

FREE Press

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STOP
MURDOCH
BUYING SKY
Centre page pull-out

SKY TAKEOVER: 300,000 SIGNERS SAY ...

We'll stop him again!



RUPERT MURDOCH'S 21st Century Fox is making a second bid to takeover Sky TV, and once again a popular movement is bidding to stop him.

Six years ago Murdoch's attempt to buy up the 61 per cent of Sky he doesn't already own crashed in flames as the phone-hacking scandal exploded around his London newspapers.

But it was already facing mounting opposition, particularly from a new style of popular campaigning, the online activism of Avaaz and 38 Degrees, which circulated a petition that reached 150,000 signatures.

In 2017 both are working with a coalition of media reformers, which include the CPBF. This time 38 Degrees has already handed in a petition to culture secretary Karen Bradley with more than 300,000 names.

"Giving even more control over our media to one man is a serious threat to our democracy," said Maggie Chao, campaigner at 38 Degrees. "Rupert Murdoch is not fit and proper to take even more control over the news we read and watch."

Industry experts have been persuaded by Murdoch's managers that the takeover will pass comfortably through the regulatory process ... but so they were in 2010-11.

They had no idea how many and how deeply people resented the abuse of power by the Murdoch media, and now there's a much wider range of people for whom the prospect of their power extending even further is intolerable.

They contend that Murdoch, with his record of bullying, influence-peddling and corruption, is not a "fit and proper person" to have complete control of the network. The regulator Ofcom has a power to conduct the "fit and proper" test to media firms, but it is not a required part of the takeover procedure.

Former chairman of the BBC Sir Michael Lyons challenged her to "do anything in her power to resist the further growth in the Murdochs' grip on news and media".

Shadow culture secretary Tom Watson, who played a key role

in exposing criminality within Murdoch newspapers, said the prime minister needed to come clean on what she discussed with Murdoch when they met last September.

The former Labour leader Ed Miliband asked: "Do we want Rupert Murdoch controlling even more of media landscape? No." And to Theresa May: "You said you would stand up to the powerful. No better test than Murdoch bid for Sky. Over to you."

TOUCH AND GO FOR SKY BID

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**For all campaign news and
info go to cpbf.org.uk
Email:
freepress@cpbf.org.uk**

The alt-reality of the alt-right



GRANVILLE WILLIAMS reports on the problems of the US media that they helped to create by hyping Donald Trump

THE NOTION that the US “liberal mainstream media” are crooked and deceitful goes back to the late 1940s and 1950s. But President Donald Trump, the Fox News-Breitbart axis and a conservative ecosystem that includes blogs, Facebook pages, and conspiracy sites have taken it to a whole new level.

There is now a gaping divide as two parallel media systems, mainstream and right-wing, promote facts and alternative facts and describe reality and alternative reality.

Trump creates his own reality, which is why his attack on media that challenge him is so vehement. His idea of the media as the “opposition party” is also unreal. The “mainstream”, or corporate media are highly concentrated – 90 percent of them owned and controlled by six multinational corporations – and hardly left-wing or liberal.

The six corporations function, like all big corporations, to make big profits. This rationale that led them to cover Trump excessively during the primaries. As Les Moonves, chief executive of CBS, remarked: Trump’s campaign “may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS.” Some opposition!

Trump’s media assault is selective, focusing particularly on CNN and the New York Times but exempting Murdoch’s media empire. Murdoch has been running Fox News in person since the departure of Roger Ailes. The key three prime hours on Fox News are now presented daily by Trump supporters and the White House has easy access.

Trump asked Rupert Murdoch to put forward candidates to run the Federal Communications

Commission (FCC), which regulates the media industry. Already the FCC has started its assault on regulations that maintain media fairness and independence. Its new chair is Ajit Pai, a Republican lawyer who worked for the broadband internet provider Verizon (formerly part of Bell and before that AT&T). Ajit Pai strongly opposed the 2015 net neutrality rules that reclassified broadband providers and treated them like a public utility. In December he vowed to take a “weedwhacker” to what he considers unnecessary regulations and said that net neutrality’s “days are numbered”.

The Republicans have a new majority at the FCC. Ajit Pai has long maintained that under former Chairman Thomas Wheeler it overstepped its bounds, suggesting that he would steer the agency in a direction more favourable to big phone and cable companies. Pai opposes online privacy regulations that force broadband providers to ask consumers for permission before using their data.

The FCC is likely to allow more huge mergers; Pai voted to approve AT&T’s 2015 acquisition of DirecTV and has said he would do the same for Comcast’s effort to acquire Time Warner Cable.

The cable industry’s trade group, the NCTA, has supported him, saying he has a “common-sense philosophy that consumers are best served by a robust marketplace that encourages investment, innovation and competition.”

Another Trump target will be the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). This provides funds for National Public Radio (NPR) and television (PBS). The CPB budget to support these services was \$445m in 2015. Donald Trump intends to follow a list of budget cuts, suggested by the conservative Heritage Foundation, one of which is that the CPB should be privatised.

Such an action will not cut much off the Federal budget but it will undermine one vital source of independent reporting and current affairs programmes which many Americans rely on.

CAN THEY HACK IT?

TRUMP’S SELF-PROCLAIMED “running war with the media” and journalists (“among the most dishonest human beings on earth”) encourages suspicion and confusion. The test will be how robust the media which are not compliant with Trump can be – not so much in responding to his diversionary tweets and off-the-cuff comments, but in reporting and documenting the reality of his regime.

They will have to jettison notions of “fair and balanced” when the President and his staff reject objective truths and embrace conspiracy theories. Will they be up to the task?

The coalition of extreme right-wing websites like Infowars, Drudge Report, The Gateway Pundit, LifeZette, and Breitbart serve as bridges between the alt-right fringes of the internet and the conservative mainstream media. They have a sophisticated level of coordination which facilitates the spread of fake news into the mainstream media.

The right-wing media infrastructure is well established, in the mainstream as well as the fringe. Fox News began in 1996. Mainstream conservative news outlets, spanning talk radio and Fox News, have fomented a toxic alternative reality within which a constellation of fake news-purveying websites has thrived.

I THINK IT’S PROBABLY BETTER FOR ME NOT TO GO INTO HOW THE INTERVIEW AROSE ...

RUPERT MURDOCH was present during Michael Gove’s grovelling interview with Trump, published in *The Times* on January 16, according to *the Financial Times*.

The Murdoch and Trump families have been close for

years. Numerous photos were taken of the encounter in Trump Tower, some showing Gove giving an excited thumbs-up signal.

But Murdoch appeared in none of them.

When Gove was asked in

an interview to confirm that Murdoch was there, he gave a strange reply.

“The best thing to say I think, in fairness is, um, in securing the interview, I think the fact that it was the Times newspaper and the fact that

we had the – what’s the word ... I think it’s probably better for me not to go into how the interview arose or how it came about but I think it’s entirely fair for people to make a set of conclusions or assumptions about that,” he said.



Demonstration against the takeover of Sky by the Murdochs in 2011; the same is happening again

LAWS AND ORDERS

Touch and go timing

The big questions in media politics – Murdoch and Sky, phone-hacking, Leveson and media regulation – are entwined in a chaotic timetable that could affect the outcomes of them all

1 WILL THE GOVERNMENT activate Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act? This is the law, passed by Parliament in 2013, that would mean publishers having to pay both sides' costs in a defamation case even if they won. This would happen if they had failed to agree to arbitration of the case with a recognised press regulator, as proposed by the Leveson Inquiry report. The major newspaper companies are dead against this because their tame regulator IPSO is not formally recognised, partly due to its refusal to set up a fair, accessible and cheap arbitration service.

2 WILL THE GOVERNMENT allow the second stage of the inquiry to take place? This was intended to cover law-breaking and improper conduct within media organisations – mainly phone-hacking – and whether police were complicit with them. It was postponed because of the court cases over phone-hacking and bribery of officials that have now finished. The publishers are dead against this for obvious reasons.

3 WILL THE GOVERNMENT approve the buy-up of Sky TV by Murdoch's 21st Century Fox company? There is a major case running in the High Court in which a number of phone-hacking victims are suing News International, and their lawyers have asked for access to email accounts used by James Murdoch and Rebekah Brooks, both then top executives, as they are again now.

The victims claim the accounts will show

that up to 20 million emails were deleted in 2010 and 2011, to destroy evidence of the pair's complicity in the phone-hacking operation, after police launched their criminal investigation. News International (now called News UK) contends that any deletion of emails was part of normal housekeeping.

If the order is granted the revelations could be highly embarrassing to the two bosses, but especially James Murdoch who is boss of both sides – chairman of Sky and chief executive of Fox – in the Sky takeover. The judge was expected to grant the order on **MARCH 10**, but legal delays are now likely to put back the decision until May.

His particular worry is that it could lead to a finding that Fox is not a "fit and proper" company to have complete control of Sky. The change of date could be crucial, since the Murdochs' hope is that the deal will be done and dusted by then. For there's another deadline that will intervene.

At present the much-vaunted "fit and proper" test by which media regulator Ofcom assesses broadcasters operating under its licences is not actually a legal requirement for takeover approval. It would require culture secretary Karen Bradley to make an order, and she is under pressure from campaigners to do so.

She said she was "minded" to forward the takeover to Ofcom on two other statutory grounds and was expected to do so on **MARCH 17**, after Free Press goes to press.

To end this uncertainty the Labour peer Lord (David) Puttnam, who has been a great advocate for media democracy and accountability over the years, tabled in the House of Lords an amendment to make the test a requirement for all takeovers and mergers.

He tabled the amendment to the Digital Economy (DE) Bill now in Parliament, which the

government will oppose but may get through; there is a lot of opposition to Murdoch media in both houses of Parliament. Contentious amendments often go through the Lords at the last minute in the rush to get legislation through in time, and the DE Bill has a very tight deadline.

It has to be enacted in law by **MARCH 31**, because one of its provisions is the transfer of the regulation of the BBC from the current BBC Trust to Ofcom; the Trust will be wound up that day and Ofcom take the reins on **APRIL 1**. Puttnam's little grenade could just slip under the door in time for Ofcom to apply it.

Ofcom should be starting its scrutiny of the takeover on **MARCH 20**, with 40 days to complete it, that is by **MAY 1**. Its conclusion could well not be the end of the story. Last time round, in 2011, the result of Ofcom's deliberations in March led to an intense period of negotiations that were still going in July when the Milly Dowler bombshell blew up.

The argument was about the conditions Ofcom put on the takeover, which, subject to conditions, it actually agreed. Most of the

concerns expressed had been about the future of Sky News, and Ofcom proposed hiving it off to a separate company for ten years, with Murdoch giving undertakings in lieu (UILs) on its future.

There was much scepticism about the value

of Rupert Murdoch's UILs, since he has over the years had little trouble breaching legally binding conditions on other takeovers. Often these involve boards of independent directors to be consulted on major decisions such as a change of editor, which he has simply ignored.

And it is perfectly feasible that some similar compromise will be the outcome of the regulatory process now. So there is everything for campaigners to play for.

Murdoch has had little trouble breaching conditions on other takeovers in the past

'No ads, no clickbait, just real journalism'

A PIONEERING local journalist sacked from a paper in Cornwall by the Trinity Mirror chain has set up what he claims to be the first subscription-funded local news website.

Graham Smith was a reporter for the Cornish Guardian, published by the Local World group, which was bought up by Trinity Mirror (TM) in November 2015.

Now he's the owner, manager and editor of Cornwall Reports, which is going strong behind a paywall – such is the demand for news that the corporate media are dismally failing to supply.

TM, obsessed with cost-cutting, straight away made 12 staff redundant – but not Graham Smith, who as a former TV reporter and experienced operator in the area for 37 years – he is 62 – was worth keeping on. Instead they increased the area he had to cover to more than half of Cornwall.

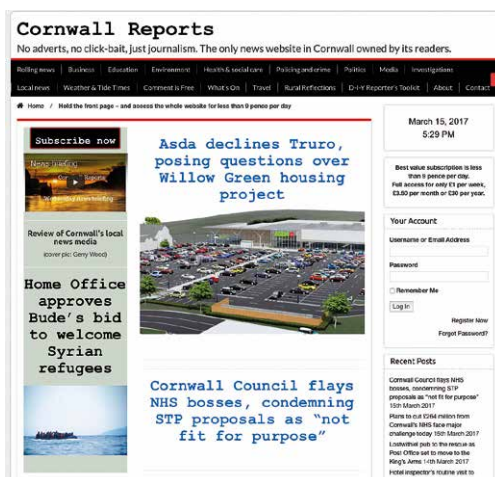
But they didn't seem interested in his news skills or contacts at all. What they wanted was clickbait. On his first day on TM's website Cornwall Live, he said: "I was asked to write a listicle on ten illnesses that can kill your pet."

"Today the top story on Cornwall Live is the 50 sexiest people in Cornwall. Most are actors that have appeared on Poldark but are not from Cornwall at all."

He told TM he was going to launch a site of his own in competition to this kind of rubbish, one with real local news on it. They sacked him for "failing to share the aims and values" of the company. Smith sat down with Wordpress and had Cornwall Reports onscreen two days later.

A crowdfunding appeal brought him over £3,000 to get started, but for the long term he decided to go for subscriptions and put the news behind a paywall, in what he claims to be "Britain's first local news website to rely entirely on its readers". The website is updated throughout the day.

He set his sights on recruiting 1,000 readers within a year. In early March he had 259 so was still



on target. "No adverts" is his crucial concept; "just journalism". The "cover price" of Cornwall Reports is £30 per year, or £1 a week.

"It's a business model which should be of interest to every journalist," he says. "It puts journalists in charge, free from the tyranny of having to feed massive audiences a never-ending diet of trivia and click-bait, and it has the potential to breathe new life into local news as a pillar of a free press and democracy."

Smith uses social media, and has a 4,000-strong email list, accumulated over his years as a journalist in Cornwall – 25 of those years on television, becoming current affairs editor of Westcountry TV. He says he is "probably better known than some other local journalists".

Every morning he posts a video on Facebook, promoting Cornwall Reports. Those videos are watched by nearly 4,000 people every day.

■ cornwallreports.co.uk



GRAHAM SMITH:
taking on the
too-big media

New Internationalist

RENEWAL AS A CO-OP

NEW INTERNATIONALIST, the world development magazine, is restructuring itself into a worldwide community-owned cooperative. The independent publication has launched a £500,000 share offer – claimed to be the largest of its kind by a media organisation globally.

Having pioneered a more ethical reporting for more than four decades, NI has now created a new way to finance and run not-for-profit media.

The minimum investment is set at only £50. Shares cannot be transferred or sold on. Investors have one vote, no matter how much they invest and, as co-owners, become stewards of NI's mission into the future.

The campaign runs on Crowdfunder.co.uk. The organisers hope the share offer will create a secure and democratic structure, bucking the trend of media ownership concentration.

New Internationalist co-editor Hazel Healy said: "We have always written about other people coming together to change things, now it's our turn. It felt like we needed to do something big. Fear, and mistrust are rising all over the world, and misinformation along with them."

"Meanwhile, the media's broken business model is making it harder than ever for independents like us to survive."

"Our slogan #FactsAndHeart says it all. This is journalism that has the power to bring people together."

Graeme Roy, community shares officer at Crowdfunder said: "Community shares are a great way for the public to own and run the businesses that are important to them. I am sure the crowd will support New Internationalist and the independent media they stand for."

MURDOCH BIDS AGAIN TO TAKE OVER SKY TV

THE ANSWER IS STILL 'NO'

BIG MEDIA mogul Rupert Murdoch is bidding to buy up Sky TV. It's the second time in six years he has tried this.

The first time he had the support of the new Tory-led coalition government and expected it to be nodded through.

They had no idea how many and how deeply people resented the abuse of power by the Murdoch media. There was a long and fierce political battle as a growing opposition campaign held up the process for more than a year, until the bombshell revelation that the Murdoch press had hacked the phone of a murdered teenage girl brought the bid crashing down in a wave of public revulsion.

There was a profound inquisition into the unethical practices of the press and the corruption surrounding them. Yet, despite all that came out at the Leveson Inquiry, when a stronger Tory government was elected last year the Murdochs blithely banged in another bid.

Once again they believe they're home and dry, and once again a popular campaign is out to stop them.

■ SKY TV is a big company with UK revenues last year of £8.3 billion – well over twice the BBC's £3.7 billion – and total profits of £1.5 billion.

It is a joint venture resulting from the government-sponsored merger of two rival satellite TV companies in 1990. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation was restricted to holding 39 per cent. Murdoch has always wanted the whole caboodle and is bidding for it again.

The case against him is even stronger than it was six years ago. In formal terms, there are three main issues:

- the "plurality" of media ownership;
- the degree of commitment to the standards of public service broadcasting;
- whether the Murdochs are "fit and proper" to have total control over such a powerful combination of media.



WHY?



WE DID IT LAST TIME

THE CAMPAIGN that stopped the Murdochs in 2011 was a rapidly assembled coalition of Labour politicians, media unions, campaigning groups like the CPBF and the new internet "clicktivist" groups Avaaz and 38 degrees.

A 38 Degrees online petition against the first attempt at merger got more than 100,000 signatures.

Avaaz organised a series of demonstrations at Murdoch-related events, including this one with a giant Rupert Murdoch puppet pulling the strings of Prime Minister David Cameron and culture secretary Jeremy Hunt outside his department's office.

Labour MPs Chris Bryant and Tom Watson fearlessly defied the timid consensus in Parliament to attack the Murdoch press with gusto.

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THE BIG REASONS WHY

1 MEDIA PLURALITY

THE MARKET SHARE of Murdoch-owned newspapers and TV in the UK is around the same. But there has been a big increase in the Murdochs' position in commercial radio. Last year News UK bought the Wireless Group – owner of the national Virgin Radio, TalkRadio and TalkSport services – and Sky News itself now provides national news bulletins to the whole independent radio network; some 270 stations.

In effect there would be only two universal nationwide TV and radio news providers: the BBC and Murdoch; but the BBC has no newspapers, while Murdoch has more than anyone.

Despite this, the Murdochs are pushing the point that consumption of media has changed dramatically in the last six years, with more and news received online via social media. While this is true, the origin of most of this news is still traditional “legacy” media.

So the big shift to news consumption via Facebook, Google and Twitter does not reduce the importance of news production; in fact it increases it. Social media distribute news, they do not produce it. It is not news consumption that matters, but its production.

2 BROADCASTING STANDARDS

THE CLUE to the question on broadcast standards is in the name of the bidder: Fox.

The spectre of a “Fox News UK” is looming over the Atlantic. Fox News in the USA is a byword in blatant political bias and failure to separate reporting from comment. Fox has been the dominant media voice behind the whole populist right-wing revival in the USA over the last ten years, from the Tea Party to the so-called “alt-right”, wrecking Obama's presidency and propelling Donald Trump to the White House in highly dubious circumstances.

Naturally this kind of output is alien to the UK broadcasting ecology, based on principles of balance and impartiality supposedly embedded in the public service broadcasting (PSB) regime. Sky News is as close to these principles as any of the others, and its journalists insist they will always abide by them.

But no-one can be certain that this state of affairs would persist if Murdoch was given free rein and the UK-based shareholders were removed from the board and management. Rupert Murdoch himself admitted to a House of Lords committee in 2007 that he wanted Sky News to be more like Fox News to make it “a proper alternative to



the BBC” – which he seems to regard as left-wing propaganda. He complained to the peers that changes had not been made because “nobody at Sky listens to me”. The truth is rather that no-one wants it!

3 FIT AND PROPER MANAGERS

THE CONCENTRATION of ownership in the hands of the Murdoch clan is the big issue. These people's record of corporate governance is appalling. After the hacking scandal at their London papers, News Corporation was investigated by police agencies in both the UK and USA and came close to being prosecuted, according to numerous reports.

In their desperate attempts to stave off a corporate prosecution and save their own skins News International managers committed the cardinal journalistic sin of betraying confidential sources, supplying the Metropolitan Police with all the incriminating evidence they could lay their hands on against their own journalists and their sources – evidence that led to dozens of prosecutions.

But this is not a matter that can be consigned to the past. The removal of the check provided by the UK-based shareholders will make Sky a wholly pliant outlet for the Murdochs' management as much as their journalistic style.

They corrupt democratic politics, using their media power to dominate governments. Murdoch had four of the last five Prime Ministers in his pocket – the one who resisted, John Major, was hounded from office with a brutal press campaign as Tony Blair sold Murdoch his soul – plus the very minister, Jeremy Hunt, who was supposedly responsible for ruling on its first bid to buy up Sky.

They corrupt the police, offering them favourable reporting and easy prosecutions, such as the unfortunate individuals set up by Mazher Mahmood, the News of the World's supposed “fake sheikh”. In return they got protection from investigations themselves: the Met police in London took part in the cover-up and stonewalled demands to probe into criminality at News International for three years.

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

The CPBF is part of the Media Reform Coalition, which is co-ordinating the campaign against the Sky takeover.

Go to www.cpbf.org.uk or contact us at freepress@cpbf.org.uk for information on the latest actions and information. Phone 07729 146 846.

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FREEDOM**



The Sky TV newsroom: Murdoch would call all the shots if allowed to buy up the network

Welcome to Downing Street! It's easy access for Murdochs

MURDOCH'S managers have put more effort into ensuring that the takeover will ease through the regulatory process this time with an intensive lobbying effort. Unsurprisingly, they have found open doors across the Tory government.

Between April 2015 and September 2016, senior News Corp executives met with government ministers or their special advisers on 22 separate occasions. According to research by the Media Reform Coalition, 17 meetings involved the Prime Minister, the Chancellor or Culture Secretary; and Rupert Murdoch was himself present on at least eight occasions. In the year before that, NewsCorp bosses met with government ministers, officials and advisers ten times – more than with any other single company.

This ready intimacy between Murdoch and ministers contradicts statements made by both sides in the wake of the hacking scandal. In 2011 Prime Minister David Cameron said: "The challenge is how we address the vexed issue of media power. We need competition policy to be properly enforced. We need a sensible look at the relevance of plurality and cross-media ownership ... never again should we let a media group get too powerful."

In 2012 he said at Prime Minister's Questions: "I think on all sides of the House there's a bit of a need for a hand on heart. We all did too much cosying up to Rupert Murdoch ... The problem of closeness between politicians and media proprietors had been going on for years and it's this government that's going to sort it out."

Nothing has been done. There has been more talk of putting a

check on lobbyists in general, and a voluntary register has been set up, but no political initiative or regulations to stop politicians falling captive to powerful media interests.

Rupert Murdoch himself said in evidence to Leveson: "I have made it a principle all my life never to ask for anything from any prime minister". Most likely, he never had to ask; Thatcher, Blair, Brown and Cameron gave what he wanted so willingly. These words were all worthless. As for Theresa May, on the day she took power she said in Downing Street: "The government I lead will be driven not by the interests of the privileged few but by yours [the people]. When we take the big calls we'll think not of the powerful but you. When we pass new laws we'll listen not to the mighty but to you."

In September on a 36-hour visit to New York, she found time for a private meeting with Rupert Murdoch. She already appointed Sky News deputy political editor Joey Jones as an adviser.

And as for Culture Secretary Karen Bradley, last August she appointed a special adviser on media: Craig Woodhouse, chief political correspondent of the Sun.

Those meetings that Murdoch and his men had with Theresa May or Philip Hammond in 2015-16 were more than with any other organisation, according to government statistics.

While there were ten meetings involving Rupert Murdoch or

**Theresa May and
Karen Bradley have
Murdoch journalists
as advisors**

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senior executives of News Corp and the PM or Chancellor, there were just six with BBC senior management and only three each with the Confederation of Business Industry (CBI) and major companies such as JP Morgan, Siemens, BlackRock and HSBC.



The lists do not include many meetings between ministers or officials and staff working for Murdoch

papers. A government spokesperson said: "Ministers meet with a range of stakeholders. We publish the details of these meetings in our transparency returns."

There were no meetings between senior ministers and media reform campaigners or groups opposed to the expansion of Big Media power. Justin Schlosberg, chair of the Media Reform Coalition said: "Decades of rampant criminality and corruption within the Murdoch newsrooms

News Corp

does not appear to be of concern to the present government, as senior ministers continue to sit down with News Corp bosses at a rate that dwarfs other companies and organisations. It's as if it's part of their job description."

MEETINGS BETWEEN NEWSCORP/FOX AND UK MINISTERS, APRIL 2015 – SEPTEMBER 2016

MAY 2015: George Osborne and Robert Thomson, News Corp chief executive

JUNE 2015: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch

JULY 2015: David Cameron and Robert Thomson

SEPTEMBER 2015: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch

SEPTEMBER 2015: George Osborne, Rupert Murdoch and Robert Thomson – dinner

SEPTEMBER 2015: John Whittingdale (culture secretary) and David Dinsmore (News UK chief operating officer) – breakfast

OCTOBER 2015: George Osborne and David Dinsmore

OCTOBER 2015: David Cameron, David Dinsmore, Sun editor Tony Gallagher

DECEMBER 2015: George Osborne and Robert Thomson

DECEMBER 2015: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch – Christmas drinks

DECEMBER 2015: David Cameron and Rupert Murdoch

JANUARY 2016: John Whittingdale and 21st Century Fox

JANUARY 2016: George Osborne and Robert Thomson

MAY 2016: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch

MAY 2016: Theresa May (home secretary) and NewsCorp

SEPTEMBER 2016: Philip Hammond and Robert Thomson

SEPTEMBER 2016: Theresa May (prime minister) and Robert Thomson

SEPTEMBER 2016: Karen Bradley (culture secretary) and Robert Thomson

SEPTEMBER 2016: Theresa May, Robert Thomson, Rupert Murdoch and the Wall Street Journal editorial board.

THE UNDEAD RISE AGAIN

LIKE GHOULS in a Hammer horror film, the discredited heads of the Murdochs' UK operations have risen from the phone-hacking grave.

In 2011 the chief executive of the Murdoch's UK newspaper company News International was Rebekah Brooks (right).

After the hacking scandal broke she resigned and in 2014 was tried at the Old Bailey for conspiracy to intercept voicemails and pervert the course of justice but was sensationally acquitted while her close colleague and fellow former editor Andy Coulson went to jail.



The chairman of News International was James Murdoch (left), younger son of Rupert. The chairman of BSkyB, as Sky was then known, was also James Murdoch.

After the hacking scandal broke he resigned and was flown back to New York while all those around him were arrested, amid fears of imminent corruption charges against the company.

In its report on the attempted buyout of Sky the regulator Ofcom said he "repeatedly fell short of the conduct to be expected of as a chief executive and chairman" and that his lack of action on phone hacking was "difficult to comprehend and ill-judged".

News International has been rebranded News UK, in a bid to shake off the hacking shame. In 2017 its chief executive is Rebekah Brooks.

As a subsidiary of News Corporation it has no chairman, but that of News Corp is Rupert Murdoch.

The chairman of Sky is James Murdoch. He also happens to be chief executive of 21st Century Fox, the likewise rebranded film and TV arm of News Corp that is bidding to buy up Sky. The chairman of Fox is Rupert Murdoch, by the way.

'Hi Karen' ... 'Hi Ben'

AMONG THE more revolting revelations at the Leveson Inquiry was the exchange of messages between the minister responsible for checking the buyout of Sky in 2011, culture secretary Jeremy Hunt, and News Corporation's European head of public affairs Frederic Michel.

In the year after the Sky buyout was announced, Fred Michel had 191 telephone calls and 158 emails with Mr Hunt's office.

After one Commons performance by the Jeremy Hunt, Michel texted him: *You were very impressive yesterday, and yes, let's meet up when it's all done. Warmest regards, Fred.*

Another time he messaged: *You were great at the Commons today. Hope all well, warm regards, Fred.* Jeremy Hunt responded: *Merci. Large drink tonight.*

Fred Michel tried to fix a meeting between the minister and James Murdoch, then chairman of News International, but Jeremy Hunt was given legal advice counselling against it.

Instead, they spoke by mobile phone, prompting a text

from Fred Michel that read:

Thanks for the call with James today, greatly appreciated. Jeremy Hunt replied: *Pleasure.*

After Jeremy Hunt took over the brief in December 2010, Fred Michel texted him to say: *Hi, James has asked me to be the point of contact with you ... Speak soon, Fred.*

Jeremy Hunt replied: *Thanks Fred. All contact with me now needs to be through official channels until decision made.*

He later texted apologetically: *Hope you understand why we have to have the long process. Let's meet.*

Fred Michel communicated even more frequently with Jeremy Hunt's special advisor Adam Smith, who had to resign when the messages were published. Jeremy Hunt was promoted.

Fred Michel went off to form his own lobbying firm. His successor, now entitled Director, Government Relations, Europe, Middle East and Africa, at 21st Century Fox, is Benjamin King.

Karen Bradley is bracing herself for a stream of smarmy messages from him; but how will she respond?

Lies on the line

Strikes over company plans to get rid of onboard conductors have been taking place for months on Southern Railways in south-east England. Reporting of the dispute has become increasingly hostile.

KEITH RICHMOND of the drivers' union ASLEF surveys the coverage

THE STRIKE and overtime ban by ASLEF, the train drivers' union, on Southern Railways in December and January was an industrial, not a political, dispute – whatever it suited Transport Secretary Chris Grayling and a clutch of under-briefed backbench Conservative MPs to claim.

It was unusual because it was not a battle for more pay or fewer hours, but a row about passenger safety and the introduction – without negotiation – of driver-only operation.

Not that you would know this from some of the lazy, dishonest – and at times downright malicious – coverage that the drivers have had. The Sun, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph were, predictably, the worst offenders.

Mario Ledwith in the Mail turned an industrial dispute into an attack on Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and ASLEF president Tosh McDonald under the headline "Corbyn Led Standing Ovation For Strike Comrade" (January 2).

Lucy Osborne – who cheerfully told me "the editor doesn't like strikes, strikers or trade unions" – wrote: "ASLEF has banned its members from doing overtime" (January 5) even though I had patiently explained to her that our members had voted overwhelmingly to ban it themselves.

Nor did she include the fact that if the company employed the number of drivers it had promised in its franchise application, it would



not need to rely on our members working overtime.

She also deliberately got general secretary Mick Whelan's salary wrong (7 January) by including employer pension and national insurance contributions, despite being provided with the correct figure.

Patrick Foster, cheerfully swallowing a wildly inaccurate

briefing by the Department for Transport, went big on "Union leader warns of 10 years of unrest" in the Daily Telegraph (13 December) and the next day offered "This is war with Tories, unions declare" without a single piece of evidence to justify it.

Anyone with any knowledge of the way what they used to call Fleet Street works will know that the pressure to provide a story to back up a headline dreamed up in the editor's office, by the backbench, or the news desk can be immense.

The Sun (22 December) tried to make something of nothing with "Unionists' 2 days off rails" (which was really "People have a drink at Christmas") while the Evening Standard splashed with "Rail strike boss off to work by car" (6 January) – a risible story which prompted Mark Ellis of the Daily Mirror to laugh: "Man has lift with wife shock!"

The cartoonists had a field day, too, with Mac in the Mail (15 December) and Adams in the Telegraph (19 December) happily imagining Jeremy, Tosh and Santa at Christmas.

It wasn't all bad. Conrad Landin interviewed Graham Morris, ASLEF's

organiser on Southern, for a piece which appeared in the Morning Star under the headline We are determined to win – passenger safety too important to risk, and The News Line, the paper of the Workers' Revolutionary Party, splashed on Southern are bullies! (both on 11 January) after talking to Graham on a picket line at London Bridge.

Mick Whelan was interviewed by Simon Hattenstone for a flattering flagship profile in The Guardian (14 January); Tosh McDonald talked to Danny Scott for a fascinating Life in the Day feature in the Sunday Times Magazine (15 January); and Gwyn Topham wrote a typically thoughtful and well-informed, analysis of the problems in the rail industry – "Is Britain's train system getting worse?" – in The Guardian (7 January).

We live in a free society, with a free press, which has had, for 350 years, the right to be partial and the right to be wrong. And journalism, of course, like politics, is a rough old trade.

So I won't be disingenuous and say I was surprised at some of the coverage. Just disappointed at the distortions and lies.

BBC's public funds boost private profit

THE BBC has agreed to spend £8 million a year of its hard-pressed licence fee income on employing 150 local reporters around the country. They will supply copy not just to the BBC but to local commercial media, helping to plug the "democratic deficit" in local journalism.

One effect of the plan agreed with the big commercial newspaper chains is to subsidise their editorial forces and permit yet further cuts in staff. According to most estimates – nobody has counted them – well over half of the 12,000-plus journalists on local papers prior to 2008 have lost their jobs.

The local press is 80 per cent owned by three companies: Trinity Mirror, Newsquest and Johnstone Press. For 20 years they have been hacking away at their costs as they lose advertising and sales to maintain what are still high levels of profit.

Numbers of reporters have fallen so far that the vital institutions of civic life – notably local courts and council meetings that take a lot of reporting time – are simply no longer being covered. This "democratic deficit" has long been a worry, and the BBC has responded to appeals for help.

It will fund the salaries of 150 "local democracy reporters", funded by the BBC, but they will be employed by existing media, or "qualifying news organisations".

These must be existing news publishers "within or close to the relevant authority area" who provide content in multimedia formats and already employ journalists trained to recognised standards.

The reporters will be distributed around the



Savage cuts have led journalists at the Newsquest group's south London base to strike

to save their papers. A newsroom that had 38 journalists a year ago now has 18 – to produce

11 weekly titles. Last year the US-owned Newsquest made profits of £70million – 25 per cent of turnover.

UK, with for instance three in Northern Ireland, 11 in the West Country and 12 in London and the South East.

Their stories will be available for use by the news organisations and the BBC, and through a "news bank" to outside media organisations shortly after transmission.

They will concentrate on top-tier local authority areas – more than 350 authorities at country and district level. Effectively they will have to focus on the big stories, leaving an unfilled gap for covering covered parish or local events.

There is no way that 150 reporters are going to replace the 7,000 thrown out of work, but they might improve the papers a little, since existing reporters are highly office-bound, churning out pages from press releases and

material sent in by the public.

It has taken months for the BBC to negotiate this deal with the News Media Association, the UK press's trade association.

They said in a statement: "Following months of detailed work and consultation with the providers of local journalism right across the UK, including the hyperlocal and local TV sector, the BBC and the NMA will now take forward agreed proposals which aim to invest in the local news media, increase coverage of public services and institutions and use the expertise of both the BBC and the local news sector for the benefit of all audiences."

They might have added: "They will also give local newspapers the cover to sack more staff and improve their profits as well as their coverage of local affairs."

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More rush to probe 'fake news'

TWO HIGH-LEVEL investigations have been set up to analyse the phenomenon called "fake news", in the wake of the moral panic that followed the triumph of Donald Trump in the US presidential election.

Fake news is the production of untrue reporting by people other than commercial media, who after decades of experience do it more professionally. It invariably appears on the internet, which being open to everybody is self-evidently suspect.

The UK Parliament's Culture, Media and Sport Committee has launched a probe into the "widespread dissemination, through social media and the internet, and acceptance as fact of stories of uncertain provenance or accuracy".

Explaining the reason for the inquiry, the committee noted concerns over people being fed propaganda and untruths from non-traditional news sources. Damian Collins, chairman of the committee, said the trend was "a threat to democracy and undermines confidence in the media in general".

The Labour Party is conducting a similar inquiry conducted by Michael Dugher who was briefly shadow culture secretary last year. The probe will look into the changing ways in which news is consumed and shared online, and what social media could do to tackle fabricated news being shared.

Deputy leader Tom Watson, who took over the culture brief, said the increase in fake news undermined politics. He said: "Fake news challenges our democracy by undermining the very basis on which we make decisions about who to trust and who to vote for. I want this inquiry to make concrete proposals to protect the integrity of our news media."

He said fake news was accessed with more frequently than real news in the run up to the recent US presidential elections. "That cannot [be] healthy for democracies, which operate on the assumption that voters make choices based on facts and information that are for the most part accurate and truthful."

Beancounter who now leads the Beeb

THE NEW Chairman of the BBC, Sir David Clementi, invented his own job when he was asked by government to recommend a new structure for the corporation.

He proposed replacing the BBC Trust with a straightforward management board and subjecting this public service to the regulation of Ofcom, whose remit until now was competitive commercial media.

And so it came to pass. Clementi takes charge on April 1. He is a former deputy governor of the Bank of England and chairman of



Prudential and Virgin Money.

At least he wasn't a right-wing media boss. According to reports, rivals for the post included John Makinson, former chairman of Penguin Random House, Roger Parry, former chairman of Johnston Press and now of pollsters YouGov, and Sir David Arculus, the former boss of publisher Emap and now of lobby group Energy UK. There was also the friendly Murdoch biographer William Shawcross, and Dame Deirdre Hutton, the chair of the Civil Aviation Authority.

COST OF A TWEET

FOOD BLOGGER Jack Monroe's triumph in her libel action against vile right-wing rent-a-gob Katie Hopkins in March was not just clearly the right thing to happen, but a significant move in media law.

Hopkins had tweeted a snide and crude message about Monroe, accusing her entirely falsely of condoning the spraying of offensive graffiti on a war memorial. When challenged she refused to apologise but instead insulted Monroe further, calling her "social anthrax".

Monroe was awarded £24,000 in damages but legal costs will set Hopkins back a six-figure sum.

The judge found that the tweets had caused "serious harm". It could be a precedent that has an effect on people who use Twitter to pile abuse on others, if the courts continue to find that serious harm has been done to a person's reputation.

Hopkins had contended that on Twitter vulgar and crude statements are par for the course, but this argument was roundly rejected by the court.

According to lawyers, it may now be more difficult to argue that attention-grabbing provocative tweets are just "mere abuse", "banter" or statements that aren't taken seriously. Tweets can be held to the same standard as a "reputable" or "serious" publication and controversy-baiting Twitter celebrities may need to be more cautious in the wake of this judgement.

To refrain from behaving like Katie Hopkins is generally sound advice.

IPSO's Teflon Trevor

TREVOR KAVANAGH, the Sun's columnist and former political editor is still a member of the board of tame press regulator IPSO, despite having two complaints upheld against him over the same article.

IPSO ruled in February that he had been wrong to claim in a column last October that "two out of three asylum seekers lied about their age".

The Sun published a correction in print but not online. When this was pointed out it appended an inadequate footnote that failed to correct the statistics; the Sun argued that it would be "inappropriate" to amend the words of a columnist – even those ruled to be wrong.

IPSO said: "Given that the inaccuracy clearly related to an assertion of fact, the committee rejected the newspaper's reasoning for the delay, and considered that the newspaper had failed to correct a significant inaccuracy promptly."

This was the second time IPSO had found him at fault

over the same column. It released a statement saying Kavanagh had apologised for his comments on Channel 4 News presenter Fatima Manji.

He wrote that Manji should not have complained to IPSO over another Sun column by former editor Kelvin MacKenzie that had attacked her for wearing a hijab on air.

IPSO said it was "committed to ensuring that individuals who believe that they have been wronged by the press are able to seek proper redress without fear of retribution or victimisation."

"In this instance, public comments by an IPSO board member brought the strength of this commitment into question."

"This should not have happened. The board has received an apology from the board member and an assurance that it will not happen again."

If two reprimands by a regulator against one of its own members aren't enough to make him resign, how many would be?

CPBF AGM 2017

THE CPBF will be holding its 2017 annual meeting on Saturday July 1, at the HQ of Unite the Union in London. Further details will be announced – all members and supporters welcome. Unite the Union, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8TN; nearest station Holborn.

Not just the papers; Tories take the BBC

THE PUBLIC spectacle of George Osborne's venality and greed was gripping enough, but there were even worse things about his taking the editor's chair at the Evening Standard.

The Standard already had a nasty right-wing evening newspaper monopoly in London – a Labour-voting city – and George Osborne is likely if anything to make it more oppositional to the Tory government if he uses it to pursue his lavishly anticipated vendetta against Theresa May.

So it's not the Tories tightening their grip on the press that's new, but that it's on the BBC as well. The "populist" right-wing slant of BBC news is a growing pain, which an influx of Fleet Street establishment figures goes some way to explain.

The editor that George Osborne succeeds, Sarah Sands, is moving to edit the BBC Radio 4 Today programme. Her Evening Standard was a mouthpiece for Boris Johnson as Mayor of London, and in the election to succeed him the paper front-paged all the crude and stupid Tory accusations of jihadi connections against the inoffensive Labour contender Sadiq Khan.

Just because he's a Muslim, that's all; so now we have Donald Trump politics directing the Today programme.

Sarah Sands had never worked in broadcasting – just as Osborne has never worked in newspapers – but was eased into the job by head of news James Harding, the Tory press's "enemy within" at the BBC. He was a newspaper editor, at Murdoch's Times, and has brought a succession of prominent figures from national papers into key editorial positions at the BBC.

BBC journalists are not happy about this. Amid reports of rumbling mutiny one told Press

Gazette: "He has lost the dressing room. He doesn't have team news on his side." James Harding's imports include two senior colleagues from The Times and business correspondents from the Sunday Times and Sunday Telegraph.

And then there is the media editor, Amol Rajan. He's a former editor of the Independent, the one who drove the paper into closure (though it still totters along online) in March last year, 10 months after it defied its 30-year tradition of non-partisanship to call for the re-election of the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition in the 2015 poll.

This was an idiotic call anyway, since the coalition wasn't standing in the election. No



Lebedev: Social life



Osborne: Vendetta

doubt it was the brilliant idea of the proprietor, Yevgeny Lebedev, who also happens to own the Evening Standard and has just hired George Osborne.

Yevgeny worked his way up as the son of Russian oligarch Alexander Lebedev, who bought the papers and gave them to his spoilt brat as a present. Yevgeny likes nothing better than seeing his face, and name, in print. He gets the paper to set up glitzy events for him

AWKWARD SQUAD



TIM GOPSILL

to be photographed hobnobbing with west London society. He writes plodding first-person articles about his exhilarating social life and his exciting adventures.

Glossy magazines are full of fulsome profiles of this wretched man, as if he was a genius rather than a narcissist who happens to own newspapers. The journalists flatter him too. "It has been an absolute pleasure to work for him," said Sarah Sands.

Now she's been airlifted into a role at the BBC it does make you wonder: if she can't resist the adolescent whims of a preening creep like Yevgeny Lebedev, how is she going to stand up to the more substantial figures who make rather greater demands of the BBC?

Of course politicians are unscrupulous and proprietors are vain, but the worry is the journalists. Why should they have to kowtow to these people? It's like an Evelyn Waugh novel 100 years on.

Inside knowledge can be so valuable

THERE ARE certainly worries about Amol Rajan's media reporting, though it may not be surprising that his reports tend to represent the national paper editor's point of view.

In January he covered the controversy around Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Bill – the law, not yet activated, that could in rare circumstances lead to publications being made to pay both sides' costs in a libel case if they had failed to sign up with an officially-recognised press regulator.

All the corporate press are dead against this law, naturally, which Rajan reported at some length. He allowed one dissenting voice: a

brief interview with Max Mosely, the motor racing tycoon who is funding the only recognised regulator, IMPRESS, through a labyrinthine structure that protects its independence.

Mosley made his point that, at present, gaining redress from the national press is only possible for the rich; a laudable contention, though it was emphasised that Mosley is immensely rich himself, which rather made him seem a hypocrite. But there was not a word from or about the countless poorer people



Amol Rajan: media reporting from the editor's point of view

who have been denied such redress over the years, nor from victims or other critics of the press's intrusive and irresponsible behaviour. Nor was there any declaration that media editor Rajan had been involved in this story himself, which he had.

As editor of the Indy he has been accused of suppressing a story on the private life of then Culture Secretary John Whittingdale, who allegedly had an affair with a sex worker. The story was well known in media circles but none of the red-top papers wanted to embarrass Whittingdale, who

was about to pronounce on the enactment of Section 40!

The Indy was on the verge of publishing – the story being not so much Whittingdale's sex life as on the suppression of what would seem to be very a tasty tabloid tale.

In October 2015 Rajan attended a Society of Editors meeting with Whittingdale and other editors. On his return to the office he had the story pulled, "on editorial grounds", he explained. Shortly afterwards, Whittingdale announced he was "not persuaded" to enact Section 40. He may, though, have been persuaded not to, but that's an angle that media editor Rajan didn't cover.