

IT'S BIRT'S LEGACY, DYKE'S CHALLENGE

BY TOM O'MALLEY

EARLIER this year John Birt stood down as Director General of the BBC and was replaced by his friend Greg Dyke. Will Dyke take the BBC in new directions? What should he do, in the face of nearly two decades of increasing marketisation of broadcasting, to advance public service broadcasting?

Birt was a child of the 80s. He came to the BBC in 1987 just after the Tories had forced the resignation of the Director General Alasdair Milne (1982-87). Milne had stood up to Conservative attempts to blatantly interfere editorially in BBC programming and had mounted a vigorous defence of the BBC against attacks from the very heart of government.

In contrast Birt epitomised the rhetoric of the 80s and early 90s. He was into markets and the language of competition and efficiency.

By the time he became DG in 1992 his line was clear. He forced the BBC into adopting an internal market (producer choice), presided over cuts in staffing, drove the BBC into alliances with the major commercial satellite rivals, and launched into satellite and internet services.

In his ventures into new technology he was developing a strategy which the BBC under Milne had attempted, but which had floundered, in part, on Thatcherite distaste for the idea of public service satellite operators. His greatest legacy was to make the BBC more market orientated and more vulnerable to privatisation by the way he restructured the organisation. Instead of defending the BBC as an holistic, accountable broadcasting organisation, he began to turn it into an organisation that sought greater integration into the market. He went with the flow of marketisation, not against it.

Many think he saved the BBC from privatisation in the 80s. But the BBC was 'saved' by, in part, Milne's successful defence of the attempt to make the BBC take advertising in the 1980s. Milne himself has attacked Birt's legacy. On bureaucracy at the BBC 'Birt has centralised the whole thing; we were much freer and we all pulled

together'. He went on, 'I am highly critical of Birt spending vast sums of money on running a 24-hour news service nobody wants; of employing McKinsey-style management consultancy concepts to reform the organisation; and of worrying about the commercial side of things when the main competitive strength of the BBC should be quality programmes'. (Sunday Times, 10 October, 1999)

Policy developed in a broad context of promoting market forces (1990 and 1996 Broadcasting Acts), but without allowing the public to have a say. Many, especially the CPBF, called for greater public involvement. Others called for more coherent policies. One of these was Greg Dyke, who in an interview in *The Journalist* in October 1994, said: 'We need to develop a media policy, which we haven't had for ten years. We have had no consistent policy, just people jumping from this to that and the other'.

Dyke has an opportunity to insist to government that it develop a coherent policy in which the public interest is asserted, the needs of public service are placed at the centre, and all forms of mass communication can develop in a framework of effective democratic accountability. He arrived with a record as a successful businessman in commercial TV, and is quite capable of pushing the BBC more aggressively into the commercial environment.

His main contribution, however, might be to persuade the government to involve the public in a reassessment of policy, one that challenges the assumptions so dear to those who put John Birt into power as DG. That would mean we could mount a real challenge to the intensifying drift of the BBC and broadcasting as a whole towards the market.

This is perhaps Dyke's major challenge. As the government prepares a White Paper on broadcasting he could insist on a wider public debate and assert the value of public involvement in that debate. If he takes an internalistic view and like Birt seeks to deal with the BBC by making it much more market-orientated he will further accelerate the decline of public service broadcasting.

FOI – keep pressure on

THE Freedom of Information Bill completed its committee stage on 10 February, with no amendments being accepted by the government other than their own. There is no indication when the bill will go to the Report Stage, but it is likely to be before the end of March.

Between now and then we need to ensure that maximum pressure is put on MPs to get drastic amendments to the bill. The Information Commissioner must be given powers to over-ride ministers to force disclosure in the public interest. Other amendments likely to be moved will cover areas such as the present exemption on policy advice, and a fuller briefing on these issues can be found on the Freedom of Information's web site (www.cfoi.org.uk).

The bill is likely to come under heavy scrutiny when it reaches the Lords in the spring and discussions are already taking place about developing the campaign in the second chamber.

● We are compiling a list of 'email activists', campaign supporters who would be prepared to contact their MPs either by email or letter on CPBF related issues. We would also use it to give you advance notice of CPBF events. Just email us at freepress@cpbf.demon.co.uk and we will do the rest!

LAST STAND FOR THE RIGHT TO KNOW

Public meeting
at the Commons

MONDAY MARCH 13

THE CPBF, together with the NUJ, is organising a meeting to step up the pressure on Parliamentarians. The main speaker will be Kevin Murphy, the Information Commissioner in Ireland, where an information act introduced two years ago is working well.

The meeting is at 6pm on Monday March 13 in Committee Room 11 in Parliament.

Lords to the rescue again

Page 2

Lords to the rescue?

BY TIM GOPSILL

THE House of Lords, traditional bastion of conservatism, could be the only hope for a real Right to Know in Britain, as Jack Straw's much-derided Freedom of Information Bill sails through the Commons without significant improvement.

The Bill passed its committee stage in February still with a massive list of exemptions and without the power for the Information Commissioner to order recalcitrant officials to give out information sought by citizens, even in the public interest.

Government whips packed the committee with stooges, most of who took little interest in the proceedings. Only one Labour MP, Mark Fisher, and the two Liberal Democrats raised any amendments, but none were accepted.

Amendments will be moved at the Report stage but it is not likely they will be passed, with most Labour MPs, including

many with commitments to Freedom of Information in the past, obeying the whip.

Ironically, the Tories, traditionally seen as defenders of the status quo and of Britain's notorious "culture of secrecy", will be supporting the amendments, as will the LibDems. It will be New Labour MPs that prevent a realistic information regime being adopted by the House of Commons.

The Lords are another matter. In their current stand-off with the government over their future they seem to relish confrontations and this issue, like the right to jury trial, could be one to take a stand on. True, the House is stuffed with former ministers who in office felt the compulsion to keep out seekers of information. But the arguments for amendments are strong.

First is the blatant manner in which Jack Straw has distorted party policy and even the White Paper of two years ago to protect the bureaucracy.

Second is the way this protection would

work. A long catalogue of exemptions includes information given to ministers for the formulation of policy. And the argument that disclosure of such information would threaten the stability of government is simply a lie: governments in the many countries with stronger laws seem to survive.

Third is the fact that the Bill puts no compulsion on public authorities to disclose information. The Information Commissioner must have a power to order disclosure, else the job is meaningless. The Bill gives him power only to "recommend", with no appeal, no come-back and not even an obligation on the authorities to give reasons for refusal.

And fourth is the strength of the campaign. For 20 years Freedom of Information has been a demand from a wide range of parties and organisations. In opposition Tony Blair backed it strongly himself.

The campaign cannot give up now.

Neil backs secret government

BY GREGORY PALAST

I SHOULD have been flattered. Lord Neill's Committee on Standards in Public Life dedicated an entire chapter of its final report to the so-called 'Lobbygate scandal' I reported in The Observer over a year ago. The material enumerated legislative fixes, tax exemptions – an entire flea market in favours run out of Downing Street for New Labour's best friends – Derek Draper, Neil Lawson and others – and their corporate clients.

The Committee discussed what 'Mr Greg Palast told us' and what 'Mr Palast suggested' many times. Strange that: because I never testified before the Committee. They WOULD'N'T LET ME testify. In its so-called investigation of influence, Lord Neill rejected the offer to see The Observer's evidence, including information never published regarding the Chancellor's key advisors.

Neill did not reject our evidence without reason. 'The Committee,' their spokesman told us, 'believes the subject matter was thoroughly covered in the testimony of Derek Draper.' And what extraordinary testimony it was from the man presented as 'former aide to the Rt. Hon. Peter Mandelson MP'.

'In my 10 months in lobbying, I wasn't actually passed any confidential information about a government decision,' Draper put on the record. Hmmm. Months earlier, Draper told me that the Chancellor's office passed him advance word of the exact increase in the capital budget (up 2.75%) which he passed on to US investment

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bankers. The Financial Times independently confirmed this.

I don't really care whether Draper lied to the Committee. The danger is the Committee seemed to fall in love with the lie. As one member said, 'So there is a bottom failsafe ... we may have serious problems but they are not of the gravest nature.'

So, after its year of 'investigation' the good Lords concluded there should be NO registry of influence peddlers and NO regulation of contact between industry and key government advisors.

But Lobbygate was not about lobbyists, but about THE LOBBIED ... the government ministers, including the one called Prime, who hold closed-door legislative swap-fests with corporate executives or their messengers. At bottom, the real issue was Secret Government or, in sanitized policy terminology, Freedom of Information. If Draper got the inside word on the budget, WHO GAVE IT HIM?

As an American journalist, I thought that answer was a phone call away: all I needed were the phone logs and diaries of Special Advisors at the Exchequer. I was struck dumb when I learned that in Britain, phone records of the People's Government were secrets more guarded than an MI6 hit list.

Lord Neill did adopt one of my written suggestions, demanding that Ministers keep a careful written record of all meetings with business operatives. This information will then be released to the press and the public ... in 30 years.

Gregory Palast writes a fortnightly column for The Observer, 'Inside Corporate America'

QUIZ SHOWS: DUMB AND DUMBER

It's sad really, but ITV's Who Wants To Be a Millionaire? quiz format has been one of the most successful TV exports. Six months ago the US television network, ABC, began airing its own version and the result is rather like it was in the 1950s. Then all the networks then had their quiz shows – \$64,000 Question, Twenty-One – until TV executives scuttled them when the revelations of question rigging emerged. The career of a young college professor, Charles Van Doren, ended ignominiously in the subsequent scandal.

Now the quiz shows are back with a vengeance in prime time. Last autumn Fox, part of Rupert Murdoch's empire, launched its bluntly titled Greed; and in early January CBS started Winning Lines. This was followed a week or so later by NBC reviving Twenty-One, the show which had collapsed in ignominy in 1957.

There are some differences though between the quiz shows from the 1950s and today's versions. One of the original contestants on Twenty-One, Herbie Stempel, who blew the gaff on the question-rigging scandal, said, 'In the old days we had arcane and esoteric stuff. The questions were designed to make the audience gape.'

Not now. As if questions like What is your power source if you use solar energy? or In what year did Columbus discover America? were not easy enough, contestants get multiple choice answers to pick from. But that, the market researchers say, is the way the audiences want it. They want to know the answer before the contestant does.

The other worrying aspect is that the NBC market researchers found that when they were considering resurrecting Twenty-One hardly anyone in the target audience had any inkling of the show's dubious history. FP readers might like to get a refresher on this episode by watching Robert Redford's film, Quiz Show, with Ralph Fiennes as Charles Van Doren

MEDIA AWARD TO COUNTER RACE HATE

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) will present the IFJ Prize 2000: a Celebration of Tolerance in Journalism to reward journalists, one from the written press, one from radio and one from television, for their contribution to a better understanding between Europe's different cultural, religious and ethnic communities.

In this, the fifth year of the award, an expanded prize will, for the first time, be accepting entries in Serbian, Croatian and Italian, in addition to English, German and French.

The award – which is of 4,000 to 8,000 Euro – will be presented on May 3, 2000 at the European Parliament in Brussels during

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the European Media Forum, an annual debate between media professionals, politicians and NGOs on the role and performance of the media in promoting tolerance in a multicultural Europe.

The IFJ prize is supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and the European Broadcasting Union. A jury of leading European journalists will assess the entries, placing emphasis on quality of journalism and the impact on and relevance to public opinion.

The IFJ Prize is part of the programme of the International Media Working Group Against Racism and Xenophobia (IMRAX) which brings together media professionals, publishers and unions of journalists with a common objective: the promotion of tolerance in media.

Closing date for entries 29 February 2000. Information, rules and information form are available at: www.ifj.org/issues/racism/prize.html. Or contact the IFJ in Brussels Tel +32-2-223 22 25 Fax +32-2-219 29 76

VICTORY FOR GERAGHTY

Tony Geraghty, threatened with prosecution under the Official Secrets Act, has been told he no longer faces trial. The announcement was made on 22 December by Attorney General Lord Williams just one year after he was arrested with Nigel Wylde, a former army officer, following the publication of Geraghty's book, The Irish War. The book, published two years before their arrests, dealt with the covert activities of the

security services in Northern Ireland. No requests were made for it to be withdrawn.

Labour opposed the Official Secrets Act in principle when in opposition, but has failed to produce any proposals for reforming the legislation since it came to power in May 1997. Meantime questions as to whom pushed for the prosecution to take place and why, will, no doubt remain unanswered, especially in the absence of a powerful Freedom of Information Act.

NEWS AT TEN TO FACE THE MUSIC

Fresh from its attempts to savage the BBC, the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee is to hold an inquiry into News at Ten. Written evidence will be taken by the committee towards the end of February with hearings being held early in March. The committee is already on record as opposing the move to 23.00. Committee chair, Gerald Kaufman recently told Broadcast: 'Statistically there has been a substantial reduction in the number of people who watch news on ITV.' On this occasion the CPBF will be siding with Chairman Kaufman.

WOMEN IN JOURNALISM REPORT

The latest Women in Journalism report focuses specifically on photographic images of women in newspapers. Real Women: The Hidden Sex argues, based on an analysis of nine national newspapers over a four-week period, that images of men dramatically outnumber those of women and that newspapers are failing to reflect the lives of the very women readers they are trying to attract.

When women do make the pages of the daily newspapers, they are more likely to feature in irrelevant images than men, or to be actresses, models, and other celebrities. The majority of men pictured, by contrast, are mostly 'professionals' and politicians.

A news story about an 'incident' involving a British man and woman, who were arrested and charged with outraging public morality during the American Airlines flight from Dallas to Manchester made the splash in The Sun on October 4. The 'Mile High Club' story had a picture of the blonde woman blown up very large as the main image, with a very small picture of the man in the case in the bottom right-hand corner. One picture editor from a national tabloid explained 'the quality of the picture of the woman was better than the picture of the man; he ducked and dived into his house past the photographers, but she allowed the photographers to take a proper picture of her.'

■ Copies of the report are available free (send a SAE envelope) from WIJ. E-mail: wij@kmcmillan.demon.co.uk

Seattle and the WTO: Don't read all about it

THE US magazine Extra! produced by the media watch group FAIR, devotes the cover story of its January/February issue to 'Prattle in Seattle: the Media and the WTO' by Seth Ackerman. In a very detailed analysis of the mainstream print and broadcast media coverage of events in Seattle it suggested that 'they treated protesters' concerns with indifference and often contempt. That hostility translated into slanted coverage of both demonstrations and the police reaction'.

The demonstrators were characterised as 'anti-trade' by papers such as the Washington Post who described the demonstrators as 'a guerilla army of anti-trade activists (who) took control of downtown Seattle today' (1.12.99) When attempts were made to describe the protesters' goals, such as an ABC News story by Deborah Wang, it was in terms of platitudes and generalities about issues from the 1960s focused by the demonstrators on 'the WTO which has come to symbolise all that is wrong in the modern world'.

When the headlines were dominated by violent scenes with police using rubber bullets and pepper gas, again a continuing theme was that the use of tear gas and concussion grenades by the police was an appropriate response to 'violent' activists.

However there was a different perspective on media coverage of Seattle. The Independent Media Center (IMC) was a coalition of activists and journalists who,

Old-timer backs new venture

ONE of the best initiatives so far to put media information on a web site was officially launched on February 3. The website, www.MediaChannel.org, described as 'the world's first Internet supersite dedicated to the global media' has been the result of the energy and enthusiasm of the Media Channel's founder and executive editor, Danny Schechter. Schechter has been a prolific publicist for the project and has succeeded in drawing together the organisations and financial support for what can become an indispensable information resource. The project is run in association with OneWorld Online, a UK-based organisation concerned with human rights and social justice issues around the world.

Veteran US broadcaster, Walter Cronkite, has enthusiastically endorsed the website initiative. 'I urge you to make the Media Channel your media bookmark and your

according to Don Hazen, were 'armed with cell phones, laptop computers, video cameras and webcams' and always at the centre of the action. His piece on the Alternet website, www.alternet.org, is a remarkably upbeat and positive account. 'It's always been a fantasy of the community-based and alternative media to break through the stranglehold of corporate media gatekeepers who shape much of the news people see and hear ... Now, due to technological advances that enable more direct access to media consumers, the alternative press is much closer to imagining parity with large media organisations,' he suggests.

One of the founders of IMC, Jeff Pearlstein, was equally clear about the aims: 'It's all about getting the people's voices heard. We're about providing an alternative to the mainstream press that's without censorship, editing or corporate bias, allowing people to tell their own stories.'

The success of the IMC's efforts to spread information and images out globally stood in marked contrast to the secrecy and elitism with which the WTO conducted its business. The determination of the US to steamroller its own expansionist trade agenda through the talks produced an angry reaction from African, Caribbean and Latin American countries and the collapse of the talks, but it will be the scenes on the streets of Seattle and the effective mobilisation of a global protest movement which we remember.

portal to the Internet,' he says in a taped message for the launch. He also highlighted what he thought was important about 'this unique global resource'. 'I'm particularly excited about one aspect of the Media Channel's work - its encouragement to people inside the media to speak up, to speak out, about their own experiences. Corporate censorship is just as important as government censorship, you know ... and self-censorship can be the most insidious form of pulling punches. Pressures to go along, to get along, or to place the needs of advertisers or companies above the public's need for reliable information, distort a free press and threaten democracy itself,' he says.

Cronkite also directs his fire on what he calls 'the merger mania that has swept our industry, diluting standards, dumbing down the news, and making the bottom line sometimes seem like the only line.'

Net book without hype!

THERE is so much uncritical hype about the liberating powers of the Net pumped out these days that the odd book which gets it right is worth our attention.

In *The Net: An Internet Guide for Activists* by Jim Walch (Zed Books, £15.95) is one of these. It has a cautiously complimentary introduction by the Amsterdam-based media commentator, Cees J. Hamelink which is a useful reminder (and corrective) to those who think the Net will change all the rules about power, communication and democracy.

Hamelink (and the book's author) are clear the Net technology has extraordinary potential for human empowerment, but 'the realisation of this potential will depend not upon features of the technology itself, but upon the political decisions and the institutional arrangements that govern their deployment'.

He points out the worldwide trend for governments to delegate the responsibility for basic social choices to the marketplace, and to leave the governance of the new Information and Communication Technologies in the hands of private entrepreneurs.

In *The Net* starts with a history of computer communications and moves on to examples from the early nineties like the Association for Progressive Communications, and how this network was effective in disseminating material at the 1992 Rio summit on the environment.

There's a good section on Networking in a War Zone: The Case of Former Yugoslavia, and examples of what he calls media substitution for self-censoring news services where media activists have used the Net to identify issues in East Timor, Burma, the radio station B92 in Belgrade and the land mines campaign and generate global publicity.

Access to the Internet, as the author points out, is heavily concentrated amongst the more affluent and influential in the North, and in the South amongst an even narrower elite.

He believes that because the elites of the world are increasingly 'interconnected and interinformed' they are also more susceptible to 'cyber warfare'. He also praises the efforts of communication activists over the years who 'broke the technology out of closed culture and control of the military-industrial complex' and injected issues of social meaning, ethics and non-commercial concerns into the technology. A positive and thoughtful book.

Over here, over there

TWO media mergers, one which dominated the British media, the other the world's, took place just over a month apart. Granville Williams identifies some issues about the current and future direction of media policy, and the distorting impact of huge media corporations on the democratic process.

THE announcement on November 26 of the plans for the £8 billion merger of two media groups - Lord Hollick's United News and Media and Michael Green's Carlton Communications - received a mixed reaction. Some analysts commented on the differences, personal and political, between the Labour Lord and the man associated with Thatcherite broadcasting reforms in the 1980s. Others saw in as a defensive merger of two under-performing companies on the stock market both associated with lack-lustre programmes.

But the significance of the merger was not lost on the other big ITV company, Granada, whose chief executive, Gerry Robinson, has often stated his belief in the need to create a single ITV plc, and he will now move against one or other of the companies as the bid has been referred to the Competition Commission. This is one more step on the road to the consolidation of the 15 ITV regional franchises and it seems the industry is pushing at an open door as far as the government is concerned. The Media Secretary, Chris Smith, wants change in the ITV sector for at least three reasons, very much associated with commercial and business imperatives.

The loss of ground by UKTV programme exports, already overwhelmed in value terms, by imports is something which he has been concerned about for over a year and the argument has been much rehearsed that only if ITV companies were bigger would they have greater economies of scale in production and distribution and take risks to innovate with programme ideas.

Also, in terms of the global media giants, even though a merged ITV would be very much in the second division, it would at least be growing towards the scale necessary to compete globally.

Finally, Chris Smith wants digital to succeed, and that means persuading the 70% of the population who have resisted multi-channel television to subscribe. The

Carlton-Granada digital terrestrial joint venture, ONdigital, if it were part of a stronger ITV, could be a more powerful persuader.

However, all sorts of issues got lost in what seemed to be an impeccable business case for the merger. ITV was established as 15 companies to serve the regions, but that concept has already been drastically eroded as companies merge and pull facilities and resources out of some localities to rationalise and recoup the merger costs. If we look back to the franchise commitments which companies made to win their franchises in 1991, and compare them with current programmes and performance, there has been a lot of slippage, to put it mildly. All that seems to have been forgotten in the push for a single ITV system.

Such parochial concerns for UK TV viewers were swept aside by the news of the \$327 billion merger between America Online and Time Warner on January 10 2000, followed by the merger with the UK

music group, EMI, on January 24, to create the world's largest music group. Media commentators searched for superlatives to convey the enormity of the deal, but independent organisations were less sanguine.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) warned that the merger could threaten democratic values and freedom of expression. The IFJ General Secretary, Aidan White, said, 'This merger may redefine the worlds of entertainment, communication and commerce but it may also threaten democracy, plurality and quality in media. We are now seeing the dominance of a handful of companies controlling information and how this information reaches people. Unless action is taken to ensure journalistic independence we face a dangerous threat to media diversity.'

In the USA the media-watch group, FAIR, pointed out that AOL was a major player in the fight for 'open access' to high speed cable lines, seeking guarantees that cable lines would be open to competitors in the same way that phone lines are. Once the merger was announced Time Warner's Chief Executive, Gerald Levin, redefined the concept of 'open access'. 'We're going to take the open access issue out of Washington, and out of city hall and put it into the marketplace, into the commercial arrangements that occur to provide the kind of access for as much content as possible,' he said.

This mega-merger (and ones which preceded it like Viacom/CBS) were made possible with the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which liberalised the rules governing just how big a media company could be. The Act, promoted in the name of competition, has stifled competition.

The most chilling aspect of this whole business is the grandiose role the leaders of such huge media groups project for themselves. Gerald Levin, speaking a few days before the merger on the CNN Millennium 2000, suggested the media business was more important than government: 'We're going to need to have these corporations redefined as instruments of public service, and that may be a more efficient way to deal with society's problems than bureaucratic governments.'

Issues of democratic accountability, threats to media diversity, and the impact on the range and quality of journalism are the central concerns posed by these mergers. Shareholders and top executives may make fabulous profits from them, but the democratic process is the poorer.

'This merger may redefine the worlds of entertainment, communication and commerce but it may also threaten democracy, plurality and quality in media. We are now seeing the dominance of a handful of companies controlling information and how this information reaches people. Unless action is taken to ensure journalistic independence we face a dangerous threat to media diversity.'

The flawed picture show

Duncan Forbes on the Magnum exhibition at the Barbican in London

IF THERE is one thing more intimidating than the scale of Magnum: Our Turning World, it is the exhibition's gathering of portentous anniversaries: a (belated) fiftieth birthday celebration for the Magnum agency itself; a decade of visual reportage in the post-cold-war world; and the end of a century of photography dominated by documentary practice now widely perceived to be in crisis. This is heady stuff. With over 350 images to absorb and only a modest critical framework supplied by the curators, this is an exhibition which courts disorientation.

Magnum is usually understood as promoting a humanist photography, plotting a path after the Second World War between the visual platitudes of the Stalinist states and the West's moronic commodity culture. All along the agency's strength has been the relative freedom it offers its photographers. Since the 1960s in particular, Magnum's greatest contribution has been to create a space for documentary practice comparatively free from commercial pressures.

As this exhibition reveals, that space fosters stunning reportage. In the photographs of James Nachtwey in Rwanda, Larry Towell's ongoing commitment to the Salvadorean people, or Philip Jones Griffiths' return to Vietnam to account for the continuing terror of agent orange, there is an intensity of engagement with those photographed that is rarely the province of the wire photographer. This might be a cliché of documentary practice, but the exhibition reminds us that such density of experience can produce complex – sometimes shockingly beautiful – visual testimony.

Yet after a destructive decade, at the tail end of a brutal century, Our Turning World is impossible to experience as a celebration. As Michael Ignatieff hints in his troubled – and troubling – catalogue essay, the confidence of the liberalism attached to Magnum's past

'The press was almost unanimous after Archer's last fall from grace, the Anglia shares affair of 1994. The Tory peer could not return to frontline politics, they insisted, without a proper explanation of what happened over Anglia... Four years later, after hundreds of TV and radio interviews, I have yet to hear a broadcaster ask Archer for an explanation of what happened over Anglia. Despite Today's awesome reputation, I don't recall Archer facing tough questions about Anglia. On the contrary, some of his appearances have been



Kuwait: Pollution in the Gulf by Bruno Barbey

seems exhausted alongside the escalating horrors of a post-cold war world.

At the heart of the exhibition is a section titled 'Chronicle of Confusion', a disturbing rendition of injury and annihilation in the 1990s: the Gulf war, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kosovo, the daily lives of the Russian people. It's a catalogue of horror lacking any coherent effort of explanation. Images of disparate conflicts are lumped together as if to affirm the inevitability of human cruelty, as if to deny the specificity of their cause. The importance of documentary as a path to understanding is dissipated. Images, drained of meaning, become rhetorical, metaphors for the violence of the human condition. But who were the people displayed now as corpses in the streets and fields? Why were they slaughtered?

Walking around this exhibition it's not difficult to understand Ignatieff's pessimism – it so clouds his insight that he is unable to fight for, or even imagine, a different future. Likewise, the extended compilation of sometimes terrifying imagery offers little chance of critical understanding for the viewer. It is of course wrong to blame

WITHOUT COMMENT

cringe-makingly chummy.

All along, it has been left to newspapers to make the running on Archer. Max Hastings at the Evening Standard enlisted me in a relentless campaign to expose Archer's dishonesty. The News of the World broke the Ted Francis story that prompted

photography for the world it traces, or even the photographers for their compulsion to document human frailty. But surely curators have a responsibility to do more with such devastating imagery than simply hang it on a wall?

Documentary's function as reportage is much diminished in the context of the fine art exhibition, a symptom of its reduced status in today's commodity-driven media culture. The complexity of relationship between text and images in an extended photo story creates a more overtly politicised context, increasing the possibility of dialogue between the viewer and those represented. At its best, documentary photography establishes interconnections between our lives and those of others. Our Turning World works to lessen that contact. It suggests the need for strategies of display that might begin a more intense – and thus less exploitative engagement with the lives of those photographed.

■ *Magnum our Turning World: Photographs 1989-1999*, Barbican Art Gallery until 12 March 2000. Catalogue titled *Magnumo* introduced by Michael Ignatieff at £39.95

Archer's resignation. The Economist raised serious questions about the libel trial. The Mail on Sunday found Archer's former aide, Michael Stacpoole, who said he had been paid £40,000 to keep his mouth shut. True, newspapers are in a position to pay witnesses to tell their stories, but a lot of the recent newspaper work has simply involved hard journalistic graft.

Michael Crick

'Archer: in bed with TV', *The Times*, 3.12.99. Crick is the author of *Jeffrey Archer: Stranger Than Fiction* (Fourth Estate, £8.99)

Beyond the first draft

The Kosovan News and Propaganda War
ed. Peter Goff International Press Institute

MEDIA coverage of conflicts over the past couple of decades, from the Falklands, through the Gulf War, to NATO's actions in Serbia and Kosovo, should make us more cautious of the adage that news reports from these war zones represented 'the first rough draft of history'. Better to take note of Winston Churchill's cynical comment in 1943: 'Truth, in wartime, is so precious that it has to be protected by bodyguards: the lies.'

In a very clear introduction by the book's editor, Peter Goff, the link is made between the media entwined 'in a plunging cycle of violence in the Balkans' where 'flames of hatred have been fanned by biased journalists' whilst those attempting to report objectively faced appalling consequences. The Milosevic regime tightened its grip on the Serbian independent media by introducing restrictive legislation months before the air strikes began.

Goff makes the important point that the disparity between Serbia's and NATO's military resources meant that the outcome was never in doubt. In an evocative phrase he argues that it was a battle to 'be won and lost in the trenches of public opinion' and for this reason fierce disputes about censorship, propaganda and suppression of infor-

mation were given as much coverage as the military actions.

The value of this book lies in the rich collection of material, from widely divergent perspectives, contained in it. The IPI has performed a very useful service by compiling a truly international selection of views about media coverage of the NATO military intervention, and I strongly recommend it. It is not a bland, safe selection. There are, for example, good critical contributions from the UK by Richard Keeble and Phillip Hammond, and from the USA by Norman Solomon, Seth Ackerman and Noam Chomsky, as well as useful perspectives from over twenty other countries. There's also a good selection of cartoons.

Many of the contributors point out that whilst the media considered the strategy of the NATO offensive (how long to bomb; when to send the troops in) those journalists who ventured outside the broad consensus and asked whether NATO should be bombing at all, or if the intervention exacerbated the problem, were sidelined as leftists or apologists.

Early on in the war NATO's 'communication policy' was overhauled when Alistair Campbell and President Clinton's speech writer, Jonathon Prince, were drafted in to supervise a policy which relied heavily on

sound-bites for news bulletins and tabloid headlines. The strategy worked and the Western media, with the odd exception, regurgitated the NATO line. Only since the ending of the NATO action have we seen more critical analyses of the reasons for the military intervention, and the role of the media in tacitly supporting the NATO information offensive – for example, *How The War Was Spun*, BBC 2, (16.10.99) and Jonathan Dimbleby report, *A Kosovan Journey* on ITV (16.01.00).

In another ironic development, Mark Laity, the BBC's defence correspondent, has been taken off reporting duties amidst rumours that he is considering becoming a spokesman for NATO under Jamie Shea. Mark Laity clashed with The Independent's Robert Fisk at the 1999 Edinburgh Television Festival when Fisk said Laity might as well have let Jamie Shea file his reports for him.

We can expect a number of books this year analysing the role of the media in NATO's 'humanitarian' intervention. This one should be on the library shelves as an important resource for journalism and media students and lecturers to consult.

GW

You can order the book from International Press Institute, Spiegelgasse 2, A-1010 Vienna or E-mail info@freemedia.at. The book costs US\$30.00

Who's watching you at home?

SPY TV

by David Burke; Slab-O-Concrete £5.00

ABOUT a year ago we mentioned a little pamphlet, SPY TV, and now we have the book version. It draws together a large amount of material about the disturbing invasive aspects of interactive television.

The heavily promoted hype by sky digital, ON Digital and the cable companies all emphasise that it's the viewer who is in control, with the choice of a range of programmes, interactive services or online shopping which they decide what to watch or use.

This book presents a much darker and disturbing aspect which suggest that the users of digital TV are the ones who are being controlled because the data on their viewing patterns and purchases is constantly updated and analysed to create a detailed profile.

The book isn't the easiest read, and that is in part because it delves into the

techniques and jargon used by the companies who are exploiting this powerful new surveillance system in the home.

It discusses, for example, 'telegraphics' which can be generated about viewers of interactive television:

- viewing hours over week
- channel choice over week
- loyalty to shows
- who watches a certain show or shows, sorted by income and neighbourhood
- advertisements missed or seen

Another concept is the individual's 'psychographic profile' which identifies individual preferences and tastes.

In the past companies had neither the technology nor the means to collect this sort of information.

Now it can be done and it is a lucrative source of data that companies will pay well for.

Some people might argue that we are logged, checked and surveyed so much that

this development isn't one we should be too concerned about, but the book does raise important issues about privacy and the fact that this information is being collected from people largely unaware that it is happening, or of its power and uses.

SPY TV is part of a broader international campaign by White Dot and Privacy International to alert people and get appropriate legislation in place and you can find further information on the following web sites:

- www.spytv.co.uk: Information about interactive television is also available on:
- www.whitedot.org: White Dot
- www.privacy.org: Privacy International
- www.cme.org: Center for Media Education

■ If you can't get SPY TV through your bookshop, Slab-O-Concrete can be contacted on 01273 770299 or mail@slab-o-concrete.demon.co.uk

ITN AND LM LIBEL CASE

In February 1997 Living Marxism (LM) published an article by Thomas Deichmann titled 'The Picture That Fooled the World'. The journalist alleges that one image from a videotape shot by an television team – Penny Marshall (ITN), cameraman Jeremy Irvin, and accompanied by Ian Williams (C5) and Ed Vulliamy from The Guardian – is not what it seems. The image is of Fikret Alic, a Bosnian Muslim, emaciated and stripped to the waist, apparently imprisoned behind a barbed wire fence in a Bosnian Serb camp at Trnopolje.

It was seized on by the media, and Deichmann's point in the LM article was that a powerful image was seen around the world as the first hard evidence of concentration camps in Bosnia. In fact, he argues, it was not the people in the camp who were fenced-in behind the barbed wire, but the team of British journalists.

ITN's response to the article was to issue a libel writ against the editors and publishers of LM magazine. ITN is a powerful media company, and it has used the libel laws to suppress an issue of press freedom. The CPBF believes that ITN should have allowed an independent third party (eg BBC Newsnight) to weigh up the evidence, allow the two sides to make their points, and let the public decide the merits of the case. Instead ITN is attempting to thwart any discussion of the issues outside the confines of the court.

Meanwhile LM magazine has to amass the money to defend an expensive libel action. It has launched the OFF THE FENCE FUND, and you can send cheques and other donations to BM Off The Fence, London WC1N 3XX



INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Investigative journalist Nick Davies is scathing about the state of investigative reporting. 'There are reporters in Fleet Street and the provincial press who have not spent a single day learning their trade, who recycle political spin and PR fiction simply because they couldn't find an angle in a five-cornered room,' he says, and points out the reason for the demise is the 'creeping commercialism of our profession. Accountants have cut staff numbers so that those left no longer have the time to investigate the stories.'

But he is not downhearted, and is planning a 48-hour crash course on investigative journalism with Paul Foot, David Leigh and John Ware. The course is not just for seasoned journalists. 'We hope all kinds of journalists, from first-time students to hardened veterans, will join us,' Nick Davies says.

The Crash Course in Investigative Reporting will be held at the University of Sussex, March 25-26. For more information call 01273 205590, E-mail davies@pavilion.co.uk or write to IRC 55 York Road Hove BN3 1DJ

FREE PRESS ON TAPE

The next and subsequent issues of FreePress will be available on tape for subscribers who would prefer this format. If you would

like to take advantage of this facility, please contact the National Office on 0171 278 4430 with your details or leave a message on the office answer 'phone.

AGM AND CONFERENCE

This year's AGM and Conference will be held on Saturday 13 May at Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ (opposite Euston Station). The Annual Meeting will start at 11.00 am with registration from 10.30pm. The Conference which starts at 1.30 pm. will focus on media mergers. More details in the next issue of FreePress.

RACE CONFERENCE

The CPBF is joining forces with Bectu and the NUJ to organise a conference on the media after the Lawrence Inquiry. It will take place at The Tabernacle, Powis Square, London W11 on Saturday 8 July from 1.00 pm. More details in the next FreePress, meantime make a note in your diary.

COMMUNICATIONS WHITE PAPER ANNOUNCED

As we went to press Chris Smith MP announced that in conjunction with the DTI a white paper would be published later this year which will put forward proposals for reforming telecommunications and broadcasting regulation to take into account the convergence of the communications industries. The paper is expected to be broad in scope, covering areas such as future regulation of broadcasting content, media ownership rules and the role of public service broadcasting. Further details in our next issue.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council



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