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Guardian of What?

The Guardian, the Science Lobby, and the Rise of Scientific Corporatism

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Denis Campbell was a sports reporter on the *Observer* newspaper, before he got the opportunity to write about health. In July 2007, he favoured a friend and interviewed Dr Andrew Wakefield, the consultant gastroenterologist at the centre of the MMR-autism controversy, the week prior to his GMC fitness-to-practice hearing.¹ It was Campbell's intention to present Dr Wakefield in the same way as any other pre-trial defendant, exploring his fears and feelings about slipping from a professional life into that of an infamous malefactor. In creating the article, however, Campbell, who had never entered the territory before, made the most serious mistake. Hearing of a paper produced by a department of Cambridge University that cited a considerable growth in cases of autism spectrum disorder, he linked this to Wakefield's research work, which described a number of specific cases where the parents had pointed to the MMR injection as being key in the onset of a very particular form of regressive autism.

This article analyses what can happen when journalists blunder into the case of Dr Andrew Wakefield, without understanding the complex context of the media, health and New Labour. Increasing pressure is being brought to bear on the British media to report only stories that agree with corporate science. When training interpreters, teachers place considerable emphasis on the student's all-round knowledge of the culture into which they are translating. This is unfortunately not true of the post-industrial journalists, who tend to imagine that they are presenting titbits of disconnected information, rarely conceiving that their newspapers and others are pursuing ideological positions.

Denis Campbell evidently had no idea that, by trying to present a broad social defence for Dr Wakefield, he was about to place his professional career as a journalist in jeopardy. Like many other people involved in the media, although he knew that New Labour was somehow involved in spin, he did not know that a group of erstwhile revolutionary communist,

¹ I told the truth all along, says doctor at heart of autism row. Denis Campbell *The Observer* Sunday July 8, 2007.

corporate scientists, Liberal peers and members of the New Labour administration had banded together to draw up a censorship code for the British media.

In fact, Campbell was to find out on the publication of his *Observer* article, not only that the editors of the sister papers the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, both owned by the Scott Trust, had long been involved in an acrimonious argument, but that the *Guardian* was not the paper it had previously been. Since 2003, it seems to have passed from the stables of the free press into some Orwellian stew, where the news is consistently rewritten to fit a corporate view of science held by a handful of corporately-funded lobbyists.

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MMR, the mumps, measles and rubella vaccination, was introduced to Britain in 1988. Its original introduction was seriously marred by adverse reaction to the Urabi mumps strain in the vaccination. It was not until 1992 that the Department of Health, downplaying the serious adverse events that had occurred using this particular strain, took two of the MMR vaccines off the market while making low-key and somewhat mumbled explanations to the public. Following this major problem, the Department of Health and the successive governments were determined not to admit to any other problems in relation to this vaccination.

Dr Wakefield, a senior researcher in experimental gastroenterology at the Royal Free Hospital, was approached by a gathering number of parents, after 1988, who claimed that their children had been adversely affected by the triple vaccine. These cases were brought to the Royal Free because often the first signs of adverse reaction to the vaccination were gastrointestinal. Initially, Dr Wakefield was sceptical about the department's authority to deal with these cases. As well as reporting gastrointestinal conditions in their children, in the majority of cases that were brought to the Royal Free, parents reported signs of autism spectrum disorder. Dr Wakefield's main area of expertise had, until the early 1990s been Crohn's disease, a gastrointestinal condition that had markedly increased in recent years.

Initially Dr Wakefield protested that he knew nothing about autism spectrum disorders, and suggested that perhaps the Royal Free was not the best place to bring these children. However, as the rest of the team carried out more tests and observations on the gastrointestinal conditions presented by the children, superficial case review conclusions became inevitable; either the children had all developed autism spectrum disorders 'naturally' and biologically inevitably, or the condition, together with the

intestinal condition, had been triggered or exacerbated by an environmental factor.

After work over the next decade, Dr Wakefield came increasingly to the latter conclusion, and was convinced that it was the vaccine measles strain, in combination with the strains of mumps and rubella, that was responsible for the gastrointestinal condition and, in this relatively small subset of children, also for the regressive autism from which many of them suffered.

Although Dr Wakefield tried hard to interest the Department of Health in the condition that his research had uncovered, and begged them to be more cautious in their vaccination campaign, it was six years before Dr David Salisbury, the Principal Medical Officer of the Communicable Disease Branch of the Department of Health, deigned to meet with him to discuss evidence of a public health crisis.

Dr Wakefield continued to write up his research, and noted, as time passed, that even without a reasoned discussion about his research or the clinical work of the Royal Free Hospital, a campaign was being orchestrated against him. In 1998, he was one of 13 authors who published a paper in the *Lancet* reviewing the cases of 12 children who had passed through clinical tests and treatment at the Royal Free. As well as reviewing all the clinical evidence, the paper noted the view of 8 parents, that there was a link between MMR and the onset of children's illnesses.

From the time of the *Lancet* paper's publication, a propaganda offensive of considerable power was turned against Dr Wakefield, and from this point onwards, the parents who had reported an adverse reaction to the MMR vaccination, were gradually made invisible. Wakefield, his research and the clinical work of the department were roundly condemned. His identity and character were covertly attacked, and in 2003, an article by Brian Deer in Rupert Murdoch's *Sunday Times*, accused Dr Wakefield of some criminal and much professional malfeasance. Deer followed up his *Sunday Times* article with a Channel 4 television programme, on 18 November 2004. It always appeared to those who were knowledgeable about Dr Wakefield's work, that Brian Deer's reporting was based upon incomplete information.

Included in the first *Sunday Times* article was a call by the then ex-Communist Minister for Health, John Reid, ordering a General Medical Council (GMC) hearing of Dr Wakefield and his colleagues. Deer had drawn in part upon the research capability of Medico-Legal Investigations, a firm of private investigators, who carried out most of their work for, and were mainly subsidised by, the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. This agency had in the past prepared for the GMC a number of cases that might have been said to help pharmaceutical industry competitiveness.

In 2004, Deer became the sole complainant to the GMC about the conduct of Dr Andrew Wakefield and his colleagues, Dr Simon Murch and Dr John Walker-Smith. After an almost four-year wait, this case was brought before a GMC fitness to practise panel in July 2007, and, having been designed for procrastination, it is unlikely to finish before September 2008.² While the hearing to determine the future of Dr Wakefield's professional career has continued at a snail's pace, the media have continued with their onslaught, without proof or evidence, on the basis of off-the-cuff, industry-inspired hearsay, to illustrate Wakefield's bad science and criminal intentions to sink the Government's combined vaccine programme.

It is perhaps of value, even at this late stage, to examine one of the major strategies used by the science lobby to discredit Wakefield's work in the public mind, as well as to link the campaign against him to New Labour's spin tactics and the entry into the post-industrial political world of the armies of PR clones and the robotic risk-communication company voices. While attention in this respect has always been pointed at Alastair Campbell, who served as Director of Communications and Strategy for Tony Blair from 1997 to 2003, such exposure has always been a part of the 'laddish' terrain of male politics in Britain. The use of similar armies of disinformation in defence of Big Pharma and corporate science, and against alternative medicine for example, has been tackled by few journalists.

The sword upon which Denis Campbell fell when he strayed onto the vaccine field; the most powerful weapon of the science lobby, has been that of hyperbole. Dr Wakefield and his colleagues at the Royal Free were always conscious of the fact, and always made clear, that those parents who had brought their children to the hospital were part of a relatively small and idiosyncratic population.

At the same time, clinical work at the hospital, and research by Dr Wakefield, showed the science peculiar to these cases in exacting detail.³ No one at the Royal Free, nor anyone connected with Dr Wakefield, has ever said bluntly that there is scientific evidence that MMR has been responsible for the substantial rise in cases of child autism in Britain over the past decade. Further, it is easy to see what it was that Dr Wakefield did say, which so unnerved the government and the pharmaceutical industry, who were determined on a future model of increasingly combined vaccines.

Wakefield actually said bluntly, at a press conference that preceded the publication of the case review in the *Lancet*, that parents should be given the chance to choose single vaccines until the post vaccination scientific research had been conducted into the triple vaccine. He was

² So making it the second longest juridical procedure that has taken place in Britain.

³ In fact two papers were sent to the *Lancet* before the case review was published in 1998. The second paper which one peer reviewer said while giving evidence for the prosecution at Wakefield's GMC hearing, should have been published together with the case review, detailed all the science necessary to link MMR to the gastrointestinal illness of the children in the review. This second paper was 'knocked out' after two peer reviewers out of three considered it unready for publication.

encouraged to voice this opinion by the then head of the university department joined to the Royal Free teaching hospital.⁴

In a classic defence of the Government and Big Pharma, against the measured criticisms voiced by Dr Wakefield, the first thing that the science lobby did was to distort and misrepresent his research results. In this crude version of the Royal Free's complicated clinical work, Dr Wakefield was made responsible for claiming that the considerable and continuing rise in classic autism in children was entirely due to the introduction of MMR in 1988.

To argue against this simplified and distorted perspective was easy. Such a colossal cause and effect had not been observed by anyone else involved in the study of either autism or gastroenterology, and none of the large epidemiological studies carried out on the causes of autism. Nonetheless the cause and effect supposedly claimed by Dr Wakefield (whilst stated explicitly not to be the case in the paper itself) was to be frequently trotted out over the coming years.⁵

By making it appear that Dr Wakefield was making worldwide claims on the basis of 12 cases reported in the *Lancet*, his detractors can readily conclude publicly that Dr Wakefield and fellow academics are deranged and subversive and that their claims cannot possibly have a rational foundation. There is a lesson here for everyone involved in unpopular causes, up against the PR industry and New Labour spin: always ensure that you keep your eye on the *small* picture.

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In the weeks following the articles publication, Denis Campbell was carpeted and criticised by staff at the *Observer*, as well as interlopers from the *Guardian* and beyond. Months later, after the chastisement of the paper by the *Guardian*, the *Observer's* most able editor, the hugely popular and ebullient Roger Alton, responsible for overseeing Campbell's interview with Wakefield, was forced to resign. Campbell's interview people think, was just one brick in the wall that had begun being built when Alton and the *Observer* had backed Blair's decision to invade Iraq, a question upon which the *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger had maintained a principled dissent.

In a country with an apparently free press, this little story of how New Labour corporate apparatchiks enforced censorship on one of Britain's most notable papers, should have created the most terrible public storm. But so low

⁴ This was denied by the department head at the GMC hearing, yet he had specifically written this support into two letters to Dr Wakefield.

⁵ The Cochrane review of epidemiological studies that the science lobby and the government used to shore up their view that no one had found a connection between MMR and autism, pointed out that the studies quoted were not a suitable vehicle for identifying MMR as a factor in the development of regressive autism, because on the whole they didn't use focus on children with regressive presentations.

has the press sunk in Britain, and so powerful has the corporate science lobby become, that not a whisper of the scandal entered the public domain.

Ten days after Campbell's interview with Andy Wakefield, Ben Goldacre in his 'Bad Science' column in the *Guardian*, publicly discredited something; although, as is usually the case, it is difficult to tell what it was that he discredited.⁶ Despite the hundreds of emails posted on the *Guardian's* Comment is Free site by PR company associates and friends of Big Pharma, which lauded Goldacre for writing the most erudite and beautiful pieces of prose since the Second World War, all his piece actually did was to destroy the straw man put up by his crisis management PR colleagues.

While the original article had principally been about a competent medical research scientist whose work had helped hundreds if not thousands of parents, facing a GMC fitness-to-practice hearing, Goldacre's apparent deconstruction of it simply made the point that Campbell had suggested that MMR was responsible for a massive rise in autism across the board over the past decade. In fact, Goldacre dispensed with this idea in the article in a perfectly well considered, opening paragraph.⁷

Whatever you think about Andrew Wakefield, the real villains of the MMR scandal are the media. Just one week before his GMC hearing, yet another factless 'MMR causes autism' news story appeared: and even though it ran on the front page of our very own *Observer*, I am dismantling it on this page. We're all grown-ups around here.

As with the great majority of Goldacre's writing, this paragraph, though ostensibly good journalism, is completely disingenuous. While of course he was interested in showing that there was presently no proof that MMR or any other vaccination had caused a rise in autism, his prime task was to disassemble the idea that Dr Wakefield was a good scientist who had tried to forewarn the government of a public health crisis, while at the same time denying that children had suffered adverse reactions from MMR.

Campbell's article had, after all, reinforced the view that some children had suffered dreadful adverse reactions to the MMR vaccination, and given a voice to Dr Wakefield, who made it more than clear that he had been truthful about his research, and about the clinical work carried out at the Royal Free on behalf of hundreds of unhappy parents.

Neither the New Labour government nor the pharmaceutical companies, the medical establishment nor, certainly, the science lobby, was

⁶ The MMR story that wasn't. Ben Goldacre. July 18, 2007. The Guardian

⁷ Ibid. Goldacre.

going to admit that MMR, or any other drug or vaccination, provoked adverse reactions. Nor was any one of these going to admit that Dr Andrew Wakefield had a defence of any kind. Perhaps most spectacularly of all, from the beginning of the GMC hearing, the parents and their children simply disappeared. This is almost supernatural! In a major social public health crisis, to which, as always, the public are the first, only and best immediate witnesses, from this time onwards, no journalist would consider the unscientific and 'anecdotal' views of any of the parents of vaccine-damaged children. The story from now on was simply that no children were damaged by MMR, and anyone that said they were, was being unscientific and possibly suffering from Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy, or the famous False Illness Belief (FIB) syndrome coined by Professor Simon 'Spin' Wessely.⁸

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How had the profit-promoting agents of corporate science managed, not only to enable the GMC to conduct the second-longest legal prosecution in British history, but also to wipe from the blackboard all the evidence and names of those citizens whose children had been adversely affected by MMR?

As soon as New Labour came to power in 1997, spin became a major part of government. The liberal axis that steered New Labour policy was determined to create a society in which considerations of big business, science and advanced technology were at the forefront of policy.

It the late 1990s, multinational corporate science suffered one of its most serious defeats, when environmentalists organised against Monsanto's plans, supported by a number of British scientists, to unilaterally introduce GM crops to Britain. The campaign resulted in a kind of plebiscite that finally decided publicly against the introduction of GM crops. It resulted in something else as well, the organisation by the British state, something that so far had only been toyed with, of a propaganda offensive against all and any kind of criticism of corporations for damage to the environment or the health of the population. This propaganda offensive has been on a Soviet scale and has left in its wake a number of serious intellectual dissidents.

From the turn of the 21st century, corporate scientific interests organised hard and unrelentingly to promote corporate science and to argue publicly against new technology having any adverse effects on public health. The two Liberal Democrat peers most involved in the battle to push through corporate science and new technology were David Sainsbury and Dick Taverne. Both were made Lords after New Labour won their first election in 1997.

While Sainsbury was made head of the Department of Trade and Industry, in control of all matters medical and scientific, Lord Taverne began

⁸ Those who want to understand the rational behind this argument, should read this authors Brave New World of Zero Risk that can be found at: www.slingshotpublications.com.

championing corporate interests through the Science and Technology Committee in the Lords. He gathered PR personalities and ex-revolutionary communists^{9 10} together, and began the task of regulating the media's response to corporate science. With his background in libertarian think-tanks and anti-environmentalist US organisations, together with his friendship with David Sainsbury and his background in PR and consultative companies – not to mention the power-broking Bilderberg group and the Trilateral Commission – Taverne was ideally placed to set up Sense About Science, which he did in 2002. Ludicrously, he secured the emergent organisation charitable status, and from the beginning was its chairman.

However, before founding Sense About Science, Taverne's first objective was to create new rules for all media, in which science news and information were given the right of way. All stories about science, including those about health, presented in the media, were to be written or presented only by scientists. In this kind of journalism, ill health could only be written about in relation to it being cured by pharmaceutical drugs and other therapies offered by allopathic doctors.

The idea was to block all personal stories about health, which was to be turned into an aspect of life science and have nothing to do with the individual's understanding or control of his or her own body or feelings. All stories about the use of alternative medicine, and all stories about the adverse effects of environmental factors on human health, were to be forbidden. It was to enforce these new rules about science and health, and to teach only the correct information about the right kind of science, that the two new lobby organisations, Sense About Science and the Science Media Centre, came into being.

Guiding the Media

The plan to guide the media began in March 2000, when the Royal Society published its *Scientists and the Media: Guidelines for scientists working with the media and comments on a press code of practice*.¹¹ The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology subsequently endorsed this document in its report *Science and Society*.¹²

In order to produce the final guidelines, the Royal Society and the Royal Institution came together with the Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC) to form the Joint Forum of the Social Issues Research Centre, a collaboration

⁹ See the GM Watch web site and Zero Risk

¹⁰ This combination of left leaning liberals and communists, is very similar in make up to those cohorts of administrators and bureaucrats that developed around the US Congress following the Second World War. It was this growing clique, sympathetic to the Soviet Union after the defeat of Hitler that ushered in the Macarthy hearings.

between people from Sense about Science and from SIRC. The joint forum included, apart from SIRC personnel, Dr Michael Fitzpatrick with his 20-year history of revolutionary communism, and Dick Taverne QC, now, thanks to New Labour, a Liberal Democrat peer. Other members of the Joint Forum included Mr Peter Bell, former controller of policy, BBC News; Philip Harding, controller of editorial policy, BBC; Steve Connor, science editor, the *Independent*; Dr Graham Easton, GP and 'senior broadcast journalist', BBC Science Radio; Professor Susan Greenfield, director, the Royal Institution; Dr Michael Clark MP, chairman, Commons Science and Technology Committee, and Professor Sir John Krebs from the University of Oxford. The Forum was moderated by SIRC directors Kate Fox and Dr Peter Marsh

At the same time as bringing out the guidelines, the SIRC set up the Health and Science Communications Trust, a charity that aimed to disseminate the guidelines, while also organising seminars and workshops to bring together journalists, broadcasters, scientists and health professionals. The administration of the Trust was left mainly in the hands of the SIRC.

The SIRC claims to be an independent, non-profit-making organisation, founded to conduct research on social and lifestyle issues. Its website tells us that 'SIRC aims to provide a balanced, calm and thoughtful perspective on social issues, promoting open and rational debates based on evidence rather than ideology.' As with many contemporary social and medical research groups, the Centre's claim to be 'not for profit' is meant to make us think that it is not linked to any commercial organisations.¹³

However, SIRC is mainly funded from the profits of a sister organisation, MCM, and both organisations share the same founding management staff. MCM Research is a problem-solving, *risk management* research, positive communication and PR organisation, which works almost entirely for the food-and-drinks industry. It is also a research and consultancy company, which specialises in applications of social psychology to the workplace and public contexts.

MCM presents positive marketing campaigns for the sugar and alcohol industry. It works for, among other clients, Conoco, Grand Metropolitan Retail, Kingfisher Leisure, Marks and Spencer, Mars Confectionery, The Ministry of Defence and the Sugar Bureau.

¹³ See this authors: HRT: Licensed to Kill and Maim. 2006. Slingshot Publications. London, available from www.slingshotpublications.com

The Guidelines

The more recent scare over the MMR vaccine has resulted in a drop in immunisation rates, to a level possibly below that needed to prevent a measles epidemic. In such cases, the 'source' must bear much of the responsibility, but more cautious media reporting could have significantly limited the damage.

Guidelines on science and health communication Ri, SIRC, RS.

The *Guidelines on science and health communication*, which grew out of the 2000 guidelines on scientists and the media via a series of consultations, were published in November 2001. Despite sounding terribly official, they were prepared by the relatively-unknown SIRC, partnered by those long-established and august-sounding organisations the Royal Society and the Royal Institution of Great Britain, both of which had over recent years fallen victim to flooding by corporate funding. The sole objective of the guidelines was to censor articles critical of corporate science, professional medicine and their products.

The problem with the guidelines, comes immediately into sight with the title of the documents, *Guidelines on science and health communication*. In the body of these guidelines, it becomes clear that the titles should better read, *Guidelines to Enforce a Corporate Scientific Construct on Health Communications*.

Balance. Newspapers may suppose that they have produced 'balanced' reports by quoting opposing views from scientists about a particular issue. While the intention may be to present both sides of an argument, a majority view on that matter may be held within the scientific community, and the opposing view is held by only a quixotic minority of individuals.

Scientists and the Media: Guidelines for scientists working with the media and comments on a press code of practice. The Royal Society 2000

The original guidelines remained virtually intact throughout their discursive travels. This was mainly because, although the opinions of many people were apparently canvassed, almost all of them were fervent defenders of corporate science and its contemporary corporate funding.

There can be no doubt about the motivation and the goal of the guidelines. Their purpose was to serve as a defensive weapon in any future conflicts between corporate science and scientific, cultural or political dissenters. The guidelines attempt to cut off supplies of the oxygen of

expression both to dissidents and to those who might be swayed by their arguments.

Only slightly beneath the surface of the guidelines lurks the same defence of vested corporate interests dominating all the rationalisation of 'scientific' lobby organisations. The central problem seems to be that those involved in propagating the social construct based upon corporate science are unable to conceive of a democratic process that involves political, moral or social opposition to their ideas. As Fitzpatrick says in his book about MMR, 'there is nothing political about vaccination'. And, as Dick Taverne argued at a Stockholm Network¹⁴ Westminster Fringe debate in London in January 2006, 'Democratisation of science would not be in the public interest'.¹⁵

Although the majority view may occasionally prove to be incorrect at a later date, such instances are exceptions rather than the rule. While we appreciate that it may be difficult for journalists to take a poll of scientific views, it is in the public interest that journalists identify, whenever possible, a majority view.

Scientists and the media. The Royal Society, 2000

The growth of the guidelines, through the Royal Society and the Royal Institution, and finally through the SIRC, and then into the hands of the Science Media Centre, mark the development of a terrible arrogance, which is abroad in the community of corporate science. They want to outlaw political, personal and alternative views on health. They want to dismiss personal

¹⁴ The Stockholm Network pursued a wide range of policy-oriented activities. We formalised our work into three programmes: Health and Welfare, Intellectual Property and Competition, and Energy and Environment. We also hosted regular public debates in Brussels – the Amigo Society – and London – The Westminster Fringe – as well as launching seven major publications.

On January 15 2008, the Amigo Society an offshoot of the Stockholm Network held a debate in Brussels titled, 'When health scares become our daily meal'. The speakers were Nathalie Moll an executive director of Europabio and an executive member of Euro association of Bio industries and Dr William Durodie, Senior Lecturer in Risk and Corporate Security, Resilience Centre, Cranfield University and an advisor to the Scientific Alliance that argues against any Environmental dangers produced by science (Durodie is part of the Living Marxism Network that grew out of the Revolutionary Communist Party.) The 'debate' was chaired by Dr Tim Evans, Dr Tim Evans is the Stockholm Network's director of development. The 'debate' was advertised in the following terms.

The media incites us to greet unidentified risks with great caution: the policy equivalent is the precautionary principle. This entails considerable regulation and safety precautions for the general public until any untested product or technology has been proven harmless. The approach is seemingly common sense: better safe than sorry. This can, however, put a straitjacket on research and scientific inquiry overall. GMO crops are a case in point: these have been in use for 20 years and not a single health incident has been reported. Yet, national and EU authorities have decided that the technology which has the potential of saving millions of people from death by starvation must be suspended.

¹⁵ Other participants in this debate were Professor Colin Blakemore, Ian Gibson MP, Daniel Glaser, Rick Nye Shereen el Feki of the *The Economist*.

views on illness and to restrict any writing, even of fiction and drama, about science, entirely to observations about 'successful', apparently peer-reviewed science.

They are ready to move on, to exclude the personal narrative of illness and treatment, illness and cure, to outlaw the stories of curers, herbalists and homeopaths, and original scientific research, which is first, inevitably, the minority. They now want to stop any subjective criticism of science or medicine. It is necessary to control 'bad' narratives, which do not coincide with the profitable projects of the corporations.

And what of the minority view, which is implicit in any democracy, and previously dismissed only in totalitarian systems? Will it no longer be possible to report a variety of therapeutic approaches? The pharmaceutical alternative will, of course be the majority view; what of the minority within that majority, those who suffer adverse reactions? In research, what about competing minority alternatives, which find it hard to raise funding, and which anyway do not get access to the select journals? Will reporting of these be censored? What about research that reaches critical minority conclusions, such as research into environmental illness, almost inevitably a minority view? Where would we be with research into smoking and lung cancer if corporate science had controlled research in the 1960s? Ah, yes, I forgot, that was all a terrible mistake.

In addition to negative images of real science, the media purvey an exotic range of material on and beyond the fringes of scientific respectability: horoscopes, the 'paranormal', and *much of what appears under the banner of health ... as the Royal Astronomical Society puts it, too much of this sort of thing 'tends to weaken in the public mind the validity of the rational approach to problems' (italics added)*¹⁶

What of investigative writing about science, such as the 'monumental' 50,000-word article published by the *Chicago Tribune*, written by John Crewdeon, which 'put science under the microscope' and questioned Dr Robert Gallo's role in the discovery of HIV.¹⁷ What of criticism?

In Sweden, Lennart Hardell is one of a small number of scientists who managed to persuade the government to ban herbicides containing dioxin. Hardell is still fighting his corner, after Sir Richard Doll, at the time a highly-paid consultant for Monsanto, wrote to the judge in the Australian

¹⁶ Talk of 'weakening of the public will ... sorry, public mind ... made me wonder whether this quote had got into this essay by accident. Was it a quote from Germany in the 1930s?

¹⁷ Discussed by Serge Lang in *Challenges* and published with additions, as *Science Fictions: A scientific mystery, a massive cover up, and the dark legacy of Robert Gallo*. John Crewdson. Little Brown and Company. USA. 2002.

Royal Commission Inquiry into Agent Orange, suggesting that Hardell's 'minority' views should be struck from the scientific record.

And what of politics? Just because the ex-Revolutionary Communist Party has replaced politics with a religious faith in science, do we all have to do the same? Are we no longer to be allowed political choices because an RCP cadre has decided that politics has ended? Will corporate science now advise the correct course of action on health, on vaccination, on the taking of pharmaceuticals?

Journalists should be encouraged to treat with healthy scepticism work that has not been approved through peer review, including information that can be accessed through the internet.

Scientists and the media The Royal Society 2000

Everything was done in the *Guidelines* to give them an almost statutory authority. In fact, they had been put in published shape by a small group of individuals who, despite being associated with celebrated organisations, now frequently worked in partnership with the pharmaceutical vaccine industry, the biotech industry and major chemical companies.

The idea that corporate science is the only lens through which we understand the working of our bodies and diagnose or treat ill health, and that the life sciences have greater authority in our world than religion, culture, politics or the individual's own emotional being, is a consequence of a number of factors. Perhaps the primary one, however, is the development of the contemporary pharmaceutical company and its insinuation into all aspects of life. The guidelines are an attempt by science to impose a scientific construct on all health, and the creation of a break wall to censor criticism of corporations that cause either environmental or iatrogenic health damage.

Most pointedly, when these guidelines are designed by the very corporations that are sheltered by them, and that, like the pharmaceutical companies, consistently disguise or bury or fail to make public their research results, they jeopardise the very soul of scientific inquiry. When such guidelines are used to censor other kinds of research, for instance from lay patients or qualitative or participatory or biographical work, then rather than making research safer, they deprive science of the little humanity it has previously professed.

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Over the past couple of years, the *Guardian* newspaper has become more deeply involved in defence of corporate interests, particularly those of the pharmaceutical sector. Although the paper had often defended corporate interests in the past, since the employment of Ben Goldacre, an admitted quackbuster intent upon defending corporate interests, the *Guardian* has become *a priori* the paper defending industrial interests that might damage human health. While most media in Britain avoid the whole debate about environmental health, the *Guardian* has moved into a position of active support for those industries that cause this damage.

Given the nature of professional secrecy, how this happened is unlikely to become apparent in our lifetime, but it is worth looking at the circumstantial evidence and speculating. To anyone entering the fray of the present battle with the *Guardian*, which has recently turned into a full-scale campaign against all kinds of alternative medicine and any suggestion of environmental illness, an understanding of its political position could be hard. However, at least a brief understanding of the present, politically-brackish water in which the *Guardian* swims is essential to an understanding of the paper's increasingly sceptical, not to say cynical, position.

The *Guardian* was originally known as the *Manchester Guardian*; it had been produced in the heartland of liberalism since the early 19th century. In the 1920s, a modern concept of liberalism came on to the scene in Manchester, and affected the *Guardian*. Modern liberalism wanted to find a meeting point between industry and government, while also caring about social welfare. The only problem for liberals since the Second World War has been that they have not managed to maintain a party leadership that has had the same integrity as its members. Consequently, the two main competing parties have sucked dry the soul of liberalism, using its tenets in different ways.

Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 on what might be called a liberal ticket. However, in the New Right's liberalism, social welfare took a back seat to industry profitability and competition in the free market, which, it was said, would anyway profit the poor by continually lowering prices and growing a class of rich entrepreneurs who could happily finance the charitable care of the sick and needy. While many *Guardian* readers of the post-Thatcher period might understand the paper as vaguely leftwing or socialist, the *Guardian* that emerged after 1997 in the wake of New Labour's election victory, had little in common with the Left of old Labour, and hid its liberal heritage. Perhaps like every other part of the vaguely socialist left in Britain, the paper was watching to see what kind of party New Labour was.

New Labour was a hybrid party, a peculiar bastard, born of Fabian socialism and neo-liberalism, with a grassroots injection of revolutionary communism and straight, old-fashioned Stalinism. Inevitably, it took present party members and old Labourites a good part of the decade in which New Labour was in power under Blair, to understand the party's policies. Has New Labour privatised the NHS? Does New Labour believe in PFI? Why does

New Labour feel so close to Republican America? Can there be any doubt that New Labour has cast off from any moorings with the working class or the trade union movement? Doesn't it appear that the government has simply sided with industry, without any reservations? Why did New Labour have to depend upon the industrial riches of liberals to keep the party afloat? There was rarely a straight answer available to any of these questions.

While most of these questions at the nub of New Labour policies were illuminated in the early 'lobbygate' period, New Labour ran quickly back, under its stone after this bright light had exposed the rampant 'government for sale'. The history of New Labour could be summed up as a state in which multinational corporations ran the government, and the government pretended it was tackling problems such as poverty, education and social exclusion.

While the *Guardian* has been able to walk a tightrope, appearing to be trendy and left-leaning, it has done this only on some issues, while in other areas it has slavishly followed the emerging path of post-industrial corporatism.¹⁸ A major crisis occurred at the *Guardian* in 2002, when, at the height of the paper's exposure of the corporate vested interests in the government's attempt to push the population into accepting GM crops, the paper's editor, Alan Rusbridger, and the writer Ronan Bennett, wrote *Fields of Gold*, a thriller based on the possible effects of trials of GM crops. The Science Media Centre and Sense About Science tried very hard but unsuccessfully to get this drama taken off television.¹⁹ Within a year, however, Ben Goldacre had been appointed by the *Guardian*, and his 'Bad Science' column let rip against claims of any kind of environmentally-induced ill health.

Other organisations that gave political colour to the *Guardian* were meanwhile working behind the scenes to rid the paper of any of its domestic leftism, or even qualified libertarianism. It might be said that the Social Markets Foundation (SMF), while being the Blairite think tank, has also constituted the political wing of the *Guardian*. Even a brief glance at the individuals involved with the SMF gives us a clear understanding of how and why the *Guardian* has been so despotically involved in pushing the corporate and governmental cause over MMR vaccination, the mobile phone industry's rejection of claims of health damage, the peculiar pursuit of the mental health aetiology of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) and chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), its insistence on playing down adverse reactions to pharmaceutical drugs, and finally its cynical and bilious, unscientific attacks on alternative medicine.

Through 2003 to 2006, the SMF, which is sponsored by, among other corporate organisations, the mobile phone industry and MMR manufacturers

¹⁸ Corporatism was the name that Mussolini gave to a capitalism in which corporations ran the government.

¹⁹ The Lobby was much more successful in its campaign to get the BBC to ban the MMR episode of the Judge John Deed drama.

GlaxoSmithKlein, took its message to fringe meetings at all the political party conferences. The sponsor of these fringe meetings was usually the Mobile Operators Association (MOA), and one speaker, Mike Dolan, an executive member of the MOA, was at all the meetings. Also speaking at these fringe meetings were: Anne Rossiter, current director of the SMF; David Sainsbury, then head of science policy at the Dti and governor of all the Research Councils including the MRC; Ben Goldacre, enemy of all patients suffering environmental illness; defender of the mobile phone industry and euthanasia Dr Evan Harris; Alok Jha, science correspondent of the *Guardian*, who espouses very similar views against alternative medicine to those of Goldacre; Vivienne Parry, sometime *Guardian* science correspondent and member of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), to which body she declared vested interests in relation to Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, producers of HRT, about which Ms Parry has both talked and written a book.

The make-up of the SMF shows the same odd mix of liberalism, PR and communism found in other organisations associated with the science lobby groups. The first director of the think tank, Philip Collins went directly to No 10, in May 2005, where he not only put words into Blair's mouth, but became an advisor on such things as PFI. Anne Rossiter, Collins's successor at the SMF, is also a director of corporate communications consultancy Fishburn Hedges, and Lexington Communications. She has run the organisation with the aid of Nina Temple a former secretary of the British Communist Party and organiser of the Democratic Left.

In 2006, the SMF published *Science Risk and the Media – do the front pages reflect reality?* This bizarre document makes continuous reference to the case of MMR and the 'hoax' that has been perpetrated by the media. In it, Evan Harris makes grand statements about propagators of anti-science, and Vivienne Parry is there as a science correspondent of the *Guardian*. At the end of the booklet, you find that the information in it has been drawn from two sources, Sense About Science and the Science Media Centre, and that the whole thing was sponsored by the Mobile Operators Association, which 'represents the five mobile phone networks on health and planning issues'.

Subscribers to and supporters of the SMF include Eli Lilly, Exxon Mobil, German Pharma Health Fund, Hill and Knowlton, Merck & Co Inc, Pfizer Inc, Pfizer Ltd, PhRMA (the very powerful US equivalent of the ABPI) Burson Marsteller, GlaxoSmithKline, Novartis Pharma, The Fund for American Studies,²⁰ the Progress and Freedom Foundation²¹.

²⁰ The Fund for American Studies (TFAS) has been educating young leaders on the values of freedom, democracy and free market economies since 1967. Eleven institutes around the world bring college students together for educational programs engaging them in a rigorous examination of economic concepts, political systems and moral philosophy. Our goal is to prepare young people for honorable leadership by educating them in the theory, practice and benefits of a free society.

²¹ This Washington based organisation has 9 Directors all of whom are men! The Progress & Freedom Foundation is a market-oriented think tank that studies the impact of the digital revolution and its implications for public policy. Our senior fellows and other scholars are leading experts in their fields,

The directors and patrons of the SMF ensure closeness to government and a high degree of influence over the BBC. They include Viscount Chandos, Gavyn Davies (chairman of the BBC from 2001 until 2004, a former Goldman Sachs banker and economic advisor to the British government), David Edmonds, John McFadden, Baroness Noakes and Brian Pomeroy. Patrons of the SMF include two heavyweight Social Democrats, the Rt Hon Lord Owen CH and Lord Sainsbury of Turville.

* * *

The science lobby's response to the *Observer* article on Dr Andrew Wakefield, which included Ben Goldacre's piece and a signed letter in the national press expressing the censorious views of the lobby, was accompanied by more individual action from the Science Media Centre.

Ex-member of the Revolutionary Communist Party Fiona Fox, now head of the Science Media Centre and thereby one of the key participants in the protection racket that is the science lobby, wrote up how the lobby dealt with this story. For some reason, this very revealing entry on Fox's blog,²² remained virtually unread until January 2008, when it was unearthed by someone researching the role of the *Guardian* in the censorship of science. As soon as the blog's archive was visited by a few critics, however, the page was taken off the internet and buried.

Fox' story, combined with what we know about the setting up of the Science Media Centre and Sense About Science, and the showdown between the *Guardian* and *Observer* editors, is very revealing, and it shows that the lobby feels not a shred of embarrassment about putting a major British newspaper 'under heavy manners' and forcing it to toe the party line. On her blog, Fox wrote the following.

* * *

Alarminglly, almost ten years after Andrew Wakefield sparked off a frenzied debate over a link between MMR and autism, the Observer's front page was suggesting that there is still a serious dispute amongst leading experts as to whether he was right. Predictably, several papers repeated the MMR allegations the next day, and countless columnists, including James Le Fanu and Peter Hitchens, have cited the Observer

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²² Wednesday, 18 July 2007 Why we need the best journalism on public health stories

piece as evidence that the MMR autism row is still alive and well.

One of the challenges for the Science Media Centre (SMC) was what to do about it. We were set up in the wake of media furores over issues like MMR, and we know that poor journalism on public health is our territory. However, we also know that the SMC philosophy (the media will 'do' science better when scientists 'do' media better) was a reaction against the culture of complaint within science, which often saw top scientists complaining privately about coverage, rather than pro-actively engaging with the story.

With this in mind, the SMC reacted to the article primarily by coordinating a joint media statement by 14 institutions involved with child health and vaccination to back the safety of the jab, which we issued to coincide with the GMC hearing. However, I did also send a note to Denis Campbell, the journalist who wrote the article and a friendly contact of ours, to make sure he knew that the SMC was unable to defend the piece to the angry scientists who were contacting us. The result was an invitation to meet with him, the readers' editor and a variety of other Observer news editors at their offices. So, with two leading MMR experts at my side, I went to highlight the concerns.

One of the main points that I made at that meeting was my belief that in science reporting the rule of thumb should be that the more outrageous the claim, the more the need for the best standards of journalism – a rule which is often interpreted in exactly the opposite way by journalists hungry for a sensational scoop. I then argued that I would take this rule even further in this peculiarly sensitive and important public health issue. The claim that MMR may cause autism, made by Dr Andrew Wakefield in 1998, produced one of the biggest rows in public health for decades, and millions of pounds of public money have been spent on scientific studies researching the evidence for a link. Not a single reputable study has found any, and just last year the SMC coordinated a joint appeal from many of those involved in child health that the media now draw a line under this row unless and until it has compelling new evidence. Many autism experts have echoed this call and issued their own plea for resources to move from the obsession with MMR to investigating the many other possible causes – including genetics, environmental factors and so on.

* * *

So how is it possible to get to the truth in a society where the media are harassed and muscled by ex-communists and liberal corporatists? One way is to turn the discourse away from science and towards politics. Is it healthy in a democracy to have cadres of ex-revolutionary communists (in or out of uniform) visiting newspaper editors and showing them the

error of their ways?

As many sceptics have counselled, when this becomes commonplace, we are indeed turning the corner into a dark and informationless age, not as they suggest because our thinking capacity has become addled by mysticism or because we have turned our backs on the rational world, but simply because the institutions of industrial democracy have collapsed, apparently without cause but coincidental with the election of New Labour in 1997.

There *has* come an end to ideology and political discourse, and we are all now observers on the shore of a poisoned sea watching the great mother-ship of global scientific control power towards us like some post-modern Nuremberg rally. Our political institutions linked to the New-Labour government are dank with vested interests and spin, and because corporations now guide the government, we are all living on the edge of second-generation corporatism; a soulless collectivism ruled this time, not by authoritarian ideology but by science.

Martin J Walker
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