



## Media Reform Coalition

### Embedded? Politicians and the Press A dossier for change

November 29 2013 marks the first anniversary of the publication of Lord Justice Leveson's report into press standards. The Leveson Inquiry revealed a pervasive culture of mutual interest between the press and politicians. It exposed how politicians attempt to gain favour with press proprietors, just as newspaper owners expect access and influence to senior political players. Unchecked media concentration over several decades has allowed some media groups to accumulate vast amounts of revenue and influence. One consequence of this has been the development of intimate relationships between political and media elites which, according to Lord Justice Leveson, 'has not been in the public interest', and which presents adverse consequences for ethical journalism and democracy. Indeed, the Leveson Inquiry revealed a pervasive culture of mutual interest between the press and politicians which distorts democracy in two ways: first by restricting public debate to those agendas favoured by press elites; and second by failing to insulate government policy making from the private interests of media proprietors.

#### **'The game': Press-politician relations**

[O]ver the last 30-35 years and probably much longer, the political parties of UK national Government and of UK official Opposition, have had or developed too close a relationship with the press in a way which has not been in the public interest. In part, this has simply been a matter of spending a disproportionate amount of time, attention and resource on this relationship [...] In part, it has been a matter of going too far in trying to control the supply of news and information to the public in return for the hope of favourable treatment by sections of the press [...].<sup>1</sup>

Rupert Murdoch, CEO of News Corp, explained in his testimony to the Leveson Inquiry that, 'All politicians of all sides like to have their views known by the editors of newspapers or publishers, hoping that they will be put across, hoping that they will be – that they will succeed in impressing people. That's the game'.<sup>2</sup>

The eagerness for senior politicians to build and maintain relations with powerful proprietors and to spend 'a disproportionate amount of time, attention and resource on this relationship', as noted by Leveson<sup>3</sup>, is attested to by David Cameron's account of his motives for visiting the Greek island of Santorini to meet with Rupert Murdoch in 2008, when leader of the opposition Conservative party. Cameron writes that the purpose of the visit was 'to get to know Rupert Murdoch better'. Cameron testified to the Inquiry that 'Obviously I was trying to win over his newspapers and put across my opinions, so for me it was just an opportunity to try and build that relationship'. Reflecting on the significance of having a favourable relationship with media

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<sup>1</sup> Leveson, B., 2012. *An Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press: Executive Summary*. London: The Stationary Office. p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Transcript of Afternoon Hearing 25 April 2012*. p. 10. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Transcript-of-Afternoon-Hearing-25-April-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]

<sup>3</sup> Leveson. Executive Summary. p. 26.

proprietors, Cameron commented that 'It was quite a long way to go and all of that, but it seemed a good opportunity'.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence provided to the inquiry regarding the relationship between David Cameron, both in government and opposition, and the press, documented 1,404 meetings with 'media figures as leader of the opposition'. According to Robert Jay, counsel for the Leveson Inquiry, this, 'equates to around 26 meetings or interviews per month, which is more than one every weekday. It's fair to say, though, in government there have been fewer. It works out at about 13 a month, so it's 50 per cent of the time you lavished on this in opposition'.<sup>5</sup>

Murdoch's personal view, as outlined for the Inquiry, was that 'it is only natural for politicians to reach out to editors and sometimes proprietors, if they're available, to explain what they're doing and hoping that it makes an impression and it gets through', noting that, 'I was only one of several'.<sup>6</sup>

### Commercial interests

As Murdoch noted, the motivation for politicians to maintain relations with the press is the hope that their views will be 'put across', so that they might influence public opinion via a favourable press. The counterpart to politicians' influence over public opinion is the attempt by press proprietors to affect government policy. As Lord Justice Leveson outlined in his findings from the Inquiry, 'there have been those in positions of leadership of the press who have shown themselves to be exceptionally dedicated, powerful and effective political lobbyists in the cause of their own (predominantly commercial, but also wider) interests. That lobbying has been conducted in part overtly and editorially, and in part covertly and through the medium of personal relationships with politicians'.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence to the Inquiry revealed that Rupert Murdoch had sustained and substantial access to senior politicians. Between 1988 and 2012, according to lists released to the Inquiry by News Corporation, Murdoch had 113 meetings with senior UK politicians. The occasions included breakfast meetings, lunches, conferences, and the News Corporation summer party, attended often by the heads of the main political parties (as in 2011, when both David Cameron and Ed Miliband were amongst the attendees).<sup>8</sup>

After providing testimony to the Leveson inquiry, Evgeny Lebedev, proprietor of the London *Evening Standard* and the *Independent*, sent the following Tweet:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Transcript of Morning Hearing 14 June 2012*. p. 59. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Transcript-of-Morning-Hearing-14-June-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 25 October 2013.]

<sup>5</sup> Morning Hearing 14 June. p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Transcript of Morning Hearing 25 April 2012*. p. 51. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Transcript-of-Morning-Hearing-25-April-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]

<sup>7</sup> Leveson. Executive Summary. pp. 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> Burn-Murdoch, J. and Rogers, S., 2012. Murdoch meetings: the list of meets with prime ministers and leaders of the opposition. *The Guardian*, [online] 27 April. Available at: <<http://www.theguardian.com/media/datablog/2012/apr/27/murdoch-meetings-list>> [Accessed 15 October 2013.]

<sup>9</sup> Lebedev, E., (@mrevgenylebedev), 2012. 'Forgot to tell #Leveson that it's unreasonable to expect individuals to spend £millions on newspapers and not have access to politicians'. 23 April 2012, 3:36 PM. Tweet. Available at: <<https://twitter.com/mrevgenylebedev/status/194434601513521152>> [Accessed 6 October 2013.]



Evgeny Lebedev ✓  
@mrevgenylebedev



Forgot to tell #Leveson that it's unreasonable to expect individuals to spend £millions on newspapers and not have access to politicians

Lebedev subsequently confirmed to the inquiry that 'I do [...] think it reasonable that those who invest millions of pounds in publishing enjoy one potential benefit of that investment, which is the chance to meet politicians'.<sup>10</sup> Lebedev's statement asserts a perceived entitlement by press power to a certain level of political access and, hence, influence, revealing an assumption that to invest in press ownership is also to open up pathways of communication with political power.

Demonstrating a similar viewpoint, Benedict Brogan, Deputy Editor of the Telegraph Media Group commented that, 'Media companies rightfully seek to ensure that their voice is heard when political parties or the government propose changes to the regulatory environment in which we operate. In this the media is no different from other sectors in the economy. They are duty bound to do so, if only to protect their commercial interest'.<sup>11</sup>

These statements illustrate how the privately-owned press is often dominated by commercial, as opposed to public interest, concerns. Leveson concluded that 'while a free and healthy press is certainly in the public interest, that does not mean that everything which is in the (commercial or wider) interests of any individual press organisation, or even the industry as a whole, will itself necessarily be in the public interest'.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the pursuit of commercial interests can at times be directly at odds with the public interest.

### An 'implicit understanding': the Murdoch-Blair alliance

'Governments have become preoccupied with courting leaders of all parts of the press' writes Professor James Curran in his witness statement to the Leveson Inquiry.<sup>13</sup> The long-standing practice of press-politician courtship was underscored by the testimony of former Conservative party chairman Lord Patten, who told the Inquiry that 'major political parties, and particularly their leaders over the last 20 or 25 years, have often demeaned themselves by the extent to which they've paid court on proprietors and editors'.<sup>14</sup> It has been argued by some that the symbiosis of the press-politician relationship gained particular force during the Labour government under Tony Blair.

<sup>10</sup> Lebedev, E., 2012. *Further Witness Statement from Evgeny Lebedev*. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Further-Witness-Statement-from-Evgeny-Lebedev.pdf> [Accessed 6 October 2013.]

<sup>11</sup> Brogan, B., 2012. *Witness Statement of Benedict Brogan Available*. p. 16. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Witness-statement-of-Benedict-Brogan-signed-24.04.12.pdf>. [Accessed 16 October 2013.]

<sup>12</sup> Leveson. Executive Summary. p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Curran, J., 2012. *Final Witness Statement to the Inquiry*. pp. 3-4. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Curran-statement-to-Leveson-Inquiry.pdf> [Accessed 18 November 2013.]

<sup>14</sup> *Transcript of Afternoon Hearing 23 January 2012*. p. 8. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Transcript-of-Afternoon-Hearing-23-January-2012.pdf> [Accessed 21 October 2013.]

Blair, by his own account, 'had regular meetings with media figures – owners and editors and indeed prominent journalists or commentators – and found this a useful way of gauging opinion and getting a message across'.<sup>15</sup>

As Piers Morgan, former *Daily Mirror* editor, records in his diaries:

Bored one evening, I counted up all the number of times I had met Tony Blair. And the result was astonishing really, or slightly shocking – according to your viewpoint. I had 22 lunches, six dinners, six interviews, 24 further chats over tea and biscuits and numerous telephone calls with him...<sup>16</sup>

In his statement to the Leveson Inquiry, Andrew Neil, former editor of the *Sunday Times* under Murdoch, defines the relationship between the Murdoch press and the Labour Party under Blair as a 'rapprochement/alliance', which 'was one of the guiding forces at the heart of British politics for over a decade'.<sup>17</sup> New Labour was 'trying to make an arrangement with a radical-right newspaper group for their mutual interest'. It was 'prepared to pay a high price, in terms of access and influence, for the support of the Murdoch papers'.

Neil comments of the relationship between Murdoch and the Blair government:

I do not believe that there was an explicit deal between Murdoch and Blair in which the Sun gave its support in return for promises that a Labour government would leave Rupert's British media empire alone. [...] But there was an implicit understanding, never openly talked about between the two men, but an understanding nevertheless.<sup>18</sup>

Neil's statement to the Inquiry outlines the dividends reaped by Rupert Murdoch in return to friendly treatment in the Murdoch press:

New Labour in power did nothing to undermine or threaten Mr Murdoch's British media interests [...]. Demands for a privacy law (which Mr Murdoch abhors) were kicked into the long grass. Control of 37% of national newspaper circulation was tolerated (indeed supported now most of the 37% was rooting for Labour). BSkyB was allowed to grow unhindered and light-touch media regulation became the consensus of the day. [...] New Labour resolutely repelled tougher cross-ownership [rules] then went further: the Labour 2003 Communications Act ended the ban on foreign ownership of TV licences, paving the way, in the years to come, for the Murdoch News Corp to attempt to buy the 60% of BSkyB it did not own.<sup>19</sup>

Writing on the Blair-Murdoch relationship in the *Independent* in May 2012, Lance Price, former media adviser to Tony Blair commented: '[D]id Mr Murdoch really have no influence on government policy? Of course he did'.

Rupert Murdoch was the 24th member of the Cabinet. On many major decisions his views

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<sup>15</sup> Blair, T., 2012. *Witness Statement of Tony Blair*. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Witness-Statement-of-Tony-Blair1.pdf>> [Accessed 21 October 2013.]

<sup>16</sup> Morgan, P., 2005. *The Insider: Private Diaries of a Scandalous Decade*. London: Ebury. p. x.

<sup>17</sup> Neil, A., 2012. *Witness Statement of Andrew Neil*. p. 10. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Witness-statement-of-Andrew-Neil.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]

<sup>18</sup> Morning Hearing 25 April. pp. 75-76.

<sup>19</sup> Neil. *Witness Statement*. p. 15.

were taken into account. And Mr Blair explained why to the inquiry. If you own papers with a readership that runs into the millions, 'that's power'.

[A]s Tony Blair himself conceded, Mr Murdoch did have 'power'. Some of that power was ceded to him by Mr Blair himself. We know the former Prime Minister is a man of religious faith but his relationship to media power was like that of an agnostic to God. He wasn't sure it existed but he decided to behave as if it did just in case.<sup>20</sup>

A departure from the Labour-Murdoch alliance occurred under the term of Blair's successor as prime minister, Gordon Brown. Murdoch told the Inquiry that he, James Murdoch and Rebekah Brooks decided that 'it was time for a change'.<sup>21</sup> Murdoch decided that the *Sun* would now no longer support Brown politically and would throw its support behind the Conservatives. After that, 'I am afraid that my personal relationship with Mr Brown suffered'.<sup>22</sup>

### Cameron and the press

The Cameron-led Conservative Party, both in opposition and in government, has maintained the trend for cosy relationships with powerful elements within the press.

During the 2010 election campaign, Aidan Barclay, chairman of the Telegraph Media Group, suggested a daily phone call should be had between David Cameron, and Tony Gallagher, editor of the *Telegraph*. Barclay told the Inquiry: 'I suggested to [Cameron] that if he wanted to get the attention of the editor and wanted to get his message across in the most efficient manner, he should make a habit of phoning him on a daily basis and I recommended that's what they should do'.<sup>23</sup>

The Inquiry also heard that on 7 October 2009, the day before David Cameron addressed the Conservative Party conference, Rebekah Brooks, then chief executive of News International, sent Cameron the following text message:

But seriously I do understand the issue with the Times. Let's discuss over country supper soon. On the party it was because I had asked a number of NI [News International] people to Manchester post endorsement and they were disappointed not to see you. But as always Sam was wonderful – (and I thought it was OE's [Old Etonians] that were charm personified!) I am so rooting for you tomorrow not just as a proud friend but because professionally we're definitely in this together! Speech of your life? Yes he Cam!<sup>24</sup>

Questioned by the Inquiry on the meaning of Brooks' statement that, 'professionally we're definitely in this together', Cameron replied: 'I think what it means is that we were, as she put it, we were friends, but professionally, we as leader of the Conservative Party and her in newspapers,

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<sup>20</sup> Price, L., 2012. Lance Price: Pull the other one Tony. You let Murdoch shape policy. *The Independent*, [online] 29 May. Available at: <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/lance-price-pull-the-other-one-tony-you-let-murdoch-shape-policy-7794143.html>> [Accessed 21 October 2013.]

<sup>21</sup> Morning Hearing 25 April. p. 90.

<sup>22</sup> Murdoch, R., 2013. *Witness Statement of Keith Rupert Murdoch*. p. 25. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Witness-Statement-of-Keith-Rupert-Murdoch2.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]

<sup>23</sup> *Transcript of Afternoon Hearing 23 April 2012*. p. 84. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Transcript-of-Afternoon-Hearing-23-April-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]

<sup>24</sup> Morning Hearing 14 June. pp. 82-83.

we were going to be pushing the same political agenda'.<sup>25</sup>

Brooks told the Inquiry that, 'Where I have known a politician well, this has led on many occasions to a free and frank exchange of views as *we have sought to change policy* or better understand why the Government is taking a particular stance' (emphasis added).<sup>26</sup>

The Brooks-Cameron relationship is particularly indicative of a culture of press-politician mutual interest in which CEOs and party leaders work together to 'push the same agenda', in Cameron's words.

### **The editorial influence of the proprietor**

Ed Miliband, leader of the Labour Party, told the Inquiry: 'I think there's no question that the press has a significant influence on the parameters of public debate in this country'.<sup>27</sup> To what extent, then, do proprietors, for whom the newspaper industry is largely a matter of commercial concern or an instrument of power, influence news content and, hence, public opinion?

Rebekah Brooks described for the Inquiry the explicit influence held by Murdoch over the editorial line of his newspapers: 'Rupert Murdoch did of course have strong views about the stance that his newspapers would take in a General Election and it is not possible that an editor of *The Sun* or the *News of The World* would support a party in an election without discussing it with him'.<sup>28</sup>

Former *Sunday Times* editor (between 1983 and 1994) Andrew Neil writes in *Full Disclosure* (in which Murdoch is likened to a 21<sup>st</sup> century 'Sun King'):

There is a common myth among those who think Rupert Murdoch has too much power and influence: that he controls every aspect of his newspapers on three continents, dictating an editorial before breakfast, writing headlines over lunch, and deciding which politician to discredit over dinner. He has been known to do all three. But he does not generally work like that: his control is far more subtle.

According to Professor James Curran:

Rupert Murdoch was debarred by Articles of Association from dictating the editorial policy of the *Sunday Times* when he bought it in 1981, yet he wanted to change the paper from being centre-right to becoming robustly right-wing. This shift was accomplished partly through the choice of editor.<sup>29</sup>

Andrew Neil, Murdoch's chosen editor of the *Sunday Times*, confirms this assessment:

For a start he picks as his editors people like me, who are mostly on the same wavelength as he is: we started from a set of common assumptions about politics and society, even if we

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<sup>25</sup> Morning Hearing 14 June. p. 84.

<sup>26</sup> Brooks, R., 2012. *Second Witness Statement of Rebekah Brooks*. p. 7. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Second-Witness-Statement-of-Rebekah-Brooks.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]

<sup>27</sup> *Transcript of Afternoon Hearing 12 June 2012*. pp. 8-9. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Transcript-of-Afternoon-Hearing-12-June-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]

<sup>28</sup> Brooks. *Second Witness Statement*.

<sup>29</sup> Curran. *Witness Statement*. pp. 3-4.



did not see eye to eye on every issue and have very different styles. Then he largely left me to get on with my work.

But you always have to take Rupert into account: he is too smart to ignore.<sup>30</sup>

Curran comments in his witness statement to the Inquiry:

Some editors will insist that they do not take instructions from publishers. In a literal sense, this can be true. But this is not how publisher power is usually exercised. A newsroom ethos is engendered from the top though selection of senior personnel, the recruitment of new staff, through incentives and criticism, and through the editorial tradition of a paper. A determined publisher like Rupert Murdoch can get the paper he wants through shaping the culture of its newsroom.<sup>31</sup>

Submission to the Inquiry by Michelle Stanistreet on behalf of the National Union of Journalists noted that 'editors determine to a large extent the values of a publication and shape the culture of a publication'. It explained how 'editors are also charged by their proprietors with maximising circulation and therefore profit and as such have a major part to play in the type of story run in the paper and the culture that exists in the newsroom. Evidence of the last few years, following the concerted efforts of successive governments and employers to minimise the role of trade unions, shows that this culture has often become toxic'.<sup>32</sup>

Stanistreet writes in her witness statement to the Inquiry that, 'Newsroom culture is vital when considering the pressures that journalists come under to deliver on stories'.<sup>33</sup> Through the choice of editor and through influencing the editorial approach, proprietors, the Inquiry revealed, shape the culture of the newsroom which in turn influences news output.

### **Press influence over government**

'I have never asked a politician for anything' – Rupert Murdoch

'Though it would grieve him to think so', Andrew Neil writes in *Full Disclosure*, 'he [Murdoch] has become an old-fashioned *Times* proprietor of the type he used to sneer at, keeping the paper going at a loss for years because of the power and prestige it brings its owner'.<sup>34</sup>

Evidence to the Inquiry outlined how influence is exerted over government through a combination of direct lobbying, and the leveraging of the power press assets grant their owners.

The use of Rupert Murdoch's press assets for political leverage is evidenced in the diaries of

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<sup>30</sup> Neil, A., 1996. Murdoch and Me. *Vanity Fair*, [online] December. p. 2. Available at: <<http://www.vanityfair.com/business/features/1996/12/rupert-murdoch-199612>> (Excerpted from: Neil, A., 1996. *Full Disclosure*. London: Macmillan.) [Accessed 25 October 2013.]

<sup>31</sup> Curran. Witness Statement. p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Stanistreet, M., 2012. *NUJ – The Future of Press Regulation: Module 4 Submission*. p. 12. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Submission-by-Michelle-Stanistreet-on-behalf-of-the-National-Union-of-Journalists.pdf>> [Accessed 18 November 2013.]

<sup>33</sup> Stanistreet, M., 2012. *Witness Statement of Michelle Stanistreet*. P. 3. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Witness-Statement-of-Michelle-Stanistreet.pdf>> [Accessed 18 November 2013.]

<sup>34</sup> Neil. Murdoch and Me, p. 3.

former Number 10 spin-doctor Alastair Campbell. Campbell writes on 10 March 1997 that Tony Blair 'spoke to [News Corp lobbyist] Irwin Stelzer later who said Murdoch was moving towards supporting us [the Labour party] again, for commercial reasons would make clear who they were backing at the start of the campaign'.<sup>35</sup>

John Major, Conservative prime minister from 1990 to 1997, illustrated for the Leveson Inquiry the terms by which Murdoch's papers come to offer or withdraw support from political parties: 'Mr Murdoch said that he really didn't like our European policies – this was no surprise to me, that he didn't like our European policies – and he wished me to change our European policies. If we couldn't change our European policies, his papers could not and would not support the Conservative government'.<sup>36</sup>

Vince Cable, describes how, when he was to decide upon the proposed takeover of the remaining 61% of BSkyB by News Corporation (already in possession of 39%), he 'had heard directly and indirectly from colleagues that there had been veiled threats that if I made the wrong decision from the point of view of the company, my party would be – I think somebody used the phrase "done over" in the News International press and I took those things seriously, I was very concerned'.<sup>37</sup>

Not restricted to concerns of a strictly commercial nature, Murdoch, in the week leading up to the Commons vote on the use of military action against Iraq in 2003, made three phone calls to Tony Blair in an apparent attempt to influence government foreign policy. Campbell's diary entry of Tuesday 11 March 2003 documents one of their exchanges:

TB [Tony Blair] was pretty mellow, probably a bad sign. He had suddenly had a load of energy drained from him. He also took a call from Murdoch who was pressing on timings, saying how News International would support us, etc. Both TB and I felt it was prompted by Washington, and another example of their over-crude diplomacy. Murdoch was pushing all the Republican buttons, how the longer we waited the harder it got.<sup>38</sup>

Despite certain instances, such as those outlined above, when Murdoch's views can be seen to be put forward for the purpose of political influence, Murdoch's power perhaps functioned most efficiently when its potential force went unspoken.

Tony Blair describes the perceived necessity to stay on favourable terms with a powerful press: '[I]f you're a political leader and you have very powerful media groups and you fall out with one of those groups, the consequence is such that it really means that you then are effectively blocked from getting across your message'.<sup>39</sup>

It is due to this level of power that Rupert Murdoch could state to the Inquiry that 'I have never

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<sup>35</sup> Morning Hearing 25 April. p. 72.

<sup>36</sup> *Transcript of Morning Hearing 12 June 2012*. p. 31. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Transcript-of-Morning-Hearing-12-June-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 1 November 2013.]

<sup>37</sup> *Transcript of Morning Hearing 30 May 2012*. p. 65. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Transcript-of-Morning-Hearing-30-May-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 1 November 2013.]

<sup>38</sup> Watt, N., 2012. The Campbell diaries: Bush left in no doubt over Blair's support for Iraq war. *The Guardian*, [online] 15 June. Available at <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/jun/15/campbell-blair-bush-iraq-war>> [Accessed 21 October 2013.]

<sup>39</sup> *Transcript of Morning Hearing 28 May 2012*. p. 4. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Transcript-of-Morning-Hearing-28-May-2012.pdf>> [Accessed 21 November 2013.]



asked a politician for anything' (though the veracity of this statement might be considered to be in doubt). Leveson writes in his report that:

Sometimes the very greatest power is exercised without having to ask, because to ask would be to state the blindingly obvious and thereby diminish the very power which is being displayed. Just as Mr Murdoch's editors knew the basic ground-rules, so did politicians.<sup>40</sup>

### **The need for a democratic media**

Media concentration creates conditions in which wealthy individuals can amass great social and political power. Rupert Murdoch 'and family' were recently positioned at number 33 in Forbes Magazine's list of the world's most powerful people, with a net worth of \$13.4 billion.<sup>41</sup> Just three companies control nearly 70% of national newspaper circulation in the UK while only five groups control more than 70% of online news consumption measured by browsing time.<sup>42</sup>

Large sections of the British media are simply too close to powerful vested interests. We need to create a media that is free to hold power to account and to do that, we need a full and open debate on media ownership and media pluralism. But we need to go further: we need remedies to loosen the grip on the national conversation exercised by the most powerful media organisations – things like ownership thresholds, market caps, public interest obligations and creative interventions to stimulate new journalistic voices. Our existing media ownership regime is not working to protect or nurture pluralism or democracy. It is time for a change.

Please visit [www.mediareform.org.uk](http://www.mediareform.org.uk) to see our proposals for an independent and diverse media.

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<sup>40</sup> Leveson, B., 2012. *An Inquiry Into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press, Volume 3*. London: The Stationary Office. p. 1432.

<sup>41</sup> Forbes, 2013. Rupert Murdoch and family. Forbes [online], n.d. Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/profile/rupert-murdoch/> [Accessed: 1 November 2013.]

<sup>42</sup> Media Reform Coalition, 2013. *The Elephant in the Room* [forthcoming].