

EDITORIAL

Asset stripping ITV

CARLTON and Granada originally argued that a merger of the two companies would produce cost savings of £55m a year. Now the pressure is on from the shareholders to do better. In the jargon of business, they want 'merger synergies', but in clear English it means asset stripping, cutting jobs and reducing regional programming commitments.

There is speculation that Charles Allen, Granada's chairman and chief executive only averted a similar fate to Michael Green, Carlton's chairman, who was prevented by shareholders from taking up the same position in the merged company, by agreeing to aggressive cost-saving targets.

We are seeing the first signs of how these will be achieved. Granada will sell its historic Manchester headquarters for up to £15m and move into smaller premises nearby. The fear is that the move to new offices and studio facilities will also be used as an exercise to reduce staff numbers.

Granada's Meridian subsidiary is also reeling from the scale of jobs cuts—175 jobs, half the total headcount—as the company shifts its operations from Southampton to a new facility near Fareham.

Other areas targeted for possible disposal include Carlton's Nottingham studio. All of this will boost the figure for savings from the merger much higher to £100m, but at what cost to the range and quality of programming on ITV, and in particular regional programming commitments?

In our evidence to the Competition Commission, our

Continued on page 7



Who does he think he is?



TIM GOPSILL

A WEEK before George W Bush launched his 2004 election campaign in the UK, another dangerously powerful American, Rupert Murdoch, dropped in and was treated with almost equal reverence, notably by the BBC.

Murdoch was here to fix the top job in BSkyB, a company he does not even own, for his son James—a system of succession strikingly similar to those of the British monarchy and, at present, the American Presidency.

After the BSkyB meeting he granted an audience to the BBC, which was shown on *Newsnight*. Business correspondent Jeff Randall took the opportunity to demonstrate a quite breathtaking degree of corporate obsequiousness, lobbing Murdoch a succession of cues for his pronouncements on the various issues of the day. Murdoch sat back in his chair and looked condescending.

The interview made headlines for the hint that News International papers might drop their support for New Labour, and that certainly had a massive impact: within days the government reversed its line on the new EU constitution, from 'we're going to push it through no matter what' to 'we might veto the whole thing'.

But the language of the Murdoch interview was a story in itself. On the EU constitution, Murdoch said: 'I don't like the idea of any more abdication of our sovereignty in economic affairs or anything else.'

Whose is this 'our' sovereignty? (Murdoch is an Australian-born American, who switched nationality for business reasons; something he will not need to do again to buy a UK TV channel.) Did Jeff Randall ask? No, that would have been inappropriate. (This, remember, was *Newsnight*!)

Instead he went on to political leadership. Murdoch said: 'We will not quickly forget the courage of Tony Blair in the international sphere in the last several months...'

Randall: 'You talk about Prime Minister's courage in international affairs. I assume you're referring to Iraq?'

Murdoch: 'Yes'.

Randall: 'What about on domestic issues?...Have you been disappointed by what they've done on tax and regulation?'

Murdoch: 'I think you're always disappointed when you see taxes going up and you see business and people being more and more regulated in their lives...'

Randall: 'Do you feel that [EU regulation] is damaging to business?'

Murdoch: 'I think it could be damaging to business...'

There was harmony too on George Bush ('In Foreign Affairs, in most matters, in economic affairs, in getting taxes down, in moving to free up competition, getting business going, I think [he's] very good.').

The dialogue ended with Jeff Randall's ingratiating 'I am very grateful for your time.'

Press Regulation in Eire



Photo by Roman Quinlan

SEAMUS DOOLEY

THE National Union of Journalists and newspaper owners, represented by National Newspapers of Ireland, have joined forces to resist the establishment of a state appointed Press Council in Ireland and to establish an alternative independent model.

NNI and the NUJ have been campaigning for libel reform for many years. Justice minister Michael McDowell has promised libel reform but as a quid pro quo is seeking to establish state controlled press regulation. McDowell set up a Legal Advisory Group on Defamation and the all-lawyer group delivered a recommendation in line with his thinking on statutory control of the press.

The group recommends that the government appointed Press Council would draw up a Press Code of Conduct. The Code would address:

- standards of journalistic ethics and practice
- the accuracy of any facts or information relating to the honour or reputation of any person, or group of persons, living or dead
- unreasonable encroachment upon the privacy of any person, or group of persons, living or dead
- matters to do with taste and decency and sensitivity in dealing with vulnerable persons.

The Council would be appointed by the government. Therein lies the major problem.

It would be a problem at any time but among the ranks of the current government are a number of ministers who are hostile to the media. Most hostile of all is McDowell, the man who has (without proof) accused journalists of bribing policemen, and who was among the strongest defenders of the government decision to tear the heart out of the pioneering Freedom of Information Act.

The NUJ has long recognised the need for an Ombudsman and Press Council. The Ombudsman would be funded by but independent of the industry and would report to a Press Council.

That Press Council would be reflective of the interests of newspaper owners and journalists, through the NUJ, as well as the public interest and civil society.

Belatedly, the newspaper owners have come around to our way of thinking. A steering committee is being set up to draw up the code and to develop the mechanisms for appointing the Ombudsman and Press Council. The steering committee is the first step on what will be a long and difficult road.

Agreement on the code may be hard to reach, with the NUJ adamant that it must address the issues of chequebook journalism and must include protection against commercial interference. The UK-based newspapers, although not members of NNI, are likely to come on board despite fundamental differences in their approach to news.

Reaching agreement on the makeup of the council, including the thorny issue of selecting outside representatives, is likely to be especially difficult.

The grim alternative of a McDowell appointed council is likely to force co-operation between previously reluctant bedfellows as we plan for a consultative conference hosted by McDowell. Ironically it is being held on the O'Reilly Hall, named in honour of the family of Tony O'Reilly, the dominant player in the Irish newspaper industry!

GCHQ whistleblower charged

BARRY WHITE

BRITAIN'S draconian Official Secrets Act is being used yet again against a whistleblower who has revealed wrongdoing and illegality.

Katharine Gun a former translator at GCHQ in Cheltenham is due to appear at Bow Street magistrates court on 27 November (as we went to press). She has been charged under section 1 (1) of the act, which deals with the disclosure of 'any information' without authority. She was arrested in March 2003, but was only charged on 13 November, some eight months later. Her 'crime' was to reveal that the Americans had asked British intelligence to help in an illegal operation gathering information from countries whose votes were needed for a second UN resolution to authorise war in Iraq.

Her allegations were published in *The Observer*. Katharine Gun believes she acted in the public interest by making the disclosures: 'I have only ever followed by conscience' she said in an interview reported in *The Guardian*.

Her arrest was a year, almost to the day, after David Shayler was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for passing classified information and documents to the press. The legal precedents arising from David's case and the continuing lack of any public interest defence, means that Katharine is likely to get short shrift from the courts.

Campaigners for press freedom and civil liberties should be united in their support for the brave stand taken by Katharine Gun. Once again the spotlight falls on New Labour who, when in opposition called for a public interest defence in such cases. And the government also needs to come clean on whether the security services actually did help the United States spy on certain UN delegations.

STOP PRESS

At Bow Street magistrates' court on 27 November Katharine Gun entered a 'not guilty' plea. She was granted bail to appear again on Monday 19 January 2004.

STIFLING DISSENT

THE Observer (23/11/03) carried a report that Berlusconi's media group, Mediaset, is suing a comedian for spreading 'lies and extremely serious insinuations' about it. The first instalment of the show by Sabina Guzzanti, called *Raiot* (pronounced riot)—*Weapons of Mass Distraction*, went out on Sunday 16 November and included a graphic which showed Mediaset winning hands-down in the advertising war with the rest of the country's media.

The state broadcaster, RAI, will make the remaining five shows but they will not be broadcast for now because of the huge legal costs it could incur as a result of the legal threat. Guzzanti is determined to fight what she describes as 'a serious precedent for freedom of expression.'

Which leads neatly on to a highly recommended analysis in *The New Yorker* (10/11/03). Titled 'All He Surveys' Jane Kramer has written an excellent and well-informed analysis of Berlusconi which makes for chilling reading. She argues that, 'Berlusconi isn't simple the first mogul of the advertising and media age in Italy. He is the first to have grasped that whoever controlled its images of success could appropriate almost any amount of political power. Today, he monopolises a huge share of the country's sources of information, which is also to say, its sources of manipulation...his power over what other Italians see, read, buy, and above all, think, is overwhelming.'

Culture & Communications in Wales

29 & 30 March 2004
University of Wales, Aberystwyth

The Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies is holding a conference on the implication of the Communications Act 2003 for culture and communications in Wales.

For further information contact:
Tom O'Malley (tpo@aber.ac.uk)
Tel 01970 622 833

After describing the massive array of media assets that Berlusconi or his relatives or his proxies own she points out, 'Soon the list may be even longer, thanks to a draft law...that redefines the media to include a stockpot of new categories, from Web publications and publicity handouts to music and movies. If the law passes, Berlusconi's media holdings will fall well within a legal limit, and he will be able to purchase a couple of other newspapers that he apparently wants—*Corriere della Sera* being the most important and consequently the one he is said to covet.'

The impact on journalism is dire. Kramer quotes Tana de Zulueta, an opposition senator: 'Half the reporters work for Berlusconi, and the other half think they might have to' and documents the level of political interference in the state broadcaster RAI and the assignments of its journalists.

Finally we should remember that there is room in the Italian media for Berlusconi's close friends. At the end of July this year programming on nearly all the satellite hookups in Italy was switched automatically to Rupert Murdoch's Sky Italia, the Italian version of BSkyB.

GOODMAN'S MEMOIRS

'WHY bother with yet another kind of memoir about a trade that has its over-share of nostalgic inner reflection?' Geoffrey Goodman asks. Well there are plenty of good reasons to read *From Bevan to Blair: Fifty Years' Reporting from the Political Front Line* (Pluto)

One is to do with Goodman's role on the Royal Commission of the Press, which he was appointed to sit on by Harold Wilson in March 1974.

When the Royal Commission reported in the summer of 1977 he reminds us that the final document included a Minority Report, written by him and the late David Basnett. They thought the majority report 'failed effectively to address some of the main problems facing the press—especially the increasing commercial pressures already evident throughout the media; the concentration of ownership of the press, television and commercial radio; and the question of quality and standards of journalism so profoundly affected by

the circulation warfare that was daily becoming more pronounced.'

Goodman reveals that three other members of the Commission agreed with him and Basnett, but they were pressured by the Commission chair, the late Lord MacGregor, not to sign the Minority Report. Goodman is also a bit downbeat about the report's impact: 'It all went nowhere.' Well not quite—the Minority Report was one of the documents which influenced the establishment of the, then, Campaign for Press Freedom back in 1979.

POWELL'S RULES

ON 2 June 2003 the Federal Communications Commission chair, Michael Powell, announced the new FCC rules on media ownership, to come into effect on 4 September 2003. Before and after the new rules were announced hundreds of thousands of comments were sent to the FCC, almost all in opposition. It was the heaviest volume of opposition the FCC has ever experienced and it comprised what the *New York Times* called 'an unusual alliance of liberal and conservative organisations.' It included the National Rifle Association, the Parents Television Council, every major journalism association, and a variety of organisations, such as FAIR, who have focussed on media issues.

Powell's rule changes have now been frozen by a Federal Court and attacked in Congress. Their key proposals were:

- Media companies would be able to own television stations that reach 45% of the US population, up from 35%
- In large television markets with nine or more stations there would no longer be a ban on owning both newspapers and TV stations or TV stations and radio stations

Viacom, which own CBS, already breach the present rules with a reach of 39%, as does News Corporation's Fox with a reach of 38%. Both purposely violated the legal limit hoping Congress or the FCC would change the rule

As we went to press news broke of a deal between the White House and Senate Republican leaders which would set the cap at 39%. Go to www.mediareform.net for full details.

USA conference challenges corporate media

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS
on an inspiring and important conference
The Free Press Media Reform conference, held in Madison, Wisconsin from Friday 7 to Sunday 9 November, was a truly amazing experience. It was worth the hours spent travelling to witness the sheer power, energy and diversity of a movement which has mobilised to stop the relentless growth of corporate media power in the USA.

1,500 people attended the conference, mainly from the USA, some from Canada and South America. Apart from Billy Bragg (more later) I think I was the only Brit there. There were also 200 volunteers from the Madison area who acted as stewards to direct us around the university campus, located in a stunning setting near Lake Mendota. The Madison area has its own distinctive and vital political culture, and was often referred to by people as 'eighty-seven square miles of land surrounded by reality'.

As well as closed conference sessions there were some public meetings, and two of these capture the inspiring spirit of the weekend. One public event, planned for the Friday night with consumer advocate and third-party presidential candidate Ralph Nader, was cancelled due to delayed flight connections. The event was hurriedly rescheduled for 8.00am on Saturday morning. However, very few people at the conference knew about the change. Before starting his speech Nader asked the audience how many were local. The bulk of the several hundred people who packed into the hall for the meeting were. They had found out about the event either by word-of-mouth or as a result of an announcement in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, delivered to households from around 5.30am that morning.

And what a meeting! Nader was scathing about the impact of commercial media: 'We've got to have community-owned and audience-owned media that is not commercial if we are going to have a vibrant democracy,' he argued. 'Democracy that has to rely on commercial media and all the frivolity, sensationalism, advertising pressure and myopia, is not going to be able to extend the civic impulses, the civic demands of its people.'

He belittled the late evening news on the TV

networks as ninety percent entertainment and ads, satirised their obsession with weather statistics and graphics, and said the sound bite has become so short it is now a 'sound bark'. But he saw clear signs of a move towards a more diverse and inclusive media.

The audience had not come to hero worship, though. Nader got some tough questions, and an unequivocal piece of advice from one person who had supported Nader in the past but urged him not to stand again in 2004.

But the really marvellous and inspirational event took place in the Orpheum Theatre, with a range of politicians including Sen Russ Feingold; FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein who voted with the other Democratic Commissioner, Michael Copps against the FCC ownership changes; and the satirist Al Franken, whose recent book *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right* got under the skin of Fox News. The highpoint of the evening was when Studs Terkel, the prolific Chicago author, now 91, came on to introduce journalist Bill Moyers. I thought Moyers' address was outstanding, one of the best speeches I have ever heard, passionate and committed, but rooted in a solid analysis of the threats posed by corporate media to journalism and democracy.

And to end the evening, a performance by activist musicians travelling to 13 US cities on a *Tell The Truth* tour. Its members include Billy Bragg, the Night-watchman (a.k.a. Tom Morello), and blues singer Lester Chambers. FCC commissioner Jonathan Adelstein playing harmonica on the soul tune, 'People Get Ready', in a performance which brought the house down.

There were other high profile public events with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, independent Congressman Bernie Sanders and Amy Goodman, the host of the 'Democracy Now' radio programme which is carried on 170 radio stations. Surrounding these over the two days were fifty workshop sessions focusing on strategies for engaging the public in media reform. The emphasis of these ranged from the global to the national and local. The incredibly wide range of issues discussed were drawn together through workshops which discussed follow-up actions and initiatives for people to get involved in.

Many of the sessions and workshops have been recorded. You can get a sense of the range and richness of the debates by going to:

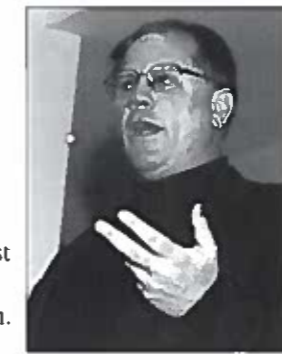
www.mediareform.net

Why did it happen & what happens next?

Two major events in the US were the catalyst for the conference's success. The first was the build-up to war on Iraq and the media coverage of war and military conflict following it. The performance of the corporate media stimulated media activism and coverage of dissent in independent and alternative media. All sorts of broad coalitions developed to mobilise support for marches and to get alternative messages across on billboards and through internet activist lists. MoveOn.org stands out, with an email list of 1.8m members who, according to a recent *Time* feature, have 'little more in common than anger and a tilt to the left.'

But the fight preceding and following the FCC's rule change of June 2 also sparked unprecedented public support from across the political spectrum. MoveOn.org played its role in pushing support for a petition against the rule changes.

The National Conference on Media Reform also owes its success to the work of two men: media academic and activist, Robert McChesney and John Nichols, a journalist with the *Madison The Capital Times* and *The Nation*. They were the founding members of Free Press, the national media



Robert McChesney, media academic and activist

Photo by Andrew Ward

reform group that organised the conference and played a key role in the two-day event. McChesney is clear that that the next crucial stage is to 'build coalitions with new allies in organisations that have a strong stake in media issues. We are driven by the words of Saul Alinsky: to defeat organised money, we need organised people.'

Danny Schechter of MediaChannel.org points out that the people attending the conference 'hail from one region of America's political landscape—occupied by progressives, Democrats and left-leaning independents.' He believes, rightly, that the challenge now is to reach out: 'Too often our laments echo through the movement without reaching the audience beyond.'

There are important lessons that the CPBF can learn from the US media reform movement. We need to refine and develop our own strategies and tactics in the campaign to defend public service broadcasting and promote our other policy concerns. On display at the conference were a range of creative ideas and rich experiences which we need to tap into.

OWNERSHIP
ENTERTAINMENT
GLOBAL MEDIA
THE RANGE OF
SUBSIDIES
NEWS AND
ALLIANCES
MOVING FROM
CRIBBAGE TO
ACTION
POLITICS & MEDIA
NONPROFIT
FRONT
DIGITAL FRONTIER
IS SHRINKING
WE
ARE
ARRANGED
WITH
ADVERTISING



the NATIONAL
CONFERENCE
on MEDIA REFORM

November 7-9, 2003 • Madison, WI

An extract from Bill Moyers' speech

'FREEDOM and freedom of communications were birth-twins in the future United States. They grew up together, and neither has fared very well in the other's absence. Boom times for the one have been boom times for the other.'

Yet today, despite plenty of lip service on every ritual occasion to freedom of the press, radio and TV, three powerful forces are undermining that very freedom, damming the streams of significant public interest news that irrigate and nourish the flowering of self-determination. The first of these is the centuries-old reluctance of governments—even elected governments—to operate in the sunshine of disclosure and criticism. The second is more subtle and more recent. It's the tendency of media giants, operating on big-business principles, to exalt commercial values at the expense of democratic value. That is, to run what Edward R. Murrow forty-five years ago called broadcasting's 'money-making machine' at full throttle. In so doing they are squeezing out the journalism that tries to get as close as possible to the verifiable truth; they are isolating serious coverage of public affairs into ever-dwindling 'news holes' or far from prime-time; and they are gobbling up small and independent publications competing for the attention of the American people...

Which brings me to the third powerful force—beyond governmental secrecy and megamedia conglomerates—that is shaping what Americans see, read and hear. I am talking now about the quasi-official partisan press ideologically linked to an authoritarian administration that in turn is the ally and agent of the most powerful interests in the world... Stretching from the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal* to the faux news of Rupert Murdoch's empire to the nattering nabobs of no-nothing radio to a legion of think tanks paid for and bought by conglomerates—the religious, partisan and corporate right have raised a mighty megaphone for sectarian, economic and political forces that aim to transform the egalitarian and democratic ideals embodied in our founding documents. Authoritarianism. With no strong opposition party to challenge such triumphalist hegemony, it is left to journalism to be democracy's best friend. That is why so many journalists joined with you in questioning Michael Powell's bid—blessed by the White House—to permit further concentration of media ownership. If free and independent journalism committed to telling the truth without fear or favour is suffocated, the oxygen goes out of democracy.'

You can read the full text of Bill Moyers' speech at: www.commondreams.org/views03/1112-10.htm

A Safe Pair of Hands?

JOHN BOGGAN

A GOVERNMENT weapons expert dies alone in a wood. He has cut his wrists to end his life, to escape the pain. In the preceding weeks he has made at least one big mistake. We are still learning about what transpired during those weeks in which his suffering became unbearable and one wonders if we will ever know the whole truth.

It is a fact that he decided, for reasons as yet unclear, to share his concerns about the behaviour of our government with a journalist.

I have no inside information about this case, nor am I concerned here with some of the apparent contradictory testimony of the witnesses. I am a trade unionist in the largest public service trade union in the country and I passionately believe in the principal of free speech and a free press. So my immediate concern is about what goes wrong with the process that exists to allow a public servant to freely and safely express genuinely held concerns about the behaviour of their employer.

In UNISON we are not strangers to the 'moral panic' and 'blame culture' which ensues following the death of a child in care. In the light of the above I have to ask myself some uncomfortable questions.

What if a social worker in a child protection team came to me with a concern that their employer had behaved in a way, which did not protect a child in care? Say for example they found out that the child was having contact with an inappropriate adult, had passed these concerns on and the Department had failed to act on them.

Would they even think of coming to me? Would they see UNISON as a safe pair of hands?

In my experience when a member in these circumstances makes a tentative approach they are scared. They need to feel that UNISON can highlight their concern without them becoming the subjects of a witch-hunt. Working for the local authority one becomes accustomed to the fact that if there is a problem there will most likely be a policy that deals with

it. Wirral's 'Whistle blowing' policy has therefore, until recently, been the policy of choice in this respect. One can whistle blow without fear of retribution because everybody knows that the whistle blowing policy is designed to protect the whistle blower. Don't they?

In Wirral's policy there is an impressive list of occasions when you would be expected to blow the whistle.

'It's your responsibility to whistle blow if you have genuine concerns about the mistreatment of people; financial malpractice; miscarriage of justice; abuse in care; dangers to health and safety; risks to the environment; and cover ups.'

The policy goes on to describe how to whistle blow and in a helpful question and answer format it provides re-assurance that it is the right thing to do. It even encourages the employee to seek 'independent advice from their trade union' However on the central question of confidentiality one will find the following:

'Every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness

Oops! Whatever happened to me as a safe pair of hands?

Wirral is not alone in this respect. I have examined the whistle blowing policies of neighbouring authorities: Liverpool, Sefton, Knowsley, Manchester, Cheshire and Clywd. On the subject of confidential whistle blowing they do not differ.

I believe that there has to be a role for UNISON to be a friend to public service workers who need to disclose their concerns but perhaps we need to find a better way than whistle blowing to do it.

Professor Keith Hawton, a 'suicide expert' who gave evidence to the inquiry, explained that Dr Kelly would have experienced 'a severe loss of self esteem resulting from his feeling that people had lost trust in him and from his dismay at being exposed to the media.'

If trade unionists can learn a lesson from the pain and suffering clearly caused to Dr Kelly, it is this. That the journalists' fight to protect their source and to place information in the public interest in the public domain is critical. Despite a protracted and public battle to 'protect his source' Andrew Gilligan failed. Against the tremendous pressure brought to bear by the employer, and in this case this means our government, he was not a safe pair of hands.

Above all when dealing with trade unionists in this position we should never, whether through ignorance or vanity, lead them to believe we can protect them when we can't. The human cost of a betrayal of trust can be too great.

JOHN BOGGAN REPRESENTS UNISON ON THE CPBF NATIONAL COUNCIL.

Victimised Whistleblowers:

A Trade Union Perspective

Published by London Hazards Centre

THIS pamphlet reveals the impact of rail privatisation on train drivers. After rail privatisation the Train Operating Companies introduced 'flexible' working hours for train drivers which cut their breaks and extended their working day to 11 hours.

This hard-hitting analysis of rail privatisation brings together the accounts of several of those who were victimised by their employers for campaigning against 'flexible' working hours. The pamphlet is available free online at:

www.workplacevictimisation.net

WITHOUT COMMENT

“Italy ranks 53rd in a world-wide index of media freedom, after Benin, Ghana and Bolivia... did you hear anything about this in the news? No. But then again, if you had we would not rank 53rd, ”

Italian satirist and comedian, Sabina Guzzanti, referring to the 2002 list drawn up by Reporters Sans Frontiers.

Press Gang: How Newspapers make Profits From Propaganda by Roy Greenslade
Macmillan £30.00

ROY Greenslade ends his important history of national newspapers since 1945 with an example of selective news reporting. An exclusive story revealed that Rupert Murdoch's companies paid virtually no tax. Between 1985 and 1995 News International recorded profits of almost £1 billion, yet only paid £11.74 million, some 1.2 per cent. The revelation was published in *The Independent* in February 1998 but Greenslade observes, 'No word appeared in the *Times*, the paper of record. The power of the propagandist in deciding what should, and should not, be published reminds us all how precious diversity of ownership remains.'

Press Gang appeared before the latest drama involving Conrad Black, who resigned as chief executive of his financially troubled Hollinger International, owner of the Telegraph group, following his admission that he had received millions of pounds of unauthorised payments. So what did his papers have to say about their former proprietor's misdemeanors? Both the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* imposed a self-denying ordinance. Robert Peston, City editor of the

Sunday Telegraph, wrote an apology for the absence of any analysis, citing conflicts of interest. This did not prevent both papers running glowing pieces praising Black's biography of Franklin Delano Roosevelt however.

The lurid story of our national newspaper industry has a rich supply of new material as the two Telegraph titles go up for sale, and one possible contender to purchase them is the porn publisher and newspaper proprietor, Richard Desmond.

Roy Greenslade has been both an observer and participant in this history, as an NUJ activist, journalist and editor in Fleet Street, most controversially, as editor of the *Daily Mirror* under Maxwell. It was on his watch that the paper conducted a smear campaign against Arthur Scargill, a low point in the paper's history, and for which Greenslade subsequently apologised.

The book benefits enormously from this insider experience and conveys clearly what it was like to work in the newspaper industry. But it also has two other strong points. Firstly, Greenslade goes back to the newspapers to check what they were writing about particular events and often revises received wisdom about their coverage of crises and controversies. One can quibble with his analysis

and conclusions in some cases, for example the chapter on the Profumo affair, but the overall approach is illuminating. Secondly, he seems to have read pretty much all the material—memoirs, biographies, histories and other items—relevant to his subject.

The end result—nearly 800 pages of text, notes and bibliography—is a solid and important contribution to our knowledge of the post war press. Let's hope a paperback version is out soon.

GW

Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media distortion in the Attack on Iraq ed by David Miller
Pluto £12.99

We want to draw your attention to this book, to be published as we go to press in December 2003. We hope it will get a wide readership because it contains a good selection of essays drawing on the work of journalists, critics and activists on both sides of the Atlantic. It also has material from members of the CPBF: Patricia Holland, Tim Gopsill, Julian Petley, Stephen Dorril and Granville Williams. We are planning a series of meetings and events to mark the book's publication in January/February 2004.

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work around the Communications Bill and in *Free Press* we warned about the inevitable consequences of a single ITV. Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt argued, 'A stronger ITV will be better able to invest in and provide programming of high quality, including regional programmes. Broadcasting as a whole will benefit.' In fact we have seen the squandering of broadcasting assets, based on the regional franchises, which both reflected their regions and contributed distinctive programming to the ITV network.

'Don't trouble me with your history,' Gerry Robinson said on his first visit to Granada's Manchester headquarters, when he took over as chief executive in 1992. It is precisely that history which we should remember now, as the asset stripping gathers pace.

OFCOM Watch

OFCOM does not emerge from the shadows until the end of December 2003, but it is already busy recruiting and developing policy. A recent advert in the Executive Focus section of *The Economist* (15/11/03) wanted staff to work in the area of Policy Opportunities and candidates must 'be sensitive to commercial and market issues and how they shape the regulatory environment'. Other posts are for Economic and Modelling Advisors. Of course, at this level it is too demeaning to talk about the salaries that go with these posts. It would be nice to know though.

One of OFCOM's first major projects is a review of public service broadcasting and this will play a significant role in setting the policy debate in the run-up to BBC Charter renewal. It will be a priority area of

CPBF work. Details of the way the review is to be conducted are on www.ofcom.org.uk

The other intriguing job which may end up on OFCOM's in-tray is the fate of Conrad Black's titles. Contenders include Richard Desmond, Lord Rothermere, and Gannett, the US publishing group and owner of the UK regional newspaper group, Newsquest. Any takeovers by these groups will be subject to a Competition Commission inquiry. If the deal happens after 29 December OFCOM would be asked to test the plurality or public interest of any new ownership.

The CPBF are planning a public launch of OFCOM Watch in the New Year. Meanwhile we appeal to our readers to let us have any information they come across on OFCOM.

Labour's TV policies BOOK LAUNCH

NICHOLAS JONES

Although there were plenty of well-deserved plaudits for the author, the launch party for Des Freedman's book, *Television Policies of the Labour Party 1951-2001*, did little to dispel a general sense of foreboding about the future prospects for broadcasting in Britain. Freedman seemed as perplexed as his guests when he posed the question: 'Why did it all go wrong?'

After having spent fifty years trying unsuccessfully to match the Conservatives' innovations in radio and television, a Labour government had ended up embarking on the greatest act of deregulation the industry had ever known and Freedman was convinced it was unlikely to lead to 'a happy ending'.

He thought Tony Blair's willingness to court media magnates was a case of

history repeating itself. Throughout the 1960s Harold Wilson had felt much happier and more comfortable dealing with the bosses of commercial TV and therefore it was no real surprise that Labour had ended up being closer even than the Tories to both ITV and the Murdoch empire.

Tony Benn opened the proceedings by acknowledging the thrust of Freedman's conclusion about Labour's lack of impact in the development of British broadcasting; the Conservatives had made 'all the major policy decisions' and not a single BBC charter had been looked at by a Labour government. 'We now face deregulation and global control and the great fear that all our commercial stations could end up being owned by the Americans'.

Tony Lennon, Bectu's president, congratulated Freedman for demon-

strating so clearly how little Labour had influenced the history of TV. After reading the book he had drawn up his own checklist of the key events and it made depressing reading: the Tories had established the BBC license and charter, started ITV, and launched BBC 2, commercial radio and Channel 5.

'As Des has shown there was no shortage of inspired thinkers in Labour...passionate people had far reaching and ambitious policies... time and again their gutsy ideas were dumped and always seemed to end up in the recycling centre at party conference'.

Lennon urged the labour and trade union movement to do all it could to hold the government to account by protecting genuine choice and the social values that had so distinguished British TV and radio. 'If the Labour government don't hold firm to the commitment they made to regional programming and production, they will drop the ball at the first time they were in the driving seat...and if they drop the ball on the renewal of the BBC charter, they will have missed a great opportunity'.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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