

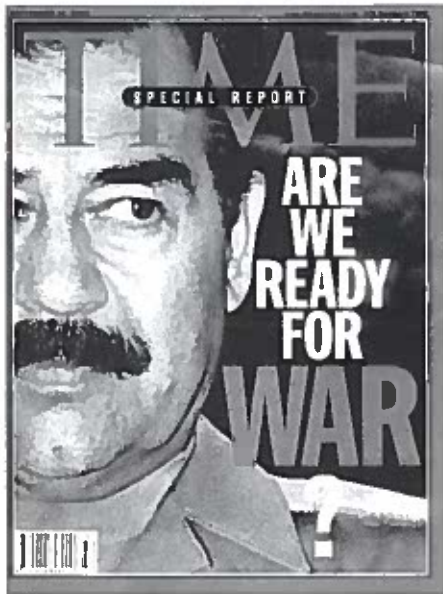
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WAR TALK



NEWSPAPER headlines are taking on an increasingly bellicose tone. Take the ones after US President George Bush's UN speech, on Friday 13 September. The Guardian: 'Bush sets the war clock ticking'; The Times: 'Bush calls the world to arms'; The Daily Telegraph: 'British Troops head for Iraq War'. Throw in the views of magazines like The Economist, 14 September, which urges 'Saddam Hussein must be dealt with - by the United Nations if possible, without it if needs be' and it is clear that, with one or two honourable exceptions, our press is now ratcheting up the war talk.

The role of the CPBF in this preparation for war is clear. A range of views, alternative policy positions, and publications which get precious little publicity are out there in the UK, Europe, and indeed America. They are crowded out by the virtual unanimity of the pro-war press. Our commitment is to the belief that the bedrock of a democratic society has to be a media which is diverse and capable of expressing a range of divergent views. Inevitably, in times of crisis it is often

the dissident, critical views that are marginalized, in spite of the fact that often they are the views held by a large number of people.

For example, in November 2001 almost 100,000 people took to the streets of London to protest against the UK involvement in the US-led bombing of Afghanistan, but the action was given minimal, often inaccurate coverage.

Since the awful events of 11 September 2001 we have seen a concerted effort by the US government to dragoon governments into an uncritical acceptance of its 'war on terrorism'. The tenor of Bush's speech to the UN was 'you get behind me, and support my actions - but if you don't I will move against Iraq on my own'.

Inevitably military action will lead to civilian and military casualties, and the political outcome, in terms of the precarious situation in the Middle East, is absolutely unpredictable. For those who think the case for war, as presented by George Bush or Tony Blair, is proven it is worth reading *The Case Against War* by Stephen Zunes (www.thenation.com)

The world did change after September 11. Most dramatically, the war on terrorism has become a pretext for a new culture of secrecy. Mary Graham in *The Information Wars* (www.theatlantic.com) describes how swathes of information have been taken off the web in the US. She argues, 'The wholesale censorship of information on Web sites and in government reports carries insidious costs.'

FAIR, www.fair.org, our sister organisation in the USA, asks basic questions about where the 'war on terror' has taken us, and identifies three issues that the media should explore:

■ the attack on civil liberties and the

erosion of rights stemming from the USA PATRIOT Act rushed through Congress with virtually no public debate in October 2001

■ unresolved questions in Afghanistan, and the 'reluctance of the media to focus on the less righteous aspects of the war'

■ environmental fallout in New York. The fires at the World Trade Centre burnt for nearly four months and filled the air with a mixture of toxic substances and many rescue workers and resident now suffer from serious respiratory problems.

In the end it is the responsibility of journalists to ask tough questions and not be used as conduits for disinformation in the pursuit by the US government of its war aims.

HELP THE CPBF

at an evening with Nick Jones

Geoff Mason

National Treasurer

SINCE we launched our appeal in June to respond effectively to the draft Communications Bill, over £8,300 has been raised including a generous grant of £7,500 from UNISON. We are currently writing to our affiliated unions for support and hope they will give our funds the boost we need. Meantime thanks to all those who have been able to make a contribution - it's all appreciated.

Our main fund raising event in October is an evening with Nick Jones. Nick, who has recently joined the national council, retires from the BBC in October and will be looking back on his time as a political correspondent (see page 4/5). The meeting starts at 6.30pm on Tuesday 22 October at NUJ HQ, 308 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1 (nearest tube is Kings Cross/Thameslink). As this is a fund raising event there is a voluntary admission charge of £5. You will be greeted with a free glass of wine. It promises to be an interesting evening with plenty of time for lively questions and discussion.

SOHAM WITNESS REWARDS: a perversion of justice?

"It was a two way street. They fed us information and the story remained on the front pages."

GRAHAM Dudman head of news at The Sun, on a working relationship with Cambridgeshire Police.

MIKE JEMPSON,
Director of the PressWise Trust

THE Lord Chancellor's decision to allow another after-hours round in the notorious Last Chance Saloon came at the height of press hysteria about arrests of the alleged perpetrators of one of this summer's most hideous crimes - the murder of ten-year-olds Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.

Paying witnesses for their stories is not a crime—yet. The Press Complaints Commission has been given a license to come up with a formula that will prevent the criminalisation of one particularly odious form of cheque-book journalism. It has until the year-end to do so. By then it is unlikely that the trials of Ian Huntley and Maxine Carr will have taken place, Huntley for murder, Carr for attempting to pervert the course of justice.

Whether or not either or both are guilty is properly a matter for a jury. However, anyone reading much of the UK (and Irish) press during August would be forgiven for imagining that their complicity in the double-murder was already beyond doubt. It is inevitable that the extraordinary press coverage that followed their arrests will raise doubts about whether they can expect a fair trial.

We may never know who was paid what for the prurient details of their sexual habits and psychological profiles with which so many papers titillated their readers—before charges were laid.

Of course once a person has been charged the press are supposed to lay off publishing information not revealed in court until after the verdict. But rarely have we been fed so much detail about suspects, nor in such a sensational manner.

Sexual behaviour which, under different circumstances, might have been regarded as within the broad margins of 'normal' was given a sinister twist as former lovers lined up to tell their sides of affairs with the two accused—neither of whom was available to contradict these versions of events. At least one story implied that a person being questioned by police about the murders was an (unconvicted) predatory paedophile, stretching the license granted to the press until a charge has been laid.

Every summer now, it seems, the 'silly season' comes down to earth with a bump—with the abduction, murder, disappearance, or tragic death of a child. Public outrage is justified, insecurity becomes endemic, and woe-betide anyone suspected of being involved.

The Sun, The Express and the News of the World all demonstrated their support for the police by offering substantial rewards for information. We have yet to be told whether anyone has claimed the money, who has been paid out—and how much. Nor is it clear what impact the coverage had on circulation figures. But we do know that the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Coroner, have criticised the effects of this intervention. The smell of money may elicit too many (false or irrelevant) 'leads', but the newspapers got great stories and no doubt upped their circulation.

The papers, upset that the police were apparently grateful for the offers at the time, have protested their innocence but the Attorney General Lord Goldsmith QC is studying some editions to see whether any represent breaches of the Contempt laws. On the eve of Huntley's first appearance in court on 10 Sept he said that editors should 'exercise a great deal of care' over coverage from here on in, but stepped back from issuing formal warnings.

No doubt that will be left to the

PCC, so they can prove that self-regulation CAN work (again)! There should be no need since the law and conventions about such reporting have been clear for years. Usually it is the police who play cat and mouse with the press over when a person may be charged—keeping editors on their toes for fear that they may publish incriminating information on the day an accused is brought to court.

The whole sad story of Soham begs many questions about press behaviour and regulation, including whether the offer of rewards (by the press) will count as an offer of payment to potential witnesses - which the Code is supposed to outlaw before the law steps in.

The press and media did begin to show more restraint locally as the families of the bereaved went into mourning, but the witch-hunt against the two accused continued, with widespread publicity about the baying mobs outside the court; and the Mirror obtaining pictures of Carr from inside Holloway; constructed accounts of Huntley's routine in Rampton and, inevitably, the relaunch of the NoW's 'sign up for Sarah's law' campaign.

Small wonder that panic set in again as it became clear that schools could not reopen because police-checking of new teachers was way behind schedule. Not that this, excellent and appropriate, story had anything to do with newspapers getting back at the police and the government for daring to criticise them... The case continues.

■ MORE than 400 journalists covered the murder of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman.

Seven detectives have now been given the task of sending a questionnaire to every British and international reporter involved with the story, asking them if they would be willing to hand over information that could prove useful.

The request is backed up with the threat that if the information is deemed relevant 'we'll get a court order if we have to'. Journalists' organisations, particularly the NUJ, has always strongly resisted any attempt by the police to hand over any information to the police on the grounds that betraying sources can put journalists at risk.

CPBF Response to Communications Bill

THE CPBF response to the government's draft Communications Bill demonstrated the way the various interests and ideas of CPBF members can be drawn on to produce a document of great clarity and consistency. It represents a fundamental critique of the principles and proposals contained in the government's draft bill.

The 31-page document, given a final edit by Kathy Lowe and CPBF National Secretary, Jonathan Hardy, includes two appendices by Julian Petley (CPBF Chair) and US media academic Bob McChesney. A full version of the text is available on our website: www.cpbf.org.uk
We print below an edited summary of the main recommendations

The role of OFCOM should be radically redefined so that instead of being an instrument to promote the interests of the media industry it has a clear public interest remit. Recommendations

■ OFCOM should have the obligation to promote high quality communications that inform, educate, entertain and fully reflect the range of opinions and cultures in the UK, across all the major services.

■ OFCOM should have a duty to secure protection for viewers and listeners as citizens, with the right and need for access to a wide range of information and communication services so that they can be informed, educated and enabled to play a full part in society.

OFCOM has to be democratically accountable

Recommendations

■ The OFCOM board should be constituted by democratic nomination from the devolved institutions and by UK-wide associations with a major

interest in the media, including, educational bodies, cultural organisations, NGOs, civil liberties organisations, media unions and the TUC.

■ In particular the devolved assemblies should have the right to nominate members of OFCOM, to both the main board and any sub-boards.

The BBC

Recommendation

■ The BBC should not be subject to regulatory oversight by OFCOM, but should remain autonomous.

Regulation of broadcasting

Recommendations

■ The Draft Bill should ensure a continued commitment to a public service system in British broadcasting, rather than a commercial system with a few protected public service 'remits'. This should be done by spelling out in detail the individual public service remits and obligations for each of the commercial broadcasters.

■ Positive regulation should be

strengthened across the whole system with OFCOM requiring a minimum investment in original production in documentary, drama, children's programmes, education, arts, news, current affairs and in the coverage of international issues.

Media Ownership

Recommendations

■ The prohibition on non-EEA ownership of broadcasting licences should remain.

■ Instead of the Draft Bill discussing broadcasting almost exclusively as an economic activity it needs to give a much clearer statement about the nature of broadcasting in terms of its social, cultural and political role.

■ The regional ITV franchises with their obligations to local news, current affairs and general programming must be retained.

■ There must be no further consolidation of ITV ownership. The companies must also engage separate advertising sales operations, to prevent market fixing.

■ The public service broadcasting requirements on ITV broadcasters should not be lowered but remain at the same level as the BBC.

■ The so-called 20:20 rule preventing any newspaper owner with 20 per cent share of national market from having more than 20 per cent stake in any terrestrial commercial TV service should be reinstated.

Puttnam's shot across the bows



KATHY LOWE

THE July report from the joint parliamentary committee set up to scrutinise the communications bill was a shot

across the bows for the government.

CPBF, together with a number of trade unions and voluntary organisations, had given evidence to the committee, arguing for tighter restrictions on media ownership and strong, positive public service obligations to be laid on media owners.

The committee led by Lord Puttnam appeared to take some of these arguments on board. It expressed its 'unease on several grounds' about the bill, making 148 recommendations on how it could be improved.

The future of British broadcasting depended as much on guaranteeing programme quality and diversity as

controlling distribution, the MPs and peers concluded. Their report put the stress on boosting the powers of super regulator OFCOM to make it more effective in securing the necessary safeguards, policing broadcasters' public service remit and reigning in over-powerful media companies. The committee also recommended that OFCOM should have a clearer role in regulating the BBC.

A 'plurality test' was proposed for prospective takeovers and mergers, requiring those involved to demonstrate commitment to investing in original production, stimulating employment and meeting the principles and standards of British broadcasting.

Continued on page 8

PLAY IT STRAIGHT



BBC Political Correspondent Nicholas Jones has played an invaluable role in documenting the 'machinations of media manipulation' in a series of books on Labour's spin doctors. As he says in the preface to *The Control Freaks*, 'My interest in seeking to illuminate through my books the hidden seven-eighths of the iceberg world of media manipulation is of long standing. In this important article he describes the problem and offers some solutions

'Play it straight' is the latest feeble exhortation from a House of Commons watchdog which has spent the last five years trying to get to grips with Downing Street's news management and the manipulative techniques which have won Alastair Campbell so many plaudits from within the New Labour hierarchy.

Instead of seeking to take advantage of a new era of openness heralded by Tony Blair's much-repeated promise to turn his back on spin, the cross-party Public Administration Select Committee has shied away from confrontation and failed to recommend any direct action to tackle the many well-chronicled abuses of the government's media machine.

Another group of the great and the good, the Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Sir Nigel Wicks, has taken over the task of considering whether anything can be done to rein in an administration which, rather than seek to provide a level playing field for all news outlets, is determined to remain a leading player in a highly-competitive media market place.

Having given evidence to both committees, I am not sure that either of them has acknowledged the full extent of the shift which has taken place since 1997: political appointees have now succeeded in taking charge of the day-to-day direction and management of the information services run by the various departments of Whitehall.

The point which I tried to get across in my submissions was that it is the government of the day which controls the flow of information from the state to the public and that if Labour ministers are genuinely seeking to drive up the standards of political reporting, they should give a lead.

Unlike previous Prime Ministers, Blair has created a culture within his administration

which has spawned a network of party propagandists within Downing Street and Whitehall who are addicted to the relentless task of trying to create their own news headlines. Under the regime which Campbell has established, there seems little likelihood that Blair's pledge to put less emphasis on presentation will persuade his advisers to relinquish the aggressive procedures which are designed to give the government the greatest possible influence over the daily news agenda.

While few could argue with the right of democratically-elected governments to make the best use of modern methods of communication, and to defend themselves in the face of media hostility and twenty-four hour coverage, there must be an obligation on public servants to provide all recognised news outlets with simultaneous access to information on a free and fair basis.

My criticism of Campbell and the other eighty or so political advisers whom Blair has appointed is that they have acquired the status of civil servants but are not bound by the same rules, especially when it comes to their conduct in the highly-critical area of media management.

The fundamental reasoning behind the continued employment of special advisers cannot really be challenged: there should be a system which allows ministers to receive political advice in private from their closest aides and there should obviously be a mechanism which ensures they have a personal conduit through which to maintain contact with party officials and activists, thus protecting the neutrality of civil servants.

Nevertheless there are several reasons why I would contend the same cannot be said about the unchecked powers which special advisers now exercise over the way information flows

from Whitehall to the public:

Why should Labour propagandists who are employed by the state be allowed to hand out exclusive stories to those news outlets favoured by the Blair administration, rather than play a straight bat with all journalists?

Why is it that special advisers have the authority to speak unattributably to selected correspondents and supply them with personal insights into what ministers and their cabinet rivals might be thinking, when a civil service information officer could be disciplined and perhaps sacked for the same "offence"?

If newspapers and broadcasting organisations find they are losing out because Campbell and his colleagues continue to play the field and dish out privileged access to their favourites, whether it be an off-the-record briefing, an exclusive interview with a minister or even a signed newspaper article, why should anyone believe that Blair is being serious when he says Downing Street is no longer reliant on spin?

In my evidence to the two committees I put forward suggestions designed to ensure that the same standards apply to all those who have the authority to speak on behalf of the government, so that the system is not distorted by political appointees, who, uniquely for the public service, have the freedom to compete in the media market place.

I consider that when special advisers talk to journalists, there should always be a presumption that this is being conducted on the basis that their identities are likely to be revealed by the news media and, that as a consequence, their conversations are on the record. Civil service information officers know they have no hiding place: they expect their briefings to be sourced to their department, and rightly so.

If governments are to speak with one voice, there must be a common guideline and if the special advisers are going to retain the status of public servants, their hole-in-the-corner conduct cannot continue to be unregulated.

Perhaps the most fundamental adjustment required from the politicians is a recognition that they could, if they wished, create a level playing field. The internet provides systems which do allow news of government decisions to be made available simultaneously to all sections of the media.

An announcement posted on a Whitehall web site could be accessed instantly by scores of competing journalists. If Tony Blair wanted to 'play it straight', he could tell Alastair Campbell that Downing Street must cease its practice of doling out exclusives to favoured news outlets.

In the last Parliament, the Speaker, Betty Boothroyd, reprimanded six ministers for publicising government decisions in the news media before announcing them first to the House of

Commons. My research for *The Control Freaks* showed that in each case the trail of responsibility led back directly to special advisers in No.10.

What the Jo Moore saga exposed was the fault line which the influx of political appointees has created in the often tense relationship between ministers and government press officers. The instructions which Ms Moore issued to civil servants, including her infamous "bury bad news" email, were subsequently deemed to have been unacceptable. However, until the arrival of Martin Sixsmith and her final denouement, she was allowed to carry on regardless, although she had clearly exceeded her authority.

My greatest regret, after working at Westminster on and off since the late 1960s, is the lowering of standards in political journalism. Day after day we see or hear exclusive stories supplying facts and quotations for which there is no attribution whatsoever.

Obviously we the political correspondents, and the organisations for which we work, must take much of the blame. Nevertheless I would argue that some of the responsibility has to lie at the door of the anonymous Downing Street and Westminster sources whose daily offerings fill our newspapers and which, I admit, are being included increasingly in political reports on radio and television.

Blair and Campbell are adamant that the media's emphasis on splits and personalities proves their point, that the output of most lobby correspondents amounts to nothing more than political froth. Special advisers, they say, are not at fault because the majority of them have no contact with the media and those that do talk to journalists stick to policy issues and never speak about ministers themselves in terms of their personalities or feelings.

Evidence to the Wicks Committee by Pat McFadden, formerly a senior special adviser in Downing Street, told a different story. He confirmed that he did speak to journalists, briefing them on what ministers felt about the proposals for devolution in Scotland and Wales, which was his specialist subject.

McFadden freely volunteered the fact that one area of his expertise was to be able to say which minister might or might not 'hit the roof' if the cabinet was asked to adopt this or that position on a constitutional issue. Such insights are manna from heaven for political journalists and feed the very story lines which Blair and Campbell disclaim responsibility for.

Perhaps a more pertinent example is the unsourced briefing which revealed that ministers intend to reject the recommendations made by the joint parliamentary committee, chaired by Lord Puttnam, which has examined the draft Communications Bill. The unidentified 'source' at

Tessa Jowell's department was her special adviser, Bill Bush, who told journalists that the government 'would not budge' on its determination to open up control over British television and radio to foreign ownership.

There was much advance trumpeting of the government's willingness to allow pre-legislative scrutiny of its proposals for the broadcasting industry but even before members of the two Houses of Parliament had an opportunity to read the report, let alone debate it, an unelected adviser had told them what ministers really thought of Lord Puttnam's report: forget it.

I know that most of my colleagues will chastise me for seeking to castigate Messrs McFadden and Bush. They consider the kind of information which is given to lobby correspondents by these political appointees is invaluable and they applaud the access they have to such informed sources.

My grouse is over the lack of accountability. We have a Prime Minister who lambasts declining standards in the media while at the same time sanctioning the appointment of special advisers who can pick and choose which journalists they speak to and then supply them with highly-sensitive information on an unattributable basis.

Campbell could help to raise the standards of political journalism at a stroke if he decreed that Blair's network of political appointees should be instructed to speak on the record and be properly sourced when they try to grab the news agenda.

The Control Freaks, by Nicholas Jones, has been updated and is now in paperback (Politico's, £9.99).

WITHOUT COMMENT

“Organised, large-scale propaganda—the systematic dissemination of ideas to capture hearts and minds—was first developed by the Roman Catholic church during the Counter Reformation. Propaganda acquired its negative connotations only during the second world war because so much of it was 'disinformation', ie lies. But, relabeled as public diplomacy, it played a key role in America's successful cold war effort, via student and cultural exchange programmes, Radio Free Europe, and so on. After the cold war, resources were cut. Now they are being sharply built up again.”

Patrick Barwise, FT Creative Business, 10 September

THE SHAME OF SCOTLAND'S MEDIA

GARRY OTTON

MUCH of the Scottish media attach a sense of shame and fuel moral outrage to any legitimate means of sexual expression. An increasingly politicised church, fearful of moral decay and advances in liberty and expression, has succoured campaigns like the 'Channel Filth' attack on Channel Five's late night depiction of erotica and the Daily Record's 'SmutWatch' campaign.

Such campaigns, however, paled into insignificance to that faced by the fledgling Scottish parliament when they were caught unawares by the longest political debate in its history—the bankrolling of a campaign by Scottish business tycoon, Brian Souter, to prevent the repeal of Section 2a, (Clause 28 in England and Wales), which forbade the so-called 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools.

The Daily Record, Scottish Daily Mail, Scottish Sun and Scotland on Sunday led the religionist's quest to prevent repeal in Scotland. They lost, but at a very high price indeed. While daily editorials attacked gays in support of a campaign to 'Keep the Clause', master-minded by a Mirror columnist and ex-editor of the Scottish Sun, doctors were brought in to explain how repeal would put children at risk of AIDS, anatomical drawings detailed how to spot a homosexual, and homophobic billboards appeared all over Scotland, gays were denied services, ridiculed, beaten and even murdered.

When any issue of sexuality has appeared in the Scottish media—as it does on an almost daily basis—it is rarely the academics that the journalists turn to, but instead a string of religious and conservative 'spokespersons'.

In Scotland it has been Mrs Ann Allen of the Kirk's ridiculously-named Board of Social Responsibility; the notorious 'Sexfinder General', the late Monsignor Tom Connelly for the Catholic Church; Phil Gallie, a deposed Tory MP; and any number of partisan organisations like the

Christian Institute and Family and Youth Concern.

This laziness on the part of journalists to latch on to sound bites or PR machines attached to religious organizations has both distorted and misrepresented Scotland's sexuality. In colluding with moral conservatives; throwing up a regular diet of propaganda and misinformation on sexual issues, the Scottish press have failed the public they are supposed to serve, thus contributing to Scotland's appalling record on teenage pregnancy, the highest in Europe and seven times higher than Holland.

In support of the morally conservative sexual propaganda issued by Churches, there has been an abundance of equally conservative columnists operating within almost every major newspaper in Scotland. Best known of the Scottish columnists promoting a conservative message was Jack Irvine, a former editor of Scottish editions of The Sun, whose column in The Scottish Mirror regularly carried his rabid homophobia, inspiring Brian Souter to enlist his support for a £2million campaign, backing the Church's influence on sex education in schools. One of Irvine's most controversial remarks was his reference to 'slobbering queers'. There are plenty more of his ilk. Jim Sillars, a former SNP MP, writes weekly in The Scottish Sun and advises readers that homosexuals need to get the homosexual age of consent 'as low as possible to ensure a continuous supply of sexual partners'.

During the campaign to repeal Section 2a in Scotland, the Scottish Daily Mail, in a feature reminiscent of material produced in Nazi Germany, ran anatomical drawings showing how to distinguish gay people from 'straight' and reported what was, in reality, a benign group of a dozen protesters from the Scottish Socialist Party handing out leaflets to the congregation outside homophobic multi-millionaire Brian Souter's church in Perth as a '50 strong... gay law mob' with their 'leaders'. No such

gay 'leaders' attended.

Even The Herald, despite its support for ditching this Tory-backed legislation, rode with one foot on the brake and a string of religionists in the back seat. Stewart Lamont wrote of his disgust of gay men's apparent love of public conveniences; Michael Fry thought the repeal of Section 28 would give children AIDS; and 'wee free' John Macleod who—before he was himself 'outed'—used to think gays "simply not equipped to live".

The Scottish Media Monitor, written by Gary Otten, began in 1995, a monthly column in ScotsGay magazine, examining the treatment of sexuality in the Scottish media. The Media Monitor's website receives over 500 hits a day: www.scottishmediamonitor.com. Gary is the author of Sexual Fascism (Ganymede Books 2001).

SCOTTISH MEDIA GROUP ANNOUNCES SALE

SMG PLANS TO sell its publishing business, which includes its main Scottish title, the Herald, the Sunday Herald and the Evening Times, and several magazines. SMG put a plausible reason forward for the sale - the group wants to change direction ahead of the new media ownership regulations in the Communications Bill, and concentrate on non-print media. Potential buyers include regional newspaper groups Newsquest and Johnston Press. At least ten groups have expressed an interest.

However the group is struggling with a debt of £408m, and the hope is the sale of the publishing assets will enable it to hold on to its two ITV franchises, its radio holdings and Pearl and Dean cinema advertising. It has a 29.5% stake in Scottish Radio Holdings and it might seek to take full control of the group if the sale of the publishing business is successful.



Protecting the young

CHILDREN'S and young people's television is seen by both policymakers and the public to be particularly important. 80% of respondents to a recent Independent Television Commission survey said the most important reason for regulating television was the protection of young people and children, with a further 65% arguing that children and young people's television is an essential part of public service broadcasting, a higher rating than that given to educational content.

Children's and young people's programming is subject to tighter regulation by the EU and UK government than other content. The draft Communications Bill places a special responsibility on the public service broadcasters with regard to children and young people's television. The new communications regulator OFCOM must ensure that the public service broadcasters provide 'a suitable quantity of high quality and original programmes for children and young people' [Clause 181(5)(f)].

However concern has been expressed by Women in Film and Television Wales about the lack of specific mandating for children's television for those television companies not included in the public service broadcasting category. In the drafting of the last Broadcasting Act, a lobbying group, British Action for Children's Television, helped to ensure the inclusion of a clause requiring that commercial TV companies had to provide a minimum number of hours of diverse children's material when children were available to view. It made representations to the Commons Select Committee on this issue.

It is important that this issue is not lost among all the others that need to be tackled in the lobbying for revisions to the draft Communications Bill because commercial considerations often override the requirement of television companies to provide a range

of high quality educational and other programming for children.

They have been watching...

A NEW report by the Institute for Public Policy Research, They have been watching—Children's TV 1952-2002 by Jamie Cowling and Kirsty Lee, includes the results of a detailed analysis of television schedules from the last week of August from 1952–2002 to provide a snapshot of children and young people's programming over the last 50 years.

The research has found: The percentage of imports has risen fivefold. Imported content on the public service broadcasters rose from 5.7% in 1972 to 28.6% in 2002. In 1972 ITV broadcast 35 minutes of imported content during the week studied (5%). By 2002 this had risen to over six hours of imported content (50%) and the majority of this was animation. In 1972 BBC1 broadcast 50 minutes of imported content during the week studied (13%). By 2002 this had risen to over seven hours of imported content (60%).

Repeats in 2002 reached nearly two thirds. Whilst in 1972 repeated programmes made up 35.9% of the total on the public service broadcasters during the week examined, repeats in 2002 now account for 62.2%. In 1972 ITV broadcast just under five hours of repeats during the week studied (40.4%) by 2002 this had risen to over seven and a half hours of repeats (57.9%).

The total broadcast hours of news programming aimed at young people and children, available on the public service broadcasters during the week, has not increased since the 1980s.

Jamie Cowling, co-author of the report, argues, 'Regulation is vital to protect diversity and domestic production. OFCOM and the BBC Board of Governors must retain a robust commitment to a diversity of content, including factual and documentary programmes, for children and young

people on the public service broadcasters.

'We're particularly concerned at the low level of news provision for children and young people. Whilst children and young people do watch other news broadcasts it is depressing to see that levels of news for children and young people have barely increased since the 1980s.'

Abandoned children

EXTRA!, the magazine of FAIR, the US media-watch group, has a report in its August issue highlighting the performance of the US commercial broadcasters in providing educational children's programmes.

The 1990 Children's Television Act requires TV networks to provide three hours a week of educational or informative programmes for children 16 and under. The performance up to now has been pretty poor, with one study asserting that one-fifth of programming presented as educational had 'little or no educational value.'

However the networks are unhappy with the profit they're making on children's TV so they are quitting, farming out their responsibilities. CBS leased its Saturday morning programming slot to Nickelodeon (owned like CBS by Viacom); NBC contracted with Discovery Networks; ABC shares programming and production costs for its Saturday morning slots with Disney Channel (ABC is owned by Disney). Fox is to sell off its children's programming slot to 4Kids, who specialise in cartoons designed to sell toys (it is responsible for Pokémon). 4Kids executive, Joe Garrity says, 'We're in the entertainment business, not education.'

Peggy Charren, who campaigned for children's television, argues, 'If you can't fulfil your public interest requirements, your licence ought to go to someone who can.' However the FCC has never denied licence renewal or even challenged a station for failing to meet the educational requirements.

CPBF NEWS

ACTION ALERT

We have only a few months, once Parliament reassembles, to make an impact on some of the potentially deeply damaging proposals in the Communications Bill. The final draft of the Communications Bill will be placed before Parliament in November or December 2002. It will then be debated over the winter and into the early spring 2003.

For the CPBF this is a matter of vital concern, and one which we appeal to all our members to do all they can to build up a strong lobbying effort.

We have produced our new pamphlet, *Why the Communication Bill is Bad News*, which gives a concise summary of the bill and our concerns. We want to ensure the widest possible distribution, so please make sure you get it in the hands of anyone interested in the issues. You can order extra copies—send a donation of £1 per 10 copies to cover postage.

Most importantly, you can also:

- Write to your MP and ask her or him to support the CPBF's revisions of the Bill. We will be drafting a series of specific amendments to the Bill, and



we can provide you with a summary.

- Write to your local and national newspapers expressing your concern
 - Organise a special local meeting of your community or trade union group with a CPBF speaker to encourage more people to put pressure on their MPs
 - Write motions for your trade union urging it to intervene on the issue and to support the work of the CPBF in seeking to improve the Bill.
- We urge you to do all you can to support our efforts in the coming crucial months.*

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Most embarrassing for those eager to see ownership of TV companies such as Carlton, Granada and Channel 5 opened up to international corporations was the committee's proposal to put any such bids on ice. They should wait until OFCOM was up and running and able to oversee terms, the committee recommended.

When Lord Puttnam held his London press conference to announce the proposals, a DCMS spokesperson issued a statement that 'the provisions in the communications bill were not tentative proposals, they were decisions'. However, Lord Puttnam remains optimistic that many of the committee's recommendations will be incorporated into the communications bill when it goes before parliament this autumn. In a Financial Times article he said that he thought up to 125 of the recommendations would be accepted, and 'a sensible compromise hacked out on foreign ownership'. But on the same day Secretary of State for Trade and Industry Patricia Hewitt told the Royal Television Society's international conference that the government will press ahead with the liberalisation of foreign ownership restrictions despite the Puttnam report.

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