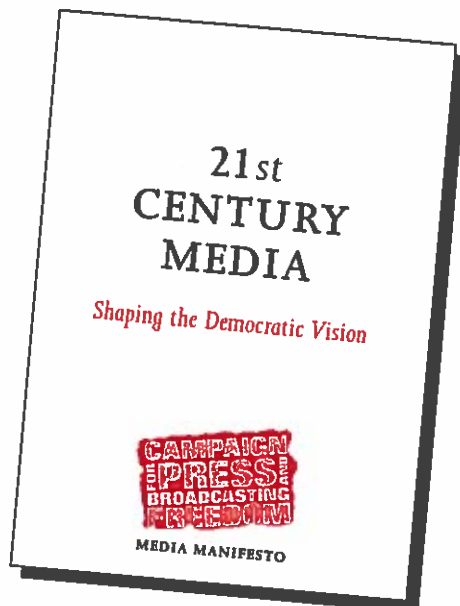


ELECTION ROLE FOR CPBF'S MEDIA MANIFESTO



BY JONATHAN HARDY

THE CPBF Media Manifesto was launched in the House of Commons on July 2. Designed to stimulate widespread debate on the future shape of media policy, it will be an important document in the run-up to the party conference season and the fast-approaching general election.

The manifesto calls for a change in the direction of media policy, and argues that a handful of media corporations exercise increasing control over what we see, hear and read. The grip of big media companies is having a dramatic impact both on the work of journalists and on the range, choice and quality of our media.

As we become part of the so-called "information society", public interests are being neglected as media policy is increasingly shaped by the interests of powerful media companies. Labour too has proposed jettisoning the existing limits on cross-media ownership, abandoning principles which have shaped media policy for decades.

The Media Manifesto calls for policies which encourage democratic accountability, quality and choice in our media and which reverse the concentration of media power

into fewer and fewer hands. Amongst the recommendations are:

- A new regulatory body (Media Commission) to impose effective controls on cross-media ownership across the mass media
- A guaranteed right to distribution and display for all lawful publications
- The creation of a Media Enterprise Board to support the launch of new media
- Establishment of a Media Consumers Council to protect and enhance consumer interests
- Enhancement of public service obligations for all broadcasters
- A new system of appointing BBC governors combined with a radical overhaul of the structures of accountability within broadcasting

"The purpose of the Media Manifesto," said Free Press editor, Granville Williams, "is to encourage debate and allow a wider group of people to realise that there are real options for reform in the media. Expansion and conglomeration may make financial sense for media companies, but for the listener, viewer or reader bigger won't mean better – in fact the reverse."

Meanwhile, back on the benches...

BY TIM GOPSILL

THE CPBF launched its Media Manifesto on an inauspicious day: Tuesday July 2 was the Third Reading in the Commons of the Broadcasting Bill, a measure that heralds the media world the Campaign wants to prevent.

Unsurprisingly the Bill went through, with its provisions to allow all but the two biggest press groups to take over ITV companies; and, among other things, to

privatise the BBC's transmitters.

More surprisingly in the debate, it was the Labour Party front bench that argued for the greatest relaxation of the restrictions on cross-media ownership. Labour tabled an amendment to scrap the limit on



Mullin: Inspired big revolt

newspaper market share, above which a group may not control a C3 franchise. The government opposed it, sticking its 20 per cent threshold – which would currently bar the Murdoch and Mirror groups. The Labour amendment went down by 302 to 232.

But fiercer opposition came in a Labour back-bench revolt, in which 73 MPs – a huge number in these New Labour days – backed an amendment from Sunderland MP Chris Mullin to lower the 20 per cent threshold to 10 and prevent, effectively, all the popular newspaper publishers from muscling in on Channel 3.

The official Labour line was that any percentage limit was arbitrary, and decisions in the case of each takeover should be left to the regulators – the Monopolies Commission or the ITC –

→ continued page 3

Football crazy

BY STEPHEN F KELLY

A WEEK before the European Football Championships kicked off, the Daily Mirror in a stinging front page editorial argued that, "If we ever cut ourselves loose from our partners across the Channel, we would become an isolated irrelevant island" (28 May).

Fine sentiments, but when it came to the football, the Mirror proved to be just as xenophobic, just as insulting as anything the tabloids have delivered in years. It was not alone. The Daily Star was almost as bad, the Sun less so. If the Mirror is the paper Tony Blair and the Labour Party look to for their support, then it might be time for them to look elsewhere.

After a week or so of insults when the Dutch were referred to as 'Edams', the Scots as 'Jocks' and the Spanish as 'Juans', the Daily Mirror sank to new depths of insults when its issue of Monday 24 June declared football war on Germany. In an editorial that aped Neville Chamberlain's fireside broadcast of Sunday 3 September, the Mirror urged Germany to 'surrender'. In five pages devoted to this war-like theme, the Mirror delivered a

barrage of predictable metaphors. There was the usual stereotyped nonsense about Germans stealing the sunloungers, and all the war-like language of 'Achtung, Fritz, Reichstag' and so on.

The Daily Star adopted a similar theme, stooping even lower with a catalogue of anti-German jokes and a fantasy that Germans were Europe's worst fartars. It was



appallingly insulting. Was this really meant to be amusing? The Mirror claimed it was, as did the Daily Mail's Simon Heffer on BBC Television's Newsnight that evening. Others were sure it was not, including all the political leaders and a chorus of foreign journalists in the country for the European championships. A BBC Radio Five 'phone in on the issue attracted 200 calls. It was

reported that only three had voiced any support for the tabloids. One of the programme's guests, Brian Woolnough of the Sun, was said to have been 'shocked' by the response of listeners. By the end of the week the Press Complaints Commission revealed that more than 100 complaints had been received. 'It will be dealt with and reported on as soon as possible,' a spokeswoman told the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. Let's hope so, and let's hope that it is not conveniently forgotten now that the football is over.

But that's not all. What the championships also revealed was an excessive amount of coverage. Tree forests galore tumbled as special supplements and acres of pages appeared. The Sun managed 21 pages on Monday 24 June. And then there was the dumping of news values. The aftermath of the Manchester bombing was relegated to some far corner; the murder of Veronica Guerin was tucked away on the inside pages; and the breakthrough in the beef war hardly rated a mention.

In June alone the Daily Mirror produced a dozen front page leads on the championships. And in the days preceding England's march towards the semi-finals, the Mirror managed nine consecutive front page leads. Even The Guardian and The Independent seemed to catch the football fever that swept through the dailies as news values were hurled out of the window. Of course the championships were a popular story, but a

perspective has to be maintained. For a more balanced view see the European press. And wasn't it interesting that once England had been knocked out, the tabloids were nowhere to be seen. Germany against the Czech Republic. Forget it, we're not interested.

Stephen F Kelly has written and edited numerous books on football. His latest is a biography of Bill Shankly (Virgin, £14.99).

Back on the benches...

→ from page 1

using a "public interest" criterion. But dominating its argument was the commercial interest of the Mirror Group, New Labour's main Fleet Street ally.

Heritage front-bencher John Cunningham said the party supported the development of multi-media ownership, but the Bill would "deny one newspaper group (the Mirror) the opportunity given to all others"; quaintly, he excluded News International, on the grounds it would be unlikely to be interested in Channel 3.

He also pointed out that the Bill already contained another barrier: that no one company could control more than 15 per cent of the national ITV market. (In fact, this percentage is lower than it looks, because all national broadcasters, including the BBC, are brought into the calculations, and 15 per cent of the national market would be about 45 per cent of ITV, so three companies could own the lot.)

Gerald Kaufman, who chairs the Commons Heritage Select Committee and has become entranced by digital and online media and the interest of companies that want to control it, went further. He said the Bill was "extraordinary, coming from a Conservative Government who claim to believe in the free market." The Mirror group would have to cut circulations or sell off a title (the People) to meet the provisions; what good would that do?

So the arguments against the free-for-all were put by the government: junior minister Ian Sproat said the objective was "to prevent national newspaper groups that enjoy a dominant position in the market from becoming dominant broadcasters, and vice versa."

"Any decision by the House now to remove the threshold would send a clear signal to the regulators and the courts that a market share above that would be perfectly compatible with owning Channel 3 licences." This was a Tory speaking!

He even opposed an amendment from

Tory backbencher Roger Gale – supported by Labour – to allow a company over the limit a year to divest itself of part of its holdings. The Bill's limit was three months, and Ian Sproat said it was "perfectly straightforward under competition law" for a company to have to sell one asset to acquire another.

The case was, of course, put with more gusto by backbenchers. Chris Mullin said the argument was simple: "Those who brought us junk journalism will bring us junk television if we let them, and we should not."

"I do not believe that big is beautiful or necessary. Ultimately a handful of American corporations will dominate most of the earth. I do not want to see us included as an offshore part of a great empire."

Chris Mullin said he would be "happier if someone could convince me that those institutions (the MMC and ITC) were up to the task" of preventing the concentration of ownership. "I do not think that either of them ... is capable of facing up to the mighty and enormous vested interests we face".

He could not, of course, directly attack his own front bench, but Scottish Nationalist Roseanna Cunningham did so with relish. She pointed out that "Labour's amendment will favour the Murdoch press ... a price Labour seems willing to pay for the prospect of a gentler run in the forthcoming general election, as if adopting Tory policies on social and economic issues is not going to be enough. The real lesson is: new Labour, no principles."

Scottish and Welsh nationalists voted for Chris Mullin's amendment. Most Labour MPs abstained in the vote – it was lost by 73 to 303 – but Gerald Kaufman did join the Tories in opposing it.

The scale of the revolt is likely to deter New Labour, if it gains power, from trying to legislate anew for a media free-for-all; there would be too much back-bench opposition.

Without Comment

Labour placed four-page advertisements this morning in four newspapers at a cost of £500,000.

Financial Times, 5 July
(the day after Labour launched The Road to the Manifesto)

Backed by an M&C Saatchi poster campaign, the latest Tory onslaught may cost as much as £2 million, twice Labour's £1 million Road to the Manifesto programme."

Michael White
The Guardian, 3 July on the Tory spoof anti-Labour manifesto, The Road to Ruin.

Do not now expect party political broadcasts to be filled with grainy black-and-white film of uncollected and rat-infested dustbins during the 1978-79 winter of discontent. That saga began before the new crop of 18-year olds who will be on the electoral register by May 1997 was even born."

Donald Macintyre
The Independent, 2 July

As treated by Labour, the press, tabloid and other, is a potent enemy of truth. It has become the reason for silence, rather than the agent of communication. Ask a shadow minister why policy is hedged about with infinite imprecision, and the answer invariably relates to the wicked distortions that would otherwise be applied to it by the liars of Wapping or the Isle of Dogs, whose defence when pushed is the same deflecting smirk they were bringing to the noxious anti-German sewage that was their contribution to Euro 96. "Just a bit of fun," said the editor of the Mirror.

Hugo Young
The Guardian, 25 June

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ★ Order a copy of the Manifesto – single copies free but please send SAE. 10 copies, £2.00; 50 copies £7.50; 100 copies £12.00 inc. P&P
- ★ Get the debate going! Organise a meeting or get your organisation to move resolutions on media policy. Contact the CPBF office if you want help with speakers or to frame a resolution
- ★ Support the fringe meetings at the TUC and Labour Party conferences. If you aren't a delegate or visitor let people who are going have the details (see page 8)
- ★ Send your own or your organisation's comments on the Manifesto into the CPBF. The Manifesto isn't a definitive document and we welcome any comments or alternative ideas.

Unions look at the challenge

TWO unions, BECTU and the CWU, whose members are at the sharp end of technological change in the media and telecommunications industries, have produced a joint policy statement, The Challenge of the Information Society. The statement looks at the impact of the information society on the world of work.

The CPBF conference on May 18 was successful, drew together over 200 people, and generated a high level of interest and debate in the workshops and plenary sessions. This report gives a glimpse into aspects of the conference which is the first of a range of activities by the CPBF to gear up interest in media policy issues over the coming months.

Media and democracy

BY JONATHAN HARDY

"WE'RE not coming together to lament the obstacles before us, but to help craft the media of the future." That call by our sister organisation FAIR in the US could equally represent the motivation for our conference in May, Media and Democracy – the Real Share Issue. The conference attracted trade unionists, campaigners, academics and CPBF members from across the country. Over 180 people came together to exchange ideas on bringing about real democracy and diversity in Britain's media.

The conference included speakers from the trade unions, the media, political parties as well as international guests from several European countries. Amongst the speakers were Carole Tongue MEP, Neil Gerrard MP, Prof. James Curran, independent TV producer Ray Fitzwalter, journalist and broadcaster Joy Johnson, the General Secretaries of the CWU, STE and NUJ and speakers from the National Consumer Council, Campaign for Freedom of Information and Labour Telematics Centre.

Joy
Johnson:
End the
lobby system



OFF SPIN

In the opening session, Labour's former head of media and campaigns, Joy Johnson attacked the culture of political reporting for trivialising politics and excluding the public. Obsession with the spin on policy, on gossip and division, is making the political process "a story of sophisticated games with rules only understood by the few" she said.

Calling for a news agenda driven by policies not personalities, she said that journalists have a duty to the democratic process, "to inform the electorate as well as entertain it. We should listen to the briefings and hear the spin, but we should always remember that the audience and the readers deserve more than the elitist fare that is often served up".

She called for an end to the lobby system to signal a real commitment to open govern-

ment. "If it's worth saying, its worth saying on record". And she argued that if journalists and above all politicians did not make politics relevant to the people, "we will end up with a disenfranchised underclass as in America where half the electorate do not vote".

In the afternoon, Joy Johnson joined Bob Franklin, author of Packaging Politics, and Guardian journalist Martin Linton, whose finding on tabloid coverage of the 1992 Election appeared in Free Press No 90, for a popular session on media reporting and the next election.



Ray
Fitzwalter:
Regions
have rights

OPT OUT OR OPT IN?

The current "opt out" from national broadcasting for a few hours of regional programmes should be reversed so that regional programmes have greater opportunity to "opt in" to the national network. That was the recommendation of a session on regional broadcasting and media concentration. Independent producer Ray Fitzwalter condemned the centralisation taking place in British broadcasting, with the BBC spending three quarters of its budget in London and ITV companies raiding their regional operations rather than profit margins for funds.

"Every region has the right to broadcast to the whole country – not just the region of London" he said. In place of the current 25 per cent quota for independent production on the BBC, there should be 75 per cent "opting in" for the regions with longer contracts to provide financial and employment security.

DIVERSITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Swedish journalist Katarina Ek showed how policies to sustain media diversity can work in practice by explaining how the Swedish press is supported. Swedes are amongst the most avid newspaper buyers in the world with over 170 national and local newspapers. "The daily press plays an important role in advancing and

strengthening the cause of democracy in Swedish Society," she said. To support this role, and ensure a wide spectrum of views at any time, the state provides subsidies to publishers. The policy was introduced to reverse the sharp decline in newspapers, from 216 in 1945 to 167 in 1994.

Today, Sweden has three kinds of subsidies: direct subsidies for production, indirect support through a lower tax on newspapers compared to magazines, and support to help newspapers share and co-ordinate their distribution arrangements. Of the 165 newspapers today, 70 receive direct support from the Press Subsidies Council which decides, independently of Government, how to disburse the total sum issued by Parliament each year. Newspapers qualify according to a set of rules which are designed to prevent political interference.

Katarina Ek said that the subsidy system had succeeded in prevented newspapers from closing. While concentration of ownership is increasing, as it is across Europe as a whole, with 12 major companies controlling 25-30 per cent of circulation, it remains far less than in the UK.

In the same session Morning Star chief executive Mary Rosser spoke of the crisis facing many small publications following the decision of WH Smith and John Menzies to reduce the titles they stock. She traced the current crisis to Murdoch's conflict with the print unions at Wapping after which proprietors began to plan road deliveries, provoking a reduction in the number of wholesalers from over 1000 to 43 today.

The Minister of Corporate Affairs, overruling a Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation into newspaper distribution which found in favour of wholesalers designating retail outlets, insisted on fundamental changes in the market. Twelve months on, after the introduction of the 1994 code of practice, 7,000 new outlets were created while more than 500 newsagents closed down. Wholesalers now prioritise the new outlets such as supermarkets and petrol stations which for reason of profit stock large quantities of a small range of titles.

Up to 500 titles are disappearing or will disappear from WH Smith's shelves with Menzies not far behind, said Rosser. "We are

witnessing the development of thought control, not unlike 1984 which we thought of as fanciful". She called for a legal right to distribution as in France and said, "I welcome this conference and hope it is just the beginning of winning back the right for a free press which men and women throughout Britain endured imprisonment to ensure."

KEY TO REFORM

In the final session, James Curran argued for an approach to media reform which combined measures to control media monopolies by regulation with strengthened "internal controls" to devolve and spread editorial authority. "The key to reforming the market," he went on to say, "is to facilitate the launch to new publications and help resource poor groups who are currently excluded from the market."



Granville
Williams:
Real options
for reform

On behalf of the CPBF, Granville Williams welcomed the contributions made throughout the day on the proposals set out in the Media Manifesto. He said that the aim of the CPBF's Manifesto campaign was to "encourage debate and allow a wider group of people to realise that there are real options available for reform in the media."

The conference was a follow-up to our successful 1995 event Media versus the People. Both these conferences have helped to consolidate and put into effect the kind of coalition of support which is needed if we are to increase our impact and influence on the national debate.

The strength of our collaboration with the media unions in particular has been vital to the success of the conference and we express our thanks to the NUJ, BECTU, GPMU, STE, CWU, UNISON, Writers Guild, Equity and the European Group of Journalists for all for their support.



Distribution the key: Katarina Ek and James Curran

PICTURES: JANINA STRUK

Distribution is the vital issue

BY JONATHAN LOGAN

A COMMON theme emerged from the Investing in Diversity workshop – how new technologies should have helped to provide more diversity in the press but have actually failed to do so.

Mike Jempson (Presswise) indicated that, since Wapping, mass circulation newspapers have dictated terms to wholesalers and in turn, the wholesalers have dictated policy to smaller circulation titles and to smaller retail outlets. Mary Rosser (Morning Star) explained it was the proprietors who manipulate the distribution systems to control the number of new titles.

She detailed how retailers were also threatening diversity of the press. With 7,500 new outlets selling publications, sales are still in decline. Most new outlets are supermarkets and petrol stations which usually stock only the best selling titles.

This has hit the profits of the largest retailers, W H Smith and John Menzies, who are both proposing to remove 300 to 400 smaller circulation titles from their shelves

to increase profitability.

As an example of a more enlightened system, Mary Rosser explained the French system which gives the publisher the right in law to display any legal publication at any retailer.

Katarina Ek of the Swedish Journalists Union explained the Swedish attitude to media diversity.

In Sweden the State realises the link between a diverse press and democracy, and subsidises loss-making publications, if they conform to qualitative and quantitative standards, to keep them open. The four wholesale companies that cover Sweden are not allowed to choose what they will distribute, but are obliged to distribute all publications.

Professor James Curran of Goldsmith's College rounded up the workshop by calling for a media enterprise board to provide venture capital for new media projects. He also stressed that the distribution issue was of vital importance and should be top of the CPBF agenda.

More than better shopping

The Information Society: Getting It Right For Consumers; A Report by the National Consumer Council; 20 Grosvenor Gardens SW1W 0DH; £12.00

BY CLARE MARSHALL

THERE HAS been much hype about the "information society" and how changes in information and communication technologies are going to affect our lives.

At a commercial level these changes are already being taken advantage of, but we do not yet know how far-reaching they will be. A report by the National Consumer Council sets out to examine the new developments and how they may affect domestic consumers.

It starts by describing the changes in technology, especially the convergence of the information, broadcasting and telecommunication sectors, and suggests that it is no longer viable to consider these sectors separately.

The council recommends a process of reviewing the concept of universal service and public service broadcasting requirements to keep pace with the technological developments. Its main concern is that of access to the information society.

Access depends on the networks being in place and there is the worry that companies are competing with each other and investing in different technologies and networks, leading to a patchwork of infrastructure across the country. The report emphasises the need for all networks and equipment to be compatible. Education and training are seen as vital to ensure all groups of people are able to make use of information technologies. Affordability is a critical factor and the report suggests a regulatory regime is needed to ensure fair pricing systems. As affordable access to new services for every home is probably not possible in the near future, the report suggests that community services could be provided in the form of kiosks offering access in places like libraries, community centres, schools and hospitals.

Essentially the report outlines the need for policy makers to address these issues now to guard against possible abuses of market power. Only if they are addressed will the information society's potential to enhance people's lives be realised, and we won't just end up with a range of shopping services.

Birt's three perils

"I DON'T know which to be more appalled by; the decision itself, or the way it was made". The issue was the announcement of yet another BBC re-organisation, the venue was a Parliamentary rally in support of the BBC World Service. But who was the speaker – an aggrieved member of staff, or a thwarted applicant for the Director-General's job perhaps?

Neither – the words belonged to the author P.D. James, ex-BBC Governor, now a Baroness in the House of Lords, and a pillar of the political, as well as the literary, establishment. Her views, taken with the opinions of innumerable other senior voices from Middle England, suggest that John Birt may have rattled just one cage too many this time. In characteristic Birt style, the decision was made in the seclusion of a locked room, and the only participants in the debate were management consultants. Even Birt's number two, Bob Phillis, admitted that he knew nothing of the changes until a day before the announcement.

Birt's reorganisation sweeps away the autonomy of World Service, Network Radio, and BBC Education by combining TV and sound broadcasting, concentrates news programming into one single department, and shifts the Corporation towards the Channel 4 style of operation, where a small commissioning section will buy in programmes from a range of suppliers. In the BBC's case, at least for the moment, the suppliers will include its own in-house programme departments, touting in direct competition with independent producers, but there is an obvious longer-term risk to the reservoirs of talent on the BBC's books.

Among the reasons given for the change is the need for the BBC to fully exploit the opportunities opened up by the coming digital era for an expanded range of services, including audio-visual packages linked to traditional programmes.

Less prominent in the publicity is the BBC's long-term objective of earning greater commercial income by operating subscription services on any digital platform that they gain access to. However, this objective remains firm, and is underpinned by a growing awareness that Murdoch's digital satellite system is just round the corner, and will inevitably roll out earlier than the Digital Terrestrial Television network outlined in the 1996 Broadcasting Act. In other words, BSkyB could end up being a major



BY TONY LENNON
BECTU President
and Chair of
CPBF

carrier of BBC programmes.

Establishment outrage at Birt's plans has focused on the erasure of World Service and Radio, arguably the last outposts of the old collegiate BBC that Reith left behind, and areas whose production techniques are very different from the TV empire that will now swallow them up.

Serious though these fears are, there are at least three perils posed by the reorganisation

which transcend the various local worries of programme-makers.

FIRST, the likelihood of increased commercialisation at the BBC. The changes are being made partly to aid commercial exploitation of the BBC's treasure trove of intellectual property (or programmes as they used to be called). The culture of making programmes with an eye to eventual earnings from cable, satellite, and sell-through, already uncomfortably well established, could become pervasive.

SECOND is the decline of in-house programme-making if the Channel 4 style of operation is carried to its logical conclusion and the BBC shrinks to a tiny centre commissioning and scheduling programmes. Good news: Birt avows that this is not the intention. Bad news: in-house programme-makers resign themselves to a future of lower budgets, and endangered production standards as they are constantly played off against the independent production sector.

THIRD, whether the BBC ends up as large programme-maker or small broadcaster, is the risk of total privatisation. Already vast swathes of BBC activity have been sold off, with the transmitter chain and 800-strong finance department likely to go next. Ironically, the Birt reorganisation, mixing as it does the affairs of BBC1, BBC2, all of Auntie's national radio channels, and the World Service, might make privatisation more difficult. The new structure would be difficult to untangle and the task of bundling up neat sellable units, like Radio 4 Ltd., might be almost impossible.

Any more detailed assessment of Birt's reorganisation will have to wait until the plans have been finalised. Meanwhile, P.D. James' observations pose a serious question: a major national institution with an annual turnover approaching £2bn is to be turned upside down in accordance with a blueprint drawn up almost single-handedly by its Director General. Is it safe in a democracy to give that much power to just one person?



The end of public service broadcasting?

BY WILLIAM ASH OF THE WRITERS' GUILD
ON 7 JUNE 1996, John Birt, BBC Director General announced a complete re-organisation of the BBC which would change it from a public service providing programmes of the highest quality to the licence-fee-paying British public into a huge market-oriented communications company selling programmes on the world-wide media for international consumption.

There was no consultation about the consequences of such a change – not even with the Chief Executive of the BBC who only heard about the changes a few days before they were announced. John Birt required no backing for his new order save that of the Chairman and members of the BBC Board of Governors who, as we have seen, are not accountable to the public the BBC is supposed to serve, but only to the Government who appointed them – a Government committed to turning all public services into profitable private businesses.

The most radical element of the changes is the complete separation of the scheduling and commissioning functions from the production function and the creation of a

bi-media programme-making division. In Birt's own words, "By bringing together all production – television, radio and multi-media – we are creating the world's largest production powerhouse". This separation is to be geographical as well as organisational, Broadcasting House in central London accommodating only the bureaucratic management responsible for scheduling and commissioning and all actual programme-makers consigned to the production unit at White City where they will be told by the bureaucrats what programmes to make.

Any proposal for breaking the BBC up into management and production units like some manufacturing business in which senior staff order products to be turned out by assembly-line methods for sale on a world market, any tampering with the public service character of the BBC by seeking private funding for digital expansion which would make the BBC accountable to some finance corporation (like the one directed by Christopher Bland before he became Chairman of the Board) will have consequences for the nature of broadcasting in this country about which both the British public and all those writers,

actors and musicians who supply that public with the programme content of broadcasting have to be concerned.

THE LATEST internal upheaval announced by the BBC would have a particularly devastating effect on World Service radio – the separately financed operation that Director General John Birt says should be split up. News would go into the new all-media news and current affairs centre at White City in west London, some programme departments would be abolished, and the language services would be left high and dry on their own.

The plan was announced by John Birt without any consultation; even World Service managing director Sam Younger was not informed.

But there is resistance, and on July 2 there was a mass protest lobby of Parliament, supported by numerous high-profile broadcasters, including former Newsnight presenter and World Service managing director John Tusa (left), maverick former India correspondent Mark Tully (centre) and former Beirut hostage Terry Waite.

John Tusa pointed out that the whole plan could leave the BBC ripe for privatising in sections, like the railways. The World Service would be buying in more programmes from the BBC domestic networks, making it into a broadcasting "publisher" like Channel 4, producing little itself.

If the news was to be bought in from White City, it would lose its distinctive World Service style and expertise. "They would just give the other services the top ten world stories every hour and that would be it."

"And if the service didn't like the news or it was too expensive in the internal market, they could go outside for it – to Reuters, or even to Sky?"

Radio is to be downgraded by losing its individual voice at Board of Management level. Jocelyn Hay of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer representing the licence-fee-paying public says, "We are extremely worried about the future of radio. It is a significant diminution of the importance of radio that it has lost its place at the top of the table of management."

BBC Worldwide which has provided such an excellent service for listeners all over the world will lose its right to produce its own programmes. It will have to order what it requires from the combined production unit.

The Writers' Guild calls on associated unions of the Performers' Alliance and the Federation of Entertainment Unions to consider carefully any other deleterious effects John Birt's proposed changes might have on the creative work of their members in providing a public service broadcasting service for Britain.

Public service broadcasting must be defended.

CPBF CONFERENCE FRINGES IN BLACKPOOL TUC

Wednesday 11 September
5.15pm
Opera House Circle Bar
Winter Gardens
Speakers include: Roger Bolton, BECTU
General Secretary
Labour Party

Monday 30 September
5.15pm
Royal York Hotel
North Promenade
Speakers include: Philip Whitehead MEP
Andrew Grahame

SOCIAL DONATION

The Society of Telecom Executives (STE) has donated £250 to the CPBF, form a three-way split of money raised at a conference fund-raising social. Thanks for your continuing support.

WE'RE ON THE NET

Sorry about the slip in the last Free Press. The correct details are:
e mail
cpbf@architechs.com
web address
<http://www.architechs.com/cpbf>

MEDIA MATTERS

The Mary Ward Centre, London, and PressWise are organising a series of Sunday seminars on CURRENT ISSUES IN JOURNALISM. The first two are:
ISSUES OF REGULATION
2 November 1996
Speakers: Mike Jempson, PressWise

Pat Healey, NUJ Ethics Council
MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL: WHO CARES?

Speaker: Granville Williams, CPBF
Booking and fee details:
Mary Ward Centre
42 Queens Square
LONDON WC1N 3AQ
Tel: 0171 831 7711

MEDIA ETHICS

Privacy, Public Interest and Censorship
Leeds University, 20-21 September
An important conference with a range of top speakers from journalism and academia, debating censorship, media bias, media sensationalism.
Details and bookings 'phone 0113 233 3233



CPBF PUBLICATIONS

The new edition of Britain's Media: How They Are Related is out now. You can buy the book for £7.50 inc p&p, or the book and an A2 chart on media ownership (with an update briefing) for £8.00 inc p&p.

PEARSON is following hot on the heels of Thomson, Reed and EMAP in putting its regional newspaper group, Westminster Press (WP) on the market.

Newsquest Media Group, currently the fourth largest regional press publisher with 82 titles, is thought to be the strongest contender. Newsquest was formed as a management buyout of Reed's regional titles, but is controlled by Kohlberg, Kravis, Roberts, America's most powerful leveraged but-out firm. (Read Barbarians At The Gate by Bryan Burroughs and John Helyar for an account of their role in the largest corporate take-over in the 80s - RJR Nabisco).

This latest disposal of regional titles by the larger media groups highlights a depressingly familiar pattern. WP own about 60 daily or weekly titles with a total circulation of 2.4 million. They include the Northern Echo, the Bradford Telegraph and Argus and the Evening Argus, Brighton. In a savage but accurate piece Roy Greenslade (Media Guardian, 1 July) gave this assessment of the Brighton Argus: "By all reasonable journalistic standards it stinks" and "the main feature of life at the paper is a gradual and relentless pruning of resources, culminating in an aggressive bout of cost-cutting."

Last year WP made a profit of £25 million, and the demand by Westminster Press board that each regional group return a margin of 20 per cent, whatever the state of sales, paid off. Now WP has been fattened up for disposal, and the man who did the cost cutting, Stephen Hill, has moved on to tackle the Financial Times (see FP 92).

JOIN

THE CAMPAIGN

FOR PRESS AND

BROADCASTING

FREEDOM

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM	AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION		
a) Individual membership	£12	f) Less than 500 members	£20
b) Unwaged	£6	g) 500 to 1,000	£25
c) Household (2 copies Free Press)	£20	h) 1,000 to 10,000	£45
d) Supporting membership (includes free CPBF publications)	£25	i) 10,000 to 50,000	£105
e) Institutions (eg libraries: includes 10 copies of Free Press)	£25	j) 50,000 to 100,000	£200
		k) Over 100,000	£400

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £ FP93

Name

Address

Postcode Tel.

Organisation (if applicable)

Return form to CPBF, 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF **Tel: 0171 278 4430**