

Storms ahead for the BBC

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

THE JOURNEY to the renewal of the BBC Charter in 2006 will be a dangerous one.

Commercial and political interests hostile to the existence of the organisation

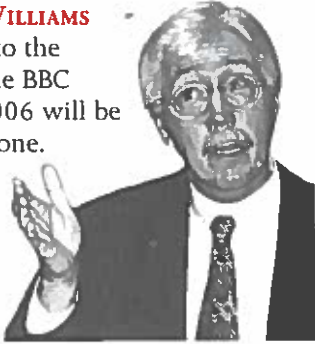
will be harassing it as the review process gains momentum. So we need to start now identifying the enemies of the BBC, what their interests are in attacking it, and developing the strategies to defend the organisation.

The Hutton inquiry has exposed the nature of the editorial process and the pressures on journalists at the BBC. Today's defence correspondent, Andrew Gilligan, was in the words of Ricard Sambrook, the Director of News, 'a particular sort of journalist' who uncovered 'stories that cause the government discomfort.' Gavyn Davies said Gilligan's style was to report in 'primary colours or bold colours rather than shades of grey.'

But often in the flax generated by press coverage hostile to the BBC the truth gets lost. Amidst calls to sack Gilligan and flay the irresponsible managers and governors at the BBC, let us remember that the essence of his report was true. It was Alistair Campbell's relentless call for a '100 percent apology' which escalated the scale of the crisis.

We now know that Campbell sent 15 amendments to John Scarlett, chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee, many of which suggested strengthening the language of the dossier, including the disputed claim that Saddam's chemical and biological weapons being ready for use in 45 minutes.

One political consequence is that after the Hutton Inquiry report we can expect an onslaught on the BBC, directed by Blair and the No 10 political machine.



The problem is that this comes as Tessa Jowell announces the timetable for the Charter Review. Her speech reassures: 'There is no subtext of threat, no code to be decoded, just a determination to get an important process underway. A process that will be open, fair and transparent.'

Claims about consultation and an 'open, fair and transparent process' were made about legislation leading to the Communications Act, but No 10 called the shots on the key clauses about US media ownership of ITV and clearing a possible Murdoch takeover of Channel 5.

The other source of hostility to the BBC comes from commercial broadcasters who want 'a level playing field'. The BBC Online services, digital channels and radio and television channels have all been attacked because, they argue, licence fee funding provides an unfair subsidy. Viacom president, Mel Karmazin, was explicit in a recent BBC *Newsnight* interview about the way BBC children's programmes competed with his own company's Nickelodeon.

However the total revenue from the BBC licence fee is tiny in comparison with Viacom's billions of dollars, and in the next four years Sky's income will double the BBC's. Some level playing field.

Finally of course there are substantial sections of the press leading a malevolent campaign against the BBC, from the *Telegraph's* *Beebwatch* to Murdoch's propaganda. Throw in the Tories, who have David Elstein (formerly of BSkyB) working for the shadow Culture Secretary, John Whittingdale, on a plan to halve the licence fee and leave the BBC with only a narrow public service broadcasting remit.

That is why the CPBF believes those who care about the future of the BBC and its vital social and cultural role as an impartial provider of a range of information and entertainment need to help the BBC win a Charter in 2006 which gives it a strong, well-financed and secure future. The alternative—broadcasting dominated by global media groups, courtesy the 2003 Communications Act—is unthinkable.

OFCOM Watch

WE ARE setting up OFCOM Watch. Maybe we should have thought of another title for the initiative, now that the *Daily Telegraph* has launched its ridiculous *Beebwatch*, to whip up hostility to the BBC. In contrast however, we think our initiative has a positive public function.

OFCOM is a monster creation, replacing five other regulators, including the Independent Television Commission (ITC), the Radio Authority and the Broadcasting Standards Commission. It already has 230 legal duties, but the real worry is what its priorities are.

One example. The ITC had a responsibility for regional ITV franchises, with offices and staff based in the ITV regions. This will now end. OFCOM will have a presence in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but the other regional offices will close. We understand ITC staff will work from home and can apply for voluntary redundancy as OFCOM takes over the ITC function. Of course, a single ITV might make the old ITC structure redundant, but what about the commitments to regional production? How will they be monitored and defended if OFCOM

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JUSTICE FOR JAMES MILLER

AWARD-WINNING filmmaker James Miller was shot dead by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) in Gaza, Palestine on 2 May. He was shot in the neck as he approached an IDF armoured personnel carrier, waving a white flag. He had been filming the demolition by armed bulldozers of a house in the Gaza Strip, and was working with a team of five on a documentary on the effects of the conflict in the lives of children. The NUJ, other journalists' organisations, British broadcasters led by Channel 4 and Jack Straw, the foreign secretary, have joined James Miller's family and supporters in calls for a wide-ranging investigation by civil rather than military authorities. This year's TU Congress passed a motion from the NUJ on the safety of media workers. A motion calling on Amnesty International to support the Justice for James Miller campaign was also passed at the recent annual general meeting of AIUK's trade union network.

A draft letter to Ariel Sharon, Israeli prime minister, can be found on the NUJ website. It can be downloaded at www.nuj.org.uk and you can find out more about the campaign at the website www.justice4jamesmiller.com

CONCERNS ABOUT ITV ASSET-STRIPPING

WHILE Carlton and Granada await the decision on whether they can merge, there are fears that US broadcasters are waiting to asset-strip ITV.

Writing in the *Business Observer* on 14 September Jessica Hodgson warns that the US media group Hallmark is sizing up the Channel's library and production business. Hallmark has confirmed its interest in specific parts of the business rather than buying the entire business. 'There are some library assets and production assets there that we are interested in,' a spokesperson told *The Observer*.

Meanwhile other US broadcasters are also lining up for a piece of the action. At the Royal Television Society convention in Cambridge, Haim Saban, the Israeli-American media mogul, said he would launch a bid for ITV if the Competition Commission clears the Carlton and Granada merger on favourable terms. Saban already owns Germany's second

GONGADZE MURDER—ACTION DEMANDED

THE NUJ, International Federation of Journalists and other media organisations have joined together to deplore the failure of the Ukrainian authorities to bring to justice those responsible for the murder of the journalist Georgy Gongadze three years ago, on 16 September 2000. His headless body was found on 2 November the same year. Gongadze was the editor of an online newspaper, which was strongly critical of the government of Ukraine and its president Leonid Kuchma.



Photo by Guy Smallman

Myroslava Gongadze widow of the murdered journalist Georgy Gongadze addressing a meeting held on 16 September, the third anniversary of her husband's disappearance. The meeting was called by the National Union of Journalists and chaired by Jeremy Dear, General Secretary (next to Myroslava). Denis MacShane Minister for Europe also addressed the meeting and pledged his support for the campaign to bring to justice those responsible for the journalist's murder.

largest commercial broadcaster, ProSiebenSat.1; acquired after the disposal of Leo Kirch's media assets after his company's financial failure.

Mel Karmazin, President of Viacom, one of the top five global media groups, also said at the convention that his company was interested in the ITV network.

Lord McNally, the Liberal Democratic Peer who strongly criticised proposals for foreign ownership of ITV when the Communications Bill was going through Parliament, says he plans to raise the matter with Lord McIntosh, the Broadcasting Minister.

THE DOTTY & BARMY WATCHDOG BARRY WHITE

'THE WHOLE report is dotty and barmy', said Andrew Mackinlay MP speaking during the Commons debate on the annual report of the Intelligence and Security Committee on 3 July. The report is supposed to examine national intelligence machinery and their agencies, expenditure, administration and policies. It reports to the prime minister, who has powers to exclude any part of the report on security grounds. This is shown by *** in the text. The report then goes to Parliament. The committee is chaired by Ann Taylor MP, who together with eight other members make up the committee. All but one of the committee members

are privy councillors.

Mackinlay's criticism are well founded. The section on GCHQ is surreal. Paragraph 28 reads: '*** continues to deliver considerable value to GCHQ... As a consequence, GCHQ expects to extend the expected life of *** and make the corresponding accounting changes. *** will start later this year. The committee wishes to record the significant contribution that *** makes to intelligence collection.'

However, the report sheds some light on the future of the Official Secrets Acts. Paragraph 92 states: 'The Committee has not yet taken formal evidence on the Official Secrets Acts and their usefulness. However, we believe that the legislation could benefit from a review, as it does not seem to produce a balanced regime. We will return to this subject in due course.'

When they do, perhaps they will be seeking the views of former MI5 officer turned whistleblower, David Shaylor, who would no doubt wish to elaborate on the phrase 'it (the security legislation) does not seem to produce a balanced regime'.

To find out more, you can visit the Committee's website at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/intelligence/

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH AND BEEBWATCH

CHARLES Moore, *The Daily Telegraph* editor, recently described the BBC as 'the greatest menace facing the country' and announced the launch of Beebwatch, which will relentlessly expose the 'soft left' bias of BBC journalism and drama.

So far the content of Beebwatch has been selective and reveals its own conservative bias: an accusation against a report by Hilary Anderson on racism in South Africa, pro-European reporting of the Swedish referendum, anti-Catholic bias on *Women's Hour*, and complaints about Clare Short reporting from Cancun.

Thank goodness some space is given for replies and Vicki Woods in her Notebook has this comment: 'Right-wing Americans call the BBC "state radio" and are baffled by it. They ask why in the Hell Blair doesn't just privatise it, if it annoys him so much? And that's what scares me. I come over all feint at the thought of Rupert Murdoch getting his horny hands on (say) Eddie Mair's far-too-clever, far-too-disrespectful Broadcasting House every Sunday morning.'

Beebwatch is an American concept imported into the UK. Relentless attacks by the conservative right in the States on the 'liberal media' has weakened America's Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and created a media environment where critical voices against America's imperial foreign policy are assaulted on the airwaves for being 'unpatri-

otic'. The really disturbing thought is that Beebwatch seems to be very much the creation of Lord Black, the paper's proprietor, who believes that America can do no wrong.

But you have to laugh. One Beebwatch had this: 'The BBC's lack of respect for the Catholic Church expresses itself in many ways: for example, in frequent references to the Pope's frailty.' What? The Pope is 83.

BENIGN DICTATORSHIP

BERLUSCONI's remarks about Mussolini's benign dictatorship were offered to Nicholas Farrell, author of a revisionist biography of Mussolini, which attempts to restore his sullied political reputation. Farrell argues that Mussolini must have had great strengths to hold power for twenty years.

It is odd though that, as an historian, he agrees with Berlusconi's comment that 'Mussolini did not murder anyone.' This is blatantly inaccurate, and Berlusconi has already apologised to Italian Jews for the remark. However it is also worth pointing out the brutal tactics used by the Italian military in Abyssinia. An Italian colonel, Giulio Douhet, in his 1921 book, *Il dominio dell'aria* (*The Command of the Air*) said the air force had to 'inflict upon the enemy attacks of a terrifying nature to which he can in no way react.'

The Italian air force used yperite bombs containing mustard gas, (named after Ypres in Flanders where it was first used), on 22 December

1935. The bombs detonated 250 yards off the ground and sprayed an area of about thirty football pitches. The Italians dropped forty-two over two days on the Ethiopian forces with devastating effects.

There is also the question of Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War. An excellent book, *Telegram From Guernica* by Nicholas Rankin (Faber) on the life of the journalist, George Steer, who reported on the Abyssinian war and established the true facts about Guernica, is highly recommended. It is a powerful corrective to any suggestion that Mussolini's rule was remotely benign.

NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

It is still the top global media group, but the imminent move into its new corporate headquarters overlooking Central Park in New York has led to a name change. The merger (well it was a takeover, really) of the 'old media' group, Time Warner, in 2000 with the glamorous 'new media' AOL has finally come full circle.

It will go down as one of the great corporate disasters, costing between \$50 billion and \$80 billion dollars, and now AOL is to be dropped from the company title. Time Warner is now the name of the company. AOL is a division within it.

For anyone who wants to revisit the events, take a look at *Stealing Time* by Alec Klein. As a reporter on *The Washington Post* he first broke the stories about the fraudulent advertising bookings which AOL indulged in to keep its share price high as it took over Time Warner.

Of course AOL should never have been allowed to merge with Time Warner. In an era of mega mergers it may seem quaint to insist on a basic principle that those who control access to the net should not also control content. As John Naughton has pointed out, 'AOL is still a gigantic ISP, providing a pipe to the internet for millions of people. If left to its own devices, it will try to ensure that the digital pap produced by its corporate owners slides more easily down that pipe than any other stuff coming off the net.'

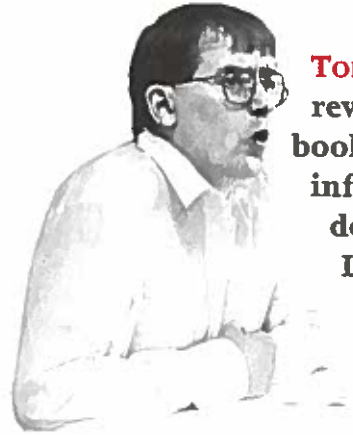
BOOK OFFERS

WE reviewed *Weapons of Mass Deception* by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber in FP 135. You can order the book for the special price of £5.99 (RRP £6.99) including p&p from The Book Service 01206 255 800 and quote CPBF

Forthcoming book

Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media distortion in the Attack on Iraq, edited by David Miller, is to be published by Pluto Press in November. A number of CPBF supporters have contributed chapters to the book, including Pat Holland, Tim Gopsill, Julian Petley, Steve Dorril and Granville Williams. You can order copies of the book at a discount price of £11.00 (a saving of £1.99) from www.plutobooks.com Quote ref PLTELL103

Labour & television policy



TOM O'MALLEY reviews a new book analysing the influences and debates shaping Labour's broadcasting policies.

DES FREEDMAN's important book * tells the story of the key debates over TV policy in the Labour party from 1951-2001.

It provides a fascinating account of issues that have dominated CPBF thinking in the last decade. It is both a scholarly and a committed book. Its aim is 'to refute the notion that nothing can ever change and to encourage readers to help build different models'.

Des identifies two important points. Firstly, it is the Tories, not Labour that have been directly associated with the introduction of the major changes in TV since 1951—from ITV, through BBC2, Channel 4, or the framework governing cable, satellite and digital. He develops an explanation for this. Secondly, he demonstrates that television policy has been the subject of ongoing, acrimonious and creative debate in the party since the 1950s.

CONTRADICTIONS

The underlying feature governing Labour's relation to TV policy has been contradiction. Labour, in opposition after 1951, formally opposed the introduction of ITV, whilst many key party supporters positioned themselves to bid for TV franchises. Sidney Bernstein, who went on to control Granada, was one of these.

While in the 1950s and early 60s criticism of the low standards and profiteering of the ITV abounded in Labour, the leadership, under Hugh Gaitskell supported ITV. They saw ITV as part of a more consumer led future that Labour needed to embrace.

When in 1962 the Conservative appointed Pilkington Commission advocated a 'root and branch' restructuring of ITV's advertising, the left wing Tribune dubbed the ideas 'brilliant', but the leadership were less enthusiastic.

As Richard Hoggart, a key member of Pilkington, recalls: 'Hugh Gaitskell said immedi-

ately after the Report appeared that we were unduly anti-commercial TV' Hoggart responded on TV by calling this 'a mistaken and patronising view'. A couple of days later Hoggart was taken to lunch by Richard Crossman. Crossman 'came into our lunch at his house in Smith Square... he was fresh from a Shadow Cabinet. He said "Gaitskell asked me to kick your arse"'.
Des's point is that television policy in Labour has always been driven from the leadership's perspective by its wider views on the direction of UK society. Thus Gaitskell rejected criticisms of ITV in the interests of the modernisation of the party. A similar general vision of 'New Labour' and its support for competition and profit making has driven Labour's TV policy under Tony Blair.

WILSON AND TV POLICY
The contradiction emerges from the fact that Labour activists, affiliated media union and Labour MPs have held different perspectives on society and on TV policy. Harold Wilson played a key role in Labour TV policy during his premierships (1964-70, 74-76) at a time when major demands for reform were emerging from without and within the party.

He both supported the BBC in the face of Tony Benn's desire to introduce advertising but helped feed contemporary critiques of the BBC by high profile confrontations. He famously snubbed the BBC by imposing Charles Hill as Chairman in 1967. Hill was a former Conservative minister and at the time was Chair of the Independent Television Authority.

Wilson was prepared to let criticisms of the BBC flourish but deep down was a supporter of public service broadcasting because it chimed with his corporatist view of politics. In spite of the growing calls for reform (more accountability of the BBC governors, less profiteering by ITV) Wilson was constrained by his pragmatism and so reform was always low down his list of priorities. Labour in the 1960s therefore did not innovate in relation to the main structures of TV.

From this position Wilson parried and utilised demands for reform from trade unions, activists in the party, academics and producers. Parried, in that he used the announcement of the Annan inquiry into the future of broadcasting (1974-77) to quieten, divert, and ultimately sideline the radical voices. Utilised, in that he seems to have used Annan to send warning signals to the broadcasters to tread carefully with

him and his government.

THE HIGHPOINT OF RADICAL POLICY

During the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a flurry of left wing inspired demands for reform. This was exemplified by the emergence of bodies like the 76 Group, the Free Communications Group and the Standing Conference on Broadcasting. According to the Free Communications Group 'newspaper, television and radio should be under the control of all people who produce them'.

This activism fed off the wider social and industrial upheavals of the period. Perhaps the most lasting institutional outcome of this was the establishment of Channel 4 in 1982 with a remit to be different to ITV and BBC, and of S4C. Overall though, Freedman shows how the Labour leadership, and official Labour policy, only ever loosely represented the range and quality of demands being made within the party for reform.

ACCOMMODATION WITH THATCHERISM

During the 1980s Labour was on the defensive. Successive electoral defeats promoted a shift away, by the late 1980s, from an unequivocal opposition to the changes to broadcasting introduced by the Tories.

Just like Gaitskell, Neil Kinnock, worked to distance the party from its associations with organised Labour and socialist policies and laid the groundwork for developments under Tony Blair. While radical ideas (for more devolution, more diversity and accountability) continued to play a part in the motions going to TUC and Labour conference, and whilst some Labour TV spokespeople, in the 80s, listened to radical policy proposals, by the 1990s Labour was fully committed to the deregulatory, neo-liberal policies that underpinned its courting of Rupert Murdoch and the rest of the media industrial establishment.

The contemporary fruit of this is the marginalisation of policies for democratising TV in the party and the emergence of the market orientated Communications Act (2003). In retrospect the high point of conflict between the reformers and the leaders in Labour was the 1970s. Since then, just as the left has been marginalised in the party, so too has the force of the radical critique of TV.

Freedman has done a service to all interested in TV reform. He has discussed the complex range of factors—economics, ideas, party divisions, trade unions, and corporate forces—that have intervened

to frame Labour policy on TV.

Yet his account sits uneasily with his desire 'to refute the notion that nothing can ever change'. His underlying explanation of why the efforts of two generations of reformers have come to nothing much is that the 'many demands for television reform expressed inside the Labour Party have fallen victim to the contradictions of a party that seeks to contain and minimise movements for radical change. The party's poor record in democratising British television reflects its position as a political organisation that is more accountable and responsive to the system it aims to manage than to those constituents on whose behalf it claims to govern.'

He argues that in 2003 the gap between reformers and Labour leaders 'who see communications as, above all, serving the needs of business and government is growing ever wider'. This suggests that little has changed over the years, even that things have got worse.

IS IT WORTH BOTHERING ?

In a sense the book avoids a key issue. It implies that the efforts of reformers have, largely, been wasted because Labour has never been a proper socialist party. If, however, we are to await the demise of the Labour party and the emergence of a grass roots socialist movement, organised and ready to take on the mass ranks of the media corporations, then we will have to wait a long time before we get our hands dirty.

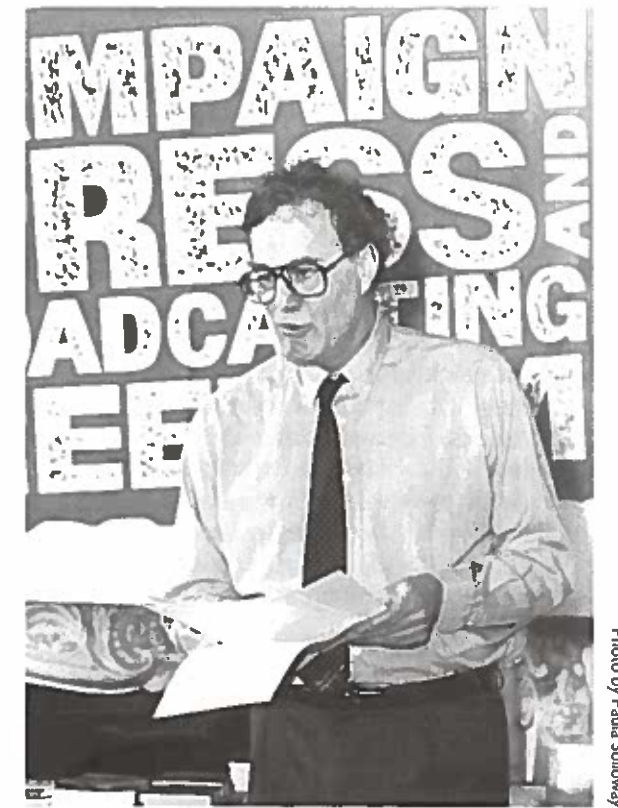
We will be conceding not just the argument to Blair and Murdoch, but also the possibility of engaging with and fighting over the day-to-day struggles around the media.

The book correctly positions the overall direction of the Labour leadership on issues to do with TV, but it does not provide a workable alternative to dealing with media politics in the here and now with some degree of coherence and organisation. Arguably to have done so would have been to produce a very different book, not an historical survey. But still the book ends pessimistically.

We may not have all the answers to the problems we and others in our tradition have faced in the last five decades. But turning our backs on the party which still attracts the support of the overwhelming majority of organised working people in the UK is not a solution. We, in the Campaign, the trade unions and elsewhere have to deal with the problems the Labour Party poses, unsatisfying as that experience will always be.

This said, nobody who is serious about understanding the struggles for a better media in this country should miss reading and reflecting on this fine book.

*D.Freedman, *Television Policies of the Labour Party 1951-2001* (London, Frank Cass, 2003, £18.50)



Robin Corbett, Labour shadow broadcasting minister, speaking at a CPBF event at Wortley Hall in 1993. Links between Labour and the CPBF were close until the shift in Labour's media policy in the mid-90s

PUBLIC MEETING Labour's Television Policies

Tuesday 21 October 7pm

Speakers include
Tony Benn & Tony Lennon
President BECTU

Old Red Lion Pub,
48 Parliament Street,
London SW1
(Westminster Tube)

Spin in retreat?

NICHOLAS JONES

WHEN I gave evidence last May to the Phillis review into the future of government communications and argued publicly for curbs on the unprecedented powers of Alastair Campbell and Labour's network of ministerial spin doctors, I imagined the review group would either hold back from making far-reaching recommendations or that Tony Blair would find ways to side-step their report.

Instead, in the wake of the Hutton Inquiry and Campbell's swift departure from Downing Street, Bob Phillis and his committee have succeeded in throwing a life line to a Prime Minister whose personal ratings for credibility and trust have been in free fall for months.

My central argument at the time was that Blair had encouraged a culture of spin by giving political appointees direct, day-to-day control over the flow of information from the state to the public. Campbell & Co had, in effect, been allowed to politicise the work being done by a thousand civil service information officers.

Therefore Blair has to be congratulated on his immediate acceptance of the review group's interim recommendation that in future a senior civil servant in the Cabinet Office should 'focus on a strategic approach to communications across the government'.

Perhaps more to the point, David Hill, the new Downing Street director of communications, will have nothing like the authority exercised by Campbell and instead will concentrate on promoting Blair in a political context, leaving the new permanent secretary to take the lead in directing the government's publicity operation.

While the structure that has emerged bodes well for the future, there is no guarantee that it will deliver a mechanism which will put a stop to the aggressive, manipulative techniques which have so marred the

government's relationship with the news media.

One of the ideas which the Prime Minister wants the Phillis review group to examine is a requirement that in future all Downing Street briefings should be held on camera. As a long-term advocate of televising the twice-daily proceedings of the lobby, I think that would represent only a starting point in creating a new era of openness.

Unless the Prime Minister ensures there is free and fair access for all news outlets—a cornerstone for a free press—many journalists will remain aggrieved and the issue of spin will continue to dog his administration.

Campbell became an all-powerful information trader, able to hand out exclusive stories, interviews and access to whichever media outlets were currently in favour. He saw himself as the editor-in-chief of an alternative news service, obsessed by a desire to influence next day's headlines and to prevent newspapers, television and radio setting their own agenda.

In the coming months Blair's revamp of the communications service will face its moment of truth. Will the government have the courage to require ministerial spin doctors to speak on the record and ensure that journalists do have simultaneous access to announcements and other news releases?

Blair could do no better than take a leaf out of the Hutton Inquiry, which has set a new benchmark for the release of official information. Over recent weeks hundreds of documents have been published on its website providing instant access not just for all journalists but also the public.

If Blair is to honour his repeated undertaking to turn his back on spin, he will have to ensure there is a quantum leap towards establishing equality for the media. Without that commitment, 'spin' will remain as deadly as 'sleaze' was to John Major.

The Murdoch Dossier

COMPILED BY GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

Bruce Page's book on Murdoch* had mixed reviews, but it really is worth reading. Some of the negative comments are to do with the fact that the book doesn't deal enough with Murdoch's recent American deals; that Page doesn't come up with any new investigative revelations (he was a key journalist on the Insight team at the Sunday Times under Harold Evans); and that the book is densely written with voluminous notes.

There is some substance in all these criticisms, but the book is successful in its attempt to explain the impact of Murdoch's business methods and his company, News Corporation, on the democratic process. It is not a Murdoch biography, but rather an attempt to analyse the way the media mogul has done the deals which have enabled him to build a global media empire. The book is also revealing on what the consequences have been for the quality of journalism within the Murdoch empire.

One key theme is the way Murdoch has from the beginning presented himself as the bold challenger to media elites, state media monopolies, media regulation, and presented himself as an advocate of competition, choice and media freedom. Page convincingly demonstrates that in Australia, the UK and the USA, Murdoch's expansion was, and is, due to political and regulatory help from politicians keen to secure political support from Murdoch's newspapers and broadcast media. There is a powerful section on Murdoch's accommodation with the Chinese government which also demonstrates the shallowness of his libertarian credentials.

'Power is abused when the apparent rules of society become a cover for other arrangements, or when things every insider knows to be true can be coolly denied in public,' Page argues. One of the book's great strengths is the way it dissects events from across the globe in support of this statement, but one close to home is worth citing. Remember the Gavyn Davies report into the development of digital television, which reached conclusions

deeply disturbing to Rupert Murdoch? Why, Page asked a senior mandarin in Whitehall, were the recommendations ignored. His response was that the requirements of 10 Downing Street were perfectly clear—nothing was to be done to upset Rupert Murdoch.

Page distances himself from Stanley Baldwin's charge against the 1930s press lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere that they exercised 'power without responsibility' but believes that Murdoch has 'changed real political outcomes by covert and strictly irresponsible manipulation.'

Page has an impressive track record as a journalist and he reserves his most withering comments for the impact which Murdoch has had on the on the practice of journalism within his global group. He argues that for over 130 years media systems have played a role as disseminators of information and enlightenment, and exposing abuses of power. John Thadeus Delane, editor of *The Times*, asserted in 1851, that the press lives by disclosure. Page demonstrates that whilst Murdoch has made great play of the liberating power of the media and the citizen's right to know, in practice News Corporation has a dismal record. Indeed 'Murdoch's lack of practical interest in disclosure is neither accidental nor episodic. It is part of the NewsCorp business model...' The examples are legion: easing out reporters who look into Monsanto's impact on the environment, diluting the truth about Murdoch's friends in Beijing in *The Times*, taking BBC World off the Star TV link to China, or ensuring all the Murdoch press marched behind the Bush push for war with Iraq.

Page's analysis highlights what will be a central and important theme of politics in the 21st century: the link between media ownership and politics and the distorting impact abuse of this link can have both on the political process and the range and quality of information we receive. For that reason alone it deserves a wide readership.

* *The Murdoch Archipelago* Simon and Schuster £20.00



Murdoch exported his tabloid formula to America, but while it increased the New York Post's circulation, it lost advertisers. *Newsday* quoted a space buyer for the top store Bloomingdales saying to Murdoch, 'But Rupert, Rupert, your readers are my shoplifters.'

The Age of Murdoch

JAMES FALLOWS has a long essay in the September issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* which presents an analysis and estimate of Murdoch's impact on US media. 'Murdoch's companies now constitute a production system unmatched in its integration,' he writes. 'They supply content—Fox movies (*Titanic*, *The Full Monty*, *There's Something About Mary*), Fox TV shows (*The Simpsons*, *Ally McBeal*, *When Animals Attack*), Fox-controlled sports broadcasts, plus newspapers and books. They sell the content to the public and advertisers—in newspapers, on the broadcast network, on the cable channels.'

The DirecTV will make Murdoch the biggest owner of the US satellite system and it will ensure wide distribution of his movies and his news, sports, and original TV programming.

In preparing the essay Fallows interviewed people who have worked or still worked closely with or have competed against him. All the associates and employees I reached, and most of the business rivals, refused even to meet for a discussion unless I agreed not to use their names. The Fox news organisation is under blanket orders not to talk to the press unless pre-cleared. I did not manage to get anyone at Fox to admit the incongruity of a news organisation taking this

stance.' The essay is on www.theatlantic.com/issues/2003/09/fallows.htm

Fox vs. Franken

A BOOK by Al Franken, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: a Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*, became the best-selling non-fiction book in America as a result of News Corporation's attempt to suppress it. The cover of the book shows Al Franken dressed in a conservative blue suit, standing in front of a quartet of television monitors showing the heads of Fox TV talk show star, Bill O'Reilly, another right wing media commentator, Ann Coulter, George Bush and Dick Cheney.

It appears Bill O'Reilly insisted that News Corporation sue the publishers for trademark infringement of the phrase 'fair and balanced' and prevent distribution of the book. An excerpt from the Fox News lawsuit gives a flavour of their flimsy case:

'Defendants' intent in using the trademark in this unauthorised fashion is clear - they seek to exploit Fox News' trademark, confuse the public as to the origin of the book, and accordingly, boost sales of the book...

Moreover, since Franken's reputation as a political commentator is not of the same calibre as the stellar reputations of FNC's on-air talent, any association between Franken and Fox News is likely to blur or tarnish Fox News' distinctive mark...

Franken has skilfully turned the lawsuit to comic effect: 'When I read "intoxicated and deranged" and "shrill and unstable" in their complaint I thought for a moment I was a Fox commentator.'

The lawsuit was dismissed as 'wholly without merit'—a slogan Franken suggests Fox should now substitute for 'Fair and Balanced'.

The book is published by Penguin under its E.P. Dutton imprint. Lisa Johnson, Dutton's Director of Publicity, said 'It is extraordinary that one of the largest media corporations would take such action. In trying to suppress Al Franken's book, News Corp. is undermining First Amendment principles that protect all media by guaranteeing a free, open and vigorous debate on public issues.'

CPBF NEWS

11 September—two years on

OVER 120 people attended a meeting in London on 11 September, to discuss the role of the law and the media in the so called war on terrorism. Called by the Campaign against Criminalising Communities and supported by the CPBF, the meeting heard from Martin Bright, Home Affairs Editor of the *The Observer*, how the state used reports by journalists to justify use of the anti-terror laws against individuals and communities, whilst Mike Marqusee a freelance journalist recently returned from the United States gave his impressions on the role of the media in the US.

Solicitor Gareth Peirce gave a moving account of how the anti-terrorist legislation was used not just against those involved in terrorist activity, but against groups and individuals considered by the authorities to be undesirable or a nuisance.

The following day demonstrators at the London arms fair were given permission for a full high court hearing into the legality of the police's use of anti-terrorist legislation to stop, search and arrest protesters. At least one journalist was stopped filming and challenged under the legislation.

Both David Blunkett, Home Secretary, and Ken Livingstone, London's Mayor, have asked Scotland Yard to explain why public order legislation was not used instead. The case was brought by Liberty on behalf of a demonstrator who was stopped by police under the Terrorism Act 2000.

Liberty has recently published *Casualty of War—8 weeks of counter-terrorism in rural England*. It contains testimonies of three peaceful protesters at RAF Fairford and can be downloaded free from www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk

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moves to a centralised structure?

The OFCOM publication, *From Royal Assent to Vesting*, has a section 'OFCCOM for the Nations and Regions' which is very general in terms of information. There will be an 'OFCCOM for the English Regions' team and we need to monitor what it will do.

The first major piece of work OFCOM will initiate is a review of the whole of British public service broadcasting—the three commercial channels, ITV, C4 and Five, and the BBC. This will have very significant implications for the BBC Charter review because it will assess the public's valuation of the corporation's output against the cost of the licence fee. Again this will be a vital area for us to keep an eye on, and respond to

The success of OFCOM Watch depends on our readers and supporters sending in information. We will have a dedicated section on the CPBF website for material, as well as covering issues in *Free Press*. If you want to contribute information, comments or articles please send them to the CPBF office, or email them to freepress@cpbf.org.uk

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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