

TWO DISASTERS, TWO RESPONSES



GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

THE contrasts between media coverage of two disasters, the war in Iraq and its aftermath, and the tsunami which engulfed areas in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India, are striking. They give us some remarkable insights into the way we were overwhelmed with words and images about one event, and receive partial and distorted reporting of the other.

Take the issue of access. Robert Fisk has coined the phrase 'hotel journalism' to describe the situation where more and more Western reporters in Baghdad are reporting from their hotels rather than the streets of Iraq's towns and cities. 'Many reporters are reduced to phoning the American military or the Iraqi "interim" government from their hotel room, receiving

"facts" from men and women who are even more isolated from Iraq in the Baghdad Green Zone around Saddam Hussein's former republican palace than are the journalists,' Fisk writes in *The Independent* (17 January 2005).

Another revealing report by the US Frontline reporter, Nick Hughes, cites, amongst others, a reporter from *The Washington Post*, Jackie Spinner, squatting down behind a concrete wall trying to file a story by satellite, and lamenting her dependence upon Iraqi stringers and the military for information: 'I can't be my own eyes and ears anywhere,' she says.

Meanwhile the interim government has forced the independent al-Jazeera TV station and critical newspapers to shut down, whilst US subsidised media broadcast freely. Officials for the interim prime

minister, Ayad Allawi, have been handing out envelopes with \$100 notes to journalists, simply for turning up at press conferences.

The result of this constrained reporting suits the military. Embedded reporters occasionally reveal partial accounts of military operations. Scott Petersen, a photographer with Getty Images and reporter with the *Christian Science Monitor*, was in Fallujah and reveals that of the 150 marines he was with 25% were killed or wounded. But what of the Iraqi dead? We have the estimate published in the *Lancet* of 100,000 killed (which Downing Street attempted to discredit, questioning the methodology used by the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health) but no specific figures for the death toll in Fallujah.

MediaLens, in a piece of the 30 January Iraqi election, points out that 'a search of the LexisNexis media database shows that there has not been one substantive analysis of press freedom in Iraq under occupation anywhere in the UK press over the last three months. And yet the media are almost unanimous in describing the

Continued on page 7

The Future of the BBC & Public Service Broadcasting

**Saturday 5 March
10am-5pm**

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The news monopoly

CHRIS ASPINALL

THE Press Association describes itself as 'the UK leader in news and sports information'.

Listen to any day's review of the papers on the Today programme, and it would be easy to get the impression that each has its own huge newsgathering operation. In London, each of the nationals may have staff reporters to cover Whitehall, Westminster, the high courts and repel the enthusiasm of the capital's PRs. Elsewhere, the reality is different. While some, truly local, papers may be able to unearth stories of their own, they have become forced to rely on the monopoly of PA for court, business and national coverage. The BBC may claim to have the world's largest

'newsgathering' operation, but relatively few of the Corporation's hundreds of journalists are 'primary' reporters, out and about, their ears close to the proverbial ground, making and developing contacts, gleaned tip-offs and following up hunches. Evening and regional morning papers, commercial radio and television stations operate under similar constraints. Reporters are under pressure to fill space or airtime, on shifts that are understaffed, leaving them unable to escape from their desks, online computers or umbilical telephones. That pressure gets worse overnight, at weekends and during the silly seasons of August and Christmas holidays. So, almost by default, PA has become the UK's

monopoly reporter. Some smaller agencies exist, and are profitable, but it is PA which has the contracts with most publishers and broadcasters. Few freelancers now see livelihoods in court reporting. Some can survive, usually by covering several hearings almost simultaneously at crown courts, but there are far fewer than there were. Buying material from them can add to the burden of duty editors, who must then justify the spending, a task that may not be worth the hassle. So, unless there is something 'on diary' and a radio or television station knows about an event in advance, coverage will depend—almost by default—on PA. PR handouts may be devoured, often verbatim and without checking, but it is PA that provides much, if not most, of any news organisation's basic material. PA monitors their users too, cannibalistically recycling what little original reporting may have been in one paper, or broadcast on the Today programme or Breakfast with Frost, so others can regurgitate that copy. Papers may top-and-tail PA copy with their own reporters' words, and bylines; radio stations may get anyone who happens to be around the newsroom at the time to 'voice' the same material, but the material has still come from the one source. Editors appear to invest PA with a credibility that is generous, largely uncritical and may not always be convenient. Copy may be ordered from PA, but with, say, only one reporter covering a large area, it may be late afternoon before a report from an early morning hearing is written and filed. It is easy to forget that a story may not be worth using, even if PA has covered it and filed copy. Indeed, the managing editors now overseeing the BBC News Online operation from Birmingham prescribe PA as authoritative. Yet how reliable is the copy? PA has managed reasonably well to maintain the historic quality of the material it circulates. As a commercial organisation that is itself under financial pressure, its managers face the hard decisions of balancing maximum productivity, using human and other resources at optimum capacity, with accuracy and authority. Commerce loves monopolies, simply because competition is expensive. Market economies only function

risk by breaching confidentiality rules—has significantly reduced the chances of finding such stories. Hospital managers, and the commercial PRs many employ, seem to relish the protection that 'medical confidentiality' provides. Secondly, the growth of the media, especially in terms of 'no budget' local radio news, means there are now so many calls for the police and fire services to deal with that details of incidents are recorded on 'voicebanks' for journalists to call. The 'service' provided by the civilian and uniformed officers responsible for these answering machines varies greatly. In some counties, it can take three or even four days for the police to release details of a road accident or the discovery of a body. Others record them and issue e-mail releases within minutes. Checking has become difficult too. Although many police and fire services have media officers, getting hold of them outside normal office hours is not always easy. For journalists, voicebanks are single sources. Fires may be more visible than many police operations, but for most of the time, journalists only get—and report—what the police want to disclose—and how healthy is that?

Check calls

TODAY, as for decades, most journalists start their duty newsdesk shifts at daily and weekly regional and local papers, local radio or regional television stations by making check calls—but the quality and quantity of what is found and reported has changed. Two decades ago, hospitals would be on that list, as well as the police and fire services. Reporters would probably get directly through to the duty police inspector, the duty fire officer and a charge nurse in the accident and emergency department. Tips from one could be checked with the others. Indeed, one memorable Monday, early in the 1980s, a call to the police about the weekend workload elicited nothing, while, a few minutes later, a nurse at the town's hospital revealed that two people had been brought in with knife wounds. Calling back did get a police admission that there had been a nasty brawl outside a pub—and a good splash. Binge drinking may have changed town centre Friday nights since then, but difficulties in getting such information from a hospital—without personal contacts who might be putting their jobs at

when regulation is imposed to enforce competition (and increase costs for the end users). Many cities and counties now have local paper monopolies, even though the perspective across the UK as a whole is more diverse. The legislators who enforce regulation when potential monopolies threaten political interests may not have appreciated this—or how PA has become the single news provider for most. PA is a trusted news source. But trust is always delicate. With PA under as much pressure as any other news organisation to deliver profits, commercial practice presents a major threat to that trust. There may be a greater quantity of news than ever hitting the airwaves or filling the column centimetres, but the quality in terms of the breadth and diversity, of the stories being covered has declined—and more has very much become less.

WITHOUT COMMENT

“Mrs Thatcher's success was founded on winning a significant part of the working class constituency, which had voted Labour, to vote Conservative. Tony Blair's counterstroke since 1994 has been to win back this same constituency, plus a large swathe of Tory 'Middle England' for Labour—or, rather, New Labour. Where Thatcher stole Sun readers from Callaghan, Blair stole Daily Mail readers from Major (and has so far kept them from drifting back to William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Howard).”

John Campbell, reviewing Stephen Pollard's *David Blunkett* Independent on Sunday 17 December 2004

MEDIA MONITOR

CBS PURGE

THE US television network CBS, now part of the global media group Viacom, once had a strong track record in news and current affairs. But it has been tarnished over recent years. The Michael Mann film, *The Insider*, made in 1999, presented the conflict between investigative reporting and corporate interest when a programme on Big Tobacco was pulled from 60 Minutes in 1994.

The recent controversy around the status of documents used in a 60 Minutes programme about President Bush's non-performance in the Texas Air National Guard, transmitted on 7 September 2004, has now led to the sacking of four senior news executives.

The circumstances and processes leading to their sacking have uncomfortable parallels with the whitewash techniques used in the Hutton Report to sacrifice the innocent and protect the guilty. Words like 'purge' and 'witch-hunt' were being used to describe the cowardly actions by CBS executives after they received a report from an 'Independent Review Panel' comprising Dick Thornburgh, former Attorney General to George Bush and former Associated Press chief Lou Baccardi, with help from a corporate law firm. Danny Schechter of Media Channel saw them as 'two guys who knew nothing about TV news and cared less'.

But what really happened, and who was responsible for a media controversy which was a coup for the Bush re-election campaign?

Minutes after the programme was transmitted bloggers contested the authenticity of the memos that were the basis of the story and a blogstorm engulfed CBS over the following weeks.

Cory Pein in *Columbia Journalism Review* (January/February 2005) points out the political stance of the bloggers: 'One of the story's top blogs, RATHERGATE.COM, is registered to a firm run by Richard Viguerie, the legendary conservative fundraiser. Some were fed by the conservative Media Research Center and by Creative Response Concepts, the same PR firm that promoted the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. CRC's executives bragged to *PR Week* that they helped legitimise the

documents-are-fake story by supplying quotes from document experts as early as a day after the report, September 9.'

The mainstream media picked up the 'evidence' and 'verification' for the claims that the documents were forged. The outcome was CBS news anchor, Dan Rather, who presented the original story, apologised; CBS News claimed a source had misled the network on the document's origins; and on 22 September the network announced 'an independent review of the process by which the report was prepared and broadcast to help determine what actions need to be taken'. One other consequence was the controversy effectively froze any attempt by other journalists to investigate the story of Bush's Guard years.

We now have the 'independent' report, which took nearly four months to produce, and reeks of cover-up. Mary Mapes, one of the affected staff, points out in a statement on the report: 'It is noteworthy the panel did not conclude that these documents are false. Indeed in the end, all that the panel did conclude was that there were many red flags that counselled against going on air quickly. I never had control of the timing of any airing of a 60 Minutes segment; that has always been a decision made by my superiors. Airing that story when it did, was also a decision made by my superiors, including Andrew Hayward.'

Andrew Hayward, CBS News President, keeps his job. So does Dan Rather—he is stepping down from CBS Evening News but will still stay on 60 Minutes. Les Moonves, the CBS Chief Executive, in his statement on 10 January 2005, terminated the employment of Mary Mapes, the producer of the segment, and asked Josh Howard, Mary Murphy and Betsy West to resign. Mary Mapes is 'shocked by the vitriolic scape-goating' of Moonves's statement and asserts 'his actions are motivated by corporate and political considerations—ratings rather than journalism'.

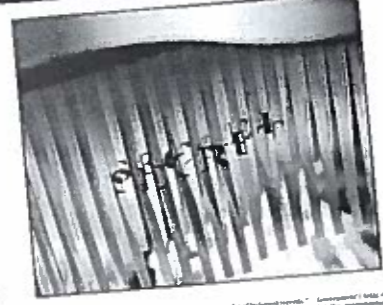
Another episode in the dishonourable tradition of corporate fat cats surviving whilst those lower down the chain are the scapegoats.

THE INDEPENDENT

ARE YOU SMART ENOUGH FOR THE TOUGHEST QUIZ OF 2004?

SHREDDDED!

Hundreds of thousands of government documents are destroyed in the great Freedom of Information Act scandal



When they should not have been destroyed, thousands of government documents were shredded in the great Freedom of Information Act scandal.

MAURICE FRANKEL on how to use the Freedom of Information Act

AFTER a four year delay, the Freedom of Information Act has finally come into force. The new right of access applies to government departments, councils, NHS bodies, schools and universities, the police, the armed forces, quangos, regulators, publicly owned companies, the BBC and Channel 4 (but not to journalistic materials), the devolved assemblies and Parliament itself. The security services and courts are not covered.

The right is retrospective and applies to any recorded information held by an authority, regardless of its age. You no longer have to wait 30 years to see old government records.

To obtain information apply in writing or by e-mail to the authority concerned. Your request will be valid even if you don't mention the FOI Act, though it's a good idea to do so. Send it to the authority's FOI officer—details should be on its website—or to the official handling the issue, if you know who that is. Journalists can use, or bypass, the press office, depending on their preference.

The authority must reply 'promptly' and in any case within 20 working days. A further 10 working days is allowed for requests to the National Archives. A 'reasonable' extension is also allowed where the authority has to consider disclosing exempt information under the Act's 'public interest' test.

If a government department can find the information, extract it from the files and carry out any necessary editing for less than £600, access will be free apart from photocopying, printing and postage costs. But if the cost exceeds this limit, an authority is not obliged to provide the information at all.

The £600 limit is calculated at a fixed rate of £25 an hour, equal to about three and a half days work. Crucially, the time spent deciding whether the information has to be disclosed can't be included in this calculation. For all other public authorities, the limit is £450 or about two and a half days work.

The trick will be to resist the temptation to make sweeping 'give me everything' requests and focus in on the specific information you need. Authorities are required to advise and assist applicants, and should help you identify the kinds of information that may be available. If your request does cost too much they should tell you what information they could release without exceeding the limit. You probably won't get away with breaking a large request down into several smaller ones as the costs of such requests can be aggregated.

There are numerous exemptions though most require even exempt information to be disclosed if the public interest in openness outweighs the public interest in confidentiality. Some apply only if disclosure would 'prejudice' interests such as defence, international relations, law enforcement or commercial interests. The test under separate Scottish FOI Act is whether disclosure would

'substantially prejudice' these interests, making it harder to withhold information.

Certain exemptions give weight to the 'reasonable opinion' of a senior official, for example, on whether disclosure would harm the frankness of advice or 'prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs'. All information relating to the formulation of government policy, ministerial communications, legal advice and information obtained by police or prosecutors while investigating a possible offence is exempt. But in all these cases the information must still be disclosed unless the balance of public interest favours confidentiality rather openness. Exemptions also apply to personal data, breach of confidence, court records and other matters.

If you're after environmental information, your request would be dealt with under new

Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) which implement a European directive. These provide a more powerful right of access than the FOI Act and apply not only to public authorities but also to environmental consultants or contractors working for them. Requests can be made orally as well as in writing, and are subject to their own set of exemptions. Notably, information about emissions to the environment cannot be withheld under the commercial confidentiality exemption.

If you think information has been improperly withheld, or want to challenge any other decision under the Act or EIRs the first step is to ask the authority to reconsider. Afterwards you are free to approach the Information Commissioner, who has the power to overturn the authority's decision on exemptions and public interest and order disclosure.

Unfortunately, ministers have also insisted on a right of veto. This can be used if the Commissioner orders a government department to release information on public interest grounds. The veto cannot be kept secret and could be judicially reviewed. Whether ministers can resist using it, when politically sensitive information is at stake, remains to be seen.

Nevertheless the Act is a major step forward. If requesters are persistent in bringing cases to the Commissioner many long established traditions of secrecy may be overturned.

Maurice Frankel is director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, www.cfoi.org.uk

Freedom at last?

STEPHEN DORRIL HALLEJUAH, a Freedom of Information Act at last! Having used over the past few years, the US, Australian, Irish and even Japanese acts, I know that the British version is one of the weakest in the world. The British Act does not even cover my specialist interest—the role of the security and intelligence services.

I am aware of the stories of weeding and destruction of files before the Act came into operation, and that the attitude of ministers appears grudging at best. The suggestion that material released under the Act will be 'put into context' by government spin doctors is worrying. However, it is now in operation and we need to make as best use of it as we can.

Because of the Act's many restrictions we are unlikely to see major coups along the lines of Watergate or Arms to Iraq-type scandals but there is plenty of scope for revelations now that the '30 year rule' on release of documents comes under the FOIA. Enterprising journalists and historians have an opportunity to revisit such episodes as the Miners Strike, the Westland Affair, the Falklands War, Ireland and the myriad other issues which were never properly covered by an overly constrained press.

There is already evidence that the government has realised the absurdity of still keeping records secret for fifty or even a hundred years, and many are now to be released.

The experience of the US FOIA is that business has been the main group to exploit the potential of the Act by seeking information on rivals and government contracts. It will be no different here.

The other group which has effectively clogged up the system in the US, particularly with regard

to Immigration and Naturalisation records, has been family historians, feeding the endless desire for family trees. Whilst this is a pain to historians and journalists it may have benefits. Hopefully, the FOIA can be used to expose the appalling state of official's records on individuals. Police records, for instance, are notoriously inaccurate.

It is in the area of the environment where the Act is likely to have the greatest impact (partly because Europe demands greater openness) as local citizens seek out information on such immediate issues as electricity and microwave pylons, nuclear and chemical dumps. Local PFI and PPP projects, particularly with the collapse of Jarvis and the mounting costs of many the long-term hospital contracts, would also seem to a profitable area to investigate, but will local newspapers use the Act? The paucity of investigative and in-depth news on councils in local papers suggests not.

The national press, rightly cynical about the government's trumpeting of the Act, has been cautious in its response to the introduction of the FOIA. The Guardian and Independent, however, have been commendable in taking it seriously and setting about using the Act in a planned and systematic way.

It was nearly a decade before the American Act came into its own and then only after major reforms. It is going to be a hard slog in this country and it may be many years before (with a reformed Act with fewer restrictions) any real changes in the general openness of British government comes about. However, the Act is here and everyone genuinely interested in a free press should take the opportunity to chip away at the all-enveloping secrecy with which officialdom encloses the British State.

Stephen Dorril's Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism will be published in September 2005

Congratulations

CPBF'S indefatigable director, Maurice Frankel, topped the Press Gazette poll to become Person of the Year. Back in 1984 Maurice was approached by Des Wilson to set up a group to campaign for openness in government. But it was only in 1998 that Labour found a place for it in the Queen's Speech.

I still have a card, which Maurice was giving out at, I think, the 1998 Labour party conference. It pointed out that freedom of information featured in Labour's election manifestos of 1974, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992 & 1997. He comments that 'no other policy has been consistently promised over 25 years. This is a frustrating and damaging delay'.

Maurice has worked energetically between the time the Act was passed in 2000, until its implementation. He played an important role in the announcement by Lord Falconer in October 2004 that charges for freedom of information requests would not be prohibitively expensive.

It is very appropriate that the journalists' trade journal recognises Maurice's efforts. Let us hope journalists now use the Act. GW

Lobbying, FoI & News International

THE Guardian has also played a very important role in the campaign for freedom of information. Week after week the paper carried reports based on information prised from government departments through legislation which now is extinct. The Conservative minister, William Waldegrave, introduced the Code of Practice on access to government information in 1994. It gave powers to the Parliamentary ombudsman to overrule officials in the civil service who resisted requests to hand over information.

An intriguing set of documents relating to the lobbying by top executives of BSKyB and News International around the Communications Bill was obtained by The Guardian. For documents and a background commentary on their significance go to www.spinwatch.org

Journalism & Public Trust

DEIRDRE O'NEILL reports on an important conference

AN ethical dimension to training, more transparency and named sources in articles, and an NUJ conscience clause were just some of the measures called for to improve public trust in journalism at a conference organised by the National Union of Journalists and Mediawise on 4th December 2004. The conference was attended by journalists, educators, politicians and representatives of key bodies, such as the PCC.

John Lloyd of *The Financial Times* pointed out that the media had become more powerful in the last 20–30 years than at any other time in its history, partly because of the decline of other institutions—the family, the church, trade unions—in which people had previously placed their trust. This left two major powers to compete in providing the narrative of society: the media and the state. The infotainment culture, driven by fierce competitive pressure, demanded a revelatory and scandalous public affairs agenda. Yet the primacy of truth telling should be at the centre of journalism, a notion that can challenge proprietors and editors who claim to be in the same business as the working journalist. Lloyd proposed a halfway house between training and media theory, a forum for bringing together the public, journalists, educators and other relevant industry and professional



John Lloyd
of *The
Financial
Times*

bodies to debate journalism issues, to publicise good practice, and to voice concerns and recommend possible solutions.

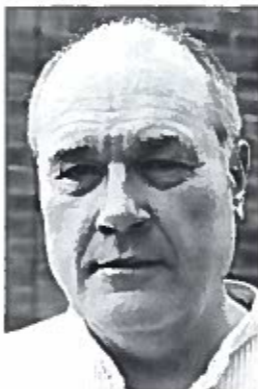
Former BBC political correspondent Nicholas Jones and PR executive Julia Hobsbawm found a receptive audience in calling for more transparency in journalism, particularly with regard to naming sources, rather than relying on unattributable quotes. Nick Jones believed journalists should presume all briefings are on the record rather than the other way around and that the televising of lobby briefings would be one step towards breaking down the culture of secrecy.

Mediawise resolved to continue to campaign for an independent media ombudsman and the right to reply to false or scurrilous allegations. In the meantime, the organisation, which is concerned with standards and ethics in the industry, is considering launching a website to give members of the public an immediate right of reply. There was also a need for correction columns in all publications. At the same time, the NUJ would continue to press for a Conscience Clause in workplace agreements, so that journalists refusing to act in unethical ways at the behest of an employer would be afforded some level of employment protection.

There were many criticisms of the narrow remit of the Press Complaints Commission, despite a robust defence by PCC representative Bob Pinker. It was generally felt that the lack of ordinary working journalists on the PCC promoted editors' interests, and the fact that the PCC only deals with complaints from the people directly involved in a story provided no mechanism for other members of the public to complain when the press over-stepped the mark—an example being the inflammatory coverage of asylum seekers, mostly by the *Express*, that lined the conference room walls.

Bob Pinker, however, warned that

Chris Frost,
Chair of the
NUJ Ethics
Council



with more regulation we could end up sanitising the press, resulting in dull journalism and further falls in circulation, though this argument held little sway with those present. Chris Frost, of Liverpool John Moores University and Chair of the NUJ Ethics Council, highlighted the tiny percentage of complaints that ever make it through to adjudication—most fall at the first hurdle—only half of which are eventually found to have fallen foul of the Code. In his view, it is no surprise that broadcast journalism, with statutory regulation, is more trusted by the public.

As a journalism educator, it seemed to me and other contributors that training the next generation of journalists in ethical and responsible journalism would be key to improving standards in the future. I believe it is high time that the National Council for the Training of Journalists broadened its training programme to encourage a greater ethical dimension.

Both the NUJ and Mediawise made a commitment to take these measures forwards and, while there was no doubt the day was worthwhile, it was notable that key figures from Ofcom, the Government and journalists from some of the most scurrilous newspapers were absent. Getting these parties to listen and take note is the challenge for us all if we are not to have a press that poisons the wells of public life—a warning from Onora O'Neill's 2002 Reith lectures that all should heed.

Continued from page 1

elections as democratic and free.'

In contrast to the extensive reports on aid agencies, volunteers, and money flowing to the victims of the tsunami, it highlights the work of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) who have received \$80m for political and electoral activities in Iraq in preparation for the election. Their role is described by Professor William I. Robinson of the University of California: 'I suspect that (NDI and IRI) are trying to select individual leaders and organisations that are going to be very amenable to the US transnational project for Iraq.'

Again a LexisNexis media database reveals no British newspaper has mentioned the activities of NDI and IRI over the past twelve months.

'Helicopter journalism' is the phrase used by Danny Schechter of

Media Channel, to describe media coverage of the tsunami. He quotes a colourful piece from *The Washington Post* written from the sky above Aceh in Indonesia and comments: 'This is an example of helicopter journalism and distanced "outside-in" reporting that accesses few if any sources in the country itself, does not speak the language, and does not explain much about what is going on. It's like the foreign correspondent who flies into a conflict zone for an afternoon and gets most of his information from a taxi driver... Why is it so hard for western news organisations to connect with local journalists who often know the story best? What we need is "inside-out" and bottom up coverage—not just reporting from the clouds.'

Also, as in other media coverage of disasters, the emphasis was all on the work of Western agencies and their work helping desperate and distraught local people, very little on local

people's initiatives and responses.

But there are other factors which explain the dramatic differences between the reporting of the two events.

In Iraq we have the withholding of information—it took months before the Abu Ghraib, and now the Basra, torture and abuses were made public.

One story was a great media event, involving UK and other European nationals, which could evoke human sympathy and interest, but did not require much analysis or debate. In the other, man-made, catastrophe of invasion, and now guerrilla war, in Iraq the US has lost 1,100 troops at a cost of \$200 billion and there are lots of uncomfortable questions about the roles of the US and UK governments and the military. It is the lack of coverage of this catastrophe by our media which should concern us. As the saying goes, 'Silence speaks volumes.'



WITH the BBC under attack and a massive shake-up under way in broadcasting as a whole, the CPBF is mounting a major conference in defence of the BBC and public service broadcasting. The conference 'The Future of the BBC and public service broadcasting' is a joint initiative of the CPBF and National Union of Journalists. It will be held at the NUJ's London headquarters on Saturday 5 March. The event is timed with an eye to a likely May General Election, to the upcoming OFCOM final report on public service broadcasting, and to the imminent publication of the government's Green Paper on BBC Charter renewal. Culture secretary Tessa Jowell has been invited to introduce the government's Green Paper if it is published before the conference, as originally scheduled. The conference will debate the package of cuts and changes at the BBC announced in December by director general Mark Thompson, analyse the government's proposals

on the Charter and discuss the OFCOM review. It will also look at the prospects for public service broadcasting—quality programmes that inform, investigate, educate and entertain—in the commercial and independent production companies. Speakers include Georgina Born, author of *Uncertain Vision*, a study of the BBC; Jeremy Dear, general secretary, NUJ; Tony Lennon, president, BECTU; Jim Pines, senior media arts lecturer and broadcaster; Tom O'Malley media historian and campaigner; Peter Murray, reporter with BBC Scotland and NUJ executive member; Nick Jones, author and former BBC political correspondent and Granville Williams, editor of *Free Press*. The conference aims to map out campaign strategies to defend public service broadcasting and strengthen alliances between the broadcasting unions, media reform campaigners and the wider labour movement. It will also provide a platform for the launch of the new CPBF Media Manifesto.

SOUTH OF THE BORDER

THE Mexican Center for Journalism and Public Ethics claims the country is now the most dangerous for journalists on the continent to work in. One commentator says Mexico has been converted into a 'narco-democracy' where 'narco-elites' wield their wealth and influence over national and local politics and exert far greater influence than legal corporations.

The case of Roberta Mora García, editor of *El Mañana* illustrates the scale of the problem. His paper covered drug trafficking and corruption in his home town Nuevo Laredo, close to the US-Mexican border and notorious for its drug gangs and violence. As he arrived home he was stabbed to death. The person accused of his murder was arrested but was tortured and later died of stab wounds in a Mexican jail.

CPBF NEWS

RIGHT OF REPLY

PETER Bradley MP for The Wrekin has published a Private Members Bill aimed at giving the right of reply in the press. Although the final wording of the bill was not available when we went to press, representatives from the Campaign met with Peter in January to discuss his proposals.

Since it was set up in 1979 the CPBF has campaigned for the right of reply and welcomes his initiative. The bill is a very important and valuable contribution to a public debate on this fundamental issue of citizens' rights.

The Campaign supports the right of reply and the right of redress for factual inaccuracies in the press and we join him in supporting the aim of raising the standards of journalism. There needs to be a serious public debate on devising a framework to enforce the publication of corrections and we will play our part in trying to devise such a framework.

The bill has little chance of being debated in parliament. Early last December 20 MPs' names were pulled from a hat and given Parliamentary time to put forward a bill. Peter Bradley came 20th. Normally, only the first six or seven names chosen in the

ballot have a serious chance of getting their bill through the Commons and Lords. With a general election forecast for May, there will be even less time than usual to debate private members' bills.

The last time a bill dealing with the right of reply was discussed was in 1992/93 in Clive Soley's Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill which was defeated on its Commons third reading.

SCOTTISH MEETING

A MEETING to set up a CPBF group in Scotland was held on Tuesday 8 February (as we went to press) at the Scottish TUC Centre, Glasgow. The meeting also planned a launch for the group at a Spring public meeting.

Further details will be placed on the CPBF web site and Scottish CBF supporters will kept informed.

NEWS FOR SALE:

information in the age of market-driven journalism

CONFERENCE organised by Friends of Le Monde Diplomatique in partnership with the National Union of Journalists and CPBF.

SESSIONS ON: Impact of 'Free' Market on Content, Control and Distribution of News; Information as a Right and The Value of Public Service Broadcasting.

SPEAKERS: from UK (David Miller, Granville Williams), Italy (Marco Travaglio, author and journalist), France (Serge Halimi Le Monde

**12 March
10am-5pm**

**Camden Centre, Bidbury
Street London WC1.**

Diplomatique), USA (Josh Silver & John Nichols Free Press), Russia (Oksana Antonenko) and India (Dipankar de Sarkar)
SESSION CHAIRS: Jon Snow Channel 4 News and Jeremy Dear General Secretary NUJ
BOOKINGS: Advanced tickets £15
Concessions £10 with photocopy
INFORMATION LINE: 07984 178 193.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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CPBF web site: www.cpbf.org.uk
Email address: freepress@cpbf.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