

The BBC & British Airways

Corporate Interest vs Investigative Journalism?

ANITA RODDICK wrote in a recent *Big Issue*, "As we approach the third millenium, we stand as probably the most uninformed spectators of the rise of the most powerful monopoly - the media monopoly. The problem is not simply that the media is in the hands of so few, which is scary enough, but the untold stories of those who own the companies. If big-dollar industries are behind the daily news how are we going to hear critical stories of those businesses?"

Broadcasting organisations which are parts of bigger conglomerates will ignore stories where there is a clash of commercial interests. One of the arguments for public service broadcasting is that it is able to report and probe controversial issues in politics, industry and commerce relatively free from such conflicts of interests.

It also means that when political regimes pursue or condone unpalatable policies a public service broadcaster like the BBC will report them without looking over its shoulder to see whether it will affect it. This stands in stark contrast to, say, News International, which took the BBC World Service off Star TV rather than offend the Chinese authorities.

by Granville Williams

It is this relative independence from commercial and political interests which has given the BBC its unique status internationally. Of course there have been great pressures on the BBC when it has been reporting events at times of heightened national tension, and the CPBF has in the past accused it of bias or omission in the reporting of industrial disputes, for example.

Ten years ago the BBC entered a period of intense conflict with the government and sections of the media over the programme *The Monocled Mutineer* and the Falklands War play by Ian Curteis, with the playwright convinced he was the victim of political censorship when the BBC drama department decided not to go ahead with the production. A libel case against two Conservative MPs over a Panorama programme *Maggie's Militant Tendency* was settled out of court. At the Conservative Party conference Norman Tebbit launched a ferocious attack on the BBC's news standards, accusing BBC News of unbalanced coverage of the bombing of Tripoli in April 1986. This was followed in January 1987 with the BBC governors banning the Secret Society programme *Zircon*, the police raid on BBC Scotland to

seize tapes of the series, and the dismissal of the Director General, Alasdair Milne.



John Birt as Deputy Director General at Broadcasting House

In March 1987 John Birt joined the BBC as Deputy Director General with responsibility for the BBC's journalism, and he brought with him a revised journalistic code which laid stress on preparation and balance. It was a new regime which scrutinised and vetted any programmes which might risk attacks on the BBC by the government or the Prime Minister.

It's clear that John Birt still plays an

continued on page 3

Media Manifesto

The debate gets going

Several thousand copies of the Media Manifesto have been distributed to media organisations, trade unions and a wide range of community, voluntary and campaigning groups. It has also gone out to MPs, MEPs and Labour Party branches. The Community Radio Association has circulated it amongst its members and supporters, and a motion at the National Union of Journalists ADM in October urges the union to distribute the Manifesto throughout the NUJ and stimulate discussion on its proposals.

We've also begun to get back valuable comments pointing out omissions, but also supporting our initiative, as well invitations to speak on the Manifesto and develop its ideas. So far, so good but we have to gear up our work now that the prospect of an election grows ever more imminent.

The relevance of the ideas and arguments in the Manifesto grows as people are beginning to wake up to some of the awesome implications of the boost to media power which will follow the Broadcasting Act after it takes effect in November 1996.

Take the example of the column 'Stop Murdoch now or regret it' by Polly Toynbee in *The Independent*, 23 September, which identifies the main threat with absolute clarity. She points out how, with the connivance of both Labour and Conservatives, 'Rupert Murdoch is about to snatch control of British television from under our noses.' His plan to launch digital satellite television in 1997 and ownership of the patent on the technology through which the signals are received and decoded means he 'will control how much space and on what channels the terrestrial television channels can enter his digital box. BBC1 could be on channel 322 if he chooses'.

continued on page 3

Knacker nets the Internet

IT'S BEEN a hot summer for service providers (ISPs - they're the ones who provide internet services such as access to the World Wide Web). On 2 August Superintendent Mike Hoskins of Scotland Yard's Clubs and Vice Squad invited them to a briefing. He told them they had to do something about child porn on the Net. If they didn't, police action could be taken ending in prosecutions. He also put his thoughts in writing and provided them with a list of 134 newsgroups, wide ranging discussion groups, which Scotland Yard believed to contain obscene material which would contravene the Obscene Publications Act and other legislation. Most service providers left the meeting in thoughtful mood.

Five weeks later Mike Hoskins gave the same presentation to representatives of the industry attending a Censorship Forum, organised by the Internet Developers' Association in London. He was calm and sounded reasonable, indicating that he did not wish to censor the Internet, only protect the victims of crime and point out that providers may be breaking the law and liable to arrest.

Most if not all people in the audience accepted that child pornography and its use by paedophiles needed to be tackled. The question was how. There was also a need for rational discussion and a need to counter recent media coverage which has lead the public to believe that 80% of the content on web sites is pornographic.

John Browning from the publication WIRED took up this theme and argued that there was a danger of regulation being ineffective and damaging to the Net. ISPs should be treated as common carriers like the Post Office and British Telecom and not be held responsible in law for what appears on the Web. Even removing 'offensive material' from one site would not stop it popping up in another, he explained. Instead of blocking transmission the responsibility should be shifted to the perpetrator. He likened the situation to drug pushers in a park. You didn't close down the park, you cleared it of the offending trade.

Another speaker, Jack Burger an ISP from Intonet, who had recently gone to the police with evidence of child porn on the Net, put it more bluntly: "Regardless of the debate, I have to work with the law enforcers."

Barry White on Censorship, Regulation & the Internet

Lawyer Robert Klein who specialises in communications law said there should be no legal knee jerk reaction as had been the case in North America. Here the new US Communications Decency Act provided for tough penalties of up to two years in jail for using a modem to send 'any comment, request, suggestion, proposal, image or other communication which is obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy or indecent'. The Act had been challenged as contrary to the First Amendment of the US constitution and was now in the courts.

Peter Dawe, founder of Uni-palm Pipex, which he recently sold for a reported £35million, used the forum to announce the launching of a foundation whose aim was to help providers (ISPs) hinder the distribution of illegal material of the Net. Although unclear on the details ("we only thought of the idea last week!"), the service would allow anyone to report incidents of pornography (not necessarily against the law) and copyright infringements. His aim was to remove 99.9% of child pornography and 90% of pornography from the network. In so doing, he had to admit that at present it looked like for every one 'illegal' site removed, 100 legal sites would also disappear! Peter's Cambridge-based hotline service is due to come into operation on 1 October, but his plans faced some criticism as being a scatter gun approach, with no accountability for decisions made. His move was, however, welcomed by Superintendent Hoskins. (ISP Demon announced the setting up of a Hotline for complaints the same day.)

For the CPBF there are a number of issues to be addressed including those of civil liberties and freedom of speech. Much of the debate has been hi-jacked by the press and diverted down the porn track. It's known that the government has set up an Inter-Departmental Working Group on obscenity. One working party is already looking at the Internet. There is a lot of so-called 'moral outrage' which could be politically dangerous.

There are fantastic benefits to be gained by the Web; its potential is enormous. That's why Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation

has announced plans for a news service on the Internet. The company will also be offering Internet services and software. Haven't we been here before?

A number of points need to be considered immediately:

- ♦ government wants the ISPs to regulate themselves (the big stick is the threat of prosecution and their licences removed by the Department of Trade and Industry). This could set the pattern for the future.

- ♦ the action of Superintendent Hoskin's letter of 2 August has resulted in a number of quite 'legal' newsgroups being removed from the Net, eg gay discussion groups, an erotic art group, sexual discussion groups and the like. The point that they are distasteful to some people is irrelevant. Did the ISPs seek legal advice before going along with this?

- ♦ there has so far been a weak response to what's happening because the group most affected is Net users who are not generally active in any medium other than the Web itself. Whilst recognising that anyone involving themselves in defending porn is likely to get shot to pieces, we should be raising these issues with civil liberties and similar groups.

- ♦ the issue is being sidetracked by the porn and smut uproar taken up by sections of the media (ISP Demon had a nasty run-in with The Observer during August which is likely to finish up before their lordships).

- ♦ a campaign needs to be launched with political parties and organisations as well as consumer interest groups to ensure that ISPs are given the legal status of 'common carriers' like the Post Office and British Telecom. This would switch attention to those who put illegal material on to the Web and finish the role of ISPs as regulators.

- ♦ we need to keep an eye on what Murdoch is up to in this field!

- ♦ the CPBF is preparing a pamphlet on the information superhighway and the Internet. A small working group has been set up and hopes to publish by the end of the year. Meanwhile a full discussion on the Net was held at the CPBF's National Council in September.

Net Censors

Human Rights Watch's May bulletin (Vol 8, No2) is titled *Silencing the Net* and it contains a useful overview of global threats to freedom of expression on-line. It reviews the limits to access to the Net which have been put in place in at least twenty countries, and outlines the principles of free expression which it believes are needed "to motivate citizens to become more involved in decision making as they organize, debate, and share information unrestricted by geographic distances or national borders".

E-mail: hrwatchuk@gn.apc.org

from page 1

active role in determining what should and should not be transmitted. Reports broke in *The Observer* and *The Guardian* as we went to press about programmes on British Airways which are not to be transmitted.

In August 1994 Newsnight ran a report by a freelance reporter, Martyn Gregory, about an alleged dirty tricks campaign by British Airways which elicited a five-point memo from John Birt criticising the rigour of the journalism. A half-hour film, with new material, was then pulled, despite 18 month's work. Now another film, on alleged anti-competitive practices by the airline, has been dropped.

Martyn Gregory, a seasoned investigative journalist and award winner, said, "It is the most important aviation story of this decade" but John Birt criticised the original programme because it showed "no sophisticated understanding of how institutions work" and wanted to know what kind of legal check the script received. This level of interest in the programme does raise some issues and questions. For example, *The Guardian* suggests that John Birt has been talking to Sir Tim Bell, a public relations adviser to British Airways, and until recently, the BBC. He is also a friend of Robert Ayling,

chief executive of British Airways, and both have holiday cottages in Hay-on-Wye where they go walking together.



Martyn Gregory has lost confidence in the BBC

The BBC has denied that John Birt played any part in the decision to axe the report, but this whole affair raises important issues about the BBC's public accountability, and what seems to be the overweening power of John Birt to shape an organisation in his image. If, as one senior BBC journalist asserted, the affair has "driven investigative journalism into the sand" this is one issue that urgently needs clearer information - not just bland denials from the BBC's PR people.

It is also an ill-timed controversy coming so swiftly after John Birt's Edinburgh MacTaggart lecture setting out the case

for an increase in the licence fee. Martyn Gregory said, "I have lost confidence in the BBC's ability to put challenging pieces of journalism on the air. I would also criticise the BBC's amateurish and wasteful approach towards the financial and legal sides of my investigation." The BBC has denied that the cancelled programmes cost £100,000, and puts the cost at £35,000, but that's still a lot of money to pay for something which isn't transmitted. There was also extra expense because the BBC took outside legal advice from a barrister that contradicted the BBC's own lawyers but supported the decision not to transmit. All this becomes even more puzzling because a book by Martyn Gregory making exactly the same case as his TV programmes has been cleared by lawyers for publication this month by Little Brown.

But the important issue is how far the BBC's ability to pursue investigative journalism is being undermined by the PR fixer, Sir Tim Bell, and pressures from above on Newsnight to block further investigation and reports. We know from the bungled attempts to block and censor *Real Lives* and *Zircon* in the '80s that this only stimulates public interest in the issue. We can be sure that British Airways, and the way the BBC reports it, will be under sharper scrutiny as a result of this episode.

from page 1

And Polly Toynbee puts her finger on the key threat to democracy by this unaccountable media mogul:

Fear of Murdoch's power to sway the voters in the run-up to the election through the pages of *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Sun* and *The News of the World* has rendered both parties silently acquiescent ... Pusillanimous and self-interested, they have allowed him monopolistic control of a colossal slice of our media to the serious detriment of democracy and the quality of journalism.

She concludes her piece, "By the time the election is over the future of broadcasting will have in effect been set in concrete, so even if Labour were to win and to decide (unlikely) to challenge the Murdoch monopoly, it will be far too late."

We urge all CPBF members and

supporters to get hold of a copy of Polly Toynbee's article. Use it and the Media Manifesto to galvanize awareness, debate and action. Please do all you can to keep the momentum up on this crucial initiative.

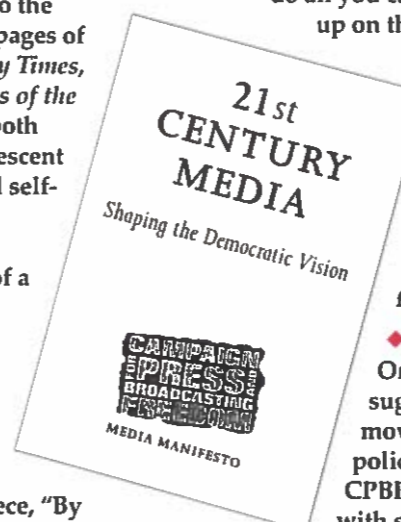
WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ♦ Order a copy of the Manifesto - single copies free, but please send SAE.

Ten copies, £2.00; 50 copies £7.50; 100 copies £12.00 inc P&P

- ♦ Get the debate going! Organise a meeting or suggest your organisation move a resolution on media policy issues. Contact the CPBF office if you need help with speakers or to frame a resolution.

- ♦ Send your own or your organisation's comments on the Manifesto in to the CPBF. The Manifesto isn't a definitive document and we welcome any comments or alternative ideas.



CPBF Book Service

Three publications which give the background to what's going on in the BBC.

Selling the BEEB?

By Tom O'Malley and Jo Treharne - CPBF £2.99

Closedown?

By Tom O'Malley - Pluto £12.95

The Battle for the BBC

By Steven Barnett & Andrew Curry - Aurum Press £18.95

You can order these books from the CPBF Book Service. Please add 10% to the book price to cover P&P.

Reshaping Regional Newspapers

WITH THE take-over of Thomson Regional Newspapers by Trinity, of EMAP by Johnston Press and Westminster Press by Newsquest, six large groups of newspapers have become three very large groups in little more than a year. All under the watchful eye of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Department of Trade Industry.

Perhaps we should not be too hard on the MMC. On the only occasion in recent years when it recommended that consent to a take-over of a newspaper by a large group be withheld, they were overruled by the Department of Trade and Industry. Northcliffe's acquisition of the *Nottingham Evening Post* then gave them control of every daily newspaper between Leicester and Hull.

Deplorable though this further concentration of ownership is, especially when it comes at the same time as the relaxation of the rules on cross-ownership between newspapers and television, there are mitigating factors.

Most of those currently buying up everything for sale are interested mainly, if not wholly, in newspapers. The sellers are those companies which used newspapers as only one of the means of generating the profit which goes to inflated salaries for the directors and dividends for the shareholders. Having come to terms with the fact that newspapers will never be able to produce the kind of returns realisable from the electronic media, they decided to get out. The multi-nationals which remain are likely in my view, to sell up as soon as the market calms down.

No-one who has seen or been affected by the lunatic developments in United Provincial Newspapers can seriously believe they have any interest in the long-term future of the titles they currently own. The regionalisation of production, whereby all newspapers in a particular area are compiled and produced in one centre, must lead inevitably to a loss of individual identity.

Journalists take a professional pride in being able to produce a given piece of information in a way which will appeal to a particular kind of reader. Freelance journalists are especially proud of their ability to present the same information in a

by Colin Bourne



Colin Bourne: No tears over big group selling up

variety of ways so as to satisfy a number of different clients. But to expect reporters or production journalists to do that repeatedly day after day, even in the same shift, while retaining the individual identity of each title is ludicrous.

I hear the cry of those paid to defend this stupid decision: "The greatest threat to the long term future is the inability to obtain a reasonable return for the shareholders."

When you ask why this should be so the answer is that, if shareholders do not get what they consider to be a proper rate of return on their investment, they will sell up and move to a business where the dividends they can expect are higher. Precisely. They do not give a bugger about the long term future of the industry, only what they can get in the short term. Satisfying shareholders and taking account of the long term future are mutually exclusive in Britain because of the way the City manages its affairs.

The staff employed in the industry have much more interest in the long term despite the fact that they are rarely consulted about important decisions which affect them directly. If the board of Pearsons or Thomson or Reed Elsevier have made such

a cock-up of their duty to manage the business properly, it will be the employees who pay with their living standards and ultimately their jobs. The shareholders just move elsewhere and directors, no matter how bad a job they have done, walk off into the sunset with huge sums of money.

The regionalisation now being introduced by UPN has but one aim; to reduce the cost of production, regardless of its effect on quality and thus the long term viability of the papers. Reduced costs = higher profits = a higher sale price.

While Trinity and Johnston Press have a better record than most on their attitudes and approach to editorial, they are both publicly quoted companies who have shareholders to satisfy. It would be naive to assume that a company the size of Johnston Press can grow as fast as it has in recent months without undergoing some fundamental structural change. Its industrial relations record is among the best in the industry and we have no reason to doubt their sincerity when they assure us that they have no intention of changing their policy of recognising and working with trade unions. Large scale structural change may, however, force some degree of change in corporate character because those same shareholders may see, in the short term, that investing in an anti-union company where employment conditions can be attacked without too much fear of resistance could produce a higher dividend.

Trinity too has a reasonably good track record both on editorial and industrial relations. Perhaps with two of the leading players in the industry being enlightened the Neanderthal nature of the Newspaper Society may be subject to change. Even their erstwhile Director, Dugal Nisbet-Smith, is glad to see the back of the multi-nationals. Without the relentless drive to lower costs which was a feature of their stewardship the industry might yet witness a change of direction towards higher editorial imperatives.

No I don't believe in airborne bacon either but hope is hard to extinguish.

♦ *Colin Bourne, North of England Organiser for the National Union of Journalists since the early 1980s is now moving on to train as a barrister. We wish him well, and welcome his successor, John Toner.*

THE CAMPAIGN on Press Distribution, in the wake of the decision by W H Smith to withdraw over 300 titles, gathers momentum. The CPBF has submitted a response to the committee which has been established, and part of the text is printed below.

Newspaper & Magazine Distribution

"The freedom of the press depends on the channels of distribution being kept open" (Lord Denning - commenting in judgement on Sir James Goldsmith's action against the distributors of *Private Eye*, 1977)

The CPBF has expressed concern in the past about press distribution systems controlled by a handful of companies. The recent action by retail giants WH Smith and John Menzies strike at the very heart of choice, diversity and the freedom of the press. They pose a real threat to smaller circulation magazines operating on small margins and highlight more fundamental problems of UK media policy.

The Right to Distribution

In many European Countries such moves by WH Smith and John Menzies would be prohibited by national law. Other countries recognise the importance of the right to display for publications in maintaining press diversity. In France and Italy retailers are banned from refusing to stock a periodical on commercial grounds, while in Greece recent legislation means that a retailer can be prosecuted for refusing to stock a lawful publication.

Wholesalers and retailers of newspapers and magazines who do not carry titles for commercial reasons are pursuing a form of censorship. The CPBF advocates domestic legislation to guarantee all lawful publications the right to distribution and display. This right is accompanied by the responsibility of the publisher to meet the appropriate costs of distribution.

The Monopolies & Mergers Commission

The CPBF is concerned that there are inadequate measures taken to guard against excessive concentration of ownership in distribution, with its implications for media diversity and freedom of expression. We are concerned that the public interest test of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is inadequate. In this investigation of concentration of press ownership, the MMC has failed to act to prevent a single take-over in the national press. The CPBF believes that the MMC as presently constituted provides an inadequate



Irwin Bartle runs the local Post Office and newsagents in the former mining village of Upton, West Yorks (see 'Cutting Where It Hurts' FP92). It provides a vital local resource in isolated and rural areas, but they are under threat from the monopoly pressures on press distribution.

Press Distribution Campaign

mechanism to meet the obligation of the state to ensure the conditions for diversity and pluralism in the media. There should be a full enquiry encompassing both newspaper and magazine trade distribution and cross-media ownership.

Freedom of Expression & the European Convention

The UK Government is internationally bound by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (known as ECHR). The scope and interpretation of article 10, which sets out the right to freedom of expression. Within the scope of Article 10, States may limit the "freedom of enterprise" of media undertakings so as to safeguard pluralism. While States may only do so to the extent necessary in a pluralist and democratic society, they have a positive duty to ensure "the rights of others" to receive and impart information.

"The freedom of the press also has a social aspect: all democratic States have an obligation to secure adequate protection of this freedom for everyone. The concentration of power in a few media consortia is considered to be a possible threat to the freedom of the press and is regarded as sufficient justification for media regulation in order to protect this freedom and to safeguard media pluralism and informational and cultural diversity."

(Critical perspectives on the scope and interpretation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Council of Europe 1995)

The CPBF believes that the UK Government is failing to meet its obligations under the European Convention to ensure diversity if it does not adequately tackle the actions of WH Smith and John Menzies and the wider effects of concentration in newspaper and magazine distribution.

Give a dog a bad name

by Keith Withall

ON JUNE 6th 1996 BBC *Newsnight* (10.30pm) ran an item which promised to "name" the men behind the IRA decision not to lay down their arms". The context was the new round of peace talks in the six countries of Northern Ireland due to start the following Monday. Sinn Fein had performed better than expected in the polls and was knocking on the door of the peace talks on the basis of its voting performance. The BBC followed up its stark promise with evocative black and white silhouettes, representing the faceless seven leaders of the IRA Army Council. It then gave little portraits of six republicans who, it claimed, were both leaders of Sinn Fein and the IRA. All of these portraits were liberally illustrated with footage of various bomb 'outrages', and three of them contained lengthy film set in cemeteries. The actual hard text was a little less black and white. Unnamed sources in 'security services' and among 'republicans' were offered as support. They (the programmers told us) "consider... believe... understand... that these men are undoubtedly... key men at the top of the IRA". The only two witnesses seen and heard were Liam Clarke (journalist) and Kevin McGinnis (Unionist politician) who also offered their opinions, but no hard evidence.

The lack of hard evidence was presumably balanced by the liberal use of bogies, Colonel Gadafy was mentioned on

three occasions. He (we were told) shared with one of the men a commitment to "world-wide revolution" and opposition to British Imperialism. Footage of one of the men sitting down without any form of violence, apart from being lifted and moved by the Police, "might be described as peaceful protest". The cemeteries provided support for claims about the IRA being "rooted in blood sacrifice" and, in the "choice between war and peace", "choosing the grave".

In case any less perceptive viewers missed the point this item was followed by one on Pol Pot, leader of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia - Kampuchea. The rationale for this item was rumours that he was dead. It proved the opportunity for more film of cemeteries, comments about genocide, simplistic equations with Hitler and Stalin, and guestimates about the deaths, 1, 2, 3 millions.... There was no mention of the role of the US bombing (estimates 500,000 to 1,000,000 deaths) - or the Vietnamese invasion - (50,000 refugees). This is not a question of rehabilitating Pol Pot, but of giving the US (amongst others) their share of the blame.

Noam Chomsky provides an excellent analysis of this question by comparing the treatment of 'the killing fields' in the US media with the genocide in East Timor. (*Manufacturing Consent*, book and video). Over 1,000 column inches versus under 50. A US bogey versus a US 'ally'. One does not have to support the IRA, Khmer Rouge or Indonesian Junta in order to be worried by simplistic caricature.

One could make other *Newsnight*s about the six countries, the Unionist forces and those of the British state. Since both groups (plus the Irish government) are attending the talks, it would be interesting to hear about the involvement of those politicians in death and destruction - in Ireland, or elsewhere - Indonesia?

Presumably the BBC would claim they reported informed opinion. They conveniently forget that such opinion is ideological and represents political interests. The long line of blatant misrepresentation of the Irish liberation struggle in the British media provides ample examples of this kind of demonstration. This occasion conveniently paralleled government propaganda aimed at keeping Sinn Fein out of the talks. A TV drama set in the six counties was titled *Naming of Names...* perhaps the news media could leave fiction and dramatic images to the artists and try news and dispassionate reportage for change.

Without Comment

"The Conservative government is a well-known commodity when it comes to media policy....What would a Labour government do? The Mirror Group, owner of 46 per cent of *The Independent*, is convinced Labour would change at least one aspect of the current Broadcasting Act at some point in the not too distant future. Mirror Group insiders say Labour has privately assured them that the 20 per cent ceiling on ITV stakes that now applies to Mirror and News International would go."

Mathew Horsman, Media Editor, *The Independent*, 24 September 1996

"Let the bells at Canary Wharf peal out...Last Friday, Mirror Group boss Monty Montgomery cashed in some share options, making a modest £608,000 profit on stock he bought four years ago. Those journalists who have so richly contributed to MGN profitability by leaving the various titles as a result of 'restructuring' will join us today in celebrating his good fortune. But we must add a word of tribute to Monty's restraint: it is as long ago as March that he last pulled off such a stunt, on that occasion profiting to the melodious tune of £780,000."

The Guardian Diary, 18 September 1996

"There have been mutterings about the impact an alleged friendship between John Birt, director general of the BBC, and Robert Ayling, chief executive of British Airways, could have had. This is a red herring. The real problem is that Birt has been the all-powerful head of BBC journalism for ten years. Executives in the News and Current Affairs directorate seem unhealthily cemented in their posts, fearful of taking risks. The mission to explain can all too easily become the mission to manage."

Maggie Brown, 'Familiarity breeds contempt for investigative journalism', *PR Week*, 20 September 1996

"Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation made a profit of £793 million last year. The group's tax bill was a meagre £76 million. That was £185 million less than most companies would have paid - enough to buy a small TV station, a clutch of regional newspapers, or one year's exclusive coverage of Premier League football."

Roger Cowe & Lisa Buckingham, 'Murdoch's global tax maze', *The Guardian*, July 16 1996

TV Festival: Dunblane

THE EDINBURGH International Television Festival had its highspots. One of which definitely wasn't the turgid delivery by John Birt of the MacTaggart lecture urging an increase in the licence fee. In the debate about media coverage in the session *Dunblane: The Lessons* Pat Greenhill, who became the unofficial community spokesperson in the wake of the killing of 16 schoolchildren last March, had some harsh criticisms of the media's role.

Residents, she said, were left feeling like a 'commodity' as news crews swamped Dunblane. She reminded the audience of her experience where she would be telephoned relentlessly at all hours of the day or night. If this was the media acting with restraint because of the awful nature of the tragedy, she would have hated to be at the receiving end of it when it was off the leash. She added, "That was where the insensitivity did come in - they were interested in filling their slots and they would not take no for an answer."

In an interesting insight into the herd instinct of reporters who were huddled together after the event to decide the news angle, it was the confession by BBC Scotland's Head of Production, Colin Cameron, that Kate Adie's 'forensic nature of the delivery' was considered 'inappropriate' which was seized on and dominated reports in the following day's media.

The Final Act: Part One

ONCE THE political parties abandoned the notion that limits on media ownership were important or anything to do with them, the Broadcasting Act inevitably placed a much more strenuous responsibility on regulatory bodies. The Independent Television Commission (ITC) is in exactly that position, and we should watch with interest how it responds to the first challenges which impact on commercial television.

First, what are we to make of Scottish Television's purchase of Caledonian

Publishing (which incidentally the NUJ in Scotland supports because of the pledges on trade union recognition and jobs) but which cuts across the notion of diversity and plurality? The 'public interest' test is to be invoked by the ITC to deal with this cross-media merger.

Then there's the marriage of Lord Hollick's MAI and Lord Steven's United News and Media - a conveniently 'deadlocked' arrangement which went through months ago. That too will invoke the public interest test, but don't hold your breath that the ITC will unravel this particular merger.

Do you remember the absurd sealed envelope blind bids in the franchise auction that have resulted in Yorkshire-Tyne Tees paying £62 million a year to the Treasury while Central pays just £2,000? Well, the ITC has to work out a fair payment level, with the Treasury breathing down its neck at the same time as it considers privatising Channel 4 to raise a couple of billion pounds. Do the absurdly low payments by some of the franchise holders increase dramatically, or is a token adjustment downwards conceded for the high payers? Either way the system is absurd. The CPBF Media Manifesto argues for an open and accountable system where the franchise goes to those companies committed to producing quality programmes for the regions, rather than the highest bidder. What's wrong with that?

TUC Fringe Meeting

"OUR TASK is to ensure that we have the media which our democracy deserves". That was the message of Tony Young of the CWU, BECTU General Secretary Roger Bolton and Granville Williams from the CPBF at our TUC fringe meeting.

Highlighting the joint statement on the Information Society by CWU and BECTU, Tony Young described how the convergence of telecommunications, computing and media will affect all workers, not just those already working in media related industries. Following adoption by the TUC of a wide-ranging motion on cross-media ownership, the task for the media unions, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and

others is to campaign to ensure that the Information Society is truly liberating and not a massive extension of private corporate power over all our lives. The government has pursued a policy of deregulation, but effective measures to regulate media industries and ensure access are vital said Roger Bolton. "The question of access is intimately related to the whole democratic process".

Free Press editor, Granville Williams pointed out that the CPBF was launched at the TUC seventeen years ago, and the issues of media concentration, access to the media, and distribution took on an added urgency. He outlined the work the CPBF was doing around the Manifesto, our future work on an Information Superhighway pamphlet, and in the run-up to the general election the establishment of Electionwatch, to track and monitor media bias.

Discussion focused on the need for debate and action across the trade union movement about the fundamental issues at stake. Both the trade union speakers welcomed the CPBF's media manifesto, *21st Century Media: Shaping the Democratic Vision* as an important means to campaign and promote debate on future policy.

Conference Resolutions

A NUMBER of important conference resolutions on media policy were passed at TUC. A resolution on cross-media ownership, condemning the drift in Labour policy and urging the production of a report on the future of the media and communications industry was passed. The resolution was moved by the GPMU and seconded by the NUJ.

The Writers' Guild had a strong resolution on BBC reorganisation, which puts at risk the quality of radio and television programmes: "John Birt has behaved like an owner-manager planning the future of a private business rather than the director of a public service who ought to be accountable to the licence fee paying public."

Incidentally, there was no coverage by the BBC of the debate on BBC reorganisation. Why?

Review

The Media Student's Book by Gill Branston and Roy Stafford

Routledge £14.99

This textbook is excellent. It's an introduction to Media Studies aimed at post-16 and undergraduate students, and it has three strong features to recommend it.

First the authors demonstrate their close familiarity with an extensive and rapidly shifting range of issues and debates, and their ability to condense into clear accessible language the key points from a range of theoretical material.

Its second strong feature is its user-friendliness. The book's structure linking key areas (ideologies, genre, industries, etc) to case studies is ideal for students to work with in both formal teaching situations and through individual study.

Finally as a product, the book suggests an active creative collaboration between the authors with a great deal of thought about the design and structure of the finished work so that the student can get the maximum benefit from it. Indeed the authors actually devote their final chapter to Case Study 32 - Writing This Book!

Judging from the number of requests the CPBF is getting from publishers to reproduce material from our publications, there's a boom in books for Media Studies which reflects the growing popularity of the subject. Let's hope the books which follow emulate the high standards set by this textbook.

G.W.

CPBF Notices

Urgent Financial Appeal

The CPBF has been involved in a period of intense activity since January 1996. We organised a major conference, *Media and Democracy: The Real Share Issue*, published a new and expanded edition of *Britain's Media: How They Are Related* and are still heavily involved in promoting the Media Manifesto.

The important debates around the Broadcasting Bill were also a major commitment.

All of this work has drained our limited resources and we are literally running on empty. Also we heard at the end of September that a bid for funding to the Joseph Rowntree Trust had been unsuccessful. This will seriously affect the work we want to do in the crucial period between now and the election, and that's why we're appealing to all our members and supporters to help us financially in any way they can.

If you are a member and your renewal is due, please do it promptly and add a donation if you can afford it. Also we need to enlarge our membership base - can you get your union branch, college library, or people you know who have an interest in the media to affiliate?

One of the best ways to ensure regular income to the CPBF is to take out a standing order - even a small monthly amount can make a difference for us. Contact us and we can send you one.

The CPBF doesn't make financial appeals month after month - when we ask you to dig deep it's because we really need your support. Please do all you can.

We're on the Net

e mail:
cpbf@architechts.com
web address:
http://www.architechts.com/cpbf

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 on the latest media ownership changes) for £8.00 inc p&p.

◆ Members of the CPBF received a copy of the new Media Catalogue, listing over 100 books, postcards and videos, with *Free Press* 93. If you would like a copy of the catalogue please send a SAE to the National Office or CPBF North The Media Centre, 7 Northumberland Street, Huddersfield HD1 1RL. Tel 01484 454184

◆ The CPBF's next publication is on the Information Superhighway and we have a group of interested people working on it. Our financial appeal is partly to secure funds to cover the cost of publishing and promoting the pamphlet, so if you or your organisation can help please get in touch with Granville Williams at CPBF North.

JOIN
The Campaign
For Press and
Broadcasting
Freedom

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM

- a) Individual membership £12
- b) Unwaged £6
- c) Household £20
(2 copies of Free Press)
- d) Supporting membership £25
(includes free CPBF publications)
- e) Institutions £25
(eg Libraries: includes
10 copies of Free Press)

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- f) Less than 500 members £20
- g) 500 to 1000 £25
- h) 1,000 to 10,000 £45
- i) 10,000 to 50,000 £105
- 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 £.....FP94

Name

Address

.....

.....

Postcode

Tel

Organisation (if applicable)

.....

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

21st CENTURY MEDIA

Shaping the Democratic Vision



MEDIA MANIFESTO

SHAPING THE DEMOCRATIC VISION

The prospect of an election is one of the spurs for the publication of the Media Manifesto by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF). Another is the simple fact that we are living through a period of unprecedented change in the media, and we believe now is the time for a wide-ranging debate on policy issues.

The contours of the media in the next millennium – what we see, hear and read, how we receive it, who owns and controls it, and how we pay for it – are not minor and marginal policy issues for political parties. Indeed, to the extent that changes in our society make us ever more reliant on the media for information and entertainment, they are becoming more pervasive and powerful in shaping our responses to the actual political, social and cultural changes we are experiencing.

The CPBF's concern is that debates about media policy have been directed and influenced by media corporations whose primary focus has been to ensure policies favourable to their commercial success

The CPBF's concern is that debates about media policy, certainly over the past decade, have been firmly directed and influenced by a range of media corporations and lobbying groups whose primary focus has been to ensure policies favourable to their commercial success and growth. Also the main political parties have accepted that media companies should be encouraged to expand to take advantage of the 'multimedia revolution' and compete with the global media giants like Time-Warner and Walt Disney.

The voices of ordinary viewers and listeners, those working in the media, and those concerned about the democratic and cultural importance of the media have been neglected. It is time now for our voices and arguments to have wider impact and influence. If we really care about the possibility for truly democratic and diverse media, then the ideas and policy issues in this Manifesto need the widest debate and support.

In 1986 the CPBF published and distributed a Media Manifesto. We used this to present to the public, at meetings, through the press and through distributing copies nationally and internationally, a list of policies for media reform. We hoped that it would help influence debate in the run up to the election which was due in 1987 or 1988. In the event the election of 1987 was won by the Conservative Party who by that time were committed to promoting market forces in the media.

Since then the Campaign has continued to work for media reform. We have written three Right of Reply Bills, have produced pamphlets on the BBC, Ireland, media ownership, and have been involved in campaigning around the major media issues of the last ten years.

This Media Manifesto lists the range of issues in the area of the mass media that need reform, and suggests some of the options which can be pursued to achieve that reform. We lay no claim to having the definitive answers to the problems we identify and have often indicated options for debate where we consider further discussions are needed. But we do think that there are alternative ways of running the media and that those alternatives should have a legitimate place in policy making on media issues.

The controversies which have followed the privatisation of the public utilities provide ample warnings about the effect on the cost and quality of services which accompany the extension of market forces into areas which were previously publicly owned or regulated. Although the market has a role in the provision of media goods and services, we are absolutely clear that there is a need both for strong democratic accountability, quality and choice in the media. This is even truer today than it was in 1979 when the Campaign was founded.

We hope that by producing a manifesto and campaigning with it we will allow a wider group of people to realise that there are real options available for reforms in the media. We want people to join in the debate and respond to the ideas in the manifesto. We hope, also, that this initiative will help to shift debate away from the terms set by the big players in the media industry and towards terms set by people who are interested in creating a diverse, accountable and democratic media.

THE SAD STATE OF THE FOURTH ESTATE

On 25 January 1986 Rupert Murdoch moved his editorial and production centres from around Fleet Street to a new, purpose-built print factory, complete with razor wire and surveillance equipment worthy of a prison, at Wapping.

In March 1986, *Today* was launched, and a golden era was predicted. The paper would be the pioneer to prove that cheaply produced, full-colour publications, produced with far fewer and non-union staff, would lead to a flowering of titles, catering for a diverse range of politics and taste.

A handful of new papers did start up – *The Independent*, *London Daily News*, *Daily Post*, *Sunday Correspondent*, *Independent on Sunday*, *News on Sunday* – and only *The Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* survive, with an uncertain future, as part of Mirror Group Newspapers.

But the real truth is that ten years after the Wapping Revolution national newspapers are more firmly under the control of a handful of powerful, politically partisan proprietors.

Sometimes it is useful, for a sense of perspective, to get a view from outside the country, of how others view us. In May 1994, Reiner Luyken, the special correspondent for the Hamburg paper *Die Zeit* wrote a report on the impact of News International on the British press. He described Wapping as a 'cultural Chernobyl' and argued that Rupert Murdoch's philosophy, the primacy of commercial imperatives over principles like freedom of expression and the right to know, was now embedded in this country. He noted the commonly used term 'the media industry' and argued that for editors and proprietors "news and knowledge in the much talked about information society are commodities, arbitrarily exploitable and solely at the mercy of consumer demand".

The grip of the big media corporations is having a dramatic impact, both on the actual work of journalists, and on the range, choice and quality of our media at both a national and regional level.

Anthony Bevins, political correspondent at *The Observer*, has worked on John Junor's *Sunday Express*, Larry Lamb's *Sun*, and the David English *Daily Mail*

before moving to *The Times* and then *The Independent*. "Journalists," he says, "cannot ignore the pre-set 'taste' of their newspapers, use their own news sense in reporting the truth of any event, and survive. They are ridden by news desks and backbench executives, they have their stories spiked on a systematic basis, they face the worst sort of newspaper punishment – by-line deprivation".

Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent of *The Independent*, was until 1986 in the same post at *The Times*. "I would not accept the Murdoch ethos. Over and over again, I was writing against the paper's presumptions. I was in the odd situation where *The Times* didn't want me to leave but they would find themselves embarrassed at the content of what I wrote. *The Times* is an example of what has happened to much journalism in Britain and Europe, which has become dominated by the micro-journalism of television and radio newscasts of one minute each".

Ten years after the Wapping Revolution national newspapers are more firmly under the control of a handful of powerful, politically partisan proprietors

And journalists like Dave Wilson, the former union officer at the *Daily Mail*, get short shrift if they want to remain in the National Union of Journalists. He fought a long and high profile campaign through the courts over the policies of Associated Newspapers (publishers of the *Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday*, *Evening Standard*, and, through Northcliffe Newspapers, owners of a large number of regional newspapers) on union de-recognition. Six years ago the company denied a 4.5 per cent pay rise to staff who refused on principle to sign personal contracts accepting de-recognition. The owner of Associated Newspapers, Lord Rothermere, is a tax exile who is in the top ten wealthiest people in Britain, with wealth estimated at £1.2 billion.

David Wilson was sacked for, according to his dismissal letter, being "openly critical of the company, its profits, its editorial policy and the remuneration of various individuals". But in the period since 1986 we've seen a concerted offensive by the media groups to derecognise the print and journalism unions – the GPMU and the

NUJ – in national and provincial newspapers and magazines; in commercial broadcasting media workers have also been deprived of a voice.

The press is termed 'the Fourth Estate'. When Lord Macaulay declared in 1828 that "the gallery in which the reporters sit has become a fourth estate of the realm" newspapers were emerging from two centuries of repressive laws, financial corruption and political bribery, and a new breed of independent and campaigning editors and papers emerged. Now it is media concentration in the hands of private owners which poses a greater threat to press freedom than state regulation. As John Keane points out in *Media and Democracy*, "...communications markets restrict freedom of choice by generating barriers to entry, monopoly and restrictions upon choice, and by shifting information from that of a public good to that of a privately appropriated commodity".

In the late twentieth century the press in the United Kingdom, highly concentrated in the hands of proprietors mainly with explicitly Conservative views, uses the language of the freedom of the press to advocate deregulation of media controls, arguing that liberty, choice and diversity for consumers can be achieved through competitive market mechanisms. In fact a new form of commercial censorship develops which shapes information gathering, journalistic practice, information flows and public access to information.

POLICY ISSUES

Since 1986 there have been major changes to the structure, ownership and regulation of the media. Concentration of media ownership, both within and across different media, has increased considerably. Statutory regulations and restrictions on concentration have kept only a minimal check on the creation of huge media conglomerates. The opportunities for large companies to move across media from print to broadcasting to telecommunications have expanded. Companies like Pearson, News International, the Mirror Group, Carlton, Associated Newspapers, have all taken advantage of these. The most recent dramatic example was the merger in February 1996 of Lord Hollick's MAI (the Anglia and Meridian ITV franchises are

part of the group) with Lord Steven's United News and Media (owners of the *Daily and Sunday Express*, *Evening Standard* and a string of 100 provincial papers).

In broadcasting the UK has witnessed the restructuring of the sector away from public service obligations and towards a greater dependence on the market as the main force in regulating activities. Since the 1990 Broadcasting Act the impact has been a rapid shift downmarket with, in the case of the ITV regions, a diluting of regional content as mergers go through. On this issue the regulatory body, the Independent Television Commission (ITC), in its 1995 Performance Review had some critical comments about co-productions between regions which were owned by the same groups (Granada/LWT, Meridian/Anglia, Yorkshire/Tyne Tees). The ITC also criticised the growing volume of programmes about the police and emergency services presented as documentaries and factual shows. However the efficacy of the ITC in regulating the ITV companies is itself questionable because its role was deliberately diminished in the 1990 Broadcasting Act.

Commercially driven cable and satellite are now expanding and are, through force of money, increasingly buying up the major sporting events which had previously been available to viewers for the price of a licence fee. The most dramatic recent example was the deal struck by Rupert Murdoch's BSkyB on June 6, 1996 to pay £674m in a four-year deal for the Premier League soccer rights. The BBC, unable to compete with Rupert Murdoch's chequebook, paid £73m for the highlight rights.

The new media, financed through pay-per-view and subscription, is growing dramatically, and new alliances between media groups will stimulate this. In the UK BSkyB has a growing subscription base which is generating substantial profits. It is now poised, as a result of an amended clause in the Broadcasting Bill, to launch a UK based digital satellite system, which could provide up to 200 channels directly to UK based homes. This move would also free up the BSkyB Astra satellite service, based in Luxembourg, to use for continental pay-TV operations.

In March 1996 the biggest names in commercial television in Europe (Havas, Canal

Plus, Bertelsmann, News International, BSkyB and TV Film Europe, UFA) launched a £300m venture to develop a new 100 channel digital television service. In mid-June BSkyB withdrew from the alliance, apparently unhappy with the speed of the venture's progress, amidst suggestions of another alliance by BSkyB with the huge German group, Kirch. Whatever the final shape, such powerful alliances will be a challenge to European public service broadcasters, struggling with limited budgets, to retain coverage of sporting events.

The CPBF believes that public service principles, redefined and revitalised, need to be developed to encompass the established media, and the new media around cable, satellite and the information superhighway. We have to defend and extend the notion of sections of our media being editorially and financially independent from powerful vested commercial and political interests in order to make programmes and report on world events free from such pressures. We have unfortunate examples of what happens when commercial or political imperatives shape media policy. News International dropped BBC World News from Star TV because of Chinese government threats; and the BBC Arabic Television service, carried on Orbit Satellite Television, was closed down less than a week after a BBC *Panorama* programme, *Death of a Principle*, revived criticism of human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia. Orbit is owned by the Mawarid Group whose chairman, a Saudi prince, Khalid bin Abd al-Rahman, is a cousin of King Fahd.

THE GLOBAL ISSUE

The Campaign believes strongly that the spread of global media corporations means that national governments and regional blocks, such as the European Community, have an increasing obligation to regulate their activities in the interests of local populations. Production and distribution facilities and markets are located in the regions of nation states, and national governments retain the power to intervene on ownership and regulation. This is apparent in all fields of economic activity and is, in a sense, proven by the energy and money that global multinationals put into seeking to shape national legislation and international treaties.

Intense lobbying is focused on the Council of Europe and the European Union by American and European media and telecommunications groups, to shape favourable policy outcomes on media concentration and pluralism, the future of public service broadcasting, copyright issues, the development of the information superhighway (the infobahn), and the revised *Television Without Frontiers* Directive.

There is a need for a global strategy. There is a need for a European strategy. But it is also vital that individual governments act in ways which promote diversity across the media. To argue, as many in the industry and in government do, that the global market rules out strong national regulation is little more than special pleading and a challenge to 'national sovereignty'.

THE CASE FOR REGULATION

We consider that the best way to promote diversity of the press, broadcasting and telecommunications sectors is through accountable, positive regulation.

A body of law already exists which purports to regulate the press to promote accountability and diversity. The problem is that much of it is ineffective. For example the Monopoly and Mergers Commission (MMC) has signally failed to counter monopolisation, and the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) has no effective powers, because of its self-regulatory role, as either a press watchdog or a vehicle for redress. Existing laws need to be reformed, and new ones introduced to promote accountability and diversity.

In broadcasting and telecommunications the task is to halt the spread of deregulation and to re-regulate. But this must not be in the old style of allowing the electronic media to be run by unelected people. We must inject electoral accountability into the regulation of electronic media.

However it is also true that the range of regulatory bodies in existence is often confusing and ineffective in delivering standards and accountability. In proposing new regulatory bodies we believe new forms of election are needed, which avoid the political patronage and quangos developed in the Conservative years, and involve people with interests and experience who

represent our diverse society. At the same time as the number of regulatory bodies are reduced, those that we propose would have clear and positive roles, with the resources to be effective.

As the pattern of ownership becomes increasingly complex we propose the establishment of one regulatory body covering the press, radio, television, cable, satellite, the Internet, and telecommunications. This body would have the facilities to research policy issues, and patterns of media ownership.

At the same time, viewers, readers and listeners need a separate body which can ensure that their interests, including the right of reply, are given a single coherent and effective voice.

OWNERSHIP

Conservative governments have allowed and encouraged the growth of large media combines. In particular News International has, in the last seventeen years, been allowed to build a media empire spanning print and satellite broadcasting, and to also control the means of distributing media products. In 1995 the government announced a package of measures designed to make it easier for major companies to own large slices of individual media across different sectors. A Labour amendment to the Broadcasting Bill proposed increasing to 25 per cent the market share allowed by a newspaper group seeking to buy an ITV company. This would allow Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN) to build up its television holdings, and the amendment by Labour seemed to be motivated by political expediency rather than principles.

MGN already owns two of Scotland's strongest newspaper titles, the *Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail*, and is developing its cable TV service. If it was allowed to acquire Scottish Television a strong regional monopoly would be created which would not only concern groups like the CPBF on issues like diversity and plurality. Advertisers and media buyers also fear the prospect of 'conditional selling' and a 'take it or leave it' basis for setting the costs of advertising. It was this issue which actually led the MMC to recommend **against** the takeover by Northcliffe Newspapers of the Nottingham Post group. It would have created a regional press monopoly in the East Midlands and the prospect of advertising rates

increasing by 20 per cent. The government overturned the MMC report, however, and in December 1994 the takeover went ahead.

There are vital issues here. Responsible democracies have long recognised the need to ensure that the printed word and the visual image, in the interest of diversity of opinion, should not be unduly monopolised. The case for limiting media ownership is based on democratic, cultural and social concerns: it is about encouraging wider participation and reversing, not promoting, concentration of media power into fewer and fewer hands.

The case for limiting media ownership is based on democratic, cultural and social concerns: it is about encouraging wider participation and reversing, not promoting, concentration of media power

Now such principles have been abandoned. The consequences of the proposed changes will be to allow the power of a few individuals who run large companies to grow unchecked. The need to promote diversity of ownership and to check the power of cross media concentrations is urgent. In suggesting these policies we are acutely aware of the failures of the MMC to prevent the present concentrations of press ownership at a national and regional level. Our proposals below for a statutory body, the Media Commission, are based on learning the lessons from the record of ineffectiveness, and establishing clear principles which will ensure that media diversity is not ignored.

We recommend:

- ▶ An immediate review of the ownership regulations by an incoming Labour government.
- ▶ The imposition of effective controls to limit the spread of cross media ownership and to ensure pluralism of ownership.
- ▶ The use of a levy on media advertising revenue to fund new forms of media ownership and new enterprises.
- ▶ The establishment of a Media Commission to monitor cross media ownership, and to enforce the new regulations. This body would have a key role in researching all aspects of media activity, including telecommunications.

NEW MEDIA INITIATIVES

There should be a Media Enterprise Board, funded from a levy on all media advertising, sponsorship, subscription and pay-per-view revenue. Its job would be to provide start up and long term support for new media initiatives in all fields of the media. It would have a special task of funding media which served communities of interest not served by the mass media and also providing community based programme-making facilities and training. The Board would be run by elected members serving fixed terms and would be serviced by a specialist staff.

James Curran in his discussion document, *Policy For The Press (IPPR)*, envisages such a body in these terms:

Its influence on the press would probably be confined to a small number of initiatives in specialist magazine publishing, although if this included political journals of opinion it could have a wider influence in terms of generating ideas and debate within the mainstream press. Its most significant area of impact is likely to be in local radio, specialist book publishing, independent music production and independent TV production.

PRESS

The measures on ownership should be supplemented by the following:

- The establishment of a statutory Right of Reply to factual inaccuracies. A body should be established, promoting the interests of readers, viewers and listeners, which could administer the right of reply, and represent people's interests as consumers of the media.

- The repeal of legislation passed since 1979 which restricts the rights of journalist to report. This would involve repealing all or part of the 1981 Contempt of Court Act, parts of the 1986 Police and Criminal Evidence Act, and the 1994 Criminal Justice Act.

- We support proposals for a review of the libel laws, with a fast track procedure, free for ordinary people to gain redress.

- Privacy. We argue for the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. This provides both for the right of privacy and the right to freedom of expression.

DISTRIBUTION

In March 1996 W H Smith began to withdraw some 350 small circulation newspapers and magazines from its retail outlets, including *Tribune* and the *Morning Star*, and to replace them with a magazine ordering service. Part of the reason for this is that it is trying to turn round an interim profits slump from £45.2m to £17.3m, but it raises the broader issue of the monopolisation of the news trade by the retail giants and the distribution companies. It is because they have such dominance, and can decide for purely commercial reasons to de-list titles, that they pose a real threat to choice and diversity in terms of newspaper and magazine publishing.

Companies like W H Smith and John Menzies occupy increasingly dominant positions in both wholesale and retail areas of newspapers and magazines. They have over 53 per cent of the market for wholesale distribution, and now John Menzies are following the W H Smith example with plans to cut low volume titles in their retail outlets.

Other countries recognise the importance of the right of display for publications and the importance of this in maintaining press diversity. In France legislation prevents retailers refusing to stock a periodical on commercial grounds. Publishers have the right to require that any legal publication is displayed.

- Wholesalers and retailers of newspapers and magazines who do not carry titles for commercial reasons are pursuing a form of censorship. Legislation is needed to guarantee all lawful publications the right to distribution and display.

THE RIGHT TO REPORT

- Journalists should be given contractual protection against interference with their professional standards by proprietors or Editors. They should be able to refuse to handle copy which breaches the NUJ Code of Conduct or the Industry Code of Practice.

SECRECY

- There should be a Freedom of Information Act which opens up government papers to journalistic and public scrutiny.

- There should be reform of the 1989 Official Secrets Act to alter the prohibitions on what can be reported and to strengthen the public interest defence. Also the 'D' notice system should be abolished.

BROADCASTING

- Broadcasting legislation should be rewritten to enhance the public service commitments of all broadcasters and all providers of telecommunications related services. One important policy issue should be to abandon the franchise auction for ITV licenses. Licenses should be allocated to those committed to producing quality programmes rather than making money.

- There should be a radical overhaul of the structures of accountability within broadcasting. In the short term this could mean adopting the widely supported proposal that appointments to the Boards of Governors of the BBC and ITC should be subjected to approval by a Parliamentary committee. There should also be consideration of more fundamental long term reforms which extend accountability throughout the system. The CPBF, without specifying a precise method, believes this could be in the form of a series of Boards to control broadcasting operating at a regional and national level which could replace the present BBC and ITC Boards of Governors. Membership of some or all of these Boards could be determined by election.

- The BBC's Charter should be rewritten to turn it into a major in-house producer of public service products, to end its commitment to the internal market known as Producer Choice, and to curtail its activities as a commercial broadcaster.

- The financial future of the BBC as a public service broadcaster should continue to be based on the funding from the licence fee.

- There should be a major review of radio services to end the dominance of commerce in national and local radio, and to promote community based public radio. A third sector of radio – non-profit or community radio – should be created whose licences are not competed for by commercial companies, and who cannot be taken over by them.

- The regional element in broadcast production and regulation should be enhanced. This, in addition to the new system of regulation, would provide for more regional production and accountability.

- The people of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland should have a direct say in the nature and provision of broadcast services.

- Satellite TV services should be required to carry a full range of public service programming.

- The current list of sporting events which are meant to be available to all viewers should be revised in terms of content and changed so that more events are available on terrestrial television., not merely on a subscription or pay-per-view basis. Careful consideration should be given, on a case by case basis, as to whether full live coverage or highlights are listed and whether legislation is needed to restrict the amounts of money which sporting governing bodies can demand.

- The idea of establishing a Consumers' Council of the Airwaves, which would be charged with promoting the interests of viewers and listeners, should be extended to include the press and telecommunications, and have the resources (funding and research facilities) to carry out this function.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The information society has the potential to provide enormous benefits, but policymaking, both in Europe and the United States, is guided by a market orientated position which holds that if the market is set free the benefits of the information society will automatically follow. The debate has been dominated by industry imperatives, whereas the starting point has to be how the information revolution can enhance democracy and the quality of our lives.

The boundaries between traditional broadcasting and those of telecommunications and information technology will become blurred, and pluralism and access will only be guaranteed if there is a regulatory framework to prevent the establishment of monopolies which can restrict the free flow of information, services and programmes. The issue of universal access to the information superhighway is important, but also the issues of control and censorship. Already governments wary of the political impact groups

using the Internet can have are seeking ways to control and censor.

There is ample evidence to show that the benefits of universal access to the new services provided by cable, digitisation, signal compression and the Internet will only come if there is substantial public investment and regulation in the sector. The current orthodoxy that only the market can provide this is highly contentious. Conservative policy has been hesitant, inconsistent and market led. We consider that the debate has to be re-opened in this area. Here we offer some points for consideration.

► The question of whether ownership of the national telecommunications infrastructure should be in public hands ought to be re-opened by an incoming government. We recognise that there are many opinions on this matter but consider that the issue is so important, and has not been subject to sufficient public scrutiny, that it needs to be revisited.

► The question of equitable access to telecommunications services should be examined and people should not be excluded from using key services such as the phone, on grounds of cost.

► Service provision should be a mix of public and private.

► A Media Commission should regulate the telecommunications industry to ensure a cheap, diverse, efficient and innovative service.

► The interests of consumers in the field of telecommunications development and services should be under the aegis of a Media Consumers Council.

union movement representing the views of viewers, listeners and readers.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The media industries do not pay sufficient attention to this important policy issue. Reports confirm time and time again that black journalists are mainly excluded from 'white' media. There are only 20 black journalists among 8,000 working in the provincial press; the BBC is working to a quota of 8 per cent black employees by the year 2000 but to date only 2.5 per cent are involved in production. A larger number is working in clerical/administrative roles.

Women's roles in journalism are similarly diminished by their absence from senior and decision making roles. A *Women in Television* report by Helen Baehr (1996) highlights glaring gaps in the lack of any equal opportunity provision by the BBC or ITV companies when signing production agreements with independents. 10 of the 16 ITV Channel 3 licensees have no female staff at board level, and four of these ten no female staff in senior management positions either.

► Equal opportunities are linked to trade union rights. Without the protection that trade unionism can give to all workers, equal opportunities will be introduced only at the whim of management, and can be taken away just as easily. The spread for casualisation in the press and in broadcasting makes the case for equal opportunities even stronger.

► Equality of opportunity – covering ethnic origin, gender, disability, class, age and sexual orientation – should be part of all the media industries. The government should provide funds to promote equal opportunities in employment practices, in training, and in promotions.

TRADE UNION RIGHTS

► Employers should be required to recognise the right of trade unions to act on behalf of workers in the media industry for collective bargaining, and to have full representative rights on issues regarding discipline, health and safety, grievances, etc. Employers should be penalised where they seek to exclude or discriminate against trade union organisation.

► Trade Unions should have a right to be represented on all the regulatory bodies associated with the industry. This applies both to media trades unionists and to the wider trade

ACTION

► If you are not a member of the CPBF please join.

► Ask us for a model resolution on media policy for your local trade union, political party or community organisation.

► Write to your local MP and to all the candidates in the election asking them to respond to the policies in this document.

► Contact the CPBF to organise a meeting with trade unions, community groups and other organisations in your area on media policy.

► Pass this copy of the Media Manifesto to a friend to read, and get extra copies from the CPBF to distribute to colleagues.

WE WELCOME BULK ORDERS

10 copies £2.00; 50 copies £7.50; 100 copies £12. Prices inclusive of post and packing. Please contact us to discuss other order requirements, or to offer wider distribution of the Media Manifesto.

This Media Manifesto was published in June 1996, just as the Broadcasting Bill was moving to its final stages in Parliament. For an expanded analysis of the issues covered in the Manifesto we have published *Britain's Media: How They Are Related*, which is available from the CPBF, price £7.50 inc P&P. For updates on the rapidly changing media scene and comments on the Media Manifesto read the CPBF journal, *Free Press*.

We would welcome any comments on the Media Manifesto.

Please send them to the CPBF,

8 Cynthia Street, London, N1 9JF.



**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 £..... 21CM

Name

Address

Postcode Tel.

Organisation (if applicable)

Return form to CPBF, 8 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF

Tel: 0171 278 4430



CPBF, 8 Cynthia Street, LONDON N1 9JF
Tel 0171 278 4430 • Fax 0171 837 8868

Design: Alan Slingsby 0171 281 2810 • Print: Wernham Printers (TU) 0181 808 1677