
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 knowability of its readers (who are expected to know the meaning of abbreviations like CMCR, CAC, ASLEF, NUJ, DEP, and PMC and to be able to decipher cryptic references like the Annon 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 1966; 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-