VINTAGE

DISTANT VOICES

JOHN PILGER

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About the Book

Throughout his distinguished career as a journalist and film-maker, John Pilger has looked behind the ‘official’ versions of events to report the real stories of our time.

The centrepiece of this new, expanded edition of his bestselling *Distant Voices* is Pilger’s reporting from East Timor, which he entered secretly in 1993 and where a third of the population has died as a result of Indonesia’s genocidal policies. This edition also contains more new material as well as all the original essays – from the myth-making of the Gulf War to the surreal pleasures of Disneyland. Breaking through the consensual silence, Pilger pays tribute to those dissenting voices we are seldom permitted to hear.

About the Author

John Pilger was born and educated in Sydney, Australia. He has been a war correspondent, film-maker and playwright. Based in London, he has written from many countries and has twice won British journalism's highest award, that of Journalist of the Year, for his work in Vietnam and Cambodia. Among a number of other awards, he has been International Reporter of the Year and winner of the United Nations Association Media Peace Prize. For his broadcasting, he has won an American television Academy Award, an 'Emmy', and the Richard Dimbleby Award, given by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

ALSO BY JOHN PILGER

The Last Day
Aftermath: The Struggle of Cambodia and Vietnam (with Anthony Barnett)
The Outsiders (with Michael Coren)
Heroes
A Secret Country
Hidden Agendas

FOR JANE AND DAVID

Distant Voices

John Pilger

Preface
by Martha Gellhorn

Punching through TV channels, I found myself watching a strange scene. A gang of literary lights was attacking a tall lanky sunburned young man with curare-tipped words. It was a very high-class panel book review programme. The young man looked bewildered but dignified. I had never heard of him, by name John Pilger, nor of his book, *The Last Day*. It was apparently his first book, the record of an historic event, the Retreat from the Embassy Roof, the suitably shameful end of a vilely shameful war. The literary lights, none of whom had attended that war (or probably any other), were really attacking John Pilger's viewpoint, not his facts or his prose. They seemed to think the Vietnam War had been a good thing.

The next day, I bought and read the book and wrote to the author, telling him how fine it was and that he should not pay the slightest attention to his critics. That was in 1975. They've been attacking him ever since. Which proves John's continuous success. ('Yeah,' John might say, a unique drawled two-syllable sound that suggests he has been thinking it over calmly and almost agrees with you.)

After my fan letter, John came to see me. He said that Hugh Cudlipp, then editor-in-chief of the *Mirror* (ah, the golden past), read my 1966 Vietnam articles in the *Guardian*, called him in, gave him the articles and said, that's the story, go and get it. So began John's long devotion to the people of Indo-China. I am always convinced that my writing is useless but it had done something very good if it got John to Vietnam. My 1966 articles appeared two years

too early. I was repeatedly refused a visa to return to Vietnam. I had the painful honour of being the only journalist blacklisted out of that country and that war. Probably John did my work for me – though I must say I'd rather have been able to do it myself.

John is a compulsive worker, compulsive but not frenzied. He has plenty of material; he will never come to the end of it. Basically, it seems to me, he has taken on the great theme of justice and injustice. The misuse of power against the powerless. The myopic, stupid cruelty of governments. The bullying and lies that shroud *realpolitik,* a mad game played at the top, which is a curse to real people.

Conscience has made John a brave and invaluable witness to his time. In many circles, conscience is regarded as oafish; in periods of crisis, it is considered treasonable. During the Vietnam War, contempt for conscience produced the term 'bleeding hearts'. (Mrs Thatcher's 'wet' was of the same order of contempt.) It is tiring to own a conscience, and it does not endear the owner to our rulers. Not surprisingly, John opposed the use of force in the Gulf War, urging continued use of sanctions. Considering the miserable end of that war, with Saddam Hussein still firmly in place in Iraq, uncounted thousands of innocents dead, and millions uprooted, it looks as if his conscience was a first-rate guide.

I have not followed all of John's work; there is too much of it. More than 30 documentary films, five books, hundreds of thousands of words of reporting. But I do not forget the documentaries I have seen and probably no one who saw it will ever forget the great film *Year Zero*, made with David Munro, that showed the world what Pol Pot had done to the Cambodian people. Like John, I think that Nixon and Kissinger were father and mother to Pol Pot and that successive US governments, tirelessly punishing Vietnam for having won that war, have extended their vengeance to the

Cambodians. John never hesitates to blame the powerful in the clearest language; they never fail to react with fury.

John's range is wide. He has done noble service to the Aborigines of Australia, and condemned his own government in the process. He made a film, dangerously and secretly, on the Charter 77 members in Czechoslovakia. He went to Japan and discovered the poor.

Whoever thought of Japanese as being poor? (To me, those black-clad hordes pouring out of bullet trains in Tokyo always looked like African soldier ants, which move in packed narrow streams and eat their way through everything, dead or alive.) Suddenly, like a revelation, the Japanese became human: a gently smiling giant, John bent to listen to tiny, wrinkled old people, and it turns out that Japanese can be poor, neglected and out of it, in rich Japan, as anywhere else. Steadily, John documents and proclaims the official lies that we are told and that most people accept or don't bother to think about. He is a terrible nuisance to Authority.

We agree on every political subject except Israel and the Palestinians. Thinking it over, I believe this has to do with age. John was born in October 1939, an infant in Australia during the Second World War. He was eight years old when the Jews of Palestine, who had accepted the UN Partition Plan, were forced to fight practically with their hands to survive the first combined Arab onslaught and declared their state. Perhaps nobody can understand Israel who does not remember the Second World War and how and why the nation came into being. Since we cannot change each other's views, John and I declare a truce, for I fear the Arab-Israel problem will not be solved in my lifetime.

It is lovely and comforting to have a friend who is as angry about the state of the world as you are yourself. It means you can give it a rest, have some drinks, go to the movies, talk about surfing and snorkelling – our different favourite occupations – make each other laugh. All the fame and fuss

about John have not affected him. Off screen and off print, he is a modest, easy, somewhat shy man. He takes his work very seriously, but not himself. And that is, in itself, a remarkable quality.

Some years ago, John made an unnoted documentary series called *The Outsiders*. He interviewed six or seven people, among them myself, dragooned by friendship into what I least like doing. I never saw the finished product and remember the names of only two of my fellow participants. I had never thought of myself as an outsider or an insider: the question did not arise. I wonder if Helen Suzman, at home in her own country saying ‘No’, thought of herself as an outsider. Or did Wilfred Burchett, an Australian, who said ‘No’ so much that the Australian Government peevishly took away his passport, think of himself that way?

It seems to me that John was simply interviewing people who had their own opinions and did their own work, whatever it was, as they saw fit. At most they could be called dissenters, but even that is rather grand, since we are used to dissenters paying with their life or liberty for their unpopular ideas. It occurred to me that this odd label had to do with the peculiar Aussie–Brit relationship and the way they regard each other. And, as a result, John saw himself as an outsider.

Of course he is not. He belongs to an old and unending worldwide company, the men and women of conscience. Some are as famous as Tom Paine and Wilberforce, some as unknown as a tiny group calling itself Grandmothers Against the Bomb, in an obscure small western American town, who have gone cheerfully to jail for their protests. There have always been such people and always will be. If they win, it is slowly; but they never entirely lose. To my mind, they are the blessed proof of the dignity of man. John has an assured place among them. I’d say he is a charter member for his generation.

July 12, 1991

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK SETS out to offer a different way of seeing events of our day. I have tried to rescue from media oblivion uncomfortable facts which may serve as antidotes to the official truth; and in so doing, I hope to have given support to those 'distant voices' who understand how vital, yet fragile is the link between the right of people to know and to be heard, and the exercise of liberty and political democracy. This book is a tribute to them.

Written originally as essays for the *New Statesman and Society*, and the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, the collection draws on my previous books, notably *Heroes*,[1] Indeed, in some respects it is an extension of *Heroes.* I have rewritten and combined many of the pieces, adding new material as the dates at the end of each chapter indicate. This is especially true of the four long Cambodia chapters, which grew out of work published over a dozen years. Indeed, in this completely revised edition there is a great deal that is new, notably the chapters on East Timor, which formed the basis for my documentary film, *Death of a Nation*, broadcast in 1994.

I have used a range of styles, which I hope readers will regard as a strength. There are pieces written in response to unfolding events, as in the Gulf War, which have a contemporary feel rather than a linear narrative, and more reflective chapters such as those on East Timor, Cambodia and Australia. And there are pieces simply about people, which I enjoy writing, as in the opening chapters of 'Invisible Britain' and later, in 'Terminator in Bifocals'. There is also a

shamelessly sentimental tribute to my typewriter, 'Baby Hermes', still going after 30 years and numerous close calls.

The title *Distant Voices* is taken from an essay I wrote in the wake of the disintegration of communist power in Eastern Europe and which argued that Western triumphalism and the 'new world order' had brought a renewed threat to many freedoms, such as diversity of expression.[2] The media, the arena in which I work, has been both a major victim of and a collaborator in the narrowing of information and ideas, although it is misrepresented as the very opposite. That's why the majority of these essays are about or touch upon the role of the media in controlling the way we see and in confining and isolating us in the present. This new power is perhaps best demonstrated in the section 'Mythmakers of the Gulf War'.

Long after the Gulf War, I remember vividly two surreal moments from television. The first was on the BBC's arts programme *The Late Show*, which devoted an edition to foreign correspondents talking about their adventures in the Gulf.[3] As each one spoke, the background filled with images from the war itself, mostly tanks and artillery and missiles flashing in the night. Then suddenly the scene changed to bulldozers at work; and the reporter's monologue was overwhelmed by shocking pictures behind him. Driven by Allied soldiers, the bulldozers were pushing thousands of bodies into mass graves. Many of the bodies were crushed, as if they had been run over. The memory reached back to similar scenes at Belsen, Dachau and Auschwitz where newsreel cameras recorded bulldozers pushing thousands of bodies into open pits.

To my knowledge the BBC's subversive blink was the only time the British public was allowed to see the *extent* of the slaughter in the Gulf. Certainly there were news reports of the 'turkey shoot' on the Basra road; and the famous *Observer* photograph of a man burnt to a skeletal monster, upright in the cabin of his truck.[4] But the dead generally

were represented as looters, and the pathetic objects they had taken from Kuwait – toys, electric fans – were highlighted as evidence of their guilt. The crime of slaughtering people who were fleeing was passed off as an 'unfortunate' and 'tragic' postscript to a necessary war – a war in which precious few Allied lives were lost and Western technology had entertained the viewers at home. It had been both a good war and a clean war. That was the official truth.

The second memorable moment was Clive James reviewing 1991, again on BBC Television. In awarding Saddam Hussein the 'BBC's *Gardener's World* Award' as 'the person who's done most to transform the appearance of our planet in 1991', James made the war the joke of the year.[5] No bulldozers were shown, no bodies piled in open pits.

When these events next entered public consciousness, the process was complete: the unthinkable had been normalised. In May 1992 a coroner in Oxford handed down an 'unlawful killing' verdict on the deaths of nine British soldiers killed by American 'friendly fire'. Newspapers which had supported sending the troops to the Gulf and had colluded with the Ministry of Defence in obscuring the true nature of the war now attacked the government for 'covering up the truth' about the soldiers' deaths.

No irony was noted. Not a single reference was made to what the American writer Michael Albert has called 'one of the more wanton, cowardly massacres in modern military history', and which resulted in the deaths of as many as 200,000 men, women and children, none of them the subject of a British inquest or an international enquiry convened by the United Nations in whose name the slaughter was initiated. Most were almost certainly killed unlawfully: either by 'anti-personnel' weapons and 'weapons of mass destruction', whose legality has yet to be tested under the Geneva Convention; or by attacks on civilian centres, such as the RAF attack on the town of al-Nasiriyah;

or while retreating and surrendering. Countless defenceless men were buried alive in the night beneath advancing American bulldozers, the same machines which were later used unlawfully to dump the dead in pits without respect for human identity and for the rights of their families to know the truth and to mourn.

The fact that the war continues today against the children of Iraq is of no interest to the Western media. Iraq is no longer ‘a story’. There are more dramatic, more ‘relevant’ pictures to be had elsewhere. Thanks to a few – the voluntary aid agencies, the Harvard medical teams, Dr Eric Hoskins of the Gulf Peace Team, Victoria Brittain of the *Guardian* – careful readers will know that, as a direct result of American and British-led sanctions against Iraq, more than a million Iraqi children are seriously malnourished and more than 100,000 are seriously ill, and many of those are likely to die.[6] Iraqi doctors are struggling with a disease not seen for many years, *pica*, which babies contract by eating dirt.[7] In its latest study, the Harvard team describes Iraqi infants as ‘the most traumatised children of war ever described’.[8] Like the slaughter that preceded it, the ‘unthinkable has been normalised’, as Edward S. Herman wrote in his fine essay, ‘The Banality of Evil’.

Understanding this concept, in war and peace, is one of the aims of this book. As Herman pointed out: ‘Doing terrible things in an organised and systematic way rests on “normalisation” . . . There is usually a division of labor in doing and rationalising the unthinkable, with the direct brutalising and killing done by one set of individuals . . . others working on improving technology (a better crematory gas, a longer burning and more adhesive Napalm, bomb fragments that penetrate flesh in hard-to-trace patterns). It is the function of the experts, and the mainstream media, to normalise the unthinkable for the general public.’[9]

Of course, ‘normalising’ can only be successful once ‘distance’ has been established. General Schwarzkopf’s

video game show during the Gulf War, which television dutifully transmitted at peak viewing times, was an outstanding example of this. Like the pilots who dropped the 'smart' bombs, politicians, journalists, bureaucrats and the public, all of us, were kept at a distance. In East Timor, the Suharto regime's murder of two television crews, its sealing of the country, and the collusive silence of Western governments, kept us all at a distance. What we could not see did not happen.

My own experience as a journalist, much of it spent in wartime and at places of upheaval, has taught me rudely about this process. The first time I saw and touched a victim of Napalm – her smouldering skin came away and stuck to my hand – I also saw the aircraft that had dropped the Napalm bomb on a village path. When, a few days later, I stood up at a press conference and asked an American briefer, a pleasant man just doing his job, if *he* had ever seen a victim of Napalm, he stared blankly at me, a beacon of incredulity. Earlier he had used the term 'collateral damage'. I asked him what this meant. He stared some more. Surely, I knew my 'ABC'. He finally asked me to 'rephrase' the question. I repeated it, twice, until he said the word 'people'. When I asked him if this meant 'civilian people', his affirmation was barely audible.

No doubt because I was young, this and other encounters of striking similarity left an impression upon me. I formed the view that journalism ought not to be a process that separated people from their actions, or itself an act of complicity. I became especially interested in the decision-making of those of apparently impeccable respectability, whose measured demeanour and 'greyness' contained not a hint of totalitarianism and yet who, at great remove in physical and cultural distance, executed and maimed people, destroying and dislocating their communities on a scale comparable with the accredited monsters of our time.

In the Cambodia and East Timor chapters I have described this synthesis – in Cambodia, between Nixon and Kissinger on the one hand and Pol Pot and his gang on the other. What the former began from afar, the latter completed. Only the method varied. To understand that is to begin to understand the true nature of the crime perpetrated in Cambodia and where the responsibility for it lies. And it helps to explain why every conceivable moral and intellectual contortion is currently being attempted to protect those who, in the 'division of labour', share the culpability either as accessories or apologists.

In the East Timor section I have drawn together my own experience as a reporter going undercover, with interviews conducted around the world with those who played a part in the cataclysmic events that have consumed that country beyond the reach of the TV camera and the satellite dish. In this way, with hillsides of crosses and faces of unsmiling, courageous people fresh in our memory, David Munro and I were able to reconstruct a largely forgotten history and lay before its culpable participants the enduring evidence of their work. For me, the brutal death of 200,000 East Timorese, a third of the population, says much about how the modern world is ordered and how most of us are pressed to believe otherwise.

The long 'silence' over the genocide in East Timor is indicative of how much of the modern media is ordered. In recent years a new version of an old ethos has arisen in the so-called 'free' media in the west. It was expressed succinctly in May 1992 by the director of programmes of the new British network television company, Carlton, which replaced Thames following the infamous auction of commercial franchises instigated by former prime minister Thatcher. Current affairs programmes 'that don't deliver', he said, 'will not survive in the new ITV'. To 'earn their way', they have to attract viewing audiences of at least six to

eight million people, regardless of the subject matter. ‘We have to be hard-headed and realistic,’ he said.[10]

The departing editor of Thames’s *This Week* series – which died with Thames – analysed this ‘hard-headedness’ and apparent failure to ‘deliver’. He pointed out that the two ITV current affairs flag carriers, *This Week* and *World in Action*, represented ‘the only area in commercial television that had not only maintained its popular audience, but improved it’; that current affairs audiences had increased by 60 per cent; and that *World in Action* with its thirty-five-year tradition of controversial, award-winning broadcast journalism, was set to *average* eight million viewers per programme. Moreover, current affairs drew larger audiences than even some ‘light entertainment’.[11] Following the late-night screening of *Death of a Nation*, my film on East Timor, British Telecom reported calls to the advertised ITV ‘helpline’ number running at 4,000 a minute.

None of this ought to be surprising. What the public wants is so often not what the editor of the *Daily Beast* says they want. Year after year surveys of television trends demonstrate people’s preference for strong, hard-hitting factual programmes. This and quality drama remain the strengths of British television while its listings show more and more anodyne sitcoms, the worst of Hollywood and soaps. In April 1994 Granada Television announced that it was dropping *World in Action* for two months to make way for a ‘bumper episode’ of *Coronation Street.* This will be the series’ longest absence from the screen in its history.

Official truths are often powerful illusions, such as that of ‘choice’ in the media society. One of the principal arbiters of this is Rupert Murdoch. Having swallowed Times Newspapers and British Satellite Broadcasting with the help of his friend, Margaret Thatcher, Murdoch in 1992 added the television coverage of Britain’s most popular game, football. In secret collusion with the BBC, Murdoch’s BSkyB bought the rights to live coverage of all premier league games. As

its cut of the deal, the BBC shows the highlights. Even those who already own a Murdoch satellite dish will almost certainly have to pay a monthly football charge, or be excluded from what millions regard as the high point of their week.

This is 'choice' at its most Orwellian, denying people not only programmes that are politically unpalatable but also their time-honoured pleasures. Murdoch's next 'buys' are reported to be the television coverage of the Grand National and the rugby union final. One wonders what the purpose is of such voracity. Profit, of course; and power of an explicit kind.

In an article entitled 'Britain's class war in a satellite dish', the London correspondent of Murdoch's *Australian*, Nicholas Rothwell, described Murdoch as a free-market Karl Marx. 'Murdoch's empire has always shared one thing with the Marxist enterprise,' he wrote, 'it turns ideas into social and economic experiments . . . If BSkyB's swoop to seize control of televised soccer marks the climax of News Corporation's long-term plan for a self-reinforcing media system, it is also the culminating event in a social . . . and even ideological . . . transformation of Britain in the image of a radical philosophy: one which places the media corporation, as a promoter of information to the ordinary consumer, in direct opposition to the established elites'.[12]

This is presumably what Murdoch himself believes. As a principal backer of Thatcherism's 'radical philosophy', he can claim to have shaken the old order, helping to abolish the humanist wing of the Tory Party and to damage the royal family. As his London man implies, he intends to replace this with a Murdoch-approved elite which 'places the media corporation . . . in direct competition to the established elites'. In other words, so powerful are Murdoch and his fellow media corporatists that they hardly need governments any more.

For many people, this struggle between the elites means an accelerated erosion of real freedom. Under the old system the bias of the state operated through a 'consensus' that was broadly acceptable to the established order. Controversial television programmes could be kept off the air, or watered down, merely by applying arbitrary 'guidelines' that were accompanied by ritualistic nods and winks. In this way, *The War Game*, a brilliant dramatisation of the effects of a nuclear attack on Britain, was suppressed by the BBC for twenty years;[13] and during the same period more than fifty programmes critical of the war in Ireland were banned, delayed or doctored.[14]

As the influence of television has surpassed that of the press, perhaps in no other country has broadcasting held such a privileged position as an opinion leader. Possessing highly professional talent, and the illusion of impartiality (a venerable official truth, with its lexicon of 'balance', etc.), as well as occasionally dissenting programmes, 'public service broadcasting' developed into a finely crafted instrument of state propaganda. Witness the BBC's coverage of the Cold War, the wars in the Falklands and the Gulf, and the 1984–5 miners' strike.

One wonders why Thatcher wanted to change it. Of course paternalism and false consensus were not her way, neither was dissent in *any* effective form, albeit token. Thus, she never forgave Thames Television for showing *Death on the Rock* and exposing the activities of an SAS death squad in Gibraltar.

As for the BBC, most of its voices of dissent have long fallen silent. They are the broadcasters and producers who opposed the slaughter in the Gulf and the way it was represented to the British people, but who remained anonymous. Even before the last British election campaign had got under way, the BBC's principal current affairs programme, *Panorama*, felt the need to suppress a report

that had made a few mildly critical observations of seasonal Tory back-stabbing over economic policy.[15]

Today BBC current affairs is seldom controversial as it is secured within a pyramid of 'directorates' that have little to do with free journalism and are designed to control: to shore up assumptions, not to challenge them. In any case, silence is no longer optional in the increasingly centralised, undemocratic state that is the other side of the media society. As the market has been 'freed' from state controls (i.e. nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* nostrums have been re-imposed), so information has been subjected to draconian new controls.

I have touched upon these restrictions in several chapters, believing that many people may be unaware that, behind the supermarket façade, certain state controls are now reminiscent of those in the old Soviet Union. As you drive south across Vauxhall Bridge in London you pass the most striking new building in the capital; it houses the domestic secret intelligence service, MI5, now expanding its role as a police and domestic surveillance force, its anonymity and unaccountability guaranteed by Parliament. How ironic that is, now that the KGB is no more. While John Major professes 'open government' and theatrically names Stella Rimington as the head of MI5, the secret state grows more powerful than ever.

As Tim Gopsill has pointed out, Britain is the only country in the world with a statutory bar on an elected member of Parliament addressing his constituents through the broadcast media.[16] There are now more than 100 laws in Britain that make disclosure of information a crime. Under the 'reformed' Official Secrets Act – 'reformed' being officialspeak for even more restriction – all the major revelations of official lying and venality in the 1980s would now be illegal. The *Sunday Telegraph* once likened investigative journalism to an offence against the state; it has become just that.[17]

Two examples: the 1981 Contempt of Court Act empowers judges and magistrates to ban the reporting of trials. Thus, hundreds of trials take place in secret every year, some of them deeply sensitive to the state. Under the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act, broadcasters and journalists must surrender film and source material to the police; and an order against one media organisation automatically applies to the others.

In 1991 Central Television and I encountered the full sanction of government secrecy and intervention in the courts in a libel action brought against my film *Cambodia: The Betrayal*. ‘Public Interest Immunity Certificates’ – gagging orders – were used successfully against us before they were exposed in the Matrix Churchill trial. I have described this in the chapter ‘Through the Looking Glass’. Britain has the most restrictive libel laws in the democratic world – a fact which Robert Maxwell exploited until the day he drowned.

The Director of Public Prosecutions has used the Prevention of Terrorism Act to force Channel 4 and an independent programme maker to reveal the identity of an informant whose life could be at risk. The case concerned a documentary film, *The Committee*, which alleged widespread collusion between members of the British security services, Loyalist paramilitaries and senior members of Northern Ireland’s business community in a secret terrorist campaign dedicated to sectarian and political assassination.[18]

This, and similar cases, receive scant attention compared with the sex lives of establishment politicians, and the marriage difficulties of the royal family. There are the perennial calls for protection of privacy legislation, but this has little to do with protecting the rights of ordinary people, and everything to do with protecting the reputations of establishment figures. There is no real desire to intervene in ‘tabloid scandal-mongering’ – which is duly reported in

depth by the ‘quality’ press. The scandal mongers, after all, are important people. They can witchhunt dissenters when required; and every five years most of them can be relied upon to help elect a Tory government. For this, the Queen is instructed to honour their editors: a fine irony. The lost issue is the need to protect the public from the state, not the press.

I have devoted the final chapters to Australia, which in many ways offers a model for the future. In the 1960s Australians could boast the most equitable spread of personal income in the world. Since then the redistribution of wealth has been spectacular as the world’s first Thatcherite Labor government has ‘reformed’ the fragile Australian economy and given it over to the world ‘free market’. Bob Hawke’s ‘big mates’ – the likes of Murdoch, Kerry Packer and Alan Bond – were able to borrow what they liked and pay minimal income tax.[19] In 1989 Bond’s borrowing accounted for 10 per cent of the Australian national debt.[20] Today, Bond’s empire has collapsed, Bond himself has been in and out of prison; unemployment is as high as 15 per cent and the rate of child poverty is the second highest in the developed world.[21] And Australia can now claim the most monopolised press in the Western world.

Of twelve metropolitan dailies, Murdoch controls seven and the Canadian Conrad Black three. Of ten Sunday papers Murdoch has seven, Black two. In Adelaide Murdoch has a complete monopoly. He owns all the daily, Sunday and local papers, and all the printing presses and printing premises. In Brisbane he owns all but a few suburban papers. He controls more than 66 per cent of daily newspapers in the capital cities, where the great majority of the population lives. He owns almost 75 per cent of all Sunday papers. And Black controls most of the rest.[22]

Both are conservative ideologues. Another arch conservative, Kerry Packer, owns most of the magazines

Australians read and the only truly national commercial TV network. None of this could have happened without government collusion: the bending of regulations and legislation advantageous to a few ‘big mates’.[23] In the East Timor section I have documented how the interests of the Keating government and its principal media ‘mate’ converge in the promotion of the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia as ‘stable’ and ‘moderate’ while the truth of the regime’s genocide in East Timor is suppressed and obfuscated.

This presents good journalists in Australia and all over the world with an increasingly familiar dilemma. How can they pursue their craft without serving such concentrated power? And once having enlisted and taken on the day-to-day constraints of career and mortgage, how do they remain true to a distant notion of an ‘independent’ press?

Some journalists try their hardest, maintaining high standards in mostly uncontroversial fields. Others believe they can change the system from within, and are forced out. Others are unaware of their own malleability (I was), or they become profoundly cynical about their craft. Echoing the fellow travellers of Stalin’s communist party, they insist, as one Murdoch editor once told me, ‘I can honestly say I have never been told what to put in the paper and what to take out of it’.[24] The point was that no one *had* to tell him, and his paper reflected the unshakeable set of assumptions that underpin Western power and prejudice, including those that would lead us, to quote Nicholas Rothwell, into ‘a social and even ideological transformation . . . in the image of a radical philosophy’.

I have attempted throughout the book, to show how closely censorship in the old communist world compares with that in the West today and that only the methods of enforcement differ. I am reminded of a story recounted by the writer Simon Louvish. A group of Russians touring the United States before the age of *glasnost* were astonished to find, after reading the newspapers and watching television,

that all the opinions on the vital issues were the same. ‘In our country’, they said, ‘to get that result we have a dictatorship, we imprison people, we tear out their fingernails. Here you have none of that. So what’s your secret – how do you do it?’[25]

In the section ‘Tributes’ I express my admiration for Noam Chomsky, whose formidable analysis has helped many of us to identify how they do it. It was Chomsky who understood the nature of the ‘delusional system’ of one-doctrine democracy and the sophisticated manipulation of public opinion, using the ‘free’ media.

The results of this manipulation are often historic. When President Kennedy declared in the early 1960s that there was a ‘missile gap’ with the Soviet Union, his message was carried without question by the Western media, and the nuclear arms race accelerated. In fact, the opposite was true: America was well ahead in missile development.[26] When President Johnson unleashed American bombers on North Vietnam in 1964, he did so after the media had helped him sell to Congress a story that communist gunboats had ‘attacked’ US warships in the ‘Gulf of Tonkin Incident’. There was no attack, no ‘incident’. ‘Hell,’ Johnson is reported to have said in private, ‘those dumb stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish.’[27] Thereafter the American invasion was legitimised, millions of people were killed and a once bountiful land was petrified.

In manipulation on such a scale, a vital part is played by an Orwellian abuse of conceptual thought, logic and language. In Vietnam, the indigenous forces resisting a foreign invasion were guilty of ‘internal aggression’.[28] In the Gulf the slaughter was described as one in which ‘a miraculously small number of casualties’ was sustained.[29] In Russia today, anti-Yeltsin democrats opposing ‘free market reforms’ – ‘reforms’ that are likely to reduce some 60 million pensioners to near starvation – are dismissed as ‘hardliners’ and ‘crypto communists’.[30]

The unerring message is that there is only one way now. It booms out to all of humanity, growing louder and more insistent in the media echo chamber. Those who challenge this sectarianism, and believe in real choice in public life and the media, are likely to be given the treatment. They are ‘outside the mainstream’. They are ‘committed’ and ‘lacking balance’. If the criticism is aimed at American power, the critics are ‘anti-American’ – a revealing charge for it evokes the ‘un-German’ abuse used effectively by the Nazis and the ‘anti-Soviet’ provisions of the old Soviet criminal code.

These attacks come not only from the Murdoch camp, but also from a liberal elite which sees itself as the fulcrum of society, striking a ‘sensible balance’ between opposing extremes. This is often translated into evenhandedness between oppressor and oppressed. Faithful to the deity of ‘impartiality’, it rejects the passion and moral imagination that discern and define the nature of criminality and make honest the writing of narrative history.

In Britain and the United States members of this liberal group can be relied upon to guard the conservative flame during difficult times, such as when established forces go to war, or feel themselves threatened by civil disturbance or a surfeit of political activity and discussion outside the confines of Parliament. This is especially true of the ‘modernised’ Labour Opposition which, in moulding itself to what ‘market research’ tells it, serves to muffle any suggestion of mass resistance. What it says, in effect, is that society is static and people’s consciousness cannot be raised. Of course this is a role that goes back a long way, perhaps as far as the reaction to the seventeenth-century revolution when John Locke thought that ordinary people should not even be allowed to discuss affairs of state.

In the BBC Locke’s views have also been modernised; people *are* allowed to discuss the affairs of state, though within a certain framework, as represented by *Question*