

FREE Press

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'We must be able to show the world as it is'

David Henshaw, executive producer of 'Undercover Mosque', explains how the documentary was vindicated by Ofcom

Twenty years ago, a young black man walked into a pub in Bristol and ordered a drink. Right behind him, a gang of white youths started a chant: "Nig nogs on the starboard bow, starboard bow..." Straightforward, everyday racism. Only this time, it was caught on camera and broadcast on BBC1.

Fast forward 20 years, and another young man walks into a mosque in Birmingham, a supposedly moderate mosque, one apparently committed to interfaith dialogue. The preacher, however, seems less than committed: "Christians and Jews are enemies to Muslims", he says. What about a gay man? "Throw him off the mountain" And women? "Allah created the women deficient." Again, all caught on film, this time broadcast on Channel 4.

Two pretty clear cases of antisocial, illiberal behaviour. But here's the difference. Twenty years ago, Avon and Somerset Police were full of praise for our undercover expose; at last people could see what they were up against, that racism wasn't the invention of an oversensitive race relations industry. How very naïve we were to imagine that such a sensible, realistic reaction would follow the broadcast of *Dispatches*, "Undercover Mosque".

When the film was first shown, local politicians in the West Midlands were horrified. Something had to be done. The police went to court to obtain a production order to go through our rushes, convinced that there was enough to investigate a possible breach



David Henshaw: police acted badly

of the law, including the encouragement of terrorism. We said they were wasting their time — what we had filmed covertly was profoundly anti-social, illiberal, and offensive, but we couldn't see that it broke any laws. It was just plain nasty, and clearly at odds with Green Lane Mosque's supposed commitment to moderation and interfaith dialogue. This was the job of investigative journalism — to expose what was really going on rather than what we were being told was going on.

So no great surprise when we heard nothing for months. We assumed it had all gone away. What we really didn't expect was a press statement out of the blue from West Midlands Police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) saying that not only did the featured Imams have no case to answer, but that they had turned their attentions on us, the programme makers. They had considered prosecuting us for inciting racial hatred, but decided there wasn't quite enough evidence, so had referred the case to Ofcom, the broadcasting regulator. A CPS lawyer, Bethan David,

made one of the most damaging allegations: "The splicing together of extracts from longer speeches", she was quoted as saying, "appears to have completely distorted what the speakers were saying."

Well, we knew all along what Ofcom has now, in forensic detail, shown to be the case. That what was going on here was the simple everyday television technique of editing, reducing material to broadcast length. Distortion? At no point in any of the diatribes we recorded, or broadcast from DVDs and tapes, did any of the preachers renege on the offensive statements they made in the film. Context? No one from the West Midlands Police, the CPS, or Green Lane Mosque has yet to give us the correct or appropriate context for the notion that women are born deficient, that homosexuals should be thrown off a mountain, or that if young girls refuse to wear the hijab, they should be hit.

But here's the really strange thing. It emerged that in the aftermath of "Undercover Mosque", the West Midlands Police received not one single formal complaint about the programme. Not one. I have now written to the director of public prosecutions and the chief constable of the West Midlands Police asking for an explanation for the highly damaging allegations made in August — allegations that sought to undermine legitimate investigative journalism and which unjustly blackened the reputation of a courageous and entirely honest team of programme makers.

The lingering suspicion must be that here was a police force over anxious to placate local "community leaders". That this took precedence over free speech and, in the words of Liberal Democrat shadow culture secretary Don Foster, appeared to be "an attempt to censor television, stifle investigative journalism, and inhibit open debate."

● *David Henshaw was executive producer of 'Undercover Mosque' and is managing director of Hardcash Productions*



Andrew Gilligan: wars create a seller's market for news

Media workers challenge war

By Barry White

We have got to learn the lessons and do the work to make sure that nothing like what happened with Iraq happens with Iran." — Andrew Gilligan, *Evening Standard*.

The timing of the Media Workers Against the War conference, *The First Casualty? War, Truth and the Media Today*, on 17 November could not have been better. Sections of the media are already ramping up tensions as a prelude to a possible attack on Iran.

While the US administration insists it is pursuing diplomacy in its disputes with Iran, critics of President Bush see worrying parallels between recent statements on Tehran and those made in the run-up to the war in Iraq. In October, the Bush administration announced new sanctions against Iran, accusing the regime of backing terrorists, sup-

porting insurgents in Iraq and working to build an atomic arsenal. More recently, the administration's negative reaction to a US intelligence report which said Iran has not pursued a nuclear weapons development programme since 2003 has caused further concern.

Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ president, opened the half-day conference. She said that journalism was under attack due to newspapers, the BBC and ITV sacking thousands of staff at a time when the need for well-researched reporting had never been greater.

Tony Benn reminded the conference that information has always been at the core of all national decisions. He went on to explain that while the Government wants to know everything about us, they do not want us to know anything about them. He warned the US was a declining empire and "wounded tigers are very dangerous creatures". Peter Wilby, from the *Guardian* thought the press had learnt

'The US administration has decided that the attitude towards correspondents is "You are either with us or against us"'

— PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY

nothing from the dodgy dossiers and phantom Weapons of Mass Destruction preceding the Iraq war. He referred to a recent article in his own paper, a front-page story warning of Iran's military threat that was based on unnamed US sources and without reference to any other sources.

In the "War Plan Iran" workshop there was a call for effective media monitoring of stories about Iran. Professor Abbas Edat told the audience. "We are here because we have a job to do." Attacking sections of the media for not telling the truth about Iran he said: "We never hear in the media that there is a fatwa in place in Iran against the production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons." He warned that if the media did not expose lies told about Iran there would be another illegal and catastrophic war in the Middle East.

In another workshop, "Journalists in the war Zone" Phillip Knightley, investigative journalist and author of *The First Casualty*, a history of war reporting, said the traditional relationship between the military and the media, one of "restrained hostility", had broken down. He said: "The US administration has decided that the attitude towards correspondents is the same as that described by President Bush of other countries when it comes to the war against terrorism. You are either with us or against us. There is no room in US foreign policy for neutrals."

Speaking in the closing session Andrew Gilligan, a sacked BBC journalist now writing for the *Evening Standard*, said wars create a seller's market for news. Investigative journalist Nick Davies said many journalists were no longer active reporters but had become passive processors of information from the public relations industry. Davies gave the conference a taste of his new book, *Flat Earth News*, which exposes falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the global media. During his research for the book, which is being published in February, he found that journalists now have fill three times as many column inches as they did 20 years ago. "I call it 'churnalism'" he concluded.

The message from the conference was clear: "We won't be fooled again".

WWW.GUYSMALLMAN.COM

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL FREE PRESS READERS

Amnesty launches net campaign

By Tim Lezard

The internet is often held up as a shining example of freedom of expression, allowing minority voices to be heard amongst the cacophony of corporate commentary.

But what happens when these voices themselves are silenced? Who speaks up for them? Hopefully, you will!

Concerned about the growing trend of states trying to censor the internet, Amnesty International is running a campaign called *irrepressible.info* to draw attention to what it calls “the new frontier of human rights”.

Writing in the *Observer*, Kate Allen, UK Director of Amnesty International, says: “Governments still fear dissenting opinion and try to shut it down. While the internet has brought freedom of information to millions, for some it has led to imprisonment by a government seeking to curtail that freedom.

“They have closed or censored websites and blogs; created firewalls to prevent access to information; and restricted and filtered search engines to keep information from their citizens.”

But it's not just governments that are the villains: often it is IT companies themselves, for they have built the systems that enable surveillance and censorship to take place.

For example, Yahoo! has supplied email users' private data to the Chinese

authorities, helping to facilitate cases of wrongful imprisonment, while Microsoft and Google have both complied with government demands to actively censor Chinese users of their services.

The National Union of Journalists has been a strong supporter of the *irrepressible.info* campaign, not least because many of the people who have suffered as a result of this collusion have been journalists.

One high-profile example is the case of Shi Tao, a pro-democracy blogger in China who was sentenced to 10 years in prison for forwarding a government email to the foreign press.

Another is Jiang Lijun, sentenced to four years after writing articles calling the Chinese government “autocratic” and saying he favoured a Western-style democracy.

Both were jailed after Yahoo! provided the authorities with information that led to their identification.

NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear said: “We regard Yahoo!'s actions as a completely unacceptable endorsement of the Chinese authorities”.

But it's not just China: internet repression is also reported in Vietnam, Tunisia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Amnesty is asking people to join the campaign by signing an on-line pledge stating: “I believe the internet should be a force for political freedom, not repression. People have the right to

seek and receive information and to express their peaceful beliefs online without fear or interference.

“I call on governments to stop the unwarranted restriction of freedom of expression on the internet — and on companies to stop helping them do it.”

Amnesty are also asking you to write to Microsoft, Google and Yahoo! putting pressure on them to support freedom of information and expression, as well as to the Chinese government asking for the release of Shi Tao.

There's also another, more imaginative, action where bloggers the world over are being asked to undermine censorship by themselves publishing censored material.

It works like this: if you go on to Amnesty's website, you can access snippets of information that has been censored. By taking that information and adding it to your own website Amnesty hopes you will confuse, or at least keep busy, the internet police currently trawling chat rooms, blogs and websites.

So why not take part? Details are available at www.amnesty.org.uk. After all, freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. It is one of the most precious of all rights and we should fight to protect it.

● *Tim Lezard represents the NUJ on Amnesty's Trade Union Network Committee*

Murdoch says Sky News should be like Fox

Rupert Murdoch told a Lords committee that Sky News would be more popular if it were more like the US Fox News Channel. Speaking to the House of Lords communications committee in New York on 17 September he said that adopting the approach of its US cousin would make Sky News “a proper alternative to the BBC”.

He told the peers that Sky News could become more like Fox without changes to broadcasting impartiality rules and that the only reason Sky had not become more like Fox was because “nobody at Sky listens to me”.

Murdoch went on to say that the reason no such

news alternative existed was that British broadcasters did not know any better. Because the BBC has trained so many of the UK's broadcasters people working in commercial television were not trained to make commercial decisions.

Claiming that concerns about BSkyB's purchase of a 17.9 per cent stake in ITV were “paranoia” and the UK was “anti-success”, he attacked British regulatory regime for preventing News Corporation from expanding further, such as through the purchase of local evening newspapers. Murdoch said the success of local evening papers in the UK illustrated the

population remained interested in local news.

Just weeks after his appearance in New York Murdoch handed over control of News Corporation in the UK, Europe and Asia to his son, James. However it is unlikely that James's views will differ from those of his father.

The Lords committee was visiting the USA, as part of its inquiry into Media Ownership and the News. During the trip they also met with Fox News, CNN, ABC, NBC and CBS. They also talked to Arthur Sulzberger Jr (publisher of the *New York Times*) and many other publishers and news providers. They also met with the Centre for

Public Integrity, The Consumer Union and the US regulator, the Federal Communications Commission.

Meanwhile, Michael Grade, ITV executive chair has called on parliament to reduce BSkyB's stake in ITV to “well below 10 per cent”. His call came in evidence to the Lords communications committee at the end of November. Grade also defended ITV's plans to cut back on regional and local news saying that the “old map” was “no longer viable”.

The Competition Commission is expected to make its final recommendations on BSkyB stake in ITV by the end of December.

BBC unions ballot for action on jobs

Union members are being balloted for industrial action across the BBC, following moves by the corporation to push ahead with plans for compulsory redundancies.

The decision to hold a ballot was taken jointly by the NUJ, BECTU and Unite, the three unions representing staff across the BBC.

A strike ballot was averted in October after managers backed down on plans to begin the process of cutting 2,500 posts without consulting the unions.

However, BBC Vision announced it

would begin selecting people for compulsory redundancy, despite the fact that over 300 people have expressed an interest in voluntary release.

Unions have criticised the decision to begin the compulsory redundancy process without first agreeing on the release of volunteers, potentially putting a large number of people at risk of losing their jobs.

NUJ general secretary, Jeremy Dear, said: "We've been very clear with the BBC that any attempt to force through compulsory redundancies will result in a ballot for industrial action. Our mem-

bers are already deeply concerned about the strain they will be put under as a result of the BBC's cutbacks.

"Now management is piling on the pressure by leaving thousands of people uncertain about whether they will have a job in the new year, even though it appears that many of these cuts could be dealt with through voluntary redundancies."

The ballot closes on Wednesday 9 January and the result will be announced shortly afterwards.

For further information go to the NUJ web site at: www.nuj.org.uk



Solidarity forever: London demonstration in support of striking US screen writers

Screenwriters strike for fair deal

By Bernie Corbett

Who has a worse copyright deal than journalists? 12,000 American screenwriters, apparently, who have been on strike demanding higher royalties on DVD sales plus the introduction of payments for internet downloads, currently a royalty-free zone.

The strike by the Writers Guild of America (WGA) is mainly centred on Los Angeles and New York, but for one day on Wednesday 28 November, it became a global fight with pickets and demonstrations in London, Cardiff, Ireland, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and various other places.

The London demonstration was organised by the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (WGGB) and took place on the steps of the TUC. It was joined by supporters from the NUJ, Equity and

other unions — as well as some expat US writers.

Playwright David Edgar, president of the WGGB, said the American writers' fight was for the recognition of the fundamental right of authorship. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber pledged support and actor Timothy West also addressed the demo. Everybody sported authentic WGA t-shirts and placards.

American screenwriters are contracted on the "work-for-hire" arrangement, which means that all their rights belong to the giant networks and studios. This is similar to the terms under which UK newspapers and magazines employ staff journalists — and also, in many cases, freelancers.

The WGA negotiates fees, royalties, credits, health care and other contractual details but for 20 years screenwriters have received only four cents on every

\$20 DVD. They want this doubled, and they want royalties extended to internet downloads, for which they currently receive nothing — the media corporations say downloads are "promotional" even when they are paid for or financed by advertising.

Within a few days the strike halted topical chat shows and shooting of many drama and comedy series. As supplies of camera-ready scripts ran out, the American TV and film industries were rapidly grinding to a halt.

The strike, which began on 5 November, is in its early days compared to their last one in 1988, which was settled after a five-month stoppage. But on 6 December, after two days of further discussions aimed at settling the dispute, the Writers Guild said it had held "substantive" talks with the studios, but was still waiting for a response to all of its proposals. However, the next day, 7 December, the employers abruptly ended negotiations by once again walking out and leaving WGA negotiators alone at the table. The writers have been supported by many actors and directors, who will be pressing similar claims when their own union agreements expire in June 2008.

Said one commentator on YouTube: "Thanks for reminding the world that the issues at stake in the American Writer's Guild strike are important to all writers everywhere: The right of the writer to own and profit from the proliferation of their work, whatever the medium, is a universal right that holds true not just in America but all over the world"

For a video of the 28 November demonstrations see youtube.com/user/writersdaysofsupport
The Writers Guild of America is at www.wga.org

● *Bernie Corbett is general secretary of the Writers Guild of Great Britain. Additional reporting by Barry White*

PHOTO: ANDREW-WARD.COM

Crisis looms in kids' telly

By Patricia Holland

Children's culture in the UK is being damaged. Children's programming has long been a justly celebrated feature of our television output. But children of all ages are already losing that diverse, home-produced mix of dramas, animation, factual material and the sheer scatty ebullience of the live studio.

"I can't emphasise too much that this is a crisis, and it's happening now" says Greg Childs of the Save Kids' TV campaign group. Companies like HIT entertainment who produce *Bob the Builder*, *Angelina Ballerina*, *Art Attack* and many other much loved programmes are in difficulties because of shrinking commissions.

The BBC, hit by the low licence fee settlement, are cutting staff in the children's department and commissioning fewer programmes. They also have to bear the cost of moving the department to Salford. The commercial broadcasters' investment has halved since 1998. Five has concentrated its output on *Milkshake!* for younger children, aired in the early morning when there is least competition. Channel 4 has no obligation to produce children's programming and by 2006 was no longer commissioning.

But the most striking change has been on ITV. The channel has steadily reduced its investment, and by 2005 had stopped commissioning new material altogether. The commercial companies argue they are facing the financial realities of the 2000s: less available advertising, increased competition from non-UK satellite channels, and the countdown to analogue switch off.

The danger is that, if nothing is done, only the BBC will be commissioning and broadcasting UK-originated children's programming, and this may well be confined to its dedicated channels, CBeebies and



CBBC. Overall, only 17 per cent of the current output for children is UK produced (and only 1 per cent of that is first-run programmes). But Ofcom's research has shown that this 17 per cent provides 34 per cent of the programmes children choose to watch. Of their top 10 favourite programmes, nine were British.

There is a chorus of voices drawing attention to the situation. Producers, academics, columnists, campaigners and some MPs have been shouting that public service television is facing a serious crisis. Children's programming is like the candle in a mine, they warn. When it flickers and goes out, disaster is at hand.

But we live in an age when market values dominate. And market values simply sweep aside any audience which is difficult to "monetise". The only body which could to influence the situation, the television regulator Ofcom, states it has no power to require broadcasters to commission programming for children.

At the same time, Ofcom are balancing several responsibilities. In October it published a Discussion Paper and an extensive Research Report on children's television, initiated in response to the accelerating changes.

The research includes a review of studies which demonstrate the benefits to children of a diversity of programming — ranging from citizenship to personal identity. But they remind us that the children who make up the appreciative audience are an important segment of society and have a right to information, educational material, and sheer fun on their own terms.

Recognising that a plurality of provision is an important factor in maintaining standards, the Discussion Paper, rather surprisingly, appears to have accepted that some sort of intervention is necessary after all. Various options are put forward to ensure that the BBC is not left as

the sole provider. These include tax breaks for producers, extending the remit of Channel 4, and creating a new public institution, all of which give rise to difficult questions about funding. And Ofcom does not grasp the ITV nettle; seeking out ways to ensure that the channel continues its long and illustrious tradition of commissioning and broadcasting high quality children's programmes.

As with so many areas of broadcasting, "children's" should not be seen as a separate, closed off, "public service" category. It is intimately linked to the rest of the television output. Behind the screens many who have started in children's have gone on to run other parts of the schedules, while on the screen children's pro-

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vision has run the gamut of the genres, from age-appropriate news, through drama and participation to the zaniest of games shows.

Children's television has long been highly interactive, and pioneered the light-hearted disrespectful style which now characterises so many "adult" shows. (Ant and Dec and Trinny and Susannah are just big kids). But most importantly, when children are treated with respect in their own shows, it will be easier for children's voices to be heard on their own terms. Children should be part of the mainstream too.

The rights of children, which cannot be reduced to market values, show in its starkest form the limits of a commercialised media.

Ken's Islam study

On 13 November, London mayor Ken Livingstone launched *The Search for Common Ground*, a study commissioned by him that looks at the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the national media. **Julian Petley**, co-chair of the CPBF, reports

If anything ever demonstrated the correctness of the analyses presented in *The Search for Common Ground* (on which I worked as a consultant) it is the ill-informed hostility shown to it in sections of the British press — a pleasing irony of which the authors of these pieces appear to be blissfully unaware.

The report recommends that news organisations employ more Muslims (along with other minorities) so their workforces are more representative of the society and the world on which they report; that news concerning Islam and Muslims should — like all news — be accurate; and that when reporting on sensitive and difficult subjects, such as those involving members of Britain's minority communities, those working within news organisations should at least reflect on the possible consequences of their actions. Not a great deal to ask, one might think.

But apparently it is. However, rather than engaging critically with the substance of the report its critics, such as Nick Cohen and John Ware, merely looked “behind” it and discovered (entirely erroneously) bogeyman-of-the-moment the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and, armed with this “fact”, dismissed the whole thing out of hand as irredeemably biased. Bizarrely, Inayat Bungawala of the MCB has been repeatedly fingered as the author of the chapter on the controversial John Ware 2005 *Panorama* episode “A Question of Leadership”, when, as is clearly

When newspapers deal with stories concerning Muslims and Islam, normal standards of accuracy are thrown out of the window

acknowledged in a footnote, the author is in fact me. Perhaps journalists feel that reading such “academic” features as footnotes is beneath them. But, whatever the case, it certainly helps to prove the report's contention that when newspapers deal with stories concerning Muslims and Islam, normal journalistic standards of accuracy (never exactly high in the first place) are thrown out of the window.



Ken Livingstone: open to Islam

Of course, it's compulsory that those who have the temerity to suggest the media might try to report more accurately, or more sensitively, or, God forbid, more responsibly, must be presented as would-be commissars and censors. So, bang on cue, up pops the hardly disinterested John Ware in the *Sunday Telegraph* to claim that the report's call for more community-sensitive reporting about multi-culturalism and British Muslim identities “suggests that the aim of the ‘experts’ is to put political Islam beyond the scope of media enquiry”. Again, the heavy-handedly ironic use of inverted commas is absolutely *de rigueur* in self-serving and anti-intellectual nonsense such as this, but the piece does have the virtue of proving once again that Will Hutton was correct when he wrote: “Britain's least accountable and self-critical institutions have become the media — and the way they operate is beginning to damage rather than protect the society of which they are a part.” It also reminds us that when Corporal Jones in *Dad's Army* proclaimed “they don't like it up ‘em” he was of course referring to journalists and not to Germans.

However, freedom from censorship (is not the same thing as freedom from censure. But media freedom brings with it certain responsibilities; indeed, as I point out in the recently published *Freedom of the Word*, media freedom in modern societies is largely premised on the idea that the media play a key role in the democratic process. Onora O'Neill said in a 2003 lecture to the Royal Irish Academy. “Democracy requires not merely that the media be free to express views, but that they actually and accurately inform citizens. If we are to have democracy, the media must not only express views and opinions but must aim to communicate and inform ... Inadequate reporting, commentary and programming may marginalise important issues or voices, may circulate inaccurate or manipulated ‘information’, and may suppress or distort material that is relevant to its own assessment. It damages democracy by making it hard, even impossible, for citizens to judge for themselves.”

So, precisely to the extent that the media fail to perform their proper democratic role, the arguments for defending their freedom become proportionately weaker. Sadly, *The Search for Common Ground* shows all too clearly how, when it comes to representing Muslims and Islam, the media, and especially the press, frequently fail every one of O'Neill's tests. Inaccurate reporting, distortion, ill-informed commentary, the further marginalisation of already marginalised voices — these are all so common as to be routine across vast swathes of newsprint, and are now, as demonstrated by Ware's *Panorama* episode, beginning to infect broadcasting as well. If an increasing number of people, and by no means simply Muslims, think (quite wrongly, in my view) that media freedom is no longer worth defending, the media should look to themselves for the reasons, and not make wild accusations about their critics, an increasingly numerous and well informed band.

● *Julian Petley is Professor of Film and Television at Brunel University, and co-chair of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. Censoring the Moving Image, which he co-authored with Philip French, will shortly be published by Seagull Books/Index on Censorship.*

EU adopts new rules for ads

By Granville Williams

After two years of intense debate and lobbying the controversial revision of the European Union's Television Without Frontiers (TWF) directive has been concluded. A vote in the European Parliament on 29 November agreed the new policies contained in the renamed Audiovisual Media Services (AMS) directive.

Back in July 2005 the European Union's Media and Information Society Commissioner, Viviane Reding, produced six position papers proposing changes to the TWF directive.

One, which was fiercely resisted by the UK Government and the media and telecommunications industry, proposed the extension of the directive's scope to cover the internet, mobile phones and other platforms delivering audiovisual content. Another paper proposed liberalising TV advertising rules and allowing product placement within programmes.

In the opening stages of debate on the directive the UK Government seemed to be isolated in its opposition to the extension of the directive's scope.

However it mounted — in alliance with Intellect, the UK industry body representing the information technology, telecommunications and electronics industries, the media regulator Ofcom, and the Broadband Stakeholders Group — a determined lobbying campaign in the UK and Europe.

The UK coalition also drew support from a number of powerful EU-wide lobby groups such as the Association for Commercial Television (ACT) and the European Publishers Council and the World Federation of Advertisers. As a result the directive will now only apply to "TV-like" services such as web-streamed TV programmes.

The revision process of the directive revealed some painful realities about power and policy-making priorities with the EU. The European Commission wants to create a neo-liberal, single-currency, free-market area able to compete in the global market. Concerns by citizens groups, media trade unions and consumer organisa-

tions, presented both in written evidence and hearings in the European Parliament, were marginalised during the revision process.

One example of this was on the proposal to allow product placement. A powerful alliance of European consumers (BEUC) and the Federation of European script writers, with support from the US Writers Guild of America (West), presented strong arguments opposing the introduction of product placement. A CD with some of the absurd examples of product placement on US TV shows was circulated to MEPs.

Green MEPs were also opposed to lifting the ban. German Green MEP Helga Trüpel said: "American-style advertising and product placement are set to become the norm in Europe under the legislation...The Greens voted against the legislation, which will extend the creeping commercial intrusion into private life."

But rather than taking a neutral position and listening to such concerns Viviane Reding, at an ACT conference in April 2006, explicitly urged the European commercial TV companies to be more active in lobbying their governments and MEPs, "frankly speaking, I have the impression that your work, the political support by commercial broadcasters for a more flexible and modern framework, could be more visible and effective if you want to meet your goals. Your help is needed if you want this directive to support growth in your sector."

The decision to allow product placement will be left up to member states. However under the "country of origin" policy countries which do not allow product placement will not be able to prevent programmes being broadcast from other EU countries which have allowed it.

What the new directive demonstrates very clearly is a shift away from public service broadcasting principles. Whereas the directive claims to protect the social and cultural interests of European citizens the main thrust of it is deregulatory, giving a boost in the creation of an increasingly commercialised media.

Full details on the AMS directive at: ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/index_en.htm.

Scottish Broadcasting Commission wants to hear your views

The Scottish Government Commission is looking into the future of Scottish broadcasting. It has launched a website to collect the opinions of the general public, TV specialist and non-specialist alike.

It follows the launching of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission by First Minister, Alex Salmond, in August which is being chaired by a former head of news and current affairs at BBC Scotland, Blair Jenkins.

The commission website (www.scottishbroadcastingcommission.gov.uk) is currently examining the economic potential of broadcasting in Scotland and comments on this section are needed by the end of December 2007.

Other sections are on culture (comments by the end of February 2008) and the role in the democratic process (comments by the end of April 2008). However, the entire feedback section will stay open until April 2008 to enable you to give the commission your thoughts.

In a statement the commission says: "We want to look into how the sector's strengths and public resources can be harnessed to best grow the industry and how we can maximise the economic benefits which can flow from a strong broadcasting sector. This is a key consideration for us and is the focus of the start of our evidence gathering.

"We want to hear from everyone who has a say in this matter - from the chief executives of the major broadcasters to the grip on the latest period drama production, the indie producer making their latest pitch, the camera operator in the studio or the Corrie fan."

The cultural and democratic aspects of Scottish broadcasting are also key elements of the consultation.

The commission plans to hold public workshops, where people will be able to discuss issues and share information in more detail. More information will be available on the above-mentioned web site, nearer the time.

The commission is due to report in summer 2008.

Citizen Milton

A new exhibition at the Bodleian Library Oxford celebrates the 400th anniversary of the birth of John Milton (1608-74). Phillip Pullman opened the Citizen Milton exhibition and reminded the audience that many of the books in the exhibition had been saved from the bonfires of censorship on two occasions.

In 1660 Charles II, in his attack on the recent republican past, ordered Milton's books to be burnt. In 1683 the Convocation of Oxford voted to burn Milton's and other subversive books. On both occasions the books survived, hidden away in the Bodleian Library.

The exhibition emphasises Milton's role as a politically engaged writer through his advocacy of freedom of the press, public debate, education for liberty and the abolition of the monarchy.

On display in the exhibition are Milton's major works from the Bodleian Library's collections including the rare first editions of *Areopagitica* and the greatest epic poem in the English language, *Paradise Lost*. The exhibition explores the lasting power and influence of Milton's works.

There is one book with a direct connection to the CPBF. On display is *Milton and the Modern Media* which Milton's *Areopagitica* and "A Text for Our Time" by Granville Williams, which explains the historical context of Milton's work, and its contemporary relevance.

The free exhibition continues in the Bodleian Library until 26 April. Copies of Milton and the Modern Media (£4.50 inc P&P) are available from B&D, 6-8 Church Street, Church, Accrington BB5 4LF

ALAN JOHNSTON TO LEAD MEDIA FREEDOM CONFERENCE

Alan Johnston, the former BBC correspondent in Gaza who was recently held hostage, will speak on the problems of reporting conflict at a major NUJ conference, *New Threats to Media Freedom — how we fight back*, on 26 January.

Building on the success of the union's Journalism Matters campaign, the conference, sponsored by NUJ London Freelance Branch, is aimed at journalists, broadcasters, media campaigners, media students and academics.

Sessions will cover the mounting political and commercial pressures on journalists, the crisis at the BBC, secrecy and censorship, and bias in war reporting.

Johnston will lead a line-up of speakers including Martin Bright, political editor of the *New Statesman*; BBC Newsnight correspondent Paul Mason and Peter Wilby, former editor of the *Independent on Sunday*.

How media unions around the world are resisting controls and defending standards will be covered in presentations by NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear, Chris Frost of the NUJ Ethics Council, BECTU president Tony Lennon and leader of the International Federation of Journalists Aidan White.

The conference is being organised with the support of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF). It will take place on Saturday 26 January 2008 between 9.30am and 4.30pm at NUJ headquarters, 308 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1.

To register for the conference send a cheque for £10 payable to "NUJ London Freelance Branch" to CPBF, 23 Orford Road, London E17 9NL. The registration fee, for those signing up in advance, includes lunch. Registration also available on the day.

CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS, NUJ LONDON FREELANCE BRANCH AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM

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