

MEDIA CULPA?

The Media & Iraq

ON 7 September, 2002 George Bush and Tony Blair appeared before TV cameras at Camp David. They cited a 'new' report from the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency allegedly stating that Iraq was 'six months away' from building a nuclear weapon. No such report existed, but the media did not confront the White House, in spite of the fact the IAEA had not issued a new report.

The occasion marked the beginning of a disinformation campaign and the propaganda drive to push the US and the UK into war with Iraq.

In the USA the abysmal role of newspapers and the TV networks in uncritically reporting the stream of stories emanating from the White House, 'security sources' and Iraqi dissidents and defectors about weapons of mass destruction has now led to some grovelling apologies. The *New York Times* reporter, Judith Miller, was reliant on sources sympathetic to the administration and presented one-sided, deferential coverage. In May the *New York Times* editors wrote, 'Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged-or failed to emerge.'

The *Washington Post* had a lengthy piece by a staff writer, Howard Kurtz, in August which pointed out 'some reporters who were lobbying for greater prominence for stories that questioned the administration's evidence complained to senior editors, who, in the view of those reporters, were unenthusiastic

about such pieces.' The result was that administration assertions were on the front page, whereas pieces challenging the administration's evidence were buried in the paper. Kurtz commented, the coverage was 'strikingly one-sided at times.'

The excellent Media Lens (www.medialens.org) analysed and challenged the performance of sections of the UK media in a series, *No Mea Culpa From The British Media*. What is worrying is the way the BBC post-Hutton seems to be distancing itself from the stance taken by Greg Dyke on the Andrew Gilligan reporting of the 'dodgy dossier'. John Ware, a reporter for *Panorama*, and three of his colleagues are saying the broad thrust of Gilligan's story was wrong. BBC managers also seem to have decided that critical or challenging reporting of the consequences of the government's Iraq debacle need to be toned down.

The terrible debacle in Iraq, and the reasons for it, need tough critical reporting. As Tony Blair tries desperately to refocus on domestic issues we still need an honest accounting for the disinformation peddled by Tony Blair, Alastair Campbell and John Scarlett (who amazingly for his role on the Joint Intelligence Committee became head of MI6) which led us into an illegal war. We also need sections of the media to ask why they were compliant, uncritical conduits for that disinformation too. As Media Lens demonstrate, this is not happening.

The *Washington Post* Executive Editor, Leonard Downie, commented to Howard Kurtz, 'People who were opposed to the war...have the mistaken impression that somehow if the media's coverage had been different, there wouldn't have been a war.'

The point surely is that the pretext for war was based on dubious evidence. If the media had done their job, both here and in the States, we would not now be seeing the mounting military casualties and the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis. The drive to war could have been stopped. An informed public would have seen through the distortions and fabrications of the Bush/Blair case for war.

Public service broadcasting campaign E-ACTIVISM SITE LAUNCHED

THIS autumn sees the renewal of the debate around the future of public service broadcasting, with OFCOM publishing its Phase 2 Report on the future of public service broadcasting soon, to be followed by its final proposals and recommendation in late autumn. The DCMS is holding a series of seminars, organised by Lord Burns, and in February/March 2005 Culture Secretary promises a Green Paper on the future of the BBC.

Lots of consultations, lots of debate but how do we get our views across? The CPBF wants to develop on its

website an e-activism campaign which will have a variety of features. For example, we have just added a link to FaxYourMP.

The first step is for you to sign up so that we can send you messages, and suggest actions you can take to defend PSB. To be effective we need to build an extensive activist mailing list so go to www.cpb.org.uk and sign up. We will be publicising this initiative more widely over the coming months but you can help too by getting other people to sign up as well.

Is *Wife Swap* A PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAMME?

PATRICIA HOLLAND identifies the dangers lurking behind rigid definitions

Is *Wife Swap* a public service programme? And what about *Holidays in the Axis of Evil*? Or *Mark Thomas, Weapons Inspector*? Or repeats of *Till Death Us Do Part*? When Ann Robinson tested the nation's IQ from a studio ranked with volunteer guinea pigs, there was a line up of rocket scientists and a phalanx of blondes. Was that public service?

The answer, of course is that the whole notion of a 'public service' programme is either nonsensical or dangerous. Nonsensical because it is impossible to define, dangerous because it would drive programmes which aspire to be 'public service' into tight little worthy ghettos and would inhibit innovation, humour and dreaming up new and subversive formats. The most interesting programmes are usually the ones that don't fall into categories.

Why does it matter? The recommendation from the Conservative Party's Broadcasting Policy Group for the OFCOM review of public service broadcasting was that there should be a pot of money—contestable funding—which is up for grabs for any broadcaster who can prove that this programme is 'public service'. Get rid of the BBC and the licence fee, release the other terrestrial channels from their draggy public service obligations, but make tax payers' money available for the worthy stuff. Leaving aside the desirability of direct government funding for such politically sensitive areas as news and current affairs, it is fairly obvious that the only way this could work is by knowing—and by being sure about it, because lot of money would hinge on it—which programme is which. It needs a 'narrow' definition of public service, which pins it down to certain genres (and this was earnestly argued for at a recent seminar* by Barbara Donoghue of the London Business School, a

member of the Conservative group).

It seems that OFCOM, with its commitment to reducing regulation and freeing up the television market, is tempted by this view—if not in its most extreme form. Its own review is explicit that public service broadcasting should not be defined by types of programme. But at the same time it sets out to identify what is public service television and what is not—chiefly so that those broadcasters that are not can get on with the serious business of competition and not bother their heads with content regulation.

OFCOM begins by assuming that what it describes as 'PSB' (and even the use of that glib abbreviation prejudices the question) is something tangible, which can be identified, defined and, where necessary, supported. It is as if this special bit could be inserted into the television output without any dialogue with the surrounding programmes—whereas what happens at the moment is a productive confrontation between different programme ideas and influences. Trash television has its moments, and the need to attract an audience and compete with *Big Brother* stimulates the driest of political slots. To assume that some broadcasters may be 'public service' whereas others needn't bother, misreads the history of British televi-

WITHOUT COMMENT

“Running a TV station without cash sounds funny today, but it made life very difficult for everyone at TV-am. By the winter the ratings remained good but the amount of advertising was still pitiful. At one time we only had three regular advertisers, Ponds Cold Cream, Edam Cheese and Wall's pork sausages. In those circumstances I was concerned when Lynn Faulds Wood wanted to use her consumer slot to expose Wall's sausages for containing too much water. We both agreed that perhaps it was a story we should put in into the drawer for a few months”

Greg Dyke's Memoirs—
The Observer 12 September 2004

sion, which has evolved through a series of pragmatic compromises between commercial companies, regulation with a strong public commitment, and the BBC and its licence fee—with a strong input from creative programme makers. A diversity of funding mechanisms has strengthened this system.

The ecology depends for its mix on the frivolous as well as the deadly serious, and the flashes of insight into family life and contemporary mores that come from *Wife Swap* are even more fascinating because no one is setting out to educate us.

* Seminar organised by the International Institute of Communications

WITHOUT COMMENT

“The 'independent' panel picked by culture secretary Tessa Jowell contains several potential supporters of any plans to sell off parts of the BBC (Sly Bailey and Sir Alan Budd) or redistribute parts of the licence fee to the commercial sector (Tim Gardam).”

A similar pattern is emerging on the BBC board of governors following the appointment of Anthony Salz as vice-chairman. Salz, from one of the city's biggest law firms, has made millions specialising in merger and privatisation cases, including the sale of BP. He knows nothing about broadcasting, so this appears to be the only skill he brings to the party.”

Private Eye 6 August 2004

WHISTLEBLOWERS GET ORGANISED

THE Truth-Telling Project was a project initiated by Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers about US involvement in Vietnam. The project's focus was on the USA, and particularly the Bush administration. It urged 'current and recently retired government officials to reveal the truth to Congress and the public about governmental wrongdoing, lies and cover-up.

The project argued that the dominant theme of the Bush administration is 'cover-up on urgent matters of life and death. Cover-up of the real motives for the war on Iraq. Cover-up of Presidential inattention before 9/11 to warnings of imminent attacks by Al Qaeda. Above all concealment of

the judgement by the Administration's own counter-terrorism chiefs that war in Iraq is a disaster for the war on terrorism...It is time for truth-telling.'

Now the project has taken on a broader, international perspective, with the formation of the Truth-Telling Coalition. One of the key figures in this country is Katharine Gun who worked as a translator at the government's GCHQ monitoring centre in Cheltenham. She was put on trial at the Old Bailey, charged under the Official Secrets Act for revealing American plans to bug the phones of delegates to the United Nations Security Council in the run up to the vote on a second resolution for action on Iraq. She claimed the email, which she leaked to *The Observer* in January 2003 was from US spies asking British officers to tap the phones of nations

voting on war against Iraq. The charges against her were dropped in February 2004 because the prosecution offered no evidence.

In a thoughtful Comment piece in *The Observer* (19/9/4) she explained the sorts of pressures on her as a result of her decision to leak the email. It was, she explained, 'a huge decision I took which led to me being arrested, my house searched, being sacked, and finally charged.'

Now she believes the coalition will make it easier for people to speak out. 'Here in the UK we will be campaigning for a fundamental reform of the Official Secrets Act. It must be changed to distinguish between espionage breaches which genuinely endanger national security and public-spirited whistle-blowing,' she said.

OBITUARY



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEFANO CAGNONI

Paul Foot

MAYBE the way I found out about Paul Foot's death was the most appropriate. I saw a person in Seattle wearing a *Socialist Worker* tea-shirt and approached him. There is an International Socialist organisation in the USA, and in conversation with the comrade he told me about Paul's death, and I bought a copy of their paper, also called *Socialist Worker*, with his obituary in it.

It is testimony to the reach and

impact of Paul's writing and political activity that in this country obituaries appeared in all the national newspapers, the left press, the trade press, even a full page obituary in *The Economist* which, whilst missing the point by dismissing his politics as 'potty', when in fact they were the key to, and reason for, his journalism and other writing, was fulsome in its praise for his 'reveatory journalism'.

Paul Foot is firmly in the tradition of radical journalism going back to the 18th and 19th century essayists and pamphleteers Tom Paine, William Hazlitt and William Cobbett. They, and he, were committed campaigners, not neutral observers or reporters and at the core of all his writing was the desire to expose injustice, corruption or political chicanery. *Words as Weapons* was the title of a collection of his journalism. But he also had a marvellous sense of humour, often mocking or satirical, which would strengthen the impact of his message, particularly when speaking.

I first met Paul when he came to speak to a packed meeting in the Bay Horse pub in the mining village of Bentley, near Doncaster in the late 60s. When I moved down to the South West I remember organising a meeting in Camborne, Cornwall. He was down on holiday and came across to speak, uncertain if anyone would turn out. They did and it was a great meeting. When Paul came to speak in

Birmingham the deal was you had to take him to second hand bookshops before the meeting. Again I remember a marvellous packed meeting in the Digbeth Hall in support of the Shrewsbury Three.

Paul gave the CPBF support, and put material from us in *Private Eye* and in his other columns, although he disagreed with the Right to Reply policy. He spoke at one AGM where he referred to a novel by Jonathan Coe (it spurred me to read *What A Carve Up!*) to make a point about public service broadcasting, moving on to an angry denunciation of the way Carlton boss, Michael Green, had intervened to squash an investigation on sleaze at the heart of the Major government.

He was absolutely absorbed in politics but there were other facets to him—his zest for life, his love of sports and games—which were revealed by his sons at the deeply moving commemoration at Golders Green Crematorium on 27 July. He had a wide-ranging passion for literature, too, notably Shakespeare and Shelley.

It is worth ending with a quote from former *Daily Mirror* editor, Richard Stott. In an obituary in *Press Gazette* he wrote: 'Paul Foot stood for everything that is the best in journalism...He had a rare ability to make our trade feel noble.'

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

Broadcasting: the European dimension

THE European Union is changing. The accession of ten new countries, mainly from Central and Eastern Europe, will have a major impact. The new President, Jose Barrosa, the former Portuguese Prime Minister, has appointed economics and trade commissioners who are pro-market and free trade and there is a real sense that the European social model is under threat.

This has particular implications for the future of public service broadcasting in Europe, as well as for policies dedicated to promoting media pluralism and media diversity. Associated with these are also concerns about professional journalistic practices, and protecting a European cultural identity.

The Council of Europe seeks to promote policies which typify the social market model for the media. A good example of how these policies are presented is in the 2002 report, *Media Diversity in Europe*. The report emphasises that 'the private sector alone, that is, the market, cannot guarantee per se a pluralistic media landscape' and 'a public broadcasting system detached from State influence is absolutely essential to provide diverse information, culture and content to all citizens'

In terms of threats to media diversity, pluralism and cultural diversity, it identifies particularly trade liberalisation and negotiations within the World Trade Organisation on trade in goods (GATT) and services (GATS) and asserts, 'the audiovisual field holds a special position because of its cultural value and should therefore be granted a privilege and an exemption from total liberalisation (which if applied to the audiovisual sector would preclude

measures in support of audiovisual industries, ie subventions). The second argument is linked to the wish to avoid "Americanisation" or "globalisation" of culture and the loss of European national/regional cultural values.'

The core concerns of the CoE's position are echoed by other pan-European political and media organisations. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is active in arguing the case for the preservation and spread of public service broadcasting in Europe. The European Parliament, until the elections held in June 2004, had a number of socialist or social democratic MEPs who were strong supporters of the same range of ideas. The accession of the new member states, and the June 2004 election results across the EU countries have diminished that support, however, and shifted the political composition of the European Parliament more to the right.

The EU Commission has also been subject to sustained lobbying, and through this activity we see most clearly how the social market model has been challenged. This is part of a wider process which encompasses attempts to dismantle EU policies which are deemed to create excessive regulation, put up barriers to free trade, and in terms of media policy, create conditions which give public service broadcasters unfair competitive advantages over commercial broadcasters.

There are two broad coalitions which want to see fundamental changes in media policy within the enlarged EU. One is the grouping of European commercial media organisations: the European Publishers Council, the Association of Commercial

Television in Europe and the Association Européenne des Radios. Their membership is overwhelmingly West European, with the exception of the Polish publishing group, Agora, and ARCA, the Romanian commercial radio association.

An important intervention in policy debates was the production of *Safeguarding the Future of the European Audiovisual Market* (2004) which essentially threw down the gauntlet, charging the EU in the audiovisual sector with, 'a lack of political will, unimaginable in other sectors' by allowing market distortion through massive subsidies to publicly funded broadcasters (PFBs), which the report defines as 'TV and radio broadcasters with public service remits funded either wholly through State Aid or through a combination of State Aid and commercial revenues including advertising.'

The report uses data from the 15 member states before EU enlargement to argue that PFBs have a privileged position: 'PFBs received State Aid equalling a massive \$15 billion (more than \$82.2 billion between 1996 and 2001). The magnitude of this subsidy effectively makes PFB the third most subsidised 'industry' in Europe.' The report also cites numerous examples where, they claimed, PSBs breached EU competition law, but the EU had not acted against them. PFBs have also been placed in a privileged position, compared with private radio and TV broadcasters, because they could use a 'predictable, stable and reliable income stream' to build a position at the expense of private radio and TV broadcasters as well as press and internet publishers.' Another charge is that PSBs are weakly regulated so that they are able to build audience share through scheduling serious, distinctive programming off the main channels and scheduling popular programming. In adopting such tactics they move away from their PSB remit.

This report is part of a systematic attack on PSB at a European and national level. For example, the genesis of the *Report of the Independent Review of BBC Online* (DCMS, 2004) was the lobbying efforts of the British Internet Publishers Alliance (BIPA), which six years ago began to argue that the dominance of BBC Online had a detrimental effect, by inhibiting commercial investment in other online initiatives. Also local and regional newspapers in the UK, through their organisation, the Newspaper Society, have been unhappy with the way BBC Online has developed local content which intrudes on their business activity. The chair of the online report, Philip Graf, was former chief executive of Trinity Mirror, which owns national newspaper titles (the *Daily Mirror*, *Sunday Mirror* and *The People*), but is also the largest owner of local and

regional newspapers in the UK.

The report's recommendations were seen by BIPA as a 'victory' for their lobbying efforts: in future the BBC's online activities must be carefully monitored, with a priority given to coverage of news, current affairs and education; the BBC board of governors should appoint two new governors, one with new media experience and another with competition law experience; and the BBC should source 25% of its content from outside suppliers, except for news.

Intriguingly, the contact for further information on BIPA's response to the Graf report is Angela Mills Wade, the same person who is listed to contact for further information on the EPC/ACT/AER report discussed above. She is a ubiquitous lobbyist who has worked for Rupert Murdoch's News International for several years.

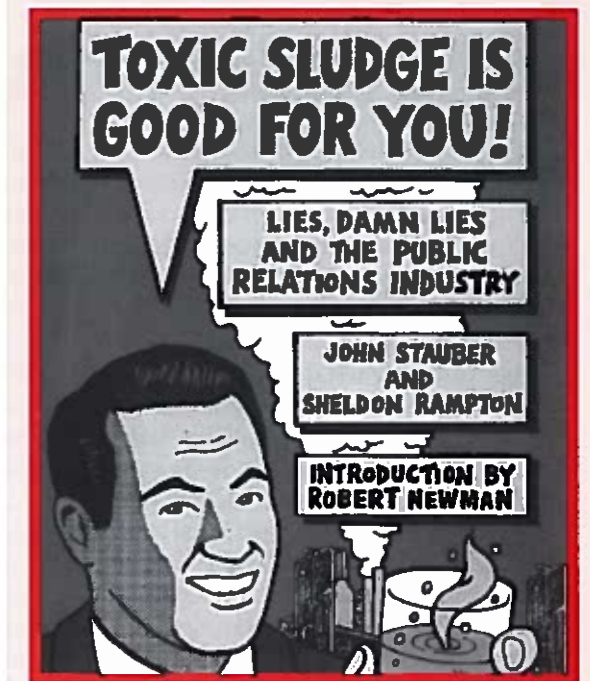
The second broad coalition organisation has a global as well as a European focus. The International Communications Round Table (ICRT) represents 25 leading media, computer and communications companies, including Time Warner, Walt Disney, News International/News Corporation, Reed Elsevier, Sony Entertainment, Bertelsmann, Philips, Siemens and Microsoft. ICRT has put considerable energies into lobbying the European Parliament and European Commission on the revision of the Television Without Frontiers directive.

It argues that the aim of a future directive, 'should be to create a liberal and clearly less restrictive regulatory framework for the audiovisual sector to replace the TV without Frontiers directive.' It rejects regulation: 'Content, in particular broadcasting content, must be free from the straightjacket of regulation developed in a different—historically changed—media world.' Quotas on EU-originated programmes are 'no longer viable or justifiable in a global and technologically converging environment.' On advertising, the EU should 'trust more market forces and self-regulation' and 'the advertising rules in the TV Without Frontiers Directive are classic examples of how technological progress can render obsolete legislation that was intended for the television of the 1980s...The time is thus ripe for a determined modernisation and deregulation of restrictions on TV advertising.'

Some conclusions

Despite fears about the impact of multi-channel TV, publicly funded broadcasters such as France Télévisions, Spain's RTVE, Germany's ZDF and ARD and the UK's BBC have retained their audiences, been able to diversify into new digital initiatives and develop online activities, in contrast to commercial broadcasters who had been affected by loss of income in the advertising recession.

However a new ideological and political offensive seems to be underway against the



THE first UK edition of *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You!: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry* by US media critics John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, with an introduction by Robert Newman has just been published by Constable and Robinson, £6.99.

The book was given a distinctly cool review in PR Week by David Gallagher, the London CEO of Ketchum, one of the agencies attacked in the book. He described it as 'a dusty reprint of a polemic first published in 1995. I had hoped to be challenged; instead I was bored.' He concludes, 'Should you read this book for yourself? Sure, if you've got the time & patience.'

We beg to differ. It remains a relevant, and disturbing, expose of some of the more dubious and dishonest tactics used by the PR industry, and a very informative read.

concept of PSB. The accession of the new member states (many of which have extremely weak and politically compromised public service broadcasting structures) will weaken some of the traditional bases of support for both PSB and the body of ideas associated with the social-market broadcasting model. Also policies associated with the defence of Europe's cultural identity, and interventions to protect EU-originated programming through the *Television Without Frontiers* directive, are also likely to be modified, partly through intense lobbying by European and global commercial groupings. Also CEE countries may be reluctant, because of structural weaknesses within their indigenous broadcasting industries, to apply them. As a new commercial media policy dynamic, driven by primarily economic goals, develops wider support in Western Europe, countries from CEE will also be likely to focus their media policy objectives on achieving the same goals.

NUJ launches PR guidelines

'Never has there been more suspicion and misunderstanding about the role of journalists working in public relations, press offices and information services,' declared Jim Corrigan, President of the National Union of Journalists, as he unveiled new Ethical Guidelines and Working Practices for NUJ members working in public relations and information services.

'Our public relations members are worried about job security and attempts to alter the nature of the press officer role, particularly in local government. That's why this year's NUJ Annual Delegate Meeting in Liverpool called for guidelines to clarify the role and expectations of press and information officers and to defend their professional and personal integrity.'

Jim Corrigan said well publicised cases, such as the dispute at Haringey Council in London, had highlighted the need for strong ethical behaviour

and good practice in press offices and information services'.

Lionel Morrison, Chair of the Union's Public Relations and Information Industrial Council, which drew up the guidelines, said: 'The new guidelines provide a set of working practices that lets our PR members and their employers know what is expected of them. They make it clear that the NUJ will give immediate backing to its members should they refuse to carry out unethical instructions.'

The Guidelines clarify the professional standards expected of PR members in press offices, consultancies and information services and what they expect from their employers and clients. A copy of the guidelines may be found on the CPBF web site www.cpb.org.uk The guidelines were launched at a meeting of the Press and PR Industrial Council on 9 September.

1979, Trade Unions & Journalism

NICHOLAS JONES on a book launch which produced surprising areas of agreement

AN evening with Old Labour and New Labour-in the shape of Geoffrey Goodman and Alastair Campbell-produced an unexpected and united front: they both felt trade unionists had been let down by their leaders.

Goodman considered it was 'a lack of imagination' on the part of the unions that led to the 1979 Winter of Discontent; Campbell argued that once Margaret Thatcher was elected the trades unions played the media game which suited the Conservatives' agenda and as a result the unions ended up marginalising themselves.

Another shared concern of the two former *Daily Mirror* stalwarts was over the future direction of journalism. Goodman thought the problems journalists faced in trying to do their job with 'honesty and integrity' were greater than ever before; Campbell went further, claiming that 'a lot of journalists are doing what they are told' rather than reporting fairly.

Campbell was the guest speaker at a reception held by the London Review Bookshop in support of Goodman's new book, *From Bevan to Blair*, which has just been published by Pluto Press.

With the debate chaired by the former UNISON general secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe, it was perhaps inevitable that one focus of discussion was the 'Winter of Discontent' and the events surrounding Labour's defeat in the 1979 general election.

Goodman said it was 'a failure of imagination at the highest level of the union leadership' that opened the door for Thatcher to walk through; she inherited a situation which should never have been presented to her and she was 'able to undo almost everything that the 1945 Labour government tried to achieve'.

Campbell thought the reason Thatcher was in power for so long was because she was driven by an agenda which had huge media support and which depended on the general hostility of the trade unions; it was the unions which allowed the Conservatives to define industrial journalism in a way which suited their strategy and helped them stay in power.

Union leaders ended up believing they could only make their point if they played the media game, delivering headlines about 'rows, scandals and the like' rather than concentrating on what they were really doing. 'In the end union leaders have only been

able to attract attention to themselves if they set themselves in conflict with a point of authority, which recently has usually been the leader of the Labour Party'.

Campbell believed that by adopting this tactic the unions had rendered themselves less relevant. He was amazed the union movement still had no strategy to communicate to the public those things which it did so well, as happened for example in Germany, where the unions were seen as performing a valuable service for their members.

When it came to the role of the news media, Campbell had little sympathy for the journalists of today. Goodman urged politicians to be more understanding of the pressures they faced due to twenty-four hour reporting and technological changes. 'The problems they face in trying to do their job with honesty and integrity are greater than ever'.

But Campbell accused journalists of conveying politicians' work to the public through 'a ceaseless prism of cynicism' when in fact most people in politics were honest and decent. 'I regret to say I don't believe that most journalists are honest people trying to do their best. A lot are doing what they are told, driven by an agenda set by the small group of people who own newspapers'.

Winning a voice for licence fee payers

THE BBC should be more democratic and responsive to the citizens it serves, CPBF members agreed at a special seminar organised by the CPBF and NUJ in London on 8 September.

The meeting considered a proposal that the Board of Governors, which failed the BBC so lamentably during the crisis that followed the publication of the Hutton Report in January, should be elected by the licence free payers. At present the government appoints its twelve members.

The proposal came from Professor Sylvia Harvey of Lincoln University, an expert in the governance of the BBC. In a submission to the government's review of the BBC Charter, in the run-up to the renewal of the

charter due in 2006, she proposes a ballot every three years by all licence-fee payers. There would be a new independent BBC Council that would oversee the process.

Licence fee payers, she said, were effectively shareholders of the BBC and should elect the board in the same way as happens in public companies. The BBC should continue to be funded by the licence fee, and its level should be set, not as at present by government, but by the BBC Council.

Sylvia Harvey said: 'The old principle must apply: no taxation without representation.'

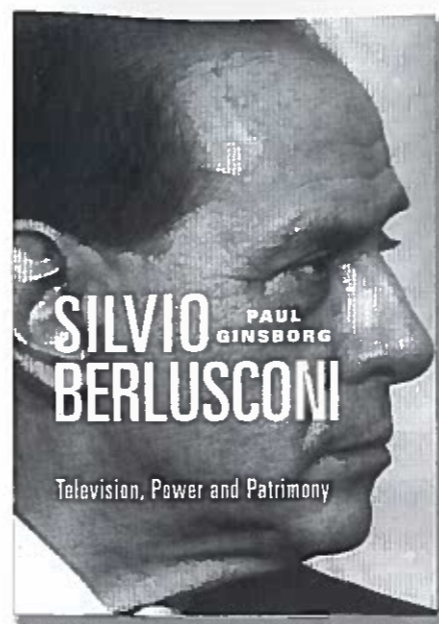
As representatives of the public, the governors' responsibilities would not

be to run the BBC but to defend it as a public service.

During the Hutton crisis, the Board of Governors came under widespread criticism over its conflicting roles. It was expected to supervise the corporation's management, to deal with complaints, and to defend the BBC from attack. As Downing Street stepped up its criticisms of the reporting of the run-up to the war, the conflicts became impossible to deal with and the governors went into a panic and, after blindly resisting, caved in to government pressure.

The CPBF has for a long time recognised that changes in the powers of the governors are needed and that there should be a radical overhaul of the structures of accountability within broadcasting.

A full transcription of the event is being prepared for the CPBF website.



Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power and Patrimony by Paul Ginsborg **£16.00**

JUST as I was starting this review yet another Berlusconi story appeared in the papers. The Italian Prime Minister has appointed Elisabetta Gardini, an actress and television variety show presenter with little political experience, to be the spokesperson for Forza Italia. In the June European elections Forza Italia's share of the vote slipped to 21 per cent, down from 29 per cent in the 2001 general election, which brought Berlusconi to power for a second time.

Berlusconi made the appointment because he believed that she would enhance the party's support, and attract women voters. But some Forza Italia politicians had urged him not to make the appointment. *La Repubblica* quoted one saying the Italian leader had a 'weakness for tall, slim, beautiful women with long legs.' The paper also thought the appointment revealed Berlusconi's approach to politics was that of an entertainer and media tycoon, and he was 'more interested in image-making than policies and ideas.' This could be dismissed as one more example of Berlusconi's bizarre and erratic behaviour (during the Italian Presidency of the European Union, for example), and the man himself as a vain, clownish figure so concerned about his appearance that he has a face lift or hair transplant. It was, after all, *The Economist*, which dubbed him 'Burlesquoni'.

Paul Ginsborg does not share this view. He is a respected public intellec-

tual who teaches history at Florence University and both in this excellent book and his earlier *Italy and Its Discontents* he has taken the rise to power of Berlusconi very seriously.

Berlusconi's first government fell in December 1994, after only six months in power. It was the precarious state of his company (Fininvest moved dangerously into debt after 1989) as well as the need to preserve his near monopoly of commercial television which had pushed him towards politics in 1994. He used the years after his loss of power to rebuild his economic power so that he entered the 2001 election as one of the richest men in Europe with around \$10 billion dollars.

Berlusconi used his massive wealth to reorganise Forza Italia into an effective machine to mobilise electoral support, and recreate the coalition of Umberto Bossi's Northern League and Gianfranco Fini's National Alliance with its nostalgia for Fascism, under the name of the Casa delle Libertà, the 'House of Liberties'.

Ginsborg is rightly critical of the failure of the centre-left to recognise the potential danger of the emergence of such a figure as Berlusconi: during five years of government no laws on the conflict of interests were passed; no reform of the Italian media system undertaken; no challenge to the fact that Berlusconi was the leader of the opposition at the same time as being on trial on a number of serious charges. Most damningly, 'a climate of opinion was created which favoured indulgence and procrastination, not only with regard to Berlusconi but also in key Mafia trials and those

regarding Tangentopoli.'

The result was the creation of a 'corrosive combination' of media and political power. Ginsborg analyses the television culture projected through Berlusconi's television channels based on consumerism and the promotion of an ideal Italian television family which puts its own acquisitive instincts and interests first. Ginsborg argues that this power and control means that 'dissenting voices from society are never heard...unless they reach such massive proportions, as with the European Social Forum's peace march in Florence in November 2002, that they cannot be ignored.'

One consistent target for Berlusconi has been the judiciary which has been involved in a series of charges against him for bribery and corruption. In a speech on the tenth anniversary of his decision to enter politics, he proclaimed to resounding applause, 'Better Fascism than the bureaucratic tyranny of the judiciary.' He has used political power to shield himself from the charges and to mount an assault on the independence and integrity of the judiciary.

Ginsborg ends his book by reminding us that spring 2006, the date of the next national elections, will be decisive: 'If Berlusconi wins, there can be no doubt that he will establish a fully fledged politico-media regime in the heart of Europe.' This book's relevance goes beyond the Italian national frame, however. The themes Ginsborg explores in this very important book resonate globally, as media and political power grow ever more integrated.

GW

SUPPORT THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM

TIM LEZARD

THE European Social Forum is coming to London between 14 and 17 October, and the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom wants you to be a part of it.

The ESF is a chance for activists to come together to engage in debate, organise action and build networks to strengthen our movement. It is a giant gathering for everyone opposed to war, racism and corporate power and for everyone who wants to see global justice, workers' rights and a sustainable society.

The media, of course, plays a huge role in how the world is viewed, which is why the CPBF, together with the National Union of Journalists, will be running a series of seminars on the subject.

We have one seminar on the concentration of the media, which will look at how newspapers and broadcasters are being controlled by a shrinking number of global conglomerations and how these unelected chiefs of capital are exercising their power to dictate the global agenda to

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CPBF NEWS

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protect their own interests, rather than those of elected governments.

The session will be chaired by Jeremy Dear, (NUJ General Secretary), with speakers including *Free Press* editor Granville Williams and Jasmina Popovic, President of the Croatian journalists' union.

On a similar theme, NUJ President Jim Corrigan will chair a meeting on public service broadcasting. Focusing on the importance of keeping the media free from state and commercial interference, the UK speaker is CPBF national council member Tom O'Malley.

The third seminar looks at how governments try to control the media in times of war through a mixture of propaganda and censorship.

Chaired by Paul Mackney, General Secretary of NATFHE, the UK speaker is David Miller, editor of *Tell Me Lies* and frequent *Free Press* contributor.

We have also contributed to a seminar on how governments manufacture terror to keep us in a state of frightened compliance. Human rights lawyer Gareth Pierce will be speaking.

Times for the seminars have yet to be

The Error in 'Terrorism'? Political Violence & the Media

11-12 November at Southampton Institute Conference Centre

The first day of the conference explores the nature of political violence and terrorism and the second day the role of the media. Top speakers from the media, politics and academia, including Mary Riddell (*The Observer*), Mike Berry, co-author *Bad News From Israel*, Sharif Nashashibi (*Arab MediaWatch*) and David Miller, editor *Tell Me Lies*.

Full conference information & booking details:

www.jc2m.co.uk/conference.htm

confirmed, but why not book your place now and attend the whole event?

Registration costs £30, with the first 20,000 people receiving a free London travel card.

At a time when world leaders have been forced to conspire in ever-more isolated spots, the ESF is unashamedly vibrant and on the streets, connecting with people.

There are more details on the website (www.fse-esf.org) which will tell you how to become part of this amazing event that unites activists from all over the world in their desire to reclaim politics from the politicians and return democracy to the people.

Spin & Corporate Power

18-19 November Strathclyde University

Leading experts will analyse how spin works and how to counter it. An impressive range of international speakers and a keynote address by Leslie Sklair, author of *Globalisation: Capitalism and Its Alternatives*.

The seminar is a project of Spinwatch (www.spinwatch.org)

Further details email:

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Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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