

## Abusive images

We have seen several sequences of photos revealing the treatment of Iraqi prisoners in Baghdad by US soldiers. On 28 April the US network CBS showed images on *Sixty Minutes II*, to be followed a few days later by Seymour Hersh's article in *The New Yorker* which published a different set of photos.

Over the following weeks the full story of the political and public relations disaster emerged. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld knew about the investigations into the alleged abuses on 16 January and briefed President Bush a couple of weeks later.

We now know that the soldiers at the centre of the abuse charges, members of the 320th Military Police Battalion, were swapping the images from computer to computer within the battalion. Rumsfeld in his testimony to Congress was 'surprised' that soldiers could be 'running

around with digital cameras' and e-mailing grotesque snapshots all over the world. It is clear that, after their earlier successes in news management and propaganda, they thought they could control the story.

Seymour Hersh quotes one Pentagon official who said that secrecy and wishful thinking were defining characteristics of Rumsfeld's Pentagon and this resulted in their failure to do anything about the scandal until the media exposed the abuse.

However in the UK we had our own scandal, it seemed. On 1 May the *Daily Mirror* published photographs which it claimed showed Iraqi prisoners being tortured by British troops. An investigation by the Royal Military Police said the pictures were not taken in Iraq and Adam Ingram, the Armed Forces minister, denounced them as fakes. On 14 May, partly as a result of shareholder pressure from US investors in *Trinity Mirror*, *Mirror*

editor Piers Morgan was sacked.

We should pause and think about the broader issues here, and not just gloat about the end of a less-than-perfect editor, as sections of the press have. It would have been useful to get some kind of independent inquiry into both the status of the pictures and the abuse allegations made against the Queen's Lancashire Regiment. Instead a very effective public relations campaign has linked the abuse allegations to the faked pictures, thus diminishing the force of the claims. It would also be a great pity if the faked photos at the *Mirror* leads to the paper shifting from its critical anti-war stance, especially if it is a result of US shareholder pressure.

There is also the dispiriting spectacle of government ministers declaring their ignorance about Amnesty and International Committee of the Red Cross reports on the actions of US and UK troops in Iraq.

Post-Gilligan, post-Piers Morgan we need more vigilant, critical independent reporting, not less. The danger is that these experiences produce the opposite.



Ofcom's honeymoon period is over. Even before its inception we criticised both the philosophy behind its creation and the huge straddling regulatory remit it has.

Back in August 2003, as the shadow Ofcom was set up, we were told that the running costs for the organisation would be £125m a year, 7% lower than the combined budgets of the five predecessors.

In April 2004 the figure had dramatically changed to £164m, a 27% increase in the cost of the five regulatory bodies it replaced.

Ofcom is certainly busy with its flood of consultations, reviews, guidance notes, codes and reports. It

has now published its plans for activities over the next period which show no slackening in pace.

But it is only now, with the publication of its review of public service broadcasting, that we see that some of the CPBF's predictions about the role and function of Ofcom are being confirmed. The essence of the Ofcom position is that the commercial broadcasting market can provide a wide range of programmes and that public service broadcasting is about bridging the shortfall.

This is an absurd position. To limit the BBC to providing programmes which commercial broadcasters find commercially unattractive is to assign it a marginal and ultimately irrelevant role. Ofcom also comes up with another dangerous proposal: why not let the commercial broadcasters have licence fee money to make public service programmes?

Broadcasters and producers could compete for 'contestable funds' from either the licence fee or some other source, to make programmes.

Ofcom's proposals also raise important questions about the future of the BBC's online activities, its foray into digital television, and News 24. The logic of the Ofcom analysis is that the BBC is excluded from such areas because commercial organisations can provide them.

Ofcom also has this peculiar hybrid view of us as 'citizen-consumers'. What does that mean?

All in all the Ofcom review is deeply worrying because it indicates that the economists and others who are developing policy care very little about the BBC and its role in our society. Which is one powerful argument for not allowing Ofcom to oversee the BBC's public service remit.

# Reporting the Miners' Strike



**NICHOLAS JONES** reveals his 'Gilligan moment'

IT DIDN'T take him long to get going; it was as if nothing had changed. Within a few minutes of opening his speech at the rally to mark the 20th anniversary of the start of the miners' strike, Arthur Scargill was back on familiar ground. He denounced the 'media pundits and nut cases' who had re-appeared to portray the dispute as a terrible defeat.

'It was the most principled struggle in British trade union history...Then we were subjected to trial by media, attacked for our integrity...Now, even after the strike, there's an attempt by the media to destroy our achievement.'

As I listened to this onslaught from the honorary President of the National Union of Mineworkers, the memories came flooding back of the dark days of the pit dispute. This was Scargill at the Jubilee Gardens rally in June 1984: 'I wanted to wave to all the union members here, had it not been for the fact that one of these vermin here might have taken a photograph of me waving my arm in the air and then written something underneath it. (Cheers) Throughout this dispute, day after day, television, radio and the press have consistently put over the views of the coal board and government even when they have been exposed as being guilty of duplicity and guilty of telling lies...this bunch of piranha fish will always go on supporting Mrs. Thatcher. (More cheers.)

When I look back on my own reporting of the strike for BBC Radio, I remember it as a roller coaster ride, switching from one momentous story to the next, often getting the lead in news bulletins and current affairs programmes, week after week. I maintain to this day that broadcasters like myself tried our hardest to be fair; we did all we possibly could to give the mineworkers and their union a decent shout. Nonetheless, twenty

years later, I recognise that the balance of the coverage tipped firmly in the management's favour once it became clear there was no longer any chance of a negotiated settlement.

For the final six months of the strike, television and radio reporters became, in effect, the cheerleaders for the return to work. What had happened was that Margaret Thatcher had succeeded in setting the agenda: the outcome was going to be determined by the National Coal Board's success in persuading miners to abandon the strike and return to their pits.

Lining up in support were the newspaper proprietors who realised that defeat for the NUM would pave the way for their own subsequent confrontation with the print unions. At the time Rupert Murdoch was already planning to switch production to Wapping; in fact News International's recruitment of alternative print workers began within months of the NUM's defeat.

Each weekend as the strike wore on, the newspapers were full of stories warning the miners they were fighting a lost cause; this was backed up new offers of increased redundancy money for those willing to return. The aim was to put pressure on the men's wives to persuade their husbands to give up the struggle.

From early on each Monday morning I was on duty at Broadcasting House, pulling together information from Coal Board officials around the country about the number of 'new faces' who had gone back at work. For the newspapers these men were the heroes. Television pictures showed them being bussed into their pits, braving the picket lines.

Sir Tim Bell, Ian MacGregor's chief media adviser, could hardly have put it better when interviewed on Channel Four's recent documentary, *Strike: When Britain Went to War*: 'We wanted the strikers to drag themselves back to work, their tails behind their legs. That was what it was all about at the end'

As defeat loomed, I felt increasingly uneasy, sensing that I was being manipulated. I was determined to

blow the whistle on the return to work propaganda. I suppose it was my Andrew Gilligan moment.

By January 1985 I had amassed the necessary evidence. Without it having been noticed, the NCB had been quietly massaging down the figures for the total number of men on the books. In this way it would be possible to hasten the day when the NCB could claim that half the men were back and Mrs Thatcher could declare victory.

My expose was broadcast on *Today* and attracted immediate complaints but the Thatcher regime did not need to resort to the blunderbuss techniques of Alastair Campbell. A week later I was told to report to the secretary of the BBC governors as there had been a number of letters criticising my story; my revelations were not regarded as having been 'helpful'

Realising what was afoot I went armed with every relevant edition of *Coal News* and was able to prove conclusively that the figures I had quoted were accurate.

Such was the antagonism between miners and journalists that my story was just ignored by the NUM. At the root of our troubled relationship was Scargill's repeated declaration that the media should be regarded as the enemy, nothing more than agents for Mrs Thatcher.

Reporters were simply not welcome in the pit villages. So great was the hostility that TV crews had little alternative but to seek protection behind police lines in order the film the 'new faces' as they want back to work.

There is one positive legacy from the pit dispute. Never again will a union fighting a strike seek to alienate the journalists assigned to the story.

Perhaps the most telling illustration of this media awareness was the most recent fire fighters' dispute. Almost every report for TV news bulletins ended with a piece to camera from outside a fire station.

The brazier would always be well alight; the flames would help light up the shot; standing around in a dignified way would be fire fighters carrying placards in support of their wage claim.

The FBU had learned a valuable lesson from the 1984-5 pit strike: let the pictures help tell the story.

## JUSTICE FOR VANUNU



Photo: Barry White

**Nick and Mary Eoloff, Mordechai's adopted US parents being interviewed outside the Ashkalon prison**

ON 21 April, Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli whistleblower who had the courage to tell the world about Israeli's nuclear weapons was released from his prison in Ashkalon, south of Tel Aviv. Sentenced to 18 years, he spent some 12 of them in solitary.

Vanunu's release was not welcomed by everyone. The Israeli authorities have placed him under severe restrictions. He has been refused a passport and the right to leave Israel.

Many in Israel regard him as a traitor—and on his release he was met

## THE LYING GAME

THE April 2004 issue of *Index on Censorship* has a themed section, 'The Lying Game' with a number of strong contributions and thought-provoking photographs. Caroline Moorehead's article, 'Necessary Lies', is particularly timely, with its focus on the falsehoods and misinformation of newspaper reports on immigration and asylum seekers. She concludes her piece, 'Lies, inaccuracies, untruths: this is the climate in which the current asylum world lives, in which policy is made not so much on evidence as in response to media and public perception...'

The issue also contains a piece by CPBF chair, Julian Petley, 'Fourth-Rate Estate' which questions the traditional

with death threats—'Who will be our Jack Ruby?' asked some sections of the media. Only the day before the release, the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* published a reader poll which asked its readers if Vanunu should be killed after his release from prison. The poll attracted some 4,500 votes and asked readers to vote on 'what should be done with Vanunu?' 33% voted that he should be killed, and 28% that he should be kept in prison. The majority (36%) voted that he should be allowed to leave the country.

The paper received hundreds of emails complaining that the poll was an incitement to murder and peace campaigners organised protests and contacted the Israeli attorney general. Within days the poll was pulled from the newspaper's web site and removed from the archive of daily polls.

Vanunu has been released, but is not a free man. Whilst safe for a while, his life is under constant threat. We need to put pressure on the British government to secure Mordechai's right to leave the country and travel without hindrance. Freedom of association is a basic human right, which he is being denied. It's the least we can do for him.

**BY BARRY WHITE (one of the seventy-odd members of the international delegation who travelled to Israel to welcome Mordechai on his release)**

watchdog role assigned to journalism, and one by David Miller, 'Caught in the Matrix'. Recommended.

## THUMBS DOWN FOR BERLUSCONI

THE European Parliament adopted a hard-hitting report on the press freedom crisis in Europe, but particularly in Italy. The report called for Europe-wide legislation to guarantee pluralism in the media and singled out Italy for particular criticism.

'The Italian system presents an anomaly owing to a unique combination of economic, political and media power in the hands of one man,' said the report, prepared by Johanna Boogerd-Quaak, a Dutch liberal. The

vote on the report in April was in spite of efforts by Forza Italia and others to prevent its adoption. They dismissed the report as biased and ill-informed, and refused to vote.

The European federation of Journalists (EFJ) however welcomed the report. Its chair, Arne König, said, 'It sends a powerful message to the new and enlarged European Union—governments and media corporations must respect editorial independence, limit media concentration and increase media pluralism.'

## CHARTER FOR THE MINORITY PRESS

KEN Livingstone launched Red Pepper's Charter for a Minority Press on 13 May. Red Pepper's editor, Hilary Wainwright, said 'We need a charter because the flow of knowledge cannot be entrusted to the market. In Britain Red Pepper, *Tribune*, *New Internationalist*, *The Ecologist* and all the rest of the alternative press have to compete with crisps and sandwiches for space on the shelves of WH Smith. But publishing is not just another industry—the free flow of information and ideas is a human right.'

The chain stores—WH Smith News, Menzies Distribution and Dawson News—have some 87% of the wholesale distribution market and WH Smith, the biggest player have just released their new 'range grade' system. To maximise profits magazines like *Prospect* are being squeezed off the shelves.

## WITHOUT COMMENT

“ I was never a great devotee of freedom of information but I have had a bit of a change of heart on this. The Hutton inquiry showed that if you veer towards openness and you find the world does not come to an end, it may be no bad thing. ”

**ALASTAIR CAMPBELL, giving evidence to the Public Affairs Select Committee, 11 May 2004**

# Public Service Broadcasting—options for the future



**JONATHAN HARDY**  
CPBF National Secretary

We are in the midst of an unprecedented series of consultations and reviews about the form public service broadcasting should take in the 21st Century.

Immediately after taking up its powers in December 2003, Ofcom initiated a review of PSB as stipulated in the Communications Act. Its recent report on the first phase of the review is examined below.

Also in December, Tessa Jowell announced a DCMS review of the BBC's Royal Charter, presenting this as the most far-reaching in the BBC's history. A white paper will follow later this year which will bring together the results of the DCMS consultation, Ofcom's review, as well as separate scrutiny of the BBC's news and online services.

## Ofcom's review of public service television

Ofcom's report *Is Television Special?* gives us the best indication yet of arguments that will crystallise in coming months. These occur in the context of an analysis of changes in the media landscape many will endorse. The main terrestrial channels share has fallen from 87 per cent in 1998 to 76 per cent in 2003, and in multichannel homes from

63 per cent to 57 per cent. There has been a marked loss of share amongst younger and non-white audiences. Competition and audience fragmentation make it more difficult to sustain mixed PSB channels and to retain audiences for many categories of serious and 'challenging' programmes.

However, Ofcom's account neglects to examine how 'light touch' regulation has itself contributed to the difficulties now faced. The next phase of its study will focus on how the market would develop on its own so that the precise costs and benefits of regulation can be factored in. An alternative study is needed, assessing how stronger regulation could help to sustain desirable qualities otherwise threatened.

Fears that Ofcom would favour the commercial sector it is charged to regulate with a 'lighter' touch appear amply justified. Sympathetic to ITV's desire to drop low-rating 'public service' arts and religious programmes, it calls on the BBC in particular and Channel Four to take up the slack. At the same time it advocates a reappraisal of the funding framework for PSB including assessing the case for reducing the licence fee and for spreading licence fee funds across other broadcasters.

Here Ofcom gives succour to arguments put forward by Barry Cox, Deputy Chair of Channel Four and others such as David Elstein, Chairman

of the Conservative appointed committee's report, *Beyond the Charter* (2004).

## Rationales for Public Service Broadcasting

Ofcom retains two key rationales for PSB: to correct market failure and to realise social value but its proposals establish, without resolving, a fundamental contradiction. PSB is justified by serving 'non-market' provision. However, it must also justify itself by its audience size and share; PSB should be on channels with high reach and impact. But to receive public funds 'it must be clear that the market would not deliver similar output, of the same quality, on the same scale'.

Further, every programme on the BBC should demonstrate a public service value. Ofcom admonishes the BBC, in particular, for derivative formats, aggressive scheduling and dumbing down. The justification for 'mixed programming', while acknowledged, is narrowed. Ofcom's definition of PSB is 'bridging the shortfall between what a well-functioning broadcasting market would provide and the wider ambitions of UK citizens'.

Ofcom's review is conducted under the terms of the Act which requires evaluation of PSB provision across broadcasting 'taken together'. The fear is that this will further polarise broadcasting, with the BBC required to provide clearly, but also more narrowly, defined public service output in

an expanded and largely unregulated market.

Instead of PSB being a system-wide set of standards, this shifts to a model in which PSB contributions are safeguarded principally by the BBC, while, in turn, justifying the relaxation of obligations on commercial broadcasters.

The bargain that sustained ITV under spectrum scarcity, namely monopoly advertising rents in exchange for PSB obligations, is considered unsustainable in a more competitive environment. For Ofcom's Chief Executive Stephen Carter only the BBC and, where feasible, Channel Four will have substantial PSB obligations. But this is predominantly the industry talking, not viewers and listeners.

The proposals would see public funds go to commercial broadcasters, but with their pressures to satisfy shareholders and without strong enforced obligations, the system would shift to one in which PSB programmes were produced only with public funding, generating a massive shift of 'subsidy' to private hands.

As the only broadcaster with significant obligations in an overwhelmingly commercial system, the BBC would be forced, under an intensification of current pressures, towards a cultural ghetto, a version of BBC Four, perhaps, that might serve elite interests but could make no tenable case for a significant licence fee.

Reformers assert that the government must act

principally to ensure that public service broadcasting remains at the heart of the media system. This requires intervention to ensure that public service values remain predominant, with obligations on all mass broadcasters. Historically PSB has been delivered through a mixed system of a well-funded BBC and regulated commercial sector. While this system is now under considerable competitive pressure, there is no evidence to suggest there is a better method for producing and delivering cost-effective public service programming of a high standard to all households in the UK.

We must continue to argue for PSB provisions to apply to all major providers of radio and TV. They should vary across channels but it is vital that the BBC does not become the sole provider of PSB and that both BBC and PSB provision is extended across digital services, the Internet and new media. More immediate, concrete goals include ensuring there is continuing competition between BBC and ITV across all news services; requiring broadcasters, especially ITV to increase investment in regional programming and production 'outside the M25'; and investment in original children's programming.

**This is an edited version of a longer article, *Safe in their hands? New Labour, new regulators and Public Service Broadcasting* which will appear in *Soundings***

## The danger of top-slicing



**TIM GOPSILL**

THE media industry certainly generates its share of jargon and the current debate over the uncertain future of public service broadcasting (PSB) has already thrown up a couple of new concepts.

One of them, 'top-slicing', would be the favoured outcome of Ofcom's current review of PSB for many commercial broadcasters. It's what they're lobbying for behind the scenes.

Don't believe scaremongers who tell you that the licence fee, the source of funding for the BBC, is going to be scrapped in the review that is leading to the renewal of the BBC's Charter by Parliament in 2006. That would be politically impossible, at least this time round, and in any case, those who want to deregulate the industry for the benefit of the commercial companies have

got a much better idea: to divert some of the cash in their own direction.

Top-slicing is the idea that a share of the licence fee should be paid to ITV to provide what it calls 'public service' programming—news and current affairs, culture, religion, arts and so on. The reasoning is in another jargon phrase, 'market failure'—which might be thought a strange one for such runaway free-marketers as ITV companies to be pushing around, but they are currently very taken with it.

'Market failure' means that the market cannot produce such programmes. In other words, there's no money to be made from them because advertisers believe that viewers don't particularly want to watch them. If, therefore, ITV is to be required to broadcast them, it will have to be paid to do so. And since the purpose of the licence fee is to pay for high-quality 'public service' TV and radio, that's where the money should come from. QED.

It seems very plausible, but, however much the argument might appeal to the regulators as well as

the regulated, it is ultimately self-defeating.

For one thing, these advocates of the free market are admitting, in affect, that it can only produce rubbish. OK, they are not philosophers, but it is not even true. For 50 years it the present dual set-up has produced a very high standard of programming.

It's true that ITV has been in a terrible mess but that's nothing to do with the burden of producing good TV. It's down to the greed, complacency and incompetence of its managers, who have taken the 'licence to print money'—1960s jargon—too literally and pocketed short-term profits at the expense of properly developing their output to meet the new environment. The BBC, unfettered by the market, has done it much better.

The real effect of top-slicing will be even more than to deprive the BBC of funding and feed the bloated fat cats of ITV. It will be to define 'public service broadcasting' as something exceptional from the mainstream run of broadcasting, which viewers don't want but regulators are foisting on them.

It's not really anything to do with viewers. The only people who matter to commercial TV are advertisers, and they want 'feel-good' programmes that make people rush out and buy.

But the point about PSB is that it covers all kinds of programming. No-one wants 24 hours a day of Panorama. It's about standards and quality, in comedy, entertainment, drama, soaps and everything else on our screens. Commercial broadcasters want to cut costs and lower standards, and shunting PSB into a publicly funded siding would be a dream come true.

## Top-slicing: The Irish experience

TOP-SLICING has not come out of the blue. It is being tried in the Republic of Ireland, where its roots in the early 1990s were not in a policy decision but the actions of a bent politician. The one-time Minister for Communications, Ray Burke, was found by an investigating tribunal to have taken a bung from Century Radio, a national commercial station, to rig the market in its favour.

The Irish public broadcaster, RTE, is dual-funded. There is a licence fee, but RTE also takes advertising. Ray Burke tried but failed to arrange for licence fee money to go to Century and instead put through legislation to cap RTE's advertising revenue. The legislation also compelled RTE to allocate a rising proportion of the licence fee to private production companies.

But the licence fee itself was held down for 10 years, putting RTE under severe pressure. Last year it was finally allowed a rise—with the stipulation that 5 per cent will be allocated to commercial broadcasters for specific programming. (This has not yet been implemented.) The categories do not include news and current affairs—nor religion. Rather they are cultural, covering the Irish language, heritage and art.

These messy arrangements are regarded by journalists in Ireland as a disaster because of the effects on RTE, which has effectively been starved of funding for political reasons. The exact circumstances may not pertain in the UK, but the warning should be heard.

# Campbell's alter ego

**NICHOLAS JONES**

SHARING a platform with Alastair Campbell's Australian alter ego was an un-nerving experience. His diagnosis and prescription bore striking similarities: because Australia's news media treated politics as a game, government information officers down under could no longer regard themselves as neutral or divorced from the political fray.

Modern communications had changed the face of public services around the world and this had created a problem for politicians and their media advisers in Canberra, just as it had in Westminster.

Grahame Morris, former chief of staff and spinmeister to the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, painted a bleak future for public sector information officers who ignored this reality.

Morris was as convinced as Tony Blair's former media supremo that the fault lay with political journalists who saw everything through a prism of 'who is winning and who is losing, who is playing the game badly or poorly.'

Reporters did not report any more because they had become commentators. As a result everything which a government did was being judged politically. Ministers were in effect on trial every day of the week; their actions were analysed each evening by the broadcasters and then judgement delivered next day by the newspapers.

'Information officers who think that somehow the public services can be divorced from public scrutiny and from political impact are out of touch...I don't think there can be neutral public servants...It means that if you are in public affairs, you are obliged to throw your heart behind the government of the day...You need to find ways to re-communicate the good news of recent years; to be telling ministers about the time bombs that are ticking away; and telling them the best phrases that will

capture the messages that they want to deliver.'

Morris left the Howard government in 2000 and became a partner in a leading Australian public relations consultancy which was re-launched as Jackson Wells Morris. Like Campbell, he was once a journalist and keeps his hand in as a commentator by writing for his former newspaper, *The Australian*. His weekly column has the catchy title *Beyond Spin*—a strap line that seems tailor-made for his soul mate in London.

Although I have never heard Campbell go as far as Morris in suggesting that civil service information officers might end up having to sacrifice their neutrality, he has spoken with equal vigour about need for Whitehall press officers to do far more to communicate the government's successes and then to keep reminding people where the delivery of public services has improved.

After hearing Morris explain why communications staff will have to do more to support the party in power, I wondered whether this indicated that Australia, like Britain, was edging towards a presidential style of government and would follow the practice in Washington where vast swathes of public appointments change hands whenever there is a switch between Republicans and Democrats.

Morris agreed that Australia had taken the first step towards having a more politicised information service but so far the Howard government

had just 'put a toe in the water and was still a million miles from going for a swim with the Yanks.'

When it came questions about what might happen if there was a change of administration in Canberra, Morris defended the right of an incoming government to bring in new blood.

'If a new minister comes in and doesn't think the support is there from the communications staff, if there isn't the trust, that's hopeless, especially when changing a few individuals can bring about a stronger relationship...If John Howard loses and the new Opposition leader, Mark Latham, wins, then a whole heap of people will go. That's life and will not change.'

The mass exodus of information directors in Whitehall after Tony Blair won the 1997 general election was unprecedented in British terms. I would guess there is more than likely to be a clear out of similar proportions once the Conservatives regain power.

The lesson of my trip to Canberra couldn't have been clearer: such are the pressures imposed by the news media, that we are fast approaching the day when the governments of Britain and Australia will insist on having information services that are far more partisan than anything we have seen up to now.

(Nicholas Jones gave the opening speech at the 14th annual Public Affairs in the Public Sector conference in Canberra).

## WITHOUT COMMENT

“...the cost to the taxpayer of the No 10 press office has doubled since Labour took office nearly seven years ago. The annual running costs have ballooned from £597,000 in the 1996 to 1997 period, when John Major was in power, to £1.3m last year. The PR bill reached a peak during the Iraq war and the row over the death of Dr David Kelly.”

PR Week 2 April 2004

# Privatising spin

**DAVID MILLER**

THE appointment of Howell James as the first ever Permanent Secretary for government information is a strong indication of the shape of things to come in government spin. His post is the most powerful civil service propaganda job since the Second World War. James is the former Director of Corporate Affairs for both TVAM and the BBC, overseeing the latter's commercialisation. Latterly, this 'close friend' of Peter Mandelson ran his own PR firm, briefly advising the Hinduja brothers in the donations for passports row which led to Mandelson's second resignation from the cabinet. In his role as partner of PR firm Brown Lloyd James, he also sat on the Phillis committee which recommended the creation of his new post. Phillis abolished the half century old Government Information and Communication Service in February, which had inhibited the progress of spin, leaving its incumbent director Mike Granatt, jobless. This was the culmination of the New Labour reforms of spin set in train by Mandelson and Campbell in May 1997.

The *Guardian* thought there was a 'whiff of cronyism' about the

appointment, but this is to see only the surface personal links in the tight knit New Labour milieu. In fact the problem goes much deeper. James' appointment is an indication of the profound changes set in train by Phillis which are most notably about opening the way for hundreds of millions of public money to be spent on private sector PR consultants. The future of government information is not the much-heralded end of spin. Instead, we will have the wholesale adoption of private sector PR techniques, the defining characteristics of which are cynical manipulation and lying dressed up as openness, consultation and 'partnership'. Their job will be to use the latest techniques for manipulating or bypassing public opinion thus undermining democracy by further insulating government from the people.

James appointment sets a further record as the most senior propagandist ever to be appointed to a civil service job from the private sector. But typically the network of connections and revolving door links goes much further. James himself was a special advisor to Lord Young at the self styled 'Department for Enterprise' in the 1980s and later political

secretary to John Major. He oversaw the Tories 1997 election campaign. He sat on the Phillis committee along with a brace of other PR consultants. All have direct interests in prising open the £ multimillion PR budgets for the private sector (see FP 134).

It was only under Labour that a roster of PR consultancies for government work was set up. The full roster is a secret but at least some of the PR consultants on it have been associated with public scandal and alleged wrongdoing. To highlight only those represented on the Phillis committee gives the general picture. Colin Browne is a partner in the Maitland Consultancy which was implicated in 'dirty tricks' for British Gas. Sir Tim Bell of Chime Communications is well known to have criminal convictions and to have involvement in, at best questionable public relations activities.

The appointment of James is not the only indication of the process underway. The first indication came within weeks of the report of the Phillis committee. The Scottish Executive advertised on its procurement site a contract to cover advertising, web design and PR for itself, ten agencies, 23 health bodies, 35 quangos and several government bodies. These include the PR activities of the Scottish parliament—an obvious structural conflict of interest.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Joshua Rozenberg *Privacy and the Press* Oxford University Press £18.99**

ONCE again in recent weeks headlines such as 'World Exclusive: Beckham's Secret Affair' have heralded the latest tabloid feeding frenzy over the intimate details of the private lives of the rich and famous. The issues this latest story raises about media intrusion and the balance between the individual's right to privacy and the press' right to publish have been the subject of vigorous debate, none more polarised than that in evidence amongst law and media professionals at the Media Society launch of Joshua Rozenberg's latest book in March.

In *Privacy and the Press* Joshua Rozenberg explores the effectiveness of existing law and practice in

regulating the media and addresses the question of whether a new law or tort of privacy is needed to tackle the increasingly invasive nature of contemporary press coverage. Something suggested by the Calcutt Committee way back in 1990 and more recently reiterated by the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee in their report on Privacy and Media Intrusion.

Joshua Rozenberg provides a meticulous analysis of the points of law in some of most recent headline-grabbing cases involving issues of intrusion and invasion of privacy.

One of the many strengths of this book, however, is that it moves beyond the high profile cases involving celebrities to focus on the

impact of media intrusion for ordinary people through, for instance, the indiscriminate use of CCTV footage. Rozenberg is not convinced that either a statutory law of privacy created by Parliament, or the evolution of case law within the framework of the Human Rights Act, would be an avenue for redress for ordinary people.

Rozenberg's book provides an informative and timely contribution to a wide-ranging set of issues. Written from a legal perspective the detail of some of the rulings and case law might prove a little off-putting to the general reader but a stimulating contribution to the debates none-the-less.

**KATHY WALKER**

## CPBF NEWS

### DON'T MISS THE AGM

**Saturday 26 June, 10am-1pm**  
**NUJ, 308 Gray's Inn Road**  
**London WC1.**

We extend a warm invitation to CPBF members and delegates from our affiliated organisations to attend the AGM. This is your chance to influence CPBF policy and discuss the key issues for the next year. Guest speaker will be Tony Lennon President of Bectu, who will lead the discussion on PSB and Charter Renewal. The national council is elected at the AGM and nominations are invited from individuals and organisations. Motions for the AGM and nominations must be submitted in writing no later than 14 June. Details from the CPBF national office.

### BOOK LAUNCH

**Tuesday 22 June 7pm**  
**NUJ, 308 Gray's Inn Road**  
**London WC1.**

A NEW book exposing the bias in media coverage of the Israeli/

Palestinian conflict and the impact this has on public opinion: Bad News from Israel by Greg Philo and Mike Berry published by Pluto Press.

### BANANA REPUBLICANS & THE ONE-PARTY STATE

SHELDON Rampton co-author of *Weapons of Mass Deception*, *Toxic Sludge is Good for You*, and *Trust Us We're Experts*, will be speaking at the NUJ HQ in London on Wednesday 9 June to promote his book *Banana Republicans* (written with John Stauber). Sheldon and John are two of the most important analysts of the propaganda used by the rich and powerful to control USA citizens. In *Banana Republicans*, they show how the techniques developed by the Bush team in Texas in the 2000 and 2002 elections and in the run up to the Iraq invasion will be deployed in the next six months in an attempt to secure a second term for Bush.

Don't miss this rare opportunity to hear Sheldon, an expert on the public relations industry, provide a unique



insight into the workings of the modern media.

**Wednesday 9 June 6.30pm**  
**NUJ, 308 Gray's Inn Road**  
**London WC1 (fully accessible).**

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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