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PRIVATE EYE

YES! IT'S SNOW-GO BRRRR-ITAIN!



Street OF Shame

THE Daily Mirror mourned the demise of HMV, pinning most of the blame on the coalition.

"Previous governments would have leapt to action in the face of such a pressing challenge," its editorial declared, "but the collapse of HMV did not even merit a mention at yesterday's cabinet meeting... We need a plan for our high streets, we need a plan for the economy that works."

Not once, however, did the paper mention the company's own management, whose strategic errors, many believe, compounded structural problems in the retail industry. Simon Fox, chief executive for six years from 2006, saw the HMV share price fall by more than 90 percent under his leadership. Bowing out last summer, he boldly told reporters: "The business has come through a very turbulent period and is entering a relatively calm point. The wind is behind our backs now, not a gale in our face."

And which company decided that it, too, could benefit from Fox's Midas touch and vision? Last September he left HMV to become chief executive of... Trinity Mirror.

THE Daily Telegraph warned in December that HMV was "fighting for survival", but it reckoned there was some good news for the beleaguered retailer.

"Trevor Moore, who arrived as chief executive in September, is fighting to turn around the business," the paper reported. "Mr Moore was hired by HMV after nursing photographic retailer Jessops back to health."

Hardly surprising then, that the *Telegraph* felt confident enough to offer as one of the prizes in its Christmas supplement prize draw, a "£100 Jessops Gift Voucher, redeemable in-store only and valid for one year".

Even more unfortunately timed was the *Daily Express*'s competition to "win a Samsung Galaxy camera worth £399.99" courtesy of "Jessops, the UK's leading photographic retailer". Much-trailed in the paper from November onwards, entries by premium text or phone line at a minimum of £2 each closed on 9 January – the very day the chain went into administration!



"We can't compete with our digital rivals"

WHY has *Sun* editor Dominic Mohan moved Frankie Boyle's column from its long-standing Friday slot to the Sunday edition, swapping with the blander if marginally funnier Katie Price column? Is Frankie's sour style really suited to the Sabbath?

"Murdoch thought the Sunday edition was shit," an insider explains, "so Dom transferred his favourite columnist there."

ARMSTRONG SHOCK



AFTER the abrupt defenestration of *Times* editor James Harding last month, everyone at Wapping assumed the paper's so-called "independent national directors" (INDs) would rubber-stamp Rupert Murdoch's choice of successor.

Ever since being created in 1981 as a condition of the Dirty Digger's takeover of *Times* Newspapers, the INDs have always fallen into line. But now they have become the mice that roared, amazing Wapping executives by refusing to ratify the appointment of John Witherow.

The willingness of the six INDs to stand up to Murdoch shouldn't come as a total surprise. After three comatose decades, their mood began to change around two years ago when the Digger was drawing up plans for an editorial board for Sky News, modelled on the *Times*, as part of his bid for BSkyB.

Stung by suggestions in the press that they were just Murdoch stooges, the INDs – who include worthies such as Lady Eccles, Lord Marlesford and banking banker Rupert Pennant-Rea – took the rare step of writing a letter to the *Guardian* in January 2011 insisting that the appointment or dismissal of an editor "requires our approval". As *Eye* 1282 pointed out, the row had "woken a long-dormant creature" and the INDs were now looking for "an opportunity to flex their muscles".

Then came the Leveson inquiry, at which the directors had to testify about their legal obligations. "We see our presence as the editorial equivalent of a nuclear weapon – a deterrent to possible proprietorial interference, and therefore reassuring for the two editors," they wrote in a joint witness statement. Hence their horror when Harding quit last month, declaring that it has been "made clear to me that News Corporation would like to appoint a new editor". Murdoch upset them further with his cost-cutting plan to merge the *Times* and *Sunday Times* into a seven-day operation – a move that is banned as part of the 1981 deal and requires government approval to change.

So, after taking legal advice, the INDs detonated their nuclear weapon at last, by publicly refusing to sanction the appointments of Witherow at the *Times* and his sidekick Martin Ivens at the *Sunday Times*. Blithely disregarding them, Murdoch has made the two men "acting editors" anyway, in line with his traditional policy: when in a hole, keep Digging.

WITH John Witherow installed as "acting editor" of the *Times*, who else will he bring along from his old berth at the *Sunday Times*?

There is little love lost between the two papers – as Eleanor Mills, columnist and associate editor on the Sunday title, discovered when she moved across to the *Times* as Saturday editor under James Harding. She lasted barely a year before fleeing back to Witherow.

Now it seems she is set to return to the daily, this time with his protection. Fearful *Times* hacks await an eruption of score-settling.

THE Financial Times led the way last week in exposing a wheeze by the great vampire squid, aka Goldman Sachs, to postpone annual bonuses for its bankers in London until the new tax year in April so they could take advantage of the new, lower 45 percent rate on earnings over £150,000. Three days later, the *FT* was able to boast on its front page that Goldman had backed down "in the face of withering criticism".

Let's hope all this is forgotten by the time of the glittering Goldman Sachs/*FT* Business Book of the Year Award dinner, co-hosted every autumn by editor Lionel Barber and Goldman's chief squid, Lloyd Blankfein.

NEW STATESMAN deputy editor and blogger Helen Lewis laid into the controversial ongoing use of booth babes – "models paid to drape themselves over otherwise fairly mundane updates of technology" – at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas this month.

Her indignation was, however, somewhat undermined by the seven large photographs of scantily-clad mobile phone and iShower users apparently needed to titillate *NS* readers, or sorry, to illustrate the phenomenon.

SENT to interview John McCririck, the *Daily Mail*'s Jane Fryer found the celebrity racing tipster bickering with his wife, Jenny, about breasts.

"And in particular the breasts of his previous visitor, a blonde and female interviewer, who has just left. 'For goodness sake, John, why did you have to say all that?'" says Jenny. "You're such an idiot. Just because she was wearing a low-cut dress. I bet she wore it on purpose and you fell straight into her trap."

Who was this blonde temptress? Step forward Camilla Long of the *Sunday Times*. Here's her own account of meeting McCririck: "I'm a great breast man," he gurgles. "Yours aren't very big, but I'm a great breast man"... He gets defensive, saying he only mentioned my breasts "to see a reaction". He can't explain why he wanted one, it's just he's been "taking peeks" and "they're very nice" and he is "envious". Later he will offer a new assessment: apparently they are "very well developed", he "really fancies" me and wonders if I am taking down his number "to ask me on a date".

All of which, cynics might conclude, shows the trap was indeed set to perfection!

A HAPPY new year in the world of glossy magazines. Writers and sub-editors at Haymarket Network, the customer publishing wing of the empire owned by Michael Heseltine and his family, have been told that "to balance the books, the gross day-rate for casual workers will be 20 percent less than the rate paid in 2012."

Haymarket reported a 40 percent rise in pre-tax profits last year, with its highest-paid director – unidentified in the company's account, but strongly suspected of bearing the surname Heseltine – taking home £1.1m for his services.

Meanwhile employees at IPC Media, the publisher of *Country Life*, *TV Times*, *Nuts*, *Marie Claire* and countless other glossies, have been told that due to "changing market conditions along with the pressures caused by economic stagnation", a salary freeze will be in place for the whole of 2013. Last year's accounts show that IPC paid a dividend to its parent company, Time Warner, of £52m, and its highest-paid director received a £239,000 pay rise, boosting their pay packet to £820,000.

SO. Farewell then Toby Young, sacked from the Sunday edition of the *Sun* after less than a year to limp back to that sheltered housing unit for the incurably insane, *Telegraph Blogs*.

He has been replaced by Louise Mensch, who earns her first regular weekly berth chez Murdoch with a column that promises to be "tough, outspoken and sharp". Although James and Rupert probably won't mind too much if she misses a couple of columns because she's got to leave early to pick up the kids from school...



"I wish you'd go back to reading a real newspaper at breakfast then I wouldn't have to see your face!"



"We can't compete with our digital rivals"

Celeb

LIGGER



FOR THE RECORD...

SCENE & HEARD

By DAVID ZIGGY GREENE

