

# Media North

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## An assault on reality

By Granville Williams

ON 10 September 2020 Donald Trump flew into Freeland, Michigan on Air Force One, spoke to the crowd of supporters and declared, “We brought you a lot of car plants, Michigan! We brought you a lot of car plants. You know that, right?” Back came ear-splitting roars of affirmation from his audience.

Since Trump has been President no new car plants had been built in Michigan. In fact, as the *Detroit Free Press* pointed out, three thousand Michiganders had lost jobs in the vital auto sector.

Fast forward to late November and still the lies flow forth. Some commentators are suggesting that Trump and Fox News are at war, and the news channel which had for years promoted Trump’s bizarre claims and conspiratorial rants, is now challenging him.

It’s just not the case. Fox hasn’t turned on Trump. Media

### We need to combat the lies and fabrications of our leaders

Matters for America, a watchdog group, calculated that between November 7 – the day that outlets including Fox called the election for Biden – and November 16, Fox personalities and guests cast doubt on, or pushed conspiracies about, Biden’s win hundreds of times.

On Thursday 19 November the network aired the Giuliani-Powell conspiracy marathon (one hour, 45 minutes) in its entirety.

Among other things, the lawyers alleged that Trump’s defeat had been engineered by ‘communist money’ and rigged voting machines in a scheme hatched by the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. Among the other alleged culprits: George Soros, the Clinton Foundation, and ‘communistic’ countries like China and Cuba.

Trump and his cohorts know that even the most bizarre lies will find an extensive audience in the far-right media ecosystem. Fox News is enmeshed in this system but now faces intense competition from One America News Network and Newsmax, which have been eager to push Trump’s favourite conspiracy theories about the election. They are making a concerted play for an audience that is accustomed to a steady diet of outrage and grievance. Their drive for ratings fuels the willingness to embrace Trump’s lies.

In the UK we have another accomplished liar in Boris Johnson. Peter Osborne, chief political columnist of the *Daily Telegraph* until he resigned in 2015, has this to say about the prime minister: ‘I have reported on British politics for almost

three decades, and have never encountered a senior British politician who lies, cheats and fabricates as habitually or systematically – or with as much inventive relish – as British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Or gets away with deceit with such ease.’

The government’s handling of the COVID 19 pandemic has been appalling. The National Audit Office reveals that it spent £12.5bn in purchasing PPE equipment at inflated prices. Of 32bn items ordered only 2.5bn had been distributed by July.

Johnson dismisses as ‘trivia’ allegations of bullying in government and wasting taxpayers’ money whilst enriching cronies with PPE contracts. For him there is no distinction at all between fact and fiction or truth and falsehood.

The need for trusted, independent media to hold lying politicians to account has never been more urgent.

**IDIOTIC BLUNDERS AND CATASTROPHIC CONFUSION – PAGES 4-6**

## EDITORIAL

# More noise needed

**T**wo public inquiries are giving us disturbing insights and information. The Grenfell Tower inquiry is now in its second phase in which evidence is being gathered to apportion blame for those responsible for the terrible disaster.

On 16 November Jonathan Roper, a former assistant product manager at Celotex, a subsidiary of the French construction materials company Saint-Gobain, admitted that the company behaved in a 'completely unethical' way.

Executives who sold combustible insulation for use on Grenfell Tower perpetrated a 'fraud on the market' by rigging a fire test and making 'misleading' claims about it, he revealed.

Roper worked on two fire tests of the

foam panels and subsequent sales plans as the company tried to grab a slice of a £10m-a-year insulation foam market.

In the Grenfell fire on 14 June 2017, the foam, known as RS5000, fuelled the flames and released toxic gases and smoke. The foam was withdrawn from the market nine days later.

The second is the Undercover Policing Inquiry which has the aim of 'getting to the truth of undercover policing and providing recommendations for the future'. There are over 230 core participants in the UCPI including individuals who have been duped into relationships with undercover officers, families of victims of murders, politicians and trade unionists.

There have been some startling revelations about the scale of undercover

policing by the 139 officers in the undercover unit. They passed details of trade union activists to a blacklisting organisation used by companies to stop them getting work. Activist and author Tariq Ali was spied on by at least 14 officers. Police spied on the Stephen Lawrence justice campaign, compounded by the Metropolitan police's failure over the past six years to release documents about what happened.

What is striking is that reporting of both inquiries in the mainstream media has been minimal. The insights they give us into the seamier side of our society deserve much wider publicity.

**Granville Williams**  
Editor

# Unions fight to defend media

## Governments urged to step in to save print and media jobs

By **Tony Burke**

TWO international unions recently launched a campaign to save print journalism and to defend jobs in the news and media industries.

The International Federation of Journalists and Union Network International (which represents print, packaging and publishing unions worldwide) announced a campaign to win government support for the printed media through emergency rescue packages covering journalism, publishing, printing and distribution, as well as introducing a digital services tax on tech giants such as Amazon, Google, and Facebook who have soaked up much needed advertising revenue from traditional media outlets and dedicated news websites.

The Covid-19 crisis has accelerated the drastic changes the printed media was already facing and with it a massive reduction of needed advertising streams. Revenue for 2020 is already down 20% and much of this money was taken away from content providers and siphoned off by the big tech companies.

In 2018, Google earned \$4.7 billion income from news with none of the massive profits shared with the journalists, editors and content providers who produced it.

"The current global health crisis is significantly increasing the great difficulties facing the print media sector," Anthony Bellanger, IFJ General Secretary warns. "Governments need to react urgently. The sector is a public good and a crucial pillar of our democracies."



Print and media unions say they want national governments to step in to protect print and media jobs and to safeguard a print media industry that stands for quality, solidarity, labour rights and fundamental freedoms.

"The health of our democracies rests on holding people in power accountable, and journalists are the ones who, more often than not, shine a spotlight on political and corporate power abuses of the public trust," says Christy Hoffman, General Secretary of UNI Global Union. "Print media plays a huge part in disseminating this information and supporting the online components of journalism."

Unless action is taken, thousands of media outlets including newspapers, magazines,

news websites and other content providers risk being closed down and thousands of jobs risk being lost due to the consolidation in the media sector and loss of advertising income.

Louisa Bull, Unite's National Officer for the print, paper, media, packaging and IT sector, said that Unite are fully supporting the campaign. She said: "In the UK we are facing major job losses. These are decent jobs with a dedicated and skilled workforce. Some members have already taken pay cuts to keep companies going, but free newspapers, regional and specialist titles are in danger of closing and further consolidation is more than likely."

● **Tony Burke** is Unite Assistant General Secretary



# A death turned into voyeurism

IpsO decides in favour of *Mail's* use of video of daughter's death

By Mandy Garner

MY 20-year-old daughter Anisha was killed in a hit and run incident in February this year. The morning after her death, when we were waiting for our other children to wake up so we could tell them the news, the *Daily Mail* published the CCTV footage of the incident with a sensationalist headline – 'EXCLUSIVE: Shocking moment young woman is killed by speeding hit-and-run driver escaping police – as she is flung 20 feet into the air and lands in front of horrified onlookers at London bus stop'.

Three of my brothers saw that footage as it uploaded automatically on mobiles when you accessed the story it was embedded in. One of them complained and the *Mail* took the video down a couple of days later, presumably after they had got all the clicks they wanted.

I took the case to the press complaints body, IPSO, under Clause 4 – intrusion into grief. I thought it was a simple case of clickbait journalism and a clear breach of press standards.

I was extremely worried that my other children might see the footage – there is a lasting power to video that words don't have – and I know that some social media sites specialise in this kind of voyeurism.

I did not anticipate five months of to-ing and fro-ing with the *Mail* trying to justify its actions. IPSO has recently ruled in favour of the *Mail* on the grounds that the video was



"I want to be thinking about my daughter Anisha (above), and remembering her," says Mandy Garner. "I don't want to be doing this"

'sensitively edited' and grainy so no-one would know who it was – my brothers knew who it was – and they gave the police an hour to tell us (even though they didn't and it would have made no difference to them posting it).

So they are free to do this again. Indeed they cited a similar previous case. The point about it being clickbait was not dealt with.

Mid-way through I told IPSO that the process was extremely distressing and they told me that not many people take out cases under Clause 4, and I found only one that had been successful in the last five years.

I can well imagine why – it is not what you want to be doing in the midst of grief. They asked if I wanted to drop the case. Then at the end of the

process, they suggested I could perhaps help train their people in handling such cases. As I told them, that is not going to make any difference in the absence of them actually standing up for press standards. I have since contacted the Hacked Off campaign to press for change.

I want to be thinking about my daughter and remembering her. I don't want to be doing this, but I feel that, as a journalist myself, I have a duty to so that it doesn't happen to others who might not know the system so well – although knowing the system has not helped me.

● A more detailed account appears here - <https://hackinginquiry.org/how-much-did-they-get-out-of-turning-my-daughters-death-into-voyeurism/>

## Mail on Sunday v Marcus Rashford

By Granville Williams

'WHAT a result! Campaigning football star has bought five luxury homes worth £2m' was the *Mail on Sunday* headline for 15 November. Marcus Rashford, the Manchester United footballer who has forced the government to reverse its policy on free school meals twice, was the target of the story.

The story provoked Jonathan Liew to comment on the *MoS's* terrible journalism in the Sports section of *The Guardian* the following Tuesday. He wrote how the article subtly painted a bad picture of Rashford. There was, "The juxtaposition of 'school meals Rashford' with the '£2m homes empire'. The dog-whistle reference to the 'campaigning football star'. The early mention of the player's age (23). The picture of Rashford himself, frowning in a dark hoodie."

Liew argued, "*The Mail on Sunday's* story is simply the latest escalation of the growing Stop Rashford movement, one begun by right-wing pundits and Conservative MPs on Twitter in recent weeks."

Liew's piece hit home. Ted Verity, editor of the *Mail on Sunday*, wrote an unconvincing letter to *The Guardian* defending the *MoS*. 'It's simply an interesting story,' Verity wrote.

One thing is clear. The *MoS* won't be writing about the paper's proprietor, Lord Rothermere, who has a £50m property portfolio owned by companies in the British Virgin Islands to take advantage of Rothermere's non-domiciled tax status.

● You can read Jonathan Liew's *Guardian* article here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2020/nov/16/mail-on-sunday-v-marcus-rashford-a-sinister-attack-on-a-young-black-man>

**Nicholas Jones** surveys the ways in which Boris Johnson has squandered the support he enjoyed from the Tory press

# Idiotic blunders and catastrophic confusion

**P**OLITICAL honey-moons are often short lived, but few Prime Ministers have squandered media loyalty and support as rapidly and as comprehensively as Boris Johnson.

Dominic Cummings' forced departure has paved the way for the launch in the New Year of White House-style televised briefings from Downing Street by Allegra Stratton, who is to become the new face of the government.

Once Johnson's most slavish supporters in the popular press started to question his competence and leadership, exacerbating unease in his parliamentary party, a shake-up in public relations could no longer be avoided.

Tabloid editors, who had loyally backed the Prime Minister in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, realised the scale of their misjudgement and accepted they could no longer fool their readers.

Blame for repeated catastrophic blunders and chaotic confusion over rules on social distancing was placed firmly at the door of the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues – and Johnson's infamous adviser was one of the top targets.

For many Conservative MPs, a second U-turn after Downing Street's pointless renewed opposition to the campaign by footballer Marcus Rashford for extending free school meals marked the end of the road for Cummings

and his closest henchman Lee Cain, Downing Street's director of communications.

**T**HEIR aggressive tactics of whacking public service broadcasters, civil servants, scientists et al had suited the news agenda of Conservative newspapers but the mood of the country had changed once the easing of the summer gave way to an autumn blizzard of grim headlines.

For too long editors had chosen to ignore the extent to which Cummings was becoming a hate figure among vast swathes of the population who had sacrificed so much to follow the guidelines and who would

ultimately hold Johnson accountable.

Several diversionary tactics helped to deflect some of the newspapers' fury and the BBC remained a regular kicking post amid rising anger over a hotchpotch of tiered restrictions and then the renewed gloom of a second lockdown.

'Put the boot into the woke BBC to cheer us all up, Boris' was the cry of the *Sunday Telegraph's* Julie Burchill (18.10.2020).

She rallied her fellow columnists to urge the government to bring about 'a brisk defunding, of the self-righteous BBC' and provide some 'savag

The A level exam fiasco leads to bitter attacks on Johnson and Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson



amusement till this nightmare before Christmas is over'.

**A**LLISON Pearson, who never misses an opportunity to castigate the BBC, called on TV news to stop its 'shroud-waving' news coverage from hospitals and start to acknowledge that 'the reporting of a virus from which 99.6 per cent of people make a full recovery should be kept in proportion' (*Daily Telegraph*, 11.11.2020).

Pearson's rage against the broadcasters, mirroring Donald Trump's assault on the fake news of the mainstream media,





Refusal to fire Dominic Cummings damages Johnson's standing with Tory MPs and his support among Tory voters

only served to highlight the presentational failings of Johnson and his ministers – and the government's desperate need to be more engaging, and believable, when communicating via television and radio.

Allegra Stratton's appointment as Downing Street Press Secretary, which became a catalyst for Cummings' grudging exit, was a recognition that the provocative free-wheeling cam-

paing days of the Brexit Boys were over.

Reluctance to face up to the cumulative damage inflicted by Cummings' regime had eroded Johnson's standing among Conservative MPs; his authority had tanked, as had his personal rating in the opinion polls.

**CUMMINGS'** breach of lockdown regulations by driving his family to Durham – and then visiting Barnard Castle supposedly to test his eye-sight – was the moment Johnson should have acted, but he had convinced himself he could bluster his way through.

From the start, the Tory tabloids were resolute in their support. After the *Daily Mirror's* Saturday morning exclusive – 'Cummings broke lockdown rules' (23.5.2020) – the *Mail on Sunday's* front page splashed on Johnson rejecting calls for his adviser to quit: 'Boris: It's

not like he was visiting a lover' (24.5.2020).

Public anger at a flagrant breach of the rules, coupled with contempt for Johnson's attempt to excuse his chief adviser's behaviour, was challenged briefly by the *Daily Mail* the following Monday: 'What planet are they on?' (25.5.2020). Two mugshots filled the *Daily Mirror's* front page above the headline, 'A cheat and a coward'.

Nonetheless, there was no instant hue and cry in the Tory press, and loyalty to Johnson won the day: 'Defiant Boris stands by his man' (*Daily Express*, 25.5.2020); 'He has acted responsibly, legally and with integrity' (*Daily Telegraph*, 25.5.2020).

Cummings' lame excuses next day, delivered in the Downing Street garden, were greeted with incredulity by the *Daily Mirror*, 'No regrets, no apology' (26.5.2020).

But Johnson had escaped yet again: his tabloid cheerleaders were already switching their

focus to a predicted easing of lockdown and the comfort of a flurry of 'good news' headlines. 'High street to re-open as UK edges back to normality' declared the *Daily Telegraph* (26.5.2020). An 'Open for business' sign filled the *Sun's* front page (26.5.2020).

**T**HROUGH the early summer, the tabloid narrative was dominated by story lines that encouraged a country-wide determination to enjoy the summer holiday and take advantage of falling infection rates.

As the government stumbled from one crisis to another, front pages increasingly sounded the alarm over scandalous shortages of protective equipment and the chaotic roll-out of testing. 'How many more fiascos?' asked the *Daily Mail* (19.6.2020) as the U-turns began to multiply.

Johnson was about to be



# Boris Johnson's blunders and confusion

## ● From Page 5

deserted by Tory titles that had backed him to the hilt on Brexit and aided and abetted his smash-and-grab take-over of Downing Street.

'You Dunces!' declared the *Daily Mail* (13.8.2020) under pictures of Johnson and the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, who were blamed for the mishandling of A-level school exam results.

After yet another inevitable U turn, allowing teachers' recommendations to be followed, the *Mail's* front page mocked up Johnson and Williamson as Laurel and Hardy above the headline, 'Another Fine Mess'. (18.8.2020) the *Sun* marked them both F for 'Farce'.

Contempt for government ineptitude was about to give way to despair amid warnings of a second lockdown.

'Doomed by a government with fear in its eyes' was the grim assessment of the *Sun's* cheerleader-in-chief, Trevor Kavanagh (12.10.2020) whose doom-laden prose was taken a step closer to the edge by Leo McKinstry, 'The time has come to give the country a Covid Coalition' (*Daily Express*,



12.10.2020).

Conservative MPs were in revolt at the prospect of renewed restrictions. If a second lockdown had to be extended even further, the *Mail on Sun-*

## Defending the indefensible, Johnson sticks up for the 'Prittster' and appoints a press secretary

day was ready to think the unthinkable: 'It's curtains for Boris, the Tories – and for Britain' (8.11.2020).

**S**HORED up by a conviction that in the end Conservative-supporting newspapers always rallied to his support, Johnson was ready to take another risk with public opinion by rejecting the finding that the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, had broken the ministerial code by conduct in the Home Office that had 'amounted to behaviour that

can be described as bullying'.

Holed up in Downing Street, and again having to quarantine, the Prime Minister left it to cabinet colleagues to speak in her support.

'Stick up for the Prittster' was the *Sun's* page two response (21.11.2020) echoing Johnson's order to MPs to 'form a square around the Prittster' but with the exception of fellow Brexiteer, Patrick O'Flynn – 'Boris right to stick with Priti and snub chinless wonders' (*Daily Express*, 21.11.2020) – most columnists steered clear of getting drawn into a dispute about bullying behaviour.

Johnson's political career had been built on his expertise in currying favour with the Tory press. Years of favourable treatment have given him a false sense of security. The fragility of that relationship has been tested almost to the limit by the Covid-19 shambles and the collateral damage of the Cummings' regime.

Allegra Stratton must be counting her good fortune that her debut in front of the cameras did not require her to front up an explanation for Ms Patel's Prime Ministerial pardon and a defence of the indefensible.

# US local journalists 'could vanish'

A NEW US Senate report provides a stark look at the state of local journalism. Local newspaper newsroom employees in the US could 'all but vanish in the next few years' if the rate of lay-offs forced by the Covid-19 crisis so far continues, according to a Senate report, *Local Journalism: America's Most Trusted News Threatened*.

Over the past two decades the US local newspaper industry has lost around 70% of its total revenue. Newspapers have been forced to lay off more than 40,000 newsroom employees, 60% of the journalistic workforce, and close newspapers, leading to news deserts.

The report identifies two



Another news desert: Pennsylvania's *Press & Journal* closed on 2 July 2020

primary factors for the destruction of local journalism.

The first is the rise of the Internet and digital information which has fundamentally altered how Americans receive and digest the news, disrupting journalism's business model. Besides the loss of classifieds revenue, the more than 80% decline in advertising revenues since 2000 has been devastating. The mass transfer of content and advertising online, combined with a proliferation of news sites, has siphoned dollars from the local newspapers that produce the content supporting those ads.

The second major challenge is that local news has been hijacked by a few large

news aggregation platforms, most notably Google and Facebook, which have become the dominant players in online advertising. These trillion-dollar companies scrape local news content and data for their own sites and leverage their market dominance to force local news to accept little or no compensation. Today, Google and Facebook alone control 77% of locally-focused digital advertising revenue.

● You can read the report here: [http://www.newsmediaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Local-Journalism-Report-10.26.20\\_430pm\\_Draft.pdf](http://www.newsmediaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Local-Journalism-Report-10.26.20_430pm_Draft.pdf)

## BOOK REVIEW

# In defence of the BBC

Book presents convincing case in support of broadcaster

By Granville Williams

PETER SISSONS worked as a news presenter for ITC, Channel 4 and the BBC. He retired from the BBC in 2009 and published his autobiography *When One Door Closes* in 2011. He was highly critical of his former employer. He argued that the organisation had a left-wing mindset 'in its very DNA' and that the BBC News had a bias towards New Labour, the United Nations, the European Union, environmental groups, Islam, ethnic minorities, and women.

He claimed that, 'I am in no doubt that the majority of BBC staff vote for political parties of the Left.' Sissons also highlighted the BBC's corresponding bias towards the *Independent* and *Guardian* newspapers, stating 'producers refer to them routinely for the line to take on running stories, and for inspiration on which items to cover'.

The author joined a number of other former BBC employees who proceeded to attack the

**The War Against the BBC. How an unprecedented combination of hostile forces is destroying Britain's greatest cultural institution ... And why you should care.**

Patrick Barwise  
Peter York

**THE WAR AGAINST THE BBC**  
by Patrick Barwise and Peter York  
Penguin £10.99

BBC once they had left it, most recently John Humphrys who in his autobiography *A Day Like Today* is damning about BBC management and exasperated by what he views as the corporation's 'institutional liberal bias' and 'groupthink mentality'. These authors had their books serialised in the BBC-bashing *Daily Mail* and, in John Humphrys' case, writes for it.

There is a fascinating and well-argued chapter, 'Bolshevism, Brexit and Bias', in Patrick Barwise and Peter York's *The War Against the BBC* where they dissect the key elements

of the sustained right-wing assault on the BBC. They argue that, unlike left-wing criticisms of the BBC, when it comes to the assault on the BBC from the right, journalists, think-tankers and others attack it 'as part of their day job often because their organisation has a political or commercial vested interest in weakening it'.

*The War on the BBC* is so timely, and it's good that it has been published by Penguin rather than an academic publisher. It's written in a lively accessible style and presents masses of information very clearly.

The authors tackle head on the charge that BBC political coverage is 'left-wing' demonstrating that it consistently favours the government of the day, with a more pronounced bias when that government is Conservative. Taking its cues (and many of its guests) from the conservative-dominated print media, it over-represents

the right on programmes such as *Question Time*, *Politics Live* and *The Papers*. In response to incessant attacks and accusations of metropolitan leftism, the BBC is desperate to appease those who hate it.

Another strength of the book is that the authors address the BBC's weaknesses and blunders, from the prank-call 'Sachsgate' affair in 2008 to major institutional failures such as the gender pay gap and the Jimmy Savile scandal. They also recommend finding a viable alternative to the licence fee.

The rise of streaming, funding cuts and a hostile prime minister make the BBC's current predicament particularly grave but we need to be clear: if those on the right who want it diminished or destroyed succeed we will be in dangerous territory. Look at broadcasting in the States where partisanship, distrust, disinformation and conspiracism thrive.

## Watch Our Zoom meeting with Patrick Barwise

MediaNorth organised a meeting on 19 November with Patrick Barwise and two other speakers, Julian Petley and Pat Holland. 'Excellent', 'interesting', 'stimulating' and 'very interesting discussion by well-informed people' were some of the responses.

● Here's the link: <https://youtu.be/Z82heTh9UMQ>

## Ofcom releases new report into BBC

OFCOM has published its third annual report on the BBC. The report covers the period April 2019 to March 2020. The report said the BBC's 'overall reach is still very high, with almost nine in 10 adults consuming its content on a weekly basis'.

However, it pointed out: 'Overall audiences to the BBC are in gradual decline; it reached 87% of adults in 2020

compared to 92% three years ago. If audiences do not consider the BBC a core part of their viewing, they may not see value in the licence fee, which in turn, risks the BBC's ability to deliver its Mission and Public Purposes in future. The BBC also needs to broaden its reach and appeal to a wider range of people, in particular audiences from minority eth-

nic backgrounds and those in lower socio-economic groups.'

The report clearly demonstrates how comprehensively the BBC is made accountable to the regulator.

● You can read the full report here: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/207228/third-bbc-annual-report.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/207228/third-bbc-annual-report.pdf)

## Channel 4 builds defence

MEDIA minister John Whittingdale has suggested he wants to sell Channel 4.

Now Channel 4 has said advertising has bounced back and it is 'stronger than ever'. It has unveiled a new five-year strategy for the business, Future4, to increase both streaming of Channel 4 content and new revenues.



# Australian bid to curb Murdoch

RUPERT Murdoch renounced his Australian citizenship in order to bypass American media ownership laws. Nevertheless he still runs a newspaper called *The Australian* and owns close to 70 per cent of Australia's newspapers, the nation's only cable news network (an Australian version of Fox News) and a host of online publications. And through this media power he has wielded political power.

Two former prime ministers, Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull, the respective former Labor and Liberal leaders of Australia, know this well. In high public office both men lived and died at the word of the world's most influential media mogul. But now the two are at the vanguard of a campaign to redress the balance of power.

Last month, Rudd launched



Photo: Wikimedia

**Rupert Murdoch: Petition signed by 500,000 people**

a petition for a royal commission into the need for a strong, diverse media, dubbing Murdoch 'an arrogant cancer on our democracy'. The petition was signed by more than 500,000 people.

Rudd and Turnbull hope what they are doing in Australia will undermine all of Murdoch's international enterprises.

News Corp's reaction to the petition has only confirmed the urgent need for such an inquiry. There won't be a Royal Commission but the Senate will hold a public inquiry and this has provoked a sustained attack by Murdoch's media on Rudd and the petition with attempts to discredit it, *The Australian* suggesting there are fake email addresses and that the petition is 'subject to foreign interference'.

Anger at Murdoch's excessive power in Australian politics has focused on the issue of climate change.

This summer, James Murdoch, one of Rupert's two sons, resigned from the board of News Corp citing 'disagreements' over editorial content, several months after he had criticised the company's coverage of the Australian bushfires.

"The campaign on climate denial is just staggering and has done enormous damage to the world, to the global need to address global warming," Turnbull said in an appearance on ABC that went viral. "I mean, it is so horrifically biased, and such propaganda that Rupert's own son James can't stomach it."

Opinion is divided about the impact of the Senate inquiry. "In the same way the Leveson inquiry publicly discomfited and briefly broke News Corp's momentum, the Senate inquiry will have some passing impact but nothing enduring or substantial," is Australian journalist and writer Dr Chris Wallace's view. But he agrees that 'anyone who has ever been bullied by a Murdoch media outlet – and that's a lot of people – is enjoying it tremendously'.

## MediaNorth is two!

WITH this issue *MediaNorth* arrives at its second anniversary. When we launched back in December 2018 we couldn't have envisaged what we would achieve with your support. Apart from the regular quarterly issues we have produced six issues of *ElectionWatch* during the 2019 general election, three specials on COVID-19 and the Media, and one on the BBC. We produced two books, the 2nd edition of *Shafted* and *It's the Media, Stupid!* and the

media reform booklet, *Fix the Media*.

Until lockdown and COVID restrictions we had regular public meetings and now Zoom meetings to promote *MediaNorth* and our publications.

Not bad for a venture which relies on book sales, donations and standing orders to survive. Thanks to all of our contributors and supporters without whom we would have disappeared. Best wishes to all of you in these disrupted times.

## An outstanding journalist

ROBERT Fisk died suddenly in a Dublin hospital on 30 October. Fisk first distinguished himself in 1970s' Belfast where he was Northern Ireland correspondent for *The Times*. He subsequently moved on to reporting the civil wars in the Balkans, Lebanon, and Algeria, the Iran-Iraq war, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution.

He joined *The Independent* in 1989 after a row with the Murdoch-owned *Times* which spiked one of his stories. He became an expert on Middle East politics and history (along with Patrick Cockburn who still writes for *The Independent*).

In 1982 he was one of the first reporters to enter the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon where more than 1,000 people were killed by Lebanese Christian militiamen who entered the camps, watched by Israeli forces who



**Robert Fisk**

were 'guarding' the locations.

Robert Fisk was an historian as well as a reporter. He wrote, among many other books, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*.

● *The best obituary on Robert Fisk was by his colleague, Patrick Cockburn, appropriately enough in The Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/robert-fisk-iraq-2003-patrick-cockburn-the-troubles-b1539514.html>*

## MediaNorth

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