

FREE Press

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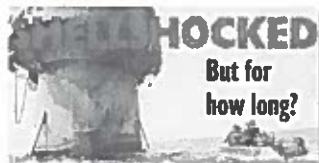
EDITORIAL

DUMPING DOWN

AN INSPIRED Greenpeace campaign, including occupying the installation and Europe-wide petrol boycotts, forced the oil-company Shell to back down from its decision, with UK government support, to dump Brent Spar in the ocean in the summer of 1995.

Fast forward to May 11, 1998 and The Independent

has a front page lead predicting a turnaround in government policy on dumping oil rigs in the North Sea. At the Labour Party conference last October environment minister Michael



Free Press September 1995

Meacher promised, 'there will be no more Brent Spars under Labour.'

Now it appears that the government wants the option of dumping more than 60 oil rigs at sea.

In FP 88 we made the point that there are about 200 structures linked with North sea oil operations, and the total cost of decommissioning will be £7

billion pounds over 30 years. Dumping at sea solves a big financial headache for the oil industry.

That's why the UK Offshore Oil Operators Association mounted a full-



Independent May 1998

blown PR and lobbying campaign after the Brent Spar debacle to ensure that the total ban on dumping was neutralised. PR Week reported that a budget in

excess of £500,000 was allocated, with an option on an advertising campaign. It seems that the investment is beginning to pay off, at least in the UK.

The public is largely unaware of the secretive techniques used by shadowy lobbying organisations on behalf of powerful clients. We hope the feature in this issue will help to remedy this.

Labour backbenchers lay down marker over predatory pricing

LABOUR backbenchers called for action against predatory pricing by Rupert Murdoch and other newspaper owners during the recent second reading of the Government's Competitions Bill.

A number of Labour members spoke in support of an amendment (the McNally amendment) passed in the Lords which added a new clause to the bill specifically outlawing predatory pricing by newspaper owners. The clause was not supported by the Government who proposed to have it thrown out during the bill's passage through the Commons.

News International was mainly in the firing line for having reduced the price of the Times on Mondays and Saturdays, at an estimated cost of £375 million over a five year period, to undercut the Independent and Telegraph.

Speaking during the debate Chris Mullin,

Chair of the Commons Home Affairs select committee, said that the acid test of the bill was whether Murdoch's pricing policy would be stopped. He was supported by a number of other Labour backbenchers including Giles Radice and David Winnick who called for effective legislation to prevent The Times from undercutting other newspapers to drive them out of business.

Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, who had already had a private meeting with unhappy MPs to persuade them to support the bill, said that that by introducing European law and a court judgement (known as the TetraPak case) into the proposed legislation, predatory pricing would be illegal.

This did not satisfy the Liberal Democrats, who had sponsored the McNally

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AGM AND CONFERENCE

YOUR CHANCE TO SHAPE POLICY

THIS YEAR our AGM and Conference will be held on Saturday 6 June at the LVS Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA. The AGM is in the morning. Registration 10.00am. AGM 10.30-12.30. In the afternoon we will be holding our annual conference which tackles media policy issues. This will run from 1.30 to 4.30pm

Both events give CPBF members an opportunity to get involved with and shape the direction of CPBF activity. We'd urge members to make a note of the date so that they can attend. The venue is a modern and comfortable conference centre, easily accessible.

Also we'd like members to consider nominations for our National Council. There are a number of different categories so if you are interested please contact the London office (0171 278 4430) for further information.



Bozzy, John and Billy cook sausages on the picket line, Seaforth '97

Striking images

DOCKERS: The 1995-1998 Liverpool Lock Out, a moving photographic essay of the recent Liverpool docks dispute is on until June 10 at the Dash Gallery in London Docklands. The photographs are by Liverpool photographer and retired docker's son, Dave Sinclair.

IN SEPTEMBER 1995, 400 Liverpool dockers were sacked for refusing to cross a picket line. For the next 28 months they and their families fought for reinstatement in the longest-running industrial dispute since the miners' strike of the early eighties.

On the picket line from day one, Dave built up an extensive library of images capturing the dignity and self-respect of the dockers and their families. "My family on my father's side have been seamen and

women going back at least five generations. My father was involved in disputes on the docks in the 1960s and 70s, so I feel I have a strong emotional connection with the dockers," he explained.

The media have not done justice to the dispute. Editors like to portray the dockers as unfashionable dinosaurs, representing a tradition of struggle that has been lost. But the dockers represent a tradition that is alive and well in British society – in having the confidence and courage to stand up to a bullying employer, they brought hope to others."

Exhibition open 10.00am-6.00pm weekdays. Dash Gallery, Jack Dash House, 2 Lawn House Close, Marsh Wall, London E14. Tel 0171 364 5030. Nearest station: South Quay DLR.

Fairness at work?

THE Magnet strikers accepted the company's package of £850,000 at the end of April – an amount ten times what would have been needed to pay the 3 per cent increase which sparked the original dispute. The Magnet factory in Darlington now has a non-union workforce with no guaranteed working week, and management have imposed all the conditions they were demanding when the strike began.

Jeremy Hardy in his Guardian column (2/5/98) commented: "We shall have to wait and see what is the Government's definition of fairness. In the meantime how nice it would be if Blair could find it in himself to use his voice unashamedly in support of the kind of people who earn a couple of hundred pounds a week, at the risk of spoiling lunch with the kind of people who earn thousands."

Docks dispute down under

ONE OF the most informative background pieces on a dispute which has received international attention appeared in the April 22 issue of a free paper, *Southern Cross*, distributed in London for exiled Aussies.

National docks company Patrick sacked its entire 1,400-strong workforce on April 7 1998, and the action sparked a response that has spilt on to the streets, into the courts and received international support.

The wharfies, members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), were a priority for the victorious coalition government, elected in March 1996.

Its transport spokesman, John Sharp, pledged in opposition "to break the grip of the MUA." The December 1996 Workplace Relations Act was passed with tough sanctions against unions taking industrial action in support of other unions.

Patrick Stevedores was actively involved with the government, including receiving advice on deregistering the union and on how not to pay union workers taking industrial action.

The company also began to assemble a team of serving and former soldiers in Dubai to train as wharf workers, but had to cancel this once the media broke the news about the plans.

A final comment from the *Southern Cross* editorial – "Consider people, not just economics" – which pulls no punches. After quoting from the London-based *Economist*, which predicted the demise of the dockers, it went on to savage the tactics of the company:

"To date these have included sacking the entire union workforce; setting up a 'shelf company' which doesn't actually have any money to pay the workers; trying to train SAS commandos to replace wharfies; employing balaclava-clad security guards on the docks; and using the Supreme Court to keep unionists away from picket lines."

It concludes: "What all workers must understand is that the wharfies are not just fighting for themselves.

"They are making a last stand against the economists and big business people whose interests are calculated in dollars, not people."

As we went to press the High Court found against Patrick Stevedores and the wharfies returned to work, but a useful web-site for up-to-date information is: www.labournet.org.uk

Kids these days

CHILDREN'S Express – a news agency staffed by journalists and editors aged 8 to 18 – presented its research findings about the stereotyping of children in news reports at a one day seminar entitled 'Kids These Days' at the Freedom Forum on 20 April 1998.

Children's Express analysed all news stories featuring children and young people published in national daily newspapers and the *Sheffield Star* and *London Evening Telegraph* for five days beginning 15 September 1997. Findings revealed that newspapers routinely portray children by referring to seven stereotypes: children as victims (32%); children as 'cute' (27%); children as 'little devils' (11%); children as 'exceptionally gifted' (9.7%); children as 'adult accessories' (8%); children as 'kids these days' who behave in ways that adults never did when they were young; children as 'brave little angels' exemplified by stories about children who have been ill but managed to smile through adversity (5%).

Children's Express concluded that the majority of reports were negative; none presented children realistically and none gave expression to children's voices. Mehrak Golestani of Children's Express argued that

"the way the media portray children has a really bad lasting effect on all kids." Delwar Hussain claimed that when he's on a train with other people "I can see they are wary of me because I look young – because the representations of young people in the media is that they are criminals."

Jack O'Sullivan, associate editor of the *Independent*, responded by suggesting that the absence of children's voices in media coverage reflected the fact that journalists worked under pressure of deadlines and did not always have a contact number for younger spokespeople; a point endorsed by Robin Lustig. Children's Express offered five practical recommendations designed to help journalists respect children's views and challenge stereotypes while chasing good stories within the time constraints of deadlines.

- Give children a say in your stories – interview children
- Listen to what children say – stories will have more angles and greater interest
- Talk to a representative group of children – don't assume 8 year olds think like 17



year olds

- Involve children in setting up the interview
- Consult children on a wider range of issues

With some of these proposals in mind, Lotte Hughes and Sarah McCrum – two journalists at Save the Children – have recently produced *Interviewing Children, a guide for journalists and others*. It's available for £6.50p from Save the Children publications, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD.

Party political broadcasting

THE BBC, ITC, Radio Authority and S4C issued a consultation paper in January 1998 on the reform of party political broadcasting. The document suggested a number of changes, including the abolition of the party political broadcast (PPB) which gives parties the right to broadcast to the electorate between elections – and the promise of additional party electoral broadcasts (PEB) during the actual campaign.

It has met with a decidedly cool response from the Communication Research Centre at Loughborough University (the group which, among other things, did the analysis of media coverage of the 1997 election in *The Guardian*). In a clearly argued response, (which includes such uncomfortable facts as a John Major interview on *Panorama* during the election attracting a lower audience than *The Antiques Road Show* on BBC2 and that there was a sharp increase in video rentals during the campaign) the authors oppose the key proposals in the consultation paper.

The submission, written by Dominic Wring, Peter Golding and David Deacon, makes the point that decisions about the allocation of PPBs are not just the concern of television executives, and that future procedures should be considered by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

The key proposals, and the authors' responses, are:

- **MOVE** the focus of party political broadcasting to election campaigns when parties are directly seeking votes from the electorate. Such a move would deprive all parties of an opportunity to communicate to the electorate in the mid-term of a parliament, a period which research has identified as being more important if not central to voters' decisions than the actual short, four week election campaign itself. Furthermore there is a case for extending the system and allowing the minor parties a right to mid-term broadcasts.
- **REPLACE** the annual series of PPBs with

more PEBs to reflect the growth in the number of elected bodies in the UK. With more elections comes the need for more PEB airtime – why should the PPBs be affected by these changes?

- **ABOLISH** ministerial and Budget broadcasts. Given the time and resources invested in coverage of these items, parties should continue to have the right to directly address the population.
- **INTRODUCE** a higher threshold of one sixth of seats contested for the minor parties in all elections. This proposal, if implemented, would be highly prejudicial to the interests of the minor parties, particularly those contesting elections in England. The prohibitive cost of standing 110 or so candidates may prevent minor parties from obtaining a PEB.

Copies of the document are available from Communication Research Centre, Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3TU.

Big media, big money, big influence

BIG MEDIA is the most rapacious lobby in the United States

The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the industry's leading trade group, is a lobbying behemoth founded in 1922. Today it boasts 7,500 members and annual revenues of more than \$35 million.

A lobby disclosure act which took effect in 1996 reveals for the first time the magnitude of the broadcasters' lobbying efforts. Reports filed for the first half of 1996 alone show that the NAB spent \$2.3 million to lobby Congress, the Clinton administration, and the

Federal Communication Commission. During that period, the reports indicate that the association spent more on its lobbying efforts than the Bank of America, the Chrysler Corporation, or the National Rifle Association.

But industry giants don't just rely on the NAB. Broadcasters such as ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox and the Tribune Co. also retain their own lobbyists to influence elected officials and regulators. According to lobbying reports, these largest broadcasters, along with the NAB, spent more than \$4 million on lobbying during the first half of 1996.

But even this figure underestimates the resources expended to influence elected officials and policymakers.

For example, it doesn't take into account the lobbying expenditures of Disney, Westinghouse, and General Electric, owners of the three major TV networks. These corporate parents spent more than £6.7 million on lobbying during the first half of 1996, bringing the total the broadcast industry invested in its lobbying to at least \$10.7 million during the first six months of 1996.

Of course, the broadcasting industry is not the only lobby that makes big campaign contributions and hires powerful lobbyists. But there is one thing broadcasters can do that almost no one else can: shape the national news agenda by controlling the information beamed into American living rooms.

They have the power to report and shape the news, including the power to control how issues affecting their own operations are covered.

A striking example of the deployment of this power was over the idea which some Congress members had to make broadcasters pay for the right to use broadcast spectrum for digital television – a resource that might be worth up to \$70 billion – rather than hand it over free. Advertisements appeared warning that the government was about to impose a 'TV tax' and urging people to call their elected officials to protest. As a news story, however, it was not on the radar screens of TV reporters and it meant that the only information television viewers received about the spectrum giveaway came from the ads raising the imagined spectre of a 'tax' on free TV.

Material extracted from *Channeling Influence: The Broadcast Lobby and the \$70 Billion Free Ride* by Common Cause, a group that publishes investigative studies of the effects of money in US politics.

He jumped ship and fell on his feet

ONE of Tony Blair's closest media advisers, Tim Allen, is leaving to take up a top job as director of corporate communications at BSKyB with a reported salary of £100,000.

He has worked for Tony Blair since 1992, and after the election was deputy to the Prime Minister's press secretary, Alistair Campbell.

Having been on the inside "gives me a knowledge of how and when decisions are made and where Whitehall's pressure points are," Allen says.

In March David Hill, the party's long-serving chief media officer, left to join Bell Pottinger, the Whitehall lobbyists run by Sir Tim Bell, Mrs Thatcher's advertising man.

This is part of a much wider exodus of

people who worked for Labour up to and after the election and are now moving on to lucrative jobs in the lobbying and PR industry, or to represent large companies.

After years of Tory governments which brought easy access to ministers by lobbyists, this is a new trend by lobbyists to recruit people with intimate knowledge and contacts among Labour ministers and advisers.

At the same time the Labour Party has promoted a scheme which will give privileged access to lobbyists in return for cash.

At a special policy seminar at the party's headquarters on March 31 representatives of companies like Tesco and Railtrack were offered a policy information service in

exchange for subscriptions of £1,000.

The seminar was the first step in a new marketing campaign which involves selling companies access to policy documents and special policy seminars.

For cash-strapped pressure groups like the CPBF this causes concern; businesses with deep pockets will be able to gain easy access to Labour's policy making process.

Andrew Puddephat, director of Charter 88, said: "We are starting to see a worrying drift towards a situation where organised money counts for a lot and politics becomes the province of exclusive interests, and is not genuinely reflective of the attitudes of people who might not have the same level of access."



Why 'new faces' are set to star in the global warming debate

THE largest public relations firms operate globally. Burson-Marsteller, a subsidiary of the advertising conglomerate, Young and Rubicam, operates in over 30 countries and its clients include major corporations, business associations, government agencies, right-wing political movements and wealthy individuals.

The company's mission is to "help clients manage issues by influencing – in the right combination – public attitudes, public perceptions, public behaviour and public policy."

Tom Tomorrow's cartoon inspired the title of an excellent book, *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry*, by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton (Common Courage Press).

The book argues that public relations, which many people equate with advertising, often carries out activities which are more secretive and sinister than designing clever slogans or TV ads.

It's a very clearly written dissection of the techniques used by PR firms to support corporate interests.

One chapter, 'Silencing Spring', describes the response of powerful agricultural chemical business to the environmental movement since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962.

In the era of genetically modified food,

which companies like Monsanto are promoting, it's a timely reminder of the methods used to discredit her work, including emotional appeals, scientific misinformation, front groups, extensive mailings to the media and opinion leaders, and the recruitment of doctors and scientists as 'objective' third party defenders of agrichemicals.

And in the wake of last December's Kyoto climate change conference we read that the US oil industry wants to recruit a team of 'independent scientists' to do battle with climatologists on global warming.

A report in Guardian Online (7/5/98) describes how the powerful American Petroleum Institute and oil giants Exxon and Chevron want "to find new faces ... who do not have a long history of participation in the climate change debate."

These media-trained scientists will brief science writers, contribute 'a steady stream of columns and letters to the editor', appear regularly on radio talk shows and organise university campus 'debates' on climate change. The budget for this propaganda team until next November is \$600,000.

The authors of *Toxic Sludge* have a website: www.prwatch.org

WITHOUT COMMENT

Whether called director of corporate communications or head of corporate affairs, these positions share a common role – to sell their companies to the people who ultimately control their survival. Not viewers or customers, but civil servants, ministers and regulators ...

Top of the ITV wish-list in recent years was a change in the rules of ITV ownership, which prevented company takeovers. Two of the new breed of politicians-turned-TV-executives masterminded the lobbying which helped to bring about the change. Granada's Chris Hopson (ex-Department of National Heritage) worked alongside David Cameron of Carlton Communications, who was the adviser to Norman Lamont. The two rule changes they urged doubled the size of their television businesses. No new products were launched, and no new viewers wooed. All that changed was the legislation.

Nick Robinson

'Oh yes, minister, ITV knows just how to bend your ear'
The Times, 8.5.98.

We had a sense of injustice about the 1990 Broadcasting Act (which) was obsessed with the so-called dangers of cross-media ownership – phantom fears in somewhat disturbed political minds ... So some three years ago I formed the British Media Industry Group, which consisted of Associated, The Telegraph, the Guardian and Pearsons. We set out to persuade the Government to draft a new act which would end cross-media restrictions ... In the three years of lobbying, I got to know and talk to more politicians than I had in all the 23 years I had been a national newspaper Editor. For lobbying turned out to be a full time occupation in addition to my day job. Parties, dinners, receptions, the rubber chicken circuit. But then we all have to make sacrifices on behalf of our companies!

Sir David English

Daily Mail Chief Executive
Speech to Radio Festival, July 17, 1996

We plan to devote a section of FP 105 (July/August) to Public Service Broadcasting. Ideas and offers of articles welcome.

Mexico: journalists fight back

THE Mexican authorities' offensive against journalists, both Mexican and foreign, is on the increase, but journalists are fighting back.

CENCOS (National Centre for Social Communications) and the Network to Protect Journalists and the Media has been set up to counter the very serious attacks on journalists' human rights and on press freedom in Mexico.

In an attempt to deflect world attention from the militarisation of Chiapas (Mexico's most southerly province) which has been in a state of rebellion against the government for the past five years, the authorities are conducting a xenophobic campaign against foreigners in Mexico.

In addition they are stepping up their attacks on journalists – Mexican and foreign – who are trying to report



what's going on.

The Network recently produced a handbook on journalists' rights containing advice and emergency telephone numbers for use by media workers who are threatened at work.

The handbook is being distributed, via media organisations and trade unions, throughout the country. The Network aims to get a copy to every journalist and media student in Mexico.

This is a costly operation and the Network needs to raise US\$3,500 to print another 10,000 handbooks and buy computer software for data storage.

Any donations, no matter how small, would be welcome.

They should be sent to
CENCOS Medellin 33 Colonia
Roma Mexico City Mexico TEL 00
52 5 33 64 75 and 76 Email
cencos@laneta.apc.org

Culture of silence inhibits the Hong Kong media

ONE OF Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy activists, Emily Lau, is worried about trends in the media there and is speaking out. Too much self-censorship by the media and too much second-guessing of Beijing, she says. 'Journalists put themselves in the minds of the authorities, accentuating the positive and downplaying the negative. A culture of silence is developing under Hong Kong Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa: When Tung doesn't speak, nobody under him speaks.'

Lau, who has been a journalist for more than 15 years, was elected twice to Hong Kong's legislative Council, from 1991 to 1995 and from 1997 to 1997. She will run in elections this May, the first since Britain returned Hong Kong to Chinese control last summer, as a candidate from the Frontier Party.

Lau said the essential 'checks and balances' that a probing independent media require are not in place in Hong Kong. This

is particularly dangerous in difficult times, she said, such as during the recent Asian financial crisis. "Vital decisions with serious repercussions are being made without the knowledge or mandate of the people," she said.

There is a subtle form of suppression in Hong Kong today, she added. Charging that television, by far the most influential form of media in Hong Kong today, conveniently chooses to ignore the pro-democracy activists. Lau sees this policy as being "far more effective and less traumatic than throwing us all in jail."

Moreover, she said, the independent media in Hong Kong generally walk a financial tightrope, often relying heavily on advertising revenues from state bodies and organisations. Anti-Beijing comment, she went on, tended to reflect badly on a newspaper's bank balance.

■ Extracted from IPI Report, the *International Journalism magazine*

'Far more effective than throwing us all in jail'

WAR MUSEUM EVENT FOR FREEDOM DAY

WORLD Press Freedom Day (May 3) was at least given some prominence in the UK this year with an event in the rather odd setting of the Imperial War Museum. Index on Censorship, Article 19 and UNESCO organised a conference, *The Media in Danger: Covering Conflict*, on 30 April.

Alain Modoux, Director of UNESCO's Unit for Freedom of Expression and Democracy highlighted a new era of 'deconstructed wars' which often mixed political, military and criminal intentions. Warlords often operated according to their own rules, and for journalists or UN negotiators this created added dangers.

For Frances D'Souza of Article 19 it was in conditions of "eerie silence that human rights abuses flourish." She argued that management of information could lead to the shaping of consent to wage war, and that a free media could shape anti-war opinion. She cited the example of Turkey, where, because of censorship, large sections of the population were ignorant of government oppression of the Kurds.

UNESCO awarded the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize this year to a jailed Nigerian journalist, Christine Anyanwu. Wole Soyinka accepted it on her behalf at the event.

Keep it entertaining and energetic

The More You Watch, The Less You Know

Danny Schechter *Seven Stories Press* £15.99

LET'S SING the praises for this book. It's partly autobiographical but mainly a sustained critical analysis of the US broadcast media and the insidious processes which place trivia and celebrities centre stage, at the expense of serious subjects.

Although the material deals with US experiences in the main, it's also a book which is very relevant to UK readers.

Schechter sees a connection between the concentration of media power in the hands of the few, and the way media is used as "a weapon of mass distraction". The author has been an active working journalist for many years in the US media, including an eight-year stint as producer on ABC's *20/20*, but as an independent producer he sought to get programmes with a human rights emphasis on the myriad TV and cable channels in the United States.

"We created Rights and Wrongs because we believed that human rights was the post-cold war challenge, and that neither network news nor public television were paying enough attention to it," he explained.

"The networks were shutting down overseas bureaus and moving down-market with tabloid-style journalism." But the networks and cable channels (with the exception of Faith and Values, a channel reflecting the concerns of mainstream religious denominations and reaching only a small percentage of cable viewers) weren't interested.

PBS, created in 1967 as an alternative to commercial broadcasting, didn't even want to see a pilot, dismissing the idea because they considered human rights 'an insufficient organising principle for a TV series'.

Fortunately, despite the PBS hierarchy dismissing the idea, 140 local PBS stations carried *Rights and Wrongs*, and the series, amidst struggles to win financial support, produced 62 half-hour programmes between 1993 and 96. The series was finally silenced by the paucity of funding.

Schechter learnt that only a certain type of content was acceptable, and quotes one cable executive turned sales agent

describing what programmers needed: "Avoid philosophy – just show it. All the execs I know are terrified of taking a stand – whether of the liberal or conservative variety. They want you to keep it entertaining and energetic."

In the wake of the recent revelations about the Carlton current affairs programme, *The Connection*, which contained several alleged falsehoods in order to give dramatic impact, Schechter's book, particularly the section, 'Documentaries; An Endangered Species' is valuable and timely. It deserves a wide readership and should be on the shelves of libraries wherever media courses are run, at the very least.

GW

Hallo, this is your PR wake-up call

The Invisible Persuaders

David Michie

Bantam Press £18.99

THE BOOK'S author is something of a poacher turned gamekeeper. The blurb tells us that he advises blue-chip British and multi-national companies on corporate communications, but the book is presented as "a ground-breaking expose of how Britain's spin doctors manipulate the media."

It's actually quite a useful book, partly because there isn't much written in the UK which does attempt to dissect the hidden world of PR and lobbying. And one thing is certain – it's a rapidly expanding area. Michie describes his book as "a wake-up call to media consumers everywhere ... do you really know where the information you are digesting came from? Who wants you to consume it and why?"

What's really worrying is that whilst we may have notions that the news we consume is generated entirely by journalists, one PR luminary, Quentin Bell asserts: "80 per cent of what appears in the business pages, and 40-50 per cent of general news, has been produced or directly influenced by PR practitioners." Michie quotes the industry maxim: "The best PR is never noticed".

PR insiders will be able to pick up the national newspapers and quickly identify which of their colleagues placed or massaged a particular story.

The book is divided into three sections: Financial and Corporate PR, Celebrity PR, and Lobbying and Political PR. Some of the material will be familiar to PR readers already, but there's a lot more material here that should give us cause for concern. And, in a sense, that's why the book's conclusion was so puzzling.

On the whole we are presented with a pretty manipulative and devious set of activities, but with the exception of some critical comments on corporate and financial PR and the danger of media manipulation, he concludes "the vast majority of PR activity has always been at worst innocuous and at best a force for enlightenment."

Coincidentally, I saw *Wag the Dog*, directed by Barry Levinson and starring Dustin Hoffman and Robert de Niro, just as I got the book. The plot is about the way an embattled President's election campaign is threatened by sexual scandal, so he calls in the cavalry in the form of spin doctor Conrad Breen who in turn enlists the help of Hollywood producer Stanley Mott. It's not the greatest film, but there is an eerie echo between the film's invention of a war with Albania to deflect attention from the Presidential scandal, and President Clinton's ever-growing aggressive stance to Iraq in January 1998, or images of him clasping Nelson Mandela during his African visit.

PR has a lot to answer for, and Michie's book at least alerts us to the issues.

GW



Order your copy from CPBF – price £7.50 inc p&p

CPBF NEWS

JOURNALISTS AND WAR REPORTING

JOURNALISM: Bystander or Attachment? was the title of an event at the Pictureville Cinema, Bradford on April 25 which explored representations of journalism in cinema, and their relationships to debates about journalistic 'attachment' first raised by Martin Bell.

The event was organised around the film, *Welcome to Sarajevo*, which deals with the daily horror of front-line reporting, but also with the way that such reports fitted uncomfortably into domestic news agendas where news as entertainment (the O J Simpson trial) took precedence. The impact of the film is heightened by the use of real documentary footage shot alongside the recreation of real events.

Speakers at the event included Keith Withall, Roy Stafford and Granville Williams.

CORRECTIONS COLUMN

Ian Mayes, the man who runs The Guardian Corrections Column, spoke at the April CPBF National Council. Ian is a senior journalist with a unique job in British newspapers – one which he started in November 1997. It's also expensive to employ him and a secretary, but the paper is committed to a two-year experiment. He also has complete independence and can't be sacked by the editor.

In the first six months he has had 1,500

calls, and dealt with about a third of them. He makes a distinction between factual accuracy, which come under his remit, and expressions of opinion or argument which should be directed to the letters page. Issues to do with the integrity of a journalist's work would, in turn, be referred to The Guardian's external ombudsman.

INFORMED OR FOREWARNED

Seminar on New Communication Technologies

The next seminar in the series is *Changing Channels: new broadcasting technologies and the public interest*, to be held at the University of Leeds, Friday 19 June, 10.30-3.30.

Speakers include Professor Brent Macgregor, Bob Towler (Head of Research, ITC), Tony Lennon, CPBF national Chair and President, BECTU.

Sessions cover

- Implications of new broadcasting technologies
- Policy and regulation in the digital era
- Ethical considerations
- New Technology: the programme maker's view.

To book a place contact Stephen Lax, Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT informed@leeds.ac.uk www.leeds.ac.uk/ics/informed.htm

Backbenchers lay down marker over predatory pricing

→ from front page

amendment in the Lords with support from Labour and Crossbenchers. Their spokesperson David Chidley doubted that the European Court judgment was tough enough to deal with Murdoch, as The Times only had a 6% share of the market. He believed that the TetraPak case could only apply to newspapers in a dominant position.

Clive Soley doubted that a competition law could deal with concentration of ownership. The question was how to regulate the media to ensure diversity with increasing ownership and control by fewer global players, of which Murdoch was only one. He called for a new media or communications bill which would cover ownership, privacy, accuracy and harassment.

Although the bill got its second reading without any rebellion, the issue of predatory pricing will be raised again during the committee stage. Unless assurances are given, it is quite likely that a revolt is still on the cards. Meanwhile, Clive Soley's suggestion of a new media bill needs to be taken seriously and will be debated in future issues of Free Press.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

JOIN

THE CAMPAIGN

FOR PRESS AND

BROADCASTING

FREEDOM

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM

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

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

f) Less than 500 members	£20
g) 500 to 1,000	£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 £ FP104

Name

Address

Postcode Tel.

Organisation (if applicable)

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

Tel: 0171 278 4430