

EDITORIAL

MR JUSTICE EADY'S comments on the reports in the *Daily Telegraph* about George Galloway, MP, which appeared in the paper in April last year, were devastating. His response to the *Telegraph's* executive editor, who thought the paper covered the story neutrally, was: 'he is not the only *Daily Telegraph* witness to be deluding himself in this respect.' He went on, 'They did not merely adopt the allegations. They embraced them with relish and fervour.'

The *Telegraph* leader, 'Saddam's little helper' was 'a value judgement about Mr Galloway's unproven conduct.'

The *Telegraph* defence was one of 'qualified privilege' where a paper publishes serious allegations which they are unable to prove are true. However this defence, established five years ago in a case brought by the former Irish premier, Albert Reynolds, against *The Sunday Times*, had an important proviso. The law lords ruled that the media would have a defence in a libel action where the information, even if false, concerned a matter of public interest, but only if the story was published in a responsible way.

The libel award of £150,000 did not please *The Times*. It supports the *Telegraph* applying to the Court of Appeal, seeking to challenge both the ruling on liability and the 'excessive' damages award. In a leader (3/12/4) it reviewed both the Reynolds case and one which followed that, *Loutchansky v Times Newspapers*, and quoted the Master of the Rolls, who said that it was in the public interest in a democracy that there be 'free expression and, more particularly...the promotion of a free and vigorous press to keep the public informed'.

This is a very thin argument indeed to deploy in defence of the *Daily Telegraph*. Surely *The Times* is not suggesting that 'free expression' justifies recklessly publishing material without checking its accuracy first?

THREATS TO THE BBC

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

'We like to make sure we always have one review (of the BBC) in process and two pending,' Bill Bush, special adviser to the Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, said in January 2003. The gloating tone of this remark suggests something of the gulf between theory and practice in the relationship between government and the BBC.

In theory, the BBC is meant to operate independently from government, yet when the BBC applies the policies laid down by government, the reverse happens.

In 1994, as part of Charter renewal, the Conservative government required the BBC to expand into new media, to generate commercial revenue and build a presence in global markets. The BBC did this, and provoked fierce attacks from its commercial rivals, who then lobbied the Labour government, citing competition law, to charge the BBC with unfair trading, abuse of licence fee money, and distorting the market.

The result has been a string of reviews: BBC Online, BBC News 24, BBC3, the children's channels, and so on. Also there has been an escalation in government intervention in the operations of the BBC. As Georgina Born points out in her excellent book, *Uncertain Vision*, 'government instruction dictated BBC policies, which provoked competitors' hostility, which in turn elicited government sanctions against the BBC.'

Now we have another report, by the independent panel, chaired by Lord Burns. The report states that it wants to help ensure a 'strong and independent' BBC but its proposals, if implemented, would have the opposite effect. It proposes another review of the BBC's funding and structure half way through the next



BBC Director General Mark Thompson

Charter renewal in 2012, a move towards subscription, close monitoring of the BBC's remit by an independent body, and a sharper focus on distinctive public service programmes.

BBC Director General Mark Thompson has announced 2900 job cuts, and plans to boost the amount of independent programming, move parts of the BBC out of London and sell off assets.

Again the government is interfering, with Tessa Jowell enthusiastically supporting an increase in independent production, a policy which will do great damage to the BBC's programme making capacity. The government's interference in the BBC, vividly demonstrated in the events around the death of David Kelly, is part of a broader pattern of unacceptable intrusion into the operations of the organisation.

It is absolutely vital that policies to enhance the BBC's independence, and to push back the influence of government in its day-to-day workings, are pursued. The problem is, as Georgina Born points out, the government's drive to curb the BBC is fuelled 'by its ideological discomfort with a creative and powerful public sector, and its insalubrious political interest in appeasing Murdoch's press.'

Digital deadlines—who pays?

BARRY WHITE

In September Ofcom published its timetable for digital switchover. It formed part of the new licences for ITV, Channels 4 and 5 and suggested that a final switch-off date of 31 December 2012. It also announced that some areas could switch from analogue from 2007. Two such areas are the villages of Ferryside and Llansteffen in South Wales. Here the analogue signal could be switched off in 2005 as part of a government trial. Although free digital replacements are being offered, the picture is none too clear about what will happen to the rest of us. Which is why the British Pensioner and Trade Union Association have launched a

campaign and petition to get the government to pay for the switchover for pensioners.

They point out that many pensioners only have analogue television sets (while a recent Ofcom survey reported that 13.7 million households have digital TV—some 55% of UK homes), which means they can only watch the five analogue channels. If they want to continue watching TV pensioners will have to buy into Cable, Sky or Freeview, which can cost between £50 and £100 and depends on signal strength. Remembering back to the days when Channel 5 was introduced and all TV and videos were converted without cost to the viewer, the Association is

calling on the government to meet the cost. It also points to Italy where analogue switch off is scheduled for 31 December 2006 and the government plans to give away one million digital sets free of charge.

The Association has raised an important question. The switch off will save the television companies cash—the Association estimates ITV will save £200 million per year, and the government will also benefit from the sale of the vacant analogue signals for non-TV use.

To find out more about the Association's campaign, contact Jack Sprung at Flat 11, Victoria Court, 10 Davenport Road, Coventry, CV5 6PY or ring 02476 675840.

Open Access—a publishing revolution?

MIKE McGRATH

'LET them put their money where their mouth is. I am not saying that they are not going to do that, but the academic community now needs to show how seriously it wants Open Access. So yes, it is time for the open-access movement to put up, or go off and do something else.' So what has caused Derk Haank, the CEO of Springer to get so riled up in this interview with *Information Today*?

Academic publishing may seem small beer but it generates over a £1 billion gross profit for Springer's rival, Elsevier. Springer was bought recently by private equity firm Candover and Cinven who certainly aren't interested in academic research—maximising profits is their goal. The industry publishers around 20,000 journal titles a year. A subscription to Elsevier's *Brain Research* will set you back by about £13,000 a year.

The movement that worries them has grown from a few visionaries in the late 1990s to the subject of a Select Committee report last month and two reports from the Wellcome Trust, the largest non governmental of medical research in the UK and probably in the world. The driver has

been the unbridled greed of commercial publishers who typically increase prices of their journals by 2-3 times the rate of inflation every year. Their input is research articles that are given free along with copyright by the authors, only to be packaged and sold back to the same audience at vast prices. Academic librarians can no longer afford to be gouged in this way. Many academics see the Web as a way of making their findings freely and quickly available to all who wish to read them, rather than via high priced, slow and restricted access.

Sounds reasonable? Not to New Labour, which has rejected all the recommendations of the Select Committee, chaired by left winger Ian Gibson but cross bench in composition. The quality of the exchanges says something about the incompetence and corruption of the Department of Trade and Industry: Some are hilarious and could come straight from a script for *Yes Minister*; for example—'Professor Sir Keith O'Nions (sic) told us in oral evidence that "I am not going to express a view on whether their (publishers) profits are reasonable or unreasonable. It is a matter for

Government to decide whether it is an industry it chooses to regulate or not regulate". We were baffled by this response; particularly because Sir Keith himself appeared before us as a representative of government.' (p32). You couldn't make it up. The DTI has ensured that the interests of the commercial publishers are paramount rather than the interests of research dissemination, the vast part of which is paid for out of taxes. I suppose one shouldn't be surprised. A government that is willing bed fellows with an Italian crook and an American religious lunatic isn't going to be hard on those who profit from publicly funded research.

However all is not lost. The USA is far more radical than the UK on issues of publishing freedoms and the mandatory deposit of academic articles in electronic repositories is being established where they will be freely available to all. The Wellcome Trust in the UK looks as if it will do likewise and the Higher Education community is getting its act together. A movement started by Robert Maxwell with Pergamon Press may have had its hay day of gross profiteering.

SpinWatch gets a great launch

OVER sixty people attended the inaugural launch of SpinWatch at an international conference on Spin and Corporate Power at Strathclyde University on 18/19 November.

SpinWatch is a new collaborative venture between academics, and investigative journalists that aims to counter government lies and corporate spin. The organisers hope the web-site, SpinWatch.org, will become an invaluable tool for journalists on a whole host of deceptive PR techniques.

The conference opened with the theme of corporate power, spin and deception. Andy Rowell, a freelance journalist, and one of SpinWatch's cofounders, argued that corporate spin could fool the media and public. He gave an example involving the issue of climate change.

On 8 November 2004, there had been the publication of a major 4 year study into the effects of climate change on the Arctic, by 300 leading climate scientists, eight governments and indigenous groups from the region. The scientists had reached some alarming conclusions that the Arctic was rapidly warming and sea ice disappearing, which threatened the future of wildlife such as polar bears and the survival of indigenous groups.

The following day, the world's media picked up the story. *The Los Angeles Times* led with 'Climate Change accelerating, report warns', while the *Daily Mail* warned of the 'Arctic Apocalypse'. The one dissenting voice was *The Guardian*, whose headline ran 'Climate Change Claims Flawed, Says Study'. The article, written by *The Guardian's* science editor, Tim Radford, argued that a 'team has condemned claims of climate catastrophe as "fatally flawed" in a report released today'.

What Radford did not tell *Guardian* readers that his article was based on a spoiler report by the International Policy Network, a right-wing think tank based in London, that received \$50,000 from the world's largest oil company Exxon in 2003. Rowell argued that Radford's piece 'was a

perfect example of corporate PR and spin at work. A corporate front group with hidden funding from the oil industry scuppers the launch of a huge international report on climate change. It leaves the controversy about climate change open when it should be closed. It left the reader confused when they should be outraged'. The oil industry was using the same tactics as the tobacco industry had done, he said, trying to delay action regarding its products.

Next up was Laura Miller, from the Center for Media and Democracy in the US, who highlighted the case of the DCI Group, a Washington based public affairs organisation, with close ties to the Bush administration. The DCI Group runs a host of corporate front organisations in Europe and the US.

One of the most influential is the website Techcentralstation, which is sponsored by Microsoft and Exxon, that is becoming a leading vehicle for right-wing ideology and for attacking progressive organisations. Miller showed that in some cases DCI-groups were totally virtual organisations. 'You don't even have to have staff to set up a front group,' she said.

David Miller, another co-founder of SpinWatch, and researcher, Angela Millar spoke about the 'Case of the curious cufflinks,' in another example of corporate spin undermining the truth. On 8 January 2004 one of the world's most prestigious scientific journals, *Science*, had reported that Scottish farmed salmon contained high levels of toxic chemicals. The researchers tracked how the Salmon industry spun the story to discredit the original research, using corporate front groups and a 'sustainability communications' company run by an ex-funder of Greenpeace, who has become a lobbyist for several controversial industries.

David Miller also argued that the PR campaign implicated Scotland's first Minister, Jack McConnell, in a 'clear conflict of interest'. McConnell's Scottish Executive pumped £1.5 million into the campaign to convince the public that salmon was safe. Miller



David Miller co-founder of SpinWatch

highlighted that the biggest gift McConnell had received since becoming First Minister was a pair of gold cuff-links given to him by Marine Harvest, a fish farm multinational who benefited from the PR campaign. McConnell's brother also runs a Marine Harvest fish farm.

Eveline Lubbers, gave details of a major report published by SpinWatch to coincide with the conference into BAe's secret 'Spy Ring', that spied on the pressure group the Campaign Against the Arms Trade. The firm at the centre of the spying scandal had collated the identities and details of 150,000 left-wing and environmental activists.

The conference brought together many people fighting propaganda, amongst others: Bob Burton from Australia who talked about Disinfopedia, an online database on the PR industry; Andy Higginbottom on Coke's spin campaign in the face of a growing consumer boycott; Olivier Hoedemann, from Corporate Europe Observatory in Amsterdam on the Brussels 'Lobbyocracy' and James Marriott from Platform on the con of Corporate Social Responsibility. Aeron Davis, from City University highlighted the incestuous world of financial journalism and PR. 'Financial journalism doesn't hold people to account', he argued.

Speaking at the end, David Miller urged people to write for SpinWatch or post articles to the web-site. Others were not so enthusiastic. Interviewed on *Newsnight* Scotland, Peter McMahon a former new labour spin doctor dismissed the SpinWatch site and labelled David Miller, a regular contributor to *Free Press*, a 'sub-Marxist conspiracy theorist'.

Broadcasting: healthy diet or junk food?

FRANCES BALFOUR

THE DCMS has recently been holding seminars on BBC Charter renewal.

At an early seminar on 'Funding' Caroline Thompson, (Director of Public Policy, BBC) commented that, as the BBC is funded by the licence fee, paid by every one that has a television, they are very conscious of their obligation to the whole audience. Other members of the panel from the commercial sector spoke about subscription and advertising. People were prepared to pay a lot of money for programmes they want. Fine for those that can afford 'a lot of money' but is this just another way of saying that there is a lot of money to be made?

In the DCMS seminar on 'Television' Peter Bazalgette, the chairman of Endemol, an independent production company, revealed that when they make programmes for the BBC they put in more 'takeaway' than when producing for commercial companies. He did not define 'takeaway'. But it was a significant comment. What is the 'takeaway'? Maybe it covers a wide range of elements: a better constructed plot; more psychological depth in a drama; more underlying ideas; or more engagement with the social, moral or political issues of the day,

A comparison with food seems helpful. Junk food is so seductive: crisps, chips, coca cola, biscuits, chocolate, ice cream. But for a healthy diet protein, vegetables, fruit, the right balance of fats, sugars and starches, with the associated vitamins and minerals, are essential to be fit and well. Are these the edible equivalent of more TV 'takeaway'?

Advertising encourages children to eat too many foods high in salt, sugar and fat. The providers of processed foods and ready meals are giving us food with more salt than is good for us, currently successfully stalling on the government's efforts to make them reduce it. The food manufacturers make good profits but it can be at the expense of our health.

In the case of television, the BBC is aware of its responsibility to have a genuine concern for the welfare of its audiences. It can aim to provide the mental equivalent of a balanced meal or a healthy diet. Serious news, current affairs, drama, documentaries, history, science, nature programmes, gardening, religion, philosophy, and more, all perhaps fall into the category of serious nutrition.

This is not to say that public service broadcasting should never produce light and enter-

taining programmes, any more than one should totally exclude ice cream, puddings, chocolate or chips from one's diet. The right proportion is the key. Light comedy, variety, relaxing chat shows and perceptive but not too serious sitcoms have their place. And better quality ingredients and less of those that are harmful in excess mean that some 'junk foods' can be quite nourishing. More 'takeaway'-more quality ingredients- and less unnecessary sex and violence, simplistic stereotyping, product placement and the like

mean that some lighter programmes are less 'junk' than others.

We are fortunate that the BBC and other public service producers have set high standards and produce programmes which inform, challenge and inspire. And there are commercial companies which aim at similar quality. But technological change is leading to an explosion of commercial channels. Will all these commercial companies, as they compete for advertising, subscription and profits, produce too many 'junk' programmes with too little 'takeaway'? And will we find that only the BBC, wedded to the dull-sounding concept of public service broadcasting, has our best interests at heart?

A public service publisher?

PAT HOLLAND

THE days when television is neatly organised into predictable channels, each with its own recognisable identity, are numbered.

At least that is the assumption of the communications regulator OFCOM, whose newest proposal is to set up a broadcaster which would be a publisher rather than a channel. The Public Service Publisher will be tailor made for the age of digital convergence. It will 'use all electronic forms of visual media' as well as broadcasting. It could be a server or a continuous loop; you might get it whenever you choose on your computer screen or your mobile phone, and it will probably take up an hour or so on a more conventional broadcast channel. It could publish simultaneously on different platforms. Nobody knows much about what its content will be-apart from the fact that it will be non-commercial, not carry advertising or sponsorship, and will plug a gap 'for certain areas of quality visual content which are unlikely to be supplied outside the BBC in the digital age'. OFCOM has promised to find an annual budget of £30 million-although it's not totally clear where from. It will be launched in 2008, the year the analogue signal-which carried all our television pictures before digital came along-will begin to be phased out.

OFCOM have invited media consultancies to put in four 'shadow bids' to run the new publisher, to give some idea of how it might work out, and have suggested that it should be based outside London and 'could fund new content for the nations and regions'. It is a welcome development, opening up possibilities for innovative formats, interactive structures, community media and smaller scale participatory programming. A bit like Channel Four when it first began, it is being asked to seek out material not available elsewhere. It could give an outlet for those energetic community voices that had a brief flowering in the early days of Channel Four, be much more open to debate and interactivity than the current broadcasters, and offer a space for political participation. But all this is up for grabs.

OFCOM's own research has shown that the many publics that make up the UK appreciate the current heterogeneous mix of domestic channels-some commercial, some not-which has evolved over the years, creating that curiously British

mixture described as public service broadcasting. The problem is that, faced with the challenge from the powerful global multi-channel world, the future does not look bright for what we have come to value as an interrelated public service system. ITV has virtually dropped out of the public service ecology and Channel Four feels threatened. Only the mighty BBC is left, moving into the digital world with its specialised channels, interactive services, websites, educational services and the rest-squeezing the others even more, and creating a dangerous imbalance.

Yet when the conventional analogue signal has been switched off and everything is digital what we now think of a television channel-a varied stream of programmes with a coherent identity, may well no longer be viable. With a multitude of signals streaming in, and a remote control that makes it difficult to find our familiar anchors, a television set may end up more like storage for a programme archive, or a video shop or a computer screen rather than delivering the organised flows of programming with their familiar channel identity we have come to expect. So the idea of a publisher rather than a channel is an imaginative one.

The question is whether this is simply letting ITV off the hook, and providing an excuse for not giving greater support to Channel Four.

It is unlikely that a new publisher could fill the space that is being rapidly vacated by ITV and provide proper competition for the BBC, for example in current affairs and factual programming. It is very necessary and very welcome-but something much more weighty is needed as well. ITV should not be allowed to abandon their traditional public service commitments so easily and Channel Four should be supported. A new public service publisher is welcome, but with the established terrestrial ecology totally shaken up, can it be more than a patching up job?

OFCOM seems an increasingly schizophrenic organisation. While it is full of respect for the complex and closely interrelated system of public service broadcasting which has developed in the UK over the last 50 years or so, it is still seems to be gleefully steaming ahead into a deregulated free market in which telecoms, television, cable, you name it, all set out to compete on a mythical 'level playing field'. It can't have it both ways.

Iraq: the gaping gaps in war reporting



ON 28 June the United States handed over power to a 'sovereign' Iraqi interim government. Within days the Baghdad office of al-Jazeera was raided and closed. The network was accused of inaccurate reporting and banned initially for one month from reporting from Iraq. The ban was then extended 'indefinitely' and in mid-November the interim government announced that any al-Jazeera journalist found reporting in Iraq would be detained.

Al-Jazeera now broadcasts a daily apology 'because we cannot cover Iraq news well since our offices have been closed for over three months by orders from the interim government.'

Maybe we should ask US and UK news media to consider some sort of apology for not being able 'to cover Iraq news well', especially in the light of the non-reporting of the massive destruction wreaked in the assault on Fallujah.. On 30 November the UN's Integrated Regional Information network reported on Fallujah: 'Approximately 70% of the houses and shops were destroyed and those still standing are riddled with bullets.'

An analysis of one week's US television

coverage concluded that 'American media is little more than the 'information arm' of the US military. In every case, the events are shaped to create a favourable impression of our involvement. The allusions to weapons caches, anthrax labs and torture rooms are invoked to feed ethnic and racial hatred and to rationalise the horrific punishment we are visiting on the innocent civilians of Falluja.'

In the UK Media Lens points out, 'You would not know from BBC coverage that a vast war crime has taken place in Fallujah. If Saddam Hussein had demolished 70% of Kuwait in 1990, it would surely have been declared one of the great atrocities of the twentieth century.'

And the concept of 'embedding' reporters worked like a charm. Alex Thomson, the Channel 4 reporter summed it up succinctly: 'A one-sided battle and one-sided coverage to go with it.' The exception, of course, was the NBC film report by Kevin Sites of a US Marine shooting and killing a wounded and prostrate Iraqi in Fallujah. But the copy filed by embedded journalists in the main demonstrates the success of the Pentagon strategy in shaping the stories.

Trade unions & journalism—a response

Operation Scapegoat revisited

DOMINIC WRING

THE last issue of *Free Press* ('1979, Trade Unions and journalism') featured a quote from Alastair Campbell: 'union leaders have only been able to attract attention if they set themselves in conflict with a point of authority, which recently has usually been the leader of the Labour Party'. I take issue with this assertion and argue that it was the Labour hierarchy, and spin-doctors like Campbell in particular, who did much to make an already hostile media climate worse for their supposed allies in the unions. Indeed the exploitation of the prejudice that characterises much mainstream journalistic coverage of labour movement affairs became a key rallying point for the self-styled 'modernisers'. The idea of union leaders controlling the party was one of the myths successfully spun by this cabal, a grouping that can in historically and ideological terms be more appropriately labelled Labour's 'new right'. And a defining moment for them was the 1992 general election which not only saw the defeat of the party but also a 'project' which had supposedly been designed to make it 'electable'. Yet an ensuing campaign of distortion and misinformation was able to lay the blame for this setback elsewhere.

Labour's post-mortem on 1992 was largely conducted through the media (remember this was the campaign that had just popularised the term 'spin doctor') and soon developed what Lewis Minkin called an 'extraordinary fixation' with the role of the party's affiliated unions. The resulting coverage was almost entirely hostile and reminiscent of the kind of biased coverage analysed by the Glasgow University Media Group in the 1970s. But this time the inspiration for much of this criticism came from within the Labour fold and the conduits were those agenda-

setting newspapers (especially the *Guardian*, *Independent* and Campbell's own *Mirror*) most associated with the party and read by its membership. In the coming weeks and months the unions were accused of being 'rooted in the past', 'undemocratic', a source of 'extremism', having 'cloth cap' images and their party allegiances 'constitutionally wrong'. The myth of the monolithic 'barons' became a persistent feature of journalistic reports which took no account of a more complex reality in which the affiliated unions were frequently divided over many issues. An honourable exception in the media reporting was Stuart Weir who marvelled at the way the issue raised and quickly abandoned by the Conservatives during the campaign was now being resurrected by certain Labour politicians after it. Tellingly Weir's *New Statesman* piece was entitled 'Operation Scapegoat'.

Highly selective commentaries from Labour's own private focus groups were used to further the party new right's anti-union agenda at a time when journalists were increasingly sceptical of traditional polling and its perceived failure to predict the recent election outcome. Yet if anything qualitative based findings were more open to being misinterpreted and distorted than conventional opinion research and this is precisely what happened in this case as columnists like Donald Macintyre of *The Independent* were passed leaked reports and began concluding: 'Labour lost the election because floating voters saw it as union-dominated and outdated and because they believed voting for it was not in their financial self-interest, according to confidential post-election research circulating in the party's high command'. Similarly Patrick Wintour of *The Guardian* wrote about 'devastating' feedback which suggested the party was 'too old fashioned, too tied

to the past, too linked to minorities and old images of the trades unions'; the latter were blamed for offering 'an old fashioned, bureaucratic image (to) key suburban swing voters'.

In sharp contrast the media failed to seriously address other possible negatives such as the so-called 'Kinnock factor', a notable omission given the presidential nature of modern campaigning and this leader's widely recognised unpopularity with voters. This self-denial had in fact been unofficial policy as party strategist Philip Gould had consistently suppressed damning research feedback on Kinnock's performance in order to protect the leader.

The official party report on the election defeat, published in Autumn 1992, drew on conventional polling and was far more judicious and balanced than the highly questionable journalistic analysis that had been based on leaked focus group material. Its publication came too late to correct the distorted debate over the party-union 'link' but it did however reveal that only 7% of voters had mentioned unions as a reason for not supporting Labour. The more common explanations were general party image (30%); economic competence and tax (30%); Major and Kinnock (20%) and all of these were comprehensively explored in *Labour's Last Chance?*, the official and independent British Election Study's lengthy inquiry into the 1992 election outcome. Significantly the BES team limited their discussion of the union influence on the result to the longer-term electoral consequences of declining membership. By contrast the mediated post-mortem did much to question and delegitimise the unions as political actors and eventually hasten the installation of a Labour new right-winger like Tony Blair as party leader.

Dominic Wring is the author of *The Politics of Marketing the Labour Party* (Palgrave)



Challenging Corporate Media

Outfoxed A Robert Greenwald film

SOME people seem to think that Jeremy Paxman or John Humphrys are tough interviewers. But they don't go 'Shut

up, shut up, shut up!' at people they don't like. That's what Fox News anchor Bill O'Reilly does, and you can see it for yourself in the film *Outfoxed*, now released on DVD in the UK.

The target of this outburst is the somewhat bemused son of a man killed in New York on September 11 2001 who was against the war. After being told he was a traitor to his father's memory and so on, the man ventured to reason with his host, and that's where Bill O'Reilly lost it.

Outfoxed, directed by Robert Greenwald, gives the strong impression that this kind of exchange is

routine on Fox News. There is a seamless line between news and comment, with presenters breaking off from reports to deliver mean-minded right-wing homilies.

The intolerance, the flagrancy, the arrogance, the natural assumption of

authority—these really are the stuff of fascism. You can almost see the ghost of Dr Goebbels in the control room.

There is nothing like it in the UK, of course. Even Rupert Murdoch could not possibly get British-trained TV journalists to behave like this, and indeed Sky News is no worse and in some ways less restrained than the BBC or ITN.

But then there's nothing like *Outfoxed* in the UK either. Without a theatrical release it has been outselling Hollywood blockbusters on DVD, promoted by the radical movement. There is nothing in the UK like Michael Moore's films either. Or books with the popularity of those of Greg Palast, Al Franken or Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber. David Miller's *Tell Me Lies*, containing an equivalent critique of the reporting of the invasion of Iraq, did not even get a review in the liberal press, let alone nationwide promotion and sales.

There is no Moveon.org and no popular radical media organisation like FAIR. There is the CPBF, but we have a long way to go to the stage where we can involve millions in a campaign to stop the media shutting us up.

Tim Gopsill

Censored 2005 Peter Phillips and Project Censored (Seven Stories Press) £12.99

THE latest Project Censored publication is dedicated to the American Library Association (ALA). The Patriot Act, passed six weeks after the events of 11 September 2001, gave unprecedented powers to federal law enforcement agencies to gather intelligence and investigate anyone suspected of terrorism. One provision (Section 215) granted authority to law enforcement agencies to obtain search warrants for business records, including those retained by libraries and bookshops. Through a 'gag order' the Act also prohibits any person or institution served with a search warrant from disclosing what has taken place.

The ALA was very concerned about the chilling effects of the Patriot Act and began to mount a campaign to amend the Act so that libraries and bookshops would be exempt from the provision. This campaign has won broad support, with over 300 communities passing resolutions

opposing the Patriot Act, and urging local officials contacted by federal investigators to refuse requests that they believe violate civil liberties.

For readers wanting a broad analysis of the threats to media freedom, and the insidious way corporate media marginalise important stories, this is the book. The core of *Censored 2005* is the selection of 25 important stories the mainstream media ignored. Some of them will be familiar to *Free Press* readers, such as the decision by the Florida Court of Appeals unanimously agreeing with the assertion by Fox News that there is no rule against distorting or falsifying the news in the United States. This involved the case of the investigative journalists Jane Akre and Steve Wilson and their report on the health risks related to the controversial bovine growth hormone, manufactured by Monsanto Corporation. Under pressure from Monsanto and Fox the reporters refused to make revisions to the story which were in direct conflict with the

facts. They were fired.

In addition to the top censored stories of 2003 and 2004, there are also some good, chunky chapters on the giant media groups which dominate the US media, a very good forensic analysis of what happened in Haiti, and an overview of 'Junk Food' (empty calorie news) and 'News Abuse' news stories (coverage of tragic or horrific events).

The focus of the book is mainly on US media, but the book deserves a wide readership in the UK. Buy a copy, and in solidarity with the AMA's stand, make sure your local library orders a copy too.

GW

Timely Book

JUST out from Pluto Press to coincide with the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act: *Your Right to Know* by Heather Brook. It is a basic, clear guide on how to go about using the act, with details of the various organisations to approach for specific information.

CPBF NEWS

OFCOM RESPONSE

THE CPBF response to the Ofcom Review of Public Service Broadcasting, Phase 2: meeting the digital challenge has been sent in. You can find the full text by going to the CPBF website: www.cpbfb.org.uk

BBC CONFERENCE

WE are planning a major conference in London to coincide with the publication of the Green Paper on the BBC's future on Saturday 5 March 2005. Please keep the date free.

Full details will be published in next issue of *Free Press*.

With the possibility of a General Election in May 2005, the timetable for consultation on the Green Paper is unclear, but it is important that broadcasting issues are not lost during the election campaign.

The Campaign is also reviewing and updating its Media Manifesto, last published before the 1997 General Election. With publication planned for early February, the manifesto should make an important contribution to making the media an

election issue. It will also be available on the CPBF web site.

CPBF SCOTLAND

THE CPBF had a bookstall at the Spinwatch launch, and a number of people were interested in setting up a CPBF group in Scotland. If you live in Scotland, and are interested in

establishing a CPBF group, please get in touch with Barry White at the London office (0208 521 5932). It is proposed to hold a planning meeting in either Glasgow or Edinburgh towards the end of January. Details will be placed on the CPBF web site and Scottish supporters of the Campaign will also be informed.

WITHOUT COMMENT

“ ANECDOTAL evidence led this paper to investigate the possibility that valuable and inevitably embarrassing, but not secret, information had been destroyed in advance of the Freedom of Information Act's 1 January starting date.

The evidence we discovered gave support to the anecdotal evidence, but unless and until whistleblowers come forward to provide first-hand accounts, it will be impossible to have more than grave suspicions about what has been happening.

Given the record of this government for candour, given Whitehall's tradition of stultifying concealment, given the fact that some local councils have already been caught shredding what they should have left to posterity, nobody can be blamed for finding officials guilty until they prove themselves innocent.”

The Daily Telegraph November 29 2004

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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FOR PRESS AND

BROADCASTING

FREEDOM

CPBF web site: www.cpbfb.org.uk

Email address: freepress@cpbfb.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER ANNUM

- | | |
|---|-----|
| a) Individual membership | £15 |
| b) Unwaged | £6 |
| d) Supporting membership (includes free CPBF publications) | £25 |
| e) Institutions (eg libraries: includes ten copies of Free Press) | £25 |

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- | | |
|---------------------------|------|
| f) Fewer than 500 members | £25 |
| g) 500 to 1,000 | £30 |
| h) 1,000 to 10,000 | £50 |
| i) 10,000 to 50,000 | £115 |
| j) 50,000 to 100,000 | £225 |
| k) Over 100,000 | £450 |

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £.

Name

Address

.....

Postcode Tel.....

Organisation (if applicable)

Return form to CPBF, 2nd floor, Vi & Garner Smith House, 23 Orford Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9NL
Tel: 020 8521 5932