

FREE PRESS

No 208 Autumn 2016

Journal of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

REFERENDUM

How they got it all so wrong

THE EU referendum campaign turned the British media on their heads. The maligned and biased right-wing popular press got it right while the revered public broadcasters got it completely wrong.

The exposure of its failings came as the BBC was already facing an uncertain future through the process of renewing its royal charter and licence fee agreement. It has led to calls from among supporters of public service broadcasting that it should be made more independent of government and accountable to the public it supposedly serves.

Two new reports – one from a high-powered commission led by film-maker Lord Puttnam, the other from the campaign group Save Our BBC – have urged wide-ranging changes to the way the BBC is governed.

The public broadcasting system was crafted to cater for the whole community. Its production of news is bound by law to be balanced, impartial and fair. To achieve this, the broadcasters stuck to – indeed they helped manufacture – a national consensus. This posited Westminster as the centre of

the political universe, which was passable through the decades of centre left/centre right consensus politics.

With the EU referendum it fell apart, as the majority vote flatly rejected the consensus. Referenda offer themselves to a protest vote and the outcome on June 23 was not so much about Europe as the UK. It was hardly surprising that the broadcasters were so shocked by the result. In applying their notion of “balance” they missed the truth by miles.

For one thing, they reduced the story to that of the civil war inside the Conservative Party. Time and again viewers were faced with pro- and anti-EU

Tories quarrelling. This excluded any more serious consideration of the range of economic and social issues raised in the referendum. It also excluded the reasons for which many people actually voted: the rare chance to register their protest.

The requirement for balance meant that as soon as one side said something, the broadcasters were obliged to find somebody – anybody – to state the opposite; even when the facts were clear, they had to manufacture a difference.

At the same time the broadcasters have struggled to report Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party. Corbyn and his supporters are outside the consensus and the scope of the BBC’s comprehension, so they

have to be reported as if they were terrorists. The assumption that they are wrong justifies the acceptance of all the smears and lies from their opponents, and their presumption to lead the Labour Party means they must be patronised and sneered at as well.

The only difference is that the BBC got the referendum wrong by accident but Jeremy Corbyn on purpose.

“For too long broadcasters have gravitated towards a perceived centre ground,” says Des Freedman, joint leader of the Inquiry into the Future for Public Service Television chaired by Lord Puttnam. “Instead of promoting a multitude of voices and taking risks, they have too often clung to the familiar and acceptable.”

“There remains a necessary role for public service television to act as the counterweight to a commercial system more likely to chase ratings than to cater to its viewers’ needs. The challenge is to devise ways in which television can relate to the diverse requirements of audiences without imposing a false consensus.”



3
UNFAIR TO CORBYN, THE PROOF
BBC ‘mouthpiece for right-wing press’

4
POINTLESSNESS OF TIT-FOR-TAT
Referendum coverage let people down

8
GREAT STORIES, NO REVENUE
Start-up flop shows marketers need vision too

For all campaign news and info go to cpbf.org.uk
Email: freepress@cpbf.org.uk

Continuity for media freedom

THE CPBF'S popular national organiser Barry White has retired, after devoting 19 years, mostly voluntarily, to the cause of media reform and democracy.

Taking over from him is Josef Davies-Coates, a campaigner with a different style but the same aims to reclaim the media from the global corporations and fight for independent media that can respond to the community's real needs.

Barry White became the full-time CPBF organiser in 1997 when he took early retirement from the mega union Unison, where he had been a field campaigns and publicity officer, helping local activists to develop media campaigns to boost their union work.

There was a send-off party for him after the CPBF AGM in London in July, when members and friends paid tribute to his work. He said: "Over the years I have been lucky to be involved with so many marvellous people pushing boulders uphill to get truly independent media and I'm so pleased the work is going on."

As well as in the CPBF, Barry was actively involved in the work of the National Union of Journalists, particularly its international work.

He was the NUJ's delegate to the European Federation of Journalists and worked in Turkey, where numerous journalists are arrested and jailed. Barry White has been an official observer at a number of trials and helped to organise international solidarity.

■ See below



Handover: Barry White and Josef Davies-Coates pictured after the CPBF annual meeting in July.

Josef Davies-Coates (right) is an advocate for co-operative media, and has been a paid organiser for the Media Reform Coalition, to which the CPBF is affiliated. The MRC co-ordinates the work of various media reform groups and Josef was charged with initiating contacts with other civil society groups.

He launched the monthly Reclaim the Media meet-ups in London, at which people from a range of activities gather to swap ideas and experiences in an informal atmosphere.

Last year's meet-ups culminated in a Media Democracy Festival last December, and both monthly meetings and festival will be repeated this year. This time it will be the culmination of a nation-wide series of media reform meetings organised by the CPBF and Real Media, the Manchester-based co-op of journalists dedicated to public interest journalism and challenging mass media distortion.

In each city the format will be an evening meeting on an aspect of media reform, followed next day by media training workshops. *See panel right.*

MEDIA DEMOCRACY

CPBF is organising a string of conferences in nine different cities from October to December. Each will run over two weekday evenings and will include a panel discussion followed by media training workshop the following evening. All begin at 7pm.

MANCHESTER: Future of the BBC. 12-13 October

GLASGOW: Mainstream Media Bias. 26-27 October

BRIGHTON: Media Diversity. 2-3 November

LEEDS: Environmental Issues. 9-10 November

NEWCASTLE: Technological Innovation. 16-17 November

OXFORD: Class in the Mainstream Media. 23-24 November

LEICESTER: Press Barons, 30 November-1 December

BIRMINGHAM: The Future of Investigative Journalism. 7-8 December

Finally there will be a concluding Reclaim the Media event in London on Saturday 10 December. Details to be announced.

■ For more details and venues go to realmedia.press

... then they came for the journalists

BARRY WHITE outlines persecution of media workers in Turkey since the attempted coup in July.

THE BOTCHED coup against Recep Tayyip Erdogan in July gave the President of Turkey a green light for massive purges. Within a week more than 6,000 military and 9,000 police officers, 3,000 judges, 30,000 teachers and 1,500 university deans had been sacked or suspended. All had been supposedly linked to a movement supporting Fethullah Gulen, an exiled Islamic cleric accused of instigating the uprising.

During the coup attempt rebel soldiers took control of the state broadcaster TRT, the private broadcasters CNN-Turk and Kanal D and the daily newspaper Hurriyet. In TRT's Ankara studios, news anchor Tijen Karas was forced to read a statement at gunpoint. Several journalists were attacked and at least one journalist, Mustafa Cambaz of the daily Yeni Safak, was killed.

This was just the start. On 19 July Turkey's media regulatory body revoked the licences of 24 radio and TV channels accused of having links to the Gulen movement, giving the state control of all but a few media outlets. The government

then issued a decree ordering the closure of 131 media organisations, including three news agencies, 16 television channels, 23 radio stations,

45 daily newspapers, 15 magazines and 29 publishing houses.

Three hundred TRT staff were suspended and more than 50 journalists arrested and jailed without due process. Because of the purges of lawyers and judges, many believe that fair trials of them will be impossible.

It was bad enough before. In May an Istanbul court sentenced Can Dündar, editor-in-chief of the big daily paper Cumhuriyet, to five years and 10 months in prison for publishing a story, with photos, about Turkey supplying arms to ISIS terrorists in Syria. The story infuriated President Erdogan and Can Dündar was charged with espionage, aiding a terrorist organisation and disclosing classified documents.

He was bailed pending appeal and fled to Germany. In his farewell editorial he wrote that he would not return since the emergency powers assumed by Erdogan since the coup meant he would not get a fair hearing. "From now on, what we face would not be the court but the government," he said. "To trust such a judiciary would be like putting one's head under the guillotine."

■ To support the solidarity campaign with Turkish journalists go to: bit.ly/1FJ-Turkey.



Barry White has been an observer at numerous trials of journalists in Turkey as a delegate from the European Federation of Journalist, where he was for nine years the delegate from the National Union of Journalists. The trials included that of Can Dündar and Erdem Gül, editors on the daily newspaper Cumhuriyet. As an international observer Barry White was interviewed outside the courthouse in Istanbul during the trial.

Corbyn coverage : 'BBC was a mouthpiece for right wing press'

THE EXTENT of the staggering bias in the reporting of Jeremy Corbyn has been confirmed by research since he became Labour leader a year ago.

Even the best of the national media have been unfair to Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, according to research by the Media Reform Coalition. Researchers analysed reports carried by TV news bulletins and major news websites and found that most of them were loaded.

Researchers examined 465 online news items from eight websites and 40 bulletins on BBC One and ITV.

It is not surprising that predominantly conservative national newspapers would adopt a negative editorial view of Corbyn. But TV news providers are subject to rules on impartiality and balance, and the news websites supposedly lacked the historical hostility to the left.

But the persistent imbalance in favour of sources critical of Jeremy Corbyn was the case across both the online and television sample.

Online news stories overall were almost twice as likely to be critical compared to those that were supportive. The report stated there was "a marked and persistent imbalance in favour of sources critical of Jeremy Corbyn, the issues that they sought to highlight, and the arguments they advanced".

The BBC evening news bulletins gave nearly twice as much unchallenged airtime to sources critical of Corbyn compared to those that supported him. In contrast, it found the ITV evening news bulletins, and the BBC's online news were "relatively balanced" in their reporting.

The most balanced outlets overall were those that did not operate on newspaper platforms: the Independent, International Business Times (IB Times) and Huffington Post.

With the BBC the report says: "What was particularly striking was the degree to which the Labour leadership and its supporters were persistently talked about in terms that emphasised hostility, intransigence and extreme positions."

THE REPORT highlights remarks by the BBC's chief political editor Laura Kuenssberg to show the emphasis on Corbyn's apparent unreasonableness and stubbornness. She said on a news bulletin:

"The danger in all of this is while they're engaged, locked in this complete battle, with him refusing to back down, that so much damage is done to the Labour party that it could take them years to recover from this if they actually recover from this at all."

No question of the MPs backing down apparently.



The report concluded: "This research has uncovered systematic failings in the way that mainstream news organisations covered the emergent Labour leadership crisis.

"It offers further evidence that the internet offers no boon or automatic solution to problems

this respect was the repeated way in which supporters of the Labour leadership were labelled with pejorative terms that suggested extreme positions, with the implication that Labour rebel MPs were, by contrast, moderate in both their political views and actions."

THE BBC responded: "We are confident our coverage of Labour's unprecedented en masse frontbench resignation was impartial". A spokesperson added that the Media Reform Coalition was a "vested interest group" and had acknowledged that the sample did not reflect the breadth of the BBC's news coverage.

Justin Schlosberg, chair of the Media Reform Coalition and author of the report said the charge of vested interest was "completely unsubstantiated ... The coalition was founded by world-renowned professors with the research carried out by academics at Birkbeck and Goldsmiths, University of London.

"Rather than engage constructively with that research, which is what we appealed for in the report, they chose to slander us. This is exactly the problem: the BBC has become a mouthpiece for the right wing press."

Justin Schlosberg: BBC chose to slander us



associated with concentrated media power. Though newspapers are under increasing commercial pressure, their audience reach across platforms is, in most cases, larger than was ever achieved in the pre-digital era.

"What was perhaps of most concern in

Still the same old story

REPORTING OF Jeremy Corbyn has been biased throughout his Labour leadership, with the new MRC report merely confirming one that showed how bad it was at the start.

Three-quarters of newspaper stories in the first two months of his leadership either distorted or failed to represent his actual views on subjects, a study by researchers at the London School of Economics discovered.

They found that in 52 per cent of articles about the Labour leader his own views were not included – while in a further 22 per cent they were "present but taken out of context" or otherwise distorted. In just 15 per cent of the 812 articles analysed, Jeremy Corbyn's views were present but challenged, and in only 11 per cent were they present without alteration.

"Our analysis shows that Corbyn

was thoroughly delegitimised as a political actor from the moment he became a prominent candidate and even more so after he was elected as party leader," said project director Bart Cammaerts.

"Denying such an important political actor a voice or distorting his views and ideas is highly problematic."

The papers in the study were The Sun, The Daily Express, The

Daily Telegraph, The Daily Mail, the Evening Standard, the Independent, the Daily Mirror and the Guardian.

In terms of tone, fewer than 10 per cent of articles were judged by the researchers to be positive, while more than half were antagonistic or critical. Around a third had a neutral tone. 28 per cent of articles analysed were based on anti-Corbyn Labour party sources, while 23 per cent were based on pro-Corbyn sources.

Objectivity overboard!

BRITAIN'S BROADCASTERS abandoned objectivity in their coverage of the EU referendum campaign, according to research at Cardiff University. Instead they resorted to impartiality.

The difference was clear, between the responsible juxtaposition of rational arguments and the thoughtless repetition of tit-for-tat. The public were confronted by a blizzard of facts and figures, with exaggerated claims from both sides.

Some statistics were inevitably more credible than others, but broadcasters were afraid to make a judgement.

Cardiff University carried out a content analysis of evening news bulletins on the five main channels over ten weeks. They found that half of the 571 news items examined related to the process of the referendum itself, rather than the issues at stake. There was also a focus on Conservative party infighting.

What was most lacking was any sense of scrutiny by non-partisan sources. And since 40 per cent of items featured a statistical claim about the EU, the burden of independent scrutiny was left to journalists.

About a quarter of these items were either

LABOUR Leader Jeremy Corbyn was severely downplayed in the coverage of the EU referendum, according to the research. Although leader of the opposition, he featured in TV bulletins a long way behind not just Prime Minister David

Cameron (who was in 7.2 per cent of all politicians' appearances) but also Boris Johnson (the most reported of all on 8.7 per cent), Nigel Farage (third on 4.4 per cent) and George Osborne (4.1 per cent). Jeremy Corbyn's share

of appearances was 2.4 per cent - well behind Conservative sources. This lack of coverage might help to explain the supposed lack of activity in the campaign for which right-wing Labour MPs attacked him so fiercely in the aftermath.

challenged or contextualised by journalists, such as questioning the claim made by Leave that the UK paid £350 million a week to Brussels. In other words, three quarters were not.

It was difficult for audiences to make sense of these claims and counter-claims, regardless of their veracity

A third of items involving statistics were simply tit-for-tat exchanges between rival camps, where journalists did not intervene. "Without a great deal of prior knowledge, it would be very difficult for audiences to make sense of these claims and counter-claims, regardless of their veracity," the report says.

Broadcasters have to abide by "due impartiality" guidelines but this does not necessarily mean they have to be strictly balanced when reporting facts and figures. The editorial goals of accuracy and objectivity should have involved challenging or the claims.

For a BBC independent, accountable and proud

THE BBC'S independence from government must be reinforced, according to an inquiry chaired by Oscar-winning film producer Lord Puttnam. Appointments to the corporation's board should

be entirely independent of government.

The *Future for Public Service Television* report also said the BBC licence fee should be abolished "as soon as is practically possible" and replaced

with a more progressive funding mechanism via council tax or general taxation.

The government's white paper in May proposed that as many as half of the new board of up to 14 people would be government appointments.

The BBC's director general, Tony Hall, has said he wants no more than five non-executive members to be government-appointed. Puttnam report says there should be none.

The report says we need to democratise the BBC and ensure it has a solid foundation for the future. That means more digital engagement, a new and transparent funding regime, a new constitutional settlement in law, and a properly independent appointments system.

"ITV's commitment to public service should be strengthened especially in regional television and current affairs programming".

A new fund for public service content should be established, available to cultural institutions and small organisations that aren't already engaged in commercial media or broadcasting. This would be funded by a tax on the largest internet service providers and commercial digital services.

Pay-TV platforms such as Sky and Virgin Media should pay "retransmission fees" for carrying public service channels such as the BBC and ITV, which are the most popular and bring in big audiences.

Des Freedman, joint leader of the inquiry, said: "Public broadcasters should continue to receive special privileges, such as onscreen prominence and universal funding (in the case of the BBC).

"They will have to earn these privileges, however, raising their game and generating truly innovative and relevant content."

Puttnam's recommendations include ...

- The licence fee should be replaced with a more progressive funding mechanism such as a household fee or supplement to council tax
- decisions on funding should be taken by an independent advisory body, not government
- the royal charter should be abolished and the corporation established as a statutory body
- the BBC board should be entirely independent from government, with its members appointed by an independent body

Other PSB channels

- Channel 4 should not be privatised
- ITV and Channel 5

- should strengthen their commitment to 'public service'
- ITV should restore a higher level of regional news and current affairs.

Diversity

- Public service TV commissioning and editorial policy would be covered by the requirements of the Equality Act
- Public service broadcasters should ring-fence spending on ethnic minority productions.
- Spending in the devolved nations of the UK should be controlled by commissioners in the nations.
- There should be dedicated national BBC news bulletins

in Scotland – the "Scottish Six" – and in Wales and Northern Ireland.

General

- Commercial pay-TV platforms should pay the public service operators to carry their channels, which are the most popular and bring in big audiences.
- The big corporations and service providers should pay a levy for a Fund for Public Service Content to offer grants to cultural institutions and small organisations not engaged in commercial operations.
- Public service channels should be guaranteed prominence on electronic programme guides.

ENGAGE WITH US, CAMPAIGNERS URGE BBC

THE BBC must be made accountable to its owners, a hard-hitting report demanded in September. And we are all its owners, says the report.

Paying the licence fee effectively makes viewers and listeners the shareholders of the BBC; not that you would know from the way it carries on.

While it does have audience panels that it consults about reactions to programmes, it does not have any kind of



democratic structure.

The report suggests a new online Licence Fee Payers Forum should be established to be the conduit with the corporation; all BBC Board Members must have

accountability to it and to licence fee payers in general.

Licence fee payers should be automatic members of audience councils for all the BBC's channels, services, national, regional and local radio stations using online platforms with views and information fed to and from the Licence Fee Payers Forum.

The report comes from an independent inquiry - *The public and the BBC; what role in oversight and governance?*

conducted by the campaign group Save Our BBC.

Strategic director Peter Blackman said: "From the wide-ranging submissions to our Inquiry, we conclude that the licence fee payers expect the BBC to be more accountable to them and engage more with them.

"We call upon the BBC, BBC Trust, the Government and Ofcom to work with us and others to devise the necessary mechanisms."

MPs' go-ahead for plans to weaken the BBC

THE COMMONS culture committee has nodded through the plans to weaken the BBC in the white paper published by the government in May.

Backbench committees' job is to scrutinise government's conduct, but the culture committee's response to the White Paper is to accept all its important points.

It accepts that the BBC's regulation by Ofcom, whose remit is to foster competition and commercial interests rather than public service media.

On the proposals to contract out all BBC output except news, which the CPBF and others maintain will destroy its production base and weaken the foundations of the whole industry, the committee says defiantly that it will "keep a watching brief".

It also says that the plan to use licence fee money to fund local newsgathering by other media is "vague and unclear". This plan will subsidise the big private sector newspaper groups that have cut back on local journalism to bolster their profits – a shocking use of public

money, yet the committee does not oppose it outright.

CPBF national council member, Tom O'Malley said: "The committee has missed the opportunity to nail the fundamental flaws in the government's proposal for the BBC.

"Instead of pressing for better regulation, an end to the idea of contracting out the bulk of production and misusing the licence fee, it gives comfort to those who want to see a diminished BBC operating in an expanded commercial environment."

Public service TV is what the punters pay for

DESPITE THE rapid spread of digital TV, the public still prefer public service TV, according to research by the media regulator Ofcom. In a report published in July, Ofcom says that 71 per cent of all TV viewing is still of public service channels. And 77 per cent of people surveyed described themselves as regular viewers.

Collectively, the study found that "when all the channels broadcast by PSBs are taken into account, they represent 71 per cent of total TV viewing." This represents only a small decrease over the last ten years – down just 6 per cent from 77 per cent in 2005 – despite the fact that all UK viewing has gone digital in the past decade. So all the dozens of non-PSB commercial channels still account for under a third of viewing.

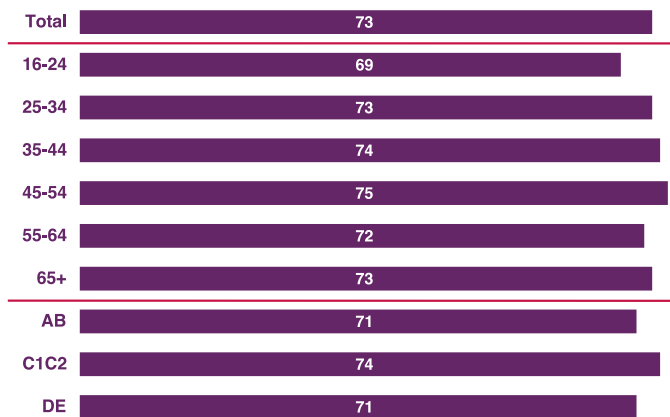
This is especially remarkable since the digital TV switchover and the closure of analogue broadcast signals, with every home having access to dozens of channels – the UK became a truly multi-channel TV market, with every home now having access to all of them.

These viewers are also pretty satisfied with PSB. Just under three-quarters (73 per cent) of viewers claimed to be quite or very satisfied with PSB output, including – surprisingly for some – 69 per cent of 16-24 year-olds. One in eight (12 per cent) said they were more satisfied with PSB output than a year ago, citing "better/more choice/variety of programmes" (41 per cent) followed by better quality of output more generally (16 per cent) and better dramas/films (10 per cent).

On news, 70 per cent or more agreed that the channels delivered trustworthy quality programmes that helped them understand the world. The highest approval was for children's programmes, which 85 per cent said were "high quality".

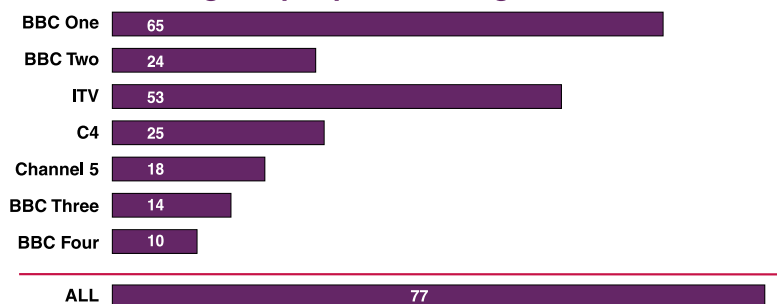
Satisfaction with PSB by age and group

% claiming to be quite / very satisfied



'When all the channels broadcast by PSBs are taken into account, they represent 71 per cent of total TV viewing'

Percentage of people watching PSB channels



The journalists who have not forgotten

THERE are still media workers prepared to take a stand against the Murdoch media over the Hillsborough disaster. Two sports journalists have lately quit their jobs.

Colin Murray was a presenter at the radio station Talksport when it was taken over by News Corporation in July. He immediately resigned, "due to a change of ownership", after the Murdoch company bought the station from the Wireless Group for £220 million.

As a Liverpool supporter, he said he could not be associated with the Sun, whose notorious reporting on the 1989 football tragedy in Sheffield is still remembered on Merseyside: "the inevitable future working relationship between Talksport and The Sun that has made my position unsustainable," he said.

And a football reporter has quit his job on Murdoch's The Times after the paper failed to report the outcome of the Hillsborough inquest on its front page in April. Tony Barrett was widely praised on social media for his response to the Times's decision not to put the "unlawful killing" verdict on page 1. Still on staff, he tweeted that it was "unbelievable", and next day he tweeted an apology to "everyone who's been let down".

The overwhelmingly reaction on social media, with his messages retweeted thousands of times, did prompt The Times to change the page overnight. Editor John Witherow said: "We made a mistake. We put it right".

Other staffers in the sports department tweeted their outrage including Henry Winter, the chief football writer. One said it amounted to "mutiny ... to say there's anger about it is an understatement". Former England footballer Gary Lineker also complained on Twitter.

The Wapping Dispute Exhibition that has been shown in venues around England since 2012 will be on display in Scotland from October 3-28.

The exhibition, supported by the CPBF, was put together by veterans of the historic dispute in which 5,500 print workers sacked by Rupert Murdoch in 1986 fought for a year to win

back their jobs and workers' rights in the industry.

It uses photographs, texts and graphics to tell the story from the workers' point of view, and for the Glasgow showing new material has been added about

the dispute at Kinning Park, the mini-Wapping plant built by Murdoch in the city, which was likewise the scene of picketing and scabbing.

The exhibition will be at Unite's Scottish head office, John Smith House, 145 West Regent Street, G2 4RZ. More info at www.wapping-dispute.org.uk.



THEY JUST DO CONSULTATIONS. THEY WOULD STOP IF THEY COULD

CURTAIN UP on Act III of *The Phantom Regulator*, the farce that looks set to run for ever. It opened nearly three years ago in London and still nothing has happened! It's not even funny.

Jonathan Heawood, former director of English PEN, set up IMPRESS as an independent regulator for the press in compliance with the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry. It looked at good idea at the time, especially since it was obvious to all that the national papers' own pet watchdog, named IPSO, could never comply with Leveson's strict conditions for independence.

To meet these it set about launching consultations on every aspect of its structure and putative performance. At the same time the government instituted a Press Recognition Panel (PRP) to test, endorse, appoint and supervise any regulators who applied, after extensive consultations on the same sort of things.

A consultation, by the way, for those who have never been consulted, is when an entity solicits others to write usually at some length what they think of something, then considers the responses, again at length, and produces a report or paper on the subject.

There were so many consultations going on at one stage that it is fortunate they did not accidentally consult each other. The PRP held a consultation on IMPRESS'S formal application when it came in a year ago; then another when IMPRESS had read the results of the first. In July the PRP announced that on August 23 the board would meet and announce a decision.

It was to be a great moment. The proceedings were not just open to the public but streamed live. Hacked Off!, the media reform lobbying group, whipped its members to attend and gather at a café afterwards to celebrate what was bound to be IMPRESS's ordination.

Hold your horses. The PRP had received a letter from the News Media Association, a front organisation for the national papers, raising fresh questions about IMPRESS's bid. The national papers hate IMPRESS and seek to derail the process at every stage, which is all too easy.

So on August 23 with eager crowds gathered the PRP announced: "In accordance with our commitment to operating as openly and transparently as possible, and ensuring that we have the fullest possible basis to take a robust and independent decision on IMPRESS' application, the PRP has launched a further call for information."

So that's yet another round of consultation, to close on September 23. The PRP says: "Once the call for information ends, IMPRESS will have 15 working days to provide a response to any of the points raised by third parties."

"Once IMPRESS's final application is ready, the PRP will validate and verify it along with any additional information received. This will be followed by a meeting of the PRP Board, who will make the final decision. This meeting will be open to the public. It is not currently

possible to say how long the application process will take." The strictures of the Leveson process require such fastidious practice as to render it practically impossible. For all the absurdity, there is a lot at stake. Once IMPRESS were registered, all publishers not signed up with a registered regulator could be liable to pay enormous amounts of money in court cases if they fail to agree the settlement of complaints.

This is not the great injustice that the papers like to make out, because they'd have to behave very badly to end up in that position. But I does give them an incentive

to wreck IMPRESS, and all they need to do, it seems, is to do is lob in a couple of nuisance questions and the whole recognition process has to start again.

Meanwhile IMPRESS has itself announced a new consultation of its own. It has drafted a standards code, which it will need to regulate properly, and a final consultation has opened. IMPRESS said this follows "an extensive consultative process including public polling, focus groups, expert roundtables and an analysis of over 50 codes from press councils around the world."

In these consultations they will have found that all the codes are much the same. It matters less with codes what they say than how they are followed and enforced. Still, no harm in it if you must.



AWKWARD SQUAD



TIM GOPSILL

BEHOLD: IN THE STANDARD, ALL IS VANITY

LAST YEAR Free Press described London monopoly local daily the Standard as a "mouthpiece for Boris Johnson", which it was. How times have changed.

In September the paper hosted a strange event called Progress 1000, coverage of which filled the first five pages of the paper, plus the whole leader page further back. The front page said: CHARLES, LONDONER OF THE DECADE, with a big picture of Prince Charles.

Prince Charles made a speech at the event; full text on pages 4-5, alongside pictures of Prince Charles with the Standard's beaming proprietor Yevgeny Lebedev, and with Sadiq



Kahn, the mediocrity elected to succeed Johnson as Mayor.

The leader page editorial was headed "London's progressive Mayor and Prince", Sadiq

having been pronounced merely the humble Londoner of the Year. He still looked pretty pleased with himself.

Under a headline "Film stars mingle with business chiefs as Mayor hails innovators" were the photos of rich people holding champagne glasses, including Boris Johnson's sister Rachel. But not a word nor sign of her brother, evidently last year's man.

It does make me wonder. We fume about media owners abusing their power to corrupt governments, procure laws that suit them, dominate the market or just dodge their taxes, but perhaps they have more modest aspirations. All Yevgeny Lebedev seems to want is to smooch with aristocrats and mayors.

NOTE TO THERESA MAY: REMEMBER JOHN MAJOR

LOOKING BACK, it would have been remarkable if the result of the UK's EU referendum had not gone the way the popular press were pushing. This doesn't mean that they determined the outcome as much as that they were in tune with the disgruntled that did.

Rupert Murdoch celebrated Brexit along with the triumph of the showman Donald Trump in the US Republican Party. His voice in the USA, the New York Post's chief political columnist, Michael Goodwin, wrote: "millions of people in the US and Britain are in open revolt against the encrusted establishment, economic as well as political ... It's a thing of beauty to see such undaunted courage on both sides of the Atlantic."

Goodwin praised Boris Johnson's Brexit role, but his boss was thinking ahead. As the battle to become Prime Minister broke out in David Cameron's wake, Murdoch decided to pull the plug on Johnson, who had been presumed to take over with Murdoch's encouragement for years, in favour of Michael Gove.

Five days after the vote, at a London conference Murdoch confided that Gove had "the right qualities to be the next Tory party leader ... I'd be happy for Michael Gove to get it".

Extraordinary things started to happen. The forceful Boris became a dithering idiot. Michael Gove's wife Sarah Vine sent her husband an email



to remind him of Johnson's untrustworthiness – hardly news, and hardly the sort of message that couples exchange, do they? – which somehow found its way into the news.

It was reported that Johnson's leadership team were "beside themselves with fury" when Gove announced he was going to run, and Johnson had to pull out. But was the instigator of Gove's treachery the man himself, his Lady Macbeth-like spouse, or someone with a bit more clout?

Unfortunately, most Tories didn't get it and turned against Gove, so he has taken refuge

as a columnist on The Times, where he came from, to await the next opportunity.

Which might just come, who knows? Theresa May might contemplate the career of John Major, the compromise Tory PM of the 1990s and the only one in more than 30 years to stand up to Rupert Murdoch, who once memorably said, "I pick my Cabinet, not Mr Murdoch".

The errant minister he was defending, David Mellor, under fierce attack in the tabloid press, resigned within days. And Major himself suffered terrifying press assaults for years leading to the humiliation of losing to Labour in 1997.

LEAVE IT TO EXPERTS. BUT WHO ARE THEY?

POOR OLD Facebook got its algorithms in a twist over the selection of stories for the "trending" module in its news feed.

Back in May there was a cooked-up scandal over a perceived left-wing bias resulting from the fact that the automated process of prioritising stories was overseen by human beings to make sure everything was fair.

FB's response was that of any sensible employer. It fired the "curators" and left the algorithm to do its job. Within days the fully automated trending module pushed out a stream of fake stories.

One reported that Fox News host Megyn Kelly had been sacked as a "traitor" for supporting Hillary Clinton.

According to another, a TV

comedian had called right-wing US pundit Ann Coulter a "racist cunt", while a third linked to a video of a man masturbating with a McDonald's chicken sandwich.

The sources of these stories were dubious conservative sites in the USA. FB removed them.

Amazingly FB is now the world's largest distributor of news. Did you know that? To operate on this

scale, the company says, it must automate. "Our goal is to enable Trending for as many people as possible, which would be hard to do if we relied solely on summarizing topics by hand," it said in a blog.

The trouble with automated processes of course is the people who program them, who fail to instruct them to exercise discretion and judgement.

Wrong kind of success

MORAY CALLING

MARK WATTS was editor of the pioneering investigative journalism website Exaro, closed down by its owner in the summer. He warns of what can go wrong when a start-up, however brilliant, is dependent on a 'benevolent capitalist'

EXARO SHOWED how a small start-up team can hold power to account, and it pointed the way to make investigative journalism financially sustainable. So why wasn't this success matched on the commercial side?

Launched in 2011, Exaro established itself with some big stories in its first few months.

We obtained a secret recording of Rupert Murdoch admitting how he knew that his journalists had long been paying bribes for information, and our reporting on evidence of child sex abuse by MPs and other VIPs – and subsequent cover-ups – sparked multiple police operations and an overarching inquiry.

I was responsible for overseeing its editorial success. I had much less say on the commercial side, though my colleagues on the board knew less about the evolving media industry than I did.

The founding managing director Jerome Booth proposed early on that Exaro put up a paywall. I pointed out that would have no prospect of working until there was strong awareness of a brand and of what it did. The proposal was plainly premature, and fail it did.

But I was just a journalist. It was assumed that the MD knew what he was doing on commercial matters.

Exaro hired an advertising salesperson as a commercial director. His strategy was to sell stories to trade magazines. This would never bring in significant revenue, and neither did the planned sources of subscriptions, data services and advertising. In practice Exaro's most significant revenue stream was the sale of content to national newspapers and broadcasters. The first major scoop – the Whitehall tax scandal around senior civil servants who were allowed to work "off payroll", through personal-service companies,



FRAN TESCO/KANSARIS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Mark Watts (centre) chairing a London debate on child abuse run by the Exaro team

allowing them to dodge income tax – was done with BBC2's Newsnight.

One national outlet offered a retainer contract for a year that would have meant a significant, steady revenue stream. We could have built on that but the board decided to halve the editorial budget and throw away the prospects offered by the deal.

Frustrated by the lack of commercial progress, we stepped up work on data journalism. The first project was to monitor corporate insolvency data and produce regular stats on bankruptcies. This provided new journalistic insight with wide commercial application.

But the commercial side failed to sell it so the editorial staff had to become part-time salespeople to demonstrate that the service would attract subscribers. Then the board pulled the plug on that, too.

We showed, though, that an investigative website could produce material that had commercial application and could fund journalism. But vision is required not only on the editorial side, but the commercial side, too.

Exaro became an example of "benevolent capitalism". A wealthy owner provided funding to keep the publication going. But if the journalism is upsetting people in positions of power, as Exaro did, then there's always the possibility that the benevolent wealthy owner is going to pull the plug.

NEW MEDIA that take over where legacy media give up can cash in using the internet, and a new one in Scotland is doing just that.

The UK's first independent online-only newspaper, set up in 1995, was the Shetland News in the northern isles, which attracted a worldwide readership among the Shetlanders' diaspora 21 years ago!

One of its founders was a journalist from the rival printed Shetland Times, and now journalists from STV (Scottish Television) have done the same thing in Moray, 300 km to the south.

Since STV closed its community websites in 2013, the people of Moray found themselves without a local news service. So Stuart Crowther – who had been STV's local editor – created InsideMoray.

"As an independent we are free to report on any news which we think our readers should hear about," he says. "We go to great lengths to make sure that both sides of every story are told and to ensure accuracy.

"A quarter of our readers come from outside Moray. Nostalgia for news of home runs deep and the ex-pat community got hooked. Many come from as far away as Australia, New Zealand and Canada."

Three years into the project and with around 100,000 unique visits a month, Stuart has just launched a crowdfunding appeal to take his publishing venture to the next phase.

Join the
campaign
for press
and broadcasting
freedom

Join online
at www.cpbf.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP RATES PER YEAR

- a) Individual membership £15
- b) Unwaged £6
- c) Supporting membership £25
(includes free CPBF publications)
- d) Institutions (eg libraries) £25
(includes 10 copies of FREE Press)

AFFILIATION BY ORGANISATION

- f) Fewer than 500 members £25
- g) 500 to 1,000 £30
- h) 1,000 to 10,000 £50
- i) 10,000 to 50,000 £115
- j) 50,000 to 100,000 £225
- k) Over 100,000 £450

I/We want to join the CPBF and enclose a cheque/PO for £

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Tel _____

Email _____

Organisation (if applicable) _____

Return form to CPBF, 23 Orford Road, London E17 9NL, 07729 846 146, freepress@cpbf.org.uk