

MURDOCH'S LOVE FOR NEW LABOUR

IT SEEMS Rupert Murdoch and Tony Blair have done a deal. Nothing has been written down (as far as we know), because this is not necessary. But an understanding between the two men clearly has been reached. Murdoch likes Blair for the same reasons he liked Margaret Thatcher; the Labour 'moderniser' represents a 'new' right-wing Britain unfettered by sentiments about social justice and the rights of ordinary people. Blair is especially attractive because he will look after Murdoch's interests, in return for electoral support from the Sun, Times etc., while appearing to represent a new populist movement sweeping away tired and stale Toryism.

Already, the Sun recognises him as one of their own. "He has vision, he has purpose," said a Sun editorial recently, "and he speaks our language on morality and family life".

Like Thatcher, Blair sees no contradiction between his close alliance with Murdoch, and his frequent lectures to the nation on the need for higher moral standards. After all, the Sun presents a coherent, ideological view of a society profoundly influenced by the Thatcher revolution, of which Blair is both the product and natural heir. Like Thatcher, he can stand before a Murdoch-invited audience in Australia and with a straight face speak of the "need for a new moral purpose in politics". Like Thatcher, he can attack the most vulnerable while deferring to the most powerful. As the Sun rightly says, "he speaks our language".

This "language" was expressed vividly when Blair flew 50 hours to Queensland and back to make a speech for Murdoch.

Tony Blair flew for 50 hours to address Murdoch's minions.

JOHN PILGER tells us what to expect next

Having spoken about the "new moral purpose" and the "new moral challenge" (he and Murdoch are, after all, practising Christians), he got down to business. "There is an obvious requirement," he said

with the regulator are of course Murdoch's. It is ironic indeed that it is Tory legislation on cross-media ownership limits that prevents Murdoch from expanding in Britain and that it will be a Labour government that will almost certainly remedy that.

There is a striking precedent. Ten years ago Murdoch got a similar nod from Paul Keating, then treasurer in the Australian Labour government, which became Thatcherite and is much admired by Blair. Murdoch was allowed to swallow the huge Herald and Weekly Times group in

Melbourne. A restrictive takeovers act was ignored, and all but two members of the Australian parliament acquiesced with their silence, remembering as one of them put it, "the old story of a bucket of shit a day".

Today Australia can claim the distinction of the most monopolised and politically restricted press in the western world. Of 12 city dailies, Murdoch controls

seven and Conrad Black two. In Adelaide, Murdoch has a complete monopoly. He owns all the daily, Sunday and local papers, as well as the printing presses. In all he controls almost three quarters of Australia's metropolitan press, and Black has the rest.

This is not yet the situation in Britain; but my Australian colleagues say beware. Certainly, self-proclaimed moralists who sup with Murdoch somehow seem more transparent in Australia, the contagion more recognisable. "You can be assured," says David Bowman, former editor in chief of the Sydney Morning Herald and a leading media observer, "Blair is not being seduced and will be a full partner".



SPEAKING OUR LANGUAGE:

The Sun's report of Blair's speech to the TUC.

"The Sun had a better report than The Guardian of what I said," Blair told the BBC.

◆ Media Monitor, page 7

from the blue Newscorp lectern, "to keep the system of regulation [of the British media] under constant review. The revolution taking place makes much of it obsolete. This is the mass multi-media society ... we have real concerns about the suggested role of the new media regulator which is to be given immense power under the [Major government's new] proposals." The signal was clear enough. Labour's "real concerns"

What's new?

THE Labour Party's recent policy document on information superhighways, *Communicating Britain's Future*, is the result of months of leisurely debate and evidence taking from the great and the not so great, the good and the not so good, of the new worlds of communication.

The result of all this genteel straining is a veritable mouse – after thousands of words had been submitted to an overweight Policy Commission stuffed with professional consultants and private sector advisors (two trade unionists were initially involved) the Party pandemics issued a 20-page document which, in its most dramatic conclusion, recommends the adoption of a position set out in a 1994 all-party Trade and Industry Select Committee report – and rejected a few months later by the DTI – to set 1998 as the start date for phasing out the so-called 'asymmetry rule', which prevents BT from competing directly for full cable franchises.

GARY HERMAN finds it hard to see light between Labour and Conservative policies on the information superhighway

In return, BT says it will invest a promised £15 bn in fibre. Well, yes Mr. Smith we all knew that. If the Conservative government were not in hock to the cable TV companies (now predominantly owned by US and French multinationals), they would agree too.

The promise of a firm start date for phasing out the asymmetry rule is critical, not because BT is suffering because of it, but because superhighway policy must be nationally (and internationally)

planned and implemented. Only the telecommunications companies can do that, and it is not for nothing that Rupert Murdoch has made his biggest deal to date with MCI, America's second largest international telecommunications carrier.

Yet it is becoming increasingly difficult to see any light between the Conservative and Labour positions.

The Tory minister responsible for information technology, Ian Taylor, now promises not to do anything about the asymmetry rule until 1998, but this is an advance on his predecessors who promised not to think about the asymmetry rule until 1998.

If Mr. Taylor moves a little further, there will be hardly anything of substance separating Tony Blair's New Labour from John Major's Conservatives on superhighway policy.

In fact, the real purpose of Labour's superhighways policy seems to be to please the media. The conference that unveiled the policy document was thick on media business celebrities. Mr. Blair jetted in from antipodean discussions with Murdoch's News Corporation, while the platform was graced by moguls like Lord Hollick (MAI Group), Greg Dyke (Pearson TV), Bob Phillis (BBC), Sir David English (Associated Newspapers), and Sir David Puttnam (Enigma).

These seemed to be the people calling at least two verses and a chorus of the tune. Most of the policy document's positions have been adopted from existing positions of media lobby groups, and there is little evidence that any of them have been thought through deeply or widely enough.

Concrete proposals included separating the regulatory mechanisms for content and infrastructure, though apparently the BBC is to be excluded from this neat binary structure, not to mention the Internet providers who are barely mentioned in the document.

The document proposes cabling all new and refurbished schools but conveniently ignores the question of how that will be paid for, and whether it is recommending one terminal or cable access point per school or one per pupil.



Market farces

PLATFORM

TOM O'MALLEY on Labour's 21st Century Communications Conference

HERE we go again. Who was it that said history repeats itself as farce? Well history does repeat itself where the Labour front bench media and trade and industry teams are concerned. The occasion was Labour's second 21 Century Communications Conference.

Star billing went to Tony Blair, backed up by Chris Smith and John Cunningham. Last year Mo Mowlem and Robin Cook were running the show, and the results were an appalling capitulation to the arguments put forward by the big media companies. This year was a repeat performance.

Labour had lined up bigwigs from the media industry, from BT, the Cable Communications Association, and from Anglia TV to extol the virtues of its policy on the Information Superhighway. Amidst the splendour of the surrounds, Anglia's chief, Lord Hollick, set the tone. Retorting to the man from BSkyB, Hollick said, "We're in the advertising market, you're in the pay market," and went on to hope that BSkyB would co-operate with his desire to break into the pay TV market.

But Hollick had struck the right chord. The Labour Party is into markets. Tony Blair spoke about ditching old style socialist planning and creating an enabling framework for the competitive development of the media industries. He argued that by allowing the maximum amount of leeway to the market in mass communications you could get a whole host of benefits. Deals could be done with the main cable companies to wire up all schools and hospitals and give us all a slice of the action.

Both Blair and Smith argued that companies could be persuaded to carry these benefits. But failing this the Labour Party would 'insist' that companies wired up the schools and hospitals. This brought a sharp response from Richard Woollam of the Cable Communications Association: "We have had full and robust discussion with the Labour Party on our commitments for schools and are therefore surprised to note in the policy document that the Labour Party would insist that providers lay a broadband feed into every school ... I will stand here today and promise you that the cable industry in the UK will provide a free feed to every library; that will be the same day that every publisher in the UK promised to provide free books."

According to Smith, schools will have the best information technology on offer. Yet a Labour government will not pay for this – the money would come out of hard-

pressed IT budgets in schools, schools doing paid work for business and by schools getting cast-off equipment from local businesses.

After a particularly utopian set of presentations where a series of wonderful socially useful products were displayed, the panel were asked who would pay for their application and dissemination. New Labour took the old fashioned way out. The panellists simply did not attempt to answer the question.

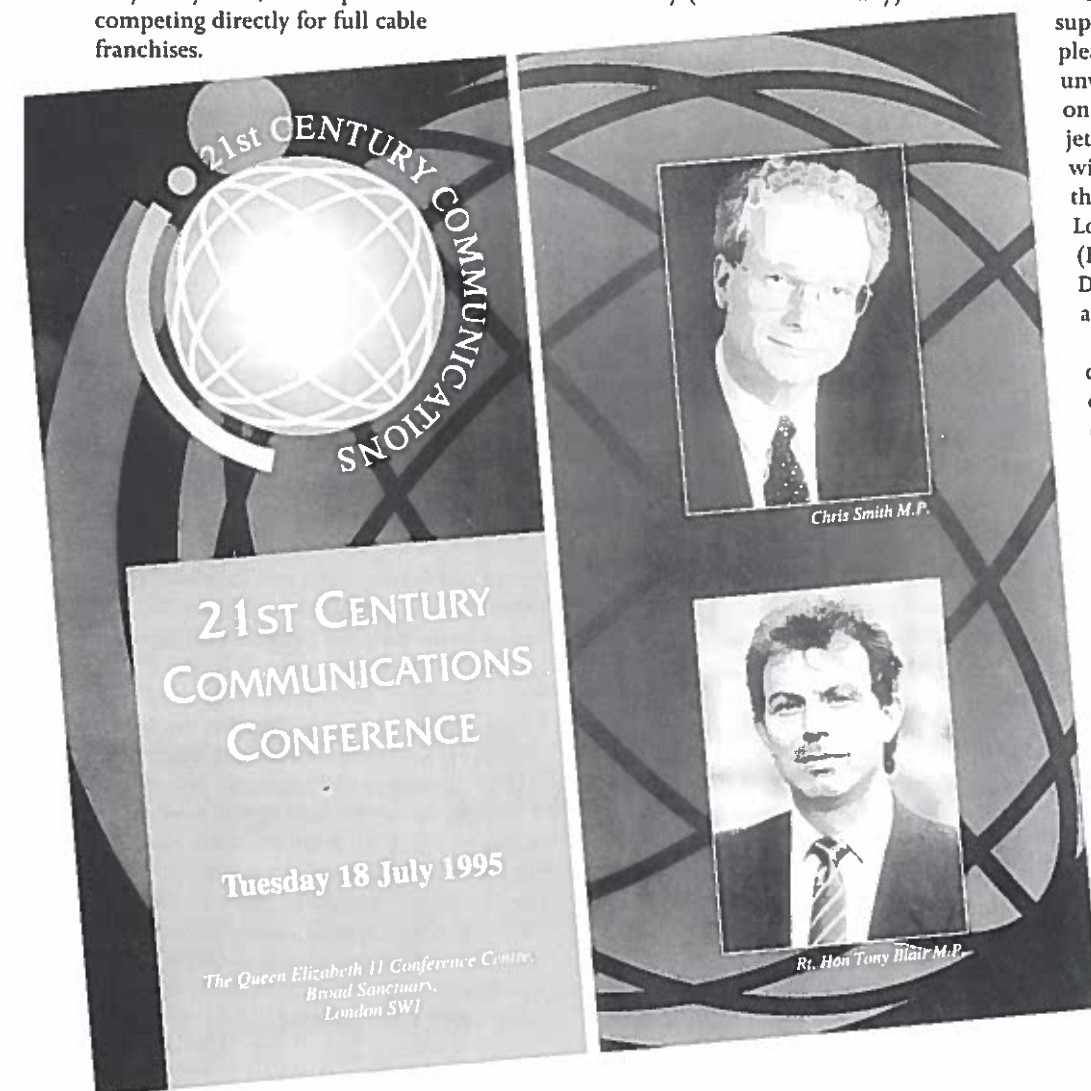
And this goes to the heart of the whole business. Labour is courting the media industries. All very well you might say. But its policies show signs of fraying at the edges when questions are asked about ownership, public service provision and accountability. The noises are there but they are very much for presentational purposes. Scratch the surface and the core thinking is that the market will provide. This is Conservative Party policy writ large.

Labour, for a set of odd and questionable economic and political reasons, has taken sides on the question of whether BT should be allowed to enter the market for entertainment services. It supports BT against the cable companies, who argue that BT had its chance to get into cable and withdrew, and now wants to rectify a big mistake at the expense of the companies which have risked money investing in laying new cable. But at the end of the day there is little difference between the policy of the Labour Party and the Conservatives.

The conference was a sort of meeting for the faithful. The CPBF and the media unions received no publicity about the event and had to make a direct approach to attend and have a stall. Ordinary people were excluded on price grounds from going to the conference. The people the Labour Party is courting are wealthy, influential figures in the media industry.

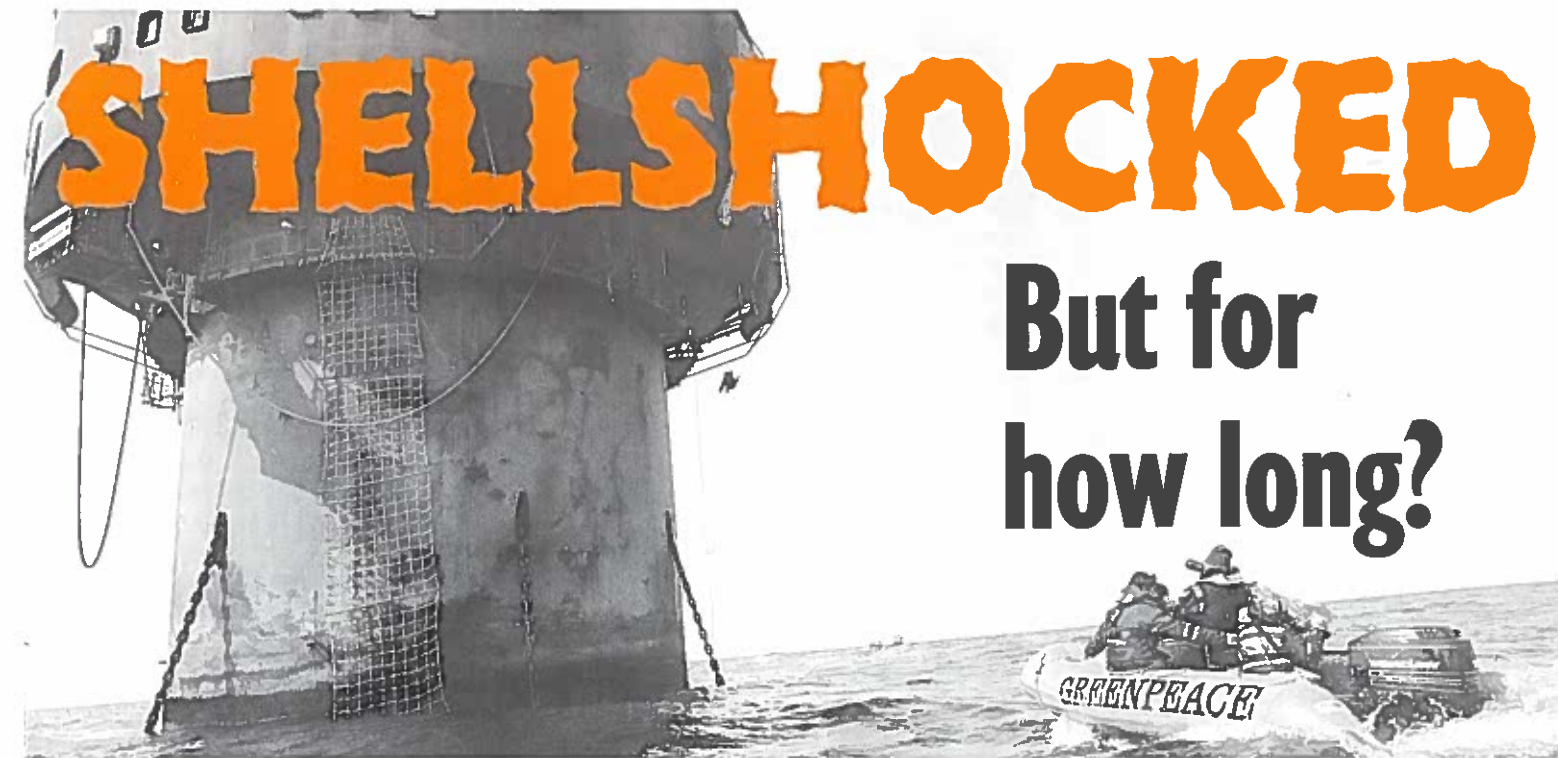
Perhaps Labour will do the same thing next year. But, of course, history does not only repeat itself as farce. We can expect a real tragedy if a Labour government implements the policies it proclaimed at this year's 21 Century Communications Conference.

New Labour took the old fashioned way out



SHELLSHOCKED

But for how long?



ONE OF the highlights of the Edinburgh TV Festival was Greenpeace: Making the News. Before the panel debate got underway we saw a short in-house video produced by Greenpeace to celebrate the Brent Spar victory. Impeccably edited, the stunning images of the occupation were given added impact by the soundtrack of Tom Petty's song, I Won't Back Down. The appeal was simple, direct and emotional.

For David Lloyd, C4's Senior Commissioning Editor, this was the problem with Greenpeace's media campaign: "On Brent Spar we were bounced ... by the time the broadcasters tried to intervene on the scientific analysis, the story had long since been spun far, far into Greenpeace's direction. When we attempted to pull the story back, the pictures provided to us showed plucky helicopters riding into a fusillade of water cannons. Try and write the analytical science into that to the advantage of the words."

Richard Sambrook, BBC News Editor, acknowledged Greenpeace "are extremely accomplished at projecting their message in ways which touch a chord with the public, and to do so they exploit some weaknesses in the media." He pointed out how Greenpeace can "provide better, more compelling and more frequent footage than we can ourselves." He cited the resources deployed: "On Brent Spar alone they spent £1.3 million, about £350,000 of which was on TV equipment and feeds – many times what a news organisation could devote."

Sambrook listed the way the media "were had over Brent Spar":

- ◆ Greenpeace exploit our thirst for a good story (particularly in the summer) and for dramatic pictures, and they play on the traditional news values of conflict and confrontation. "Unfortunately, even the most telegenic

The Greenpeace campaign, and Shell's decision to back down over the dumping of the Brent Spar storage platform generated massive media coverage and analysis. The shock waves from the spectacular success by the pressure group have continued to reverberate.

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS analyses the issues

scientist in a lab is less compelling viewing than drama on the high seas."

- ◆ They rely on the time pressures under which a daily news operation operates, the need for a fast turn around of material, the increasing number of news deadlines which sometimes prevent in-depth enquiry

- ◆ They exploit the power of a moral message – assertions based on broad values, rather than dry detail or inconclusive facts.

And the poor old journalists? "Lay men and women caught up in the crossfire of a battle of statistics." Add to this the other dimension of that poor old slow moving, but well-intentioned multinational, Shell, being unable to match the nimble footwork and rapid reactions of Greenpeace – "It kept Shell on the back foot, the defensive for most of the campaign," Sambrook said – and the case seems pretty conclusive.

But hold on. There never was any rule that news editors should include footage filmed and edited by sophisticated pressure groups. And don't news organisations have specialist correspondents covering the environment, science and technology to give the essential background? It's over-egging it to project the

image of innocent news channels being manipulated by the media expertise of Greenpeace, or at least in the case of the two main news providers in the UK – the BBC and ITV.

What the incident has provoked though is a debate on the professionalism or otherwise of using Audio News Releases (ANRs) and Video News Releases (VNRs). Caroline Diehl of the Media Trust suggests in Broadcast (23/8/95) that they give access to a much wider range of opinion and debate: "For charities and NGOs, many of whom are restricted by the broadcasting regulatory bodies from buying airtime, news programmes provide the main opportunity to ensure public awareness and support for their work. Large and small pressure groups are becoming adept at setting the news agenda, delivering messages and pictures into millions of homes." A reason she cites is the attraction for the "overstretched news editor, squeezed on time and budget" to use free footage.

What this process strikes at is the notion of 'impartiality' in newsgathering. I think Caroline Diehl is being disingenuous when she argues, "As new channels spring up weekly, and pressure on budgets increases, free footage is too sweet an offering to refuse. Not only news, but also documentary producers are succumbing to temptation and, who knows, maybe they produce stronger programmes as a result." She also uses a revealing phrase, when she speculates whether VNRs and externally supplied footage, will be "the fodder to keep the TV channels of the 21st century alive".

I'm not persuaded. The huge multinationals, whether in oil or media, and government, want their message to get out but often on the terms they set. It would be a terrible prospect if the floodgates open and news organisations for reasons of expediency and cost do succumb to the pressures.

A photograph of George Orwell to replace the portrait of Lord Reith in the BBC council chamber – just one of the good ideas at the Edinburgh International Television

IT'S A SIGN of the times. Major sponsors of this year's Edinburgh International Television Festival included Sky and the Cable Communications Association. There were valuable and informative sessions on TV in 2005, South African Television's Revolution and Beyond the Pale, which examined what is and what isn't acceptable to broadcast.

BBC: Year Zero asked broadcasters to say what sort of a BBC they would develop in their first 100 days as Director General. Some interesting ideas emerged.

NICK FRASER,
Editor BBC's Fine Cut

"Those of you who watched Pocahontas or Aladdin will realise that they were doctored for their global audience. The doctorings may not seem significant – the depiction of the colonists, mostly Brits, as drunken louts, idealisation of the Native Americans, removal of the more vicious aspects of the Koran – but they are signs of things to come. Censorship by the market is what large monopolistic companies do to protect themselves.

"And yet the BBC transmitted George Orwell's Animal Farm unexpurgated in 1946, only months after it had been turned down by most London publishers on the grounds of its presumed anti-Sovietism, and long before its version of the truth had come to seem self-evident. This is the BBC tradition, and it continues.

"For me the most remarkable reporting last year was Sue Lloyd Roberts' investigation, for the Nine O'Clock News, of the Chinese Gulag. When Harry Wu, who had travelled to China with her, was arrested, and a 'confession' was extracted from him on videotape, the BBC stood by his original version of events.

"The BBC should make no compromises where its central role of truth-telling is concerned, whether in this country or not. In a broadcasting system dominated by the market, the BBC is under the obligation to be courageous. So this is my first agenda item: **FREE SPEECH:** "Symbolically, to give the tradition precedence, I've personally removed the likeness of John Reith from the pride of

Sign of the times

place it occupies over the fire in the council chamber, and replaced it with a life sized photograph of George Orwell."

STEVE MORRISON,
Managing Director of LWT

had a seven point plan, and it wouldn't be a bad idea if the current BBC regime plagiarised some of his policies. They included:

STOP THE ROT IN BBC PROGRAMME PRODUCTION

The volume of programme production inside the BBC must remain high. "The message must go out loud and clear that the BBC will remain a producer as well as a broadcaster ... we must say loudly to our own creative staff that we are committed to producing within the BBC," he said. "In drama, if you take out core production like Casualty and Eastenders, the rest is split 50:50 between in-house and independent producers. In light entertainment the current split is about 35 per cent independent, 65 per cent in-house, but in comedy the split is again 50:50. That's 50 per cent outside production. Double the quota."

CARRY OUT SURGERY ON BBC MANAGERS

"I would instigate a BBC-wide review of all layers of management. A revealing exercise is to go through last year's BBC directory. There are 11,000 entries – not including BBC Enterprises and BBC Worldwide – and 119 staff have job titles which refer to 'Policy and Planning' and 'Planning Strategy'. If you include the words 'Corporate Affairs', 'Policy', 'Policy and Services', 'Corporate Management Development', 'TV Management Direction', 'Director's Office', 'Management Support' –

they give a total of 1098 people involved, however mysteriously, in management."

PHASE OUT PRODUCER CHOICE

"Editorial and resource management must come together so that £5 notes are not chucked out of the window to buy outside cutting rooms, while internal staff remain under-utilised. ... Our objective should not be to get more efficient to cut back on our programmes, but to grow them further."

REPLACE THE CHARTER WITH AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT

"The Charter is a millstone because it keeps the BBC toadying to government. Supporters of the Charter have argued that it gives the BBC flexibility and supports its independence. But there is another model which would secure these goals more effectively ... Channel 4's constitution, and more importantly, its programme remit, are both made transparent and secure by the 1990 Broadcasting Act," he said

"The Licence Fee is guaranteed for five years. That means in only three years time it will have to cuddle up to the government to get a decent income. The BBC's lease is getting shorter, and the government's leash is getting tighter."

MAKE THE CASE FOR A HIGHER LICENCE FEE

"We have gone through the agony of discovering what we already knew: that the Licence Fee is the least worst way to pay for the BBC. Now we have to make sure it is secure and enough," he said.

"The government recognises that commercial broadcasters have to plan their business – why not the BBC? The formula for ITV payments is set for ten years – why not one for the licence fee? One that gives us a small margin on RPI, plus a long run on security.

"But to bring the public with us the marketing message must continue to be hammered home ... Sky has set the standard in aggressive – and effective – marketing. If they can get people to pay between £100 and £140 for the basic Sky package the BBC should be able to sell its TV services, particularly those things we are known best for."

In the long run the success of Greenpeace in seizing a media opportunity over Brent Spar will be eclipsed by something far worse – and the incipient signs are there already. The massive resources of the UK oil industry are being deployed to mount a major PR offensive after the Shell debacle. According to PR Week (18/8/95) a full blown PR campaign, worth in excess of £500,000 is being planned by the UK Offshore Operators Association (UKOOA), with an even bigger ad campaign an option.

The stakes are high. There are about 200 structures linked with North Sea oil operations and, according to consultants Arthur Andersen, the total cost of the decommissioning will be £7 billion over 30 years. UKOOA wants to ensure that the pressure for a total ban on dumping is neutralised.

That's why the concern of news organisations to develop and act on clear guidelines on the use of VNRs, from any source, is to be welcomed. It's critically important that we get

accurate, impartial news reporting of these issues, and why I hope the broadcast news editors get just as indignant when PR organisations financed by oil multinationals with deep pockets, or the British government, seek to impose their agenda on news reporting.

Greenpeace hit the headlines and humbled both the mighty multinational, Shell and John Major over Brent Spar, but it is only one skirmish in the long struggle to win the media and information battle.

How to carve the media

CPBF The response questions the assertion in Media Ownership that 'there is a need to liberalise the existing ownership regulations'. It points to the fact that very little seemed to happen after the review announced by the then national heritage Secretary, Peter Brooke, in January 1994. It quotes from a well-informed Economist article (May 20, 1995), which suggested "any new rules on media ownership would have to decide what to do about Mr Murdoch ... Boxed in, ministers seemed to have decided to do nothing, and hope the whole issue would go away".

In fact, the fear that Murdoch might gain access to terrestrial TV through a consortium to run Channel 5 was one spur to action. Extensive media coverage highlighted the potential threat and urged government action, even to the extent of putting the bids on hold until a review of media ownership was completed. The other was the high profile and effective lobby by the British Media Industry Group (the consortium of Pearson, the Daily Telegraph, Associated Newspapers and the Guardian Media group) for a change in media ownership laws.

The CPBF argues that "both the Murdoch and BMIG cases show the power existing already in the hands of media groups to influence the political agenda". The need to liberalise media laws "has been created by powerful lobbying and the deployment by media groups of their power, acting in congruence, to shape emerging media policy to their advantage".

◆ The assumptions behind the report and its primary focus, on media ownership in commercial and technological terms, are criticised. The CPBF challenges the validity of these assumptions, and particularly the assertion that British media companies should be allowed to build in size to compete in the global market. "Globalisation is being used as a buzz word to promote liberalisation ... We are not talking about UK companies which want to operate in a global market, but ones which want to expand into different, more profitable bits of the media within the UK".

◆ The proposal for a system of measurement based on market share or 'share of voice' is rejected. "The idea of relative impact cannot be measured in any meaningful way," the response asserts. It also suggests that the "apparently neutral

The government invited responses to its publication, Media Ownership, which proposed a new regulatory system and method of measurement to 'carve up the media cake'. We covered the proposals in Free Press 87. These are summaries of media union and CPBF responses

statistical method to monitor media ownership" ignores practical democratic concerns, where different newspaper groups have remarkably homogeneous views on a range of political issues.

◆ The role of the regulator comes in for sustained criticism for being "unclear and unsatisfactory". CPBF asks: "How will the regulator be appointed, and what system of accountability will there be?" The regulator



will also have to decide whether takeovers and amalgamations are in the public interest, but this is a contested area where experience of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission suggests the public interest test is unsatisfactory.

◆ The CPBF believes 'the government's proposals pay lip service to the vital issues of diversity and plurality in the media, but in reality pave the way for a dramatic increase in cross-media ownership and the reduction of range, choice and quality'.

◆ The CPBF urges the government to publish the data on which it bases the suggestion that there is a need for further

deregulation of media ownership. In place of an approach it considers "inherently dangerous", it argues for a series of positive measures to enhance media standards and accountability, including clear limits on cross-media ownership; ensuring a secure and well-funded public service through the BBC; revising the 1990 Broadcasting Act to require commercial TV and cable and satellite services to adhere to a range of public service requirements; and exploring ways to make broadcasting organisations more accountable.

NUJ "It seems we could be moving into an age in which broadcasting, not to mention the new electronic media, is becoming like the press: an unregulated free-for-all in which big companies can own as much as they can buy and do with it what they will," warns the NUJ.

◆ Issues of broadcasting standards and regulation are not addressed in the proposals: "There seems to be an assumption that the rules on ownership can be relaxed and standards will be unaffected, which is mistaken".

◆ The regulator "must be independent and have complete decision making power. The MMC system of leaving the final say to ministers is discredited."

The NUJ also raises the crucial issue of divestment: "...if there are limits on ownership, whether calculated by market share or by number of outlets, it must follow that they are absolute ... The regulator must have powers, not just to prevent acquisitions, but to require companies to divest".

◆ There are "glaring problems in the proposed 'exchange rate' between sectors - and even within them; how, for instance, do you measure the relative shares of the Sun and the Financial Times? ... There are so many variables and discrepancies that the exercise is impossible".

The NUJ dismisses the case of the middle rank British-owned media companies which have argued for a relaxation to allow them to challenge the multinationals: "If the multina-

tionals are too strong, the answer is to restrict their operations in the UK".

GPMU The union comments: "It will be interesting to see if Rupert Murdoch manages to persuade the Tory government, as he has persuaded governments elsewhere, to change their mind regarding any proposals that adversely affect News Corporation".

◆ The government's proposals echo most of what the BMIG lobbied for and "reflect more on the government's fear of losing the next election because of lack of support from the major newspapers than any real political will to provide a more open and diverse media".

BECTU A key omission identified is that of "gatekeepers", the most obvious example being the effective monopoly of encryption technology (picture scrambling) by News International (via News Datacom) which will be reinforced by the rapid development of digital television. "By concentrating only on the shares of those already within any given market, the broader problem of denial of access to a market is missed".

The government's proposals are "set against a surprisingly static view of the broadcasting sector (and) do not necessarily address adequately the growth of subscription television with the current market, let alone the imminent development of digital satellite and terrestrial broadcasting". Ownership proposals should "span the media sector in its entirety" and consider potentially excessive concentration in new sectors outside the present definition of the media.

◆ Concern is expressed about regional TV: "The recent trend towards concentration within ITV has already seriously eroded the regional character and regional production base of many companies. Further incursions by national newspaper groups would seriously accelerate this process".

◆ The proposals "allow an extraordinary and unacceptable amount of discretion to the proposed regulator. If a company exceeded any given threshold then, according to the proposals, the regulator would only be obliged to act 'if, on examination of the facts in the case, it were concluded that the public interest demanded it' ... the regulator is left with sweeping discretion based on the inevitably subjective concept of the public interest".

MEDIA MONITOR

REGIONAL MEDIA UP FOR GRABS

◆ Two major sales of regional newspapers will drastically reshape the pattern of ownership. Trinity International's £327.5m purchase of Thomson Regional Newspapers (which has to be cleared by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission) will make it the largest regional newspaper publisher in the UK. Trinity will acquire 51 titles, to make a total of 121 owned by the group.

In Scotland there's concern about the titles Thomson has put up for sale - The Scotsman publications (The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday) and Aberdeen Journals. One fear is that Caledonian Publishing, publisher of the Glasgow based Herald and Evening Times might bid for the titles and then have monopoly control of Scotland's quality press.

◆ Reed Elsevier has put up for sale the Hamlyn books division (imprints Hamlyn, Heinemann and Mandarin) and the company's regional newspaper division with a price tag of £800m.

Reed has done its sums and decided that the returns on regional newspapers are not as attractive as those for academic and professional publishing and new multimedia ventures.

Profit margins in the scientific and technical division of Reed are 35 per cent, and Reed wants to develop online distribution for academic and professional users.

It will mean it gets both revenue from subscriptions to journals and from online users.

SUN PRAISES BLAIR

After The Guardian leak of the Gould memo urging a tighter centralised control of the Labour Party under Tony Blair, the Labour leader was interviewed on The World at One, Wednesday 13 September. Stung by the leak, he was also clearly upset by the paper's report of his TUC conference speech the day before: "The Sun had a better report than The Guardian of what I said."

For the record the Sun report was headlined BLAIR BLASTS 'TIMEWARP' UNION BARONS, and, most unusually, did devote a whole page to his speech.

An editorial also praised "Blair's passionate speech ... he had the courage to tell them there would be no more flying pickets or strikes without ballots."

What is going on?



Back a long way - John Voos' (Independent) picture of Blair and Mandelson at the 1990 Labour conference from Soundbites and Spin Doctors

REVIEW

War of words

Soundbites and Spin Doctors
Nicholas Jones
Cassell Price £16.99.

IT'S A sobering thought really. The next general election can't be much more than 80 weeks away, and this book provides essential background reading on the relationship between politicians and the media as the struggle for dominance of the news agenda intensifies.

In the eighties the high profile of Bernard Ingham as Press Secretary to Mrs Thatcher drew attention to the importance of politicians placed on shaping the news and current affairs agenda in their favour.

Since then we've seen the rise to prominence of Labour's spin doctor Peter Mandelson as well as the appointment of Alastair Campbell (formerly of the Daily Mirror and Today) as Tony Blair's Press Secretary; and Joy Johnson, the former BBC political news editor, to the post of campaigns director for the Labour Party.

A war of attrition is being fought out between the spin doctors and journalists. Nicholas Jones has been at the centre of many of these skirmishes, and witnessed the changes since he joined The Times as Parliamentary Reporter in 1968, and for the last 20 years with the BBC as a Labour and Political Correspondent.

The book (sub-titled 'How Politicians manipulate the media - and vice versa') is an excellent insider's account of the pressures and dilemmas facing political correspondents, and also looks more widely at the demands of editors and proprietors which have changed what constitutes permissible conduct.

The book only partly deals with the important question, why should broadcast news and current affairs jump on the roller coaster? Shouldn't broadcasters be more cautious about running with the rat pack, and work to a different agenda?

Granville Williams

NOTICES

PLEASE DIG DEEP FOR THE CPBF

WHEN the CPBF was launched in 1979 few would have predicted its survival through the hostile years of Thatcherism, and to still be around after 16 years. We have survived, and the next 18 months are crucial for us. We have embarked on a major fund raising exercise – £25,000 is the target. Between now and the next election the gap between our plans, and the finances to realise them, is yawning.

We want to re-print an updated edition of Britain's Media: How They Are Related, which has sold out, and publish a new pamphlet on The Information Superhighway. We are seriously concerned about the drift of Labour's media policies, and want to mount a sustained campaign and encourage debate on alternative ideas. The focus for this would be a Media Manifesto and conference planned for early summer 1996.

Finally extra funding would enable us to employ staff to carry this workload. At present the CPBF employs two staff on a part-time two days a week basis. You can help us by raising the issue with any trade union or other organisation which may send a donation.

A standing order form is also available.

CPBF NOTICES

If you can donate a regular amount via a standing order this will provide us with a regular and secure flow of funds.

Please do all you can.

GET A PEASANT ON THE CITY DESK TO DO A PIECE ABOUT HOW PRESS BARONS ARE A RING OF THE PAST WILL YOU HARRYEVES



PRESS FREEDOM: THE PROPRIETOR'S VIEW

One of a set of six postcards just produced by the CPBF on the themes of Press Freedom and Media Ownership. There is another Tim Sanders card, two by Paul Morton, one by Steve Bell and one by Kamel Akib. You can purchase the set of six for £2.00 inc P&P

CPBF STALL. HELP WANTED ON OCTOBER 19th

The CPBF (North) offices are in the Kirklees Media Centre, Huddersfield. On Thursday, October 19 the official opening of the Media Centre will be followed by an Open Day which will be from 2 to 6 pm.

CPBF (North) will be having a stall and display at the event. We'd like to invite CPBF members to come along, and if you have some time to help us on the stall and deal with enquiries please contact Granville Williams, CPBF North, Kirklees Media Centre, 7 Northumberland Street, Huddersfield HD1 1RL. TEL 01484 454184

CPBF (NORTH) PUBLIC MEETING PACKAGING POLITICS

Thursday October 19 7.30pm

Kirklees Media Centre, Huddersfield

In the era of soundbites and spin doctors, what is happening to political reporting in broadcasting and the press? After the party political conference two experts discuss the issues. Nicholas Jones BBC, Political Correspondent (Author of Strikes and the Media and Soundbites and Spin Doctors) and Bob Franklin, Sheffield University (Author of Whose News? and Packaging Politics).

CPBF BOOK SERVICE

Politics and Media Titles

Packaging Politics by Bob Franklin (Edward Arnold) £12.99

Politics and the Mass Media by Ralph Negrine (Routledge £9.99)

The Media Trilogy by Robert Harris (Faber) £9.99. Collected in one volume, three books including Good and Faithful Servant which dissected Bernard Ingham's work as Thatcher's Press Officer.

For orders add 10 per cent to cover P&P. Send SAE for free copy of our media catalogue.

MURDOCH:

NO TAX FOR SIX YEARS

Rupert Murdoch's News International has paid no tax for six years, despite spiralling profits. In the year to June 30 profits of the group more than doubled to £778.7 million, but tax avoidance accounting means the multinational company can shift money round the globe to maximise advantage in each country.

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