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DOPEY DOINGS

MIKE JEMPSON

IF WHAT it tells us is true, The Mirror was absolutely correct to follow up a tip-off that a Cabinet Minister's son was selling drugs in a London pub. And to have approached the Minister for comment once the evidence had been gathered. A crime had been committed and the perpetrator was the son of the man responsible for making and managing the law — not to mention a Minister who had come out strong about parental responsibility and the need to name and shame.

It had all the ingredients for a good 'public interest' defence – so why didn't they go ahead and name the youth? Clearly it wasn't for the stated 'legal' reasons. The boy had not been charged, so the matter was not sub judice. And there have been plenty of occasions when young offenders have been identified by newspapers campaigning for prosecutions and an end to youth crime.

Cynics would say that the ensuing melodrama, with newspaper after newspaper dropping veiled hints, the Sun challenging the threat of a gagging order with much bravado, and eventually the Internet and papers in Scotland naming names — was a ploy to keep the public enthralled over a traditionally slack period for newspaper sales. It was certainly a bit of fun for media watchers and those in the know.

But it was also a dangerous bit of brinkmanship. A precedent was set which acknowledged a judge's right to demand anonymity where the law had been silent. Meanwhile all those Cabinet Ministers' sons who had not been out selling drugs remained under suspicion.

However The Mirror was honouring the new Code of Practice which demands more consideration for children's rights. There was something delightfully ironic about the fact that the Code wasn't supposed to come into effect until 1 January 1998.

Of course Lord Wakeham was soon congratulating the press for its admirable restraint. 'So you see, Ministers, we can be trusted to regulate ourselves,' was his New year Message to the Government. All part of the propaganda battle to let the press off the look represented by the European Convention on Human rights which the Government is at long last incorporating into British law.

Meanwhile everyone had a field day at the Straws' expense and for a brief moment after her arrest Mirror reporter Dawn Alford took on the role of martyr. But we have not been told whether the pub landlord is to be charged with serving alcohol to under-age drinkers (another crime).

By intervening in the way he did Lord Wakeham put the kybosh on any legitimate complaint which the Straws might have about the way the story was gathered. In a rare slip from his normally sure-footed role as chair of the Press Complaints commission, he has already exonerated The Mirror.

While it is unlikely that any of the Straws will complain, many questions remain about how the sting was conducted. We have been treated to highly selective quotes from 'the tapes' which reveal nothing more than the evidence that the young man, like most kids of secondary school age, is familiar with the language of 'recreational' drug culture. Like most of his peers he knows where and how to score — and we all know that boys full of bravado will do anything to impress a woman who takes an interest in them.

Had the reporter taken some elementary precautions — like arranging to tape-record and witness a colleague purchasing the hashish, then ensuring that the drug was quickly transferred into a sealed container which could only be opened for testing in front of a third party — there would be less doubt about the ethics of the operation. As it was she left herself open to challenge.

A sorry seasonal tale from which everyone emerged pretty much unscathed, except for the PCC and press freedom. Watch out for the next time a gagging order is sought under similar circumstances.

Make the media barons take notice

LAST year we were extremely active on a number of issues. In the run-up to the General Election we produced and widely distributed our Media Manifesto. During the election we ran Election Watch '97 in which we monitored the behaviour of the press In their election coverage. Details are reported in this issue of Free Press. A conference on Media Reform under Labour was held in June and we gave solid support to the Press Distribution Campaign which was launched following the decision of WH Smiths to withdraw over 300 titles from their shelves.

These activities stretched our already limited resources, just as we are planning further major initiatives this year. We need to have a clear view on the current debate over privacy versus press freedom. We want to launch a new publication about the Superhighway and the Internet, develop our work in mainland Europe and work with our contacts in Parliament around the issues raised in our Election Manifesto.

Over the post three years we have not increased the price of membership or Free Press. On the other hand our costs have been rising. We can expect an increase in our office rent and rates. Printing and publicity costs are on the Increase.

All this means we need additional cash now.

You can help us by raising our financial appeal in your trade union or political party branch. Help recruit more members to the Campaign. Recruitment is the life blood of our organisation. If you could recruit just one new member in the next few months our financial position would look a great deal healthier. We want to make the Campaign more pro-active. Please dig deep to help achieve this.

Tough on soundbites, tough on the causes of soundbites

Bob Franklin on new Labour and news management

ON 5 AUGUST 1997 The Times' headline announced 'Mandelson Accused Of Fixing The News.' Many expressed surprise that such a routine event was judged newsworthy.

Political correspondent Ewen MacAskill found the story less than revelatory. 'Mandelson,' he alleged, 'was fixing the news before, during and since the general election. As do many others who work for the government or the party. That is what they are paid for.'

Columnist Francis Wheen was similarly unimpressed by what The Times considered to be headline news. 'Whatever will they come up with next?' he asked. 'The Pope Accused Of Being A Catholic?'

News management has become a remarkably public business; it has also become an increasingly disreputable business. In opposition, the Labour party earned a formidable reputation for its presentational skills, its effective news

management and its use of the news media to promote its policies, but in government praise has increasingly been replaced by opprobrium?

GETTING THE GIS 'ON MESSAGE'

In government, new Labour has access to the resources and services of the Government Information Service (GIS) which is staffed by approximately 1000 career civil servants whose activities are governed by a code of conduct (The Whitehall Red Book) which underscores their impartiality and protects them from possible Ministerial ambitions to recruit them as propagandists for the government cause. The GIS role is to provide the media and the public with background, contextualising information about government policy; under no circumstances should it be seen to be promoting that policy.

Special advisers may be paid to be their masters' voices but civil servants must never engage in such partisan ventriloquism.

From the outset, Labour has been impressed by the need to 'modernise' the GIS. The service was judge to be too 'defensive' and 'reactive' and had failed to recognise that servicing media requirements was a 24 hours a day job. For their part, the GIS civil servants, have complained increas-

ingly vocally about what they consider to be the 'politicising' of the GIS. The recent Mountfield report* investigated both claims. The case suggesting the politicisation of the GIS rests on a number of claims.

First, the new government has appointed an unprecedented number of special advisers to assist with the communications task; 60 compared with 32 under John Major. These appointments cost an additional £600,000; an increase of 44per cent over the Conservative government spend. These advisers are paid from the public purse and, if they are acting as partisan rather than impartial advisers, the resulting propaganda is being financed by tax payers. (p3).

Second, 8 of the 18 Heads of Information of 'cabinet rank' have resigned since May 1997; one of them confided 'there is this feeling that Ministers want to put their own people in'. Even Sir Robin Butler, employing the cautionary vocabulary characteristic of the civil service, described the unprecedented scale of these staff changes as 'disturbing and unsettling'.

Third, the arrival of the special advisers is creating a two tier system of information; the advisers have quickly become the dominant partners in the relationship with civil servants. Hand picked by Ministers, they are trusted allies. The Heads of Information are judged to be rule governed and unaware of the demands of contemporary media.

In these circumstances the adviser quickly colonises the more significant areas of work leaving the civil servant to deal with more mundane matters. Jill Rutter, who resigned as Head of Information at the Treasury complained that Charlie Whelan had 'taken over three quarters of her job'.

Fourth, the Prime Minister's press secretary has encouraged civil servants to be more robust in their dealings with journalists. One retired Head of Information described the new mood as the 'thuggish control-freak approach. As civil servants, Alastair Campbell specifically encourages us to be heavy-handed with the press.' In December 1997 Dave Hill threatened to break all links with the BBC following John Humphry's interview with Harriet Harman on the Today programme.

Fifth, the 'major change at the GIS has been the emphasis on setting the agenda and the need to stay "on message".'



Ministers Alistair Darling and Harriet Harman take note as Peter Mandelson explains the line to be followed. Picture Courtesy John Harris, Report Digital

Campbell's memo to GIS staff argued the key ambition of GIS publicity is that the government's 'four key messages' must be 'built into all areas of our activity'. Labour is a 'modernising' government, a government 'for all the people', which is 'delivering on its promises' with 'mainstream policies' which are providing new directions for Britain. Little wonder that Jill Rutter believes there should be 'a strict code of conduct on the handling of government information which everyone in the department signs up to whether they are political appointees, ... temporary civil servants or permanent civil servants'.

Sixth, the increasingly centralised control of communications under Campbell and Mandelson, which will be exacerbated by implementing Mountfield; government communications will be less open to public scrutiny. A retired GIS officer commented: 'It is very frightening actually, because with an unwritten constitution we have these various checks and balances and one of the cherished elements in all that was that the government in power could not use the fact that it was in power to peddle its own party ideals to help it remain in power. There was the notion of the neutrality of the GIS based on a mission to inform and a duty to tell the truth; and not just the good bits; all that's under threat.

Another member of the GIS spoke of 'the Stasi type figures who stand in the corner and seem to watch everything you do.'

Seventh, there seems to be a new openness about news management which was exemplified in the Network First documentary about the press office at the Treasury Charlie Whelan's candidness about his activities were more than a little alarming. 'You have to be economical with

the truth sometimes' he observed 'although you should never lie, but its very difficult'. More worrying was ITN correspondent Michael Brunson's open admiration for the ability of Labour when in opposition to 'grab the news agenda and hold it for three days'. For Brunson, news management seems to have become a purely technical matter hollowed of any political significance and expressing little more than the skill of the spin doctor involved.

Managing the news has become a public secret. What is perhaps of greatest concern is the fact that the programme itself, advertised as a fly on the wall documentary, a televisual format designed to be open and critical of its subject matter, has itself become part of the spin.

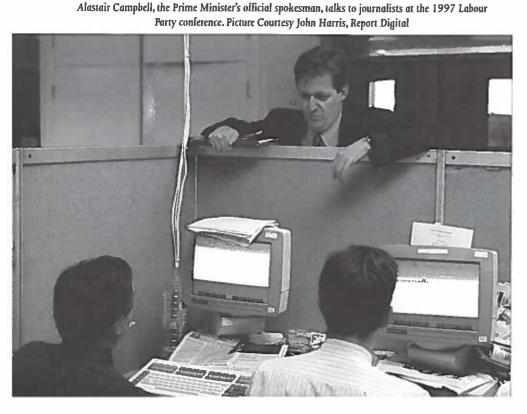
The main consequence of the recent Mountfield report will be to concentrate further the government's communications network at No 10. Indeed this was Mountfield's central concern (Mountfield, 1997, para 5). A Strategic Communications Unit will be established, composed of six civil servants and special advisers selected by Alastair Campbell and answerable to the Prime Minister via his press secretary. The unit will ensure that 'key government messages' are being communicated in a coordinated way across the various government departments (Mountfield, 1997, para 23). A 24 hour media monitoring service, to be funded by efficiency savings, is being piloted immediately and 'tailored to meet the needs of the 24-hour media world'(Ibid, para 5).

A new computer system will replace Cab-E-Net and provide the core of the government's 'fast rebuttal' potential similar to the party facility in Millbank. The computer will provide information to the centre and between departments about forthcoming government events. It will also include 'appropriate lines to take, the number 10 daily media briefing, the text of the Prime Minister's speeches and the output of the pilot media monitoring unit' (Ibid, para 24). The report also proposes changes to the system of attribution (paras 25-31), suggests a greater emphasis on recruiting Heads of Information from outside the Civil service, makes recommendations for improving training within the GIS and proposes the GIS be renamed the Government Information and Communications Services GICS.

The government eschews any suggestion that it is 'politicising' government information services; Governments and press secretaries always have. The Mountfield reforms are couched in terms of the need for 'strategic coordination' and 'closer integration of policy and its communications' (Mountfield, 1997, p2). But those who have recently felt obliged to leave the GIS after many years have a different view of the service under Labour. They express deeply felt concerns about recent changes and their possible implications for the impartiality of civil servants. One ex GIS officer identified a 'new attitude which says that if you are not 100 per cent for us you are against us. They seem to have thrown out of the window the whole idea of dispassion and detachment, standing back and saying "hang on there is a wider remit". That wider remit - a duty to inform - has totally gone. The duty now is simply to put over the good message." * Réport of the Working Group On The

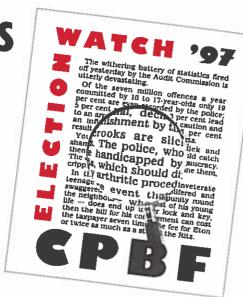
* Report of the Working Group On The Government Information Service, Cabinet Office, HMSO November

Bob Franklin's latest book, Newszak and News Media, is published by Edward Arnold, price £14.99



ELECTIONWATCH '97

It was Labour's sophisticated strategy wot won it, but for how long?



What was the media's role in Labour's election victory of May I 1997? It's a question which has been well worked over in the intervening months, and this article by Granville Williams draws together the insights gleaned from the CPBF Electionwatch monitoring exercise, as well as other material of interest to our readers.

BACKGROUND

If, with hindsight, the election result seemed a foregone conclusion, that wasn't the way it seemed as the parties geared up for the longest election campaign at the end of the longest Parliamentary session since the Quinquennial Act of 1911. For Labour, Neil Kinnock's 1992 defeat was a constant reminder both of the volatility of the electorate, and the role of the partisan press in creating an anti-Labour mood.

For the Conservatives the exhibaration of victory on 9 April 1992 was short lived. The next five years were to be punctuated by a series of gaffes, scandals, divisions and crises which brought radical realignments amongst the proprietors and editors of Tory-supporting papers. The process began with 'Black Wednesday', 16 September 1992, when the Chancellor, Norman Lamont, announced unilateral withdrawal from the Exchange Rate Mechanism. On 14 January 1994 the Sun had a leader, 'What Fools We Were', which effectively apologised for advising its readers to vote Tory in 1992.

But the sharpest indication of the devastating loss of support for John Major amongst the press was the coverage of his resignation to stand again as leader on 22 July 1995. With the exception of the Express and Star all the national papers which supported the Tories in 1992 pulled away from Major in the leadership election. The Sun described him as the 'Prime Ditherer' who 'couldn't organise his own funeral' whilst the Daily Mail, on 4 July, the day of the election, had a front page cartoon of John Major on the deck of the

sinking Toryanic, with the bold headline 'Time To Ditch The Captain'.

For Labour however once Tony Blair was elected leader on 21 July 1994 he set about creating a formidable communications strategy, using the skills of Peter Mandelson and former Mirror journalist Alastair Campbell, and the establishment of the media centre in Millbank Tower, London. A sophisticated rapid rebuttal computer system, Excalibur, provided the information to tackle Tory challenges.

Also Tony Blair went directly to the proprietors and editors of key newspapers, to assure them of the changed policies and priorities of new Labour, and to try to win more balanced reporting of the party, if not active support. Most dramatically, on July 17 1995 Tony Blair flew to Australia to address the News Corporation leadership conference.

In this period newspapers were themselves affected by dramatic change too. Rupert Murdoch unleashed a predatory price war, cutting the price of The Times to weaken the circulation of papers like The Independent and Daily Telegraph; and the Sun to challenge the Daily Mirror and Star. It meant the Sun held at a circulation around four million and The Times doubled its circulation to 772,000, Also whilst the price war raged newspapers were affected by newsprint shortages and Rupert Murdoch decided that Today had had its day, closing it in November 1995.

The merger of Labour-supporting Lord Hollick's media group MAI with Torysupporting Lord Stephen's United News and Media immediately had an impact on the trio of papers, the Daily Express, Sunday Express and

Daily Star which began to distance themselves from Conservative Central Office and take a more independent line.

INTO BATTLE: THE PRESS

The key feature of the 1997 election was that Labour had the support of most national daily papers. Six of the ten backed Labour: the Sun, the Daily Star, the Financial Times (cautiously), the Guardian, the Independent and the Mirror. The last three papers also combined their support for Labour with an appeal for anti-Conservative tactical voting. Conservative support was confined to the Express, the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph, with The Times advocating a vote for Euro-sceptic candidates.

The combined circulation of Labour newspapers was 7.9 million, compared with 4.5 million for the Conservatives, but in readership terms the gap was even greater. Labour papers had 21.6 million readers, double the 10.6 million for the Conservative press.

Whilst the Sun backed Tony Blair, it was conditional support for him as leader, rather than for Labour policies on Europe, trade union rights and the minimum wage, which the paper wasn't too happy about. The Sun, in stark contrast to 1992, lacked the combative, scathing tone which characterised its assault on Kinnock; the venom wasn't redirected against the Tories, except briefly around the Piers Merchant exposé. The result was that election coverage was strangely muted possibly because not all the Sun journalists were enthusiastic about Murdoch's decision to re-align the paper with Blair.

The Mirror was the house journal for the Labour Party, with each day's coverage clearly coordinated with Millbank; double-side features coincided with Labour's daily press briefings on the campaign themes of health, education, unemployment, etc. In contrast with 1992 when the Daily Mirror gave only muted support to Labour, its coverage in 1997 could be deemed uncritically sycophantic.

Amongst the Tory-supporting press the influence of Lord Hollick meant that in place of the strident partisanship of 1992, the Express in 1997 was lukewarm, whilst the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph ran strong Euro-sceptic campaigns which had the effect of emphasising Tory divisions. The Mail, even more than the Telegraph, pursued an anti-European agenda. Europe, it announced on 15 April was the issue, with the banner headline, THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN, established a hot-line to encourage Euro-sceptic candidates to go public, and by the eve-of-poll had a list of 308 candidates opposed to the single currency. Finally the paper recommended 'If you believe this country should retain its independence you must, however reluctantly, vote Conservative.' Not really a ringing endorsement for the Tories!

But the Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph did inject combative anti-Labour content into

their columns and editorials, with both papers warning of the Blair-Murdoch link and asking whether a deal had been done (the 'devil's bargain' Stephen Glover suggested in the Telegraph) to allow Murdoch's media empire to expand further Town Hall sleaze, Labour's trade union 'bully boys' and the flaws in Tony Blair as a leader were all worked in.

A similar pattern of support for Labour emerged in the Sunday press, with circulation of the total pro-Labour papers 9.7 million (the News of the World, Sunday Mirror, People, Observer, and Independent on Sunday) compared with 5.6 million for Conservative titles (Mail on Sunday, Express on Sunday, Sunday Times, and Sunday Telegraph). The three mass-circulation Labour supporting Sundays didn't devote much space to the election, even on the last Sunday before polling; both the Observer, which published a seat-by-seat survey in the pre-election edition, and the Independent on Sunday encouraged tactical voting, and covered the election campaign in detail.

In the pro-Conservative camp the Mail on Sunday gave only lukewarm support, grudgingly finding 'on balance' a better case for Mr Major than Mr Blair, whilst the Express on Sunday in its last election front page had Conservative MP Edwina Currie featured predicting a Labour landslide. The Sunday Times declared for the Tories 'warts and all' but alongside the leader was a powerful anti-Tory broadside by columnist Robert Harris.

SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION?

Martin Linton demonstrated convincingly (Was It The Sun Wot Won It?) the important role of the partisan Tory tabloids in the 1992 election, but something different happened in 1997. Support for the Tories - portrayed as sleazy, divided, and increasingly incompetent over pit closures, BSE, 'fat cats' in the public utilities, Europe, and so on - ebbed away after 1992. In February 1997 a MORI poll demon-

strated the swing to Labour, with only four national

of readers who said they would support the Tories (the Daily Telegraph, the Sunday Telegraph, the Express and the Express on Sunday) With the Telegraph though the Tory support had slumped from 72% in 1992 to 54% when the poll was conducted, whilst support for Labour more than doubled from 11% to 26%.

The assault on the Major government by the press over nearly five years peeled away Tory support, at the same time as new Labour repositioned itself to attract both favourable press coverage and electoral support from all newspapers. By the time of the election national newspapers were accurately expressing their readers' voting intentions. (See Table)

However the really important question is how long will it be before the conditional support from sections of the former Tory press (News International particularly) is withdrawn from new Labour? The friction points were clearly signed - Europe, trade union rights, even issues of media regulation and cross-media ownership (which also involve Europe too). The debate about media power and its impact on democracy isn't over - let's see how the press line up when we have a referendum campaign on EMU.

BROADCASTING

Labour established its attack and rebuttal unit, backed up by Excalibur and the research department, at Millbank Tower in January 1996. Laid out like a newsroom and equipped with the latest high-tech equipment, it cost the party £2 million, and its staff grew to 150, with many more volunteers. There was constant monitoring of radio and television and if reports appeared to be untrue or damaging to Labour, every effort would be made to challenge them.

Nicholas Jones, as a BBC political correspondent, was at the receiving end of some of this, and his book on the election gives a behind the scenes account of the role of the spin-doctors in this activity. But the result was



Labour party workers at the media centre on 2 May were given their instructions on how to prepare for the arrival of Tony Blair at No 10. People were positioned with Union jacks, and those with children placed near the best camera shots Picture courtesy John Harris, Report Digital

NEWSPAPER READERS AND VOTING PATTERNS

NEWSPAPER	R PARTY SUPPORTED			
	BY READERS			
		Con	Lab	Lib
		%	%	Dem %
Daily Telegraph	1997	57	20	17
	1992	72	11	16
Express	1997	49	29	16
	1992	67	15	14
Daily Mail	1997	49	29	14
	1992	65	15	18
Financial Times	1997	48	29	19
	1992	65	17	16
The Times	1997	42	28	25
	1992	64	16	19
Sun	1997	30	52	12
	1992	45	36	14
Daily Star	1997	17	66	12
	1992	31	54	12
Independent	1997	16	47	30
	1992	25	37	34
Mirror	1997	14	72	11
	1992	20	64	14
Guardian	1997	8	67	22
	1992	15	55	24
Source: MORI				

most part clearly organised and 'on-message'. Only Labour's reliable spokespersons went on the air, and to prevent uncontrolled and uncoordinated appearances sometimes only one politician would be made available to broadcasting organisations so that he (it was rarely she) was fully briefed. Trade union leaders were also noticeable by their absence during the election.

But the other aspect of Labour's media operation was to ensure a steady stream of anti-Conservative material designed to disrupt the Tory media strategy and ensure that 'good news' stories (falling unemployment) were neutralised by well-placed stories about sleaze or Tory dissension. This exacerbated what was already perceived to be a much weaker media operation coordinated by their communications director, Charles Lewington. The Conservatives were seen to be responding to damaging stories on a day-to-day basis with the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, often fielded to deal with them.

The contrast between the two media strategies, with Labour leaving nothing to chance, was summed up after the election victory. Labour party workers at the media centre on 2 May were given their instructions on how to prepare for the arrival of Tony Blair at No 10. People were positioned with Union jacks, and those with children placed near the best camera shots, so that on screen it would appear like a spontaneous outpouring from offices and factories to greet the new Prime Minister."

Election monitor reports

WATCH '97

SCOTLAND

TURLOUGH McDaid ON THE SCOTSMAN AND

SCOTLAND ON SUNDAY
Despite the acquisition of the Scotsman Publications group of newspapers by the reclusive Barclay brothers and the appointment of Andrew Neil as editorial

director, both The Scotsman and its stablemate, Scotland on Sunday, maintained a neutral stance during the run-up to polling day. On election day itself The Scotsman caused something of a multiple pile-up on the road to Damascus by advocating that its readers should support Labour. It is felt that this may have been prompted more by Neil's detestation of the Pooterish John Major rather than a death-bed conversion to Labour.

The sleaze factor, both North and south of the river Tweed, provided a field day for The Scotsman. No sooner had the dust settled down in relation to the resignation, over extra marital activities, of Allan Stewart, former member for Eastwood, than the Scottish public were subjected to the sight of Tory grandees jockeying to get what was considered to be the safe Eastwood seat.

During the course of the election, the Scottish TUC met in Glasgow. The viciousness usually reserved for the Labour Party was directed at Congress.

WALES

ROD BROOKS ON THE WESTERN MAIL

The Western Mail was generous in its election coverage, devoting two full pages to it daily. But by contrast the election was the main item on less than half the days of the campaign. Of the subjects covered in the main article and editorials, the election itself (polls, campaign strategies, etc.) topped the list, followed by Europe, devolution and sleaze. The number of main items on each of the two main parties was about equal, but the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru were hardly featured.

Most of the newspaper's leaders were about Labour, treating it as the government-in-waiting. However the language of these editorials encouraged scepticism about some of Labour's policies and its ability to implement them. A recurring criticism was that Labour lacked specific proposals for the Welsh Assembly, a body supported by the Western Mail but only if it had limited powers. The Conservatives were characterised as successful over economic policy, but tired, poorly-led and split over Europe. The paper was most hostile to Plaid Cymru

and its proposals for independence, describing them as naive.

STUART ALLEN ON THE SOUTH WALES ECHO

The South Wales Echo, the tabloid counterpart to the 'quality' Western Mail broadsheet, was reasonably balanced in its coverage of the different party platforms. Although election news only rarely

appeared on the front page, there was almost daily coverage of the main events, usually on the second page. Election reporting was principally focused on local politicians and issues within a Welsh context, with Cardiff's Labour and Tory contenders receiving most of the attention.

Little effort was made elsewhere in the newspaper to make connections between local problems (education, crime, housing, the economy, and so forth) with election policy debates. The Echo conducted its own opinion polls throughout the campaign, accurately predicting (with one exception) that Wales would become a "Tory free zone".

TOM O'MALLEY

ON THE SOUTH WALES ARGUS

The South Wales Argus is owned by Southern Newspapers plc and publishes six days a week. At the outset the Argus declared it would 'remain impartial and balanced' in its coverage. Only three of the front page lead stories directly covered the election and these were neutral. Many of the other stories covered election issues, but without referring to the election. The paper carried regular election coverage on inside pages. Of the 33 leaders examined, 16 addressed election issues directly. Of these 8 were neutral, 3 were critical of the Tories. On their manifesto tax proposals, sleaze and the BSE issue, and 3 were fairly pro-Labour, including the one on 2 May which gave the new government a cautious welcome. The most hostile leader was directed against Plaid Cymru's manifesto pledge for a Welsh Parliament. The Argus did not consider the election merited much front page coverage nor did the paper adopt a strongly partisan position in its leaders.

USEFUL READING

Relive that night again. Were You Still Up For Portillo?

By Brian Cathcart (Penguin) £5.99

Compaign 1997: How The General Election Was Won and Lost by Nicholas Jones (Indigo) £8.99 gives the low-down on the spin doctors. Explains how "Labour established and then maintained their supremacy in influencing, and even manipulating, the news media".

The British General Election of 1997 by David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh (MacMillan) £16.99 gives you all the facts and statistics. Election '97: Viewers' Responses to the Television Coverage by J. Sancho-Aldridge (Independent Television Commission)

MEDIA

TOMORROW BELONGS TO ...

The latest Bond film, Tomorrow Never Dies, may not be one which FP readers rush to see, but two aspects are worth mentioning. The film cost \$100 million dollars to make, but a good deal of money in the form of product placement will have helped defray this figure. BMW (cars and motorbikes), Omega watches and other products are scattered through the film.

The movie also has an additional \$50 million dollars of free promotion through product tie-in advertising. The new TV campaign for the Ericsson mobile phone (Bond uses one to steer his car remotely from the back seat) and four BMW ads which use clips from the film itself are examples.

The other interesting aspect is the film's plot which features a media mogul, Carver, played by Jonathan Pryce, bent on world domination. He wants his news media to create the news globally and will go to any lengths to achieve this. Sounds like someone else we know ...

HARD POUNDING

World in Action producers at Granada Television are still reeling after a verbal onslaught from Labour's spin doctors that showed them to be every bit as poisonous as their Tory predecessors. The World in Action investigation into Bernie Eccleston's £1 million 'donation' came only after a barrage of hysterical phone calls from Downing Street.

The table thumping hysteria could be heard back in Manchester as the good doctors attempted to put up Home Secretary Jack Straw to answer WIA's allegations. Fortunately, it didn't work with the spin doctors unable to convince WIA that Straw was the man to answer their questions.

COSTS AND CUTS

At a conference on the future of regional television held in Manchester in December, former Granada chairman David Plowright challenged the Independent Television Commission to include financial criteria into their monitoring of regional programmes. It's not just the hours that are important, argued Plowright, but the financial input as well. Anyone can fill ten hours a week of regional programming; what matters are the budgets and the overall financial outlay.

At present the ITC is obliged only to monitor the total number of hours devoted to local programming, but Plowright's suggestion has some virtue which Chris Smith should at least consider, especially when Granada recently slashed £2 million off its regional programming budget.

Global reach

Jonathan Hardy reports on the challenges posed by an inspiring Canadian conference

Heard the one about the MAI? Probably not. That's Multilateral Agreement on Investment. Twenty nine OECD countries are drafting a treaty intended to apply not just to themselves but to all 150 countries in the world. The treaty is designed to outlaw laws and policies which restrict foreign investment. The intention is to prevent countries from operating measures in respect of transnational corporations (TNCs) which serve to protect their domestic economy and working people. If passed later this year, the MAI would further entrench corporate rule, undermine democracy and devastate the environment. There is growing popular resistance to this destructive treaty, but only amongst those who know about it ...

I spent a week last November by the shores of Lake Huron in Canada participating in the First International Symposium on Corporate
Rule, organised by the
International Forum on
Globalisation. Some 85
delegates, including campaign organisers, front line activists and policy analysts from Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America, took part in four days of discussion culminating in a mammoth global teach-in on corporate rule.

The objectives of the Symposium were for campaigners from all sectors of TNC activity to deepen their understanding of the global system of corporate rule, consolidate our efforts to expose and confront it and develop strategies to advance the struggle for democratic rights. For me, it was a huge privilege to spend time with such a diverse, courageous and friendly group. Here I'd like to feed back some thoughts from the event and considerations for our work.

First, the media overall have done a poor job in covering corporate rule, as the MAI example shows. The roll-back of democratic accountability through privatisation and deregulation has been exacerbated by the failure of the media to report, linked as it is to the structures of power, ownership and commerce which represent and sustain corporate rule. In Global Media (1997, publ. Cassells) Ed Herman and Robert McChesney highlight how 'news' is likely to become less and less diverse and independent as trends coalesce including cutbacks in investigative reporting and increasing reliance on corporations' own public relations.

Susan George highlighted at the

Symposium that the corporations' need for secrecy is secured not only by their keeping activities hidden which would be resisted if widely known, but also by making their activities so complex that they are inaccessible to ordinary people.

If globalisation is an accelerating process in which TNCs and the financial system pursue profit-maximising interests at the expense of all else, it is clear that 'Europe is a key battleground. The welfare state, democratic controls, trade union rights and public services were all won through struggle. They have acted a bulwarks against unrestrained capitalism and continue to be defended by crucial majorities. That highlights the importance of the entrenched protection of the public service broadcasting secured in the EU's Amsterdam Treaty and the protection of European cultural industries through the revised Television without Frontiers Directive which Carole Tongue MEP reported in Free

Press 100.

The world is
run by the
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show up

In Global Media the authors state: "The central question is whether the various media activist groups can generate support from sympathetic larger aggregations such as religious bodies, labor, and educators coalesce, and work

to mobilise public opinion in favor of media reform". I believe we need to find ways of assisting key constituencies affected by the corporate media system to become mobilised. Education is a key area, I learned there is now an active corporate marketing presence in every school in the US.TCI and Disney are moving into the production of educational material, while the BBC has signed a major deal whereby Disney's Discovery Channel; will fund future wildlife and environmental programmes.

Think about that deal, What happens when a corporation responsible for the exploitation of textile workers, media workers, natural resources and cultural products has control over the representation of environmental issues and of TNCs role in these, both on public broadcasting (the BBC says it won't) and in public education? We must campaign with educators, unions and with parents in Britain as well as strengthen our links with media reformers internationally.

It was a hugely inspiring event from which I learn the strength and importance of solidarity in meeting the challenge of corporate rule. Woody Allen said: "The world is run by the people who show up." It's vital we are all there too.

REVIEW

A Journalism Reader edited by Michael Bromley and Tom O'Malley 1997. Routledge, London.

(Hardback £50.00, Paperback £15.99)
Too many academic books on journalism ignore the impact that issues such as training, working practices, concentration of ownership, and industrial relations have on journalistic output. At the other extreme, accounts by journalists themselves usually seem blissfully unaware of wider concepts like ideology and hegemony. It is therefore refreshing to find that Bromley and O'Malley's hefty reader (400 pages) goes some way to bridging this gap.

It is the nature of such collections that they are rather indigestible if taken as a whole, but there is much of value here to stimulate students, teachers, producers and consumers of journalism. With a timeframe covering the period 1700 to 2000, the editors have usefully placed the contemporary contributions within a historical context provided by the likes of John Stuart Mill, George Rowel and James Cameron.

Among the essays are two welcome accounts of the conditions under which today's journalists operate. As Michael Bromley points out: "In the extensive and expanding body of literature addressing journalism which has been produced over the past 40 years journalists appear only rarely as workers".

Bromley attempts to redress the balance by tracing changes in the training and working practices of journalists, including the recent fad for so-called 'multi-skilling' which too often turns out to be de-skilling. He concludes with a warning that current trends contain the potential for the 'final fragmentation' of the industry, with the majority becoming technicians not journalists.

Gregor Gall's case study of industrial relations at the Daily Mirror raises important questions of potential links between the erosion of journalists' rights as employees and the ideological content of their output.

Finally, Sally Bailey and Granville Williams have trawled through tonnes of journalists' memoirs published from the 1940s to the 1990s and have identified changes in the way these journalists perceived their work. In the process they have uncovered many nuggets such as ex-News of the World editor Stafford Somerfield's recollection of Murdoch's words when he took over the paper: "I did not come all this way not to interfere".

A Journalism Reader is an excellent book which more than justifies its place on the increasingly crowded Media Studies shelves.

Tony Harcui

Europe success for distribution campaign

THE petition signed by 10,000 people (reported in Free Press 99) sent from Britain to the European Parliament's Petitions Committee has been ruled admissible and the Commissioners now have a duty to investigate.

Although it's an important success for the campaign, the Committee for Diversity and Pluralism estimates that there are some 100 petitions in the pipeline.

Supporters of the campaign are urged to write to their Euro MP requesting that the petition be given urgent consideration.

The European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media has also supported the need for a fair distribution system.

In a far-reaching report on the impact of new technologies upon the press in Europe, it states that: "It is an essential element of freedom of the press that all titles should have free access to distribution networks and should be treated equally".

You can support the campaign by writing to your MP asking them to back a fair distribution system, Details from Anni Marjoram, Diversity and Pluralism Committee (tel: 0171 254 0033 – fax: 0171 254 5950).

Telling it like it is . . .

IF YOU want to understand why much of the newspaper industry has a poor record on race relations, you should have been at the recent Press Wise forum Telling it like it is

Despite a good mix of groups representing ethnic organisations, not one representative came from newspaper editors, or the Press Complaints Commission.

Attempts to attract local newspaper editors, especially those in London, where the forum was held, also drew a blank. It was left to David Docherty, deputy director of BBC, to face the music during the open sessions.

The aim of the Forum was to get representatives of ethnic communities to talk to decision-makers in the media. Despite their absence, people found the Forum invigorating and informative. The format was very much 'pick and mix' with a wide range of activities including workshops, a cyberconference and much passionate debate in the open sessions.

Mike Jempson, Press Wise's Executive Director, was pleased with the outcome: "There was a very positive report on BBC Radio 4's Medium Wave programme broadcast the next day and we are looking forward to developing the many contacts we made, and a series of fresh initiatives look set to result from the event".

Barry White

CPBF NEWS

GAGGED

A one day conference is being organised by Media and Society students at Southbank University. Its aim is to give students the opportunity to voice their interests and experiences in relation to the media — experiences and interests that are rarely aired within the mass media, hence its name: Gagged.

Gagged will be held on 25th February 1998 10am to 4pm in the Abbey Conference Suite of Southbank University, London Road SE1 (Elephant and Castle Tube/BR).

If you require further information please contact: Philippa Dowse or Jess Gilchrist on 0171 407 11018.

MEDIA HISTORY

The University of Westminster and the Journal Media History are hosting an international conference on 'What is Media History? at the Harrow Campus of the University of Westminster. The conference will cover aspects of media history from the origins of printing to the present day world of mass communications and will have a strong international dimensions. The Conference is on the 8, 9 and 10th July 1998. Details of the conference and call for papers - deadline 22 February - can be obtained from Maria Way, Centre for Communication and Information Studies, University of Westminster, Block J, Northwick Park Campus, Watford Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 3TP, Tel 0171 911 5941 or e mail on waym@wmin.ac.uk.



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