



UK GENERAL ELECTION 2015

# A Manifesto *for* Media Reform

**Our media are too important to be left to the bottom line of big business or the whims of government. We cannot rely on unaccountable private corporations or partisan administrations if we want media that serve the many and not just vested interests.**

NOT MUCH PLURALITY HERE...

NO MEDIA CONTROLS    OFCOM = STASI    FREE PRESS = NO CONTROL    NO TO STATE CONTROL    MEDIA SAYS NO TO STATE

# Communications should be organised and regulated in the public interest

WHEN THE phone hacking scandal surfaced in 2011 it didn't only expose the sickening corruption involving the government and Britain's biggest media company, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. It also stopped in its tracks the bid from News Corp to get even bigger by buying up Sky TV, which is Europe's biggest pay-TV broadcaster – which was on the point of being waved through by Tory culture minister Jeremy Hunt.

This year the resignation of *Daily Telegraph* political commentator Peter Osborne showed how close Big Media are to the corporate bottom line. All too often they end up protecting powerful interests while failing to represent the lives and experience of women, workers, young people, minorities and migrants. We want media to be more accountable and more responsive to the public they serve.

UK voters want their political parties to promote truly independent media.

We want effective ways to challenge inaccuracies in

reporting. We want to ensure communities have access to a diverse range of communication services geared to serving their needs. We want an end to the corruption that surrounds the largest media corporations – but how do we achieve this?



Communications should be organised and regulated in the public interest. This means public involvement and oversight in the decisions made. Overwhelmingly, decisions are made between ministers, senior regulators and powerful commercial interests.

There are five main proposals:

- 1 Controls on media ownership**
- 2 Independent, trusted and effective regulation of the press**
- 3 Well-funded, independent public service media**
- 4 Protection for communication rights**
- 5 Action on lobbying and transparency**

## THIS MUCH AND NO MORE

### Time for controls on media ownership

WE NEED regulations to limit how much companies can own, and to require those with significant market shares to meet agreed editorial standards.

Firms with significant market share should help ensure media plurality themselves by adhering to agreed standards, protecting journalistic independence and editorial output. In order to secure plurality, we are proposing ownership caps across the total media market, as well as in separate markets for national and regional news, so that no single voice can control more than 20 or 30 per cent of a designated media market.

Any publisher with a 15 per cent share in a designated market should be subject to a Public Interest test in respect of any merger or takeover. Ownership concentration above the 15 per cent threshold may be permitted if publishers meet certain obligations, such as investment in newsgathering or

original programming, upholding codes of practice, and protecting editorial independence.

This applies to local press as much as the nationals. Over the last 15 years there has been an accelerating concentration of papers into four big groups, with many titles merged or closed. A threatened local paper should be considered a “community asset”, so that if it faces closure, a moratorium must be imposed to allow others, such as employee cooperatives or third sector groups, to take it over as a going concern. Charity law should be amended to allow newspapers to become charitable enterprises.

We call on Parliament to

- **Limit the power of ministers to override curbs on media concentration**
- **Impose public service duties on large media groups**
- **Strengthen the public interest test for media mergers**
- **Give the regulator Ofcom stronger powers to tackle media concentration and launch periodic reviews of media plurality. Ofcom itself must be made more accountable to the public.**

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## MARKING THEIR HOMEWORK

# Independent, trusted and effective regulation of the press

WE CALL for the implementation of the arrangements for press self-regulation put forward by the Leveson Inquiry in 2012. In addition we need the system to offer an effective right of reply to inaccuracies, operated by a regulator that represents, among others, working journalists and the public.

The regulator should require publishers to operate a “conscience clause” that enables journalists to refuse to work unethically. All media workers must have the right to union recognition.

With increasing pressures on media to accommodate the commercial demands of owners and advertisers, stronger safeguards are needed to protect editorial independence.



## HANDS OFF THE BBC!

# For well-funded, independent public service media

THE renewal of the BBC Charter and the licence fee settlement due next year must maintain a strong, independent BBC that can perform the central role of public service media across platforms, local neighbourhoods, and communities of interest.

The licence fee remains the best way to finance BBC services by users, but this should be collected as a progressive tax on households, with tiered rates for working households and free services for those in receipt of benefits.

The fee should fund BBC public services alone and cease to be “top-sliced” to finance digital infrastructure or other services that benefit commercial providers who currently have no public service obligations.

We should restore the revenue lost to the BBC caused by the cuts in licence fee imposed under the deal with the coalition government five years ago. Creeping privatization must also be reversed so that the BBC can be a central resource for developing and promoting digital public media for the 21st century.

The BBC has responded to financial and political pressures by becoming too pro-establishment. We want to strengthen BBC independence to ensure that it is strong enough to stand up both to government and commercial pressures, something it has notably failed to do in recent times.

We accept that there is a crisis of trust with the performance and governance of the BBC and a need for a more accountable, democratically elected body to oversee its work. This body should reflect and promote greater cultural diversity, social experiences and opinion across communities. We propose that one third of the members should be elected by licence fee payers, one third should be elected by BBC staff, and one third appointed by an independent panel.

Despite pressure from phone and data companies, a

significant portion of the audiovisual spectrum (which carries the broadcast signal) should be retained in public ownership in order to ensure that free-to-air broadcasting continues to be accessible to all.

Stricter obligations should be imposed on the commercial public service broadcasters relating to levels of investment in original programming and the nature and range of programming at peak times. All providers of broadcasting content should meet public service obligations once they reach a certain threshold of market share in return for access to spectrum.

New sources of finance are required for other public service media. This could include levies on recording equipment, pay TV revenues, advertising income and mobile phone operators. Industry levies should be imposed

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on companies like Google and Microsoft, and satellite and cable providers not covered by PSB provisions, to fund public service content across all platforms. And all the big media corporations, including internet giants like Amazon and Google, must be made to pay proper levels of tax.

The nations of the UK through their elected assemblies should be granted greater powers over the regulation of the media. Ofcom and other regulatory bodies should be subject to democratic membership and be charged with upholding and promoting public service media.

## STOP THE SNOOPING

# Protection for everybody's communication rights

BOTH JOURNALISTS and the public are at risk from state surveillance. There is also a growing threat from private companies whose business models are based on economic surveillance, gathering information on users as a commodity for marketing purposes.

Powerful corporations like Google invest heavily in lobbying to secure regulatory favours while states induce them to give up more data on users.

Neither the state nor private interests can be trusted to safeguard peoples' communication rights. These rights include access information and services, privacy and freedom of expression. Free communications also depend on protection for journalists and other communication workers to foster a diversity of voices.

A major threat to free media lies in anti-terror and surveillance laws to harass and spy on journalists and put the confidentiality of their sources at risk. This threatens investigations into vital areas of public interest and the laws must be changed – notably the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act that allows police to bypass secretly the proper procedures.

It is vital to maintain an open internet, providing universal access for producers and consumers of online content. There are not the same threats to what is known as “net



neutrality” as in the USA because in Europe the market in broadband provision is better regulated. But the goals of public service and the universal service obligation must still be protected from market monopolisation and authoritarian political control.

## WHO'S INDUCING WHO?

# Urgent need for transparency on lobbying

THE POLITICAL agenda is being set more and more by lobbyists for powerful interests and corporations. It is a £2 billion industry but there are few rules governing its activities and no requirement for lobbyists to register or disclose their clients or activities. The Commons Public Administration Select Committee has concluded that “there is a genuine issue of concern that there is an inside track who wield privileged access and disproportionate influence”. There should be a statutory system to compel the disclosure of who is lobbying

whom and how much is being spent in the process, in Westminster and the devolved assemblies.

Clandestine lobbying should then be outlawed and a fund established to allow civil society groups to carry out research in the public interest. There should be restrictions on the ways that politicians, former civil servants and media executives move effortlessly and influentially between different parts of the industry, making a complete mockery of the regulatory process.

THIS Media Manifesto has been drawn up to promote an agenda for media reform in the run-up to the 2015 UK General Election.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF) and Media Reform Coalition have worked with media trade unions, media, cultural and civil society organisations, academics and individuals to contribute and comment on proposals that reflect the need for change.

We are encouraging everyone interested in media reform to join us in raising these issues with Parliamentary candidates and parties.

We want public discussion to generate a movement for media reform that sets out achievable and progressive reform.

With these changes – we believe we have set out the key demands to bring us closer to a democratic and diverse media for all.

**Published by the  
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