

FREE Press

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'Media for All? The Challenge of Convergence' conference report

IT'S CRUNCH TIME FOR JOURNALISM

By Tim Gopsill

Doom-laden warnings for the future of "public service" journalism came from top speakers at the CPBF conference, along with strong rallying cries for the campaign to save it.

American journalist John Nichols, editor of the *Madison Capital Times* in Wisconsin and a correspondent for the *Nation*, said the commercial media system was "collapsing". "It is a system that puts profits ahead of communication. Last year 16,000 newspaper employees in the US lost their jobs.

"Newspapers are closing in the US at the rate of two a week. Journalists are laid off at the rate of one every 10 minutes. People may say, 'it doesn't matter if old media die, the internet will set us free'. But in the US 3,000 people are paid to do journalism on the internet, so we are losing journalists at a 5-1 rate.

"Even the Huffington Post has only 65 people, and that includes advertising and admin staff – and that's fewer than we have on the *Madison Capital Times*, a small local daily. The media owners are still making money but not enough. They are closing bureaux – national bureaux are closing at the rate of one a week. This is the constriction, the death of journalism."

Nichols said information was "a public good. If you don't have information you don't have democracy. Popular government without popular access to information is an impossibility, and I happen to believe that journalists are the best people to do this work.



John Nichols: 'Newspapers are closing in the US at the rate of two a week'

"If we don't become engaged in a battle for who shall control information and communications, there will still be information that will be gathered and managed by someone but not by journalists.

"It will be gathered and presented by power and by wealth and by governments and the Rupert Murdochs. And ultimately we will see the death of democracy in anything but form. We are confronting this in America, it is the export we are sending to the world.

"There must be new media for the 21st century that have core democratic principles."

Steve Barnett, professor of communications at the University of Westminster said free and diverse media were an indispensable part of the democratic process.

"Government rhetoric is insistent about the importance of pluralism and diversity, but is usually followed by deregulation and liberalisation of ownership regimes." The big ques-

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STEFANO CAGNONI

CPBF conference reports

'Politicians have failed to recognise the cultural and social roles of broadcasting'

By Tim Gopsill

Ray Fitzwalter, a former editor of Granada's *TV World in Action* and author of *The Dream that Died: the rise and fall of ITV*, traced the decline of Britain's top commercial TV channel to the Tories' 1990 Broadcasting Act, "the single most malevolent cause – perhaps the worst piece of legislation of the last 50 years".

The Act, he said, opened the floodgates to lower standards and introduced haphazard takeovers that reduced competition and destroyed the network – and essentially the same policy – deregulation – was pursued by Labour, which "continued to treat broadcasting as though it was merely an economic activity, failing to recognise its cultural and social role."

After 1990 ITV fell into the clutches of accountants and financiers who saw broadcasting merely as an economic activity. "Rather than seeking to earn money to make programmes, they made programmes to make money".

Fitzwalter said there were four policies that could now go some way to repairing the damage. The first would be standing up to the Murdoch empire, creating a more level competitive playing field in broadcasting. "There is no reason why the highly profitable Sky Broadcasting should not carry some public service responsibilities in line with the terrestrial broadcasters," he said.

Second would be reversing the fruitless policy of deregulation. "What we need is more effective regulation not less."

Thirdly, he said, "Government needs to encourage more professional broadcasters and showmen supported, not dominated, by people with business skills to run television. Accountants running creative industries is a recipe for disaster.



STEFANO CAGNONI

And fourth was the decentralisation of broadcasting. "We have 30 mainstream channels, unbelievably every one in London. We need to encourage the expansion of local broadcasting."

Tom O'Malley of Aberystwyth University said there was a problem talking about the decline of TV. "The BBC remains a key player and ITV is still standing and will survive," he said. "The public values PSB highly and pays the licence fee... But Ofcom pounces every time the BBC looks likely to do something to start a new service that competes with the commercial sector."

He made three predictions: firstly that ITV will cease to be "anything resembling a public service broadcaster, though it will still be called one"; secondly that Government and regulators will continue to chip away at the BBC, until only its key public service functions – news and current affairs and children's programmes are produced; and that there will be a "patchwork of interventions in mass communications to cover up the holes left by these policies.

"The political argument has to be won," he said. "We need to insist that healthy democracy depends on healthy accountable public media."

Carol Tongue, the chair of the UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity, explained that the UNESCO cultural convention on diversity said that every state should enjoy cultural sovereignty, and "the most obvious manifestation

'There is no reason why Sky should not carry some public service responsibilities in line with the terrestrial broadcasters'

Ray Fitzwalter: after 1990 ITV was run by accountants and financiers

of it is PSB. You would not have known it even existed in the debate about Digital Britain or top-slicing the licence fee. We must bring it back into the debate."

In a workshop on UK Government Policies, Sylvia Harvey, professor of broadcasting policy and chair of the newly formed Citizens' Coalition for Public Service Broadcasting, explained the Government's proposal for a "Contestable Element" of the BBC's Licence Fee in the Digital Britain White Paper.

The proposal was to "top-slice" around 3.5 per cent of licence fee income to fund public service programming in the commercial sector. The money given to the BBC to support the digital switchover also amounts to around 3.5 per cent of the fee, and this is what would be taken.

Critics, she said, object to the transfer of BBC resources to its commercial competitors, and claim that the transfer of funds will not in any case achieve the objective of increasing investment in public service programming.

In the final speech Granville Williams of the CPBF National Committee pointed out that Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV had just reported first quarter profits of £1.38bn, giving it an annual income far higher than the BBC's licence fee. "That makes Sky the biggest broadcasting operator in Europe.

UK culture minister Sion Simon had recently asked a CPBF delegation that urged him to impose a levy on Sky to fund PSB: "Why should we punish success and reward failure?"

Granville Williams said: "But that is exactly what top-slicing the BBC licence fee would do – it would punish the success to reward the failure of the market."

CPBF conference reports

The miners' strike can still teach us a lot

Kathryn Johnson reviews the key messages of the CPBF's conference curtain-raiser, 'The Miners' Strike and Politics Today'

"Ken Loach tells it like it is," said Tony Benn of Loach's film *Which Side Are You On?* But it was not only those who supported mining communities in the 1984-85 miners' strike that were moved by the gritty reality of the film.

The contrast with the miners' songs and poems of the bitter struggle for jobs and defence of communities against Thatcher's brutal state with "reality TV" could not be starker.

Benn recalled pushing the 1935 Miners' Federation election leaflet through letterboxes and the impact on him, aged 10, of the grisly figures the document contained: 7,839 miners died and 1,200,942 were injured in the 11 years before 1935. It drove Nye Bevan, then a young Welsh miner, to work passionately to establish the NHS when he became minister for health after the war.

In 1931, Florence Reece, wife of a union organiser for the United Mine Workers in Kentucky, wrote a song. "Which Side Are You On?" was written after she and her children were terrorised by deputies hired by mining companies during that year's bitter and violent struggle between the region's miners and mine owners.

John Nichols, now a correspondent for the *Nation*, was in a punk rock band during the 84-85 miners' strike. He was intrigued by the origin of Billy Bragg's version of Reece's song.

Nichols found Florence in Knoxville, Tennessee and told her the song was a hit in the United Kingdom. She told him all about the British miners' strike and said: "When anyone in the world is on strike, I am on their side."

Another stark contrast with Tony Benn's lament on the failure of the Labour Party and the TUC to support the miners.

That the defeat of the miners has left us all weaker and more exposed was palpable as Nichols and *Guardian* reporter Paul Lewis spoke. Lewis outlined the events and media treatment of the death of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 demonstrations.

The media ran with police briefings as fact that Ian Tomlinson had died of a heart attack and demonstrators prevented police medics from treating him. The lies were blown away by a New York hedge fund manager's phone footage showing a member of the Territorial Support Group, badges

'It's still rough treatment whether you're daring to challenge or just in the wrong place at the wrong time'

covered and balaclava-clad, hitting Ian from behind.

So, it's still rough treatment whether you're daring to challenge or just in the wrong place at the wrong time. At best, the technology may provide protestors with evidence to hold police to account.

Frances O'Grady, deputy general secretary of the TUC, chairing, felt Nichols retained the rebelliousness of his punk rock days as he warned that Lewis could be one of the last of investigative journalists as staggering job losses hit the media.

In the USA 16,000 journalists lost their jobs in the last year and 20,000 will lose them this year. Those that are left are under such pressure that regurgitation of corporate lobbyists' press releases is substituted for journalism. This is already happening in the UK and, Nichols warned, if Cameron gets elected it will get worse and the BBC too will be "restructured".

Nichols urged strong support for the postal workers: there is no more fundamental form of communication than being able to post a letter to someone but privatisation means the £5 letter is just around the corner.

Tony Benn was first elected MP for Chesterfield on 1 March 1984, the day the miners' strike began.

He spoke at 299 meetings in support of the miners. No wonder Frances said he was the only speaker she knew who had been called back for an encore! We need more like him who know which side they are on.

A great success

By Granville Williams

The conference "Media for All? The Challenge of Convergence", organised by the CPBF in London on 31 October, was an outstanding success.

Julian Petley, the CPBF chair, said: "I thought that the conference was our best ever. In particular, I thought that the intellectual calibre of the plenary sessions was remarkably high. We need now to capitalise on this."

The conference is part of a research project "Media Ownership in the Age of Convergence" and at the conference we presented a policy document. In the wide-ranging discussions all sorts of policy proposals were put forward. One, for

example, was about how to guarantee the future of ITN News (which provides the high-quality, one-hour *Channel 4 News*) in the uncertain future facing ITV. The idea of a Trust was proposed.

This policy idea links into a crucial theme which was emphasised throughout the conference: the vital relationship between news, information and a healthy democracy. (See the talk by John Nichols, of the US magazine the *Nation*, on the CPBF web site - www.cpbf.org.uk).

Our next steps, building on the conference, are these.

We want to have a wide debate on a set of policy proposals designed to protect high-quality, diverse public service programming and to ensure that local and regional media continue to serve their communities.

All of the contributions to the conference will go up on this web site.

We urge people to comment on the policy proposals. The project director,

Granville Williams, will prepare a final policy document by the end of December 2009.

This policy document will be used to prepare a Media Manifesto which will raise public awareness about threats to our media at local, regional and national levels.

We want media policy issues to be taken out for debate in the run-up to the next election and MPs in the nations and regions tackled on where they stand on them. The outcome of the next election will be vital for those who care about defending public service broadcasting, developing a regulatory framework to protect our media, and shaping new forms of democratically controlled media in the digital age.

If you want to contribute to the debate please send your ideas or policy proposals in to the Media Ownership project at freepress@cpbf.org.uk or write to CPBF, 23 Orford Road, London, E17 9NL.

British National Party

Should the BNP be allowed a platform?



BNP leader Nick Griffin and (bottom right) Question Time presenter David Dimbleby: controversial encounter

YES!

Julie-ann Davies says that the best way to combat racism and fascism is exposure and argument

When my name, and some of my details, first appeared on Redwatch (a far-right "hate" website) my blood froze. I am not ashamed to say my initial reaction was shock tinged with good old-fashioned fear.

However, within a few days the anxi-

ety eased enough to think the matter through. I have always argued for freedom of speech. I have seen activists, whistleblowers and others persecuted, and even prosecuted, for speaking truth to power. I have regularly exercised the right to publicly express my opinion – even though I knew others would strongly disagree with me.

This leaves me with something of a dilemma. How can I defend my own right to freedom of speech but seek to deny others the same liberty? I am not an apologist for the far-right. I find their politics, beliefs and activities repugnant. Yet, if it is acceptable for me to state that Nazis are nauseating then I must accept that Redwatch can (and did) label me a "Pinko Scumbag".

Denying the British National Party access to the media would set a worrying precedent that could be easily applied to other groups. This, depending on the circumstances, could exclude minority voices and have a chilling effect on future public debate.

If censored, Nick Griffin and the BNP would not hesitate to play the martyr card, particularly if they believe it will

win them votes. Including the BNP in pre-election debate exposes them, and the cruel truth behind their policies to the cold, hard light of serious questioning.

Once the true nature of the BNP is laid bare and Griffin's veneer-thin façade of respectability crumbles voters will leave in droves. However, grilling Griffin is only a part of the solution.

Politicians, academics and the media must also analyse why support for the BNP has been increasing. It appears a minority of the population, disillusioned with other parties, is moving to the far-right. If this sense of disenfranchisement is to be halted the reasons behind the drift must become the subject of a serious pre-election debate – even if that means including the BNP.

I have great faith in the intelligence of the British public. The appearance of Nick Griffin on television will not diminish their general common sense. The overwhelming majority know that a wolf in wolf's clothing is still a wolf. The minority, given information and opportunity will quickly see through the BNP's disguise.

British National Party

The CPBF has never endorsed the policy "no platform for fascists". We stand for free access to the airwaves and against bans or censorship. That's why we were against the Northern Ireland broadcasting ban, and why we believe that attempts to block the British National Party (BNP) from media access are counter-productive.

This does not mean we are neutral on the threat the BNP poses. Under Nick Griffin the organisation has effectively exploited the demoralisation with New Labour among sections of traditional Labour working-class support. At the same time the incessant and relentless coverage in papers like the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Express* of immigration scare stories gives another boost to the BNP. We also strongly support mobilisation against the BNP, or another racist manifestation, the English Defence League, when they seek to foster racial hatred through marches in cities like Birmingham and Leeds.

But we have to deal with the threat the BNP poses politically. This does not mean giving BNP members a free ride in the media, but challenging and probing what their real policies are. Some papers do, disgracefully, treat the BNP as a respectable mainstream party and that must be condemned. Radio One's *Newsbeat* was criticised recently for the lenient treatment of two leading BNP members, who posed as young BNP supporters, and were able to make racist remarks unchallenged on the programme. At no stage was any mention made of their real identity and long-standing involvement in the BNP.

In a real sense we need to see the media as a spotlight, which at its best can bring into sharp focus the ragbag of racist policies which the BNP support, and the violent, often criminal, nature of many of its members. One of the lessons that has been learnt in campaigning against the BNP in local elections is that you need to challenge and expose them with facts and solid arguments, rather than slogans.

The same applies when they appear in print or on the airwaves. Reporters and interviewers have a duty not to give BNP members an easy ride but confront them with well-researched questions about both the particular people they are interviewing and the specific racist policies the organisation espouses.

Granville Williams

NO!

Mick Gosling thinks that Nick Griffin's appearance on *Question Time* gave spurious legitimacy to his odious views

When Mr Haque, a 67-year-old Muslim pensioner, was battered to the ground by a racist gang in front of his three-year-old granddaughter outside a mosque in Tooting, South-West London, there was no one there to help him.

He died a few days later.

This is the reality of racism in Britain today. And everywhere you want to compare statistics, where the BNP establishes a niche or increases its vote the levels of racist attacks and community tensions rise as well.

The ultimate censorship is death, Mr Haque suffered it.

Discussion about freedom of speech, censorship and lofty ideals of intellectual debate may exist in academia but it is divorced from the brutal realities of what is happening here, right now.

This is why I support a position of no platform for fascists. Just look at the viewing figures for BBC's *Question Time* on which the odious Nick Griffin appeared. Instead of the standard 2.4 million viewers, 8 million tuned in.

He could have claimed the earth was flat but he was able to present himself as a martyr. The attacks on him from the press, including the *Daily Mail* and *Express*, those well-known bastions of racial tolerance, would only have helped the BNP's cause.

New Labour, Tory and Lib-Dem MPs on the panel who all support repressive policies on immigration controls that fuel racism got away with murder. Not one of them was asked a serious question about their policies on jobs, housing, education and the NHS (privatise, privatise and privatise) that have allowed the BNP to establish their foothold in British politics in devastated working class communities.

A policy of "critical engagement" by journalists is even worse. The BNP will simply say you only want to talk to us to stitch us up. More victimhood for racist thugs.

Obviously there will be times when journalists have to ask BNP members about their activities. That is not the same as providing them with a platform as the BBC did.

Straightforward questions for the CPBF arise. If journalists abiding by the NUJ's code of conduct refuse to have anything to do with the BNP will we support them? If members of BECTU had pulled the plugs on the *Question Time* programme would we have supported them? If members of the Communication Workers Union refuse to deliver BNP election leaflets will we support them?

Which side are we on?



www.bbc.co.uk/comedy

Ministers defend product placement

By Nicholas Jones and Barry White

Media standards groups opposed to product placement on British television programmes will have the chance to offer advice on possible safeguards.

Sion Simon, a junior minister at the Department of Media, Culture and Sport (DMCS), told a CPBF delegation on Tuesday 6 October, that the Government was anxious to help the industry. Ministers supported product placement because they believed it would give "immediate cash benefits" to struggling television companies.

Although consultations are still taking place, Simon said there would need to be some "convincing arguments" to change the mind of the culture secretary, Ben Bradshaw, who did not think concerns about product placement were the kind of "big deal" the opponents were making out. At a meeting with the Voice of the Listener and Viewer, Ben Bradshaw confirmed that this was indeed his position.

Product placement would not be allowed on children's programmes and would exclude alcohol, gambling and certain other products. This was the

"direction of travel" and if media standards campaigners thought they could help advise on further safeguards their input would be welcomed.

Simon indicated the Government has no intention of imposing restraints or regulations on the development of newspaper websites. Currently the online television and radio output of the press does not have to follow the guidelines on invasion of privacy and political impartiality which apply to mainstream broadcasters.

When asked if there were any "red lines" within DCMS defining limits on the degree to which newspapers would have the freedom to innovate online, Simon said "No". It was not inconceivable that at some point in the future there might have to be Government intervention to impose standards on the online output of the press, but there were such no concerns at present. "We are not saying we would never regulate... but the Government is certainly in no rush to regulate".

The audio-visual output of newspaper websites is currently self-regulated under the Press Complaints Commission and outside the reach of Ofcom.

The Labour MP Neil Gerrard, who arranged for the CPBF delegation to meet Sion Simon, said despite the decision to allow product placement the Government seems aware that safeguards might be needed and ministers were anxious to allow for consultation.

Meanwhile, the campaign against top-slicing the licence fee gathers pace. Labour MP Gerald Kaufman gave his support at a lobby of Parliament on 14 October.

The former chair of the parliamentary culture select committee condemned the plan to hive off 3.5 per cent of licence fee income as a "stupid piece of legislation." Some 60 NUJ and BECTU representatives and others from across the country briefed MPs on their fears for the BBC's future independence from Government should ministers proceed with the controversial proposal.

On 5 November the National Union of Journalists delivered 1,000 postcards to the Government protesting against proposals to hand a slice of the TV licence fee to commercial organisations. Hundreds more have been sent direct to the DCMS by supporters of the NUJ and the other organisations including the CPBF involved in the campaign.

PCC does its best to avoid public scrutiny

By Julian Petley

In October 2007 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) published the consultation document *Freedom of Information Act 2000: Designation of Additional Public Authorities*.

The CPBF has long argued that the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) should be considered a public body for the purposes of the Act, and made a detailed response to the consultation.

In July, the Ministry finally published its response to the consultation.

The PCC isn't mentioned by name, but is clearly an example of what the MoJ document calls a "professional and voluntary regulator" whose functions include "advising on professional issues and, in particular, the investigation of complaints against members".

It continues: "In order to do this, it is essential that they have their members' confidence and regulators need to be able to obtain full disclosure of the circumstances that have given rise to the complaint.

"Some respondents to the consultation suggested that member bodies

would be less likely to provide full disclosure to their regulatory body – and where membership is voluntary, less likely to subscribe and provide essential funding – if they knew that the regulator might disclose sensitive information they have provided in response to a request under the Act."

This is, of course, exactly what the PCC argued in its response to the consultation.

Oddly, given that the consultation concerned freedom of information, the MoJ didn't publish the responses, and so – yes, you guessed – we had to invoke the Act to winkle out the PCC response.

As it happens, our campaign in this area had already prodded the PCC into showing its hand, so we weren't surprised to read that "a significant percentage of the complaints handled by the Commission are about intrusions into individuals' privacy.

"The whole point about making such a complaint is to protect oneself from further scrutiny about private facts.

"The threat of disclosure of such information and objections to third parties would make the

Commission's important work in this area impossible".

However, this argument is severely weakened by the fact that in 2008 only 23.8 per cent of possible breaches of the PCC code concerned privacy, whilst the vast majority (71.9 per cent) concerned accuracy and opportunity to reply.

Furthermore, were the PCC a public authority for the purposes of freedom of information, the minority of privacy complaints could explicitly be excluded from scrutiny under the terms of the Act.

The Commission's response also insists the PCC's "main function is to conciliate and adjudicate complaints... It is not a "regulator" in the licensing or legal sense of the term". Precisely.

With an even narrower remit than its predecessor, the Press Council, the PCC is simply the equivalent of the customer services department of a large commercial company.

This isn't even self-regulation, as the Commission's utterly futile "enquiry" into phone hacking by *News of the World* journalists clearly proves, and the sooner this is recognised and addressed, the better.

Review

Pictures of the great miners' strike of 1984-85



UNFINISHED BUSINESS: THE MINERS' STRIKE FOR JOBS 1984-85
Peter Arkell and Ray Rising
Lupus Books
£7.99

By Granville Williams

Unfinished Business is an attractive with excellent photographs from the 1984-85 miners' strike. The selected photographs are the work of photographers on *News Line*. For those unfamiliar with the history of organisations on the revolutionary left, *News Line* was the daily paper of the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP). This book is written by Peter Arkell and Ray Rising who were *News Line* photographers during the great strike.

When I was chasing material to include in *Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath*, I wanted to use some photos from *The Miners' Strike 1984-85* by *News Line* photographers and reporters (New Park Publications). Unfortunately I didn't succeed in tracking down any contacts but this book fills the gap.

The book is in two parts. The first includes Ray Rising's vivid eye-witness account, with photos, of events in Stainforth in South Yorkshire in August

1984. "The extraordinary sights," he points out, "testified to the civil war nature of the miners' strike"

I don't agree with some of the points made in the book – for example, the assessment of the influence of the WRP in the strike or the blanket condemnation of trade union leaders. Dave Douglass, former NUM branch secretary at Hatfield Colliery, in his own review of *Unfinished Business*, makes a strong point.

"I know what happened at a mass meeting of the Immingham dockers addressed by Ron Todd, the TGWU general secretary. He took the platform to plead with the Immingham men to hold the line, not scab on the miners, plus the Aslef, RMT and NUS unions, which were all blocking fuel and iron ore, or betray their own agreements and standards.

"My informant tells me he thought they were never going to get out of the hall, as big, burly dockers attacked them. Todd was hit with one of the iron bolts thrown at the stage and I have it on good authority that he ended up making his appeal for solidarity with blood running down his face.

"So perhaps the accusation of 'traitor' should be directed not at union leaders in this case, but at rank and file scabs. There is a brand of left workerism which refuses to see 'ordinary workers' as ever being at fault. Sorry, comrades, but scabs are responsible in the final analysis for their own actions and their own lack of courage."*

But the overall account of the strike and its aftermath is well told. The authors cite a *Financial Times* report from March 2009, The number of adults claiming incapacity benefit in the English and Welsh coalfields was a staggering 336,000 in 2007, and since the financial crash in September 2008 the number of unemployed men claiming benefit has risen between 75-100 per cent depending on the area.

The second part of the book is a selection of photographs arranged by themes: On the frontline; Women

against pit closures; Communities come together; Paying in blood; The NUM leaders; On the march and Aftermath.

These photos are powerful and evocative, capturing different facets of the strike – the warmth and solidarity of the communities struggling to feed families and striking miners; the determination, energy and humour of Women Against Pit Closures; and the menacing force displayed by police at Orgreave and elsewhere.

The final photo in the Aftermath section of the book is Steve Tulley, former NUM branch secretary of Frickley Colliery which closed in 1993, standing in front of derelict miners' houses in South Elmsall, West Yorkshire. I live a couple of miles from South Elmsall and saw a confident community unravel once the pit closed and a key source of employment and prosperity with it. It was just beginning to pull itself together when the current recession hit.

The book rightly points out "the miners faced challenges which are now back on the social agenda 25 years later" and concludes "the great miners' strike remains unfinished business"

We have the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, caused by the rush for easy profits of commercial and investment banks, hedge funds, insurance companies, private equity firms and other financial institutions. Governments give massive bailouts for banks, whilst recession and mass unemployment loom ever larger for working people. *Unfinished Business* indeed!

● You can read the full review of *Unfinished Business* by Dave Douglass at: www.cpgb.org.uk/worker/778/classstruggle.php

● You can buy *Unfinished Business* at www.aworldtwin.net/purchase/buyUnfinishedBusiness.html

● You can buy the CPBF book *Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath* edited by Granville Williams (£12.50 inc P&P) at cpbf.org.uk/shafted

THE MEDIA AND THE MINERS' STRIKE

David Peace (novelist – *GB84, The Damned United*)

Granville Williams (editor *Shafted: The media, the miners' strike and the aftermath*)

Wednesday November 25, 1.15pm

The Green Room, Media and Journalism Building,
University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield HD1 3DH

News

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tion, he said, was: how might a policy of consolidation which accommodates the business demands of media enterprises also accommodate the need for diversity of voice in a well-functioning democracy?

ITV, he said, had a long-standing PSB obligation to provide regional news but now says it can't afford it, and Ofcom agrees. There needed to be new initiatives to solve the problem of vanishing local and regional news.

The proposed Independently Funded News Consortia (IFNCs) would operate on cross-media basis and there was an arguable case for greater flexibility in the cross-media ownership rules to support consolidation of local media groups.

This would be acceptable, he said, provided the cross-media consortia were required to meet public criteria including the production of journalism in the public interest.

Such criteria would include the diversity of stories covered, the number of journalists employed, a commitment to long-haul investigations and to professional editorial standards.

"This way we could have well-resourced journalism in a world which can no longer afford it."

The final rallying call came from NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear who spoke of the union's Journalism Matters campaign.

The campaign demands that laws and regulations are enforced and strengthened, for the plurality and

diversity of ownership. "These are too important to be left to companies motivated by profit," he said.

He called for public subsidy for public service journalism. "The argument that it would undermine media freedom no longer holds. We must not accept the idea that if rich people determine there is no profit in news that communities should be deprived of it. "But the subsidies and tax breaks must clearly have a public purpose, for publicly-owned not-for-profit print and broadcasting facilities.

"When we present these ideas to politicians they say they like them but we can't afford them. The question of the future of the media is not a question of resource but a question of political will... Cutting the BBC's income is not the only way of doing it, but for politicians it is the easy way. Our job is to make such solutions the hardest way.

"There will be a battle of ideas. We need to win the argument."

● Graham Murdock, author of *Media in the Age of Marketization*, set a philosophical base for the discussions when he introduced the concept of "digital commons."

He said the historic notion of commons has always been "haunted by the reality of enclosure" and public media now were threatened by the power of big companies to bring them under control.

"There must be a countervailing force to companies like Google," he said. "Google has bought up books to

digitalise them by doing a deal with libraries and we must not let that mistake happen with PSB. It would be a great betrayal to make people pay a company again to make use of what they have already paid for through the licence fee."

● Katharine Sarikakis of the Institute of Communications Studies at Leeds University said there was a "political malaise about the way that those working in the media are called on to fulfil their roles.

"Journalists have their codes of ethics to deal with the expectations of society about what they should do, seeking the truth and to check the Government and authorities, and on the other side they have the very real pressures from the managements and ownership of media and the economic pressures that media industries face. "The state is heavy-handed on individual wrongdoing and there are more regulations and guidelines on individual behaviour while at the same time the state is withdrawing from the control of corporations."

● "People are entitled to their opinions but not their facts", said Alexander Stille of Columbia University, New York, "but we are reaching the point where everyone has their own facts."

He was speaking about the effect on journalism of the influence of Italian Prime Minister and media magnate Silvio Berlusconi.

More reports on pages two and three

Free Press is edited by Julie-ann Davies on behalf of the National Council

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AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

f) Fewer than 500 members	£25
g) 500 to 1,000	£30
h) 1,000 to 10,000	£50
i) 10,000 to 50,000	£115
j) 50,000 to 100,000	£225
k) Over 100,000	£450

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Tel _____

Email _____

Organisation (if applicable) _____

Return form to CPBF, 2nd floor, Vi and Garner Smith House, 23 Orford Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9NL Tel: 020 8521 5932