

The media's job is to inform and entertain us but we rely on them too to tell us what our rulers and representatives are up to. In the run-up to the Iraq war the government used spin and disinformation in the media to create panic and mislead people. The truth is coming out now, but we need stronger, more independent media to be able to scrutinise governments and make informed choices.

But this vital role for the media is under threat. The CPBF has produced this manifesto to help people raise the questions with politicians of all parties and press for the policies to enable the media to hold them accountable.

Let's make the media an election issue.

POLITICS AND THE MEDIA

"Labour's Lost It" The Sun announced on 30 September 2009. In a harsh reminder of the role Rupert Murdoch has played in UK politics since the 1970s, the paper's switch to the Conservatives was designed to inflict maximum damage on Labour at its annual conference.

Culture Secretary Ben Bradshaw warned: "The Tories have subcontracted their media and broadcasting policy to News International."

In 1992 the Sun had crowed "IT WAS THE SUN WOT WON IT" after its sustained anti-Labour campaign had helped return John Major to Downing Street.

Three years later Tony Blair flew half way around the world to court Rupert Murdoch's support for New Labour. Lance Price, a media adviser to Tony Blair, wrote that Rupert Murdoch was "like the 24th member of the cabinet. His voice was rarely heard ... but his presence was always felt".

The 2003 Communications Act was amended to include the infamous "Murdoch clause" which allows him to buy a terrestrial TV channel. Also after heavy lobbying, the Act enabled the formation of the single ITV company that has led to the alarming drop in standards (and audiences) on Channel 3.

Media policy should be shaped in the public interest, not in the interests of powerful companies.

THE CPBF'S 2010 MEDIA MANIFESTO

Changes in media policy should be decided through an open democratic process, with policies designed to protect and develop high quality, diverse media for the digital age.

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

The BBC's future

The BBC, cornerstone of the UK system of public service broadcasting, is under attack.

Of course some criticisms are justified – bloated executive pay and expenses, extravagant fees to BBC celebrities and unjustified spending on grandiose projects and property development.

But there are more important issues that make the defence of the BBC vital.

Attacks come from commercial media who claim that the very size of its operations threatens their business.

The real reason for the attacks on the BBC is that the range of channels, programmes, news and information on radio, television and online is enormously popular and trusted. It occupies a space within broadcasting which is free from advertising.

The BBC is an essential component of UK broadcasting and should continue to be funded by the licence fee. It should continue to provide a full range of broadcast programmes and digital services.

Funding public service media

A proposal to "top-slice" the BBC licence fee to fund local and regional news services (Independently Financed News Consortia or IFNCs) was proposed by the Labour government. A strong campaign against this has led to it being dropped.

There are plenty of other ways in which new forms of public service content could be funded and existing public service broadcasters like Channel 4 supported, along similar lines to the wind-fall taxes that government has imposed on energy companies and the banks.

● The broadcasting unions (the NUJ representing journalists and BECTU most other jobs) have proposed levies on recording equipment, blank media, pay TV revenues, advertising income or mobile phone operators.

● There could be a levy on the independent production companies that have got rich from publicly supported broadcasting, or on ITV's profiting from its archive of programmes made while it enjoyed its lucrative public licences. The government could lease rather than sell off the analogue spectrum released by the digital switchover

● Companies like Sky and Google could pay proper levels of tax.

The BBC licence fee must be used solely to fund the BBC's established broadcasting services and new online operations.

The government must examine the ways of funding content in the digital age and set up a system that taxes the companies who profit from it.

BROADCAST NEWS

Impartiality and Tory policy

Broadcasting regulations require that news on stations licensed by Ofcom must be impartial. The Tories have stated that “impartiality” requirements should be relaxed for broadcasters not receiving public funds.

Lifting these rules would pave the way for “Fox News UK” – for Sky or other commercial broadcasters to take broadcasting down the same right-wing populist road as sections of the British press.

To ensure that a diversity of views are reported, the impartiality regulations should continue to apply to all broadcasters licensed by Ofcom

Independent Television News

ITV’s national and international news comes from ITN, a separate company in which it has a 40% stake. The current contract expires in 2012 and Sky News can bid for the new one.

Last time round Sky put in such a low bid that ITV was able to force down the price it paid ITN, which led to reduced coverage and job losses.

Sky already has the contract to supply news for C5 bulletins and if it won the ITV contract it would threaten the highly-valued news ITN supplies to Channel 4.

It is vital for ITN to continue to provide high quality news for commercial TV. To prevent undercutting, a new Communications Act should require that the ITV news service must meet set levels of original material and international coverage.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL, LOCAL

The UK media are centralised to a high degree around London and the provision of news and current affairs coverage in the nations and regions of the UK – both quantity and quality, in print and on the air – is falling fast.

This in part due to the crisis in the local press and the demise of the ITV companies, whose role in reinforcing regional identities and cultures has been all but abandoned.

It is also the result of the failure of central government to safeguard the arts and media of the nations and regions.

To substitute for this, the devolved governments of the UK should have the power to oversee their own media policies.

There should be national and regional Communication Councils, composed of representatives of the widest possible range of society, which would oversee the raising and distribution of money to ensure the development of public service media serving their areas.

Local and regional News

Local news is essential for democracy but it’s dying on its feet. More than 100 local papers have closed. ITV is dodging its contractual requirement to provide regional news, and commercial radio coverage has been reduced to gestures. Local websites are springing up but they’re making little money and have nothing like the journalistic resources the papers used to have.

ITV and the newspaper owners blame the double blow of the advertising recession and competition from the internet, but they ignore a third factor: themselves.

In the good years they turned over their astounding profits – often more than 30 per cent on turnover – to shareholders, fuelling a wave of takeovers that has left the industry in the hands of a few debt-ridden, greedy companies. These are continuing to slash away at costs, cutting the journalistic staff.

ITV has decimated its local news-

rooms and reduced the spread of bulletins. Ofcom, which is supposed to enforce the terms of the licences, has meekly gone along with it.

The government has a modest programme for funding new consortia to provide multi-media regional news services to replace ITV. The Conservatives say they will stop them: they want to leave local news to the “market” – to the companies that have done the damage. And they want to scrap regulations restricting the further concentration of ownership.

The BBC still puts resources into local news and advanced a plan for local video news services but it was killed off as supposedly “unfair competition” to commercial media. But competition in news is what is needed: it should not be left to the BBC.

The regulations that limit the concentration of ownership of local media should not be relaxed. Public funding must not be used to bail out ITV or regional newspaper groups.

There should be incentives for new local news initiatives – in print, radio and/or online – in the form of tax breaks, regional development grants or loans, or the use of existing production facilities. All ventures financed from any public source should comply with a range of conditions, to include commitments to local news, adequate staffing and the fair payment and treatment of staff and contributors.

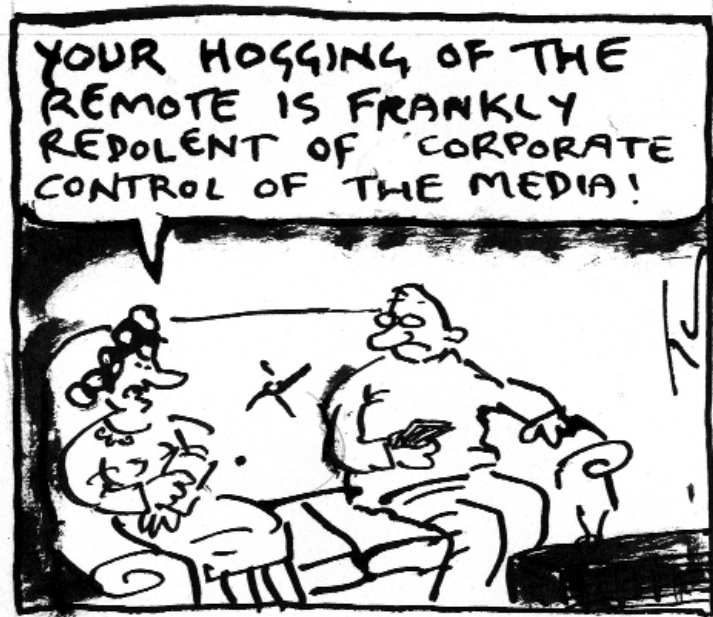
The BBC should be allowed to go ahead with its project to develop local video news channels and maintain its local web presence.

DIGITAL BRITAIN

The media landscape is in upheaval. Digital technology is opening up an uncertain future, in which familiar formats – newspapers, television, and radio – are converging, and merging with blogs, online news, complex websites and interactive entertainment. This is putting the principles of public service media, universal access and citizenship at the mercy of commercial interests.

There are two big questions:

- How to fund and build a high speed broadband infrastructure (Next Generation Access or NGA) that is accessible to all. The UK government is committed to private funding, but the private sector will want to pay only for the profitable bits.
- How to close the “digital divide”.



The gap between the haves and have-nots is widening, with the market delivering to affluent and highly populated urban areas. Delivery of broadband access cannot just be left to the market.

Government must ensure that high speed broadband is available to everyone regardless of location and income.

This expansion should be funded by levies on network internet service providers and media and communications companies.

THREATS TO MEDIA FREEDOM

Libel laws

Britain's libel laws are having an increasingly chilling effect on journalism. Research carried out by Oxford University suggests that the cost of defending a libel action is 140 times the European average. This often means that publishers will settle actions because the cost of defending them is prohibitive.

London also offers the dubious service of "libel tourism" whereby foreign corporations and wealthy individuals can pursue lucrative actions over overseas publications that may have had a negligible readership in the UK.

These abuses were highlighted in a recent report from Index on Censorship and English PEN, following which Justice Secretary Jack Straw pledged to bring in reforms restricting the amounts lawyers can charge for bringing successful actions.

The commitment to change legal procedures to reduce drastically the media's costs in defending libel actions must be carried out. Further reforms should end the right of big companies to bring libel actions to silence their critics.

The anti-terrorist threat

Visual journalism is under attack. Across the country people with cameras – amateurs and professionals, landscape, architectural and street photographers – are being targeted as potential terrorists by police invoking anti-terrorist legislation. When there are complaints, police agree to allow professionals to work without hindrance, but such promises mean little on the streets.

There are a number of laws intended to prevent people gathering information for the purpose of terrorism that are being used instead to harass photographers and videographers going about their business. These laws threaten everybody's rights.

Police forces should be required to respect the right of photographers – or anybody – to take pictures unhindered in a public place. The anti-terrorist laws that criminalise people engaged in exercising their basic civil rights should be repealed.

Transparency in lobbying

The content of all media is increasingly dominated by the public relations industry, as redundancies and rising workloads among journalists leave them with less time to do their job of independent reporting properly.

The political agenda is being set more and more by lobbyists, working in a £2 billion industry to influence decisions and the way they are reported.

There are few rules governing their activities and no requirement for lobbyists to register or disclose their



clients or activities. The Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) has investigated and concluded that "there is a genuine issue of concern that there is an inside track who wield privileged access and disproportionate influence".

The committee's report called for a statutory system of disclosure that would require all lobbyists to register who is lobbying whom and how much is being spent in the process, but nothing has happened.

The new government should legislate to enact the PASC recommendation for a statutory system of disclosure by all lobbyists in Westminster and the devolved assemblies.

The CPBF Media Manifesto should be used as widely as possible to inform debate during the election campaign. It is online as a pdf at www.cpbef.org.uk, and further copies, in bulk if needed, can be obtained from the campaign. Email freepress@cpbf.org.uk The CPBF can supply speakers for meetings or other contacts for campaigning on the media.

REGULATION

The future of Ofcom

As media converge it makes sense to have a single regulator to oversee the extraordinary technological changes that are taking place, to ensure that the important social and cultural dimensions of the media are developed and protected.

At present Ofcom works to a deregulatory, business-friendly ‘light touch’ agenda, with great emphasis on the consumer but scant regard for the democratic, social and cultural dimensions of communications. Ofcom also lacks any democratic accountability.

But even this is too much for the Conservatives, who have pledged to abolish Ofcom, or at least strip it of all its policy-making powers. This is of a number of concessions to Rupert Murdoch’s News International, which has said it wants a ‘bonfire’ of media regulations.

The CPBF takes a different view. Positive programme regulation can deliver a range of diverse, high-quality public service content.

The government has announced it will introduce product placement, allowing marketers to pay for brand presence in TV programmes. This retrograde step, which the CPBF with many others has opposed for years, will damage editorial integrity, artistic freedom, and the quality and independence of programmes.

Ofcom’s remit needs to be drastically changed to make it a democratically accountable body, and to redefine its primary job as the promotion of the public interest in mass communications into the converged digital future.”

Ofcom must change its procedures to recruit staff and appoint people to its consultative committees who appreciate the social and cultural dimensions of communications and who represent the interests of citizens.

The decision to allow product placement in TV programmes must be reversed quickly after the election.

The Press Complaints Commission

The PCC is funded by the newspaper industry and its *raison d’être* is to defend the newspaper industry’s interests. It is, in fact, a complaints mediation service that describes itself as a self-regulatory body when statutory regulation threatens. Its effectiveness in promoting ethical journalistic standards is widely questioned, and its operations have been

heavily criticised in a recent report by the Commons Culture, Media and Sport select committee.

The PCC should be wound up and replaced with an effective self-regulatory body which earns the respect of newspaper and magazine readers, the general public and journalists alike. It should have clear powers to order meaningful recompense to complainants, including fines for blatant breaches of the editors’ Code of Practice.

The new body would also ensure that the right of reply, a measure campaigned since its inception, is established in the case of complaints concerning factual inaccuracy.

One of the consequences of convergence has been the growth of newspaper websites with audio and visual content which like their papers are highly partisan and carry salacious material that broadcasters would be prevented by regulations from putting on the air. The only regulation to which they are subject as part of newspaper operations is the “self-regulation” of the PCC.

At election times the news on regulated broadcast media is required to be balanced between the political parties, but the newspaper websites and their embedded TV and radio channels are not.

The TV, radio and audio-visual services on newspaper websites should come under the regulatory oversight of a reformed Ofcom. Electoral law needs to be amended to encompass newspaper websites and require them to provide balanced, impartial news and comment at election times.

The BBC Trust

The BBC Trust was established in 2006 to replace the Board of Governors. Its creation was very much a political act in the turbulent aftermath of the Hutton Inquiry, the report into the death of government scientist Dr David Kelly that slammed the BBC over its reporting of the build-up to the Iraq war.

The Trust was given powers essentially to oversee, limit and control the corporation. Any attempt to introduce new BBC services has to be subjected to ‘pub-



lic service tests’ and ‘market impact assessments’ and a number have been blocked.

These have included a digital educational service, BBC Jam, and a plan to introduce hyper-local video news services around the UK. (Another innovation, a video-on-demand service called Project Kangaroo to be run jointly with ITV and C4, was killed by the Competition Commission.)

Ofcom also has oversight of the BBC in matters concerning broadcasting standards and service for consumers.

The BBC Trust should be abolished and the BBC be removed from Ofcom’s remit. A new democratically elected body should regulate the BBC and ensure that the BBC can provide a full range of public service programming on TV, radio and online and is protected from assaults by politicians and commercial interests.

WHO ARE WE?

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom was founded in 1979. It is the leading independent organisation dealing with questions of freedom, diversity and accountability in the UK media. It is membership-based, drawing its support from individuals, trade unions and community based organisations. It develops policies to encourage more pluralistic media and regularly intervenes in public debates over the future of broadcasting in the UK.