

FREE PRESS

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NOOSE TIGHTENS AROUND THE NEWS

THE OWNERSHIP of Britain's news media is concentrating yet further, as companies launch themselves into a new wave of mergers and takeovers.

In local papers and commercial television the number of publishers has dropped as the biggest swallow up their market followers.

After five years of growth following the great crash of 2009, which hit media companies hard, they are starting to put their profits into the kind of acquisitions that got them into such trouble in the first place.

The outcome again is going to be a tighter group on the markets by fewer firms and yet more cuts in investment and editorial spending.

In the local press, the number of national chains dominating the sector fell from four to three when Trinity Mirror (TM) bought up the Local World group for £154 million, making it the biggest operator in the field.

TM now has a combined weekly circulation of 9 million copies of 36 daily newspapers, eight franchises to produce Metro freesheets, 88 weekly paid-for newspapers, five Sunday newspapers and 43 weekly free newspapers. The two other big regional press publishers, the US-owned Newsquest and Johnston Press, each have weekly circulations of around 5 million.

The buyout – TM already held 20 per cent of Local World – was based on a potential to make further cuts in editorial spending. The company said it will deploy its “know-how” on cutting costs at its existing regional

newspapers to lost £12 million from Local World's budgets – of which £3.2 million would be from “content generation”; that is, journalism. Yet more sackings and fewer staff.

Throughout 2015 there have been reports of TM in talks to take over Express Newspapers, owner of the daily and Sunday Express and Star titles. Proprietor Richard Desmond has reportedly been keen to sell them for some time.

In commercial television, the national company ITV has bought up Ulster Television in Northern Ireland.

ITV paid £100 million for UTV, which also owns a chain of commercial radio stations.

The deal is the penultimate step in the destruction of the ITV network as originally set up as a counterbalance to the BBC.

Of the 15 original regional franchises, only one – STV in Scotland – now survives.

This process of elimination has been accompanied by the loosening of the requirements on the network to provide regional news and current affairs. Award-winning documentary current affairs programmes have all been scrapped.

ITV has fallen further and further behind the BBC in the both the quality of and audiences for its news.

There has been no intervention by any regulatory body over these takeovers. The case for regulatory action gets stronger and stronger.

- Bigger and fewer in local press, page 5
- Slow death of the ITV dream, page 7.



Sticker produced by the Media Reform Coalition as part of its campaign on media ownership

3 IT'S THE OWNERS, STUPID! Report shows spread of monopoly control

9 FIGHTING BACK FOR FoI Boost for drive to save information laws

10 'BIGGEST BLOCK TO CLIMATE ACTION' Challenge to the Mail on global warming

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A YEAR OF INACTION

PROTESTORS demonstrated outside the office of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), just off Fleet Street in central London, to mark a year of inactivity as the national press's tame "self-regulator".

The protest was organised by the campaign group Hacked Off as the papers themselves face the possible consequences of their refusal to regulate themselves responsibly.

Hugh Tomlinson QC, chair of Hacked Off, said: "IPSO was set up in defiance of the press and is not a proper regulator. The public need a body which will take effective action against press abuses." The official body set up to monitor potential regulators, the Press Recognition Panel, became operational in

November as it invited them to sign up.

IPSO has not applied, and indeed by its own admission cannot, since it does not meet the requirements recommended in the Leveson report and enacted by Parliament.

Only one regulator has been established, which is the independent outfit Impress, but this has yet to announce the names of any publications to be regulated.

From November the national papers therefore face the penalties for refusing to join the system, which include having to pay the legal costs for both sides if they refuse to deal with complaints and end up in the libel courts, with the additional threat of huge exemplary damages for persistent offenders.

BBC

SAVE IT FROM EXTERMINATION

ARMANDO IANNUCCI, the award winning writer behind *The Thick of It* has attacked government ministers for trying to kill off the BBC and called on people to defend it against politicians and Rupert Murdoch.

In a speech entitled "We're all in this together" at the Edinburgh Festival he said it would be "bad capitalism" to diminish the national broadcaster and said the debate about the BBC's future had been poisoned by the newspaper industry. "If the BBC were a weapons system, half the cabinet would be on a plane to Saudi Arabia to tell them how brilliant it was," he told the Edinburgh audience.

With the BBC charter due for renewal by Parliament during 2016, Culture Secretary John Whittingdale has said that the deal with the BBC in August, under which it will pay for TV licences for over-75s return for a guaranteed licence fee income, is not binding on the whole process, so the final licence fee could be even less.

BBC Director General Lord Tony Hall has warned that over 30,000 jobs could be lost if BBC funding is further cut.



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Edited by Granville Williams

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MAHMOOD TOO SICK TO STAND TRIAL

THE COURT CASE against former News of the World undercover reporter Mazer Mahmood was adjourned in October on "health grounds", a court official said.

Mahmood, who styles himself the Fake Sheikh, is charged with conspiring to pervert the course of justice following the collapsed drugs trial of pop star Tulisa Contostavlos last year. The judge threw out the case on the grounds that Mahmood's

evidence against her could not be relied on.

Much of his undercover work involved the entrapment of gullible and ambitious people into committing minor offences or indiscretions. Prosecution authorities have dropped a number of further cases and are reviewing past convictions secured on the evidence of Mahmood.

But while dozens of his NoW colleagues have been put on trial over the

last two years on charges connected with phone-hacking or bribing public officials, he has never been prosecuted before.

Since the paper was closed in 2011, while other lost their work altogether, he was employed initially on the Sunday Times and then the newly launched Sun on Sunday. He is currently suspended from work.

The case at Westminster Magistrates' Court in London was due to resume on November 20.

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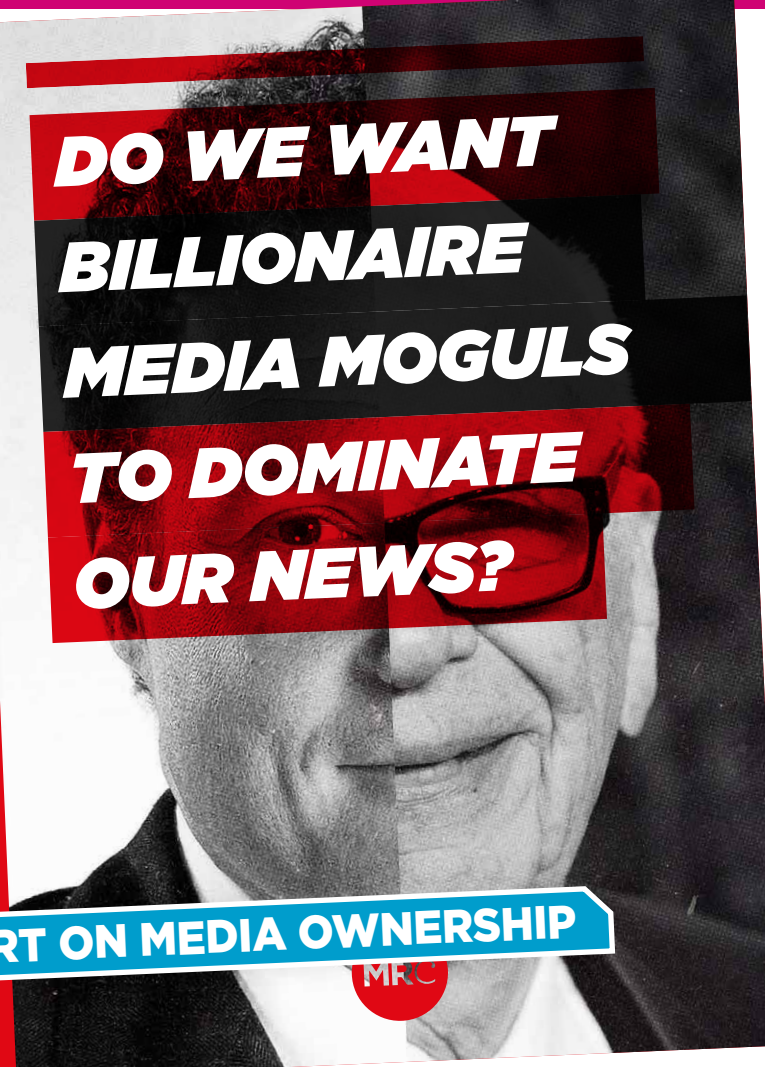
NEW VOICES
MORE DIVERSITY
REAL CHOICE

WE NEED ACTION TO CURB
MEDIA POWER

WE NEED #MEDIAREFORM

SPECIAL SIX-PAGE REPORT ON MEDIA OWNERSHIP

**DO WE WANT
BILLIONAIRE
MEDIA MOGULS
TO DOMINATE
OUR NEWS?**



Cover of the Media Reform Coalition flyer and poster which contains the graphics on the following pages

MEDIA MONOPOLY

It's the owners, stupid!

WHAT DOES IT mean to have “free” media when the nation’s TV channels, news outlets, radio stations, search engines and social media platforms are owned by a handful of giant corporations?

What does it mean to have “independent media” when many of our most influential media organisations are controlled by super-rich individuals and boards closely connected with vested interests?

Just three companies dominate 71 per cent of the national newspaper market – a market that may be shrinking but is still crucial when it comes to setting the agenda for the rest of the news media. When online readers are included, just five companies dominate some 80 per cent of market share.

Even in the area of local news, four conglomerates account for 80 per cent of all titles. We are facing an increasing number of news deserts given the fact that 36 million UK citizens – some 57 per cent of the total population – do not have a local daily paper that is able to dedicate itself to matters of concern to their community.

And where there is still a local press presence, some 85 per cent of local government areas are

faced with a monopoly or duopoly supply of local outlets.

In TV, Sky, effectively controlled by Rupert Murdoch’s 21st Century Fox empire, is by far the UK’s biggest broadcaster and continues to dominate the pay TV landscape. ITV is making huge profits on the back of its format sales

Wealthy individuals and organisations can distort the media landscape to suit their personal views

and faces fewer and fewer obligations to serve domestic audiences.

Meanwhile, Channel 5 is already owned by a US giant, Liberty Media, and there are constant rumours that the government is keen to sell off Channel 4 to the highest bidder.

Two companies have nearly 40 per cent of all commercial local analogue radio licences

and control two thirds of all commercial digital stations.

Only 14 per cent of non-BBC stations are now independently owned while all radio news is provided either by the BBC or by Sky.

The BBC itself remains a powerful presence in broadcasting and online but its budget has been severely cut by the last two licence fee deals, its independence has been undermined, and it is increasingly being told by government to be mindful of its impact on the wider commercial market.

Is the internet any different? UK search is overwhelmingly dominated by Google while the most popular apps like Instagram and WhatsApp are owned by Facebook, itself by far the most popular social media site.

This concentration of media ownership creates conditions in which wealthy individuals and organisations can amass huge political and economic power and distort the media landscape to suit their interests and personal views.

Urgent reform is needed in order both to address high levels of concentration in particular media markets and to protect against further concentration in others.

What do we want? We want democracy

WE HAVE a “capitalism problem on our hands today”, **Aral Balkan**, designer and democracy activist, told the Media Democracy Festival in London in October.

The founder of *indi.ie*, an enterprise that aims to protect human rights in the digital age, went on: “Technology has made it easier for big corporations to make money by violating privacy and accessing personal data.”

He said: “We need to go beyond worshipping Silicon Valley and its colonialism” and strive to achieve “equality, human right and democracy”.

Natalie Fenton, professor at Goldsmiths University Media Department, where the festival was held, said she felt optimistic regarding achieving media democracy.

“We need more regulation around concentration of media ownership by putting thresholds



and limits on how much any one corporation can own”.

Taxing big companies a small percentage like 1 per cent could help to generate money to then be put into a public trust fund where independent media can apply to and gain funding. Protecting journalists working with big corporation and going under editorial pressures was also essential.

The festival, organised by the Media Reform Coalition, included an open space for attendees to propose sessions on topics they wished to run, helping to answer the event’s central question: How can we create media democracy?

Alongside the open space, there was a screening of the zero-budget documentary (*left*) *The Fourth Estate* (youtu.be/jOnHBHy9r54), a film about UK’s media industry after the Leveson Inquiry, followed by a Q&A session with directors **Lee Salter** and **Elizabeth Mizon**.

The London-based Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) offered taster courses that explained the use of data to explain stories; information and security; and interactive storytelling.

The day ended with a party that included a live crowdfunding event at which various media projects pitched for support.

REGULATION

‘Don’t bust a gut over ownership’

JONATHAN HARDY is exasperated at yet another official report on media concentration that refuses to tackle the problem

GO AND INVESTIGATE media ownership, be thorough, and, er ... take your time.

I don’t suppose that successive Secretaries of State for Culture Media and Sport have actually uttered those words, but they sum up how government has sought to defuse the combustible mix of Murdoch’s BSkyB dealings, Leveson, and a public demand for action on media ownership concentration.

The investigator is Ofcom, the Office of Communications, the statutory media and telecoms regulator.

In 2010 industry minister Vince Cable asked it to report on Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation’s bid to buy out BSkyB. Since then there have been four Secretaries of State for Culture (Jeremy Hunt, Maria Miller, Sajid Javid and John Whittingdale) and Ofcom itself has come up with assorted consultations and reports, but not a single decision has been taken.

On November 5, Ofcom published its latest proposals to measure media plurality, following a consultation to which the CPBF responded.

For effective policies to tackle concentration and promote media plurality we do need careful and precise criteria for measurement and assessment – and it’s far from a simple matter:

assessing the relative influence of a copy of a tabloid newspaper, a broadsheet, a minute of TV or radio news and a visit to a web page is not straightforward.

Ofcom’s proposals are generally sound, but they restrict the scope of plurality action, only addressing news for example. The main problem is that this discussion of the means of measurement has served to substitute for developing and debating the ownership policies themselves.

The truth is that this government, even more than the recent coalition, shows little appetite for upsetting corporate media. It has sought to defuse and redirect attention from taking action by calling on Ofcom to review and deliver exclusively on measurement – and that “in consultation with industry”.

The CPBF, Media Reform Coalition, and other allies have argued regulation is needed now, and backed that with reports on the poor state of media plurality in the UK – like the new MRC report summarised on these pages.

Ofcom devotes less than two of the 20 pages in its statement to government to engaging with consultation responses, and ignores our call for greater democratic involvement, not just better metrics, in assessing what level of media plurality is “sufficient”.

What Ofcom recommends goes against the proposals we have put forward. We have argued that plurality reviews should be conducted when media firms reach thresholds of market share; operating above that share should be subject to public interest regulation, with a maximum cap for private sector publishers.

Ofcom has agreed with the House of Lords Culture Committee – to whose inquiry last year the CPBF also gave evidence – that fixed ownership limits are too rigid for fast-evolving convergent media. Yet Ofcom has also rejected our response to that problem: under the MRC and CPBF proposals, market thresholds (such as 15 per cent share of a market) would trigger plurality reviews when firms reached them.

At that stage various plurality “safeguards” and public interest regulations would be enforced, for instance to strengthen editorial independence and community access to the media concerned. There would also be measures of governance, especially for locally monopolistic media, such as editorial boards, public trust and community ownership arrangements to offset the risks to plurality.

These matters should be debated and decided with democratic involvement across the nations and for every local area.

But Ofcom’s discretionary approach will reassure corporations that platitudes about valuing plurality are more likely than tough action and that the public anger that flowed in 2010 is being channelled into the rivulets of these remote (albeit publicly available) policy documents.

They, and we, should not forget that meaningful action on media plurality is the policy supported by the majority of the public. We now need our supporters in Parliament to challenge the glacial pace of inaction and champion reform.

■ The Ofcom report is at <http://bit.ly/ofcom-plurality>

A LOCAL NEWS **DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT**

Five companies account for over 80% of local newspaper titles – more than four times the combined number of titles published by the remaining 56 publishers – and 85% of revenue

 **Trinity Mirror Regionals – 248 titles**

 **Johnston Press – 246 titles**

 **Gannett UK – 212 titles**

 **Tindle Newspapers – 126 titles**

 **Archant – 74 titles**

 **KM Group – 36 titles**

LOCAL MEDIA

Bigger and fewer chains

BIG MEDIA are tightening their grip on the local press as the number of national chains dominating the sector falls from four to three.

Trinity Mirror has bought up the Local World group for £154 million, making it the biggest operator in the field by far. It will dominate the market like none has before, with a combined weekly circulation of 9 million copies of 36 daily newspapers, eight franchises to produce Metro freesheets, 88 weekly paid-for newspapers, five Sunday newspapers and 43 weekly free newspapers. The next two largest regional press publishers, Newsquest and Johnston Press, each have weekly circulations of around 5 million.

The buyout – TM already held 20 per cent of Local World – was based on a potential to make further cuts in editorial spending.

The company said it will deploy its “know-how on cutting costs” at its existing regional newspapers to lose £12 million from Local World’s budgets – of which £3.2 million would be from “content generation”; that is, journalism. Yet more sackings and fewer staff.

Local World was itself created only three years ago as a buyout of two existing groups: Northcliffe Newspapers, owned by the Daily Mail group, and Iliffe News and Media. It was then valued at £100 million, while the new deal made it worth £220 million. Last year it generated an operating profit of £39 million on a turnover of £221 million. This is the local paper industry that is supposed to be loss-making and moribund.

The sale means another fat payoff for “vulture publisher” David Montgomery, the veteran media asset-stripper who founded Local World, whose services are no longer required and walks off with an estimated £5 million.

This is the second time he has sold a business to Trinity on condition that he departed. In 1992 he had been put in by the banks to clean up the wreckage of Mirror Group Newspapers after the Robert Maxwell catastrophe. His task was to hack away at the costs to prepare for a cheap sale.

Montgomery sacked so many staff and made himself so hated that they called him “Rommel” – because “Monty was on our side”. In 1999



Monopolies in the south-west and the north and east Midlands now extend to Wales

he achieved his aim and sold the group to a Merseyside-based local paper group called Trinity International; hence Trinity Mirror. But Trinity did not want Montgomery himself and he went off to wreak havoc elsewhere.

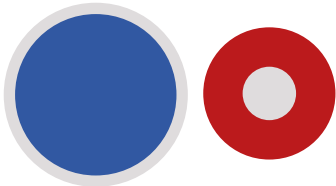
The Local World portfolio includes daily titles in Bristol, Cambridge, Derby, Gloucester, Hull, Leicester, Nottingham, Swansea, Stoke and Plymouth. Its existing regional monopolies in the south-west of England and the north and east Midlands now extend to cover Wales, where the only other daily papers, the Western Mail in Cardiff and the Daily Post in North Wales, are owned by ... Trinity Mirror.

No intervention by any regulatory body has attended this takeover. The Office of Fair Trading is supposed to police local media concentration and the Competition Commission to rule on mergers, but neither has shown any interest.

■ Trinity Mirror’s empire could spread even further. For the last eight months there has been much speculation that it is about to buy national paper rivals Express Newspapers, owned by the pornographer Richard Desmond.

TM is an exemplar of contemporary Big Media, run not by a press baron but by accountants whose sole concerns are operating profit and the share price. Not one of its directors has ever worked on a newspaper.

No wonder Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox wants to take full control of Sky



REVENUE	2015	2020
sky	£7.6BN	£9.7BN
BBC	£5.1BN	£4.1BN

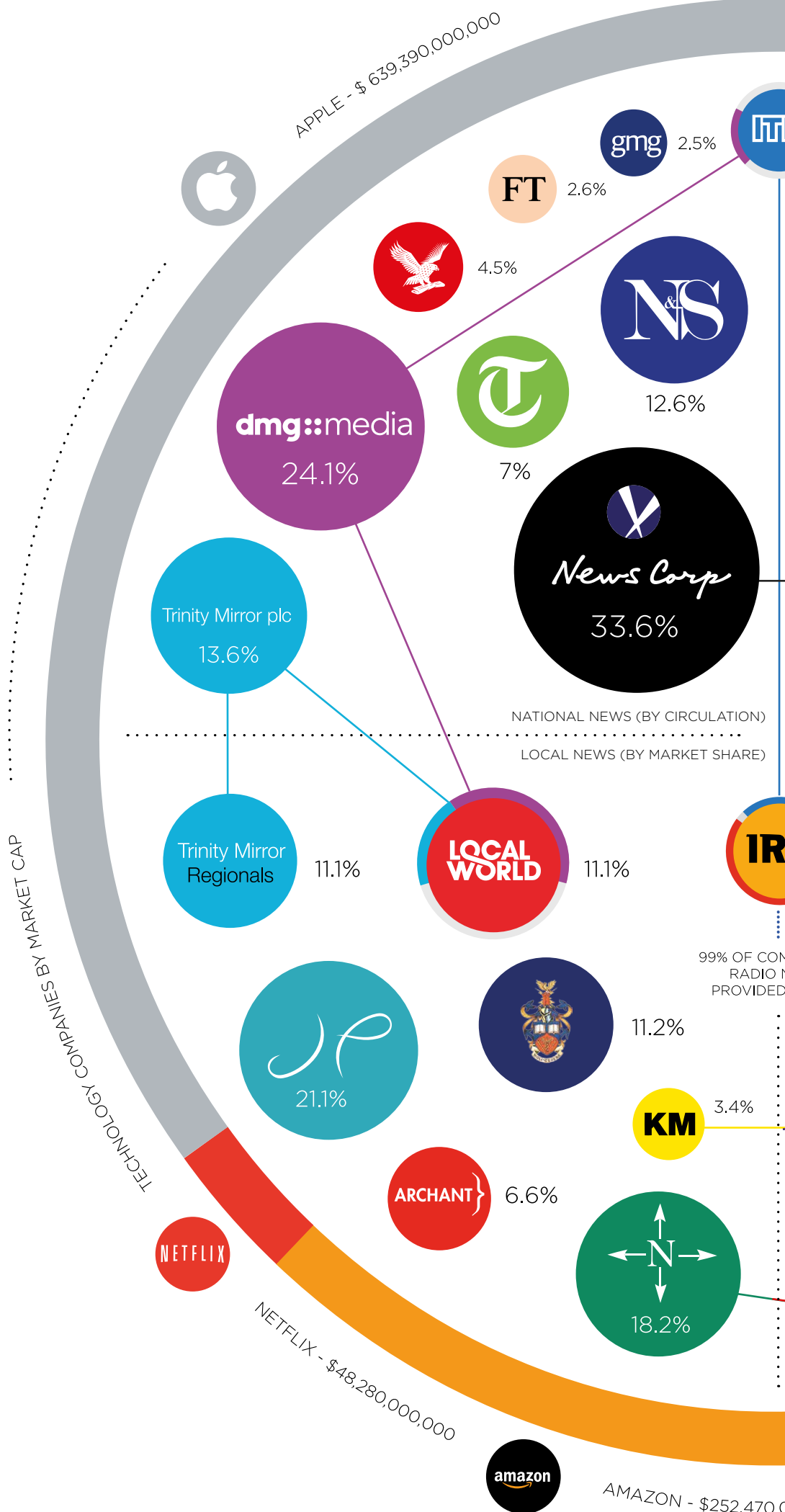
The main public service TV channels account for nearly three quarters of all viewing yet Sky is by far the biggest broadcaster. Its share of revenue is set to increase if the government gets away with proposed cuts to the BBC.



RADIO FREE BRITAIN

Two conglomerates, Bauer (German-owned) and Global Radio, have nearly 40 per cent of all commercial local analogue radio licences, while only 14 per cent of stations are independently owned.

The same two companies control more than 60 per cent of commercial digital stations.



TELEVISION

The last but one falls to ITV

PATRICIA HOLLAND looks at the lingering death of the ITV dream

THE 20-YEAR process of submerging the network of regional ITV companies into a single vapid money machine moved almost to its conclusion when the conglomerate gobbled up Ulster Television in October.

Buried with UTV's independence is the expansive concept on ITV's foundation as a collective of diverse independent broadcasters with a mission to mingle Britain's cultures as well as to serve them.

ITV paid £100 million for UTV, which also owns a chain of commercial radio stations including TalkSport and a channel in the Irish Republic – which it is holding on to. The deal leaves only STV in Scotland standing on its own. STV has managed to retain its Scottish character.

All the others covering the regions of Britain have disappeared even from the branding.

ITV chief executive Adam Crozier said in empty business-speak: "UTV Television's strategic objectives are closely aligned with our own and we are very pleased that they are joining the ITV family." [They have been in the family for 60 years, fool! Editor] "We are looking forward to working with the team going forward."

When commercial television arrived in the UK in 1955, a network of 15 companies was rolled out across the UK, each one based in a region or nation with a remit to create programmes for that area as well as contributing to the ITV network. The companies were very different from each other and made the most of their local affiliations.

Regional accents began to compete with the staid received pronunciation of the BBC.

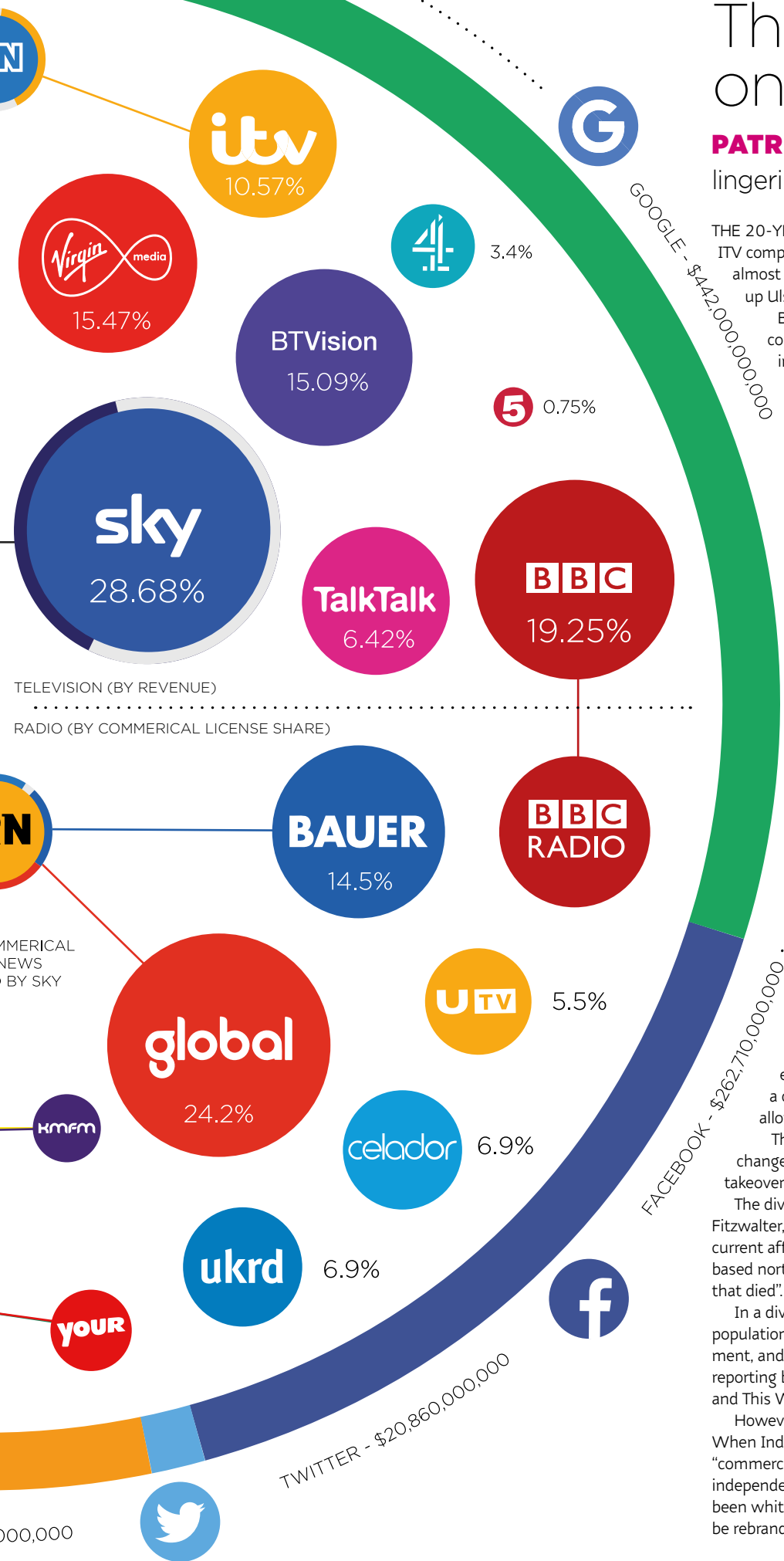
The companies were expected to compete with each other for time on the network. Strict regulation by the Independent Television Authority ensured that commercial values did not override a commitment to diversity, and no proprietor was allowed to own more than one company.

That ban was lifted by the 1996 Broadcasting Act, a change which unleashed an unruly scramble for mergers, takeovers and profit maximisation.

The diversity of programming inevitably suffered. Ray Fitzwalter, one-time editor of World in Action, the celebrated current affairs series broadcaster by Granada, the Manchester-based north west England station, called ITV "a dream that died".

In a divided region UTV had not represented the whole population. It was very close to the Protestant establishment, and during the Troubles in the 1970s had tried to limit reporting by investigatory programmes like World in Action and This Week.

However by the 2000s, commercial instincts had prevailed. When Independent Television (ITV) was set up as the first "commercial" broadcaster, regulation ensured that it was more independent than commercial. Gradually that regulation has been whittled away. Today commerce rules. Perhaps it should be rebranded as CTV.



Capital news starvation in the midst of plenty

LONDON MUST be one of the most media-saturated cities of the world, with its mighty Fleet Street press, its smart magazine stables, the base of the world's great news agencies and virtually the entire national TV industry. Yet Londoners are worse served for local news than anyone else in Britain, according to research by the journalists' online magazine Press Gazette.

Data detailing all current active local newspapers in the UK reveals that London has 11 newspapers per million of the population. Northern Ireland, the highest, has 33 per million. Scotland has 27 and Wales has 20. The other

lowest are the north east also with 11 and Yorkshire and Humberside with 12.

London's weekly papers have pitiful circulation figures. Despite all the money they can earn from property advertising, they find it hard to sell to the metropolitan middle class who lack much sense of local community identity.

There is only the one daily paper, the Evening Standard, an upmarket not to say snobby right-wing rag and mouthpiece for Tory mayor Boris Johnson. It is owned by the Russian oligarch who also has the licence for the sole local TV station in the capital, London Live.



Standard's toffs at the top

ANGELA PHILLIPS profiles the paper that will have a crucial and likely malign influence on next May's London mayoral election

THE EVENING STANDARD is a huge business success for its owner Evgeny Lebedev. Its profits are rising and its daily circulation of 870,835 is equivalent to the entire UK sales of the Daily Mirror. Its readership is more than twice as high because it is distributed free and left on trains where copies are often picked up and read by several people.

That means that in the concentrated market of London, it has the equivalent circulation of the Daily Mail or the Sun but, unlike them, it occupies a monopoly. It is the only London-wide newspaper with little challenge from local borough focussed newspapers.

The Standard's monopoly status should be intolerable even if it went out of its way to be politically neutral. But it doesn't.

It has urged people to vote Conservative in every mayoral election and, with the exception of a handful of comment writers, its coverage is heavily biased towards the Tories. In the far off days when the paper was part of the Associated Newspapers stable, joined at the hip to the Daily Mail, its editor, Veronica Wadley, was merciless in attacking Labour Mayor, Ken Livingstone.

In the week of the London Mayoral elections in 2008, Jeremy Corbyn wrote in his blog: "Monday's Evening Standard carried a pro-Boris Johnson headline and front page, while many of the inside pages were filled with so-called 'investigations' by Andrew Gilligan which amounted to the usual litany and abuse of Ken Livingstone. The paper even managed to run an

architectural attack on Livingstone and concluded with an editorial urging people not to trust the current mayor."

It was supposed to be different when Lebedev's father Alexander bought up the ailing paper for him in 2009. Young Evgeny turned it into a free sheet, but it quickly became clear that the Standard was not going to give up its support for Tory toff Boris Johnson. He appointed as editors first Geordie Greig and then Sarah Sands, a family friend of the Johnsons.

As the 2012 Mayoral election arrived, blogger Adam Bienkov listed a series of negative Boris stories that appeared elsewhere but that the Standard failed to cover.

At the same time former Standard journalist Paul Waugh pointed out that the paper was attacking every policy suggestion of Livingstone's

as "unaffordable".

Now as the next Mayoral contest gets underway, the backing of new young Tory toff Zac Goldsmith has already started. This seems consistent with the fact that the Independent newspaper (also owned by Lebedev) came out for the Conservative/Lib Dem coalition in the 2015 elections, not only overturning the promise on which the paper was launched (to be Independent in coverage as well as in name) but flying in the face of many of its staff and its usual editorial line ... and making little sense, since the coalition was not running for office!

In an article in the Standard on October 9 headlined: "Zac Goldsmith and [Labour's] Sadiq Khan neck and neck in race to be Mayor", it is only golden-haired Zac who merits a (huge) photograph. The copy suggests that "Mr Khan will ruthlessly try to exploit the fact that Mr Goldsmith is seen as in touch with far few ordinary Londoners." The demonising is already under way.

Of course the Standard is not the only local paper to enjoy a monopoly in its area; 43 per cent of local government areas in England, Scotland and Wales have only one daily newspaper, according to the Media Reform Coalition.

But at least in the rest of the country the circulation of local papers is so low that it is unlikely to make very much of a dent in voting behaviour. In the capital, where commuters are a captive market, this drum-beat of biased reporting must have an impact.

Is it time to call for the same impartiality regulation that operates in broadcast media to be brought to bear on those local newspaper markets where a single company has a clear monopoly?

■ Angela Phillips is professor of media at Goldsmiths, University of London.



Angela Phillips: London commuters are a captive market and this drum-beat of biased reporting must have an impact



First victory for freedom fighters

CAMPAIGNERS AGAINST the government's latest attempt to reduce the effectiveness of the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) have won a minor victory over the commission set up for the purpose. The commission has backed down on a plan to keep the identity of its witnesses secret.

It was a blatant contradiction of the principle of transparency when the commission, chaired by former Treasury chief Lord Burns, announced at the outset that it would "anonymise" the evidence it received: in other words it would not reveal the identities of officials or others who told them why the law needed to be changed.

FoI Campaigner Maurice Frankel wrote to Lord Burns saying: "If the Commission cannot recognise the need for openness in its own report there is little chance of it appreciating the value of the FoI Act in promoting greater openness elsewhere."

The approach called into question whether the commission was capable of properly addressing the balancing exercise required.

Lord Burns replied that the commission had changed its mind, adding: "The commission intends to publish the evidence it receives, except where the contributor asks for anonymity

'THE MEDIA MUST BE STOPPED'

A CABINET minister has blurted out some of the private thinking of government over changes to Freedom of Information laws. Chris Grayling, leader of the House of Commons, said: "It is, on occasion, misused by those who use it as, effectively, a research tool to generate stories for the media, and that is not acceptable."

The use of the law by journalists has been one of its great successes.

Reporters have unearthed thousands of stories of real public importance.

The Daily Mail published a huge expose of public sector fat cat bosses in November that it said was the outcome of more than 6,000 FoI requests.

Media organisations are supporting the campaign to save the Act, and a petition launched by the journalists' news website Press Gazette attracted 20,000 signatures in its first four weeks.

and it is appropriate in the circumstances to grant it."

Fears that the exercise is geared to weaken the FoIA by adding new restrictions on the release of information, strengthening the ministerial veto and adding new fees for applicants, have been raised by the terms of the commission's inquiry.

These are set out in six questions to be answered. The first three ask whether there is sufficient protection for internal deliberations at

public bodies.

Question four asks whether the government should have a veto over the release of information. Question five asks what is the appropriate enforcement and appeal system for FoI requests, and question six asks whether controls are needed to reduce the FoI burden on public authorities.

The consultation document does not ask whether the Act should be strengthened or broadened.

Man with a transparent mission



JAKE ECCLESTONE profiles the leader of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, now

facing his biggest battle so far

MAURICE FRANKEL has done as much to improve the quality of all our lives – and certainly the quality of our political system – as almost anyone alive. We owe freedom of information in Britain to this quiet, gently determined man who has slogged away on the issue for more than 30 years.

He is now facing his greatest test. Prime Minister David Cameron announced in July that the Freedom of Information Act was to be "reviewed" (yet again) and that he had chosen such giants of integrity as Jack Straw, Michael Howard and Lord Carlile to carry out this task.



Maurice Frankel: determined

The government's purpose is to weaken the provisions of the Act and make it more expensive for people to use.

In 1983 Maurice and Des Wilson – the founder of Shelter and former director of Friends of the Earth – realised that the fundamental problem facing all campaigners in Britain was the culture of secrecy. Did you want to see your medical records? You couldn't. Did you want to know about standards of hygiene in the meat processing industry? Not allowed. Did you want to know what railway lines the government

was proposing to axe? Official secret. On issue after issue, the shutters came down as soon as anyone asked questions.

The Campaign for Freedom of Information (www.cfoi.org.uk) was set up in 1984 with the support of such bodies such as the Patients Association, the Town and Country Planning Association and the National Union of Journalists.

It was a long, gruelling struggle to persuade politicians and the senior civil service that a Freedom of Information Act was both politically right and would benefit society at large by improving decision making and exposing waste and corruption.

When Des Wilson left, Maurice Frankel took over as director of the campaign. He ran it on the proverbial shoestring with volunteer researchers working long hours in cramped and dingy offices. More than anything else, it was his insistence on accuracy, balance and calm reasoning which, bit by bit, wore down governments and those at the heart of the civil service establishment.

One of his great skills has been the ability to persuade Tory MPs that freedom of information would empower ordinary people to call all levels of the state to account.

The Act came into effect 10 years ago. No-one seriously believes that this review has any other purpose than to return the comfort blanket of secrecy to Westminster and Whitehall. But the hand-picked bunch of has-beens who compose the panel have taken on the one of the most effective and durable campaigners in Britain.



Mutual antagonism: climate protestor brandishes copy of the Occupied Daily Mail produced for the vigil

ENVIRONMENT

You are wrong, Daily Mail



LINDA BOWYER

Direct action by environment protesters shook the Daily Mail group in October. **DONNACHADH McCARTHY** of Occupy the Media Billionaires gives his account

FOR 48 hours in late October we staged a Climate Crisis Vigil outside the headquarters of the Mail in Kensington, west London.

We were there to expose the biggest impediment to urgent action on the climate crisis in the UK. It is not the government, oil corporations or even the motoring lobby. It is the catastrophic fact that the UK media corporations, owned by the five extremist right-wing billionaires, all oppose action on the climate crisis.

■ Rupert Murdoch, whose Sun newspaper ran a false "grass-roots" pro-fracking campaign, has said "We should approach climate change with great scepticism. Climate change has been going on as long as the planet is here. There will always be a little bit of it. We can't stop it. We've just got to stop building vast houses on seashores."

■ The tax-haven based Barclay brothers' Telegraph hosts arch sceptics James Delingpole and Christopher Booker. Non-scientist Delingpole describes climate advocacy as possibly greatest threat Western civilisation has ever known. His campaign against wind-farms laid the groundwork for Tory abolition of support for on-shore wind.

■ The Express's owner Richard Desmond is one of UKIP's largest donors. UKIP does not accept climate science and advocates abolition of the Climate Change Act, promotion of coal and fracking, abolition of CO₂ regulations on coal plants and ending all subsidies to renewables.

■ Lord Rothermere's Daily Mail headlines screamed "Forget global warming – if NASA

scientists are right the Thames will be freezing over again". The Daily Mail has energetically pressed George Osborne to end green taxes and energy efficiency regulations.

When oil lobbyist Lord Lawson wanted to destroy government climate actions, he lobbied the Daily Mail's editor Paul Dacre. This directly led to Cameron and Osborne giving the go-ahead to destroy all the "green crap" that the Tories had



Donnachadh McCarthy with placard memorialising victims of climate change

LINDA BOWYER

adopted prior to the 2010 election.

David Cameron has made a huge U-turn on eco policies by ordering aides to "get rid of all the green crap". The Sun quoted an unnamed government source as saying: "The prime minister is going round Number 10 saying: 'We have got to get rid of all this green crap'. He is totally focused on it."

In the last couple of months, hard-won environmental measures trashed by the new Tory government have included:

- abolition of the subsidy for on-shore wind

and vetoing multi-billion off-shore wind projects.

- Imposed climate-change taxation on renewable energy
- Increased taxes on low emission cars and reduced them on polluting cars.
- less solar energy support for households and community groups.
- massive tax breaks to fracking industry and off-shore oil and abolished planning regulations to drill under our homes.
- A new Oil and Gas Authority to maximise UK fossil fuel production.
- Reduction in the tiny budget for UK cycling but huge new fund for roads.

Vigil organisers invited the Daily Mail to defend their climate destructive editorial policy at an event with Natalie Bennett, leader of the Green Party. To our surprise the managing editor of the Mail, Charles Garside, invited Occupy and Natalie Bennett to meet with him, which we did.

For nearly an hour, we bluntly but politely made the case that the Mail should be helping to protect Britain and the wider world's future from climate catastrophe not abetting it. Garside stated that they needed to represent all viewpoints. We replied that climate scepticism needed to be based on peer-reviewed science not on the misleading faux science of their headlines.

We asked what did the Daily Mail believe should be done to protect Britain from the climate crisis, as they had trashed everything ecologists had proposed: regulation, carbon taxes and energy bill levies. Garside's reply was a profound and uncomfortable silence.

We presented him with the Vigil's six demands:

- Make saving Britain and our global ecosystems from climate catastrophe, a top editorial issue for the Daily Mail.
- Help Britain save billions every year in wasted energy costs and the lives of thousands of UK

elderly from winter cold deaths, by supporting an Energy Efficiency Bill.

- Support Britain becoming independent in energy and create over a million great British jobs by supporting a Renewable Energy Britain.
- Save tens of thousands of UK lives from terrible transport pollution deaths every year by supporting move to electric vehicles.
- Help make our streets safe for our kids again and tackle Britain's disastrous diabetic and obesity epidemics by supporting a protected National Cycling Network.
- Call for criminalisation of further fossil fuel exploration including fracking, using the billions of proposed lethal investments, to create up to a million new UK green jobs instead.

We were amazed at the number of Daily Mail staff who told the Occupy protesters that we were absolutely right about how awful the Mail's line on the crisis and that the Occupied Daily Mail "was brilliant". One member said staff had posted

it up on their office wall.

Climate marches, politics and direct-actions pale in significance when faced with the climatically-suicidal agenda promoted by the media billionaires.

Imagine, even without the much needed media reform, if these five men decided to support climate crisis action?! The oil, coal, fracking and car corporations' resistance would be swept away. The politics would change overnight and instead of fossil fuel lobbyists ruling over us, science and humanity would win out.

Without their media corporations, it will be almost impossible to achieve the dramatic wholesale change we need, in time. So that means we must try and we must succeed.

■ *Donnachadh McCarthy is author of The Prostitute State – How Britain's Democracy has Been Bought and is the co-founder of Stop Killing Cyclists. Free Press approached Charles Garside for his take on their meeting but he was not available.*

Another great institution falls to the Murdochs

THERE ARE fears for the future of National Geographic, that stalwart practitioner of top quality photojournalism with an environmental base, since its effective takeover by Rupert Murdoch's media group.

The glossy magazine, with its distinctive yellow-bordered covers, has been published by the National Geographic Society of the USA since 1888, as a non-profit making venture. But in November it fell under the control of the very much profit-making 21st Century Fox under a \$725 million dollar deal that will fund its work but threaten its scientific independence.

The new entity is called National Geographic Partners. The society retains a 27 per cent stake.

On the day it came into effect the National Geographic Society sacked 180 of its 2,000 employees in a cost-cutting move. The "involuntary separations" also affect people who work for the National Geographic cable TV Channel, the most profitable part of the organisation and the greatest attraction to Murdoch.

In addition, voluntary redundancy offers have been made to an undetermined number of employees.

The society said the decision to undertake the layoffs was not part of the deal with Murdoch. Chief executive Greg Knell said: "I am confident National Geographic's mission will be fulfilled in powerful, new and impactful ways, as we continue to change the world through science, exploration, education and storytelling."

Rupert Murdoch is a climate change denier – though son James, chief executive of 21st Century Fox, is not. But the family's media empire is a leading source of misinformation on global warming, with fantastic anti-ecological stories in its newspapers and on Fox News, and this is raising doubts about National Geographic's scientific work.

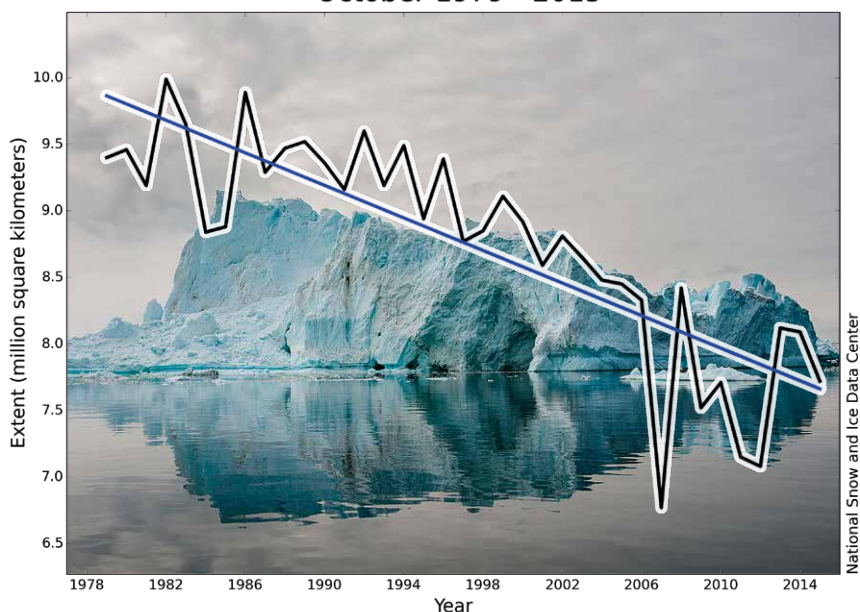
The agreement says: "The value generated by this transaction, including the consistent and attractive revenue stream that National Geographic Partners will deliver, ensures that we will have greater resources for this work, which includes our grant making programs that support scientists and explorers around the world."

So the Murdochs are now in control of a \$1 billion organisation whose stated mission includes giving grants to scientists. Can there be certainty that their position and work on climate science will not influence grant-awarding decisions?



THE MAIL: WHERE WARMER IS COLDER

Average Monthly Arctic Sea Ice Extent
October 1979 - 2015



THE DAILY Mail is one of the most inaccurate papers for covering the environment, even though it was the first to appoint an Environment Correspondent – in 1971. The Mail systematically misleads to back up its compulsive climate change denial.

Last summer it ran a headline VANISHING ARCTIC ICE CAPS? NO, THEY'VE GROWN BY 40 PERCENT above a story that the Arctic ice caps grew by 41 per cent in 2013.

The paper said this cast doubt on the whole issue of climate change, asking whether "prophesies of global doom are based on genuine science, or guesswork".

The truth was that though the ice caps grew in 2013, they were down again by 6 per cent in 2014.

To put this into context, the amount of

Arctic ice has shrunk by 40 per cent since the late 1970s. It shrunk by 14 per cent in the two years 2010–11 and in 2012 it was the lowest ever recorded.

But climate change does not go in straight lines and a reversal of such an anomaly was to be expected.

Rachel Tilling of University College London who produced the findings said: "2013 was a cold year – that happens." It was the coolest year since 2004. And the Mail failed to mention that the 2013 sea ice extent was still the sixth lowest of all time.

Meanwhile, 2015 is set to be the hottest year on record. The National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSIDC) recorded that June 2015 had the third lowest Arctic ice volume the ever recorded and predicted "rapid ice loss" to come.

'My oppressor is my friend'

THE RIGHT WING press insist that the Leveson-sourced mechanism for regulating them is state control of the press, through which government and politicians will dictate what the papers can print.

This is patently silly, because they can't, but if the press want to know what a brutal and fully armed state regulator is really like, they only have to look at Ofcom.

You can't get more statutory than the Office of Communications, which regulates broadcasting and telecoms. Set up and paid for by the state, its members appointed by the state, wielding regulations with the force of law. Unlike the succession of poodles groomed by the national press, it has the power to compel – compell! – the publication of corrections and apologies. Can you imagine them letting IPSO do that?

In November Channel 4's head of news and current affairs, Dorothy Byrne, gave a talk in London called "working with the regulator". How could she cope with having Ofcom with its 133

pages of regulations breathing down her neck all day?

"We are bound by a detailed series of rules to be impartial, fair and accurate," she explained. Fair, impartial? What was the woman on about? "We have to give a right of reply to everyone and give a fair summary of what they say." Good grief! "We can be fined or even taken off air for breaches of the rules. But we don't break them. In effect the regulator is an integral part of our operation."

So dependent is Channel 4 on Ofcom, she said, that they make their website conform to the rules even though not required to by law.

The strictness of the regime is the reason, she said, why TV current affairs is so trustworthy – trusted by audiences far more than newspapers in every poll.

Dorothy Byrne did not say so, but their journalism is clearly more rigorous than anything in the national press.

To be sensible, no-one has ever suggested that the press be regulated, let alone controlled,

by the state. But ... what about the BBC?

The regulation of the BBC is the hottest of potatoes. It has always been done in-house, originally by its governors, or at arm's length, by the current trust. The Tories are targeting the trust in their current offensive against the corporation.

From time to time people have suggested that, perhaps, Ofcom, might be the body to do it? They are always shouted down by BBC supporters (including the CPBF). When it was leaked in the summer that the government was considering the idea, it had to be hotly denied.

In fact the BBC is already subject to it on some matters of content, and it would be a perfect solution to the governance problem. BBC broadcasters would be well handled, the trust or however it is rebranded can get on with directing things without being accused of constant conflicts of interest.

Its supporters don't have to blindly reject every mooted change to the BBC. This one they should embrace.

AWKWARD SQUAD



TIM GOPSILL

Don't be too choosy: any owner is better than none

DOZENS OF towns around the country have been abandoned by the Big Media chains, which have either closed the local papers or merged them into others, produced in offices far away. So, given a choice, which would best serve the people of area concerned?

- A newspaper/website owned by an entrepreneur who loves the clout that comes with it, who employs journalists that work to conventional news standards;
- A struggling underfunded blog run by a co-op of young journalists and activists who work for little or nothing and cover radical and community activity; or
- No local news medium at all.

Most media reformers would doubtless respond: number 2. And there is no reason why every community shouldn't have one. But what's so wrong with number 1?

It might go against the propaganda of the regional news groups, but new papers do still start

up, and a few papers are actually doing quite well. For ten years the owners have been saying that the whole industry is being strangled by the combination of free competition from the internet and the desertion of the advertisers.

In fact, advertising is going quite nicely at present, and so are the media corporations, whose profits are on the climb again.

Johnston Press, one of the big three surviving groups, has bought up a free weekly paper in Brighton that has a circulation of 13,000. The Brighton and Hove Independent was launched only five years ago, by an entrepreneur called Greg Hadfield who had made a pile through a football website called Soccernet.

He says: "I sincerely believe it is possible for there to be a quality independent newspaper in print in every town and city in the UK."

A year ago Tindle Newspapers, a strange company that publishes hundreds of little local weeklies,

launched four new ones in London, covering the boroughs of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea. The big groups had closed all their titles in the area, despite it being the richest in Britain, if not the world.

Just up the road, the independent Camden New Journal, run by eccentric lefty entrepreneur Eric Gordon, goes from strength to strength, circulating 40,000 papers a week.

These enterprises look fine to me. Any paper is better than none, and one with money to pay the staff better than one without. Journalists have worked for crooks, bullies and gangsters for centuries; they shouldn't need to worry about who pays the bills, let alone, as part of a co-operative, fret about paying them themselves.

Let's have more entrepreneurs to get new media going. As long as they keep their fingers out of editorial.

Call them big media

CAN WE stop talking about the "mainstream media"? It's been a catchphrase in radical media activity for decades, sometimes shortened to MSM, but it doesn't stand up to scrutiny for long.

As online activist Aral Balkan asked at the Media Democracy Festival in October: What is "mainstream" about demonising the poor or glorifying war?

Jeremy Corbyn has shown that the mainstream can embrace egalitarianism and social justice, phenomena loathed and derided by the Corporate Media. Let's call them that, or better still, Big Media, in the manner of the Big Oil or Big Pharma conglomerates.