

MURDOCH BIDS AGAIN TO TAKE OVER SKY TV

THE ANSWER IS STILL 'NO'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



WHY? →

WE DID IT LAST TIME

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

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

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

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

**CAMPAIGN
FOR
PRESS
AND
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FREEDOM**



JANINA STRUK/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

THE BIG REASONS WHY

1 MEDIA PLURALITY

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

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

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

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

2 BROADCASTING STANDARDS

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

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

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

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



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

3 FIT AND PROPER MANAGERS

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

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

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

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

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

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

The CPBF is part of the Media Reform Coalition, which is co-ordinating the campaign against the Sky takeover. Go to www.cpbf.org.uk or contact us at freepress@cpbf.org.uk for information on the latest actions and information. Phone 07729 146 846.





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

While there were ten meetings involving Rupert Murdoch or

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

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



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

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

There were no meetings between senior ministers and media reform campaigners or groups opposed to the expansion of Big Media power. Justin Schlosberg, chair of the Media Reform Coalition said: "Decades of rampant criminality and corruption within the Murdoch newsrooms does not appear to be of concern to the present government, as senior ministers continue to sit down with News Corp bosses at a rate that dwarfs other companies and organisations. It's as if it's part of their job description."

News Corp

THE UNDEAD RISE AGAIN

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUNE 2015: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch

JULY 2015: David Cameron and Robert Thomson

SEPTEMBER 2015: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch

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

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

OCTOBER 2015: George Osborne and David Dinsmore

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

DECEMBER 2015: George Osborne and Robert Thomson

DECEMBER 2015: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch - Christmas drinks

DECEMBER 2015: David Cameron and Rupert Murdoch

JANUARY 2016: John Whittingdale and 21st Century Fox

JANUARY 2016: George Osborne and Robert Thomson

MAY 2016: George Osborne and Rupert Murdoch

MAY 2016: Theresa May (home secretary) and NewsCorp

SEPTEMBER 2016: Philip Hammond and Robert Thomson

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

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

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

'Hi Karen' ... 'Hi Ben'

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

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

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

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

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

Instead, they spoke by mobile phone, prompting a text

from Fred Michel that read: *Thanks for the call with James today, greatly appreciated.* Jeremy Hunt replied: *Pleasure.*

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

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

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

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

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

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