

ANNOUNCING THE LAUNCH OF CFOM - THE CENTRE FOR FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

William Horsley, International Director of CFOM, February 3 2009, at the Chatham House conference "Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall: What Became of Press and Political Freedoms?"

I want very much to thank Robin Niblett, the Director of Chatham House, and all the Russia and Eurasia Programme staff here who have worked closely with me and my CFOM colleagues to put this event together. The fruits of our cooperation are obvious from the line-up of speakers on the podium for both of our planned sessions -- and the large turnout of people who have come, braving the Siberian conditions in central London.

I would also like to say thankyou to the Open Society Foundation and the Foreign Office, for supporting this conference marking the public launch of CFOM, the UK's first Centre for Freedom of the Media at the University of Sheffield.

The chair of CFOM, Professor Jackie Harrison, the head of the university's Department of Journalism Studies, is here, with several colleagues. So is Jock Gallagher, CFOM's Director, a former BBC executive producer with a lifelong commitment to legitimate media freedom. We will be glad to answer any questions about the Centre and talk to as many of you as possible during the day and in future. Our website cfom.org.uk has just gone public with more on our core research areas and plans for other public events. Please read the CFOM flyer and consider if you would wish to support our future activities.

I am delighted that Sir Tom Stoppard, a vigorous campaigner for free speech and international human rights, is now one of CFOM's patrons, as well as other senior political and media figures.

The theme of this conference closely reflects the goal which CFOM has set itself, with support we hope from many sides. It is to use the resources and expertise of a leading British research university, working closely with media organisations, journalists and public figures, to raise the level of understanding and awareness of the central role that is now played by the influential news media of all kinds in the body politic of this and other countries, in other words in the systems of governance themselves, broadly defined. Our founding principle is that the independence of the media is vital for open societies to work and to allow democracies to flourish.

We don't usually think that we live in heroic times. But for many people over a certain age the dramatic events of the second half of 1989, which brought about the demise of unelected communist governments under Soviet control across eastern Europe, are still etched in the memory as the biggest geopolitical change that's happened in our part of the world in our lifetimes.

Today we will hear from some of the leading figures who helped to bring about that world-changing victory for free expression, free media and freedom of political choice. A wide range of speakers will share with us their insights into the lasting significance of the Year of Revolutions, and examine the evidence for believing that what we are now going through is a serious reversal of the spirit of 1989, which is already showing itself through a widespread retreat of both media freedom and political freedoms across many parts of post-Cold War Europe and Russia.

The Committee to Protect Journalists reckons on the basis of careful research that at least sixteen investigative journalists in Russia have been killed in contract-style murders since the year 2000. The Russian Journalists Union estimates that the total number of journalists who have died in the course of their work since the demise of the Soviet Union has reached more than three hundred.

In a few moments I will have the pleasure of introducing the day's keynote speaker, Jens Reich, whose name is closely associated with the long hard struggle against autocratic power in East Germany that eventually opened the way for millions to rise up and so hastened the Fall of the Berlin Wall. He is a scientist who shot to international attention in 1989 as the spokesman and a co-founder of the New Forum pro-democracy movement.

Also here to speak in our first session are Miklos Haraszti, who is uniquely well qualified as the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the OSCE, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We have asked him to talk about what he has called the "virtual meltdown" in some parts of Europe, of the international commitments to free media and the rule of law -- two pillars on which the post Cold war settlement in Europe was to be built.

Masha Lipman from Moscow is the Editor in chief of Pro et Contra, the international affairs and politics journal of the Carnegie Moscow Centre. She also wrote the Chatham House Briefing Paper, which was commissioned specially for this event on our behalf by the Open Society Foundation, entitled "Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia", which you found on your seat.

And later we will be joined by Lionel Barber, the Editor of the Financial Times, who'll give his perspective on the voice of independent and influential media in addressing power and abuses of power across national boundaries: can that voice still be heard, and to what effect? Unfortunately Evgeny Kiselyov, one of Russia's most committed independent radio and TV journalists, who was also to have taken part, has been prevented from doing so by the extreme weather here in the last couple of days.

I will briefly make these few key points about the broad subject we are about to discuss, and the link with what CFOM has been set up to do:-

First, we are today seeking a clearer understanding of the links between the presence or absence of press freedom and freedom of expression, and wider political and civic freedoms including the right to participate in free elections and to a fair justice system. For example, when state or commercial interests use excessive media control along with other means to exclude opposing voices in elections, and stop the media from challenging suspected abuses, the result is the direct corruption of the political process itself.

"The news media have a vital role in a democracy", the British House of Lords committee on communications declared recently. "They report the news from home and overseas; they expose injustice; they challenge government and they set out a huge range of views".

Secondly, we will I hope learn new things about the ways in which monopolistic or state controls of the media tend to lead to strident nationalism and hostility or even conflict. The Cold War was the epitome of a propaganda war. Lech Walesa has said that without western broadcasting into the old east bloc countries totalitarian regimes would have survived much longer. "The bloodless war on air ended with the defeat of regimes that tried so hard to suppress the truth", he wrote.

Thirdly, today's debate is an exercise in understanding, not partisanship or polemics. It is important that we will hear the sober assessments of two speakers in particular, Miklos Haraszti and William Bowring, who know and represent the universal values of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, the two multi-national organisations which uphold human rights across Europe east and west, and where Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union have a full place alongside nations of the old "West" and the former Warsaw Pact.

Fourthly, we now live in a new media age. We can all be bloggers, citizen journalists, and publishers on the web. Many traditional media are disappearing, the media environment is fragmented and bad information is also plentiful. The vital role of holding power to account still falls mainly to the mainstream national media, which have the resources and authority to ask

difficult and searching questions. CFOM has been created, we believe, in response to a real need. Great human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have set new expectations that abuses will be monitored and countered. We believe that the widespread assaults on freedom of the media around the world must also now be contested with a new understanding and determination.

Thankyou for this chance to describe CFOM's mission and our plans. Now on with the business of today. Jens Reich, thankyou for battling your way to London from Berlin this morning despite the snowstorms. Your keynote speech is entitled "Reflections on the Road from the Year of Revolutions". The floor is yours.