
Editorial Mercenaries and the media

NEWS breaks — or develops — on the Net these days with remarkable ease. News organisations are without the Internet at their peril. At the Commonwealth Journalists Association conference in Hongkong during January, the Pacific delegation heard a Ugandan editor, Kevin Ogen, describe in detail how his newspaper, *The Monitor*, broke a major corruption story using the Net.

Also recently, *Sydney Morning Herald* online editor Jon Casmir, author of the entertaining book *Postcards from the Net*, narrated in his column DRIFTNET how the news was broken about the second person to die under Northern Territory's controversial euthanasia legislation.

'At seven minutes past midnight on the morning of January 6, Des Carne finished uploading and checking the material he was putting live on the Deliverance Web site in Alice Springs,' Casmir wrote. 'There had been four hits on the site between midnight and seven minutes past — there would be many more as word spread of the new content. By 4 am, Carne says, the material on the site had jumped the bounds of the Web and was making its way into Australia via international news wires, spreading like a virus through the media. By breakfast, it was all over Australian radio.'

It has been interesting, too, to observe the role of the Net in peeling away the layers of secrecy about the shadowy activities of Sandline International and Executive Outcomes in the global arena and in the Pacific. EO was exposed for what they are, the 'diamond dogs of war' with a reputation so odious that even South Africa wanted to outlaw them. And Canada, base of the investment affiliate DiamondWorks Ltd, which has links with the mercenary mining company, Branch Energy, also embarked on legislative curbs. The detailed Web accounts of the complicated intrigue and economic cross-hatching frequently gave a far more revealing overview of the modern corporate world of mercenaries than the news agencies were able to provide.

This deeper insight was apparent with news organisations that made extensive use of Web research links for major reports — such as the ABC's *Lateline* 'Dogs of War' and Radio National's 'Diamond Mercenaries of Africa' programs. In fact, most of the best reporting of Papua New Guinea's mercenary saga in the global context was reported by the quality overseas media, much of it not seen or read within Papua New Guinea or other Pacific news media. This

EDITORIAL

reflects the lack of investigative reporting staff and resources here that many overseas news organisations can muster — with the exception of *The National's* simple companies register check which exposed Chris Haiveta's financing 'dead letter' was actually to a company no longer registered. This opened up a new can of financial worms, and led to official secrecy manoeuvres.

Many Web sites have been helpful for inquiring into the mercenary minerals fortune. One informative Web page is the Angola Peace Monitor. Another is the Sierra Leone Web Africa/Sierra Leone Page. The *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, the excellent descendant of my old paper, the *Rand Daily Mail*, is also useful. And *US News and World Report* online ran a revealing account of how the mercenaries were gunning for Africa's diamonds. And then — as it turned out — the dogs were out for an abortive slice of Bougainville and PNG's copper shares?

As *World Report's* Kevin Whitelaw commented: 'Some call it the latest in outsourcing. Others see it as the return of money-grubbing mercenaries to Africa. Either way, it is akin to the privatisation of warfare: With superpowers no longer throwing their weight behind civil conflicts in Africa, a new market has opened up to whip ragtag national armies into shape.'

But for my money, one of the better sources has been the Vancouver Stock Exchange which has been probing the activities of a Canadian public company, DiamondWorks Ltd, listed on the high-risk exchange. In October 1996, DiamondWorks — then known as Carson Gold — completed a takeover of the EO mining affiliate Branch Energy. This became the base for an internationally controversial share promotion. The company's management astoundingly made public claims that its assets in Angola and Sierra Leone had an 'estimated' value of some US\$3.2 billion. However, since then this claim has been 'revised'.

It is ironical that while the South African Parliament debated a ban on training of mercenaries on its own soil, and after President Bill Clinton's administration helped pressure the Angolan government to stop dealing with EO, the high-profile company linked to mercenary interests should be into American-based pension and mutual funds.

In short, this year has been a journalist's dream in Papua New Guinea — although admittedly it has also been a nightmare for many — with major news generated from the Sandline affair and two subsequent inquiries into it; the June general election which endorsed 'people's power' during the mercenary crisis and swept Sir Julius Chan and several of his cabinet henchmen from office, replacing him with Bill Skate and a government including several Melanesian Solidarity (Melsol) activists; and finally the ravages of the country's worst drought in a century. Papua New Guinea journalists can take credit for some excellent reporting on all these issues.

While the news media started the year in a buoyant mood following the decision of the Constitutional Review Commission to shelve three 'draconian' Micah draft media laws (*see the last edition of Pacific Journalism Review*), the National Broadcasting Corporation, once an icon among Pacific state broadcasters, became seriously under threat with a damages case and the failure of management to deal with it. When the NBC failed to pay K146,000 surety on October 30 as ordered by the Supreme Court, this gave former staff broadcaster Peter Koringo the go-ahead to auction NBC property to settle the damages awarded him by the National Court for wrongful dismissal.

Press freedom took a beating too in Samoa where veteran publisher and author Savea Sano Malifa and his outspoken newspaper, *Samoa Observer*, continued to be harassed by the Government with criminal libel charges, and in Fiji where the Murdoch-owned *Fiji Times* was cited for alleged contempt by the Senate privileges committee over an editorial that turned out to be too honest.

In this edition of *PJR*, University of Papua New Guinea's Philosophy and Journalism lecturer **William Ferea** sets the tone with an article about the role of the news media and the church during the Sandline crisis and the implications for the Constitution. **Alan Robson**, a South Pacific Politics lecturer at UPNG, provides a short overall summary to provide context, while Agence France-Presse news agency Pacific correspondent **Michael Field** and Pacific Media Watch commentator **Peter Cronau** provide insights into media coverage. **David Robie** follows with the script from his half-hour documentary *Fri Pres: Media Freedom in the Pacific*, broadcast by EM TV to mark World Press Freedom Day.

The next section is devoted to the Ombudsman Commission and the Media seminar debating accountability and transparency, both buzzwords in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the Pacific these days. Chief Ombudsman **Simon Pentanu** gives the the opening message while Word Publishing editor-in-chief **Anna Solomon** praises the commission for its work in bringing wayward politicians to heel. *National* editor **Frank Senge Kolma** writes about public opinion and provides an interesting insight into his paper's policy for coverage of the PNG general election. Outgoing EM TV chief executive **John Taylor** gives an entertainingly provocative presentation on television — is it 'transparent or opaque'?

David Robie gives an overview of Pacific news media development on the Internet, particularly in Papua New Guinea where both daily newspaper sites were given a boost by the Sandline affair. Father **Trevor Cullen**, head of Journalism at Divine Word University, makes a case for a better informed media coverage of the HIV/AIDS crisis. **Peter Cronau** reports on the exile of *The FSM News* editor Sherry O'Sullivan and **David Robie** analyses news coverage of the

EDITORIAL

Hagahai cell lines controversy. **Savea Sano Malifa** profiles his newspaper, *Samoa Observer*, and its valiant fight for media freedom.

David Robie traces the upheaval in journalism education at UPNG while a student journalist and world media groups give their perspective in the Forum section. An early paper by the late **Peter Henshall** provides context for the media education debate. **Kevin Pamba** traces how the Phantom inspired *Independent* cartoonist **Jada Wilson** and **Joseph Morokana** profiles broadcast journalist **Joseph Ealedona**.

Philip Cass discusses the important history of the Pacific mission press, particularly in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Two *Fiji Times* editorials that stirred senators in Suva are published along with a summary of the controversy. **Sorariba Nash**, just back from completing Masters studies at the University of Wales, gives a broadside to the paparazzi and examines privacy legislation and policy in the United Kingdom. Finally, Macquarie University academic and InterPress correspondent **Kalinga Seneviratne** profiles Radio Djiido and its dilemmas a decade after the Kanak pro-independence station was founded.

David Robie