

FREE Press

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Licence fee reprieve must be retained

Those who fight for free and independent high quality media don't win that many victories, but one has been recorded this month. After years of argument over proposals to take money from the BBC's licence fee income and give it to commercial competitors, the idea was laid to rest in November.

"Top-slicing" had been around for a while as a right-

wing dream to get public money into the pockets of commercial companies, to enable them to broadcast the "public service" programming that they are already bound to produce as part of their franchise obligations.

Earlier this year it was revived by Ofcom as a way of funding new multi-media local news services to replace the coverage being progressively

withdrawn by the big local newspaper groups. Ofcom chief Ed Richards said these Independently Financed News Consortia (IFNCs) could be paid for by taking licence fee income currently earmarked for the cost of the big switchover from analogue to digital TV.

The idea was taken up by Lord Carter in his *Digital Britain* report, and then by culture secretary Ben Bradshaw, and it

was expected to appear in the government's Digital Economy Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech to enact the proposals in *Digital Britain*. But in mid-November it suddenly emerged that it was being put on hold until after the 2010 election. And since the likely winners in the Conservative Party are opposed to top-slicing (see story below), this could well be the end of it.

INSIDE

'How we probed the PCC, and how they covered it up'
Nick Davies writes
PAGE 4

The scandal of libel tourism, and how it might be tackled
PAGE 2

BBC impartiality, a mask for bias
PAGE 6

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SO WHAT WOULD THE TORIES DO?

The Conservative Party is formulating its ideas for media policy in the event of an election victory next year, and it's no surprise that they comprise further deregulation, a squeeze on public service media and favours for the big media corporations.

Like most of the policy hints coming from the Tories, the indications are woolly and vague, designed to give a certain impression of benevolent modernism, a clearing away of old of old-fashioned regulations, but nothing too drastic; all very reasonable, almost to the extent of condescension.

These blandishments come in the polished tones of prospective culture secretary Jeremy Hunt (Charterhouse and Oxford), a vacuous young Cameron clone from upper middle class Surrey with a

background, naturally, in corporate PR.

He says the media industry needs "massive reform" to help it "embrace the new business models of the future ... Media regulations designed in the pre-internet era should be replaced with a new light-touch approach."

Even the famously light touch that Ofcom was set up to apply is too heavy for the Tories, who say they will remove all its powers to set regulations regulation, leaving it with only a technical remit.

But Hunt's "new business models" seem strangely archaic, since they apparently include the Murdochs' News Corporation monolith – the web of connections between past and present Murdoch executives and the Tory leadership has been much commented on –

Continued on page two

From page one

together with the tottering ITV plc and the regional media groups presently occupied in running the local press into the ground.

These would be the beneficiaries of his “reforms”, which, far from embracing new media and advancing the digital frontiers, appear to be aimed at shoring up the discredited and very 20th century model of the bloated profiteering plc.

The real motivation is to dish out favours to the business interests supporting them. One of Hunt’s policy advisers is Roger Parry, a former BBC journalist turned media marketing consultant and entrepreneur who chairs the Local Media Alliance, the lobbying front organisation set up by the big regional press groups earlier this year to induce government and regulators to relax the anti-monopoly rules preventing further concentration of ownership in the sector.

The LMA rounded up lots of MPs with promises to save their local papers but they couldn’t persuade the regulators, as in a rare setback for the deregulators the Office of Fair Trading decided to leave the rules as they are. No doubt it will be easier to get the Tories to legislate.

This is the rationale for the apparently contradictory Tory policy against “top-slicing” the BBC licence fee. The party is always talking about reining in the BBC, but Hunt has said that top-slicing would “set in stone the current failed model and encourage broadcasters to compete for subsidy rather than to innovate.” In other words, funding new local ventures in this way would pose subsidised competition to the newspaper companies.

For the BBC itself, the Tories are not, in public, going as far as the more excitable free marketeers like James Murdoch or the vociferous independent TV production lobby who have been slaving to get their teeth into the corporation for years.

Hunt says he will retain the licence fee and structure of the BBC. “We have no plans to tear up the BBC charter,” he says, but adds: “We do have some serious reservations about the way the BBC Trust operates,” and this could be ominous. If the Tories are doing away with the decision-making powers of Ofcom and the BBC Trust, the only body that can regulate the BBC is government itself.

In effect, the licence fee would be retained as a bargaining lever. The tortuous negotiations that have come to preceded each settlement – the next is due in 2016 – would be used to put pressure on BBC bosses over the things that the Tories’ friends hate so much: its proposed local video news services, its commercial interests, and above all its pioneering development of digital services such as offering programmes and archive material online.

This is where the money will be in the digital age and commercial companies are desperate to stop the BBC doing them. It looks as if the Tories will be only too happy to oblige.

At last some light on the libel laws

The scandal of the conduct of defamation cases in the English courts is getting too hot for the government to handle. A new report with proposals for reform is being taken by UK legislators as a way to get out of the embarrassment of presiding over ‘the libel capital of the world’. **JULIAN PETLEY** reports



STEFANO CAGNONI

Britain’s overly claimant-friendly libel laws and their exploitation by an ever-swelling stream of foreign plutocrats eager to suppress revelations in their own countries’ media of their dubious dealings have long been a scandal.

But now the conjunction of the Trafigura “super-injunction” affair and the publication of *Free Speech is Not For Sale*, a report by English Pen and Index on Censorship, appears finally to have prodded the government into contemplating their reform.

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Of the cases that actually went ahead, most were either settled before trial or withdrawn at some stage along the way, usually because the costs of court action were simply too high for publishers to risk.

The average cost of defending a libel action is estimated to be £2.4 million, consisting of the claimant’s legal costs of £750,000, a 100 per cent success fee of £750,000 to be paid to the claimant’s lawyers if they are operating under a “no win, no fee” Conditional Fee Agreement (CFA), £500,000 for the publisher’s own costs, and £420,000 for the insurance premium which they would have taken out to protect themselves against losing.

Research carried out at Oxford University suggests that the cost of defending a libel action in England and Wales is 140 times the European average.

The “libel tourism” encouraged by these astronomical defence costs risk turning the country into a global pariah. A Saudi businessman successfully sued an American academic whose book on funding terrorism sold just

Libel

23 copies in Britain over the internet. He was awarded £130,000 damages and costs by London courts.

In another case, a British consultant cardiologist, Dr Peter Wilmshurst, is being sued by an American company, NMT Medical, for questioning the effectiveness of a new heart implant device. Wilmshurst voiced his criticism at an American conference and his comments were posted on a US website, but he is being pursued at the High Court because a number of cardiologists read the article in Britain.

As a consequence of such actions, newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe* and *Washington Post* submitted a memo to the House of Commons culture and media committee, which is conducting an inquiry into the libel laws, warning that they may stop selling copies in the UK.

They asked: "Does the UK really want to be seen as the only country in Europe – indeed the world – where important US papers cannot be obtained in print form?" Currently the US Congress is considering a bill to protect Americans from the iniquities of British libel law, and several US states enable victims of libel tourism to counter-sue for harassment.

In order to remedy these problems, the report from Index and Pen put forward ten proposals:

1 Ending the situation whereby a libel defendant is effectively guilty until they can prove themselves innocent, instead requiring the claimant to demonstrate that the matter in question is damaging and false.

2 Capping libel damages at a maximum of £10,000. Currently damages are not capped.

3 Abolishing the multiple publication rule, whereby each copy of an allegedly libellous publication sold, or each new hit on an allegedly libellous item on a website, constitutes a new libel. A single publication rule ensure that no libel action could be brought over publications online more than a year after publication, which is the limit for print.

4 Preventing a case from being heard unless at least 10 per cent of copies of the relevant publication have been circulated in the UK.

5 Making mediation a requirement for any libel action. This would be conducted by a libel tribunal which would have the power to determine the meaning of the allegedly libellous item as well as to establish fair comment as a defence at an early stage of the proceedings.

6 Strengthening the public interest defence, introduced in a high profile judgement in 2001 but progressively downgraded since then.

7 Creating a broader and more contextually-informed definition of fair comment, providing greater protection for free and open debate.

8 Introducing the mandatory capping of costs. A claimant's lawyers should no longer be allowed to recover "success" that in CFA cases can be double the actual costs. Neither would they have to pay claimants' insurance premiums retrospectively.

9 Internet publishers should not be deemed liable for material provided by a third party. Online interactive chat should be exempt from liability.

10 Large companies and associations should be barred from suing for libel unless they can prove malicious falsehood.

The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Judge, has acknowledged that the pressure on publishers to settle to avoid the huge costs in losing "have a gagging effect in relation to the media. There will ultimately have to be legislation about this", he said. Lord Judge added that he was "deeply unsympathetic" to libel tourism.

Justice Secretary Jack Straw said of CFAs: "The whole thing has become a kind of sport ... It is important that people are able to sue newspapers if they have been seriously defamed, but the terms of trade have been changed too much.

"What concerns me is that the current arrangements are being used by big corporations to restrict fair comment, not always by journalists but also by academics."

He is now drawing up proposals to "introduce a radically reduced cap on the level of excessive fees in defamation cases", and has indicated that he is examining the possibility of changing the law. On December 1 it was announced in the Lords that he was setting up a working group on libel reform.

At the same time Lib Dem peer Lord Lester, a human rights barrister, announced he was drawing up a Defamation Reform Bill that would enact most of the Index/Pen points. Lord Lester said his "moderate" package would secure widespread support.

Index and Pen are asking "those concerned about the silencing of our writers, academics and scientists" to sign a petition to keep politicians' minds focused on this increasingly serious and troubling issue.

VICTORY COST A MILLION

The absurd cost of libel litigation has been clearly exposed by writer Tom Bower, who said in December that the high profile case he won in the summer was likely to cost him more than £1 million. "No author, or even publisher,

should risk losing that in a suppressive libel action," he said.

The case was brought against him by Richard Desmond, proprietor of the Express group, over a brief reference in Bower's biography of the disgraced former owner of the Telegraph group, Conrad Black.

In a submission to the Parliamentary committee investigating the libel laws, Bower said that defending the action cost more than £1 million and that without the support of his publisher and lawyers he would have been forced to capitulate – in which case, he said, "Desmond would have been able to claim, falsely, that he was vindicated.

He added that there was also a problem with some of the judges. The judge in his case, Mr Justice Eady, should have struck the action out from

the start. "For such a case to proceed, at such risk of costs, against an individual who does not have the resources of the claimant, a billionaire, risks a serious miscarriage of justice.

"It was ludicrous for Desmond to be able to suggest that anyone would seriously think the words I wrote would affect him in business in any way.

"But I believe he was encouraged to proceed by the fact Mr Justice Eady refused to let me adduce evidence about Desmond's reputation and business practices.

"This may well have encouraged the newspaper proprietor to believe that he could exploit the jury's ignorance and win the case. Without that encouragement, the case may have been resolved very much sooner."

Self-regulation

How we probed the PCC ...

The Press Complaints Commission, which runs Britain's supposed system of newspaper self-regulation, is conducting an 'independent review' of its governance and has invited suggestions. The CPBF is making a submission.

The review is being led by Vivien Hepworth, a former health service manager who has been as member of the PCC since 2001 and has stood down to conduct the exercise.

That this can be described as independent is a good indication of the PCC's lack of self-awareness. Outside its own circle of newspaper proprietors and editors it is universally derided as a useless regulator and a blatant public relations exercise, yet it carries on with an extraordinary confidence in its powers and achievements.

The review was announced by the PCC Chair, Tory peer Lady Buscombe, at a time when it is in trouble and needs a ploy to head off demands for reform from outside.

Every couple of years the PCC has a serious wobble and critics speculate that its days are numbered. In 2007 a *News of the World*

reporter was jailed over the hacking of the mobile phones of junior royalty. The PCC held an inquiry that made no effort to get at the truth, then pronounced that all was in order again.

Now two years on the story has come back to bite them. The *Guardian* conducted its own enquiries and found that, not only was the illegal tapping of the celebrity mobile phones widespread at the *NoW*, but that the paper had secretly paid off a number of the victims with huge sums to keep them quiet.

The PCC was forced to hold another inquiry. Again it made no effort to get at the facts and reported that all was in order. But this time the consequences have been more serious, with a Parliamentary committee investigating and the *Guardian's* respected editor Alan Rusbridger resigning from the key PCC editors' committee.

The *Guardian's* articles were written by **NICK DAVIES**. He writes here of just how deep is the mess the PCC has got itself into



Nick Davies, author of *Flat Earth news, the best-selling and coruscating analysis of the stated of British journalism*, was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Westminster in November. The book includes a lot of material on the failings of the PCC.

... and how it covered up the truth

The Press Complaints Commission has often failed but seldom has it been so clumsy. And that may turn out to be important.

Since it was created in 1991, the PCC has succeeded in one central aim – to act as a political safety valve, diverting the pressure from MPs and others who want to impose statutory reform on news organisations. As long as critics fell for the smooth talk and the glossy brochures, it really didn't matter that the organisation was structurally corrupt and repeatedly failed to give justice to victims of the media.

But with November's report into the phone-hacking scandal at the *News of the World*, the PCC's new chair, Lady Peta Buscombe, threw subtlety to the wind and effectively flashed her bare backside at Parliament and dared them to kick it hard. It was naked and insulting and bound to provoke – and it has jeopardised the future of the commission.

The PCC's report was supposed to be

Self-regulation

PCC



Lady Buscombe: ordered PCC review

EYES OF THE WORLD ON THE PCC

The International Federation of Journalists is investigating the Press Complaints Commission's handling of its inquiry into the *Guardian* reports.

The exercise is part of a review the IFJ is conducting into media accountability systems around the world as part of a campaign to strengthen ethical journalism.

The IFJ, which is a federation of national journalists' unions, has

commissioned Jean-Paul Marthoz, a leading international journalist and writer, to review the actions of the PCC.

His report is expected by the end of January. The CPBF has written offering to submit evidence.

"This case raises serious questions about the role and responsibility of a press complaints body to be fair and honest in its dealings with the press," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary – who was himself a sub-editor on *The Guardian* in the 1980s.

"If journalists and media cannot trust a self-regulator to be fair, the whole system of self-rule in media loses credibility."

In December the IFJ was hosting an international conference in Indonesia on the future of press councils and media accountability systems.

a response to the *Guardian's* revelation in July that the *News of the World* had paid out more than £1 million to three people who had sued the paper for its use of a private investigator who had intercepted their voicemail messages. This contradicted the *News of the World's* earlier position that they had had nothing to do with any interception and that their former royal reporter, Clive Goodman, who was jailed in 2007 for hacking the voicemail of royal staff, was a rogue operator who had deceived them.

The PCC set out to deal with only two questions.

In both cases, they came up with answers which failed to get to the truth. But, more significant, their approach was obviously dishonest. Their first question was whether the *Guardian* was right to suggest that the hacking of phones had continued after the PCC's original inquiry into the subject in May 2007. The PCC spent pages demolishing this suggestion and finally denounced the *Guardian* for failing to produce any evidence to support the claim. But this is a claim which the *Guardian* never made.

There is nothing controversial about this. The *Guardian* stories are still there online for anybody to read: all of their allegations about the interception of voicemail clearly deal with the activities of the *News of the World's* former private investigator, Glenn Mulcaire, who was sacked and jailed with Clive Goodman, and with the editorship of Andy Coulson, who resigned in January 2007. Not one word of any of our stories ever said anything about whether the interception continued after the PCC's original inquiry in May 2007.

In the announcement of their inquiry, and in their letters to me and to Alan Rusbridger, the editor of the *Guardian*, the PCC said they were interested in finding out if the hacking had continued after their 2007 inquiry – but they never told anybody that they were planning to pretend that this was part of the *Guardian's* story.

If they had done, Alan and I would have protested and stopped their game. As it was, they hid their intent. Alan and I naturally told them that we had no evidence on the point. The PCC presented that in their report as though it were a confession that we had no evidence for a central plank of our story.

Their second question did at least relate to reality. Had the *News of the World* misled them in their original inquiry by claiming that Clive Goodman was the only one of their journalists who was involved? The answer to that was very simple. The *Guardian* had documents which showed the involvement of other journalists and offered to provide the PCC with copies. The PCC dealt with that in two easy moves.

First, they never asked the *Guardian* to provide the documents. Their report quoted me explaining that there was some evidence which I could not give them but it omitted the paragraph in my email in which I offered to send them the documents they needed. Lady Buscombe then complained that the *Guardian* had refused to help them!

Second, even though the *News of the World's* current editor, Colin Myler, admitted to the PCC in writing that the *Guardian's* documents showed that other *News of the World* journal-

ists had been involved in the interceptions, the PCC decided simply to dismiss this as "speculation" and conclude that there was no evidence that they had been misled.

The result is that the PCC has laid itself open to attack. MPs, who are hardly feeling sympathetic to the press after the exposure of their fiddled expenses, have been handed a cast-iron justification for attacking the PCC, for querying the whole idea of self-regulation and for imposing statutory reform on news organisations. This line of attack can only be helped by the coincidence of the Commons media select committee publishing its report into press standards, including the phone-hacking scandal.

And yet it is not that simple. The PCC will cite its pending "governance review" as a reason to delay any big decision about its future. The big media organisations that have newly reinforced links to the Conservative leadership will help protect it. The general election will come closer. The need for reform may be obvious and urgent but the power to deliver it is slipping away.



Our new editor

Free Press has a new editor, Tim Gopsill, former editor of the *Journalist*, the magazine of the National Union of Journalists, from which he retired in November after 21 years.

He takes over from Julie-Ann Davies who is standing down from *Free Press* after two years.

Tim Gopsill also writes a blog at www.victornoir.org.

Contact him at freepress@cpbf.org.uk or timgo@inweb.co.uk, phone 07765 185427 or 020 7274 9007.

COP-OUT IMPARTIALITY

DAVID CROUCH argues that the BBC's new approach to political balance is really a way of avoiding properly responsible journalism

Twice this year the BBC has found itself at the centre of fierce controversy over the impartiality of its coverage.

In October it defended its decision to invite the British National Party leader on to *Question Time* in terms of "the BBC's central principle of political impartiality". In January on impartiality grounds it turned down a request by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) to broadcast a charity appeal for Gaza.

In the past few years the BBC has had a major rethink on impartiality. Chairman Michael Grade signalled the impending shake-up in his Goodman media lecture of 2005; the old consensus was unsustainable, he said, and something had to change.

BBC governors commissioned a fat report beseeching the corporation's journalists to move away from the traditional "Labour v Tory" approach to political balance. British society had become "multi-polar", with a diversity

of cultures, beliefs and identities, meaning that there were always more than two sides to an argument.

These concerns were eminently reasonable. But Grade was also anxious about the pace of technological change. There was about to be a wave of unregulated broadcasting over the internet, he feared, free of any requirement to be impartial. The BBC faced being drowned out by the roar of channels that pandered to their audiences' opinions. Grade talked of "influential voices among media commentators suggesting that the time is right for Britain to start experimenting with opinionated broadcast news".

This hint that opinionated current affairs coverage could sit alongside impartiality obligations – a suggestion subsequently taken up and elaborated in the higher reaches of the BBC – marked a significant break with the tradition of

The BBC's ill-advised attempt to rid itself of 'liberalism' means that its journalism has drifted towards a right-wing relativism

rational scepticism in journalism. Rather than interrogating the factual basis for particular views, the broadcaster's role becomes that of merely presenting those views and allowing the audience to take its pick.

In 2007 the BBC's final report on impartiality made this conclusion explicit: "The BBC often used to say it did not take attitudes – except that it was always opposed to racism. Is it still? Should it be? Why does it need to have a view at all, rather than merely observe and report the actions and views of others?"

The debate over impartiality that followed Grade's remarks took place amid an epidemic of soul-searching brought on by the Hutton Report.

The BBC was accused of being too sympathetic to anti-war opinion because it had a general bias towards liberal and left opinion, its senior management insisted.

This assumption shaped the discussion of impartiality, which was punctuated by calls to give more airtime to what one executive called the "lock 'em up brigade". It was in a debate on impartiality that Andrew Marr made his notorious, and completely unfounded, remark that there was "an innate liberal bias inside the BBC ... an institutional liberal bias".

Battered by Hutton and bamboozled by new media, senior BBC executives and journalists began to flirt with unequivocally one-sided current affairs coverage while atoning for their alleged liberal sins. The public wants opinion, so let's give it to them – as long as it's opinion of a particular kind.

The decision not to broadcast the DEC Gaza aid appeal on impartiality grounds revealed a terror of being seen to side with liberal critics of an ally in the "war on terror". Inviting Nick Griffin onto *Question Time* displayed the same fear of being seen to be liberal on race and immigration.

The BBC's ill-advised attempt to rid itself of "liberalism" means that its journalism has drifted towards a right-wing relativism, where racist views are treated as having an equal right to be present on our screens.

This sort of impartiality is a cop-out. Simply presenting all points of view regardless of their relationship with the truth means never having to take an editorial position – and therefore never having to say you're sorry.

● *David Crouch is convenor of Media Workers Against the War. Go to www.mwaw.net*

Why banning the BNP is wrong

It was not that Nick Griffin was on *Question Time* that was wrong, but demanding of the establishment that banning him is the right action.

Bureaucratic repression has never worked. History is full of examples of social democrats actually nurturing racism and xenophobia, as Gordon Brown's recent 'British jobs for British workers' declaration once again showed.

I oppose the shrill calls demanding bans from establishment figures or the

police; they will always be used against the left and do nothing to build class solidarity and unity.

It's not bans that will defeat racism and those reactionaries who use it for nefarious reasons in support of the intrinsically violent and degrading economic status quo and the social relationships that are determined by it.

We should continue organising counter mobilisations and stop calling for bans that play into the hands of the establishment.

Trade union and political activists should use the current rise of organised reactionary political groupings, led by racist thugs, to build the trade union movement so that it becomes a fighting political instrument for change.

**Larry Herman
CPBF National Council**

Review

Agitprop theatre with a media theme

TIM GOPSILL

welcomes a forthright production on the media's role in the financial crisis

EMBEDDED WITH THE BANKERS
Banner Theatre Company

The economic crisis is bringing back class politics to Britain, in a very subdued way.

Some might wish there was a more vigorous opposition to the slashing of the standard of life that is being imposed on the majority of the population, but at least people have stopped talking about the classless society.

There is also a sign of a revival of the "agitprop" theatre that was an integral part of political activity in the 20th century, and fortunately there is nothing subdued about the Birmingham-based Banner Theatre company, whose new production, *Embedded with the Bankers*, played at the CPBF's conference in London in October.

As Banner put it, the show "examines the relationship between big business and the media and show how the media helped to divert the public rage at the unbridled greed and corruption of the international financial institutions that precipitated the worst global financial crisis ever.

The show was developed in conjunction with Granville Williams, who heads the CPBF's project on media ownership in the digital age. The conference was the culminating event of the project.

Embedded with the Bankers was also performed at the pre-conference



Embedded with the Bankers performed at the CPBF pre-conference debate

debate, *The Miners' Strike* and *Politics Today*, held the night before.

It is a 15-minute "video ballad", a mixture of songs, script and video interviews with well-known radical mainstream journalists.

The BBC's Paul Mason, Nick Davies of the Guardian and the CPBF's Nick Jones, a former BBC political correspondent, all explain how the media work, and how they got so deeply involved in promoting the finance industry and the debt-dependent lifestyle that led to disaster.

Inevitably this involves much ribaldry at the expense of the public relations industry:

I'm a PR man I'm cool as ice
I'm calm and I'm serene
But if you got the readies ...
... He's a full on lie machine
... I'm good at turning black to white
and a yes into a no
Facts don't count for nothing
The truth is bought and sold

This verse in particular upset PR members of the National Union of Journalists when *Embedded with the Bankers* was staged at the union's annual delegate meeting in November. There were vocal objections from members working in public relations to what they saw as a certain crudeness in the presentation.

Other NUJ delegates said they found its message rather basic. A reporter sings of being "shackled to

the news desk as a brain dead correspondent", and as for the editor,

All he wants is garbage
and recycled PR dross
Churning out for the news machine
endless candy floss.

The show was not written for journalists, though, but for media campaigners and trade unionists, who have been Banner's core audience for decades.

The company tours its productions to community and trade union audiences "to build campaigns of resistance, raise awareness and understanding, and win over people's hearts and minds."

Despite the controversies – nothing wrong with them – there are plans for *Embedded with the Bankers* to play at regional NUJ events.

Part of this production will be used to create a 5-10 minute digital version to show to "target the web as a performance venue", and it will be a component of Banner's 2010 tour production *Privatisation Blues*, which will "focus on the resistance to the imposition of the neo-liberal policies of privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation."

They ask: "How much longer can we tolerate a media system that speaks for the rich and powerful at the expenses of the rest of the population?"

● For information contact Banner on 0121-551 7216

Review

Miners' Campaign Tapes

These tapes, produced by a group of independent filmmakers, take us back to the gritty reality of the epic 1984-85 miners' strike. The six separate tapes record the testimonies of striking miners, their wives and supporters in the battle against pit closures.

Congratulations to the British Film Institute (BFI) for reissuing the tapes on DVD, and producing a really informative booklet to accompany it, on the 25th anniversary of the strike.

The 1980s was a strong decade for independent filmmakers, with the Channel 4 appointing a commissioning editor with responsibility to fund independent films and video. But the genesis for much of their work was the ferment of the 1960s which saw the establishment of radical film production collectives such as Cinema Action.

Chris Reeves, a key figure in the Miners' Campaign Tapes project, describes in the booklet how the various film and video workshops cooperated on the project. He emphasises that their work was in response to the bias in TV news and current affairs programming and press coverage: "We felt we could play a part in redressing this imbalance by producing partisan material in support of the strike".

The issues the tapes deal with resonate today: police tactics (*Only Doing Their Job?*) and the role of the media in industrial disputes (*The Lie Machine*), for example. Highly recommended.

● *The Tapes* are available for £12.99 from BFI Filmstore.

Go to www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore



SHAFTED: THE MEDIA, THE MINERS' STRIKE AND THE AFTERMATH

A CPBF BOOK

"Each writer offers a different perspective though they all combine under Granville Williams' skilful crafting, to present an authentic picture of how the British media distorted the truth and became corrupted by, and within, the political culture of Thatcherism in its most virulent and arrogant period... Peter Lazenby knows the Yorkshire coalfield like the back of his hand. And his knowledge, expertise and sympathies shine through in a descriptive piece as good if not better than anything I have read about the price paid by those mining communities in their year long fight to survive."

– from the review of *Shafted* by veteran *Daily Mirror* Industrial Correspondent, Geoffrey Goodman, in *Tribune*, 8 May 2009

You can buy *Shafted* (£9.99 + £2.50 P&P) online at www.cpbf.org.uk/shafted or from the National Office with cheques made payable to "CPBF". If you would like to organise a meeting and invite us to speak about the book contact the CPBF National Office.

Free Press is edited by Tim Gopsill on behalf of the National Council

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