

## NOT 4 SALE

# No rational case for selling off C4. It's political

**W**HAT'S behind the Tory government plan to privatise Channel 4? It's only four years since a review by then Culture Secretary Karen Bradley decided not to privatise the channel. It stated, "Channel 4's public service remit and support for the independent production sector across the UK are vitally important – and we have concluded that these are best served by keeping Channel 4 in public hands."

So what's changed? One motive may be payback for C4's perceived hostility to the Prime Minister. In August 2019, Dorothy Byrne, C4's then head of news, described him in a high-profile speech as a 'known liar'.

Three months later, it replaced both him and the Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage with melting ice sculptures when they refused to appear in a climate change debate with the other party leaders.

**Granville Williams**  
on why Channel 4  
is now a target  
for Tory attack

C4 privatisation also fits with the Johnson project to undermine institutions that can call him to account and limit his power.

### Pet project

Look at what's going on with the push to appoint former *Daily Mail* editor, Paul Dacre, a ferocious critic of the BBC, C4 and indeed of Ofcom itself, as Ofcom's new chair (see p6).

The privatisation project also links in to the Tory's wider 'culture war', driven by Johnson's senior advisors, Munira Mirza and Dougie Smith. According to one source 'Dougie has Dowden on a string.'

Privatising C4 has long been a pet project of the media minister John Whittingdale. In

2015, when, as culture secretary, he last proposed it, his media special advisor was Carrie Symonds, now married to the Prime Minister. Whittingdale and the new Mrs Johnson are said to be still in touch.

C4 is a Conservative creation, launched by Home Secretary Willie Whitelaw in 1982, to offer competition to the BBC and ITV with a unique operating model as a publicly-owned but advertising-funded 'publisher-broadcaster'.

For almost 40 years, at no cost to the taxpayer, it has broadcast a wide range of universally available, free-to-air programmes; provided competition to the other public service

broadcasters and a home for new ideas and alternative voices; it has driven the spectacular growth of UK independent production and exports. It does all this with only 900 employees, 300 of whom will move to its new head office in Leeds, while others move to new creative hubs in Bristol and Glasgow.

### No pretence

The consultation document the government has produced makes no pretence that it is conducting this consultation with a completely open mind or looking at a range of options to ensure C4's long-term success: the only option it discusses is privatisation.

### This is urgent, so respond now

The consultation closes on 14 September and we urge *MediaNorth* readers to respond to it. There is a very useful briefing which the Media Reform Coalition has produced to help you do this at [www.mediareform.org.uk/blog/briefing-on-channel-4-privatisation](http://www.mediareform.org.uk/blog/briefing-on-channel-4-privatisation)



Craig Murray supporters protesting outside the High Court in Edinburgh.

By Tim Gopsill

**T**HE blogger Craig Murray is serving an eight-month prison sentence in Scotland. It is a major miscarriage of justice – and its implications for independent journalism could be serious.

The case arose from the trial last year of former SNP leader Alex Salmond, who was acquitted of all charges of sexual assault against nine women. Murray, the former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan who was sacked in 2004 for exposing UK complicity in the use of the country's torture chambers by the US's post-9/11 extraordinary rendition programme, covered the trial on his blog. He carefully did not identify any of the women complainants, yet has been jailed by Scotland's Lord Justice Clerk, Lady Dorrian, at the High Court in Edinburgh, for contempt of court for the nebulous offence of 'jigsaw identification' – publishing minor items of information that, combined with others, might lead to an identity.

#### Vindictive judgement

No evidence was presented to substantiate the charge; the judge deduced it from reading the blog. Murray is the first person in history to be imprisoned for the offence.

In his defence he made the point that, had he wished to, he could have safely published all the names before she made an

The way to two-tier media

## Jail the bloggers. Protect the press

order for anonymity during the trial. He didn't because to do so "would not have been responsible journalism".

In her bizarrely vindictive judgement, Lady Dorrian gave him no credit for this, because he did not say he did so to comply with the IPSO Editors' Code of Practice. Clause 11 of the editors' code says: "The press must not identify or publish material likely to lead to the identification of a victim of sexual assault unless there is adequate justification and they are legally free to do so."

The judge went on: "The applicant describes himself as a 'journalist in new media'. Whatever that may involve, it is relevant to distinguish his position from that of the mainstream press, which is regulated, and subject to codes of practice and ethics in a way in which those

writing as the applicant does are not." In effect, independent journalists like Murray must be judged more harshly, with more leeway allowed for those in the corporate media – as if they didn't have enough already.

Leave aside her ignorance and prejudice towards the online world; Lady Dorrian was making a groundbreaking declaration, that in her court the doctrine of equality before the law need not apply.

#### Establishment prejudice

Murray had no obligation to follow the Code since his blog could not be affiliated to IPSO (though he did comply with its intent). But the 'mainstream press' is not really 'regulated' by IPSO; it explicitly enables media companies to escape the regulation recommended by the Leveson report in 2013. It is notoriously weak in the face of the abuse of its code by the press, which funds and completely controls it. Her judgement, if it has any logic at all, must have been based on partial identifications in other media to fit with Murray's. Scottish coverage of the trial produced lots of jigsaw

pieces, yet no-one else has been arraigned

One person has been jailed: a supporter of Salmond was convicted for twice tweeting the names of some of the women involved. Lady Dorrian duly sent him down for six months. She said: "This was a blatant and deliberate breach of the order." Murray went to lengths to avoid identification, yet she gave him a longer sentence.

This new legal doctrine, that journalists in commercial media should enjoy greater legal protection than independent journalists, is also developing in a different context: the government's plans to counter 'online harms', under which the commercial press will have total immunity from the regulations applied by Ofcom to all other news websites. The way this has come about has been chronicled in detail by *MediaNorth* writer Julian Petley.

These plans arise from the same establishment prejudice towards the internet as Lady Dorrian's. The whole 'fake news' scare has been driven by the right-wing press against its more enterprising and cheaper online rivals – as if there was nothing 'fake' in the mainstream press.

If Craig Murray hadn't been nobbled by a vindictive judge he and his like would in future still be subjected to a harsher regulatory regime than their rich and protected Big Media competitors.

**Lady Dorrian was making a declaration, that the doctrine of equality before the law need not apply**



**Julian Petley** identifies the dangers in Home Office security proposals

# A grave threat to journalism

**I**N May the Home Office launched a consultation portentously titled *Legislation to Counter State Threats (Hostile State Activity)*. Although its proposals are presented simply as ‘common sense’ measures aimed at updating provisions to protect national security, the ways in which it proposes reform of the Official Secrets Act 1989 pose a grave threat to journalists.

However, what is particularly striking is that the words ‘journalist’ and ‘journalism’ appear nowhere in the main body of the document, and ‘press’ only twice. Instead it has recourse nine times to the notion of ‘onward disclosure(s)’ from someone who makes an ‘unauthorised disclosure’ (38 occurrences).

One can only assume that the purpose of the employment of such euphemisms is to attempt to disguise the fact that the proposed measures represent a fundamental attack on press freedom. And the fact that journalistic activity is discussed in a document that is so thoroughly infused with phrases such as ‘the hostile activities of foreign states’, ‘state threat’ and ‘Hostile State Activity’ carries the clearest possible implication that journalists of whose activities the government or the security services disapprove are set to be treated in exactly the same way as spies.

Thus one of the document’s most disturbing proposals would see the abandonment of the

existing distinctions between spying and leaking, and also between leakers/whistleblowers (those who, in the language of the Act, make ‘primary disclosures’) and journalists who make ‘onward disclosures’ as a result of the information thus received. The document argues that as ‘both primary and onward disclosures have the potential to cause equal amounts of harm’, those who make such disclosures should be treated equally harshly – which means that a journalist breaking the reformed Act could be faced with a maximum of fourteen years in gaol as opposed to the current two.

## Wrong in principle

But there’s worse. The current law requires that in any case brought under the Act, the prosecution must prove that those subject to its secrecy requirements – mainly former or existing Crown servants and government contractors – caused damage, or the likelihood of damage, to national security as a result of their disclosures. The Home Office argues that:

“This requirement is wrong in principle and creates real practical issues, acting as a barrier to potential prosecutions. In practice, proving damage in an open judicial system would likely require the disclosure of additional confidential information, which in turn could cause further material damage, meaning there is often a reluctance to pursue prosecutions”.

Furthermore, it is also canvassing support for the idea that no proof of damage should be required in prosecutions of those making ‘onward disclosures’, who, of course, are most likely to be journalists.

However if the prosecution is not to be required to produce actual proof of the damage which it is alleged has been committed by a disclosure, a judge and jury (if indeed there is a jury) will simply have to take the prosecution’s word for it. And as anyone familiar with past prosecutions, or attempted prosecutions, knows full well, those accused of damaging national security have usually done nothing other than embarrass the government of the day or the security services by revealing overbearing or indeed illegal behaviour, gross incompetence or dereliction of duty.

Take for example, the infamous ABC show trial or the persecution of David Shayler. Such revelations, far from being ‘damaging’ (apart from to those whose misdeeds have been revealed), actually perform an extremely valuable public service and are fully in line with the media’s duty as the Fourth Estate.

Exactly the same considerations apply to the argument that proving damage in open court might require the disclosure of additional confidential information, which could cause further damage.

Clearly the Home Office has the Katharine Gun case in mind here, in which the action

against her was dropped to stop evidence being revealed in court which would have been desperately embarrassing to the government.

The operative word here is ‘embarrassing’ not ‘damaging’, but one very strongly suspects that the current government believes that anything which embarrasses it automatically damages the nation. The highly revealing move here, of course, is to equate the interests of the government of the day with those of the nation as a whole.

## Scare quotes

Entirely unsurprisingly, the Home Office rejects out of hand any suggestion of introducing a public interest defence into the Act, arguing that:

A person seeking to make an unauthorised disclosure, whether in Government or otherwise in possession of official material, will rarely (if ever) be able to accurately judge whether the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the risks against disclosure.

And as if this supreme arrogance were not enough, it twice puts the words ‘public interest’ in scare quotes. No doubt we can expect exactly the same to happen to ‘human rights’ when the Home Office gets around to weakening, or indeed even abolishing, the Human Rights Act 1998.



# Turning the tide: A Labour media strategy

In the final years of the Thatcher and Major governments, political journalist **Nicholas Jones** charted the rise of the Labour Party's publicity machine and the winning formulas of the Blair years. He says opportunities for engaging the news media are once again ready and waiting to be exploited by Keir Starmer and his shadow cabinet

**W**ITH the party conference season likely to kick off a challenging autumn and winter for Boris Johnson, the Labour Party is in desperate need of some sustainable media strategies to try to keep the government on the back foot.

A five-paragraph news story in one of the few Labour-supporting national newspapers might seem an insignificant start but it was an illustration of what could become part of a wide-ranging campaign to exploit a myriad of failings and missed opportunities in the Brexit small print.

The aim would be not to reheat past divisions over the EU Referendum but to show how an incoming Labour administration would work to repair the UK's fractious relations with Brussels.

Across the country – and especially in leave-voting areas – there is a litany of post-Brexit woes whether in the fishing industry or food processing, disrupted trade with Northern Ireland, or insurmountable hurdles facing small exporters and the angst among professionals whose job opportunities have been limited by restrictions on freedom of movement.

Problem solving on the scale that is required is beyond the capabilities of a Conservative government trapped by the Brexiteers' red lines.

Ben Glaze's exclusive report in the *Daily Mirror* – 'Labour vows to fix Brexit music fiasco' (21.7.2021) – highlighted a pledge by the shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves that an incoming Labour government would im-

mediately negotiate procedures with Brussels to make it easier for British musicians to perform in Europe.

Within a couple of weeks, stung by the criticism from across music and the arts, the Culture Department claimed that 19 EU countries had now agreed that UK performers would not need visas or work permits for short-term tours.

But once the music industry and artists' unions had studied the statement, they concluded nothing had changed: the government had not defined the length of 'short-term touring'; differing rules applied in each of the 19 countries; and Spain, Portugal and Greece were not included.

## Sleight of hand

Elton John, who had written in *The Guardian* (8.2.2021) about his anger at the way Brexit rules were thwarting the next generation of British stars, complained that the government statement was nothing more than 'a rehash' of what everyone knew; the visa issues had not been resolved.

Touring artists still face entry requirements and financial and logistical hurdles which they insist present insurmountable barriers to British acts performing within the EU.

**Only rarely do these unresolved complications get a hearing in the Brexit press**



Yet again there had been some sleight of hand: ministers brushed away post-Brexit complications with their usual smokescreen that 'discussions are continuing' – a signal to Conservative-supporting newspapers that the story about the musicians' plight was not worth reporting and could be ignored, which it was.

Only rarely do these unresolved complications get a hearing in the Brexit press and when they do it tends to be Brussels-baiting over restraints on UK trade with Northern Ireland or sabre rattling over potential fishing wars in the English Channel.

In his rush to complete the negotiations with the EU and 'Get Brexit Done', Johnson rejected numerous potential deals that were on offer from the EU, and which could have produced

compromise agreements.

By backing the musicians' campaign – just one of countless pleas for help from professional groups and small businesses being held back by Brexit red tape – Rachel Reeves signalled what could be the start of a co-ordinated strategy to prepare the ground for a wide range of negotiated settlements.

## Media strategy

Here is the basis of an opportunity for Labour to work with – and publicise – the plight of a host of aggrieved workers and employers and assist them in devising the kind of deals that an incoming Starmer-led government could deliver.

With the easing of the lockdown and the much hoped for return in the coming months of international trade and transport, Brexit red tape will loom



Labour needs to find its own progressive patriotism *Nesrine Malik, page 3*

Africa must have fair access to Covid vaccines *Paul Kagame, page 4*

Christopher Plummer, versatile stage and screen actor *Obituaries, page 6*

The Guardian Monday 8 February 2021

**Journal**

Opinion and ideas



**Brexit rules are thwarting the next generation of British stars**

**Elton John**

In 1971, I went to Greenwich, I was the keyboard player in Bluebirds, and we had a residency at the Top Ten Club, where the Beatles had recently cut their teeth. It was a real honour of this. We played up the Superstar, then from a night in among the Beatles and we played, to audiences who hadn't come to see us. But it was still great: we played records we didn't have any choice but to improve as a band. Certainly, it was better than my solo debut on the continent a few years later, when some high school band in the region asked to see Sergio Mendez in Paris. One audience member was so impressed at having his evening of his own interrupted by the arrival of Elton John that he threw his bottle of wine. Clearly, the only way was up. I kept touring Europe and gradually built up an incredibly loyal audience.

This was all a long time ago. If I was the keyboard player in a young band, on a solo artist just starting out now, it's unlikely I'd get the chance to go to Hamburg, or indeed have bookings there at all in Paris. As a result of Brexit, British artists who want to play in Europe will now need visas, work permits and equipment permits for each country they visit. It's an administrative nightmare that really does mean the cost of staging a European tour.

Of course, none of this affects me. I'm lucky enough to play big venues and have a huge organisation supporting me. My team can absorb these costs, and I have people working for me who can sort out the admin. But in a way it does affect me, because I don't want to live in a world where the only artists who can afford to tour properly are those who have been going for decades and have already sold millions of records.

I've always been passionate about new music. During that time, I spent all my spare time in record shops, and 10 years later I still spend hours each week going through new release shelves, buying new albums and listening to songs on streaming services. As a successful artist, one of my reasons for existing is to promote younger artists and to be on their side. It's to be an incredibly privileged position, and it seems only fair to use this to help people who are starting out. It's not at all of charity: one Tuesday thing about music, in the evening and the one excitement that a new artist brings to me when we see their live. It's hugely inspiring, and it's something you only normally get from a teenage artist.

It's absolutely vital for new artists to tour Europe. Getting your music across borders from a different culture to your own, who don't necessarily speak the same language as

Elton John performing in Paris, June 2019

Elton John is an entertainer, a musician and a singer

## Luvvies' labours lost as European tours are shelved

THE National Theatre has shelved plans to tour mainland Europe due to Brexit. Actors and musicians must now apply for visas and work permits to perform on the Continent following the UK's departure from the European Union. Potential additional costs for documents and a lack of clarity around social security contributions as a result of the Brexit deal 'means regrettably it is currently not financially viable', the National Theatre said.

**Failure over Brexit visas for artists showed Government incompetence**

## Stars call on No.10 to fix EU tour rules

CHART-TOPPING music acts have joined forces to urge the government to make it easier for UK musicians to tour the EU. Radiohead's Thom Yorke, Bob Geldof and Elton John (pictured) are among those who say post-Brexit rules have created 'insurmountable financial and logistical barriers' for British acts.

by TOM HORTON

Their #LetTheMusicMove campaign calls on No.10 to take urgent action to ensure an end to 'Brexit-related cost, paperwork and bureaucracy' currently governing EU touring.

A government spokeswoman said: 'We want performers to be able to tour easily abroad but recognise the difficulties still facing the sector. That is why we are working closely with individual member states to encourage them to adopt a more flexible approach, in line with UK rules which allow creative professionals to tour easily here.'

But rocker David Bowie said restricting visa free travel means acts must negotiate a 'different regime in every country, a different visa to buy a different set of rules to follow, to tour the bloc.'

Culture secretary Oliver Dowden last month said artists could tour 17 of the 27 EU states without needing visas. His comments came after 200,000 people signed a petition urging No.10 and Brussels to secure a cultural work permit.

Elton John is an entertainer, a musician and a singer

**Brexit may never be finished, says EU's ambassador**

BREXIT is a 'living animal' which may never be complete, the EU's ambassador to Britain has said. Joao Vale de Almeida called it 'done in a way, but not done in another way. It requires permanent attention, permanent investment... trust, trust and trust - but there's no trust right now'. Five years after the vote, he added: 'The worst way to respect Brexit is to keep fighting battles of the past.'

large and with it the difficulties of restoring business, entertainment, and educational links with Europe.

In the long lead-up to the 1997 general election, Blair's strategists pulled together a rainbow alliance of pressure groups and special interest campaigns from across the political spectrum to tackle issues ranging from human rights to animal welfare.

Blair's spin doctors were pushing at an open door: frustrations that had built up during the Thatcher decade and Major years became the basis of a co-ordinated and durable media strategy to highlight causes which a Blair government would try to put right.

A similar systematic approach to explain how Starmer and his colleagues would strive to negotiate the kind of deals that Conservative Brexiteers

could not countenance would be welcomed with open arms by the Remain wing of the party while at the same time explaining to Leave supporters that the UK's departure from the EU had left a lot of unfinished business that only a new government could sort out.

### Shining example

A Labour Party pitch to solve outstanding problems would present an appealing cross-party platform and help push hard-line Tory Brexiteers even further into an unwelcome and

**Starmer's media team has a ready-made basis on which to start work**

potentially hostile cul-de-sac.

Perhaps the greatest oversight of the news media during the EU Referendum campaign was their abject failure to present a comprehensive picture of the impact which Brexit would have on British industry, business, and employment.

Yet again the dominant Brexit-supporting press is failing to monitor and chart the loss of jobs and opportunities that have occurred since 2016.

Yes, there are occasional news stories, but where is there a chapter and verse account of the extent to which employment has been lost as so many firms have found they have no alternative but to establish EU-based subsidiaries to avoid Brexit red tape.

A shining example of diligence so lacking in the mainstream media has been *Yorkshire Bylines* which has done

sterling work with its Digby Jones Index in monitoring the exodus.

Jones predicted that leaving the EU 'would not result in a single job leaving the UK' - a hollow promise which is exposed by a list of 260 reports of individual cases where British employment has been exported to Europe.

Starmer's media team has a ready-made basis on which to start work: an accurate list of the jobs that have been lost which sits alongside the David Davis Downside Dossier, another compelling account by *Yorkshire Bylines* of his false assertion that there would be 'no downside to Brexit at all, and considerable upsides'.

*Nicholas Jones' books include Soundbites and Spin Doctors (1995), Campaign '97 (1997), and Sultans of Spin (1999).*

# Boris Johnson still wants Paul Dacre in the chair

## Ofcom: Good news

**I**f you don't get the result you want, change the rules. That's what the Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden did back in May over the crucial decision of who should be the new chair of the broadcasting regulator Ofcom.

Dowden alleged there had been lobbying by the Big Tech groups like Facebook. "Any suggestion of a lobbying campaign for or against any individual is simply false," Facebook said.

The recruitment process has started again, after the prime minister's favoured candidate, the former *Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre, had his application rejected by an interview board. A new selection panel will presumably come up with the right decision.

The person responsible for the day-to-day running of Ofcom is Melanie Dawes. The 'inside story' on her appointment is that the then chair of Ofcom, Lord Burns, agreed to depart early on condition that the Ofcom Board's agreed choice of CEO was honoured – so the Ofcom Board got the CEO they wanted.

### Ofcom judgements on complaints

Some of the decisions on complaints to Ofcom about Broadcasting Code breaches are worth highlighting.

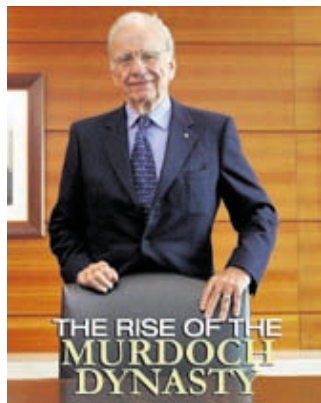
*The Lobby* was a four-part documentary programme, broadcast by Al Jazeera English from 11 to 14 January 2017, that used an undercover reporter and secret filming. It explored the degree to which the Israeli Government (primarily through the alleged actions of the Israeli Embassy and its then Senior Political Officer, Shai Masot) attempted to influence British politics (in particular, the Labour Party).

Complaints about the pro-



**Boris Johnson is determined to get his man as Ofcom chair.**

Arno Mikkor Wikimedia.org



**Murdoch didn't like the BBC's response.**

gramme included ones that it was anti-semitic and not impartial and therefore in breach of Rules 2.3 (the inclusion of harmful or offensive material) and 5.5 (due impartiality).

Ofcom rejected the complaints. Read the decision here: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0033/106989/issue-338-broadcast-on-demand-bulletin.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0033/106989/issue-338-broadcast-on-demand-bulletin.pdf)

This Ofcom decision is from 2017 but it got little coverage at the time which seemed odd, giv-

en the huge rows raging about the Labour Party and anti-semiticism.

Ofcom incidentally rejected complaints about the John Ware *Panorama* programme *Is Labour Anti-Semitic?*

### LBC presenter wins

In the latest Bulletin Ofcom, after a two-year battle, found in favour of LBC radio presenter James O'Brien against the right-wing think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), which complained of 'unjust or unfair treatment'.

The IEA attacked the Ofcom decision, describing the ruling by 'the incompetent state regulator' as 'bizarre' and 'a boon to smear campaigns and conspiracy theorists'.

James O'Brien claimed the

**In terms of its transparency, Ofcom's operation stands out in comparison to IPSO**



Press Gazette

**Former Mail boss Paul Dacre is deeply hostile to the BBC.**

registered charity is a politically motivated lobbying organisation funded by 'dark money'. He also described the organisation as a 'hard-right lobby group for vested interests of big business, fossil fuels, tobacco, junk food', and urged newspapers to stop quoting from an organisation that is registered as 'an educational charity' because they don't reveal who funds them.

Read the decision here: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/222965/Complaint-by-Institute-of-Economic-Affairs-about-James-O'Brien,-LBC-97.3-FM,-26-February-2019-and-8-March-2019.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/222965/Complaint-by-Institute-of-Economic-Affairs-about-James-O'Brien,-LBC-97.3-FM,-26-February-2019-and-8-March-2019.pdf)

### Channel 4 News

On 14 December 2020 Channel 4 News carried a report by Akram Salhab on the experience of British Palestinian people in the UK and how the community was perceived by others. Part of the report featured a discussion about the impact on Palestinians when complaints are made about charitable organisations which advocate on behalf of Palestini-



# of television regulator and bad



Wikipedia

**Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden leads attack on public broadcasting.**

ans. The website of UK Lawyers For Israel was featured and the organisation complained about unjust and unfair treatment in the programme.

This complaint was rejected by Ofcom: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/222109/complaint-uk-lawyers-for-israel-channel-4-news-14-december-2020.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/222109/complaint-uk-lawyers-for-israel-channel-4-news-14-december-2020.pdf)

## **An effective regulator?**

Ofcom has a clear Broadcasting Code which broadcasters have to adhere to in making programmes. In terms of news and current affairs this is particularly important in the era of fake news and the polarised reporting in the print media and new entrants like GBNews.

In terms of its transparency and operation it stands out in contrast with the regulator IPSO which was set up, and paid for, by the newspaper owners.

The political controversy around the appointment of a new chair raises important questions about what the real intentions of the Culture Secretary and Boris Johnston are for



Ofcom

**Ofcom CEO Melanie Dawes is highly regarded.**

the regulator in the future.

## **Another one for Ofcom**

In July 2020 BBC2 broadcast a three-part documentary, *The Rise of the Murdoch Dynasty*. Rupert Murdoch didn't like it and News UK complained to the BBC, claiming the programme adopted the view that Murdoch represented a threat to liberal democracy and exercised malign political influence, without giving due regard to the opposing point of view and to the evidence.

One small part of the complaint was upheld by the BBC Complaints Unit (ECU) and the specific sequence in the documentary re-edited to deal with it but the substantial part of the News UK complaint was rejected. The ECU stated, "The programme-makers chose to focus on the political rather than the business acumen of Mr Murdoch, interwoven with an account of his family's involvement in the company."

Murdoch has rejected the BBC's internal investigation and conclusions and has taken the complaint to Ofcom.

# IPSO: Press regulator or complaints handler?

**By Barry White**

**A** NEW report reveals how the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the press regulator which covers most of the UK's largest print and online publishers, was set up as a predetermined industry plan rather than as a response to the Leveson Inquiry which reported in November 2012.

The report, *IPSO: Regulator or Complaints Handler? How UK News Publishers Set Up Their Own Regulator to Avoid Scrutiny*, was written by Dr Gordon Ramsay and Professor Steven Barnett.

In the foreword to the report they state that: 'Both the British public and working journalists deserve regulation that is effective without inhibiting a free press, is genuinely independent, and commands public respect; future public policy interventions must take account of the continuing determination of the industry to avoid proper scrutiny and accountability.'

It examines the background, structure and performance of IPSO which, since 2014, has been presented by large parts of the press industry as the principal regulator of print and online journalism in the UK. It concludes that IPSO is deliberately constrained by the newspaper industry from



acting as an effective, independent regulator.

Published on 21 June, two weeks before the tenth anniversary of the phone hacking revelations that led to the setting up of an independent Inquiry under Lord Justice Leveson, the report details how the newspaper industry:

- bypassed Leveson's recommendations for reform in favour of its own preconceived system;
- reduced IPSO's regulatory powers to little more than a complaints-handling body;
- made it almost impossible for IPSO to gather complete information on code breaches, and to monitor compliance with regulatory standards.

It concludes that, in all three cases, "IPSO's hands have been tied by the industry, and... does not have the tools to fulfil the task of genuinely independent and effective self-regulation."

● Read the full report at: <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/v4zx8/ipso-regulator-or-complaints-handler-how-uk-news-publishers-set-up-their-own-regulator-to-avoid-scrutiny>

# Remembering Emma Croft

*We were devastated to hear the news from her partner Nick that Emma Croft had died suddenly. We deeply miss her creative, positive presence in the work she did for MediaNorth.*  
– Granville and Sue Williams

*Scott Dart, one of Emma's colleagues in The Working Group, captures her rare and distinctive qualities*

**F**IRST met Emma during the 2019 General Election. We were both on-line volunteers, failing abysmally to bring about a Labour-led government. It was obvious she had a pretty astounding skill set, combined with a compassionate, cheerful and fun nature. She applied her skills in countless ways professionally, in her time with local radio and local authority work, or as a volunteer on behalf of the Labour Party, Momentum and others. After the election she co-founded The Working Group (TWG) and through the relationship between TWG and *MediaNorth* ended up designing a new website for *MediaNorth* and helping with their social media presence. She never stopped.

To Emma socialism wasn't a theory, it was simply how she lived her life. Emma was deeply political but disliked the inevitable generalisation it brought about, not least with regards to our own 'red wall' constituencies. She listened to people in all their diversity. She listened more than she talked which is why she was worth listening to. Emma was a free thinker and more importantly a critical thinker. She didn't complain much but when she did it was usually related to a lack of critical thinking.

Her insistence on listening



**Emma will be missed by countless people who she helped, inspired, worked, laughed, and danced with.**

to views diametrically opposed to her own did make her angry at times. When that happened I'd get a ding in my inbox containing the standard Emma-ism of 'I'm a bit cross'. This usually meant she'd encountered something that would have made me absolutely steaming. I knew she'd come across some really, really distasteful opinion if I received my favourite Emma-ism – 'Blimey!'. I miss 'I'm a bit cross' and 'Blimey' a lot.

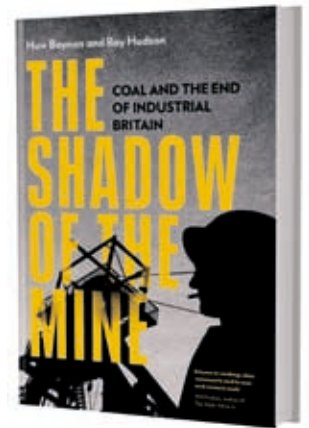
## Unbelievable output

To Emma socialism was a verb not a noun; she did it, constantly. Discussions were fine but there had to be an end product, a goal. She was always doing and she always brought others along in the firm belief that the more different voices were involved the better the work would be. Her output was simply unbelievable.

This was how Emma lived. She built a worldview based

around social justice because she believed people mattered. That world view was always in flux, informed by the voices and lives of real people in real situations. Her life was based on doing things that would help people, and in doing things she encouraged others to do things too.

Emma will be missed by countless people who she worked with, helped, inspired, laughed and danced with, most of all by her loving partner Nick. Emma will be missed by me, she was my friend. Blimey!



## When an industry dies

OUR last Zoom event was based around the new book by Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine*. Both Huw and Ray spoke, along with Jean Spence and former BBC Industrial Correspondent, Nicholas Jones. Watch the event at <https://youtu.be/8CAWd0xDy0Y>

## Local news titles thrive

THERE are now at least 400 independent and hyperlocal news titles in the UK. These are titles which are not owned by the major regional newspaper publishers like Reach, Newsquest and JPIMedia.

*Press Gazette* has a report on where the titles are based and also identifies the secrets for their success:

<https://pressgazette.co.uk/uk-independent-community-news-sector>

## MediaNorth

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