

FREE PRESS

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ELECTION COVERAGE

THE TORY PRESS ... OH NOT AGAIN!

THE NEED for better and more diverse media in Britain could not have been made clearer than by their performance in the General Election. This was the rebirth of the Tory press, rabid and roaring with more right-wing ferocity than ever.

It was 1992 all over again, when the Labour Party was likely to regain office but lost to a combination of its own mixed messages, its blustering and patently inadequate leadership and a vicious, virulent right-wing media attack.

That was the time when the Sun rose on polling day with a front page saying "If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain turn out the lights" and the next day crowed: IT'S THE SUN WOT WON IT.

The risk that this might indeed have been true was so appalling that ever since then journalists, media academics and politicians on all sides have insisted and set out to prove that the press does not determine the outcome of elections.

This May, a number of institutions carried out painstaking analyses of the election coverage to show the limited extent of the bias, and while it didn't rob Labour of victory – the election wasn't close enough for that – well it didn't do the Conservatives any harm.

Statistically, in some ways it was worse than 1992. Research by the Media Standards Trust found that 77 per cent of the leading articles in the Sun carried attacks on Labour leader Ed Miliband, compared with only 44 per cent that were deemed critical of the hapless Neil Kinnock in 1992.

From 26 March to 3 May this year, 37 out of 39 Sun leaders were anti-Labour, with 30 of them anti-Miliband. This compares with 1992, when it said 31 out of 39 leaders were anti-Labour, with 17 of them anti-Kinnock.

Of the same 39 leader columns in the Sun, the Media Standards Trust said 18 of them (46 per cent) were in favour of David Cameron's Conservatives, against 33 per cent that were pro-Tory in 1992.

The Sun's attacks on Labour were stepped up after proprietor Rupert Murdoch visited London and was reported to have told journalists to do more to stop Labour winning the election and warned of the consequences of a Miliband win for the future of News UK.

A Sun leader on 24 April claimed that the threat to Murdoch's empire was a "direct result" of the Sun



The 2015 Sun reverted to its style of 1992, with even harsher attacks on Labour



switching support to the Conservatives and that "during all the years the Sun backed them ... Labour said nothing about the size of our company."

For the first time, Labour's 2015 manifesto included a pledge to increase media plurality by putting limits on the extent of the market that single companies or individuals could control.

So it was no doubt predictable that the owners of Big Media would lash out against reforms to create more diverse and democratic media that their own

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Government poised for more cuts

6 IT WAS MURDOCH GOT THEM NICKED
The blame for 70 arrests

8 FORGET THE BIG COMPANY PAPERS
New press for local people

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MAY WANTS TO CENSOR TV NEWS

A HORRENDOUS plan to introduce state censorship to TV news by the Home Secretary was blocked by another Tory minister, it was revealed just after the election.

Theresa May planned to give Ofcom the power to take ban programmes that included “extremist content” as part of her “anti-terrorist” strategy, which would require viewing them in advance – a complete reversal of broadcasting practice and of the pledge to defend press freedom in the Conservative manifesto.

But objections from culture and media secretary Sajid Javid and other ministers ensured the idea was dropped and prevented her from publishing the policy, headlined A Stronger Britain, before the election.

Sajid Javid wrote to Prime Minister David Cameron to say that the plan would move Ofcom from a regulator into the role of a censor. It would involve “a fundamental shift in the way UK broadcasting is regulated”, moving away from the current framework of post-transmission regulation which takes account of freedom of expression, he said.

Theresa May has been named by Cameron as a potential successor when he stands down in three or four years’ time.

The new government’s Queen’s Speech, due to take place as Free Press went to press, was expected to include loosely specified powers to “strengthen the role of Ofcom to take action against channels which broadcast extremist content” but it was not known whether the censorship plan would be included.

BBC back in Tories’ sights

THE BBC is braced for an all-out attack as its Parliamentary Charter and licence fee settlement come up for renewal next year.

The BBC’s enemies in the right-wing media – in print as much as broadcasting – have been rubbing their hands since Cameron appointed John Whittingdale as culture secretary in succession to Sajid Javid after the election.

Whittingdale had been chair of the Commons culture and media committee for 10 years and built a reputation of being tough on the BBC, particularly on the licence fee as the means of funding its work.

He has described the charge as “worse than the poll tax” because it demands the same payment from everybody, rich or poor – a fair criticism.

While there is widespread agreement that the system must be changed, there is also concern that the government may go for individual subscription as an alternative.

Five years ago when the Tory/Libdem coalition took power the BBC accepted without a fight a freeze in the licence fee and the imposition of huge extra non-BBC costs on the income. In their 2015 manifesto the Tories have secured a mandate to extend this “top-slicing” of its income.

There are fears that the Corporation could be lining up for a repeat climb-down – “getting its capitulation in first” as Free Press described the 2010 debacle, which has led to the loss of thousands of jobs and cuts in BBC services.

Director-General Tony Hall has said that the BBC should be “bold and inventive about the future” in a note to staff that looked like a preparation for defeat: “The BBC is a treasured national asset but of course it cannot be immune to change.”



Tony Hall: prepare for change

■ **IT’S NOT JUST the BBC’s audiences that its jealous commercial rivals resent, but also its phenomenally successful website. According to the measurement agency Alexa Internet is the 69th biggest in the world in terms of visitors, and the biggest based in Britain – smaller only than google.uk and bigger than amazon or ebay in the .uk domain. But it is only the world’s second biggest news site: biggest is guangming daily in China at number 64.**



How Free Press reported the BBC’s cave-in to the government last time round

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POST-ELECTION

Three in four say: cut Big Media down to size

THERE IS overwhelming public support for action to confront the unaccountable power of media proprietors in the UK, according to a poll carried out for the Media Reform Coalition.

The poll shows that 74 per cent believe that, to own a UK newspaper, radio station or TV channel, companies should be based in the UK and pay full UK tax, while 61 per cent are in favour of compulsory rules (such as independent editorial boards) in order to limit the influence of owners over editorial output.

Controls on media ownership are supported by 71 per cent, including a substantial minority, 41 per cent, who think there should be fixed limits on the amount any one organisation can own. Asked whether

they would support a levy on the profits of social media and pay-TV companies to fund new providers of investigative and local journalism, 51 per cent agreed with only 9 per cent disagreeing.

The poll of 1,566 people was commissioned by the Media Reform Coalition and conducted by YouGov in March.

Des Freedman, chair of the Media Reform Coalition, to which the CPBF is affiliated, said the results showed there was a public appetite to deal with the root causes of the abuse of power demonstrated in the hacking inquiry. "It demonstrates that the public have lost faith in existing ownership rules and want something more robust to defend the public interest."

REGULATION

IMPRESS will register – 'There's a job for us to do'

MPS IN ALL parties think they can wash their hands of the touchy issue of press regulation. "We've done all we can," they say. "We set up the Royal Charter and now it's up to the press."

They are right as far as it goes, but the issue is not dead. Nothing could be further from the truth. Leveson set in motion a process which led to the Royal Charter, which allows for a press regulator to be independently accountable; and to the Crime and Courts Act, which provides incentives for news publishers to join a regulator

The elements are in place and once a regulator has achieved registration with the Press Recognition Panel established under the Charter, the charter framework will become operational.

As it happens, a regulator is poised to do just that. IMPRESS, the genuinely independent body set up a year ago to provide an alternative to IPSO, the newspaper owners' pet body, has decided to register. IPSO, the self-regulator set up

up by the newspaper owners, has said it will not apply; in truth, it could not anyway because it comes nowhere near Leveson's requirements.

On November 3 – the first anniversary of the panel's formation – the exemplary damages provisions in the crime and courts act will come into force. These are measures to advantage

Instead IMPRESS is recruiting smaller and local publishers, many online, for the protection that membership will give them.

Walter Merricks, the Chair of IMPRESS, said it was seeking recognition "because there is a market among independent publishers for regulation of this kind.

"Small news publishers particularly appreciate the kitemark which IMPRESS will be able to offer them, as evidence that their regulator is independent of the state and the newspaper industry.

"They appreciate that the new costs protections will allow them to run hard-hitting stories of a kind which are currently impossible because of the

chilling effect of libel law.

"So that is why we will apply for recognition: because there is a job for us to do. And if our intervention has a wider beneficial impact, that of course is welcome."

THE IMPRESS PROJECT

For the press - for the public

publishers who have signed up to a recognised regulator by cutting their costs if cases come to court – and conversely penalise those who have not.

Next year the panel will deliver its first report to Parliament. It is obliged to report whether there is a recognised regulator and whether its system of regulation is independent and effective according to the 23 criteria set out by the Leveson report.

IMPRESS is understood to have a number of publishers in line to join. They do not include any national newspapers, since those that have declined to join IPSO – the Guardian, Independent and Financial Times – are regulating themselves, at least for the time being because they don't like the principle of the Royal Charter.

Most commercial local and regional papers, owned by the big nationwide chains, have also joined IPSO.

IPSO WATCH

THE MEDIA reform group Hacked Off has launched a service called IPSO WATCH to encourage people who have made a complaint to IPSO or a newspaper and been given the brush-off, to report their treatment.

It will also monitor complaints made directly to newspapers and the methods used to deter people from seeing them through.

2015 CPBF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Saturday 27 June
10 am to 1 pm**

Post general election analysis and the future for media reform, plus election of national council for 2015/16 and more ...

**At the NUJ, 308 Gray's Inn Road,
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Nearest tube/rail Kings Cross St. Pancras

THE TORY PRESS AGAIN

→ from front page

behaviour makes so necessary.

Even so, it seemed shocking after the Blairite honeymoon in which some media corporations had seen their interest as lying with the “New” Labour Party. It even shocked a bard-bitten American political consultant who said the UK press was worse than Fox News.

David Axelrod, the former Obama adviser who worked for Labour during the campaign, said the press was more powerful and “much more aggressive” than Fox News in the US. He said: “I’ve worked in aggressive media environments before but not this partisan.” British conservative print media was not only more powerful than Fox News is in the US but was also far more partisan, he said. “The relationships between the parties and media outlets that are deeper.”

The Media Standards Trust also looked at leader articles across all of the national newspapers. The total number of pro-Conservative leaders (217) was more than double the pro-Labour aggregate (87).

The Daily Telegraph had most pro-Tory leaders with 55; the Daily Mail had 49, the Daily Express 36, the Sun 35 and the Times 34.

The Daily Telegraph also sent out a mass email to its readers urging them to vote Conservative.

The Sun was the toughest on Labour with 102 critical leaders, followed by the Daily Mail (75) and the Telegraph (67).

The Sun, the Times and the Daily Mail were

most critical of the Scottish National party, topped by 21 in the Sun. The Media Standards Trust found only one pro-SNP leader, in the Financial Times.

The Mirror had the most leaders (109) deemed anti-Conservative, followed by the Guardian (44).

But it wasn’t just a matter of party preference but also of the issues that were covered.

For instance, Labour made its biggest issue the NHS, yet according to MST research the NHS was only the 6th biggest story to be covered in the papers, and 7th on TV – about the same as immigration, deemed to benefit UKIP – according to research at Loughborough University (see table below).

The most reported by far was the process of the election itself: the opinion polls and the doings of the party leaders. Second was the economy, on which all media pronounced the Tories were at an advantage.

The decline of newspaper circulations and their presumed political influence were offset by the close way that the broadcasting followed their agenda. The law prevents broadcasters taking sides, yet by following the papers’ lead they were effectively doing so.

A good example was the publication on April 1 of a letter from 103 big business bosses in the Daily Telegraph urging a vote for the Conservatives. Why a letter from 100 Tories in a Tory paper saying “vote Tory” was newsworthy was neither asked nor answered, yet the “story” led BBC news bulletins for 24 hours.

THE ISSUES

How the election issues played out

TELEVISION COVERAGE			NEWSPAPER COVERAGE		
Rank	Theme	%	Rank	Theme	%
1	Election process	45.9	1	Election process	44.5
2	Economy	8.1	2	Economy	10.5
3	Constitutional issues	6.2	3	Taxation	6.5
4	Taxation	5.4	4	Standards/corruption/sleaze	3.8
5	Employment	4.4	5	Constitutional issues	3.7
6	Immigration/Migrants/Race	3.7	6	NHS	3.7
7	NHS	3.5	7	Immigration/Migrants/Race	3.5
8	Business	3	8	Europe	3.4
9 =	Social Security	2.4	9	Employment	2.9
9 =	Europe	2.4	10	Business	2.6
11	Housing	2.3	11	Social security	2.3
12	Defence	2.2	12	Housing	2.2
13 =	Standards/corruption/sleaze	2.2	13	Defence	2.2
13 =	Women’s issues	2	14	Women’s issues	1.4
15	Media	1.1	15 =	Education	1.1
16	Education	0.9	15 =	Media	1.1
17	Higher/Further Education	0.7	17	Arts/Culture/Sport	0.7
18 =	Environment	0.6	18	Public services	0.7
18 =	Arts/ Culture/ Sport	0.6	19	Transport	0.6
20 =	Foreign policy	0.5	20 =	Higher/ Further Education	0.5
20 =	Transport	0.5	20 =	Health	0.5
22	Information technology	0.5	22	Environment	0.4
23	Northern Ireland	0.4	23	Crime/law enforcement	0.3
24	Public services	0.3	24	Foreign policy	0.3
25	Local government	0.1	25	Farming/Agriculture	0.2
26 =	Health	0.1	26 =	Information technology	0.1
26 =	Crime/law enforcement	0.1	26 =	Local government	0.1
26 =	Rural affairs	0.1	27	Rural affairs	0

Notes: Percentages = (number of themes / total number of themes) x100. Up to three themes could be coded per item. Percentages are rounded.

VOTE FOR WHO NOT FOR WHO H



Let's not allow fear and sn

For decades, Prime Ministers from Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair to David Cameron have been in Rupert Murdoch's pocket. This election has seen Britain's dominant media outlet pushing a loathing agenda because they fear a new government could

To all undecided voters in Britain, vote for what's best for you – not what's best for Rupert Murdoch.

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MEDIA LINES: WHAT

Conservatives

- Freeze the licence fee at least until the next BBC charter renewal
- Continue to top-slice the fee, which currently contributes £150 million to broadband rollout.
- Provide “explicit protection” for journalists in a British bill of rights.
- Ensure police cannot access journalists’ records under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (Ripa) without court approval.

Liberal Democrats

- Introduce public-interest defence for journalists breaking the law.
- Create a “first amendment law” to make courts and public bodies take into account the importance of a free press.
- Ensure journalists have right to challenge Ripa requests for access to journalists

communications before they happen, unless it will endanger an investigation.

- Remove ministers from influencing the appointment of board members to Ofcom or the BBC Trust.
- Legislate for an independent system of press regulation if after 12 months “there is significant non-cooperation by newspaper publishers”.

enable Ofcom to conduct reviews into media ownership and to set conditions to prevent the reach of any media company damaging the public interest.

- ensure that there is a vibrant local and ‘hyperlocal’ media to help inform citizens about their local area and their local politics, by redirecting the current subsidies for local TV, extending Ofcom’s community radio grant support to online hyperlocals, and allowing non-profit local media outlets to obtain charitable status.

YOU BELIEVE IN,
E TELLS YOU TO.



near to rule our politics.

Chair and now David Cameron have sat comfortably in
dominant right-wing newspapers pushing a smear and
pass laws which challenge their power.

, for what you believe in

members
ers in Britain.

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MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Everywhere and nowhere

A NEWSPAPER proprietor donates £1.3 million to a right-wing party, and his paper carries eleven leader columns supporting the party. Another proprietor, son of a Russian oligarch, switches the line of a traditionally centrist, liberal paper to backing the right-wing coalition.

Meanwhile the biggest-selling paper announces support for two different parties in different editions: bizarre, as the nationalist and centrist parties concerned are bitterly opposed to each other at the ideological as well as the nationalist level.

Richard Desmond's backing for UKIP is both cynical and ideological. His personal right-wing views tie up with expanding sales to the Express's market – disgruntled white people who hold foreigners to blame for everything.

Evgeny Lebedev's prostitution of the Independent's traditional stance of avoiding partisan commitment signifies his desire to ingratiate himself with the London establishment. He also owns the London Evening Standard, a mouthpiece for the Boris Johnson wing of the Conservative Party.

There was no ideological element in the Sun backing the Scottish National Party at the same time as the Tories. The cynical backing for the winning side was also a business decision, a shrewd insurance policy against the potential threat of a Labour victory. Labour was promising to put limits on media ownership, and the SNP was not only leeching Labour votes by the hundreds of thousands but was also likely to hold the balance of seats if Labour ended up the biggest party.

The SNP has enjoyed friendly relations with Rupert Murdoch and his executives for several years and the party conspicuously avoided the issue of media ownership in its manifesto. The quid pro quo of its enjoying the support of the Scottish Sun could well have been to abstain from supporting any anti-Big Media legislation.

Thus did the interest of media owners dictate the political direction of the press during GE2015. Media issues are never more visible than during elections, yet reporting or discussion of them in the election coverage is negligible.

The most impactful airing of the question of ownership was in fact on Russell Brand's YouTube channel The Trews, when he asked Ed Miliband: "Can't you just go, right, I am Prime Minister now, we are passing some legislation that means that monopolies are going to be significantly broken up ... so Rupert Murdoch, it's been great but now you can only own 10 per cent or 15 per cent of total media. Is that kind of

thing a possibility, because people want it?"

With Miliband vaguely gabbling that he would do something, the go-second exchange was accessed 1.2 million times, nearly half of them in the first 24 hours.

Otherwise, not much. The CPBF and Media Reform Coalition secured no coverage for their YouGov poll showing 71 per cent public support for media ownership controls, which appears on the face of it to be newsworthy. The only airing it had was in a brief letter from the MRC itself in The Guardian. The paper's news and comment coverage avoided questions about media ownership.

Even its stories on the Sun's electoral duplicity ignored discussion of Murdoch's ownership. Yet the Independent had carried a story in March that a furious Rupert Murdoch had come to London to berate his editors for being insufficiently hostile to Labour and Ed Miliband; his visit being followed by a stepping up of the paper's attacks on the party.

A Sun editorial on April 24 attacked Labour as "sworn to use the law to dismantle News UK if it wins power", describing this as "sinister state censorship". Its Labour rival, the Mirror, despite



Facing both ways: the English (left) and Scottish Sun

its slavish adherence to the party line, carried nothing on its media policy nor on Murdoch or any other media question.

An online search shows not one article citing "media ownership" as such in any paper between March 30 and May 7. There were no media questions in the election TV debates. Yet the BBC faces an existential threat from Conservative policies to tackle its "monopoly" and supposed right-wing bias – a phenomenon visible only to right-wing people.

The then Culture Secretary Sajid Javid told the Daily Mail he wanted BBC bias addressed in the Charter renewal process, and both UKIP and the Democratic Unionist Party kept up constant complaints about it, based mainly on the level of their permitted participation in the TV debates (not a decision by the BBC alone).

Tim Gopsill and Jonathan Hardy

THE PARTIES SAID

UKIP

- Decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee and look at reducing its £145.50 cost.
- Abolish the Department for Culture Media and Sport.

SNP

- Change way licence fee take is distributed to give BBC Scotland more than £100m extra funding.
- Transfer control of broadcasting in Scotland to the Scottish Parliament and influence BBC charter renewal to protect Scottish interests.
- Review progress on implementation of Leveson proposals.

Labour

- Protect the principle of media plurality, so that no media outlet can get too big, including updating our rules for the 21st century media environment.
- Implement recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry.

- Ensure that the BBC continues to make a vital contribution to the richness of our cultural life while delivering value for money.
- Keep Channel 4 in public ownership, so it continues to produce vital public content.

Green Party

- Tighten the rules on cross-media ownership to ensure that no individual or company owns more than 20% of a media market
- Support the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry into press ethics and for the cross-party Royal Charter. If this is not supported by all the major newspapers we will support legislation to implement the Leveson system of independent self-regulation.
- Maintain the BBC as the primary public service broadcaster, free of government interference, with funding guaranteed in real terms in statute.

Press trials: who are

There's never been anything like the number of journalists arrested in Britain for phone-hacking and/or bribing public officials ... more than 70 in all, though sensibly juries are acquitting most that are put on trial. Nonetheless many have had a tough time, and if they want to know who to blame they should look at their own bosses, says **TIM GOPSILL**



THIRTY FOUR journalists were arrested and charged, of whom two were not taken to court, 13 have been acquitted and seven released when juries could not agree. Six more had their charges dropped. Two cases are scheduled to proceed.

Four journalists have been found guilty, of whom two had their convictions quashed. One whose conviction still stands had pleaded guilty and received a non-custodial sentence; the other is awaiting sentence and may actually go to prison.

This is the proud record of the Metropolitan Police Operation Elveden, the £13 million operation deploying 56 officers to root out the payment by reporters to public servants for stories and tip-offs. Its failure should be a cause for celebration, as journalists facing trial for doing their jobs are gloriously vindicated by juries of their peers.

It's not quite as clear-cut as that, but rather than celebrate, the right-wing papers prefer to fulminate against a supposed conspiracy against press freedom, involving vengeful politicians, the spoilt celebrity luvvies and lefty liberal do-gooders of Hacked Off! and politically-ambitious over-zealous police chiefs. Even if such a wondrous alliance could ever exist, they overlook another significant element to it: the owners of the press themselves.

It's obvious to everyone that the Murdoch press brought it on themselves in the first place by encouraging their journalists to engage in devious and disgraceful newsgathering techniques. But its culpability goes further than that.

Managers' reaction to the first revelations of phone-hacking in 2006 was to order a cover-up. This engaged not just News International staff but the Press Complaints Commission, which obliged by conducting no fewer than three in-depth inquiries, each time studiously looking the other way as it confirmed that all was fine.

The PCC went so far as to attack the Guardian for pursuing the story and publicly reminded it of its obligations under the Code of Practice. This was barely believable hypocrisy, even by the standards of the PCC.

The rest of the papers played their part by refusing to report the story as the Guardian pressed on with its investigation, piling scorn on editor Alan Rusbridger for good measure – though everyone knew that all the allegations were true.

The police were deep in the cover-up. Rather embarrassingly they had to ignore a mountain

that they never even looked at them. He was able to recommend to Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson that all was in order and no further investigation was needed.

THE COVER-UP fell apart, devastatingly, in July 2011. After the Guardian's revelation of the hacking of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler's phone, the police were compelled by the government to act. Such was the public horror that even David Cameron, whose trusted media chief Andy Coulson had been editor of the News of the World at the time of the hacking, expressed outrage. Yates and Stephenson resigned in disgrace, as of course did Coulson in Downing Street.

It is unlikely that such a harsh light has ever shone on corrupt relationships at the heart of the British establishment as at the subsequent Leveson Inquiry. The cynical trading of power and favours between the press, politicians and police was breathtaking and the downfall of the scapegoats truly Shakespearean. Here was a contemporary medieval court acting out its internal conflicts before our eyes.

The cathartic restoration of order in the play demanded heavy retribution on the Murdoch press, which had brought such shame on the king, and the force of order, the Met, had to purge its guilt.

So where hitherto the Yard had hardly even pretended to go through the motions, now it set up a whole series of high-profile operations: in addition to Elveden there were the 51-officer Operations Weeting and Pinetree into phone-hacking at the News of the World that cost £19 million and saw 32 journalists arrested and eight put on trial, of whom five were jailed; Operation Golding into hacking at the Mirror group; and Tuleta and Kalmyk into computer hacking by journalists, plus other operations into various related matters. The Met has so far spent £37

Why should the national papers get their hot copy for free?

of evidence. They had all the notes seized from the office of private eye Glenn Mulcaire, who had carried out the hacking for the News of the World. He was tried and jailed in 2007, along with the paper's "Royal Editor" Clive Goodman.

They were arrested because Goodman's tittle-tattle reporting of princes William and Harry had annoyed the royal family. The big cover-up required propagation of the fiction that they were lone mavericks, with Goodman the "rogue reporter" acting without the knowledge or approval, let alone the encouragement, of his bosses. Maintaining this blatant deceit was the real conspiracy in the case.

Mulcaire had kept meticulous notes of all the thousands of his phone-hack transactions. But former Assistant Commissioner John Yates, in charge of reviewing the Met's first investigation, Operation Blake, in 2009, admitted later

the criminals?

million on these exercises.

More than 100 officers were deployed, some apparently taken off anti-terrorist work to show how serious they were – or were being ordered to be.

So vindictive were the Met that the first person jailed under Elveden was one of their honest senior officers, DCI April Casburn, who had phoned the NoW to blow the whistle on the diverting of resources from anti-terrorist work.

She insisted she asked for no payment, and no story was written; but she had to be made an example and went down for 15 months, with a 40 per cent cut in her police pension, on the strength of a note written by a journalist implying that she wanted money. She now works in a shoe repair shop to keep her three children.

(John Yates meanwhile had taken himself off to Bahrain to offer the Emir and his entourage his expertise in how to handle the atrocities committed by its security forces on democracy protesters. This is how it works.)

For the Elveden team did not of course pursue journalists alone; it also went after allegedly bent public officials who had sold them stories: police and prison officers and civil servants. And with 21 imprisoned its success rate with these people is greatly superior than with the hacks.

Apart from with the cruelty of cases like April Casburn's, this is as it should be. When money changes hands between a journalist and an official, the receiving is more serious than the giving. Public officials have a duty to be honest and responsible to deserve public trust. Journalists do not; emphatically not. Provided

It was one of the greatest crimes of all time against journalism

it is justified by the public interest, journalists are entitled to use any lawful means to acquire information.

Interpreting the public interest is contentious; media do have a tendency to be generous in their interpretations, but at the same time when there is doubt they must be given the benefit. That at any rate is what the jurors in the Elveden cases have done.

You might also ask: in any case, why should such highly commercial enterprises as national papers get hot copy for free?

THE PRESS cannot see beyond the end of their noses so regard Elveden simply as an assault on themselves, but the operation can be justified for ridding the public realm of a few corrupt officials. The prosecution of the journalists themselves was based on firm and uncontested evidence. It

was the courts that decided in most cases that the journalists' actions were legitimate; in others the juries simply could not decide and prosecutors used their discretion, under constant and withering attack from the right-wing press, to smartly drop the idea of retrials.

One reason for jurors' doubt was the strange charge used in these cases: committing misconduct in a public office (for the officials) and conspiracy or aiding and abetting it (for the reporters). This is an archaic common law offence – punishable with indefinite imprisonment! – that requires the misconduct to be "so serious as to make the public lose faith in the office holder" and the journalists to know they were dealing with a public official. Proving these things is not easy.

There was no recognised crime of paying an official for information until the 2010 Bribery Act came into force in 2012, which these offences long predated.

The prosecuted officials had a feature in common apart from their alleged criminality. They would all have had a reasonable belief they would never be identified, having been promised by the journalists that they would not. And they were not – by the journalists. Everyone knows that even the most disreputable reporter will never betray a confidential source.

That obligation does not seem to apply, however, to their bosses, who betrayed their reporters and their sources to save their own skins. This was the most cynical, thoughtless, self-serving and dangerous thing that Murdoch managers did.

Almost overnight they turned from being churlish and obstructive with the police to enthusiastic collaboration. They set up a top-level Management and Standards Committee to furnish the police with all the information it could.

Well not quite all. First the company took the precaution of deleting 3 million emails that might have incriminated senior executives, but after that it handed over a server with 23 million emails for the police to search at will.

That's how the 100+ officers were largely occupied. That's how they got all their evidence, which the overall head of the Operations, DAC Sue Akers, told a Parliamentary committee, there was no other way they could have done. That's how they got the identities of reporters and their confidential sources. That's how they got the newsdesk note on April Casburn's fateful phone call.

It was one of the greatest crimes against journalism of all time. Murdoch's men, while protecting the executives really responsible, threw their employees to the wolves and destroyed the confidentiality their sources deserved.

Since then the company has re-reversed the ferret and ceased co-operating. Coincidentally the FBI has said there will be no charges in the USA. Fancy that. A bit late in the day, though, don't you think?

HACKING COSTS

THE MIRROR PAYS OUT MILLIONS

MIRROR GROUP newspapers are braced to pay out millions to the victims of its own phone-hacking crimes after the High Court awarded a record-breaking £1.2 million to a sample group of eight claimants on May 20.

They included footballer Piers Morgan and BBC boss Alan Yentob. Lawyers were astonished at the amount and parent company Trinity Mirror is considering an appeal.



Piers Morgan: edited Mirror during heyday of hacking

TM has upped its estimated costs for dealing with phone-hacking to £28 million as a result.

The judge, Mr Justice Mann, said the victims had all suffered a "serious infringement of privacy" and the scale of hacking was "very substantial indeed". His ruling will provide a framework for resolving more than 100 claims still in the pipeline.

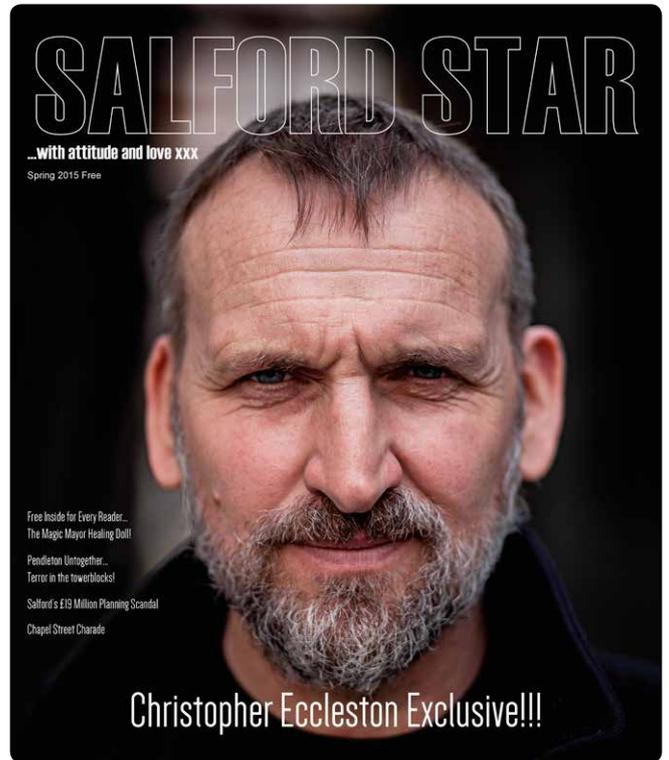
For years TM kept denying that its journalists had ever hacked phones, as the evidence mounted; then it decided to risk court action rather than settle all cases out court as Murdoch's News International papers did.

Editor of the Daily Mirror from 1995-2004, when most of the hacking took place, was the reptilian Piers Morgan, who was interviewed by police from the Met's Operation Golding for the second time, under caution, in May. Here's hoping!

And local shall speak unto local

The disused docklands of Salford are home to Media City UK, a glass-towered hive of media industry and the location of the BBC's major out-of-London production centre. But Salford itself, twin city to Manchester, is a different world, where traditional media – the local press – have been wrecked by the Big Media corporations and community media are striving to replace them.

STEPHEN KINGSTON, editor of one of these papers, the Salford Star, reports on a new network to bring such local in initiatives together.



ALL OVER THE country, local print media are closing down and journalists are either being sacked or transferred to work on “digital platforms” – the former papers’ websites – which is leaving a massive democracy deficit in towns and cities.

Take Greater Manchester, where local papers owned by Trinity Media are going down like ninepins. Half a dozen of them, including the Stockport Times, the Trafford Advertiser and the Salford Advertiser, were closed earlier this year to be replaced by the Manchester Weekly News freesheet, distributed across the Greater Manchester area to 265,000 homes – out of a population of almost 3 million.

Managing Director Paul O'Halloran explained that the new paper would only be delivered to a certain class of people ...” The Manchester Weekly News will provide us with circa 400,000 readers with the high ABC1 profile audience our clients want to reach,” he said.

What about those “readers” who are not ABC1 profile? In truth, a lot of these newspapers stopped delivering free copies to economically disadvantaged areas years ago because their staple advertisers – property, cars and conservatory floggers – aren't interested in people who live in social or cheap housing. Which leaves hundreds of thousands of people excluded from local print news; then they wonder why around 40 per cent of people in these areas didn't vote at the General Election.

This is not a new phenomenon; it's been going on for a number of years and the response has been a growing number of what were called ‘hyper-local’ websites, not only giving out local news but also challenging and holding to account local authorities and other powers-that-be. Some have survived, and some, like Stoke's excellent Pits n Pots, have hit the wall, but all along there has been a recognition that, to get around the digital divide and engage the real community, print is the only medium.

Now, local alternative print media are slowly

coming back into circulation. In Birmingham, the news co-operative Slaney Street puts out printed issues. In Bristol, the third edition of Bristol Cable has hit the streets, and in Manchester The Mule is gearing up for a re-launch. Meanwhile, the nine-year-old Salford Star has finally come out again in print, with 20,000 free copies hitting the city, after seven years of being online only.

Back in February, there was a gathering in Manchester of UK independent media groups with hundreds of people and around a dozen alternative print press creators attending. It was



organised by a group called Real Media, itself set up by Real Fare, a project that aims to challenge myths about the welfare system. The gathering examined the agenda of the mainstream media, looking at the lack of coverage for issues like inequality, corporate power, fracking and privatisation.

Jamie Kelsey-Fry, contributing editor to New Internationalist magazine, which also took part

in the event, said: “The time is ripe for a new platform of credible alternative media outlets that can show the corporate-owned mainstream for what it is – the servant to a system that is unjust, undemocratic, unsustainable and broken.”

From that Real Media event came an anti-Daily Mail week which distributed 20,000 spoof copies of the Daily Wail around Manchester and London. The front-page headline was the NEWS YOU DON'T SEE; inside were articles on mass rent rises and displacement of social housing tenants, the privatisation of the NHS, how the sick and disabled are being bullied off benefits by huge private corporations, and everything you need to know about TTIP.

There was also a moving true tale of how someone's working class dad, who worked in Lancashire's textile industry, had his mind completely enslaved and racially poisoned by the Daily Mail. The print issue has been followed up by the Real Media website (<http://realmedia.press/>) which aims to be an alternative news aggregator.

But it is offline where the battle for the media is taking place. With local papers shutting down all over the place there is a real gap to be filled by genuine community magazines and newspapers – in the same way that the community is now expected to fill the gaps left by huge cuts to public services.

The question is whether there are enough resources to sustain an ethical media. Bristol's Cable Street has a £1 a month membership revenue model, there's individual investigative journalists trying to get crowd funding to sustain themselves, while Salford Star is following the traditional advertising route, supplemented by donations.

Basically, if the community wants a bit of democracy, residents, small businesses and community groups have to support these ventures. Where there's a need, there's got to be a way.