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Public misled on Georgia and Russia

By Granville Williams

In mid-August we witnessed, sandwiched between coverage of the Beijing Olympics, reports of the outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia. In America TV and the print media also covered the extra-marital affair of former Democratic candidate, John Edwards. Interesting one this, because the story has been in the supermarket tabloid, the *National Enquirer*, since last autumn but the corporate news media, which also knew about the story, did not cover it when John Edwards was a credible candidate for the presidency. So why give it prominence months later?

For many Americans, however, the corporate news media's reporting of the Russia/Georgia conflict has caused more concern. Extensive coverage of the bombing, shelling and devastation appeared in the *New York Times* and on network TV news.

Dave Lindorff pointed out in "This War Report Has Been Approved by Your Government" that when Bush condemned the Russian invasion of another nation and called for an immediate ceasefire "there was not one word of astonishment or challenge from reporters or commentators or editorial writers at this stunningly cynical statement coming from a leader who is responsible for the blatantly illegal and much more destructive invasion of another nation".

He added: "There is almost nothing being reported about the continuing five-year old war launched by Bush and Cheney against Iraq. And certainly, over the course of five years we have gotten no visual depiction of that war even approaching the scenes that were on display from the front in Georgia." His conclusion? "This is not news. This is propaganda, pure and simple."

Another journalist, Robert Parry,



Russian troops in Georgia: crushing a democracy or preventing 'ethnic cleansing'?

analysed editorials in the *Washington Post* which acted "as a propaganda organ for the US government" in the run-up to the Iraq war but now stands for what is right and good. "What is truly taking place is a dangerous disconnect from reality in which Washington's media and political elites see offences that others commit (often cast in the harshest light) while averting their eyes from their own equally bad or worse behaviour."

Zbigniew Brzezinski writing in *Time* epitomised this disconnect: "The assault on Georgia is similar to what Stalin's Soviet Union did to Finland in 1939: in both cases, Moscow engaged in an arbitrary, brutal and irresponsible use of force to impose domination over a weaker, democratic neighbour." It was Brzezinski, incidentally, who encouraged clandestine aid to the enemies of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul

to draw the Russians into an Afghan war and who boasted in December 1979 when Soviet troops moved in "now we can give the USSR its own Vietnam war".

In the UK, sadly, we had Gordon Brown and David Miliband echoing the statements by George Bush and Dick Cheney (no change there, then). But how did the media here perform? Instead of providing context or nuanced reporting we had events cast in terms of the Russian bear crushing a fledgling democracy. Headlines in the *Daily Mail* and the *Independent* highlighted the figure of "1,500 dead as Russian tanks move in" but failed to point out that it was Georgian troops who were responsible for the initial attack which caused these.

Peter Wilby in the *Guardian* focused on the role PR played. When newspa-

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WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN?

By Julie-ann Davies

Hinsight is a powerful thing. The role of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) in influencing media output and ramping up the case for the invasion of Iraq is now well-known. In the aftermath of the invasion many media outlets publicly apologised for skewed reporting. But has anything really changed? Could the media be so easily fooled again?

Much media coverage of events in Iraq and Iran has relied heavily on quotes and interviews with “experts” on the Middle East. But frequently these commentators, and the organisations they represent, are not as “independent” as they would like the public and the media to believe.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of self-referential and interlinked media outlets, think-tanks and lobby groups vying to exert influence on US and Western government policies during the War on Terror. Many of these organisations were key players in constructing the case for an invasion of Iraq. This article can, unfortunately, only focus on a handful of the individuals involved. But, what is notable, and alarming, is that many of the same tactics have been resurrected and reused in order to influence public and elite perceptions of Iran.

In the case of Iraq, Ahmed Chalabi and the US-funded Iraqi National Congress used intelligence gathered by their own US-backed Information Collection Program to feed false information to the media. A June 2002 letter sent to the US senate appropriations

committee listed 108 articles, printed in high-profile publications across the world, which had been based on this flawed information.

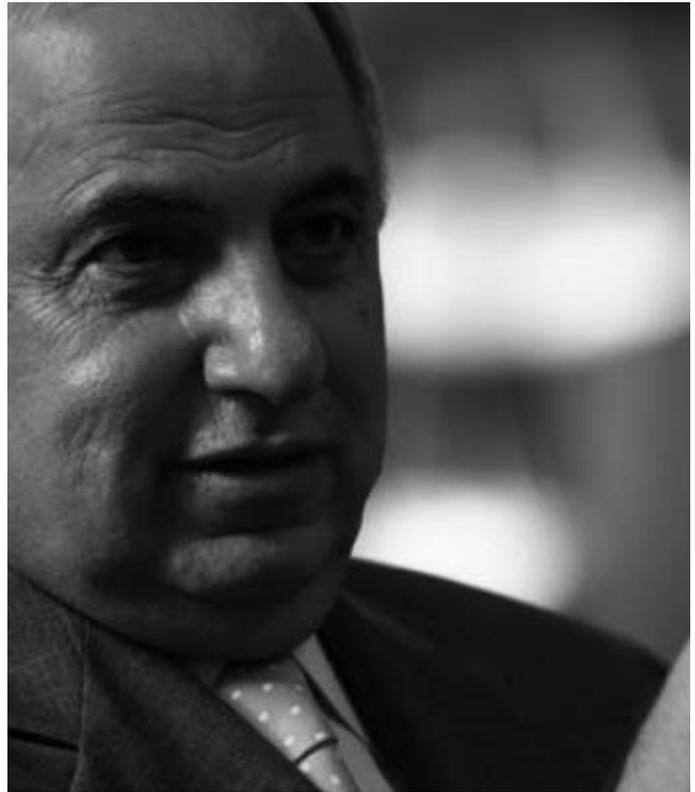
These articles reinforced Bush administration claims that Saddam Hussein was working with Al-Qaeda, developing nuclear capability and systematically misleading the international community about his control of chemical and biological weapons.

The intelligence behind these claims came from a handful of, mostly, INC-supplied, Iraqi “defectors” whose allegations were not corroborated by any other source. In fact, these claims were hotly denied by the state department and most of the US intelligence community.

However, prior to the Iraq invasion, US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld asked the under secretary for defense of policy Douglas Feith to form a unit to re-examine, and effectively second-guess, CIA intelligence reports on Iraq, Chalabi, the INC and its dodgy defectors.

The resultant office of special plans (OSP) was under the patronage of Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney. It has been claimed the unit was politically motivated as Cheney, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld are noted neo-conservatives. All three are signatories to the Project for the New American Century's (PNAC) Statement of Principles and Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz signed a 1998 PNAC letter to Bill Clinton calling for military action and regime change in Iraq. A document that predated the actual invasion by five years.

The OSP circumvented the



Ahmed Chalabi: key role in persuading US on Iraq

CIA and gave the White House briefings hyping claimed links between Hussein and Al-Qaeda that had already been discredited by the wider intelligence community. A February 2007 department of defense report found: “Analysis provided by the office of the under secretary of defense for policy exaggerated a connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda while the intelligence community remained consistently dubious of such a connection.” The OSP’s faulty briefings and analysis were used to bolster and boost hawkish demands for regime change in Iraq.

A further OSP scandal erupted in 2003 when it was revealed that Lawrence Franklin – the OSP’s Iran expert – leaked highly classified information on US policy on regime change in Iran to the director of foreign policy issues at American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and Keith Weissman AIPAC’s Iran expert. Weissman and Rosen had been working together closely for over a decade to pressure US officials and members of congress to get tough on Tehran.

Franklin is not the only former member of the OSP interested in Iran, in May 2006

Laura Rozen of the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the head of the OSP, Abram Shulsky, and two other OSP staffers were working with the Pentagon’s Iran directorate.

But, Chalabi and the INC’s friends were not limited to members of the OSP or officials in Bush’s administration. They were also assisted by other powerful right-wing organisations and individuals including – but not limited to – senior fellow of the American Enterprise Institute Michael Ledeen, ex-CIA Director James Woolsey, and the former Director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee Morris Amitay. All three were key supporters of the INC and spent many years working to promote Chalabi to a position where he could influence public opinion and Iraq policy in the US.

But, even before the first bombs dropped on Baghdad, moves were being made to bring Iran as well as Iraq into the crosshairs of America’s line of fire. Scott Ritter has revealed how, in late 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, Ledeen and Amitay co-founded the Coalition for Democracy in Iran (CDI).

The CDI was one of a number of advocacy groups striving to build greater support

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for regime change in Iran. Woolsey served on its advisory committee and other members were drawn from many neoconservative organisations including PNAC and Freedom House – who, the *Financial Times* reported, received US government funding to undertake clandestine activities in Iran.

The CDI threw its support behind the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and its affiliated organisation the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK). The NCRI is a political organisation that has set up an alternative Iranian parliament in exile in Paris. The United States government considers the NCRI to be operating under the umbrella of the MEK which has been proscribed as a foreign terrorist organisation under US Law.

In March 1991 the MEK, who at that time had their main base in Iraq, was called upon by Hussein to help suppress the Kurds in Northern Iraq. It was reported that MEK forces massacred hundreds of Kurdish civilians, including children. This, in combination with the murders of Americans in Iran and the seizure of the US embassy in 1979, led to the MEK being labelled as a terrorist group by the US.

Alireza Jafarzadeh joined the MEK shortly after the 1979 revolution. Such was his fervour that he volunteered to set himself on fire outside the UN in New York to draw public attention to the MEK cause. In 1988 he travelled to Iraq and received military training at one of the MEK camps which was then operating under the auspices of Hussein.

None of these factors seemed to be of much concern to Amitay, Ledeen, Woolsey or the other members of the CDI. They reportedly lobbied Jafarzadeh to serve as a mouthpiece for their organisation and by giving press conferences and issuing press releases brief the media and the world about Iran and Iranian ambitions to obtain nuclear weapons.

Nor does the legal status of the NCRI and MEK seem to bother the US government or many members of the media; members of the NCRI and the MEK are being allowed to operate freely in

the US. Jafarzadeh's offices are in Washington DC, his press releases and conferences are reported uncritically by media outlets and carried on newswires all around the world.

As a former member of the MEK and supporter of the NCRI, Jafarzadeh, unsurprisingly, espouses a hard line on Iran and is condemnatory of its current government. Yet he is usually simply cited as an "independent" expert, his affiliations are allegiances are rarely mentioned. As a regular Fox News contributor he is introduced as a "Fox foreign affairs analyst". He has also appeared on many other

broadcast networks including Fox News Channel, CNN, MSNBC, CBS, NBC, ABC, BBC, Sky News and ITN. He has written articles for, or been interviewed by: the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Financial Times*, Reuters, Associated Press and others.

The similarities here are striking. From Iraq to Iran many of the actors have remained the same and the plotline is horribly familiar. The underlying rationale is almost identical. Like Iraq; Iran is accused of having links to Al-Qaeda, weapons of mass destruction and developing

nuclear weapons. There are, once again, tales of information gathered from Iranian defectors and disgruntled intelligence officers.

The MEK and NCRI are becoming to Iran, what the INC was to Iraq. Jafarzadeh seems to be stepping into Chalabi's previous role, serving the media information selected and designed to move the US closer to military action. If the media has truly learned from the lessons of Iraq it must examine and disclose to the public the possible ideological and political motives of the sources for its stories on Iran, Iraq and the wider Middle East.

MPs examine regulation of internet content

By Frances Balfour

The all party parliamentary group on communications, apComms, held a meeting on 16 July to discuss the issue of regulation of the internet. The Rt Hon John Whittingdale MP, chair of the culture media and sport select committee, explained that the 2003 Communications Bill did not impose any regulation of the internet. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive is therefore the first attempt to regulate it.

There are areas where all parties agree regulation is necessary: child abuse, extreme pornography, and incitement to racial hatred. These can be reported to the Internet Watch Foundation. The home office task force also has worked on these issues and offers guidance on good practice. However, John Whittingdale said, other areas of concern have recently emerged, such as suicide web sites, piracy, peer-to-peer file sharing, and behavioural advertising.

Professor Julian Petley, Chair of the CPBF, raised the issue that the 2003 Communications Act treated online and printed newspapers in the same way. Now newspapers, in particular the *Telegraph* and the *Sun*, are producing audiovisual images online – effectively looking and sounding like TV – a new form, if not quite TV, where there is no impartiality requirement. This impairs the tradition of impartiality in broadcasting, a particularly important issue in political broadcasting at election time.

However there was strong opposition to Government regulation from the industry, which favours self regulation. Annie Mullins, the global content standards manager at

Vodafone, explained that the larger companies, Microsoft, Yahoo, AOL, are trying to create common standards. They can list blocked illegal news groups and URLs. American companies abide by US jurisdiction. Others may not. And it is very difficult to impose industry standards on the new and smaller companies and those who are building businesses very fast.

It was argued that Government regulation is too inflexible. What is appropriate in one year could be out of date in the next and the industry can profit by producing something parents know is safe. Petley raised concern about one area where current legislation is too rigid. The Criminal Justice Bill has made it an offence to possess certain types of pornography. But as this is ill-defined, people could offend unwittingly. He considered that this should be challenged under the Human Rights Act.

Effective regulation is difficult; many players including internet service providers and search engines need to be involved. Currently ISPs are not required to block content not hosted by them and search engines claim that they are neutral tools. However, China has been able to prevent any access from out of the country and in Germany the search engines have agreed not to allow searches on some subjects. But as the internet is global, any regulation can be sidestepped.

The industry and Government view in the meeting was that self-regulation by the industry works "pretty well"; by setting common standards, combined with external adjudication. It is instructive to contrast these opinions with those put forward in the parliamentary debate on 4 June 2008 in which John Robertson, MP for Glasgow NW, argues for internet regulation of content, touches on the "increasing blurring of the distinctions between the internet and the traditional media and means of accessing services" and points out that the only effective form of control of content is through the internet Service providers as it is possible for them to block material that is hosted abroad.

SHOOTING THE MESSENGERS

Photographers and journalists are experiencing increasing levels of intimidation and harassment from the police and security companies. Social documentary photographer **Larry Herman** discussed the problem with **Jeremy Dear**, the general secretary of the National Union of Journalists

Herman: There has been a strong response to the current harassment of journalists in general and photographers in particular. Both private security operatives and police regularly stop photographers while they are working in public places. What is your view on this situation?

Dear: The harassment and intimidation of journalists is a growing problem as draconian new legislation gives the police ever more sweeping powers. Those powers are increasingly being turned on journalists and, in particular, photographers. As a result we've seen everything from journalists being denied access to public places, equipment and data being confiscated, physical and verbal assaults on individuals, arbitrary stop and search, intimidatory surveillance amounting to harassment, local restrictions being placed on photography and much more besides. Many of these acts are unlawful but, shockingly, more and more of them are lawful as new anti-terror legislation is used against journalists and journalism.

Photographers and camera crews have borne the brunt of this new drive to clamp down on the coverage of public order issues and protests. At the recent Climate Camp journalists were subjected to stop and search entering and leaving the camp, journalists were followed and filmed by police Forward Intelligence Team units filing pictures and reports from a local café well away from the protest site. Photographers were physically manhandled and there were reports of police officers putting their hands over lenses and trying to impose restrictions on where and when camera crews and photographers could film. For the Climate Camp you can substitute the Olympic torch relay, the visit of George Bush or a host of



Jeremy Dear: 'We must protect sources'

other recent demos. This intolerance towards journalism has spread from the police to private security guards; the same willingness to ride roughshod over media freedoms is evident.

Would you summarise the law regarding photography in public places under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984? Are journalists required to give police film, memory cards, notes, computer files or audio recordings when ordered to do so on the street?

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 gives the police certain powers but it also affords journalists certain protections. Under the legislation the police must first convince a judge that the evidence relates to a "serious

arrestable offence" or that the evidence would be admissible in a trial. They also have to prove they are acting in the public interest and that other methods of obtaining the information have been tried without success. So the advice to journalists on the street is to politely, but firmly, refuse to hand over journalistic material – that includes film, memory cards, notes, computer files, audio recordings or anything else which may be arguably journalistic material. Arm yourself with a copy of the Union's guide to the issue available from campaigns@nuj.org.uk and know your rights.

Several weeks ago, the police forced Shiv Malik to hand over his notes for forthcoming book on terrorism. How common is this and why is it important for journalists to protect sources?

Not content with the powers contained in PACE the police have increasingly used the Terrorism Act 2000 and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 to undermine journalists' ability to carry out their work. Shiv Malik was among the first journalists to be prosecuted under the Terrorism Act – he undoubtedly won't be the last.

Greater Manchester Police used the act to attempt to seize his notes and succeeded in securing a production order to force him to hand over some journalistic material. Thankfully such events are rare but the very real fear is that such an action will have a chilling effect on investigative journalism – making sources less willing to come forward. If that happens our knowledge about a whole range of issues from terrorism to the performance of local hospitals and schools to the environmental record of major corporations to the actions of public figures could be severely restricted.

Gavin Millar QC summed up the implications of the case surrounding Shiv Malik and other defendants when he said: "To write stuff about people who are renouncing jihadism is difficult enough but to find people willing to talk in circumstances where the journalist may have to end up handing over all the material to the police is going to make people very reluctant to talk."

That's why the protection of sources is so vital to investigative journalism and why as a union we are proud to back those fighting attempts to force them to hand over such material.

In June you received a letter from home secretary Jacqui Smith informing you that the police are allowed to restrict photography in public places. What was your response?

Jacqui Smith's letter was in response to concerns we raised about the intimidatory surveillance of journalists which we felt amounted in this instance to harassment. We asked perfectly reasonable questions about why it was carried out,

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who had access to the information being collected and for what purpose the information was being used. We didn't get any answers. But her letter revealed that local police officers are able to impose restrictions on photography for operational reasons.

It doesn't say what those operational reasons are – but they are being interpreted very liberally by police officers. At Wembley, where local demonstrations are taking place over the setting up of a City Academy and the privatisation of education, journalists are being ejected and told they are banned from taking pictures. At protests near the US Embassy photographers have been threatened with having their data cards seized and at Kingsnorth power station the police attempted to stop photos of campaigners being arrested being taken. We've asked to meet Jacqui Smith to highlight our concern over these restrictions that are clearly against the public interest. We are due to meet one of her ministers, Tony McNulty, shortly.

Austin Mitchell initiated an early day motion, which was signed by more than 230 members of parliament, calling for a code regarding photography in public places. Is this necessary given all the previous 'codes', and agreements with various police bodies?

Austin chairs the NUJ's Parliamentary Group. We support his attempts to highlight and end this ridiculous clampdown on photography.

The Metropolitan Police launched a poster campaign asking people to report anyone looking suspicious taking photographs. The posters were subjected to ridicule by photographers but they have a pernicious effect on photographers' rights and absolutely no impact on fighting crime or terrorism. If the security services stopped and questioned every person that took a photograph of the World Trade Centre before the 9/11 attack, there is no evidence that it would have had any effect in either preventing the attack or finding those responsible.

Austin's calls for a code for photography in public places are well-meaning but should be unnecessary. After all, the law protects this right except where it infringes on the legal rights of others. All we want is for the law to be respected and an end to arbitrary restrictions.

In 2006 the NUJ and the Metropolitan Police agreed on guidelines for dealing with the media. These were finally adopted by the Association of Chief Police Officers in April 2007. It's obvious these guidelines are failing. What can be done to protect journalists working in public places and their notes and contacts?

Guidelines are a good starting point – but if they are routinely ignored they are not worth the paper they are written on. Right from the start, following an inci-

End in sight for lobbying inquiry

The call for a more open and ethical framework for lobbying whether at European or national level, has always been a concern of the CPBF. Lobbyists seek to direct public discussion, influence decision-makers and shape policy.

Most major corporations, political interest groups and some NGOs and campaigning organisations, hire professional lobbyists to promote their interests.

Over the past two years the CPBF has supported the European ALTER-EU campaign which argues for greater openness and ethical rules for European Union lobbying. Last year we joined forces with the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency (ALT), a grouping of civil society organisations concerned about the growing influence of professional lobbying on government decision making in the UK.

In *Free Press* 162 we reported on the progress of the Commons public administration select committee inquiry into lobbying. Now with the hearings concluded, Tamasin Cave from ALT gives her assessment of developments as the committee considers its recommendations.

When the House of Commons public administration select committee conducting the inquiry into lobbying announced its investigation in June last year, its aims were broad yet clear: to look into how transparent the lobbying industry has become, the effectiveness of recent attempts at self-regulation, and whether the rules for those in Parliament and Government should be changed.

Few who followed the eight evidence sessions would say that it was easy getting answers to these questions. Many witnesses revealed little about the nature of lobbying in the UK, but a lot about their professional skill as lobbyists, much to the frustration of some on the committee.

At one stage, chairman Tony Wright resorted to advising representatives from Tesco, AstraZeneca and BAA not to be coy: "Don't come here to lobby us," he said. "I want you to tell us like it is." Still, BAA lobbyist and former No10 spin doctor, Tom Kelly, raised eyebrows when he claimed his contacts in Government were limited to "press officers".

Yet, there were moments of clarity, namely on the failings of self-regulation, with some lobbyists being surprisingly candid. "We suspect within the industry, that the [main trade body] the Association of Professional Political Consultant's register is more honoured in the breach than it is in actually being kept to," said Eben Black of law firm, DLA Piper.

The closest the committee got to a straight answer, however, came from Peter Bingle, head of lobbying firm Bell Pottinger Public Affairs, when quizzed on transparency by committee member Paul Flynn MP: "You've worked for mass murderers," said Flynn. "Doesn't the public have a right to know who your clients are?" "No," replied Bingle, "The public has no right to know."

Hard evidence flowed more freely from lobbyists in the not-for-profit sector.

John Sauven of Greenpeace, for example, drew attention to the extraordinary lobbying power of the nuclear industry just from the so-called "revolving door" – the interchange in jobs between lobbyists, corporate staff and ministers, special advisers and senior civil servants. He cited a number of former ministers and MPs moving into nuclear jobs.

This was taken up in a subsequent session with Richard Caborn MP who is paid up to £75,000 by an AMEC-led nuclear industry consortium, a position for which he claimed he was hired for his "industrial experience" rather than his 10 years as a Minister.

Despite obvious differences of opinion within the committee, chair Tony Wright MP will try to reach a consensus based on the evidence when the committee reports in the autumn.

It will be hard for them to ignore the apparent failings of the system of self-regulation, put in place in the wake of the lobbying scandals of the 1990s. Yet, without a smoking gun, the industry may yet be spared a recommendation of regulation in the form of a mandatory register of lobbyists.

This would be a missed opportunity given the impact that greater transparency in lobbying would have on restoring public trust in decision-making.

dent in Nottingham in which a photographer was arrested and charged, it became evident that individual police officers at public order events were either unaware of the guidelines or were wilfully ignoring them. Despite our best efforts this remains a real problem. It's one of the reasons we're seeking to continue to raise the issue with all levels of the

police and with politicians. It's why we're considering some legal actions and formal complaints against police harassment. It's why we're trying to ensure our members know their rights and given the confidence and back-up to assert those rights and it's why we're turning the spotlight on continued infringements of the guidelines.

Labour MP launches attempt to reform press regulation

By Julian Petley

This has not been a good time for the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). First of all, in their various actions against the press, the McCanns, Robert Murat and Max Mosley quite simply bypassed the PCC and went straight to the courts. Then, on 15 July, Jim Sheridan, the Labour MP for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, introduced a ten minute rule bill in the Commons to reform the PCC.

In introducing the bill he said: "I should like to begin by thanking those hon. members who kindly agreed to sponsor this bill, and all those colleagues who have given me their support in the face of potential threats, or of the consequences of taking on and challenging the British press. I should also like to express my gratitude and thanks to Lord Soley, who in 1993 tried to bring in a similar bill but who was unsuccessful."

Sheridan explained his bill "would introduce a statutory method for protecting the general public from inaccurate

and, at times, inflammatory reports in the press and media. It is not intended, either by design or omission, to restrict or in any other way curtail the freedom of the press. However, a free press must balance commercial considerations with its responsibilities to individuals and to society as a whole."

Pointing out that a recent survey suggested that only seven per cent of the general public trust tabloid journalists, he went on to draw attention to the clauses in the PCC Code which state that the press must take due care not to publish "inaccurate, misleading or distorted" information, that "significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence," and that the press, while free to be partisan, must make clear the distinction between conjecture and fact.

Sheridan contrasted these fine aspirations with the fact that the number of complaints to the PCC is currently increasing, and that more than half of the complaints received in recent years relate to accuracy. The PCC's *Annual Review of*

2007 shows that there has been a 70 per cent increase in complaints since 1996, that in 2007 the PCC received a record number of 4,340 complaints, and that of the complaints which the PCC defined as "possible breaches of the Code," a staggering 75.4 per cent concerned accuracy.

Sheridan cited the CPBF and NUJ's campaign to have the PCC declared a public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, arguing that this would make for a "more transparent system, in which the PCC's workings were opened up to public scrutiny." He also drew attention to the importance in this context of the NUJ's efforts to help journalists to adhere to the codes of both the PCC and the NUJ in the face of pressure from editors to run circulation-boosting stories which may be ethically dubious.

Sheridan said: "If journalists had a contractual right to refuse to carry out assignments or tasks that required them to breach the code of practice, the result would be greater accuracy and less need for complaints. Such a 'conscience clause' would perhaps be the biggest step towards a return to a fairer, free press. There have been suggestions from some quarters that if we made the press complaints procedure more accessible and effective, our newspapers would be full of nothing but apologies and retractions. That view is clearly absurd, as the only foreseeable reason why a paper would be full of corrections is that it had been full of inaccuracies in the first place."

As things stand, Sheridan pointed out, the PCC code leaves newspapers "free to print what they like, irrespective of the personal consequences for those involved. In the majority of cases in which members of the general public are the victims of inaccurate reporting, they do not have the resources to mount a legal challenge against those responsible. There is an increasing body of evidence to suggest that in situations in which victims feel that they have a strong case, they are bought off with minimal out-of-court cash settlements, and with a small retraction buried in the depths of the newspaper."

The bill is due for its second reading on 17 October 2008. Please send letters of support to Jim Sheridan MP at his constituency office (Mirren Court Three, 123 Renfrew Road, Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland. PA3 4EA) or via email to: jim@james-sheridan-mp.org.uk.

Additional reporting by Barry White

YOU CALL THIS A MEDIA MARKET? THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN THE MEDIA SECTOR IN SLOVENIA

Sandra Hrvatin and Brankica Petkovic.
Media Watch, 12 euros

By Granville Williams

Slovenia rarely hits the headlines. But like many countries which were either part of the Communist bloc or with strong centralised economies, the role and influence of the state in the media has been problematic. After 12 years of a centre-left coalition government 2004 saw Slovenia move sharply to the right with the newly-elected government.

Media Watch produces high-quality, well-researched reports, and this publication maintains the high quality of the organisation's work. The authors point out that "accessing information was frequently a laborious process" and they encountered many obstacles. In spite of this they have produced a convincing and disturbing book which demonstrates that the role of the state, and its political influence, is pervasive in terms of ownership and through its specific interventions.

The corporate map of Slovenia is controlled by a small group of people

who owe their economic power to influential political connections. The state has preserved its influence over the national public service broadcaster, RTV, and guarded its interests in the main print media, which it obtained when they were privatised, and later sold to politically acceptable bidders. It also gives generous support to certain media through subsidies, but these are used, the authors argue, to specifically reward loyal media.

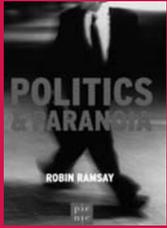
In addition the state operates a system of indirect financial or economic censorship through the selective allocation of advertising revenue paid by state-owned and state-controlled companies. In 2007 these companies virtually ceased to advertise in Dnevnik whilst its main competitor, Delo, had no problem with the same advertisers. Also, disturbingly, the state has given special privileges, including subsidies, to the print and broadcast media controlled by the Catholic Church, which is playing a more active political role since the change of government in 2004.

This book should be read by anyone interested in European media policy.

For further information visit:
<http://mediawatch.mirovni-institut.si>

News and reviews

Clandestine influences on politics



POLITICS AND PARANOIA
Robin Ramsay
Picnic Publishing £9.99

By Granville Williams

If you have read *Lobster* some of the material in this book will be familiar to you but it is still a good read. It is a collection of talks given by Robin Ramsay to a wide array of organisations – Dallas 63, Chesterfield Labour Party, Leeds Stop The War, North West CPBF, Newcastle University history department and many others.

In his introduction Ramsay describes the genesis of *Lobster*, which he set up with Stephen Dorril, in 1983 (the pair

parted company in the 90s but Ramsey continued to publish). One of the reasons the magazine became an essential read was that in 1985-86 Dorril made contact with Colin Wallace, a former psychological operations officer in the British Army, who was jailed in Lewes prison for a manslaughter he didn't commit, and with British Army Captain Fred Holroyd. Through these sources *Lobster* uncovered events in Northern Ireland and also plots to defame and ultimately overthrow Harold Wilson's Labour Government. This material was incorporated into *Smear! Wilson and the Secret State*, a book co-authored by the *Lobster* duo and published in 1991.

During the later 80s and into the 90s the North West CPBF had close links with *Lobster*. Ramsay and Dorril spoke at public meetings we organised on *The Secret State* and were joined by Holroyd and Wallace at a CPBF conference on

Northern Ireland and the intelligence services.

In the essay from which *Politics and Paranoia* takes its title Ramsay writes: "There are clandestine influences – conspiracies – at work in society. Not the ridiculous, world-controlling conspiracies like the Freemasons, or the Illuminati, or President Truman meets the aliens, but more mundane things like intelligence agencies manipulating domestic and international politics, companies buying Government policies by making anonymous donations to the Tory party and so forth." It is worth adding New Labour too, which he deals with in one section of the book describing how the party has collapsed into its present "neo-conservative vacuity".

I recommend the book – buy it and you will be supporting small independent publishing too.

ITV profit dip poses challenge to Ofcom

By Tom O'Malley

ITV's profits fell by 28 per cent in the first half of the year, and it has asserted that its advertising revenue would be flat for the first eight months of 2008.

ITV boss, Michael Grade, claimed ITV's future as a public service broadcaster (PSB) depended on Ofcom reducing the costs of its public service obligations:

"I think we have a future as public service broadcaster, provided that we can get Ofcom and the Government to realise very, very quickly that we cannot afford to pay more than the licence and the public service broadcaster status is worth." He estimated that as £45m, whilst Ofcom puts it at £320m.

It is true that ITV's position has been hit hard through the intensification of competition since the 1990s.

But it is also true that Ofcom has allowed ITV to use this argument about

increased costs as a lever to shed costly public service broadcasting obligations. A recent leak suggested that Ofcom plans to allow ITV to reduce its regional news by one fifth and halve its commitment to regional programmes in England and Wales, as well as allowing a reduction in current affairs programming.

The latest figures from Ofcom, issued for 2008 suggest a different picture. In 2008, in the UK, nearly 87.2 per cent of households have digital TV. 57 per cent of viewing in these homes was of the main five public service broadcasting channels, a slight drop from 58 per cent in 2006.

As Ofcom says: "That was more than offset by the viewing share of the PSB's other channels (such as ITV2, BBC Three and E4) which grew to nearly 14 per cent of viewing." So, PSB's, including ITV, are holding their own in the digital environment.

Indeed ITV's net advertising revenue rose by 1 per cent in the first six months of this year and its viewing share was up by 2.5 per cent. In addition, in August 2008 Ofcom received an application for public service broadcaster capacity on Multiplex B. ITV has made an application for this. Clearly ITV is in no hurry to shed this valuable public asset.

ITV seems to be playing to two audiences. It is making progress in the tough new world and wants to maintain investor support – hence the positive noises. Yet it also wants also to ditch public service broadcast programmes which it views as dispensable. This means that it is keen to keep pushing Ofcom and the Government to let it off the hook.

Arguably ITV is looking for regulatory

favours from a sympathetic regulator. It will then, have a lower cost base and the strong reach that its PSB status gives it in the world of Freeview and Freesat. It will be positioned to exploit its brand name and archives – both acquired through its status as a public service broadcaster – to increase its profits domestically and internationally.

Ofcom should force ITV to honour its commitments to public service broad-

'Ofcom has allowed this situation to develop by bracketing off some programmes as public service broadcasts and others as not, and thereby allowing ITV to claim that the former cost too much'

casting. That is the obvious route. But Ofcom has allowed this situation to develop by bracketing off some programmes as public service broadcasts and others as not, and thereby allowing ITV to claim that the former cost too much.

If ITV accepts its obligations, all is well. If not, Ofcom should take action to replace ITV, immediately, with a public service broadcaster that has public support (grant, regulatory benefits) and which secures employment for current ITV employees, but which is no longer under the control of ITV plc. The alternative is to let ITV plc off the hook thereby reducing the diversity of news and programmes on TV.

News

CPBF AGM condemns threats to Media Lens

On 28 June and 3 July, Media Lens, a UK-based media-watch project, received repeated threats of both legal and police action from Alastair Brett, legal manager of News International's Times Newspapers. Noam Chomsky pithily described the threat "pretty sick". The action was discussed at the CPBF's annual general meeting on 19 July and the following emergency motion, moved by national council member Granville Williams, was passed:

"Media Lens has the aim of 'Correcting the distorted vision of the corporate media'. It challenges journalists and editors over distorted reporting by inviting subscribers to the Media Lens bulletin to email editors and journalists with their criticisms. It has existed for seven years.

"On June 28 and July 3 2008 Media Lens received repeated threats of both

legal and police action from Alastair Brett, legal manager of News International's Times Newspapers. Brett claimed Times journalist Bronwen Maddox had been subject to "vexatious and threatening" emails from Media Lens readers, which constituted "harassment". If this did not stop, Brett told Media Lens, he would notify the police who might wish to investigate the matter with a view to bringing a criminal prosecution.

"This AGM notes the comment by Peter Wilby in the *Guardian*: "We journalists are accustomed to dishing it out, but have the thinnest of skins. At the merest hint of criticism, we are apt to turn to our lawyers"; and condemns the action by Times Newspapers and its attempt to curtail the perfectly legitimate activity of Media Lens.

"AGM agrees to send a copy of this motion to Media Lens and asks the editor to give coverage to this in the next issue of *Free Press*. In addition the motion should appear on the CPBF web site."

The Miners' Strike: Media Hits The Pits Revisited

A New CPBF publication

The 25th anniversary of the start of the 1984-85 miners' strike will fall on 12 March 2009. To commemorate this event the CPBF is producing a book, with photos, tackling themes relating to the miners and the media. It will deal with

the strike but also bring the story up-to-date. Contributors include Steve Bell, Nicholas Jones, Hilary Wainwright, Paul Routledge, Tony Harcup, Pete Lazenby, Patricia Holland and Julian Petley. The Campaign also plans to hold public meetings, and lots of other activity, to launch the book. The project will cost £4,000 and as we are always skint we are appealing to trades unions and individuals to contribute to the project. Full details in the next *Free Press*.

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pers don't have a clue about what is going on or lack the resources to find out "skilfully presented PR was at a premium" and Georgia president Mikheil Saakashvili had the best – Aspect Consulting – which also acts for Exxon Mobil, Kellogg's and Procter and Gamble. Wilby makes the point that the news releases from Aspect Consulting which landed almost hourly on foreign news desks meant that Georgia won the information war.

Western media (with some honourable exceptions) are not giving us the full picture, and in particular the radically changed military agenda of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is not being analysed. One of the clearest accounts of this was by F William Engdahl writing in the *Asia Times*. He wrote that since the 1991 dissolution of the Warsaw Pact: "Washington has steadily converted NATO into what can only be called the military vehicle of an American global imperial rule, linked by a network of bases from Kosovo to Poland to Turkey to Iraq and Afghanistan." Engdahl goes into detail about the implications of this, particularly the pressure on the EU members of NATO to admit Georgia and Ukraine and US and Israeli military and intelligence involvement in Georgia. "What is left out of most media coverage is the strategic military security context of the Caucasus dispute," he argues.

Read the full article: www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/JH13Ag05.html

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