Russia. But we should not only acknowledge our achievements but also recognise our mistakes – and try to correct them.

When I was studying in elementary school, we had a class called "Work at the mistakes". The teacher gave us our notebooks, put a question mark at the margins and we had to find and correct the mistake. I believe the time to work at correcting their many mistakes has come for all professional journalists who are aware of their responsibility to society, their readers and viewers.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

For 15 years, Natalya Skvortsova was a media commentator and television editor in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia. From 1991 to 2001 she was President of the Russian Union of Journalists (Nizhny Novgorod branch); while from 2001 to 2003 she was the Director of the *Vedomosti* newspaper (Nizhny Novgorod issue). Between 2003 and 2008 she was Executive Secretary of the Russian Union of Journalists. Since 2001 she has been the Director of the Center of Journalism Technologies and since 2008 Professor in the Journalism Department at the University of the Russian Academy of Education, Nizhny Novgorod.

25

How the Czech media emerged from under the gloomy cloud of communism

Tomáš Vrba

Tomáš Vrba traces the history of the Czech media under communist rule and, while celebrating the new freedoms, warns that politicians (even in democratic countries) are always likely to want to threaten the independence of journalists

One spring morning in 1982 I happened to enter into a *cupola*, a round baroque space under the garden fountain of Chateau Troy in Prague. There were five of us, former colleagues from Charles University, assigned by our foreman to clear the 300-years-old sewage system of layers of sediments from a nearby river, the Moldau. After a month of digging we reached a central dome and stared at a daylight beam from a top of a smaller underground replica of the Roman Pantheon. We lit cigarettes and started spontaneously to dictate, half jokingly, half solemnly, a screen play: "Five friends meet after twenty years; TV director Jan, professor Rudolf, editor-in-chief Tomas ... And one of them reminds the others: 'Do you remember the day we dug through the last meter of the tunnel?'"

Twenty years later, all that was a fairy-tale reality: Jan became programme director of a commercial TV, Rudolf was appointed an assistant professor of political science and I ran a cultural and political review. We knew that such a stupidly improbable scenario would have no chance in Hollywood. Even for us it was difficult to believe our own memories.

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF FREE INFORMATION

Communist rule in Europe was not monolithic – there were deep differences

between the Soviet bloc countries, with some more totalitarian than others. Popular uprisings in Poland, Hungary and elsewhere were never coordinated, and national democratic opposition movements had just symbolical contacts, mostly only to express their mutual sympathies. But even in the Soviet Union itself we can distinguish several relatively liberal periods: for instance, during the late 1950s and early 1960s under Nikita Khrushchev or during the second half of 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev.

Czechoslovakia had its "Prague Spring 1968", preceded by years of small scale daily struggle primarily in the arts. Czech writers, film directors (remember the legendary Czech New Wave) and journalists were prepared to join the large national movement calling for more civic rights, more freedom – a movement inspired by the somewhat clumsy attempt of Czech communist leaders to launch mild economical and political reform. In 1968 for instance, Czechs were able to enjoy a free press. *Literarni noviny* was a marvellous platform for the opposition with its 300,000 copies every week – the circulation of a major daily. The heroic days of Czech radio and television after the Soviet-led invasion in August 1968 were never forgotten. The Soviets had lost the first battle. It took the authorities almost another two years to control fully public life again in Czechoslovakia – and the world witnessed the slow death of freedom.

After the crushing of the free Czech media the public had to rely again on foreign sources. Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America played a major role. Far from being perfect, often representing too obviously official American policies, they had a great advantage: enough broadcasting time to give space to dissidents and important exiles from Czechoslovakia. The BBC, on the other hand, had the reputation of being the *only* free source of information during World War Two when it was carefully listened to in Czechoslovakia – even though listeners faced the death penalty for tuning in to an "enemy broadcast".

CIVIL SELF-DEFENCE

During the early 1970s there emerged the first clandestine publications. For instance, there were typewritten newsletters which, unlike the occasional leaflets during the 1950s and 1960s, were the work of professional journalists – often liberal communists who had lost their jobs in the massive purges organised by the country's neo-Stalinist, pro-Soviet government. Inspiration came from a similar Soviet underground periodical, the *Chronicle of Current Events*, and its distribution was relatively well organised. Particularly inspiring was the fact that these periodicals appeared regularly, in most cases on monthly basis.

Often distributed along with the newsletters were illegal copies of special press monitors published in limited numbers for the privileged members of communist *nomenklatura*. Monitoring was not subject to censorship and so was able to reveal the real picture of the international reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, namely its devastating impact on the communist movement in the West. Later – at the end of the 1970s – another purely informative newsletter, *Information about Charter 77*, started to record every case of state police persecution of people and went on for more than ten years.

With the new technologies the print runs of the alternative press rapidly increased. Xeroxed copies of *Lidove noviny* outnumbered many times the total circulation of more than 150 independent periodicals written and disseminated by brave volunteers between 1970 and 1989. Czech free culture had even its newsreels such as the *Original Videojournal* – distributed on standard two-hours videotapes – which offered documentaries, reports on opinion polls and underground artistic activities, long interviews with major poets and philosophers. Thus thousands of viewers could see for the first time the face of Vaclav Havel, who would become in two years their president.

By the mid 1970s, the somewhat chaotic circulation of anonymously typewritten copies of novels, essays and poems was replaced by a system of *samizdat* "publishing houses", which in most cases were single-manned centres of book production. Each copy was read by friends and families and the number of titles published went into the hundreds – not surprisingly in an occupied country where more than 500 authors were banned. Such operations were extremely risky and inevitably some publishers and authors went to prison. Indeed, despite all the dangers many authors and publishers dared to step out from anonymity and sign each copy of their book.

Independent book publishing had originally purely literary ambitions. Nevertheless, very soon it became clear that everything unofficial had a political dimension particularly since all independent activities were seen as threats to the ruling elite. In such an over-politicised atmosphere, a humble, handwritten copy of a booklet of lyrical sonnets grew into a subversive conspiracy in the eyes of communist leaders.

But at last the Czech underground was able to create beautiful books. Today, the *Libri Prohibiti*, the Prague-based museum and study centre of independent literature, exhibits the work of now almost forgotten *samizdat* editors and publishers: "Yes, we have made it!" they seem to proclaim.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Especially after the declaration of the Charter 77, one of the first

responsibly organised unofficial movements of citizens, foreign journalists flooded into Prague. Everybody wanted to speak with Charter's leaders, Vaclav Havel and Jan Patocka, but few were properly prepared and some even lacked the basic facts. It was amusing to follow two elegant female reporters from a French fashion magazine who came to Prague to interview the first spokesman of Charter 77, an elderly dignified gentleman, professor of classic philosophy. They wanted him to come to the most wired and spied-on café in town and insisted he should wear a red scarf because it would give a beautiful effect against the large café window with the silhouette of Prague Castle on the horizon! Fortunately, better briefed journalists were coming, too. I particularly remember some Norwegian journalists who showed not only professionalism but also human understanding bringing with them piles of Western journals and books as well as publications by exiled Czechs.

Gradually, deeper contacts between Western media and human right groups were developed. The numbers of media people just "parachuting" into Prague for a chance interview with a Charter 77 representative fell dramatically. Interviews were better prepared, with the committed journalists provided with all necessary timetables and so on.

Also during the last decades of communism, hundreds of unknown heroes – such as Western students on holiday and other tourists – smuggled into the country thousands copies of exile magazines in Czech and Slovak such as *Listy* (*Letters*) from Rome, *Svedectvi* (*Testimony*) or *150,000 slov* (*150,000 words*) from Paris. 68 Publishers in Toronto, led by a well-known Czech writers' couple, managed to transport into the country many of its texts drawn from its astonishing catalogue of over 200 titles. Czechoslovak-Polish solidarity gave birth to a long friendship between Vaclav Havel and future editor-in-chief of the opinion-making liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Adam Michnik. Such collaborations assured people behind the Iron Curtain: "You are not alone!"

NEW-FOUND WORLD

Czech media after 1989 had to cope with a double heritage. On one side there were thousands of old regime journalists; some of them very good professionals, but virtually all of them were more or less morally corrupt. Some even tried to improve their image at the last moment, speaking out against the communists in November 1989. On the other hand underground magazines and reviews had produced many dedicated non-professionals: there was no need of schools of journalism if you had top Czech writers among your contributors, and most of them joined new free

media at least for a couple of years. Some continued in two parallel tracks: an alternative rock group bass guitarist is also one of the best economic and political analysts and commentators. For very pragmatic reasons it was impossible to replace at once all employees of the state media – only Czech TV had several thousands of them on the pay-roll. Nevertheless, the pace and dynamism of changes was breathtaking. New dailies mushroomed while the old ones started to slowly disappear. Some transformed successfully into serious mainstream newspapers. Within a short time – by early 1990s – there were no state-owned media in Czechoslovakia. Existing daily newspapers were privatised, new ones established as private ones, while most of them were sold later to international media corporations such as Hersant or Ringier. State radio and television were transformed into public service media based on the BBC model, as was the CTK (Czech News Agency).

Czech media were vigilant watchdogs of democracy during the early 1990s. In fact, those were bright years of Czech journalism when editors, reporters and commentators reported responsibly on the early political conflicts among democratically elected leaders.

After the division of Czechoslovakia a new era began. A channel of Czech television – until 1989 bringing entertainment to Soviet army garrisons in Czechoslovakia – was transformed into the first private channel, Nova TV, that quickly brought tabloid values to television.

But overall, the performance of Czech media over recent years has been impressive. The Press Freedom Index formulated by Reporters Sans Frontiers has ranked the Czech Republic between fifth and 24th out 175 countries over last five years – in 2009 they were just behind the UK and the USA, but far ahead of France or Italy.

CZECH EDITOR'S NOTES

My personal journalistic experience started in late 1970s when I was invited to participate in the organisation of probably the most complex project in the history of Czech underground press. It was a thick literary review, *Spectrum*, full of poems, essays, short stories and photographs. Readers organised themselves into 88 circles, with ten members each. Every reader paid a modest amount, and the collected sum helped buy four typewriters and stationery – and pay for the typists' wages. Why 88? Well, it was the number of copies produced (the capacity of one typewriter was 11 copies at once, using 10 carbon papers, so every page had to be rewritten eight times). The number, however exceptionally high, was not sufficient, so *Index on Censorship* magazine editors in London arranged for reprints to be made

and they were secretly transported back to Czechoslovakia.

Some years later I was asked to co-found *Kriticky sbornik* (*Critical Almanac*), the first alternative review containing both literary and art criticism. We were able to use a financial gift from Czech countrymen in exile to build a large network of collaborators, and even to pay small authors' fees. This amounted to a form of social welfare aid since most authors were unemployed intellectuals. The editor-in-chief, a brilliant linguist, was a stoker in a Prague hospital, an old building with – appropriately – two entries. Every time I went to pick up an issue I saw him take it out from under a heap of coal in his cellar. Without pulling the cigar out of his teeth, he brought out the journal, sat in his tiny underground office in front of his piano and played a celebratory *Maple Leaf Ragtime.*

I then delivered the originals to another stoker in another public building; he was a protestant minister, responsible for copying and distribution. We exchanged anecdotes and that was it. The protestant had a hi-tech oil heating system, but no piano. And I was no stoker, but a construction worker. Czech workers during the last years of communism had plenty of time for their hobbies. My hobby was the underground publishing. I contributed as author, editor, coordinator. I am ready to admit that there was a dose of romanticism in it, too.

At the same time I became part of two important typewriter publishing houses. *Edice Kvart* was founded by the poet Jan Vladislav, and I took his role after he was forced by secret police to leave the country. Our top-rated title was a four-volume memoir, *All the Beauty of the World* (1981) by the Charter 77 signatory and a nationally beloved poet Jaroslav Seifert, in a special cardboard box. Three years later the author was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

The *Edice Expedice* publishing workshop was conceived by Vaclav Havel and administrated by his wife, Olga, and his brother, Ivan, during the years Havel spent in jail. In the 15 years of its existence, *EE* published almost 300 titles in two series, "black" and "white", according to the canvas used for bookbinding. The choice of texts, their order of appearance and all necessary technical aspects were decided in the editorial board, called "Admiralty". In the summer of 1988 we had one of the last meetings and for the first time the question was raised: Would the regime survive long enough to let us finish the jubilee 300th volume? It had not.

The beauty and emotions of the first weeks of freedom in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia were probably best described by British historian and honorary Central European Timothy Garton Ash in his *Magical Lantern.* He could not fail to notice the slogan wherever he went: "Back to Europe!"

LEARNING EUROPE

Czechs have never doubted the historical and cultural fact that they are a part of Europe, meaning *Western* Europe. During the 1960s, and especially in 1968 when they could travel freely, Czechs' identification with West European culture and lifestyle was strong. But there were severe problems and paradoxes surrounding the situation of Central European states: Austria (i.e. "Eastern Empire") was included in the West, while Prague, a capital 300 km to the West from Vienna, was considered an East European city. It was only after the 1968 Soviet invasion that Milan Kundera wrote – from his exile in Paris – *The Tragedy of Central Europe* (1984), an essay in which he defined Central Europe as "kidnapped West". Thus began the fight by the people of Central Europe (the bumper zone between East and West) for their own self-determination.

My return to Europe had dreamy dimensions: I was chosen to establish and direct a Czechoslovak version of an all-European magazine *Lettre Internationale*. The quarterly review for literature, history, politics and arts was originally started by the Czech exile Antonin Liehm in Paris. In addition to the French edition, the 1980s saw German, Italian and Spanish editions – by 1989 there were twelve national editions. It was a flexible network of economically independent periodicals and the ruling formula was that about half of articles should be shared by all and the rest of contents left to local initiative. Quite a demanding project, and not all language versions survived, but it was an enormous intellectual adventure: to offer to different audiences a simultaneous reading of original essays by top European (and not exclusively European) authors.

My next project was no less ambitious: *Central European Gazette*, a monthly supplement of four leading dailies in Warsaw, Budapest, Bratislava and Prague. It had a common international editorial board. The idea was simple – to improve knowledge and understanding of our Central European neighbours and challenge old stereotypes, yet the practicalities of producing it were extremely complicated. It was difficult to understand each other, difficult to communicate and to compromise; yet at the same time we were all dedicated, highly motivated, cooperative, open-minded and pro-European.

Czech journalists, in fact, joined the European Union long before their countrymen! Very soon they started to participate in different European activities. As early as 1993, the Czech section was accepted as a full member of the Association of European Journalists. Under the guidance of Günther Wagenlehner, Miguel Angel Aguilar and Atanase Papandropoulos, their colleagues from Central Europe were able to contribute to the AEJ goals – to work towards European integration on democratic principles.

The Open Media Research Institute with its English language *Transitions* magazine helped to educate journalists from Central and Eastern Europe in Prague, Czech reporters went to Brussels or to Maastricht to improve their coverage of European issues, specifically the EU enlargement process. The International Communications Forum, with the kind and wise Bill Porter at its head, kept stressing moral values in journalism and the responsibility of media workers to promote peace and freedom. The Sarajevo Commitment (2000) is the proof of such an endeavour.

Surveys of media freedom across Europe show that – perhaps surprisingly – press freedom is in danger everywhere, even in old European democracies. The reason is simple: political elites, even democratically elected elites, tend to control sooner or later the public space; every state tries to influence its media. It is like a law of nature and the only remedy is always to work to prevent politicians from threatening the independence of journalists.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Tomáš Vrba is a Czech journalist, translator and editor. From 1977 to 1989 he was the editor of non-official (samizdat) publishing networks and from 1990 to 1993 correspondent of the Portuguese daily *Público*. Editor-in-chief for the Czech and Slovak edition of *Lettre Internationale* from 1990 to 1995, in 1993 he was the founder and president of the AEJ – Association of European Journalists/Czech section. From 1997 to 2000 he was the editor-in-chief for the Czech and English editions of the monthly *Poítomnost/The New Presence* and from 1998 to 2002 he was a member of the board of the Czech chapter of Transparency International. Since 1999 he has lectured at New York University, Prague. From 2002 to 2004 he was international vice-president of the Association of European Journalists. He was a member (from 2002 to 2007) and (from 2004 to 2007) president of the board of the Czech News Agency (CTK). Since 2007 he has been president of the board of the Forum 2000 Foundation.

PART 5

MEDIA VALUES IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET

26

How ethics and exposure compete in modern journalism

Magnus Linklater

Magnus Linklater argues that, while the advent of the internet and 24/7 news operations are changing the face of journalism, there is no reason why the industry should abandon the principles on which it is founded. It remains, he says, the responsibility of individuals who belong to it to maintain the standards of what is still, at heart, an honourable profession

A simple tale of derring-do from the great days of popular journalism: it is the 1960s, a period when mobile telephones were unheard of and satellite communications a distant dream. For any experienced reporter, dashing out on a breaking story, the first thing to check, on reaching the destination, was how to phone your copy back to the office. More important than interviewing witnesses, more pressing than finding the nearest police source, the business of establishing the means of communication that would relay your story at the end of the day was a top priority.

For the well-paid teams of the popular press (long before they were called the tabloids) the approach was simple. You knocked on the door of a nearby house, pressed a tenner into the hands of the owner, and indicated that he or she should reserve their telephone for the exclusive use of the *Daily Whatever*. But what if you were miles from anywhere – at the scene of a rail crash, perhaps, or waiting for the arrival of a transatlantic yachtsman on a lonely quayside? My pal on the *Daily Express* found himself in just such a position. Driving out to the isolated house where a farmer with a grievance had holed himself up with a shotgun and a well-advertised determination to take several coppers with him before giving up, he noticed the single red

telephone box on the corner of the road. Quickly nipping inside, he unscrewed the handset and scrawled a notice saying: "Out of Order – nearest telephone 15 miles along the B287." His rivals fumed. But he got the story back before them.

Enterprising? Certainly. Unethical? Of course. But stories like this, from the great days of popular journalism, are legion and legendary, widely admired as evidence of quick-thinking pressmen, whose ambition to get the story first was lauded in the bars of Fleet Street.

THE ADVENTURES OF THE "FAKE SHEIK"

Fast forward to the 1990s and we come to the *News of the World* reporter, Mazher Mahmood, who dressed himself up as an Arab sheik to extract some embarrassing disclosures from a leading figure in the sports world. Enterprising? Well, possibly, but two things make one hesitate. First, this was deception – expressly forbidden by the journalists' code of conduct – second, it would be hard to argue that the story itself was in the public interest. Unethical? Yes – this was journalism as entertainment rather than disclosure.

Finally, the current furore over the illegal use of telephone intercepts, again by the *News of the World*. Here the dividing line is clear and unambiguous. This was illegal activity. One journalist, Clive Goodman, has already been sent to prison after being caught bugging private telephone conversations between politicians, celebrities and members of the royal family. Evidence brought before a Commons select committee suggests that the activity was being carried out on a wider scale. Furthermore, there is no suggestion here that disclosures of matters in the public interest were involved. This was a device to secure titillating headlines rather than real news. Enterprising? No. Unethical, yes.

For the young journalist setting out on a new career, there are moral dilemmas here which would disconcert even the most experienced of newsmen. Where does the dividing line lie between what is reprehensible, unethical, or plain downright criminal? Are the guidelines which govern press conduct made to be bent if the story justifies it? Where is the boundary between what is in the public interest and what the public is interested in? And do newspaper editors and their executives make it crystal clear what is acceptable and what is out of order?

CHANGING MORAL CLIMATE

Just to make the challenge even more daunting, there is the changing moral

climate of the time. By the more severe standards of a previous era, some of the stories that run today, not just in the tabloids, but in so-called serious broadsheet papers, would be judged unacceptable. Prurient coverage of celebrities' private lives has become common currency. Newspapers pick up on revelations on the internet, on blogs, on social networking sites such as Facebook or Bebo, and on the multifarious web-sites by which people in the public eye actually encourage interest in their private lives. A whole industry has sprung up whereby minor players in the world of film or television try to advance their careers by positively encouraging intrusion into their personal indiscretions. Snatched pictures, taken through telephoto lenses, which seem on the surface to be examples of gross intrusion, turn out, on scrutiny, to be part of a bid for publicity, engineered by the very people who seem the victims.

In this climate ethical certainties are hard to pin down. Readers and viewers, who have always been curious about the private lives of public figures, now regard this form of coverage as standard – they are neither particularly surprised nor shocked by it. Even heavy-weight newspapers have realised that the daily agenda must include a whole range of interests which would once have been regarded as the preserve of television or the tabloids.

It would seem, therefore, that the newspapers themselves have a duty to define the standards they expect from their reporters, and to ensure that these are instilled in young recruits from the start of their careers. In this, they are aided by a code of practice which has been drawn up and agreed by the industry's regulatory body, the Press Complaints Commission.

DUTY TO MAINTAIN HIGHEST PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

This is, on the surface, clear-cut. However, the very terms in which it is framed lays it open to different forms of interpretation. It stipulates that all members of the press have a duty to maintain the highest professional standards. It seeks to protect both the rights of the individual and the public's "right to know". But it also includes a paragraph which only emphasises the dilemma that reporters may face:

> "It is essential that an agreed code be honoured not only to the letter but in the full spirit. It should not be interpreted so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect the rights of the individual, nor so broadly that it constitutes an unnecessary interference with freedom of expression or prevents publication in the public interest."

Which, then, predominates? Editors tend to cite freedom of expression as all-embracing. The PCC itself leans towards this side of the argument, while attempting to set limits to what can and cannot be done.

Thus, while it covers an impressive range of issues – accuracy, privacy, intrusion, harassment, subterfuge, payment to criminals and the protection of children – it allows a degree of judgement to be made in almost all cases. For instance, under the heading of "clandestine devices or subterfuge," it appears to rule out entirely the use of anything that would allow a journalist to listen in to a private conversation, or to pass themselves off as something they are not. But then it adds: "Engaging in misrepresentation or subterfuge, including by agents or intermediaries, can generally be justified only in the public interest and then only when the material cannot be obtained by other means."

Through this yawning loophole, springs any newspaper which believes it has obtained a story "in the public interest", and which it can defend on the grounds that the material could not have been obtained "by other means". "Other means" is usually a reference to the old-fashioned diligence that once passed for honest reporting. It was usually more time-consuming, but at least it was above board.

Into this moral jungle steps the young reporter, who is, one hopes, imbued with the ideals of his profession – to investigate wrong-doing, crime, fraud, and serious impropriety; to protect public health and the safety of the citizen; to prevent the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organization – in short to expose hypocrisy. As well as these, come a duty to inform and entertain – there is no point in adopting lofty aims if no one is going to bother to read the result. Lay on top of this, an ability to write decent English, to invoke – as the late legendary war correspondent Nicholas Tomalin (1931-1973) once observed – "a little light learning," and to be aware of the need to keep one step ahead of the competition: the jungle just got a littler thicker. When, in addition, the media world is changing so rapidly, with the demands of instant online reporting, the pressures of the internet, and the threat to the very future of print journalism, what lies ahead is more daunting and complex than for the would-be journalists of a previous era.

CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF GOOD JOURNALISM

But at heart there are some basic propositions which remain unchanged. For all the rules and codes, the guidelines and the laws, at heart there are certain principles of good journalism, and most decent reporters and editors know instinctively what they are. They mean not twisting the facts of a story to

distort the truth. They mean learning when intrusion is justified and when it is a gross breach of privacy. They mean understanding the distinction between persistence and harassment. They mean respecting those who have suffered personal loss, but recognising that there are times when the grief-stricken actually welcome the chance to express their grief. They mean respecting certain limits – not invading hospital wards, not identifying young children or the victims of sexual assault, not paying criminals or potential witnesses in criminal trials.

But they mean, also, matters which are more subjective, such as when a story discriminates against a race or a creed, and when political or religious bias has blurred the distinction between fact and opinion. I would add another important rule: attempt always to leave any individual you have interviewed ready and willing to see you or another reporter from your newspaper again. Even if you had to have a foot in the door to gain access, there is no reason to leave them bruised and resentful after you have done your job.

The influence of the media is wide-ranging and all-pervasive, but the principles which guide it, rely, for their implementation, on the individual reporter, editor and proprietor. It is they who are the ultimate guardians of morality, decency and common courtesy. And there is a larger constraint on their behaviour. Those newspapers that consistently disregard the basic rules risk not only censure from the PCC but losing the respect of their readers. The public knows instinctively when the newspaper or media outlet that they are reading ceases to be reliable. And at that point they will turn to something that they can trust instead.

The world of print journalism faces greater challenges than it has ever done in the past. Online reporting, with its instant, 24-hour, insistent pressures, is changing the whole way the media conducts itself. That is no reason, however, why it should abandon the principles on which it is founded. It remains, as it always has done, up to the individuals who belong to it, to maintain the standards of what is still, at heart, an honourable profession.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Magnus Linklater, a newspaper columnist and Scotland Editor of *The Times,* was Editor of the *Scotsman* from 1988 to 1994. He has held a number of senior journalistic appointments in British newspapers over the past 40 years. He joined the *Daily Express* in Manchester in 1964 and was diary editor on the *Evening Standard* in London before joining *The Sunday Times* where he worked for 14 years under its then Editor, Harold Evans. In 1983 he moved to *The Observer,* where he was Managing Editor (News) for three years before being recruited to launch and edit the *London Daily News* for the publisher, Robert Maxwell. After six and a

half years as Editor of the *Scotsman,* he began a freelance career in 1994, working for *The Times,* Radio Scotland and *Scotland on Sunday.* He contributes a weekly column for *The Times* from Scotland, and was appointed Scotland Editor in 2007. From 1996 to 2001 he was Chairman of the Scottish Arts Council. Mr Linklater is the author of several books on current affairs and Scottish history.

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How professional journalists can meet the challenges of the web

Malgorzata Bonikowska

Malgorzata Bonikowska stresses that professional journalism can continue to play a prominent moral role in the new, internet-dominated meda landscape

In the contemporary world, the media (such as the broadcasting stations, newspapers and magazines and internet sites created by both professionals and citizens) undoubtedly play a crucial role. Moroever, the rapid development of new technologies and new ways of communications facilitated by the massive use of internet and incredible popularity of English as a universal language mean that the importance of mass media in our societies is growing.

Will our century, with its global circulation of information produced by different sources, see an end to the traditional media? Do we still need professional journalists and editors? What should be the mass media of tomorrow be like in order to attract its audiences?

THE CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The media today operate at both the local and global levels, transcending national borders and even continents. The television and radio stations which offer programmes through satellites can be watched all over the world. The BBC has the largest news gathering operation in place, which includes numerous regional offices, foreign correspondents and agreements with other news services. It reaches out to more than 200 countries and is

available to more than 274 million households, as against American CNN's, its nearest competitor's estimated 200 million.

The BBC's radio service is available to many regions of the world. It also broadcasts news – by radio or over the internet – in some 30 languages. Radio still plays a very significant role on all continents, offering music and local news and this helps foster community spirit. It plays an extremely important role in countries where television is not easily available and where people are often unable to read, such as in Africa.

Today 99 per cent of American households have at least one television and a majority of these have more than one set. The average number of TV sets in every home is 2.4. Statistically, an average American citizen watches television non-stop 56 days a year. In an average week, 82 per cent watch "prime time", while 71 per cent watch cable programming. The Americans are also avid radio listeners with 84 per cent switching on their sets regularly despite the competition from television while 79 per cent are regular newspaper readers.[1]

The rapid development of the internet has clearly influenced the print media market but it is still far from putting it in danger. Newspaper sales are on the increase in all continents, barring North America, which is registering a decline.[2] If we take a world average, half a billion people buy at least one newspaper every day. The average readership, however, is estimated to be almost three times higher (more than 1.4 billion people each day) with one copy of a newspaper being read by more than one person.

Asia is the biggest media market of the world. With the two most populous countries, China and India, and the Japanese heading the press consumption table, Asia is driving the global newspaper industry as well.[3] Three countries have the biggest world newspaper markets: China remains on top with 93.6 million copies sold daily, India with 78.7 million copies, followed by Japan with 70.4 million. The US and Germany come next in daily sales.[4] The Japanese remain the world's greatest newspaper buyers, while Belgians spend the most time reading it (an average of 54 minutes a day), followed by the Chinese, Finns and Brazilians, with 48 minutes each. The highest rate of consumption of newspapers is in Norway (651 copies per thousand).[5]

GLOBAL MEDIA MARKET EXPECTED TO EXPAND

The world entertainment and media market is expected to expand by more than a third over the next four years. Digital and mobile advertising revenues are expected to increase 12-fold from 2002 to 2011, to about US $150bn

worldwide. The mobile telephone customer base has already increased from 945 million in 2001 to 2.6 billion in 2006.[6] The number of wireless device subscriptions is expected to increase threefold to 3.4 billion from 2002 to 2011 while the number of homes with broadband is likely to rise 10-fold in the same period.

Moreover, the global balance of media power is shifting. Europe, the Middle East and Africa had overtaken the US as the world's largest entertainment and media markets by 2009. China, meanwhile, is expected to pass the US to become the world's largest broadband market, with more than 80 million households on super-fast connections.[7]

We seem to be in the midst of a battle between the so-called new and old media, as the migration of consumers to fast broadband and mobile phone networks draws advertisers and consumers away from the traditional print media, books and CDs. In some countries the internet will become the primary news and information source within five years, while newspapers will lose their dominating position the have held for more than a century. The print media owners now cannot sleep in peace counting on their print editions alone to keep them solvent. As readership and revenues shift on to the internet, so top news media executives must seek new digital opportunities without neglecting their traditional print publications by rushing headlong into cyberspace.

MEDIA CHALLENGES

In democratic societies every citizen has right to information guaranteed by law. The European Charter for Fundamental Rights, introduced to the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union, says that every citizen has right to express publicly his/hers opinions as well as to get and transmit information without any restriction.[8]

In the previous century, professional media enjoyed almost a monopoly on providing information. Media owners concentrated on making the maximum use of their resources to give as much information to the audience as possible. In our century we face another problem – of too much information. The consumers, bombarded by news from so many different sources, are not able to digest it and end up feeling confused and frustrated. Selection and segmentation of information in accordance with the needs and requests of every individual seems to be the biggest challenge for the media of today.

The right for information goes together with the right for education. In the twenty-first century, the development of civilisation will not slow down and new technologies will offer us more and more opportunities. The role

of *long life learning* will increase as we will need to learn new skills and return to the education system several times in one generation. We will not be able to follow the developments of the world without the help of competent "intermediators". Teachers and schools are the gates for knowledge, journalists and media are its main source.

CRUCIAL EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The role of the media in the process of learning is increasingly important because our knowledge of the world comes largely from what we are offered by television, radio, press and internet. At the same time, the growing role of the media, especially television, in the education process has also a negative impact because of its simplifications and "tabloidisation" of reality, caused by the media's desperate drive to gain its audience's attention. This approach makes journalists and editors neglect issues which are difficult and complicated in favour of easily digestible issues. This also make them prefer "bad news", which always catch eye of the people.

In the twenty-first century, the media play absolutely crucial political roles all over the world. On the one hand, they help politicians to communicate with citizens. On the other hand, they help the citizens to keep eye on politicians and their conduct. Media in democratic society should play a role of a watchdog on the political elites. However, how to implement this task without ending up with a bad image of politics and a low respect for public service? The political scandals reported by journalists can be interpreted as proof that democracy works and the public sphere is controlled. But at the same time they can raise citizens' frustration and bring doubts about democracy itself, widening the gap between the governed and the governments.

The close links between the mainstream media and political elites bring extra problems. How can politics be reported objectively when journalists are friends of politicians? Are not the media and power elites living in too close a symbiotic relationship – with the one unable to live without the other? Moreover, how can journalists report politics in sufficient depth when they are not given the resources to dedicate sufficient time to researching and analysing their findings?

So we end up having journalists who are too close to their sources and who don't even double check what they have found. Instead of reporting the facts and making the news more understandable to the audience, journalists become themselves the news and the prominent opinion-makers. They are also less interested in being objective and neutral, seeing their role often as leaders and campaigners for some political causes.

MEDIA – BIG BUSINESS FIRST OF ALL

The media of today is a big business first of all. The media owners function in the free market economy where making money is the first and main principle. When the word "profit" is the most important, other objectives such as informing or educating the audience are marginalised. The essence of the word "business" is to be "busy". Decision-makers in the media sector are so busy looking for profit that they forget the essence of this business which is neutrality and credible information.

Media businesses depend less and less on the opinion of the audience and more and more on the advertisers. The biggest advertisements providers can influence the content considerably, blocking undesired information or pushing for the coverage they want. At the same time, pluralism in the media market is declining. Mergers and acquisitions create media empires and conglomerates which are increasingly able to control the content in the media landscape. In the US, media and communication is one of America's largest industries, with revenues running at almost $250 billion and with only eight companies dominating the market[9]:

- Disney (market value: $72.8 billion)
- Time Warner (market value: $90.7 billion)
- Viacom (market value: $53.9 billion)
- General Electric (owner of NBC, market value: $390.6 billion)
- News Corporation (market value: $56.7 billion)
- Yahoo! (market value: $40.1 billion)
- Microsoft (market value: $306.8 billion)
- Google (market value: $154.6 billion)

Given the growing monopolies in the media industry, it is crucial to consider how pluralism in the media can be restored. In this context, the question about the status and condition of the public media is crucial. In the EU countries, public radio and television is supported in part by the governments. In the EU, the audiovisual sector is additionally supported by the financial instrument MEDIA, operating since the year 1987.[10]

THE NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Personal computers, the internet, mobile phones and satellites have dramatically changed the media landscape. Today anyone can be an information producer using a private channel of communication for his/her

own purposes. The internet has become a sort of a global Hyde Park where anyone can say anything. Language is no more a barrier either, having in mind the predominant position of English.

The internet as a new communication channel also influences the content and style of pieces of information. The content of websites has to be simple, short and straight to the point in order not to lose readers. So texts on the internet are simpler and shorter. At the same time, the information reaches the audience online making possible the quicker and direct contact between the information producer and receiver. It is very easy to establish connection and get the message spread out, and the reactions can be immediate. This creates also new possibilities for social dialogue and activities.

The twenty-first century, then, is not only a century of *net-work* but also of *net-politics*, *net-society*, *net-culture*. Blogs and social networks give politicians new channels of direct communication with their supporters but also allow people to organise their social and public lives in different ways. The "cyber worlds" and "net communities" cross boundaries of countries creating new loyalties and bonds.

At the same time, the growing importance of the internet in developed countries increases the problem of e-exclusion. There are countries and regions where the access to the internet is not easy or not possible at all. At the same time, even in the developed countries many elderly people have failed to adapt to the internet and so remain excluded from all its benefits.

THE FUTURE OF THE MEDIA

The rapid development of information and communication technologies as well as the massive use of the internet, satellites and mobile phones increasingly influence our lives and traditional media. For many people "virtual realities" have come to replace "real" life.

Billions of internet websites, available through mobile phones, television sets and new gadgets, give us unlimited access to information but also make our lives more difficult. Google and other search engines resolve maybe the quantity problem but don't help as for quality. Is the global web credible? How can we be sure that what we find in the internet is true? Professional journalists, editors and publishers are still needed to help select information for consumer – and help them to understand it. So, in conclusion, it is crucial for the mainstream media to find somehow a balance between its socio-political role and its need to survive in the market.

NOTES

1 Survey by Mediamark Research.
2 World Association of Newspapers' annual survey of world press trends was released to more than 1,600 publishers, editors and other senior newspaper executives from 109 countries at the 60th World Newspaper Congress and the 14th World Editors Forum in Cape Town.
3 Asia Times Online, 22 October 2007.
4 World Association of Newspapers, WAN report, October 2007.
5 The World Association of Newspapers report, May 2005.
6 World Digital Media Trends report, World Association of Newspapers, June 2008, Source: EJC Media News (e-newsletter) 4 June 2008.
7 The latest Global Entertainment and Media Outlook by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), June 2008. The survey looks at 15 global media markets from online, television and newspaper advertising to theme park and cinema ticket sales. Source: EJC Media News (e-newsletter) 18 June 2008.
8 Charter for Human Rights, Artice 11.
9 *Mother Jones*, end 2006.
10 Programme MEDIA (Measures to Encourage the Development of the Audiovisual Industry): the budget for 2007–2013 is 755 million Euros.

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Making sense of the senseless

Danko Plevnik

Danko Plevnik examines the impact of the internet on the traditional media landscape

Why do certain things make sense to us and other make no sense at all? Giving sense to something isn't a single decision, but a constant reflective and spiritual, cultural and social process. Why do we need the media today and do they still make sense? Originally, the main role of the media was to mediate between citizens to promote their coexistence. But in time society broke down into different groups and individuals. The media adapted to this process, so after the national and mass media came the minority and personal media.

But with the arrival of the internet, does everyone now have right to create their own medium – whether it be one's own portal, web blog, videoblog, YouTube video or Twitter "tweet"? According to Dan Gillmor, the director of the Center for Citizen Media, blogs are becoming the main media platform with tens of millions of bloggers around the world. Thus citizens today perform the role that used to be played by press agencies, for free. For instance, information about the plane that crashed into the River Hudson on 15 January 2009 (and miraculously escaped) appeared on Twitter before it was reported by Reuters. Nicholas Negroponte, from MIT, described the rise of blog and social network sites as the production of the "Daily Me".[1]

However, there is the danger that in the internet facts are used not in support of meaningful communication but for individual self-publicity. This particular tendency was described by Farhad Manjoo in his book *True Enough: Learning to live in a Post-Fact Society*.[2]

It seems that old, monopolistic mass media, the ones that Eric Voegelin

accused of "intellectual terrorism", are slowly paying the price of their own former omnipotence. Today, young people are simply turning away from the traditional media in disgust and promoting their own interests through new media. Moreover, the old media were dominated by economic priorities. Adam Arvidsson, in his book *Brands: Meaning and Value in Postmodern Media*,[3] claimed that media companies had been foolishly trying to "brand" a certain way of life on the assumption that this would help give sense to the lives of their consumers.

The new internet-based culture also highlights subjectivity – not objectivity. Even a columnist on *Time*, Joel Stein, admitted that journalism was essentially "just a pretext to write about the thing I do care about: me".[4] In other words, today both readers and writers strive for more attention in print, on air and in cyberspace, as *The New York Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristof and Bill Bishop[5] have highlighted.

Journalism is losing its sense because journalism that makes sense is losing its money. If we want a mature democracy to develop, then the media should be capable of educating its consumers for positive democratic participation. But how can newspapers survive in the face of competition from the internet?

One solution would be for the state to subsidise responsible media. The BBC with its excellent journalism provides a model of effective state subsidy; in contrast Fox News (with its extreme right-wing political agenda, inspired by its owner Rupert Murdoch) shows how commercial funding can seriously distort the content of the media.

NOTES

1 Nicholas D. Kristof, The Daily Me, *The New York Times*, 19 March 2009
2 Farhad Manjoo, *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society*, Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008
3 Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Postmodern Media Culture,* Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2006
4 Clifford G. Christians et al., *Media ethics: Cases and Moral Reasoning,* Boston: Pearson Education, 2005 p. 296
5 Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the clustering of like-minded America is tearing us apart,* Hougthon Miffflin Company, 2008

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Danko Plevnik is a columnist on the Croatian daily newspaper, *Slobodna Dalmacija*. His books include *The Practice of Ethical Journalism* and *The Right of Self-Meaning*. He won the Busek Award, the most important prize for ethical journalism the South East Europe.

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The internet and journalism: Responsibility, conscience and the law

Olga Noskova

Olga Noskova considers the impact of the internet on mainstream journalism in the Russian Federation – and calls for legislative regulation

A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since I took part in an international conference organised by Bill Porter's International Communications Forum in a small Swiss town, Caux, together with our colleagues from Nizhny Novgorod in 1994. There we found out with interest and pleasure that the problem of moral responsibility of the mass media to society worried not only us, but also all those present. Much has changed in the world and in Russia since then, but the problem that was discussed has not lost its topicality.

And new types of communication offered to us in the 21st century force us to think again about how journalists should realise their professional ambitions with a clear conscience and under the law. However, not only the journalist. The internet is that new communication facility which turns each user into a potential reporter and columnist.

The number of users of internet sites, the volume of information circulating in Russian-speaking regions and the number of Russian users fluent in English all transform the internet into the most powerful lever of information and influence on society. The vast amount of information, easily accessible for practically everyone, forces Russian legislators to reflect objectively on legislative control over this new part of our life. And the global networks' speed of expansion in the country gives us no chance to postpone this problem till tomorrow.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In 2000 there were no members of the Russian Federation amongst the countries who have signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. The Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (July 2007) also is not ratified by the Russian Federation. Of course, it does not mean that nobody in Russia is anxious about the problem of internet content and influence on users. The declaration "For the safety of children and youth on the internet" is a demonstration of real concern of our society about what is happening on the internet. The "Safer Internet Year" campaign, which ran recently in Russia, has shown "what huge responsibility is imposed by the development of online technologies on those engaged in the internet professionally, and also on all adult people in regard to children and youth" (from the report of organising committee of the "Safer Internet Year").

Russian legislators have tried time and again to approach legislative regulation of the internet. One such attempt was the creation of a working group on the Committee for Information Policy, Information Technologies and Communications, for developing an internet regulating law in 2009. In the process, the working group faced much criticism, which undermined their whole purpose. Unjust accusations of attempts to impose censorship, to take over the control of freedom-loving bloggers and to deprive users of the right of self-expression, rained down on them.

FOUNTAINS OF EMOTIONS

Since then the clash of cross-currents has continued, causing fountains of emotions and hindering fruitful dialogue. So, "Down with censorship! Give us freedom!" collides with "Down with double standards! Off-line and on-line publications should be equal in amenability to the law!"

Representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia consider that legal liability in the sphere of information technologies should be toughened. "For the same criminal act a person could be condemned to a year and a half suspended sentence in Russia and twenty years in jail in the USA," says one of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' representatives who suggests toughening the onus of responsibility. Yet another official considers that all-embracing regulation of the internet at the present time is unachievable, so it is not even necessary to be engaged in it.

Everything can be found on the internet; a good recipe for whole-meal bread and rules of cultivating a marihuana on a window sill; a video master

class of swaddling a baby and a video clip with execution of hostages. Everything for everyone according to his or her need. However how about threats to national security! How many temptations for immature personalities?! It's difficult to estimate the extent of the internet as a global treasury of knowledge but also as a worldwide information dumping ground.

How can the obscene language which is now so prevalent on the internet be restricted? What will be the social consequences of such a communication style? Perhaps, the new generations which are being brought up on the internet will move away from the use of normal and normative communication. Why should they stick to it, if there, on the internet, everything is possible?

In this context, legislative regulation of the internet becomes really important. But we can't succeed without the personal involvement of every participant in the global internet community.

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A graduate of the Department of Journalism at Lomonosov Moscow State University, Olga Noskova worked at the Nizhny Novgorod television channel NNTV for 30 years, the last 15 years as the director. She has been elected to the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Legislative Assembly twice – in 1998 and 2006. During her second term of office she has worked as a deputy of the Nizhny Novgorod Regional Legislative Assembly. Elected to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly (the Parliament of the Russian Federation), she is a member of its Committee for Information Policy, Information Technologies and Communications.