

Karen Bradley, Secretary of State
CC: Deputy Director, Head of Media Policy, DCMS
Department for Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

7 March 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

20th Century Fox Bid to Take Control of Sky

I wanted to contact you directly in my capacity as Chair of the NUJ Parliamentary Group following press reports that you are “minded to” issue a European intervention notice to call on Ofcom to examine the deal. The Group would like to urge you to proceed in this regard, and we also strongly believe that the deal should be stopped in its entirety until Part Two of the Leveson Inquiry has taken place.

As you may be aware, the NUJ Parliamentary Group is a cross-party body of over 40 MPs and Peers which meets regularly, along with the union, to discuss areas of interest within the media industry. The Group was formed in 2003 and has established a strong reputation for keeping MPs fully informed of the union’s concerns, and meeting with Government at all levels to raise the profile of the issues that affect NUJ members across the media sector in the UK and internationally.

The NUJ Parliamentary Group is seriously concerned by the proposed deal and would like to urge you to intervene to protect the public interest in maintaining a vibrant and pluralistic media ecology on which a flourishing democratic society depends.

It is the view of the NUJ Parliamentary Group that the deal should be referred to Ofcom with specific grounds to be considered including public interest, media plurality and questions relating to the fitness and propriety of the proposed buyers including James and Rupert Murdoch. This would need to include assessing whether or not the proposed owners are persons who are likely to maintain high standards of corporate governance, accountability, and conduct.

You will recall that a decision was taken in 2011 by the then Secretary of State to refer the deal to Ofcom under the public interest test framework, and Ofcom in turn raised substantive concerns about the merger following its review. If the logic of those decisions is accepted, then it is clear from this report that at least the same level of intervention is warranted now.

The NUJ Parliamentary Group welcomed the public interest test into News Corporation’s proposal to take total control of BSkyB by acquiring the remaining 60.9 per cent of BSkyB shares it did not own. News Corp already owned a third of newspaper circulation. BSkyB, one of only two commercial TV news companies in the UK, supplies Sky News, Channel 5 news and virtually all commercial radio news. The merged company would have had a reach of 52 per cent of the adult population, with profound consequences not just for media plurality but for our democracy. It was only the unfolding scandal of dubious workplace practices at Murdoch’s News of World along with the public campaign of opposition that helped put a halt to the merger bid.

The concentration of media ownership and a lack of diversity can distort a healthy democracy. The NUJ Parliamentary Group believes it is vitally important to support the growth and availability of quality journalism across a range of platforms and providers. We believe that this is not possible by the exertion of market forces alone; indeed, it is the competitive nature of the media industry, and cutthroat practices by some of its owners, that has led directly to a diminution of choice.

We would therefore support your decision to issue a European intervention notice to call on Ofcom to examine the proposed deal, and would be happy to meet to discuss the issue involved.

I would be grateful if you were to direct any future correspondence on this matter to the Group's Coordinator, Simeon Andrews (using the contact details provided on this letter) who will pass on all information.

Yours sincerely



Helen Goodman
Chair, NUJ Parliamentary Group