


THE TIMES


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From The Editor


Director, Media and Creative Industries
Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport
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March 25, 2021


I have been editor of The Times since 2013. Before that I was editor of The Sunday Times from 1995.

I fully endorse the application to remove the government's involvement in the undertakings of Times Newspapers Limited for two reasons.

First, it is an archaic hangover from a pre-digital era when there was arguably a need for pluralism of content because of a limited number of publications. The internet and social media has changed that fundamentally and it seems an anachronism that government should have a role in a free press. Our two titles are the only ones which have these restrictions and it is surely fair that all mainstream publications are treated in the same way.

Second, News UK has given us assurances through proposed new employment contracts that the undertakings, where they relate to editorial independence, will continue to be honoured for us and future editors by the company. It has further assured me and Emma Tucker, editor of The Sunday Times, that a small core of independent directors will remain in place in the event of disputes between the editors and the company.

One of the consequences of a seven-day digital future for the two titles is that we are and will continue to cooperate more closely on editorial structures and content. Nevertheless we firmly believe it is in the interests of the two titles and their readers that they are free to pursue their own editorial policies and diverge on coverage if they so choose.

Yours sincerely,


John Witherow.



THE SUNDAY TIMES

[REDACTED]
Director, Media and Creative Industries
Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport
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6 April 2021

[REDACTED]
I am writing to you as the Editor of The Sunday Times concerning the application by News UK to remove the undertakings for Times Newspapers Ltd. I am aware of this application and support it.

Since the undertakings were agreed in 1981 the newspaper market has changed beyond all recognition. There have been significant changes to the means of distribution of news, changes in commercial relationships, digitisation, a seismic shift in advertising spend away from print newspapers to the social media platforms and the technology giants, plurality and media mergers.

Crucially, all our future growth lies in the success of our digital products which can only succeed and make sense to readers when delivered as a 7 day offering. We now run a 7 day digital operation for The Times and The Sunday Times producing content that is distributed via smartphone, web, newsletter, radio, podcast and print. Our revenue stream is shifting from print advertising to digital subscriptions and while there may be commercial reasons for maintaining two distinct offerings, this makes no sense in a 7-day digital offering. There is certainly no logical reason for this to be enforced in the name of plurality or public interest.

TNL/TNHL is now the only publisher with oversight and restrictions on how its business is structured and run. Recent media mergers have not resulted in any restrictions to protect plurality or independence and it's my firm belief that government oversight of news publishers is not necessary.

I see no need for undertakings to the secretary of state to protect editorial independence and believe that editorial independence is understood as necessary by all on The Times and Sunday Times and at News UK. The incorporation of independence undertakings into the contractual agreements between the editors and the company with a committee to mediate on differences will, I believe, be sufficient to protect independence and represents a workable and practical solution.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Emma Tucker

Emma Tucker
Editor

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SUNDAY

From: Andrew Likierman [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The Independent Directors have been asked to comment on the News Corp application to release them from the 1981 Undertakings, as amended in 2019.

1. We believe that in the current circumstances of the newspaper industry, the Undertakings are no longer relevant. In particular, we would point to the role and application of technology in disrupting the world of newspapers as it existed when the Undertakings were originally given 40 years ago.
2. We are nevertheless mindful of the crucial national role of editorial independence for The Times and The Sunday Times. We concur in the view that this is best provided by embedding the necessary assurances in the Editors' contracts.
3. We feel that it is more appropriate for others to comment on whether additional safeguards, such as an independent committee, are required. We would note, however, that were such a committee created, the practicalities of how it might operate would need to be carefully considered. These practicalities include the procedure for recruitment and the role of such a committee in the cases of continuing disagreement between an Editor and the company.

Stephen Grabiner

Lord Jonathan Hill

Baroness Sarah Hogg

Professor Sir Andrew Likierman

Paul Potts