

The preface begins with the sentence, "The purpose of this book is to consider the ways in which political television programmes are shaped and formed within the multitude of contexts and conditions which prevail at any one moment." That sentence exhibits Tracey at his worst: ambitious but vague in aim, wordy and imprecise in language. Nonetheless, despite a meandering lack of organization, a desperate need of careful editing, an Anglic parochialism as to the knowledgeability of its readers (who are expected to know the meaning of abbreviations like CMCR, CAG, ASLEP, NUJ, DEP, and PMG and to be able to decipher cryptic references like the Annan Committee, the Paulson case, or the Wednesday play), and an all too American absence of any cross-national comparisons, this is a work which is must reading (in company with works like Epstein, *News From Nowhere* and Altheide, *Creating Reality*) for any serious student of the role of the media in politics.

If we are to evaluate the relative importance on media output of factors such as (a) the political ideology of key media figures, (b) the structure of media institutions (especially existence of financial mechanisms for ultimate corporate control), (c) organizational work-practices (which shape the definition of what is news, what is politically relevant, and how information about politics is to be presented), (d) the nature of government regulation and of other (perhaps more subtle) inputs from politicians, and of course, (e) consumer preferences, then we must have comparative analyses of cases in which some of these factors vary while others are held more or less constant. To achieve this sort of comparative analysis we may either look at a number of different broadcast organizations or at the same organization at different points in time. *The Production of Political Television* makes use of both strategies.

The book had its origins as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Leicester, and was aimed, at least in part, at remedying the lack of empirical work on the organizational structure and political content of the British broadcasting media. It compares current BBC and ITV programming at the national and regional level via (a) analysis of program content and (b) lengthy interviews with broadcast insiders who had the responsibility for shaping that program content and form; it is this to which Tracey devotes the greatest space.

Tracey also looks at news coverage and inter-organizational conflict within the BBC at three points in time: the General Strike of 1926; the more or less politically forced retirement of the BBC's popular Director, Hugh Greene, in 1968; and the controversial 1971 political documentary on the defeated Labor Cabinet, "Yesterday's Men." Each of these topics is the subject of a chapter-length case study. Tracey sees these issues as involving historical turning points in the shaping of the BBC's role in Brit-

ain's political life. These case studies illuminate the extent to which the BBC can be made to serve as a means of legitimizing the position of the then-dominant institutions and groups, rather than as a means by which political institutions are to be held responsible to the public or some higher standard of the "public interest." The book also has a chapter on commercial broadcast coverage of the 1974 General Election in the Midlands region, based on the author's participant observation research.

Tracey makes a number of general points about the role of television as a mechanism of political communication—many of which apply at least as well to the American as to the British context, e.g. "television now occupies center stage in the world of political communicators . . . in the sense that it is defined as occupying center stage by politicians and public alike" (p. 8), and "a communist or a Trotskyite . . . how do we balance him? Immediately we are filling up our studio, we are getting to the point where, like the British climate, we are overcast perpetually" (views of an anonymous producer, cited p. 96).

In Tracey's view the broadcast media exhibit "not a desire to keep political content away from the audience, nor a desire to deliberately skew the sample of political actors . . . , nor a desire to glorify established political figures," but rather a desire to "cater to 'audience requirements'" (p. 247). He asserts that "the trend is, and I think will necessarily continue to be, popularization and not politicization" (p. 247).

I am troubled by some missing elements in Tracey's analysis. For example, the issue of BBC partiality to the Tories is raised at several points (see especially p. 161), but the accuracy of this charge is never really discussed, although it is relevant to an understanding of the justification for Wilson's dislike of Sir Hugh Greene. Also, the climate of the BBC under Lord Hill is never satisfyingly treated. One is left with the feeling that Greene's resignation was a tragic loss to the BBC, but is unable to point to concrete changes in BBC programming practices after his departure. Finally, the existence of politically ordered blinders on BBC coverage of certain controversies (e.g., of the Ulster situation, and of religious conflict in Glasgow) is strongly intimated, but Tracey never discusses how restrictive such constraints actually proved to be. On balance, however, the considerable substantive merits of *The Production of Political Television* more than outweigh its defects of style and organization.