

EDITORIAL

PRESIDENT George Bush loves a military backcloth for his elaborately staged media events. And the media in turn respond with a stream of words and images which reinforce the message that Bush's extremely skilled media advisers want to give.

Few will have missed what the media praised as a triumphal and dramatic gesture to underline his role as America's commander-in-chief, the elaborately-staged event when he co-piloted a navy jet on to the aircraft carrier, USS *Abraham Lincoln*. Bush then shook hands with air-crew and sailors, before announcing the end of military combat in Iraq. However he stopped short of declaring the war over.

Mr Bush, we should remind ourselves, avoided the Vietnam draft by joining the Texas Air National Guard, and he has around him a team of politicians and advisers described as 'chickenhawks'—they avoided fighting in Vietnam (not, it is important to note, because of a principled position of opposition to the war), but now they want to deploy America's military might to protect and extend US military and commercial interests.

If the image of Bush strutting about in his pilot's uniform sends out a deceiving

message, he won't be bothered. It will be a powerful boost to his campaign in next year's election. But it is important to note that it is one more piece of deception and disinformation perpetrated by George Bush and Tony Blair around the Iraq war.

According to the *Washington Post* (11 May) the US military task force hunting for chemical, biological and nuclear weapons is to leave Iraq within a month, having found no trace of any illegal weapons. Yet in the build up to war this was the prime reason given for military intervention and regime change.

Bush, in his address to the nation from the *Abraham Lincoln*, also returned to the theme he has repeated for months—the 'proven link' between Iraq and al-Qaida. The plain fact is that there is no evidence of any link, but a poll taken during Operation Iraqi Freedom disclosed that 61% of Americans are now persuaded that Saddam and Bin Laden were accomplices in 9/11.

There is a saying to the effect that a lie can take giant strides around the world, while the truth sleeps. The manipulation of the media in spreading disinformation and downright lies about the reasons for war with Iraq provides strong support for this.

We would like to thank David Miller for his invaluable work and support, which enabled us to produce the supplement.

Articles we didn't have space for, and footnotes to articles contained in the Free Press Special, are on our website.

Communications Bill Peers line up for a show-down

BARRY WHITE

'They (Tessa Jowell and Kim Howells) give the impression that we are just a rubber stamp. They are going to be wrong.'

Lord Tom McNally 6 May 2003.

THERE is the whiff of rebellion in the air from the 'part reformed' House of Lords. After just two committee sittings (on 29 April and 6 May) the rumblings are getting louder. Fed up with behind the scenes carping about the activities of Lord Puttnam and the other members of the scrutiny committee who have tabled 70 amendments to the bill. Speaking during the debate on 6 May he hit back: 'I should like to make it very clear that the reason 70 amendments have been put forward is because, as a joint scrutiny committee, we were wholly dissatisfied with the responses which we received from the government to our report.'

He has been joined by other peers who are very unhappy with the way the government has responded to amendments put down on the bill.

Lord Fowler criticised the process during the debate, saying that it was bad enough that the bill arrived in the Lords with over 100 of the 400 or so clauses not having been discussed in the Commons.

Ray Snoddy, media editor of *The Times*, (12 May) revealed that Lord Puttnam had issued a stark ultimatum to government: drop plans to allow foreign ownership of ITV or face defeat in the Lords that could kill almost three years of policymaking. 'If there is no movement by the government, I can absolutely promise there will a vote and they could lose that vote,' Lord Puttnam said. 'If they want their bill, they are going to have to have it without foreign ownership'. A number of peers are also against provisions which would also allow Channel 5 to fall into the hands of Murdoch or another US group.

The government wants the bill 'done and dusted' by the time parliament rises for the summer recess. If they fail, it could be carried over into the early autumn before the new parliament meets after the Queen's Speech. However, that would be an embarrassment to New Labour who have set much by this deregulatory measure.

If the Lords do reject the foreign ownership clauses (and others) the focus will return to the Commons (probably in June) where 128 MP's signed John Grogan's early day motion 260 which expressed concern about these provisions. It will be then that we need to put the pressure on MP's to stand up to the power of the global media corporations and their 'apologists' on the government front bench.

Free Press Special

THIS issue has a supplement on **Iraq and the Media War**. You can get extra copies of it from the CPBF National Office. 25 copies £5, 50 copies £10, 100 copies £20.

Curbing Campbell

NICHOLAS JONES
ALASTAIR Campbell's powers to order around the government's 1,000 information officers will be severely curtailed if Tony Blair accepts the advice of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.



In a report aimed at redefining the role of the government's political spin doctors, the Committee says that Campbell's executive powers to give instructions to civil servants should be limited to Downing Street and the No.10 press office. The committee is also recommending that all 81 of the special advisers appointed by the government should lose their status as temporary civil servants and should be considered as a separate and distinct group of political appointees. Special advisers like the disgraced Jo Moore—who resigned after ordering Stephen Byers' press officers to 'bury' bad news—would lose the right to be in charge of, or give directions to, government information officers.

At a news conference to launch the report, the Committee Chairman Sir Nigel Wicks explained why he believed there should be a limit on what special advisers could do. He said he could see no reason why Campbell, who is now Blair's director of communications and strategy, should have special powers over the rest of the government's media machine. (Committee of Standards in Public Life, ninth report, published 8.4.2003

www.public-standards.gov.uk)

The Phillis Review Role of top PR Firms causes concern

PUBLIC relations consultants have been given a pivotal role in reviewing the effectiveness of the government's 1,000 information officers. This has prompted fears that yet more of the work currently being done by civil

servants might be contracted out to the private sector.

Senior executives from four of Britain's leading PR consultancies make up a third of the membership of a review group chaired by Bob Phillis, chief executive of the Guardian Media Group.

He was asked by the Cabinet Office to conduct a wide-ranging examination of 'different models for organising and managing' the government's information service in the wake of the Jo Moore imbroglio and Tony Blair's promise that his administration had turned its back on spin.

The presumption on which the review appears to be based is that government 'information' should be treated as 'a free good, rather than a political commodity' and should be released 'accurately and in accessible forms'.

One option the group is considering is whether to recommend 'a validation or regulation regime' which should ensure that information is 'honest and accurate.' This suggests the PR industry might be called on to devise ways of validating information issued by consultants on behalf of the government.

David Miller, a leading member of the Stirling Media Research Institute, says that over the last couple of decades PR consultants have made repeated attempts to win a greater share of the government's press and publicity work. He fears the review heralds a 'sea change' in the culture and organisation of civil service information officers.

In 1998 the Central Office of Information drew up a list of accredited PR companies and Labour have stepped up Whitehall's use of outside consultants. There are currently thirty-seven PR firms on the COI's roster but the list has not been published.

In view of the need to ensure transparency and openness in government information, Miller says PR consultants should not be allowed to operate on behalf of the government in a covert fashion.

He believes that the four PR executives on the Phillis review group—Colin Browne (partner, Maitland Consultancy), David Hill (managing director, Good Relations), Rupert Howell (recently joint chief executive,

Chime Communications) and Howell James (director, Brown, Lloyd James)—represent an industry which stands to gain significantly should there be a continued expansion of the amount of government PR work placed with private sector. A fifth private sector representative is Michael Goold, director of the Ashridge strategic management centre.

So far Phillis has issued no public statement about the extent of his remit or whether his group is considering the possibility that more work should be contracted out. However, Alastair Campbell and other Labour spin doctors have said repeatedly they want civil service information officers to be far more proactive and to adopt the kind of communication techniques deployed by PR consultancies.

In its submission to the review, the CPBF says anxieties about the make-up of the group have been heightened by the failure to include anyone 'prepared to advocate or defend the principle of ensuring that the flow of information from the government to the news media should be controlled and managed by impartial civil servants.'

Because of the failure of regulators across the public services, the CPBF would have no confidence in any mechanism designed to 'validate' the honesty and accuracy of information services offered by the PR industry.

You can read submissions to the review at: www.gcreview.gov.uk/evidence/index.htm

Conflict of interest

PEARSON, the media group which owns the *Financial Times*, 50% of *The Economist*, and Penguin, as well as educational publishing groups in the UK and the USA, is to take over the exam board Edexcel.

The £20m take-over of the exam board, which runs GCSE, AS-level, A-level and BTEC courses, now means a profit-making company with an interest in educational publishing is in charge of a public exam board.

MPs and educationalists have expressed concern that the government should have allowed such a deal to go through because of the obvious conflict of interests.

ITALIAN AFFAIRS

SILVIO Berlusconi appeared recently in a Milan court to deny accusations of bribing judges back in 1985. He says he is the victim of a Communist plot and that the judiciary are biased against him.

The Economist, which he is suing for libel as a result of a piece written two years ago when he was campaigning for the Italian prime ministership, has returned to the attack. On 1 July Italy takes over the European Union presidency and the magazine is unequivocal—Berlusconi is unfit to lead the EU. 'If Mr Berlusconi is indeed the victim of a plot, he needs to show the world his evidence. The proper way to do that, for a man in his position, is to step down from his public post and defend himself in court. If and when he has fully cleared his name, Europeans may feel easier about having him speak for Europe,' the magazine argues.

In this country the husband of the Media and Culture minister, Tessa Jowell, has been investigated by Italian magistrates inquiring into allegations of fraud and money laundering by companies owned by Berlusconi.

London media lawyer David Mills has represented Berlusconi for many years, and has previously been called as a defence witness in cases relating to alleged misdemeanours involving the Italian premier's Fininvest empire.

CARLTON/GRANADA MERGER

THE Competition Commission has to report to Patricia Hewitt, the Department of Trade and Industry minister, by June 25. Part of the work of the team charged with drawing up the report is to invite comments on the merger from interested parties.

The National Union of Journalists submitted written evidence (you can find the evidence on the NUJ website www.nuj.org.uk) and also gave oral evidence. The NUJ evidence argued that the impact of the present level of concentration has already had dire consequences on regional news, regional programmes and jobs, and on the fifteen-franchise regional ITV system.

Granada operates seven of the

fifteen regional ITV franchises (Anglia, Border, Granada, LWT, Meridian, Tyne Tees and Yorkshire), an airtime sales house for nine ITV licences (it's own seven and Ulster and Channel) and several programme production companies. It also has shareholdings in the Scottish Media Group (holder of the two Scottish ITV licences), GMTV and ITN, amongst others.

Carlton Communications operate four ITV licences (HTV, Carlton, Central and West Country), an airtime sales house representing its four franchises and the two SMG licences, a number of content production companies, books and video/DVD production, and shares in GMTV and ITN.

A merger would make it virtually impossible for a new consortium to bid for a regional ITV franchise against such a media monolith when the licences come up for renewal around 2010. Surely one good reason to oppose a merger which would eliminate competition?

Unfortunately the Competition Commission used to be able to assess other factors apart from competition issues, such as the public interest, when reaching its decisions. Its report to Patricia Hewitt won't be able to do that.

NEWS FOR SCOTLAND

REMEMBER the campaign for the Scottish Six O'clock News? John Birt's memoirs reveal his role in the campaign to derail it. In 1998, as the surge of support for devolution was at its height, a broad swathe of opinion, including the great and the good, in Scotland supported the idea of a distinctive Six O'clock News for Scotland.

It included BBC executives in Scotland, the Broadcasting Council, the Scottish media, Scottish civil servants, and even Norman Drummond, the BBC's Scottish Governor.

Birt's reaction? He goes straight to Tony Blair and with his support mounts a determined campaign to defeat the demand. Blair puts Peter Mandelson and the BBC Secretary, Michael Stevenson, on the case and they orchestrate a propaganda campaign which achieves its aim.

AD INDUSTRY LOBBY FOR SELF-REGULATION

JONATHAN HARDY

THE European Commission is conducting a review of the *Television Without Frontiers Directive*, holding public hearing between April and June. One of six themes is the future regulation of broadcast advertising.

In Brussels, as here, all the major commercial interests, advertisers, ad agencies and media companies, favour self-regulation. The UK Communications Bill however, retains the existing framework for TV advertising while opening the door to 'co-regulation', which OFCOM chairman David Currie has said could be introduced quickly. Implementing the current European rules is one reason the government advocates 'co-regulation'. But if European rules change, UK safeguards may rapidly disappear.

The deregulation lobby reflects the interests of all main players in adopting more 'effective' techniques beyond 'spot' ads such as split-screen, virtual, and interactive. The European Group of Television Advertising (EGTA) also want to see limits on advertising time abolished and the safeguards for mass broadcasting levelled down, a position powerfully rebutted by consumer groups.

Industry arguments about consumer 'power' and media literacy are at their most tenuous regarding children's advertising. MPs have registered growing concerns backed by research from organisations like Sustain. Last year Debra Shipley introduced an Early Day Motion seeking to outlaw advertising to pre-school children.

Tessa Jowell then reassured the food industry, favouring 'educational' initiatives, or as one official put it, encouraging children to 'deconstruct' ads. Shipley now intends to introduce a ten-minute rule bill outlawing food and drink ads in programmes aimed at pre-school children. Deliberations in Europe show the depressingly unequal lobbying resources, but campaigns against excessive or 'embedded' advertising will undoubtedly grow.

A lethal cocktail

Racism, the press and the PCC

JULIAN PETLEY

WHEN the Press Complaints Commission's Professor Pangloss, sorry, Pinker, admitted in the course of his otherwise characteristically starry-eyed preface to the PCC's *Annual Review 2002* that 'serious challenges still lie ahead', little could he have realised just how serious these would turn out to be. What Pinker had in mind was the perfectly reasonable - to anyone outside the press, that is - idea floated in some of the debates on the Communications Bill that, in an increasingly converged media environment in which newspaper owners are to be allowed to take a far larger stake in the broadcasting environment, the new communications regulator OFCOM might occasionally need to pronounce on matters pertaining to the press. This, warned PCC director Guy Black in February, 'would not simply be statutory control by the back door - it would be state control bashing the front door down'.

The all-too-predictable shrieks and howls occasioned by the OFCOM spectre were, however, as nothing compared to the extraordinary press paranoia which greeted the Select Committee on Culture Media and Sport's modest inquiry into press intrusion. By March, Black was inveighing against 'the most lethal cocktail of challenges since the death of the Princess of Wales' and editors were openly rowing with the Committee (and each other) over the merits and demerits of the PCC. Matters reached a head when Committee member Chris Bryant, writing in the *Guardian*, accused the PCC of being incestuous and argued that self-regulation was failing, following which Les Hinton, chair of both News International and the PCC's editorial code committee, accused him of prejudging the issues which the Select Committee was considering; in turn, Hinton was roundly ticked off by Committee's chair, Gerald Kaufman, for being impertinent and offensive. A clearly piqued Hinton then complained in the *Observer* that 'the PCC's chance

of discussing its strong record of service to the public had been obscured in prejudice, deliberate misunderstanding and 'rumour', whilst the PCC decided to take its ball away and told Kaufman that it didn't wish to be examined by Bryant. Poor little diddums! You'd never think that these are the representatives of some of the most thuggish newspapers in the world, which delight daily in delivering a good kicking to all those who have the temerity to disagree with their editorial line. Still, it's yet more proof that when Dad's Army's Corporal Jones uttered the immortal line 'They don't like it up 'em' he was, of course referring not to Germans but to journalists.

The PCC's case before the Committee can hardly have been helped by the appearance of its *Annual Review 2002*. Usually this farrago of self-congratulation and twisted logic passes without much comment (except in the pages of *Free Press*) but doubtless this edition will have been thoroughly scrutinised by Kaufman's committee, and it's a fair bet that this will be the last occasion on which the PCC produces quite such a smug, self-deluding and, ultimately, self-defeating document.

The *Review* reveals that 2630 complaints were received in 2002. This was down on the record of 3033 in 2001 but significantly higher than the

average of the previous three years. In its usual fashion the PCC argues that 'this substantial level of complaints underlines its success in making its services known'. The idea that it might be a reflection of widespread dissatisfaction with press standards is, presumably, far too bizarre for the PCC even to entertain.

One third of complaints the PCC found to be outside its self-imposed remit. In the case of 26% of the remaining 1799 complaints: 'no breach of the Code was established, or no further action was required by the PCC after the editor of the publication concerned made an appropriate offer to remedy any possible breach'. The PCC actually adjudicated on a mere 36 cases, upholding 17 and rejecting 19. This means that it adjudicated on only 2% of the complaints which it investigated, and upheld only 1%. Of course, according to the PCC's own inimitable *Alice in Wonderland* logic, the less complaints it adjudicates the more successful it considers the process of 'self-regulation' to be.

The sheer lunacy of this approach, which means that the PCC's most successful year would be that in which it adjudicated on not a single complaint, can be neatly illustrated by its attitude to complaints about discrimination.

The PCC Code of Practice, Clause 13 (i) states that: 'the press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, religion, sex or sexual orientation, or to any physical or mental illness or disability'. 13 (ii) states that: 'it must avoid publishing details of a person's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability unless these are directly relevant to the story'. In 2002 17.9% of complaints to the PCC concerned discrimination - up from 13.5% the previous year. The *Report* rather coyly notes that this might have something to do with the 'continuing reporting of debate about issues relating to asylum seekers and refugees'. None of these complaints were upheld. And yet, this was the beginning of the period in which, as former *Mirror* editor Roy Greenslade has claimed, many papers have conducted an

anti-refugee campaign 'misinformed by hatred, lies and exaggeration which have played on people's fears and prejudices'. In his view: 'underlying all that has been written is a vile racist agenda', with papers 'appealing to the basest of human instincts: suspicion of the alien. That is racist in principle and in practice'.

However, PCC inaction on press racism is hardly confined to 2002. According to an analysis of ten years of PCC adjudications, undertaken by Chris Frost, Head of Journalism at Liverpool John Moores University and chair of the NUJ ethics council, the period was marked by a steady rise in discrimination complaints: from 1.7% of all complaints received in 1993 to 10.6% in 2000. In 1993, 1.17% of complaints adjudicated concerned discrimination, and in 2000 5.45%. During this period the PCC adjudicated on only 38 complaints concerning discrimination (5.6% of the total number of complaints adjudicated) and only six were upheld. The upheld complaints concerned discrimination against gays and the mentally ill. None concerned race, although 16 (42%) of the original 38 did so.

In order to understand PCC inaction on press racism it's important to realise that the PCC believes that the purpose of the discrimination clause is 'to protect individuals from prejudice - not to restrain partisan comment about other nations' (PCC Report No 42, 1998). Its position was further outlined in a speech by Professor Pinker in March at Green College, Oxford. As he explained, the code 'draws a clear distinction between the personal and the collective aspects of discrimination' and the Commission 'does not accept complaints on matters relating to issues of taste and decency', issues which, in its view, are frequently the basis of complaints about discrimination. The crucial point here, however, is that these are entirely self-imposed and self-denying ordinances: no-one other than the PCC has drawn up the discrimination clause in the code, and no-one other than the PCC has decided how it will be interpreted. There is thus not the

WITHOUT COMMENT

“Last year persons in grey suits invited me to put forward my name for the post of the PCC.”

Sir Christopher Meyer

slightest point in Pinker bleating about examples of 'the worst type of journalism which all too easily can bring the whole of the press into disrepute' and 'lapses in editorial judgement' in articles pertaining to race and ethnicity when the plain, simple and unavoidable fact is that the PCC chooses to avoid confronting them. Knowing this, and being well aware that one of the other restrictions which the PCC has conveniently imposed upon itself is a veto on third party complaints, many people who are affronted daily by press racism simply don't bother to complain as they know that it would be an entirely pointless waste of time. Indeed, the only real surprise is that, in these impossible circumstances, the PCC receives as many complaints about racial discrimination as it actually does.

The brutal truth of the matter, as Richard Desmond has discovered at the *Express*, is that stoking people's fear and hatred of foreigners, and generally appealing to their very worst instincts, sells papers. These papers finance the PCC, and their editors are responsible for the code and how it is interpreted. In these circumstances you don't exactly have to be Noam Chomsky to work out why the PCC has repeatedly declined to censure its paymasters for what an increasing number of people, including many journalists, regard as coming perilously close to the inflammatory filth emanating from Goebbels' anti-Semitic propaganda machine, or, more recently, from some of the media in Rwanda, Serbia and Croatia.

Julian Petley is the chair of the CPBF. Chris Frost's findings will be published in full next year in *Journalism Studies*.

SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

A REPORT by the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, chaired by Gerald Kaufman, is due out on 3 June. It covers media intrusion and the role of the PCC and is expected to be 'robust' in its criticism of the media watchdog.

One committee member said, 'It was felt the PCC has a long way to go to protect the interests of the public. In an attempt to address the 'jagged edges and imperfections' of newspaper self-regulation, and to pre-empt the select committee report, Sir Christopher Meyer, set out an eight-point reform plan. He specifically rejected any powers to levy fines, however.



WITHOUT COMMENT

“Any infringement of self-regulation would not just erode the freedoms of the press...it would curtail the freedoms of the citizen, who, in a democratic society, will always depend on media uninhibited by both control of the state and deference to the establishment to protect their liberty.”

Sir Christopher Meyer, chair of Press Complaints Commission, speaking to the Newspaper Society

Don't do it here, don't do it there

A warning from the USA about the Communications Bill, and a devastating condemnation of corporate media in the USA.

PROF. Michael Tracey, Director of the University of Colorado's prestigious Centre for Mass Media Research has warned the British government that its intention of following a US approach to broadcasting—set out in the current Communications Bill—will lead to disaster. He says the government's hope that it can promote high quality television through market forces and 'light touch' regulation has 'all the logic of boiling ice'.

He argues that the idea that US broadcasting demonstrates the power of market forces to promote good television is a myth propagated by those who stand to make fortunes out of the cheapened but—for them—profitable television, further deregulation will spawn. He says the few good US television programmes they love to quote—such as *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under*, *Sex and the City*—are irrelevant to any understanding of what market forces have done to US television and what the future bodes for British television in light of the Communications Bill. These few programmes come mostly from the subscription channel, Home Box Office, a premium pay channel that operates as close to the licence fee system as the US will ever come. The rest of US broadcasting, driven by ratings and advertisers, is in such crisis that it is causing intense concern across America.

In 1981, Mark Fowler, Reagan's chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, said that in future the public interest would be viewed 'as that which the public is interested in'. New technologies, he argued, made broadcasting so cheap and plentiful, old

style regulation was no longer required. In reality, says Tracey, what was driving policy was a distaste for the communal values that that regulation had promoted and an almost theological belief in the virtues of the market. Both are core ingredients of the new British Communications Bill. It refuses to talk about citizens, only consumers and will open up ownership of British commercial channels to American takeovers.

Culture minister Tessa Jowell has said Britain can have the most dynamic television market in the world—while still protecting public service broadcasting. Tracey says the claim is based on a lie. The American experience demonstrates that the two are utterly incompatible. The whole story of US media since 1981 has been not just the elimination of costly, high quality programming—an essential part of public service broadcasting—but the progressive elimination of anything which does not maximise profits, with disastrous consequences.

He quotes three examples in detail: the damage to children's television; the undermining of broadcast journalism; and the growing threat to US television posed by the rise of reality television, to support his analysis.

Tracey concludes his study with a 1958 quote from US broadcaster and journalist, Edward R. Murrow, addressing a conference of broadcasters. He told them that television: 'can teach, it can illuminate; yes, it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box.'

Michael Tracey's report has been produced by the Campaign for Quality Television, 8 College Terrace, London E3 5AN

US Media Ownership



BARRY DILLER is a big hitter in the US media. He has run US networks, Hollywood studios and set up the Fox Network, the US broadcasting arm of Rupert Murdoch's global media group.

All the more unusual that he chose a National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) conference in Las Vegas to launch a devastating attack on the liberalisation of media ownership rules and lack of regulation in the US media. NAB has been fiercely lobbying the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), chaired by Michael Powell, son of Colin Powell. He is determined to change media ownership rules, and this stance has won praise from big media groups.

'There are real dangers in complete concentration. The conventional wisdom is wrong—we need more regulation, not less,' Barry Diller argued. 'Conglomerates buy eyeballs. That's it. They leverage their producing power to drive content, their distribution power to drive new services, and their promotional power to literally obliterate competitors.'

There was no possibility of anyone launching a new network today and independent producers were going out of business in droves. With the growing, unstoppable power of conglomerates, there had to be 'fierce focus and vigour for the appropriate safeguards'.

WORTH READING

A TASTER of what promises to be an important new book on the media is in the March issue of *Monthly Review*. Robert W. McChesney's and John Bellamy Foster's article, 'The Commercial Tidal Wave', analyses the ubiquitous impact of advertising on US media.

They argue, that we are rapidly moving to 'a whole new paradigm for media and commercialism...it is about the marriage of editorial/entertainment and commercialism to such an extent that they become indistinguishable'. The authors back up their analysis with a wealth of examples.

The article is adapted from their forthcoming book, *The Big Picture: Understanding the Media Through Political Economy*, to be published by Monthly Review Press in December.

WORTH WATCHING

War Spin, presented by John Kampfner in the BBC Correspondent slot on Sunday 18 May, was excellent.

It demonstrated how the dramatic rescue of Private Jessica Ryan from an Iraqi hospital was more about Hollywood than real life. John Kampfner said, 'Her rescue will go down as one of the most stunning pieces of news management yet conceived.'

REVIEWS

The Wages of Spin by Bernard Ingham, John Hardy Publishers £18.99

HAVING experienced at first hand Bernard Ingham's ability to take advantage of the sycophancy of Thatcherite newspapers, I was amused to read yet another dollop of his spurious indignation over Alastair Campbell's ruthless exploitation of political journalists eager to apply 'Blairite spin' in return for exclusive access and information.

Ingham lambastes the 'tameness' of the Fourth Estate in the face of 'the brutal methods employed by Campbell and his ilk to cow the craft of journalism'.

As I discovered when researching my first book, *Strikes and the Media*, Ingham demonstrated during the 1984-5 miners strike that he could be just as devious as Campbell in manipulating the lobby system in order to deliver a Prime Minister's political

objectives.

In the final months of the pit dispute, Ingham used a Downing Street briefing to torpedo last-minute negotiations between the NCB's industrial relations director Ned Smith and the NUM's general secretary, Peter Heathfield. His 'guidance' to political correspondents was that the talks were 'getting nowhere' as Margaret Thatcher intended to 'stand firm until half the miners were back at work'.

On leaving the meeting at 3.15pm, Heathfield was shocked to see a front-page headline in the *London Evening Standard* declaring that the talks had 'failed'. The two men been discussing a tentative twelve-point plan for a return to work which Heathfield believed could form the basis for a draft peace agreement.

Michael Eaton, the NCB's public spokesman, was so annoyed that Ingham had effectively scuppered this initiative that he asked me find out when the lobby was told that the talks had foundered. My inquiries revealed that most correspondents knew the line from Downing Street by 3pm, which was before the meeting had finished.

Subsequently, when I tackled Ingham about the timing and content of his briefing, he refused to comment and insisted he had 'no intention of breaking the silence' which he always maintained about the 'nature of his work'.

It was encounters like that which convinced me that the lobby system had to be opened up and on becoming a political correspondent in 1988 I began arguing the case for televised briefings.

What I found so disappointing in Ingham's latest book is that he sees no merit in any of the tentative steps which have been taken both to provide greater access and to make the lobby more accountable.

He dismisses Alastair Campbell's decision to open up Downing Street briefings to foreign journalists and specialist correspondents as nothing more than a 'gimmick' and he is just as withering about the use of the Downing Street website to publish a summary of the twice-daily guidance issued by the Prime Minister's official spokesmen.

My argument has always been that it is governments which control the flow of information from the state to the news media; therefore there is no reason why Downing Street should not follow the example of the White House and introduce televised briefings.

By proclaiming his reluctance to countenance changing the lobby system, Ingham reveals that he is just as much a control freak as Campbell.

NICHOLAS JONES

Informed Dissent a CD by Undercurrents and Peace News £6.50

IT ISN'T often that you can buy a CD which the makers actually invite and encourage you to copy, distribute, play and perform. This is one.

It is a joint effort between the antimilitarist magazine, *Peace News*, and the video-activist organisation, *undercurrents*. There is a really good mix of material: interviews and footage of Noam Chomsky, music videos, material on international anti-war actions, and a solid twenty-one minute video on *Globalisation and the Media*.

To order your copy online go to www.peacenews.info or send a cheque for £6.50 to Peace News, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DY.

Excerpt from PBS weekly newsmagazine NOW, Friday 25 April

Bill Moyers: THE CHAIR of the Federal Communications Commission, Michael Powell, and others, say, 'Look, we have 500-plus channels. We have the satellite. We have the wide open internet that they are gonna know so well.' I mean, these have radically changed the media landscape. Perhaps we have more diversity.

Barry Diller: No, we don't. Because what we have is an absolute fact that five companies control 90% of it all. It has been reconstituted. Instead of three channels controlled by a few people, there are now 500 controlled by a few people.

This doesn't relate to the internet, by the way...Soon though the internet will have broadband capacity. And that, by the way is a chance for another reconstitution. What I'm worried about is that unless you think about this now, broadband may be controlled by the cable business.

CPBF NEWS

FOX HUNT

THE Independent Television Commission is investigating viewers' complaints about alleged bias by the Murdoch-owned Fox news channel which, in Britain, it is responsible for licensing. The news first came to light in an article by Matt Wells, the Guardian's media correspondent, on 8 May. The complaints were also supported by an editorial the same day which pointed out that the 'due impartiality' rules 'ensure the news is balanced and independent—otherwise a broadcaster can be taken off the air'. This is precisely what the ITC did to the Kurdish broadcaster Med TV in 1999 when it found the channel guilty of repeated breaches of the impartiality rules. The editorial also warned that Murdoch was attempting to remake Sky News in Fox's image.

Fox News Channel is available in Britain to all Sky subscribers. It could easily avoid the ITC impartiality rules by applying for a licence in another EU country. Indeed, like al-Jazeera it

could probably be licensed in France, but, there again, Murdoch may draw the line at deals with the 'cheese-eating surrender monkeys'.

The complaints against Fox have been supported by Julian Petley, chair of the CPBF, who has called on the ITC to apply the impartiality rules as rigorously to the Murdoch-owned channel as it did to Med TV. 'This is the first time', he pointed out, 'that the ITC has come up against a major international media conglomerate, and it will be extremely interesting to see how it reacts. Given that the Communications Bill, unless it is amended, will deliver much of British broadcasting into the hands of such conglomerates, this is a highly significant foretaste of battles to come.'

This really does underline the fact that OFCOM must have both the resources and the resolution to take on the might of the corporate media when the principles of public service broadcasting are at stake'.

BOOK THE DATE NOW

CPBF AGM

Saturday 28 June

**NUJ, 308 Grays Inn Road,
London**

Registration from 9.30am

Meeting starts 10.00-12.30

This year's AGM is more important than usual. It is the occasion when we have to clarify where the CPBF's priorities (and limited resources) are to be focused after our work on the Communications Bill. We will be publishing discussion documents and want to ensure the widest possible participation by our members in this important debate. Please give it your priority and come along. Further details, including registration fees, from CPBF National Office.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

JOIN

**THE CAMPAIGN
FOR PRESS AND
BROADCASTING
FREEDOM**

CPBF web site: www.cpbf.org.uk

Email address: freepress@cpbf.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM

- | | |
|--|-----|
| a) Individual membership | £15 |
| b) Unwaged | £6 |
| d) Supporting membership
(includes free CPBF publications) | £25 |
| e) Institutions (eg libraries:
includes ten copies of Free Press) | £25 |

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- | | |
|---------------------------|------|
| f) Fewer than 500 members | £25 |
| g) 500 to 1,000 | £30 |
| h) 1,000 to 10,000 | £50 |
| i) 10,000 to 50,000 | £115 |
| j) 50,000 to 100,000 | £225 |
| k) Over 100,000 | £450 |

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £

Name

Address

.....

Postcode..... Tel

Organisation (if applicable)

Return form to CPBF, 2nd floor, Vi & Garner Smith House, 23 Orford Road,
Walthamstow, London E17 9NL
Tel: 020 8521 5932