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Media safety fears over China Olympics

By Barry White

In mid-April, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) undertook a four-day official visit to China. The mood of the delegation was positive, anticipating the prospects for a new era of dialogue between Chinese and Western journalists. But after a series of high-level meetings the IFJ says concerns remain over the safety of journalists and media staff in the run up to the Olympics.

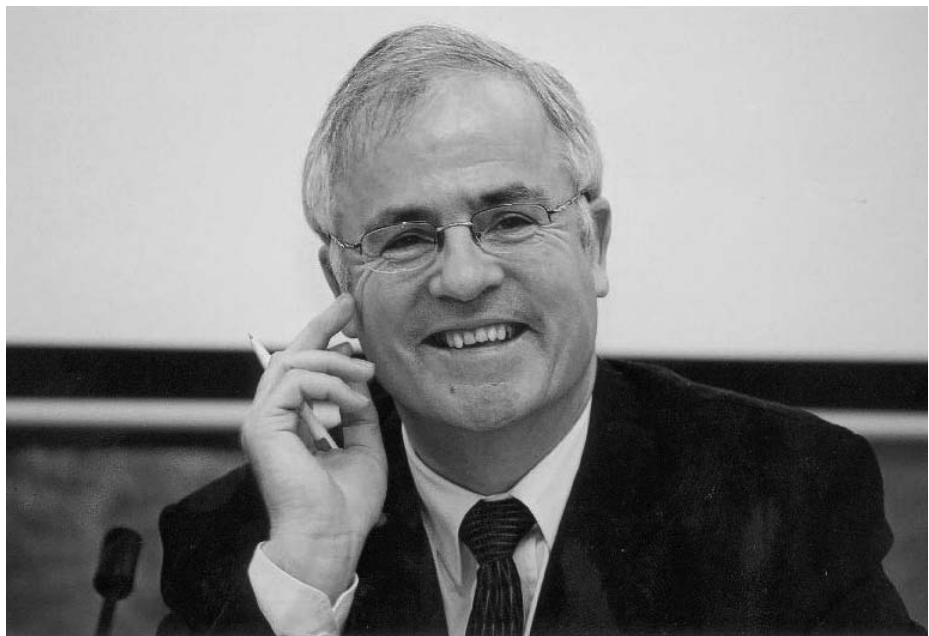
"It has been a sweet and sour experience," said Aidan White, IFJ general secretary. "We are impressed by a new willingness to talk through our differences over press freedom and journalism, but the problems facing reporters on the ground cannot be ignored."

The IFJ met with Chinese state officials as well as leading media and the government-backed All China Journalists Association and talked to a number of foreign correspondents, some of whom have found themselves threatened in the wake of Chinese anger over foreign media coverage of disturbances in Tibet and the Olympic torch rally, which has run into protests on its way through some major world cities.

"In the last few weeks some journalists have been threatened and there has been an increase in violations of promises to let media work without interference," said White. "It's time to lower the temperature and start talking about making journalism safer and take reporters out of the political crossfire."

The IFJ is planning immediate follow-up work on actions to ensure journalists' safety during the Olympics and to establish a framework for joint actions designed to improve communications between Chinese journalists and their colleagues overseas.

"We have our eyes wide open in this process and we have raised concerns over journalists in jail," said White.



IFJ general secretary Aidan White: 'Sweet and sour' experience in China

"Our key aim is mutual understanding. We may not get agreement but talking issues through allows us to challenge the prejudice and hostility that puts journalists at risk."

The IFJ mission also met with the Beijing Olympic Committee to discuss arrangements to protect journalists. Around 30,000 officially accredited and non-accredited journalists are expected in Beijing for the Games.

After the Games in August, the IFJ aims to work closely with China's journalists to ensure that promises of press freedom made before the games and new guidelines giving journalists the right to work freely will remain in place. The IFJ says there have been more than 200 violations of these guidelines since they were introduced last year.

"We recognise and welcome steps taken to allow journalists to work freely, but this must not be a one-off

Olympics gesture. China must deliver on its promises and open the door to a durable process of dialogue and co-operation among journalists," said White. "Change is inevitable and journalism can play a vital part in confronting ignorance, misconceptions and hostility along the way."

The members of the mission were: Aidan White, Gabriel Baglo (IFJ Africa Director, Senegal); Mogens Blicher Bjerregård (President, Danish Union of Journalists); Arne Konig (Swedish Journalists Federation and Chair of the European Federation of Journalists); Ulrike Maercks-Franzen (Deutsche Journalisten Union-Verdi, Germany); Michael Klehm (Deutscher Journalisten Verband, Germany); Nikos Megrelis (IFJ Executive Committee, JUADN, Greece); Christopher Warren (Federal Secretary, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Australia); Don Gasper (Hong Kong Journalists Association).

Berlusconi wins again

His record is dire – but he dominates the media, writes **Granville Williams**

There is a single striking fact about Silvio Berlusconi's record in government. He was in office for just eight months in 1994, but during his second period between 2001–2006 Italy's economy went into rapid decline. Ten years ago Italy was second only to Germany among the leading five European economies. Now it has fallen behind Spain and Greece. It is deeply ironic, to put it mildly, that his election slogan was *Rialzati Italia* ("Get Up, Italy").

If Berlusconi's economic record is dire, so too is the way he exploited his unresolved conflicts of interests as a media entrepreneur and politician. Berlusconi's near monopoly of commercial television, his publishing empire and other commercial interests make him Italy's richest person.

Bill Emmott, former editor of the *Economist*, printed the 2001 cover "Unfit to govern Italy" after a long investigation into Berlusconi's finances and legal entanglements. He



said: "If Italy were a candidate for EU membership, such concentration of power would be an obstacle. Since it was a founder member in 1957, neither governments nor the European commission dare raise this issue."

Berlusconi has been both the beneficiary and promoter of a culture of illegality and short-termism during his years in power. Take for example his announcement to hold his first cabinet meeting in Naples to symbolise his determination to resolve the city's rubbish crisis. It is a problem which his party is complicit in.

The Camorra – the

Neapolitan equivalent of the Mafia – are big in waste disposal, with 43 per cent of Italy's trash and toxic waste ending up in Campania, the region of which Naples is the capital. *Gomorra* by Roberto Saviano, published in 2006, sold 700,000 copies and became a best-seller in Italy. It described the ways in which Campania has been turned into a kind of inferno with all the illegal burning of trash and dumping of industrial waste.

The Camorra benefited from Berlusconi's moves to limit the power of magistrates who were investigating his own financial affairs. In 1994,

Berlusconi: conflict of interest

after Berlusconi's Forza Italia coalition won virtually all the Sicilian seats in parliament a Sicilian Mafioso was overheard on a police wiretap saying, "Beautiful, all the candidates my friends, all of them elected." Two former members of the old Christian Democratic Party who were convicted of corruption, but acquitted of collusion with the Camorra, returned to parliament and sat on the anti-Mafia commission.

One explanation for Berlusconi's election victory was the weak performance of Romano Prodi's fragile centre-left government, in office for only 23 months. It did begin to tackle the appalling state of public finances, but only by raising taxes.

But the central explanation for Berlusconi's success is his grip on Italy's media. Through his Mediaset empire he controls most of Italian private television, a point reinforced by the January European Court of Justice ruling that competition was smothered in Italian broadcasting. Now through his political interference in the RAI public broadcasting system he will again have influence over some 90 per cent of Italian TV.

Whistleblower Vanunu seeks asylum in Norway

By Barry White

Israeli nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu has repeated his request for asylum in Norway. However, Norwegian officials are holding out little hope that this request – his second – will be successful.

Vanunu, whom Israeli authorities have barred from leaving Israel, sent his application to Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg early in April. His previous asylum application to Norway in 2004 was rejected.

Vanunu was convicted of treason and sentenced to 18 years in jail for telling the *Sunday Times* newspaper in 1986 about his work as a technician at Israel's main atomic reactor. His disclosures exploded the secrecy

surrounding the Israeli nuclear arsenal.

He was released from prison in April 2004, but with severe human rights restrictions based on those operated by the British during their mandate in Palestine and later taken up by the Israeli authorities.

Denied the right to leave Israel, Vanunu has given many interviews to non-Israeli journalists and was prevented from celebrating Christmas in Bethlehem. In 2007 he was sentenced to a further six months in jail for violating the terms of his parole. According to some press reports, he is due to appear in Court again in mid-May and could be returned to prison.

The Norwegian daily *Dagsavisen* has cited an Israeli diplomat as saying that giving Vanunu asylum would be

considered interference in Israel's internal affairs and a "sign of the generally anti-Israeli sentiment in Norway".

Israel neither confirms nor denies having the Middle East's only nuclear weapons under a policy of "strategic ambiguity".

Declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, Vanunu has been mentioned as a possible recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, which is granted annually in Oslo. He was nominated in 2004 by Irish Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Corrigan.

The University of Tromsø in north Norway granted Vanunu an honorary doctorate in 2000 and its rector recently said that he would be willing to employ Vanunu.

Government prepares for convergence

By Granville Williams

By the time you read this the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform will have organised three Convergence Think Tank seminars, with more proposed. The purpose of the seminars, and a good deal of other activity by Ofcom and Intellect, the trade association for the UK technology industry, is to prepare for the next Communications Act and put in place a new regulatory structure for converged media.

Clearly something important is happening, even after we discount some of the more extreme predictions of the impact of convergence. The seminars are dealing with vital issues but ones which, to judge from the vast majority of participants, are being shaped by the big players in telecoms, IT, and broadcasting media. The seminars were first proposed by the former culture secretary, James Purnell, and have been picked up by his successor, Andy Burnham. It is clear that this series of seminars is unlikely to produce any radical new proposals or sharp redirection of Government

thinking about convergence. Indeed the message from Intellect in its submission is clear: "Policies and regulation are still seen by many players to either inhibit or impose unnecessary costs on business... The challenge now is to continue to regulate new content platforms and providers as lightly as possible..."

The CPBF in its submission highlighted points which need to be part of the policy debate.

The impact of convergence on ownership must be considered. Major changes are taking place in patterns of ownership as a result of convergence. Big telecommunications companies like Orange and BT are bundling their broadband services and offering on-demand TV services. Online virtual worlds and video gaming are becoming targets for either acquisition or further development by global media groups such as Vivendi and Sony.

The new information providers – search engine companies, telecom companies, internet service providers, and the like – play an important role in the selection, organisation and flow of information and therefore need to be brought into a new analysis of media

ownership in the age of convergence.

Public service values and content should be at the heart of any development of broadband infrastructure. How this can be achieved should be a key part of the policy debate. Policies driven by purely commercial, market-led priorities will marginalise and weaken public service content. It is vital in the converged media world that citizens have the choice of a diverse range of high-quality public service programming provided free from commercialism.

Universal access to broadband internet and digital broadcasting must be a policy priority. According to Ofcom's *The UK Communications Market 2007* more than half of UK households had broadband access by March 2007. However whilst more people are clearly able to access more and more sources of news and information, the National Consumer Council report *Consumer Futures (2007)* identifies that the elderly and poorer families are excluded and vulnerable.

The full submission for the Convergence Think Tank seminars is on the CPBF website: www.cpbf.org.uk

Gongadze verdict 'welcome'

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has welcomed the convictions of three Ukrainian policemen who witnessed the murder of journalist Gyorgy Gongadze, but has called on authorities to find and prosecute the person or people who ordered his killing.

In mid-March, the court handed down convictions and jail terms of 12 years to two policemen and 13 years to one policeman for their roles in Gongadze's murder. In its judgement the court said that the killing had been ordered at the highest level of the ministry of internal affairs and that the motivation was political and related to Gongadze's journalism.

"These convictions confirm that Gongadze was murdered



Gongadze: murdered

by agents of the state for his journalism," said IFJ president Jim Boumelha. "However, the people who ordered Gongadze's killing are still free. It is time for the authorities to take action to bring these people to justice."

Gyorgy Gongadze was kidnapped by four policemen on 16 September 2000. His beheaded body was found later in the woods outside of Kiev. Since then the NUJ and IFJ have campaigned tirelessly to bring those responsible to justice.

NUJ promises support for terror investigator

The NUJ annual delegate conference in April pledged full support to a journalist who faces "unprecedented legal action" by the police under the Terrorism Act 2000.

Shiv Malik has spent years investigating terrorist groups based in the UK and has published articles in the *Sunday Times*, the *New Statesman* and *Prospect* as well as broadcasting on the BBC.

He is now the subject of a court order under the Terrorism Act to hand over notes of an interview with Hassan Butt, a Manchester-based former member of an Al-Qaeda linked organisation. Malik is basing a book upon Butt's experiences. If Malik does not comply with the court order, he faces jail.

Malik's London home was raided by Greater Manchester Police on the morning of 17

March, when they demanded to see his notes. Subsequently the Manchester Crown Court ruled in the police's favour, after the judge heard the case "in camera".

An appeal was launched in the High Court in London in mid-April, which was being heard as *Free Press* went to press. If successful, the case could go to a full judicial review in the High Court.

NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear has warned that the police now see journalists as "simply another tool of intelligence gathering".

"This case is of enormous importance to the future of investigative journalism" he told *Press Gazette*. "The police argue that it would be in the public interest for them to obtain Shiv's notes, yet such action would fundamentally undermine the ability of journalists to do their work."

Interview

LIFE ON FLAT EARTH

Guardian freelance Nick Davies's scorching critique of contemporary British journalism, *Flat Earth News*, has created a sensation in the media world. He tells CPBF co-chair **Tim Gopsill** why he wrote the book

Nick Davies has taken up smoking again – and stopped, and started, and stopped again. It is not the stress from the attacks on his new book, *Flat Earth News*, that has done it, he says – virtually all the response has been positive – but there has simply been so much of it: hundreds of emails, invitations to speak at meetings – two or three a week – press, TV and radio interviews ... He is feeling the kind of pressure that the book says is brought to bear on the mass of working journalists themselves.

For our industry, *Flat Earth News* is something of a sensation – and if it's not, it ought to be. It brings up truths about our work that have long been underground – understood by journalists but not often openly expressed. Davies found “a huge camp of journalists, print and broadcast, national and local, from this country and numerous

countries around the world, getting in touch, generally saying “Thank God you said that. Let me tell you something that's going on in my place”.

But the British media being what they are, it is the critics that made the early running. *Flat Earth News* goes for what he calls the “Fleet Street Establishment” – the *Sunday Times*, *Observer*, *Daily Mail* and the Press Association (PA) – which have been “pouring invective down on the book”. It accuses them variously of concocting stories by dubious means, of running stories they know to be untrue, and of generally following the rules of what Davies calls “churnalism” – the practice of continually regurgitating unchecked stories that may or may not be true, which passes for journalism in the much of the British press.

“Our job is to check facts to get to the truth,” he says, “but in the world of churnalism with a ‘ch’ the process of

checking has been reduced to a joke procedure where journalists pick up, or sometimes make up, an allegation, trot off to the other side, get a quote and stick it in the paper.

“That does not amount to checking. That does not enable them to get to the truth. In fact what it allows them to do, is that with the exception of serious libels, they can publish any damn allegation they want because it's covered up with a denial. That's not checking. That's not getting to the truth. It's disgusting.”

So Davies can meet the accusations from people like former *Observer* editor Roger Alton and David Leppard from the *Sunday Times* who say he didn't ask them for their side of the story by pointing to the enormous amount of checking he did into the stories about them.

He worked on the book for 18 months non-stop, with eight researchers, including a team at the journalism department at Cardiff University. (He got outside funding for the Cardiff research but paid for the rest out of his own pocket). There are half a dozen stories that he checked in extravagant detail, to the extent that his subjects were effectively bang to rights.

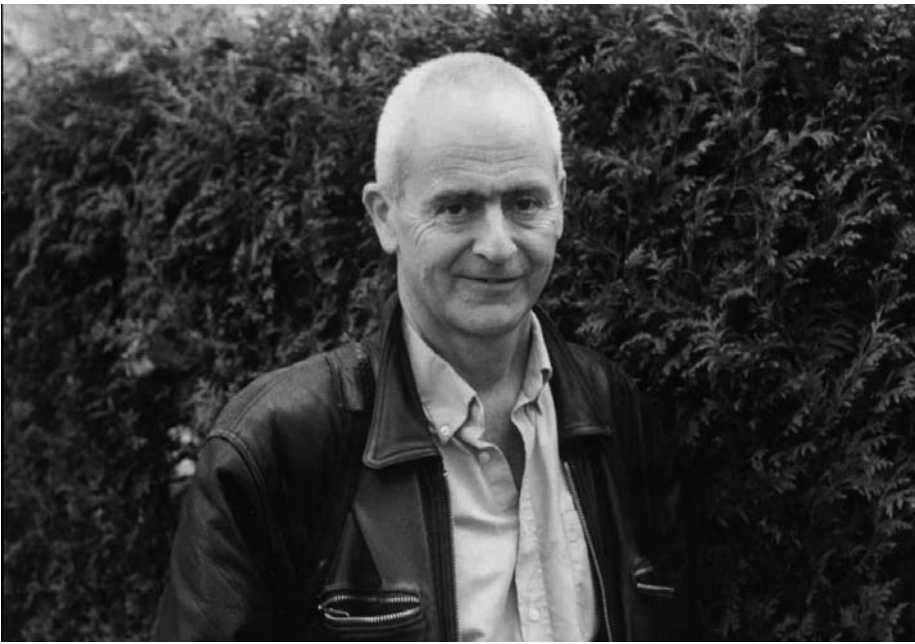
Davies is a reporter who likes to get into long-term investigations, into areas like crime and social problems. He decided on this one, he says, because of the coverage of Iraq, the constant assumption that there were weapons of mass destruction that threatened the west, in the run-up to the invasion of 2003. “I wanted to see why the media put out so much falsehood.

“For better or worse” – this will surprise some people – “I am pro-war, and the problem with [the stories about Iraq's] WMD for me is a journalistic one. What irritated was that in the 12 months after the invasion, as it became increasingly clear that the WMD didn't exist, that the media with very, very few exceptions debated that as though it were merely a problem of intelligence agencies and government. Whereas, of course, the misinformation had a third corner to it. The global media. And you stand back and ask the question that any hack would ask: ‘Why? Why did that happen?’

“I started off with absolutely no idea of where I was going to go. My formula, whenever I start with one of these long-term projects, is always the same. You ask obvious questions of accessible people. And because I'm researching an industry in which I've worked for 31 years, I've got some ideas of my own based on my own experience, and also I know masses of hacks so I know what they say. And I have this vague idea that it's something to do with what we're now calling churnalism.”

“And asking obvious questions of accessible sources, there are soon four

Interview



Nick Davies: 'The book is not an attack on individual journalists'

separate leads pointing towards these stories." On the *Observer's* stream of articles backing the invasion, written by political editor Kamal Ahmed and security specialist David Rose, for instance, he says: "I did a massive media database search on everything that David Rose had written, everything that Kamal had written. Masses and masses of checking to see whether these stories are true. So there's a story by Kamal which says, 'Downing Street sources say that next week there's going to be a report from the Strategic Studies Institute saying such and such. So then I get the report which is published three days later, and it doesn't say such and such at all."

"So, you look around for the correction. It wasn't there. So now that's becoming a little bit more solid. These

guys were running false stories, but why? So then I start contacting *Observer* staff. I spoke to a dozen *Observer* staff. And you slowly start to get this picture of what was going on inside that newsroom. So then I get onto David Rose. Long, long conversations with him about exactly how these false stories were passed into the newspaper. And then I have a long conversation with Kamal, and a detailed exchange of memos, and then I took the whole lot to [deputy editor] Paul Webster, and said, 'let's talk through all this'".

It has to be said that spending so much time and effort on a single project is well beyond the opportunities open to most journalists, so how would a churnalist have done it? "Well if you take the current convention," says Davies, "what I would do is I'd collect all this anecdotal evidence, and then I would ring the editors and say, 'is it true that your journalists are so overworked that they don't check most of their facts and recycle a lot of second-hand material?' Well I didn't do that because it's a complete waste of time. The *Press Gazette* rang those people when they were publishing extracts from the book and asked 'Is it true?' and they said 'Absolutely untrue. It's all garbage.' Marvellous."

"When you've got the story right, and people are stung by it, they can't complain about the story, so instead they find something else to complain about. I talked to Kamal through every single allegation – he then gets on his high horse and says 'Nick didn't listen to what I said'. So all that happens is that the angle of criticism moves."

Davies says he makes "a distinction between accuracy and truth". This is the point of one of his most discomfiting revelations: the reliance of British

national papers on the PA, the source of more news copy than everything else added together, and the agency's inadequacy for the task. A group of nine PA correspondents, journalists who are highly esteemed for the accuracy of their work, wrote a hurt and angry letter to the *Press Gazette*, but Davies says: "I'm not attacking PA reporters. I'm saying they are honest in intent, and I think that agency reporting tends to be accurate. But newsrooms need to recognise that PA is not trying to tell the truth. All PA is trying to do is to be accurate. I quoted the editor saying what's important is what's between the quote marks."

It's the oldest problem in journalism: how to report someone who is lying. "If Blair makes a speech you can produce an accurate account of it, that is one thing," Davies explains, "but you may well not be telling the truth."

But papers depend on PA. They can't cover every single story themselves. What are they supposed to do? "Well, you have a decently staffed newsroom with the right objectives, you set aside some reporters to go out and check the truth." This is now approaching the heart of the matter, which is, what are journalists, and the NUJ, supposed to do about it?

Davies doesn't claim to have the answer. "I think there's no way out of this. With a very few exceptions the book is not an attack on individual journalists at all. It's an attack on the structures that constrain them. As long as newspapers, broadly speaking, are in the hands of these big corporations, they will impose their logic on us and I don't see a way out of that in the real world."

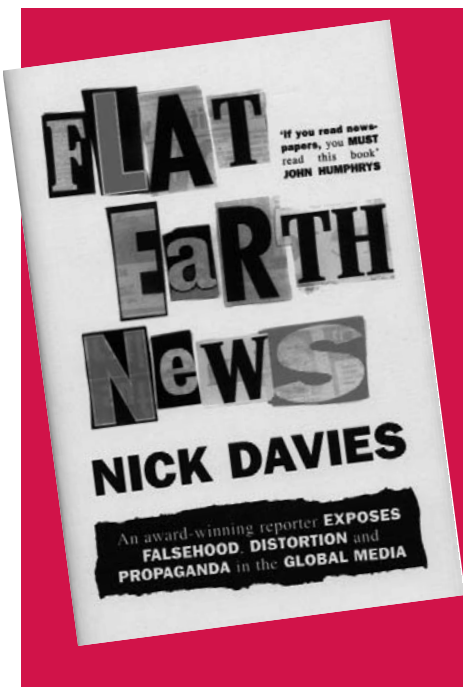
"A lot of outsiders think 'Ah, it's because you're all cynical liars. You couldn't care less.' I'm afraid to say there are some cynical liars in our profession, but most journalists are not. Most journalists want to tell the truth. There are still a lot of seriously good journalists working in British media."

"But every time any one of those good people says to their newsdesk, 'You have to give me time to work on this difficult story', or 'this story may not sell newspapers, but it's important, so you have to give me space', every time somebody wins a battle like that we hold back the tide of churnalism."

"And in that context a well-organised union in an office can be important. And if the union keeps staffing levels in an office, that would help. We might not be able to stop the papers, but we can negotiate, we can do our best."

So the NUJ does have a job it can do? "Yes," he says. "There's something to be fought for."

This article first appeared in the April issue of Journalist, the magazine of the National Union of Journalists.



Tories back licence fee top-slice

By Barry White

The Conservative Party has come out in favour of “top-slicing” the licence fee, with some cash being handed to other broadcasters to pay for children’s television and current affairs programmes.

The “vast bulk” of the £3.2bn raised by the licence fee would still go to the BBC, the Conservatives’ latest paper on broadcasting said. Shadow culture secretary Jeremy Hunt has called for a new public service broadcasting commission to be formed to “more-fairly” distribute revenue from the licence fee.

The paper states: “Other organisations should only be able to bid for licence fee money in specific areas where plurality of provision [is] lack-

ing ... with the BBC continuing to receive the vast bulk of the licence fee.” It also says the BBC must reduce its website dominance or risk crowding out innovation.

The paper also backs local television, arguing it should be given greater prominence by policy makers. The party paper was published days before Ofcom launched its second public service broadcasting review on 10 April.

Meanwhile in an exclusive interview given to the *Press Gazette* published on 11 April, the Conservative leader David Cameron gave his support to press self-regulation and the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). “We have no plans to change self-regulation. I think the PCC has settled down

and the system is now working better than it once did. But that’s not to say there isn’t an ongoing need to make sure the press acts responsibly.”

In the same interview Cameron came out in favour of extending the Freedom of Information Act to include private bodies carrying out Government functions, a review currently under Government consideration, following public consultation launched last autumn. However, he did not link this extension to the PCC, which remains exempt from the act’s provisions.

Details of the CPBF response to government on why the PCC should be subject to the Freedom of Information Act may be found at the CPBF web site at: www.cpbf.org.uk

Media ‘more open to manipulation’

By Mick Gosling

At a London meeting organised by Media Workers Against the War in April. Investigative journalist Nick Davies, discussed further the strong reaction to his book *Flat Earth News*.

His work was drubbed in the media. In particular, his contention that the *Observer* ran false stories outraged proprietors and senior editors alike. But his argument was quietly welcomed by many underpaid and overworked journalists who shoulder a heavier workload and churn out more and more stories on a daily basis.

Davies said this increased pressure leaves journalists with little chance to do

even the most basic research. This makes it almost impossible for them to challenge Downing Street misinformation, particularly in relation to the Iraq war.

Davies worked on the book with researchers from the Journalism Department of Cardiff University. Their statistical analysis found that 54 per cent of British home news stories are based mainly, or exclusively upon, copy generated by public relations officers and organisations.

Perhaps of even greater concern is their finding that the core information in only 12 per cent of stories is actually checked at all. This, Davies argues, makes the news media “hugely vulnerable” to manipulation and disinformation.

Large corporations and their public relations companies can cover their tracks and concoct phoney front groups to conceal their business interests. But this almost palls into insignificance alongside government spending on spin and propaganda.

The CIA has an annual spending of over £265m on propaganda alone (three times the entire budget of all the British security services). It claims 400 “assets” within the media, and during the Cold War it had it had assets in at least one newspaper in every country.

Public relations and propaganda, said Davies, explains “how we ran so much rubbish in the run up and during the Iraq war”.

Ofcom launches second public service review

Ofcom has launched its second review of public service broadcasting PSB. It is set against a background of falling investment by ITV in PSB, uncertainty over the future funding of Channels Four and Five and falling investment by these channels in the lead up to complete digital switchover in 2012.

The review has been brought forward two years due to Ofcom’s concerns about declining advertising revenues and investment and the threat this poses to future commercial PSB and UK-made programming.

The report offers a number of options for future funding; income from spectrum sales; a tax on some

media industries including broadband internet providers (at a time when serious money is also needed to upgrade the nation’s broadband networks); giving PSB’s advantageous advertising rates; direct Treasury funding and top-slicing the licence fee (supported by the Conservative party and some New Labour MPs).

Of course the current trends could continue, but as Raymond Snoddy pointed out in *The Independent* on 14 April, this would mean accepting that commercial broadcasters become “more and more commercial” and “as a result the BBC would be the sole public service broadcaster and the overall provision of such programmes would

fall”. That option is not supported by Ofcom or public opinion which Ofcom says favours competition between public service broadcasters.

Overall Ofcom is looking for a new public service broadcasting system to be in place before complete digital switchover in 2012 (and therefore before a new Communications Act) and is cracking on with its consultation which closes on 19 June.

This consultation is about the future of public service broadcasting in the UK. Its importance cannot be underestimated.

The CPBF will be responding and our submission will be placed on our web site at www.cpbf.org

Future uncertain for Channel 4

By Patricia Holland

Will Channel 4 and its family of channels still be able to give us *Dispatches* and *Channel 4 News* as well as *Deal or No Deal* and *Celebrity Big Brother* as competition gets tougher and digital switch-over looms?

According to its energetic new promotional document, *Next on 4*, yes it will. And it will also continue to nurture new talent, look for fresh perspectives, commission innovative formats like *Meet the Natives* and challenging dramas like *Shameless* and *Skins*. In addition, it plans to develop new content for teenagers and to increase its output of documentaries. Sounds good. But there's one important drawback – money.

Like all the terrestrial broadcasters, Channel 4 faces an uncertain future in the shift to an all-digital television provision, due to be completed by 2012. But the channel is in a special position. Although 80 per cent funded by advertising, Channel 4 is a non-profit-making public corporation. It has a special remit to make programmes which are innovative, diverse, educational and distinctive – a remit which was renewed by the 2003 Communications Act. Such programmes don't come cheap, and they don't necessarily appeal to advertisers, at a time when advertising funds are shifting to the internet and are distributed across an increasing number of television channels. In addition, the implicit subsidy which comes from free access to the broadcasting spectrum is worth progressively less. Projections of its future income estimate that Channel 4 will be facing a serious shortfall by 2012. The channel themselves put it at £100m. So, what is to be done? How can it possibly fulfil its remit and develop all the innovative new services it has promised?

The obvious answer is a public subsidy of some sort, and this is what Channel 4 has asked for. But it means there is a real danger that the channel might find itself in competition with the BBC for viewers' money. It could end up with what Liberal Democrat peer, Tom McNally described as a "squalid squabble" with the BBC, at a time when the BBC itself is weakened by a licence fee settlement lower than it needed.

Channel 4's dilemma should be seen in the context of broadcasting policies which are heavily market-driven, and which treat any type of public funding

with suspicion. Although the communications regulator Ofcom is required to promote and support public service broadcasting, its preferred approach has been to turn to the market wherever possible. Some within Ofcom – and also within the Government – have suggested that, come analogue switch-off, the BBC may no longer have the right to their hallowed licence fee. They say, why not share it out? "Top-slice" it, redistribute it, turn it into "contestable funding". That would be a simple solution.

But there are other possibilities on the cards, which have been floated by Ofcom in its recently published *Review of Public Service Broadcasting* (April 2008). They include direct public funding from the Lottery or elsewhere; free access to broadcasting on the digital spectrum; and levies on commercial broadcasters and other commercial services. This last suggestion has been forcefully put by campaigning organisations including the CPBF, but seems to have been taken more seriously by Ofcom since it was proposed for the French broadcasting system by President Sarkozy.

Ultimately the Government makes decisions about public funding. But Ofcom does the research, samples public opinion, weighs the options, and makes recommendations. Ofcom has

recently changed its approach. Its idea of a brand new Public Service Publisher, which would be the major provider of competition for the BBC in an all-digital world, has been abandoned.

Instead the regulator seems to have accepted that Channel 4 should be supported, so that it can continue to provide, as it has done for the last 26 years, a public service which complements and challenges that of the BBC because of its remit to promote independence, innovation and diversity.

Ofcom recognises that new funds must be found, which is encouraging. It has not dismissed the notion of top-slicing the BBC licence fee, which is less encouraging. It is rather depressing to read that "increased advertising minutage would appear to offer most value to Channel 4 in the short term".

Let us hope that all the new talent and innovative programming we've been promised manages to squeeze in between the expanded ads, that *Dispatches* and *Channel 4 News* continue to flourish, that pressures from those who welcome the chance to weaken the BBC will be resisted, and that we can preserve a channel which is worth saving.

The CPBF will be making these points when it responds to Ofcom's Review.

UNISON BOOST FOR CAMPAIGN APPEAL

Our media ownership project financial appeal – outlined in the last issue of Free Press – received a boost at the end of February, when UNISON agreed to make a further grant of £13,250. This brings UNISON's contribution to our media ownership work to £26,500. But we still need more cash to realise our campaigning objectives. Please send your donations to the CPBF national office:

**CPBF
2nd Floor
Vi & Garner Smith House
23 Orford Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 9NL**

New terror bill is threat to journalists

By Barry White

Another year and another Anti-terrorism Bill is working its way through Parliament. So far the media coverage has mainly concentrated on the proposed powers to give the police the right to hold suspects for up to 42 days without charge, an increase from the present 28. But the bill, if passed, would also threaten the right of journalists to report or obtain information on the armed forces. This could be applied to journalists investigating corruption in arms procurement and the relevant clause (69) contains no public interest defence, only that: "it is a defence for a person charged with an offence under this section to prove that they had reasonable excuse for their action".

The bill would also give police the power to remove any documents, which in practice means any computer or camera, for 96 hours regardless of where they might be legally privileged or the subject of journalistic qualified privilege. This represents a direct threat to the confidentiality of sources.

Sections 64 threatens the right of journalists to report some inquests by providing for them to be held in secret. This would be an additional power to that already in existence where the public can be banned in cases affecting national security.

Objections to the bill, which had its second reading on 1 April, have been

voiced by journalists and campaigning groups including Liberty and the Newspaper Society.

According to the *Press Gazette* the Society has written to home secretary Jackie Smith expressing concerns about the bill in the newspaper indus-

try, a move supported by the Society of Editors.

The bill is expected to complete its Commons stage in late May or early June, so there is still time to write to your MP expressing your point of view.

CPBF AGM 2008

This year's AGM will be held on Saturday 19 July from 10am at:

**NUJ Headquarters
Headland House
308-312 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8DP**

**Please make a note in your diary
Further details in the next issue of *Free Press***

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