

Butler's Report:

A VERY BRITISH INQUIRY

BARRY WHITE

LORD BUTLER of Brockwell's findings that intelligence was flawed; that the September dossier was 'dodgy' with caveats, warnings and words of caution omitted; that the 45 minutes claim (so eagerly taken up and slavishly reported by much of the press) was wrong and that the case for war with Iraq was overstated, should come as no surprise to *Free Press* readers. In our special edition of *Free Press* in June 2003 intelligence analyst and author Stephen Dorril wrote that; 'Despite the CIA and MI6 spending hundreds of millions of pounds targeting intelligence-gathering efforts on Saddam and the massive media campaign on WDM, not a single weapon has been discovered.'

Despite the collective failures identified by Butler, no one is to blame. This should also come as no surprise, since his remit was to judge processes, not individuals, which is one of the hallmarks of 'a classic Establishment job'. It brings no comfort to the 61 families here who have lost loved-ones as a result of the war, or to the family of the late Dr David Kelly. It's worth recalling that the only people who did lose their jobs as a result of the row over the dossier, were BBC defence correspondent Andrew Gilligan, Greg Dyke, BBC Director General and Gavyn Davies, chair of the BBC Board of Governors. Clearly Greg Dyke was right to say that BBC reports on the 'sexed up' dossier were vindicated by Butler. And where is Alastair Campbell featured in the report? After all, as Nicholas Jones reported in *Free Press* 139: 'Control over the flow of information from the government to the media became Campbell's personal fiefdom. For example, as the Hutton Inquiry confirmed, he chose the six

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THE BBC'S FUTURE



**TONY LENNON
ARGUES THAT
APPEASING THE
BBC'S CRITICS CAN
GO TOO FAR**

It seems that one of the BBC's key tactics to win renewal of its Royal Charter in 2006 is to silence its enemies before they do too much damage when the debate really gets going.

Its own contribution to that debate, a 135-page tome called *Building Public Value*, lays out several concessions to critics, many of which will be implemented long before the current Charter expires.

For those who believe the Corporation is too London-centric there's a promise of producing a full 50% of BBC programmes in the regions. Independent producers, angry at the BBC's repeated failure to buy 25% of output from them, are told that the figure is now to be treated as a minimum, not just a target.

Other commercial rivals are reassured that the BBC will in future be 'as small as its mission allows'—a hint that fewer toes are going to be trodden on elsewhere in the media industry—and new DG Mark Thompson has already embarked on a sweeping review which could result in outsourcing and privatisation way beyond the current controversial plan to sell the Corporation's technology subsidiary.

If your enemies are as plentiful, and powerful, as the BBC's, it may be wise to buy them off where possible, but there's always a danger of the appeasement game going too far.

After all, two main opposition camps have more or less fallen silent already—the radicals who challenge the

BBC's right to exist acknowledge they are unlikely to overcome the reigning political consensus, while advocates of alternative funding sources who were previously calling for the licence fee to be scrapped, now seem content to argue for 'top-slicing', a dangerous plan by which part of it would be withheld and distributed among other broadcasters.

These critics were silenced by force of argument, not by appeasement. The argument for retaining a public-service programme maker is compelling to anyone who considers what the digital, multi-channel, future would be like without one.

Opponents of the licence fee simply ran out of convincing alternatives—advertising on the BBC would be bad for ITV, subscriptions would be bad for universality by creating 'haves' and 'have-nots', and direct government funding would be bad for editorial independence, if events leading up to Hutton are any guide.

So without any major debate it looks like the answer to the funding question is...the licence fee, albeit tweaked to be 'affordable to the less well-off', as the BBC put it in a further, well-advised, concession to backbench MPs who rightly protest about single mothers being locked up for non-payment.

However, the BBC itself recognises that if the poll tax of the airwaves is to continue, it needs to be economically justified, and it proposes that a transparent 'public value test' should be applied to all of its services.

In this Micawber-style test, the cost of providing a particular service would be weighed against the perceived value it gave to individual viewers and citizens at large, after which one presumes that happiness or misery would follow, depending on how the numbers compared.

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BBC—Continued from page 1

Whether this is accepted as sound econometrics, or a self-serving exercise in smoke and mirrors, remains to be seen, but it is significant that within days of laying out this public value stall, the BBC ignored the entire concept when dealing with a critical report about its on-line service.

Philip Graf, previously CEO of major publisher Trinity Mirror Group, had been asked to investigate the BBC's website, one of the world's most heavily-used with almost 400m page impressions a week, after intense lobbying from commercial operators who wanted *bbc.co.uk* to remove its public service tanks from their private sector lawns.

Despite a cacophony of complaints that the BBC was stealing profitable web traffic from rivals, Graf concluded that the case could not be proven one way or another, but questioned whether all the BBC's web pages fulfilled a public service purpose. En passant, for purposes of illustration, he mentioned five specific web sites, including a games portal and a fantasy football site, which he suggested were of dubious public benefit.

Within minutes of Graf's report being published, the BBC issued a press release announcing that all five sites would be closed without ceremony, and apparently, without any 'public value test' being performed.

This hasty decision, which will undoubtedly encourage commercial rivals in other spheres to continue beating the BBC back from their territory—missed the whole point of 'public goods', the economists' definition of products or services that are useful to society, cost the same whether consumed by one citizen or ten million, but would not be provided by a pure market system.

Most of the BBC's offerings on the web match this description perfectly—particularly since web content, having been authored once, is usually left hanging in cyberspace for people to use freely as long as they want.

In an outfit as big as the BBC, a lot of material for the world wide web is created on the back of other activities at marginal cost—for example parts of scripts that didn't make it to air, or lists of contacts that time prevented being included in programmes. One

of the sites closed down, an area for sports surfboarders, was partly based on information like accurate weather forecasts which were freely available as a community service on other sites run by BBC local radio stations. Another banned site, the games portal with over 100,000 hits a day, consisted primarily of links, some of which drove web users to other, more 'worthy', BBC content—a standard marketing tactic on the internet.

So the panic shut-down was an example of cheap, publicly-produced, content being taken off the internet, effectively on the grounds that a commercial publisher somewhere would, firstly, step in with an alternative, and secondly, earn money from it. A rather specious argument when you consider that the surfing site attracted an average of barely 200 page hits a day.

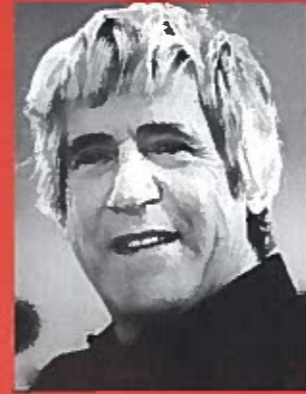
This has happened before—in the early days of Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), the BBC broke new ground by offering a news feed direct to mobile telephones. It wasn't long before commercial pressure closed it down—there was money to be made and the BBC should clear off.

Yet the WAP news feed consisted of a single unattended PC which sucked existing stories off a server hosting the teletext service CEEFAX, and automatically posted them in spare space on one of the BBC's own web servers—a valuable public service running at almost zero cost.

BBC news is now back on mobiles after a three-year absence, but the argument that closed it seems to have returned with a vengeance in the Graf report. Content created for nothing by the BBC and distributed for free, is less desirable than the same information authored expensively by a commercial operator and sold for a price. Goodbye Radio Cornwall's surfing site.

Apply this logic to more traditional services run by the BBC and you end up making programmes only when the market has failed—public broadcasting looking over its shoulder instead of forwards.

In the run-up to Charter renewal the BBC is probably right to deal with the vested interests of its commercial opponents, but needs to understand that it won't silence any enemies by rolling over in front of them.



Paul Foot died as this edition went to press. Paul was one of the great campaigning journalists of our time. He was a long-time friend of the Campaign. His work touched many lives. A full appreciation will appear in *Free Press 142* in late September.

Butler's Report —continued from page 1
journalists who were the first to be given exclusive copies of the second, so called 'dodgy' dossier on Iraq.' Campbell, who was out to nail Gilligan, only gets one mention in Butler's report. He did submit written evidence, but did not appear before the inquiry. Butler was content that Hutton had fully dealt with his role. But he was critical of the decision to publicise the fact that the Joint Intelligence Committee (the JIC) was the author of the dossier. The suggestion came from Campbell. Lord Butler said that this decision was a 'mistake' and 'had the result that more weight was placed on the evidence than it could bear.' In which case on what basis did this so called intelligence even get as far as it did? And what was the role of Jonathan Powell, Chief of Staff and Blair's chief link with the intelligence services, a key player, but only mentioned in passing in the report?

When the Franks Inquiry into the Falklands was published, Lord James Callaghan the former prime minister said that the whitewash was laid on very thickly. 'This time Butler has laid it on more thinly', comments Stephen Dorril. Peter Wright (former Intelligence Officer and author of *Spy Catcher*) once said that: 'When things go wrong with intelligence there are two solutions; promote those responsible and get the government to throw more money at the problem.' So what's changed?

RUSSIA: CLAMPING DOWN ON INDEPENDENT MEDIA

If you missed *The Russian Newspaper Murders* on BBC Four early in July, put some pressure on the BBC because it really does deserve a repeat showing. It tells the chilling story of the Togliatti Observer, the leading newspaper in Togliatti, a town about 500 miles south-east of Moscow. Most of jobs amongst its 740,000 inhabitants are at the giant AvtoVaz car factory, set up with the help of Fiat in the late 1960s, or in a chemical works.

The town itself should be very prosperous but its citizens are poor because crime and corruption, linked to the mayor's office, the police and the local mafia cost the city millions of dollars. There has also been a mafia killing spree—110 commissioned killings in Togliatti in the last six years, five of them journalists.

The Togliatti Observer built up its reputation for its tough investigations into crime and corruption, and its founding editor, Valery Ivanov, who was also a member of the local Duma, used his political position to get the

information for his investigative journalism. He was murdered in April 2002, shot several times outside his home with a silenced pistol. He was 32, and his funeral made national news, with hundreds of people attending it.

Ivanov's friend and colleague took over the paper's editorship and the paper continued to report on local corruption. In October 2003, however, he was also murdered.

The Glasnost Defence Foundation, a Russian NGO representing journalists under threat, claims that 130 journalists have been murdered in Russia since 1991. The latest death is that of the editor of the Russian edition of *Forbes*, Pavel Klebnikov, whose publication of the country's 'rich list' in April antagonised some of Russia's oligarchs who shun such publicity. Russia has more than 22,000 newspapers, but almost all are owned by pro-government or powerful political interests that constrain critical, independent reporting.

A process of control of TV is also well advanced to ensure that programmes critical of President Putin's policies are not aired. Only

three television channels cover all of Russia's 11 time zones: NTV, Rossiya and First Channel. The latter two are owned by the state. NTV was founded by Vladimir Gusinsky, the media oligarch, and earned a reputation for fiercely independent reporting in the 1990s, especially on Chechnya. It was taken over by Gazprom in 2001 after Gusinsky fell out with Putin and went into exile.

The last surviving independent political talk show, *Freedom of Speech*, was axed after Vladimir Kulistokov, former head of news at the state-run Rossiya channel, moved to NTV. At Rossiya he was responsible for bland, Soviet-style coverage of President Putin, which observers say played an important role in securing his victory in the March presidential elections.

Now the fear is that all of the important TV channels will be effectively under state control. 'This is the final stage of turning NTV into an ordinary state channel,' Igor Yakovenko, Head of the Union of Journalists, said. 'Now television viewers can throw away the remote control. All the channels will be the same.'

THE SUN & HILLSBOROUGH

KELVIN MACKENZIE bears direct responsibility for the notorious front-page headline and story which appeared in the Sun a few days after the Hillsborough tragedy. He shaped the story, even though the reporter who pulled the copy together, Harry Arnold, warned him: 'We've got to be really careful with this stuff. These are only allegations we're reporting, you know.' MacKenzie assured him: 'I know that. It's all right Harry. Don't worry. I'm going to put in "some fans".'

Under the headline 'THE TRUTH' were three subheadings: 'Some fans picked pockets of victims' 'Some fans urinated on the brave cops' 'Some fans beat up PC giving kiss of life'

The rest of the story was a classic smear, with non-attributable allegations, or attributed to people repeating what they had been told.



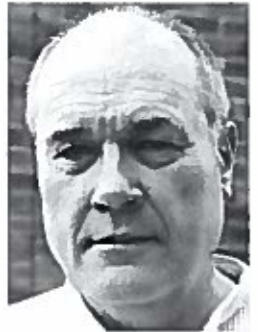
The impact was devastating on the people of Merseyside and the paper was boycotted. Sales in the Merseyside area before the disaster were 524,000 copies a day but crashed afterwards to 320,000—a loss of nearly 40 per cent. In the centre of Liverpool some newsagents stopped selling the paper, in others they slashed orders by 80

per cent. Its sales in Liverpool today total 12,000.

The Sun's full-page apology on Wednesday 7 July 2004 did not go down well in the Liverpool. In part the apology was in response to the hostile comments about Wayne Rooney's, the Everton and England striker's £250,000 deal with the Sun for a series of exclusive interviews.

For the Sun the deal may have seemed a smart way to win back lost readers. The boycott has cost News International a lot of money. It is estimated that the paper still sells 50,000 fewer copies of the paper as a direct result of Hillsborough. Assuming an average cover price of 20p over the last 15 years that works out at £55 million. Kelvin Mackenzie has long gone as editor of the Sun, but the awful impact of his front page still reverberates.

Doing its job?



CHRIS FROST TAKES A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE PCC ANNUAL REPORT

THE Press Complaints Commission's latest annual report contains no surprises as the self-regulatory defender of the British press continues to sail serenely with the stream, a stream that often

becomes the gutter of British Journalism.

It's been busy year for the PCC with a huge rise in complaints particularly those about discrimination. Sir Christopher Meyer has been appointed the new chairman, following the resignation of Lord Wakeham 15 months before. Sir Christopher was quick to introduce reforms, including more open and transparent methods of appointing commissioners and a charter compliance committee design to improve accountability. The PCC also had to face the scrutiny of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and worry about whether the Communications Act would give Ofcom a supervisory role over the PCC.

The annual report welcomes the increase in complaints as evidence of the commission's higher profile rather than any indication in the reduction of standards.

The PCC sets great store by its claim to be fast, free and fair. It is undoubtedly fast, dispatching the average complaint within 17 days and finishing adjudications within 34 days. It is also free, although this year's annual report takes to task complainants who use lawyers: '...rulings on complaints that were made through solicitors took on average 50% longer...When lawyers become involved in the process it ceases to be particularly fast—and it is certainly not free.'

However it is the claim to fairness that is most problematic. Does the public want fairness? And does it get it, when most third party complaints, that is complaints from the public rather than the subject of a story, are dismissed? The public, when asked, says it wants a press that is not so intrusive, that provides them with accurate information and entertains them with stories that don't require a scapegoat as their butt. So how come they can't complain when they don't get it?

The PCC has a reasonably sound code of practice. However, only 23 complaints were adjudicated in 2003. Can it be considered fair

that only 0.6 percent of 3,649 complaints were actually adjudicated?

Nor is this really fair to editors and their newspapers if the PCC really is about raising press standards. Adjudications lay down case law and offer guidance and with only a small number of complaints upheld in 2003, there is little guidance available for editors. Already the courts seem to hand down more detailed case law on privacy than the PCC. Both newspapers and the PCC claim to prefer self-regulation but now there is a clear danger that their obstinacy in refusing to deal with complaints will lead to legal remedies becoming the norm.

The PCC makes much of their busy year in the report. Complaints were up by a staggering 39 per cent on the previous year to 3,649 whilst adjudicated complaints continued their steady decline of the past five years from a high of 86 complaints adjudicated a few years ago to a low of only 23.

You will not find figures for adjudications in the annual report this year for the first time and only difficult to understand percentages are provided. One wonders whether the PCC sees the low number of adjudications as cause for concern.

It is clear that a substantial number of the extra 1,000 or so complaints made in the last year are about discrimination. These have risen from 163 in 2002—a fairly typical figure for the past 12 years—to 593 or 19.8% of the total. Most of these concern discrimination against groups (particularly asylum seekers), not identifiable individuals and are therefore dismissed as not coming under the code. Only 24 complaints of discrimination were dealt with.

The rest of the extra complaints were 'resolved'. It is this section of 'resolved' complaints that deserves the most attention, but largely fails to get it. 1,602 (almost half) complaints were resolved in 2003. This means that apologies or corrections were made - actions that could have been carried out without intervention by the PCC.

The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee report into Privacy and Media Intrusion made a number of recommendations that sent a shiver through the PCC. It dealt with them in the way it always has since its first incarnation as the General Council of the Press - it ignored most of them and made one or two cosmetic changes for the look of the thing



Press Complaints Commission
Annual Review 2003

including a new charter compliance committee and a more transparent appointment system. Real concerns such its inability to discipline newspapers were ignored.

It is this lack of teeth that is of most concern to the public. With no serious penalty on offer other than a requirement to publish an adjudication, very few editors tremble in their beds for fear of the PCC. Editors don't like publishing PCC adjudications, we are told, but not to worry, the PCC rides to the rescue by making sure they don't have to, except on very rare occasions: 11 in 2003. Most complaints are resolved by the PCC persuading the editor to print a correction or an apology, which should have been done when the complaint was first made, or by persuading the complainant to accept the solution first offered by the editor.

The PCC claims proudly that 96% of complainants 'were satisfied or very satisfied with the way that their complaint had been handled'. However, there are no statistics to cover the outcome. The PCC is undoubtedly fast and free and the PCC's staff works hard and effectively, so it is no surprise complainants are satisfied with the way the PCC deals with them. However, anecdotal evidence from the CMS select committee report or direct evidence from complainants suggests they are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. And, after all, it's the outcome that matters.

Letting in the light:

the Press Complaints Commission & Freedom of Information

JULIAN PETLEY

I RECENTLY brought together a number of accounts of dissatisfied complainants to the PCC*. A recurrent criticism was of the organisation's opacity, and, in particular, of its stitching up behind-the-scenes deals with offending newspapers and presenting them to complainants as *faits accomplis* on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

Thanks to the Freedom of Information Act, however, disgruntled complainants may in future be able to find out just what the PCC has been up to on their supposed behalf. Or they may not. Everything hinges on whether the PCC is designated as a body with 'functions of a public nature' under section 5 of the Act.

Currently a working group within the Department for Constitutional Affairs is considering what criteria might be used to identify such bodies, and a preliminary list has been proposed by government departments. Interestingly, the PCC is not on it. However, one of the working group's papers makes it abundantly clear that the PCC could indeed be defined as a public body for the purposes of the Act. Thus, for example, it quotes De Smith, Woolf and Jowell's *Judicial Review of Administrative Action* to the effect that bodies may perform public functions 'if they regulate commercial and professional activities to ensure compliance with proper standards', deploying techniques such as rule-making, adjudication and other forms of dispute resolution. Elsewhere the document notes that the courts have recognised a non-statutory regulatory body as exercising a public function, if, 'but for the existence of the body, the government would inevitably have intervened to regulate the activity in question' It also points out that 'possible candidates for designation' may include some self-regulatory bodies which 'have been held to exercise public functions'.

All of the above are solid grounds for designating the PCC as a body with functions of a public nature for the purposes of the FOI. The argument is further strengthened by the inclusion of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) on the preliminary list of public bodies. As Geoffrey Robertson and Andrew Nicol argue in *Media Law*: 'the PCC is exercising a recognised public adjudicative function, as a government-brokered alternative either to a Calcutt-devised complaints tribunal or to a privacy law introduced by Act of Parliament. The reasoning which has led the courts to declare the ASA reviewable applies by

close analogy to the PCC: it is a body "clearly exercising a public function which, if the ASA did not exist, would no doubt be exercised by a statutory office"'.

Not only is the PCC not on the list but, as I have discovered, it doesn't want to be on the list either, and doubtless it has been energetically lobbying the Department of Culture Media and Sport to ensure that it stays off it. Thus just as the PCC tried to get the press-alone amongst British institutions—exempted from the Human Rights Act, now it wants to shield it from yet another measure which journalists, of all people, might be expected to welcome. In the case of the HRA, the PCC was worried that, were it considered a 'public authority' for the purposes of the Act, then, as Richard Shannon puts it in his official hagiography—sorry, history—of the Commission, *A Press Free and Responsible*, the courts would ultimately be able 'to confer upon it disciplinary powers and thus make it into their definition of a truly effective regulatory body'. The Commission would thus become 'a rung in a legal ladder, a punishment squad rather than a conciliation service'.

Thus Lord Wakeham, conveniently ignoring the fact that PCC decisions were already amenable to judicial review, warned that if complainants to the PCC were able to challenge its decisions in the courts or to secure legal remedies for breach of its editorial code, then 'my task of seeking to resolve differences ... would no longer be a practical proposition'. Similarly, the PCC is hardly likely to welcome an Act which would enable dissatisfied complainants to discover exactly how the PCC had set about the business of 'conciliation' and 'resolving differences' in their particular cases.

In the end, however, the PCC lost the HRA argument, having to content itself with an amendment proposed by Wakeham himself which provided that a court must have particular regard to the importance of the right to freedom of expression in any action against the media. The fact that the PCC most definitely is a public authority for the purposes of the HRA greatly strengthens the argument that it should be considered as a body with public functions for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act. So let's get lobbying.

* 'A Modern Day Circumlocution Office?' in *Satisfaction Guaranteed? Press Complaints Systems Under Scrutiny, Mediawise 2004*.

Dissecting the US Republicans

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

BANANA Republicans, co-authored by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, is a grim read. It describes the way the Republicans have engineered 25 years of neo-conservative ascendancy in the USA, and the impact this has had on America. Sheldon Rampton was in London recently, coincidentally in the week leading up to Ronald Reagan's funeral, and he pointed out, 'It was under Reagan that the Republicans perfected a style of post-modern politics—style over substance—and the media goes along with it. He led a charmed life, too, because nothing negative stuck to him.'

The two writers work for the Center for Media and Democracy, and the four books they have published have all had a tremendous impact. The first two, *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You* and *Trust Us, We're Experts* grew out of John Stauber's work as an environmental activist in the 1980s when PR firms working for Monsanto and other corporations sought to influence debate. Sheldon cited the example of a person who came along to meetings from the Maryland Citizens Consumer Council. It didn't exist. The person was working for the PR giant, Burson-Marsteller, and came to meetings to monitor the group's activities. They used this experience to set up *PRWatch* (www.prwatch.org) to document and expose the way propaganda and the activities of the PR industry can subvert democracy.

But the two recent books, *Weapons of Mass Deception* and *Banana Republicans* have been much sharper political interventions. 'We had covered the topic of the PR industry and our interests shifted to the role of government propaganda,' Sheldon explained. The first of the books was eight weeks in the *New York Times* best-seller list, but of the top 100 US newspapers only the *San Francisco Chronicle* reviewed it. 'Iraq was front-page news but the media ignored the book. We were still writing the book when the statue of Saddam was toppled and there was a feeling at the publishers that maybe they should pull the plug on the book because the war was over. Yet is sold, mostly



Granville Williams and Sheldon Rampton speaking at the CPBF meeting on 9 June

through word of mouth, and because of the controversy over the war.'

Sheldon is very clear about the impact of the Republican right, and two important chapters in the latest book identify the reasons for their success: *The Marketplace of Ideas* and *The Echo Chamber*. Since Reagan, neoconservative ideas have been systematically promoted through think tanks, lobbyists, media supporters and corporate sponsors. At the same time there has been an assault on the 'liberal' media, parallel with the growth of talk radio and Fox News espousing the Republican agenda.

'The war on Iraq happened because key institutions failed to do their duty—the media and Congress,' he believes. They didn't reflect the diversity of opinion within the US public, and during the run-up to war uncritically reported Bush's claims about weapons of mass destruction. One consequence of this Republican dominance is that he believes if Kerry gets elected he will be in the same position as Clinton was, with the Republicans attacking any liberal policy initiatives.

But one thing Sheldon does not want to do is generate despair about the state of US politics: 'Change happens if people organise for it,' he says, and he sees a lot of positive trends to indicate that the Republicans are losing ground, as the costs and consequences of the Iraq war weaken Bush's electoral support.

Banana Republicans was published in June 2004. A UK edition of *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You* has just been published by Constable Robinson £6.99

Berlusconi's Remote Control

The Economist (10/07/04) has returned to its dogged criticism of Berlusconi. His party, Forza Italia, did badly in the June European and local elections and in early July two of his coalition allies, the far-right National Alliance and the centre-right Northern League, forced out Berlusconi's finance minister, Giulio Tremonti.

Berlusconi's response was to take on the finance job himself which means, according to *The Economist*, 'he has become the main shareholder in all state companies, including RAI, the state television network whose chairman recently resigned in protest over political interference. In a formal sense, Mr Berlusconi today controls all of Italian television.'

The consequences of Berlusconi's powerful grip over media and politics are documented in *Time* (14/06/04). It cites a news report, on state-run RAI, of the Italian Prime Minister addressing the UN General Assembly. Viewers didn't know that the cutaway shots of a full-house audience listening to Berlusconi had been

he (Berlusconi) has become the main shareholder in all state companies, including RAI, the state television network...

spliced in from an earlier speech by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Berlusconi had given his speech to a nearly empty chamber.

It is one more example of his 'soft power' over news content. He will not have insisted on the cutaway; ambitious TV executives will lean his way without being told to.

The Osservatorio di Pavia monitored the airtime given to his government and the opposition. Berlusconi-owned Mediaset channels gave an average of 81 per cent to Berlusconi's coalition in May. The news show on Rete 4 is described as 'an unabashed propaganda machine run by his (Berlusconi's) friend, Emilio Fede'. Fede said, 'I've created a new way of doing news. I say what I believe. I have the courage to declare my convictions out loud.'

BARRY WHITE

THE Association for Civil Rights in

Mordechai's appeal rejected

Israel has lost its appeal in the Israeli Supreme Court to cancel the restrictions imposed on Mordechai Vanunu on his release from prison on 21 April. The decision was announced as we went to press.

Vanunu is still living in the Anglican Cathedral of St George's in Jerusalem. *The Sunday Times* reported on 6 June that while walking near the Cathedral with a friend, he was spotted by supporters of Kahane, a banned right-wing group. They began to follow him shouting

'traitor' and 'we will eliminate you'. He has also reported other street incidents to friends.

Meanwhile the Israeli authorities have complained to the new chair of the BBC, Michael Grade, about a BBC 2 interview with Mordechai on Sunday 30 May. The authorities charged that the BBC had carried out the interview in violation of Israeli law. The BBC has received the letter and says that it contains a number of factual inaccuracies. Because of the restrictions, the interview was carried

out by Yael Lotan, an Israeli journalist.

Shortly after the interview was carried out, *Sunday Times* journalist Peter Hounam, who broke the original Vanunu story in 1986, and a freelance editor Sadi Haeri, both employed by a private film company to work on the production, were arrested, but after strong international protests were finally released.

Meanwhile the Vanunu Campaign has launched a petition against the restrictions imposed on him by the Israeli authorities. Details from: www.vanunu.freeserve.co.uk

You can also write to Mordechai at St George's Cathedral, PO Box 19018, 20 Nablus Road, Jerusalem, Israel.

The story TV news won't tell

Reporting the Arab-Israeli conflict

Bad News From Israel by Greg Philo and Mike Berry (Pluto Press) £10.99

TIM LLEWELLYN, the BBC's Middle East correspondent for ten years, wrote a passionate and well-documented review of *Bad News From Israel* in *The Observer* (20/07/04). He praised the book because 'it makes the scientifically based case that the main news and current affairs programmes—with the rare exception, usually on Channel 4—are failing to tell us the real story and the reasons behind it. They use a distorted lens.'

One chapter in the book asks 'Why Does It Happen?' and looks at patterns of ownership, and at how public relations, information control and the close political links between the USA and Britain affect what we see and hear in the media. Evidence about the efficiency of the Israeli public relations machine demonstrates how it is far easier to obtain the Israeli version of events, but not from the Palestinian side. One US journalist who ran a news agency from Jerusalem said the Israeli approach was proactive, the Palestinian reactive: 'I get 75-100 e-mails a day from official Israeli sources and organisations...about 15 per cent from government, the rest lobbyists and

supporters. I get perhaps five a week from Palestinian sources.'

There is, of course, a massive disparity between the PR resources of the two countries in terms, and also their expertise. Orla Guerin, the BBC's Middle East correspondent, drew Israeli wrath when she reported how the Israeli army had kept a Palestinian boy in a bomb belt waiting at his, and every one else's peril, while the cameras showed up.

There are also powerful lobbies that support the Israeli cause outside Israel, notably in the USA and Britain. In the USA support for Ariel Sharon's policies comes from the Jewish American AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and the politicised and right-wing Protestant fundamentalist movement. The role of AIPAC is rarely analysed in the US media because there are powerful protests and boycotts of papers or news reports deemed to be anti-Israeli.

In the UK Tim Llewellyn believes that the reasons for the unbalanced coverage of the Middle East conflict are partly to do with the Israeli embassy: 'BBC news management is by turns schmoozed and pestered by the Israeli embassy. The pressure by

this hyperactive, skillful mission and by Israel's many influential and well organised friends is unremitting and productive, especially now that accusations of anti-Semitism can be so wildly deployed.' He also believes that after Hutton 'the BBC's tendency to sniff the wind from Downing Street on such a sensitive story, where the line is taken from Washington, has also intensified.'

UK media ownership has also played a part. Conrad Black, when he was proprietor of the Telegraph group, was strongly supportive of Israel and journalists complained that this was affecting editorial policy. Sam Kiley, a correspondent for *The Times*, resigned in September 2001, blaming its allegedly pro-Israeli censorship of his reporting: 'I was told I should not refer to "assassinations" of Israel's opponents, nor to "extra-judicial killings or executions".'

Bad News From Israel is a very important contribution to our understanding of how unbalanced reporting occurs, but it also provides powerful proof of the consequences, in terms of people's ignorance, about the causes of the conflict. The book deserves to be widely read and its findings extensively debated.

CPBF NEWS

OFCOMWATCH

FOX CENSURED BY OFCOM

In contrast to the weak response to complaints about Fox News addressed to the old Independent Television Commission, Ofcom have taken a different stance.

A Fox news commentator, John Gibson, presented a piece on Fox News, when the Hutton report was published, in which he claimed that the BBC had displayed a 'frothing-at-the-mouth' anti-American bias. The network said the BBC 'continually bashed' American policy and its coverage was 'obsessive, irrational and dishonest'.

Fox failed to provide any evidence that the BBC 'bashed' US policy or ridiculed the US president, Ofcom said. It upheld 24 complaints by viewers who said the piece was 'misleading' and 'misrepresented the truth'.

All the more puzzling that Ofcom's review of public service broadcasting actually has a proposition that there might be space for a UK news channel which isn't bound by strict rules of impartiality. The regulator

surely isn't thinking about allowing Sky News to become a UK version of Fox News.

ITV FRANCHISE FEES REVIEW

Ofcom intends to set out how it will value the ITV franchises over the next decade. Under a new timetable ITV can re-bid for all 16 regional franchises from 31 December.

One report speculated that the licence fees might be cut by 40 per cent. There were enormous variations in the original bids for the franchises (one of the reasons for the subsequent destabilisation in ITV). All of the ITV companies now pay about £225 million a year to the government for the licence fees.

ITV is mounting a strong lobby over the cost of its public service commitments, which it estimates at £250 million a year. One solution would be to scrap the licence fee payments, which only came in with the 1990 Broadcasting Act, in return for ITV providing a strong strand of public service broadcasting programming at national and regional level.

BBC CHARTER RENEWAL DEBATE—WINNING A VOICE FOR LICENCE FEE PAYERS

THE CPBF along with other media groups has often called for the democratisation of the governing body of the BBC. The lead-up period to Charter Renewal is the time to spell out just what we mean.

That's why we are organising a seminar on the subject at

**NUJ HQ, 308-312 Gray's Inn Road,
London WCI
2pm-5pm**

Wednesday 8 September

It will be led by Professor Sylvia Harvey, Professor of Broadcasting Policy at the University of Lincoln whose submission to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the BBC Charter Review outlined radical ideas for the election of the governors.

Attendance is free and on a first come first serve basis, so please let the CPBF office know if you want to book a place (0208 521 5932).

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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