

UK GENERAL ELECTION 2017

A Manifesto for Media Reform

GIVE TRUTH A CHANCE

THERE IS public alarm about ‘fake news’ but who can we rely on for the truth?

It wasn’t fringe websites in the USA that first published distortions and lies. Commercial media have been doing it for decades and the public deserve better.

Big Media in the UK are owned by billionaires and big corporations. The press, which loves to claim it is the best in the world, is the least trusted by the public across the whole of Europe.

The BBC, under huge pressure from the government, is acting more and more like a tame state broadcaster; and it fails in its duty to reflect the diversity of the UK’s population.

We have digital giants like Facebook and Google who are mopping up advertising and using their market power to avoid paying tax.

And a government that finds time to meet Rupert Murdoch but can’t stir itself to ensure effective press self-regulation or to help to save our local media.

So what *should* the government be doing?

**CAMPAIGN
FOR PRESS AND
BROADCASTING
FREEDOM**

A START TOWARDS BETTER AND FAIRER REPORTING

WE NEED fairer media that are independent of government and big business and more responsive to people's concerns

... effective and independent ways to challenge and correct inaccurate reporting, especially in the national press

... a more diverse range of communication services geared to the needs of different people and communities

... an independent and publicly accountable BBC

... an end to the scandals which continue to disfigure some of our largest media corporations

This means

- **Controls on media ownership**
- **Independent and effective self-regulation of the press**
- **Well-funded, independent public service media**
- **Protection for citizens' communication rights.**

CONTROLS ON MEDIA OWNERSHIP

THERE MUST BE clear media ownership limits on what level of ownership concentration is acceptable in the various media markets – national, regional, newspapers, broadcasting and so on – and effective remedies for dealing with companies that exceed them.

We need a more rigorous 'public

interest' test to deal with groups that are already, or are likely to be, above the thresholds. These companies should be required to meet certain standards on such matters as investment in newsgathering or original programming, upholding codes of practice, protecting editorial independence and maintaining good corporate governance. The big internet corporations should be subject to standards of algorithm governance, and required to pay a levy to fund non-profit, independent journalism.

We call on Parliament to

- **legislate for a new framework for tackling media concentration as appropriate for the digital age**
- **impose public interest obligations on the biggest groups, and a levy on the biggest online companies to support non-profit journalism**
- **give the regulator Ofcom stronger powers to tackle media concentration and conduct regular reviews of media plurality.**
- **strengthen the public interest test for media mergers, removing the power of ministers to override the decisions of the regulators.**

INDEPENDENT AND EFFECTIVE SELF-REGULATION OF THE PRESS

WE CALL for the implementation of the arrangements for press

self-regulation put forward by the Leveson Inquiry in 2012, with an independent industry regulator that will

- **operate an arbitration service to allow people abused by the press to gain quick and low-cost redress; the government should immediately trigger the new law – Section 40 of the Crime & Courts Act – to penalise publishers who refuse to join such a scheme**
- **offer an effective right of reply to inaccurate reports**
- **establish a ‘conscience clause’ that enables journalists to refuse to work unethically.**

In addition, the government should quickly instigate the second stage of the Leveson Inquiry to complete the investigation into the axis of corruption between the Murdoch press, successive governments and the police that had to be limited because of the criminal trials arising from the phone-hacking scandal.

WELL-FUNDED, INDEPENDENT PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

WE NEED a strong, independent BBC that can perform the central role of public service media across platforms, local neighbourhoods, and communities of interest.

There has long been a crisis of trust in the governance of the BBC, and now that its operations are under Ofcom’s supervision, it is vital that the

regulator ensures that programming reflects and promotes greater cultural diversity, breadth of opinion across the nations and regions, and a willingness to stand up to government pressure.

Ofcom itself must be made more accountable to the public, particularly since its remit now covers the BBC as well as commercial broadcasters. And the BBC’s new board of directors, five of whose 14 members are appointed by government, should be entirely independently selected.

While the licence fee remains the best way to finance BBC services, the level should no longer be set by governments that find it hard to resist using it for political ends, but by an independent body.

Licence fee income must be used only for BBC services: not to pay for the UK’s digital infrastructure, nor to subsidise commercial news producers – and not to cover the cost of TV licences for the over-75s, which must be transferred back to central government.

New sources of finance are required for other forms of public service media – particularly to provide local news – through levies on digital intermediaries, smart TV manufacturers, pay TV revenues and mobile phone operators.

PROTECTION FOR COMMUNICATION RIGHTS

COMMUNICATION rights include free and universal access to information and services (including ‘net neutrality’ – the guarantee of the same standard of internet service for everyone), privacy and freedom of expression. Neither the state nor private interests can be trusted to safeguard them.

Both the media and the public are at risk from state surveillance – especially in the name of anti-terrorism – and there is a growing threat from private companies that gather data both to sell to advertisers and to exploit for their own ends. There is a menacing convergence of interests between the state and internet corporations like Google, running the risk that, in return for regulatory favours, such companies will accede to government demands for more data on their users.

The corporations are global and no one government can regulate them. The UK government must join with the UN, the EU and other international agencies to make them take responsibility for the material on their sites, remove what is unlawful, and protect our communication rights.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom exists to resist the corrosive effect that corporate Big Media are having on Britain’s politics, culture and society. Millions of people are turning to their own media – the various platforms on the internet – as an alternative to the public press and broadcasting that they find remote, irrelevant or even malign.

But we need public media: sources of information vital to the functioning of democracy, and forums for discussion in which all can join.



The CPBF is part of the Media Reform Coalition, a grouping of organisations committed to work for responsible, accountable media for the whole of society.

■ Go to cpbf.org.uk, or contact us for more information or for more copies of this manifesto at freepress@cpbf.org.uk

