outset, sir, if I might, that British journalism at its best is the best in the world, the finest in the world. It's emulated everywhere. So what I'm talking about as "wrong" is a relationship or an interaction that moves from being sensible and inevitable to being what I would say is unhealthy, as a result, really, of a situation in which the power that is entered by a certain part of the media and the use of newspapers particularly as instruments of political power then creates a situation in which that relationship is not merely sensible but essential, and where I think that relationship can be, and sometimes is, unhealthy. And that's what I mean by "wrong".

So "inevitable" is the close interreaction between senior media people and politicians. I think what I found uncomfortable and unhealthy was when you were so acutely aware of the power that was exercised that you then got into a situation where, frankly, it became not merely sensible and important but essential and crucial to have that interaction.

Q. The attributes then of a healthy, appropriate relationship may be a degree of tension, may be a degree of professional distance, but if that relationship becomes too close, then it may become, to use your word, wrong. Is that a fair summary?

A. Yeah, except that I find sometimes, you know, in reading about this, that -- the use of the word "close" I am ambivalent about. The use of the word "cosy" I think is not the correct relationship or description of the relationship at all. I think "unhealthy" is a better way of putting it, because what it means is that if you're a political leader and you have very powerful media groups and you fall out with one of those groups, the consequence is such that it really means that you then are effectively blocked from getting across your message. You then have all the things that I outline in my statement that happens as a consequence of that.

The nature of the relationship between the politicians and the media and that closeness you describe is really derived from that, so what, in a sense, happens is not necessarily that you become particularly close, but the relationship is one in which you feel this -- this pretty intense power and the need to try and deal with that. And I'm just being open about that and open about the fact, frankly, that I decided, as a political leader -- and this was a strategic decision -- that I was going to manage that and not confront it.

We can get onto whether that was right or wrong at a later stage but that was the decision I took.
| Q. Are we clear that you are locating the poison within the culture of the press? | A. Yeah.

| A. Yeah, in this -- as I say, what I would say is in certain parts of the media, where the line between news and commentary gets blurred -- so those papers who take a particular view on a policy, a party or a person, then that is driven with an aggression -- and, frankly, a prejudice -- that means you cross the line, I think. Now, that's what I think is the problem, and that's why, if you like, political leaders like myself have to be in a position where you're managing these major forces within the media because if you fail to manage it and you fall out with them, the consequences, you know, as I will say a bit later, are harsh, let us say. |

| Q. Is it not necessary, though, at least to recognise that part of the responsibility for the current state of affairs is the development within our political culture of a degree of cynicism and, some would say, a disposition to be malleable with the truth, the consequences of which have been toxic? | A. I would say our responsibility primarily is not having confronted this issue. Now, I will give my reasons for that, my justification for it. I actually do not think that the way this particular part of the media behaves is a response to the way the government has behaved, and what I would say -- I would actually put that around the other way and say, for example, the fact that we got a fully professional media operation operating really properly, I think, for the first time in the Labour Party's history, was a necessary part of being able to deal with a media that was extremely powerful. |

| Q. One can see that in this situation it is virtually impossible to disentangle cause from effect. If you accept the premise, please, for the purpose of argument, at least in relation to the Labour Party, that it had a terrible time in the 1980s, certainly up to 1992 and that election, and that your strategy may have been a reaction to that, but even on that analysis, that reaction created a political culture with, as I've said, a degree of cynicism -- and if you don't like the term "disodium", we can turn it down a bit and say "put the best possible gloss on the truth that one can" -- |

| A. Yes, this is where I think -- it's almost impossible now, even now, to dispute this issue to do with, let's say, spin, so-called spin, from the last Labour government. I cannot believe we are the first and only government that has ever wanted to put the best possible gloss on what you're doing. I would be surprised if governments hadn't done that throughout the ages. That is a completely different thing from saying that you go out to say things that are deliberately untrue or you bully and you harass journalists and so on. I read a lot of things we are supposed to have done. I actually dispute we did those things, very, very strongly. My view is this: I totally understand why there's a kind of symmetry in being able to say, "Oh, well, the government was spinning and so the media had to react to that." In my view -- but you can take a different one -- that's not what happened. |

| I mean, the truth is, in 1992, Alastair Campbell wasn't heard of. If you look at the way that election was covered -- and by the time I took over the leadership of the Labour Party, we'd lost four elections in a row. We'd actually never won two consecutive full terms. The point is, this is a response to the way the government has behaved.
electations in our history. The longest we'd ever been in power was six years at one go.

So -- I went through that 1992 election. I remember it. It was etched on my memory, and yes, I was absolutely determined that we should not be subject to the same onslaught.

Q. We'll come back to that issue.

Your "feral beast" speech, Mr Blair, which is 12 June 2007, which I think was a few days before your departure from office. We have it in tab 49 of the bundle we've prepared, I think in the second file.

A. I think I remember it pretty well, actually. I probably don't need to refer --

Q. A number of points you make here would be obviously as valid now as they were five years ago. On the numbering at the top of the page in this version it's page 2 of 5 on the Internet printout. At the top, you say your principal reflection is not about blaming anyone. In the third paragraph, you say:

"We paid inordinate attention in the early days of New Labour to courting, assuaging and persuading the media."

So you're careful to use the word "courting", we can see that.

A. (Nods head)

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Q. Then you say:

"In our own defence [it's a point you've just made to us], after 18 years of opposition and at times ferocious hostility from parts of the media, it was hard to see any alternative but such an attitude ran the risk of fueling the trends in communications that I'm about to question."

So arguably you're accepting there, without attributing cause and effect, to at least contributing to the overall cultural problem, are you not?

A. Yes, I am, and, you know, I chose my words pretty carefully there actually about running the risk. To be honest, I don't actually think that we created this phenomenon. I think we were trying to respond to it.

What I do think, you know, to be self-critical about the government in its first stages -- we'd, as I say, been out of power for 18 years. We got into a rhythm which is very much the rhythm of opposition. So we were still, as it were, campaigning, you know, in the first few months, possibly the first year of government, but frankly, after that time, you got into a proper rhythm of government and we had a very strong media operation, it's true, but I would argue then -- in fact, I would argue now -- you've really got to -- and I think that's -- I mean, that's not as a result of anything the media's doing. The fact is today you have a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week media, you have social media as well as the conventional media.

I mean, I remember my first election campaign in 1997. You could more or less say, "Right, here's the story of the day." By the time I was fighting my third election campaign, there was a different story in the morning, the noon, in the evening. Watching the most recent election complain here, I'd say the pace was even faster.

So there's a quite different rhythm to this today that I think -- personally, my advice to any political leader today would be: you have to have a very, very solid media operation.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: One of the things Mr Campbell said was that the problem may be, at least in part, the consequence of pursuing in government the same approach to the media as had been necessary in opposition. It may not be now to discuss it but I mention it because you were just talking about that period of transition.

The question then arises whether there doesn't have to be a different approach that works not merely for government but also for those who aspire to government, because it's very difficult -- or may be difficult -- to adjust the tempo of how you do the business.

A. Yes, I think that's a fair point. I would distinguish, however, between, as it were, how you do your proper media operation and relations and communication and so on and this issue to do with the importance of those key media relationships in circumstances where you are aware of the fact that, you know, support -- the difference between support and lack of support is so profound in terms of the effect on politics, because that's -- you know, from the political leader's point of view, that's the thing that you are aware of. So if you're -- this is not true of all the parts of the media, by the way, or all parts of all media groups. There are some papers that, you know, you could fall out with the editor and the proprietor and you'd still get a perfectly fair run of things in the news items. You might have bad editorials, you might have bad comments, but you wouldn't have a problem with the news part of it.

But those parts -- and they tend to be very powerful -- where, when you fall out with them, you then get a problem in the whole of the paper, the news as well as the comment, that's when, frankly, those relationships, as I say, move from being sensible to being crucial in a way that's probably not healthy.

MR JAY: Another general point you make in this speech, Mr Blair, page 3 of 5, the third and fourth paragraphs,
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were all sorts of things we managed to do in schools with decent results, we had rising crime. There were lists of 18 months, we had only a handful of inner city areas. When I came to office, we had health service waiting lists of 18 months, we had a party of government, able to compete on equal terms. We won two full terms before. I wanted us to become a party of government, able to compete on equal terms.

My view, rightly or wrongly, was that if, in those circumstances, I had said, "Right, I've decided what I'm going to do is take on the media and change the law in relation to the media", my view is -- and I think it's still my view, actually -- that you would have had to have clear the decks. This would have been an absolute major confrontation. You would have had virtually every part of the media against you in doing it, and I felt the price you would pay for that would actually push out a lot of the things I cared more about, and although, you know -- I think I say towards the end of my statement: although I think this is an immensely important question, I mean, I don't, in the end -- not for me at any rate, as the Prime Minister, was it more important than the health service or schools or law and order.

Now, did I come towards the end of my timed thinking to have taken it on. So the way I would put this is it's not so much -- I did a lot of things in government that were both unpopular and where I had to have a certain courage in standing up to people, whether you agree with those decisions or not. It's not that, as it were, I was afraid of taking them on, in that sense, but I knew that if I did, you have to be very, very clear about this, and that was the debate I had with Alastair and others within government all the way through. If you take this on, do not think for a single moment you are not in a long, protracted battle that will shove everything else to one side whilst it's going on.

Q. You make those points very clear in your statement, particularly paragraph 36, but allied to the point in paragraph 11, you say: "We should be aware that some of the media profoundly disagree that there's a real problem."

Do you believe that that's still the case even now, Mr Blair?

A. Yes.

Q. Are you identifying a section of media -- it may be invidious, perhaps, to start naming papers, unless you wish to, but we're confined to a section, are we?

A. Yes, I think we're confined to a section. Look, this is the point. This is why it's very difficult to discuss

where you deal with the sheer scale, weight and constant hyperactivity of coping with the media, and then you say:

"At points, it literally overwhelms. Talk to senior people in virtually any walk of life today [and then you list the categories] ... People don't speak out about it because in the main they're afraid to."

Which chimes with what Lord Mandelson said on 11 July 2011: "We were cowed." Is it as high as that?

A. Yes.

Q. Are you identifying a section of media -- it may be invidious, perhaps, to start naming papers, unless you wish to, but we're confined to a section, are we?

A. Yes, I think we're confined to a section. Look, this is the point. This is why it's very difficult to discuss

British newspapers and journalists are as good as anything there is globally.

But I think there is a genre -- that's what I'm saying -- of writing that has gone into parts of the media where, because this line between news and comment gets blurred, you know, it stops being journalism. It becomes then an instrument of political power or propaganda.

Q. Back to "feral beasts". On page 4 of 5, you make a series of points which you pick up in your witness statement in various ways. The reference to "feral beasts" itself is in the fourth paragraph. You say:

"In these modes, it is like a feral beast, just tearing people and reputations to bits."

A. Yes.

Q. I wanted to ask you more specifically about page 5 of 5 and the sixth paragraph down where you deal, with the issue of accountability.

"In the absence of an objective yardstick ..."
I'll come to that in a moment. Then you say:
"In every other walk of life in our society that exercise power, there are external forms of accountability, not least through the media itself."
Which comes back really to a recurring theme which we've heard in this Inquiry.
The external form of accountability, what were you thinking of there in terms of either its absence at this time and what would be desirable in terms of any appropriate form?
A. What I mean is, what most people feel is if you have a complaint, other than the laws of libel, there's not really a place you can go to in order to complain and get redress, and most people, I think, would say the PCC just does not or hasn't operated in a way that provides that accountability.
Look, of course newspapers are, to an extent, accountable through, you know, their readers choosing whether to buy the paper or not. But I mean that's like saying, you know, politicians are accountable because every four or five years you go to the election. The truth is you need a process of accountability that is continuing, and which people -- and which then influences the culture in which you behave.
Q. We will, of course, come to that.

You were criticised in relation to this speech in a number of ways, but one of them was picking on the Independent newspaper. I think Mr Paxman said that you attacked the poodle and not the Alsatian. You'll remember that in his MacTaggart lecture.

A. I do.

Q. That was a bit harsh, wasn't it? Not of Mr Paxman, but your criticism here.

A. I know what he means, by the way.

The reason I -- just to explain, the reason I used the Independent as the example was because the Independent was begun as a newspaper that was supposed to be absolutely against this blurring of news and views, and the reason I use that is I think the then editor of the Independent had just given an interview in which he said, "We are a viewpoint, not a newspaper", and so I was demonstrating that that is, as it were, indicative of how this culture has changed. But the point that I could have talked about the Mail, the Sun, et cetera is perfectly reasonable.

I think what's interesting though about Jeremy Paxman -- I hadn't actually read the speech until you kindly sent it to me as part of the bundle -- is even Jeremy, who I think in this issue is one of those people that is really prepared to think these issues through,
A. I think in the speech I never actually went so far as to propose that but, no, I think -- look, the notion that it's impossible to find a space between no proper system of accountability and the press becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of the government of the day, I just think that is an assertion that is, frankly, ludicrous.

Q. The Daily Mail, or rather MailOnline -- it may or may not have been the Daily Mail -- 13 June 2007. The headline is "The magnificent self-delusion of Mr Blair". To cut a long story short, they characterised the media as behaving like a great sloppy labrador which repeatedly bestowed its affections on you, rather than as a feral beast.

A. It's a description of the Daily Mail that I don't totally recognise, I have to say. Yeah, interesting, that one. I haven't come across that before. But I'm the one with self-delusion, am I?

Q. Right. Arguably, there's a more cerebral contribution from the Guardian.

A. Right.

Q. It's the leader of 13 June 2007, which still is under tab 50 in this bundle. They say there's an easy response -- I'm paraphrasing: "It is to accuse the Prime Minister, the master, some will say, of half-truth, evasions and spin, of..."

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: That's not exactly how you put it in the speech, but it's the point it's the wrong messenger. I suppose it's acceptable. So there's absolutely no reason why they would you associate yourself with those observations or not?

A. Pretty much, yeah.

Q. Then they say in the next paragraph:

"The BBC is still the best..."

A. Sorry, are you on the Guardian, are you?

Q. I'm still on the Guardian, Mr Blair.

A. Yes.

Q. They say in the next paragraph:

"The BBC is still the best journalistic organisation in the world."

Then a little bit later on:

"There's something about the polemical, argumentative, obstinate traditions of the British national press which grinds out a form of truth every bit as effectively as the supposedly more objective newspapers found in mainland Europe and North America."

Again I suppose that sentiment you would agree with as well, would you?

A. Yeah, absolutely. In fact, better than most of the papers in mainland Europe.

Q. Their real point is about the messenger, which again we'll come to later. We've already touched on it. The Financial Times piece, again on 13 June. Again, it's the point it's the wrong messenger. I suppose it's..."

A. I never actually mentioned religion in the course of my speech on the media, but anyway.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: It's actually the Financial Times, I think.

MR JAY: The one I'm looking at --

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Tab 50?

MR JAY: That's the last page. Before that, sir, there's the Guardian, the leader of 13 June. Do you have that one?

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I have it. Right sermon, wrong preacher; is that it?

MR JAY: That's the one.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I'm only reading the headline.

MR JAY: Again, they're picking up the religiose bit when they refer to a homily, but we'll pass over that.

A. I never actually mentioned religion in the course of my speech on the media, but anyway.

Q. They do say in the second paragraph, five lines down: "He [that's you] is right to highlight some of the worst qualities of some British journalism: a seam of sourness and aggression, a bullying, puffed-up self-regard, a casualness about the borders between public and private, an obsession with impact over proportionality. All those are there on a daily basis for anyone to see."

Q. That's not exactly how you put it in the speech, but
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 shouldn't, for example, choose to run certain stories
 because it accords with their political position.

 My distinction is between that and how you actually
 report the story as a piece of journalism. So if you
 take the issue to do with Europe, what I would say is
 that those papers who are Eurosceptic are perfectly
 entitled to be Eurosceptic. They're perfectly entitled
 to highlight things in Europe that are wrong. What they
 shouldn't do is, frankly, make up a whole lot of
 nonsense about Europe and dish that up to the readers,
 because that's -- I mean, how does the reader know
 that's not correct?

 So, you know, now towards the end, particularly,
 frankly, I just -- I remember when I had a huge battle
 over the European Union or the British rebate, which was
 a sort of hallowed thing, and when I had the presidency
 of the European Union in 2005 and we had to do the new
 budget deal and so on -- I mean, the misdescriptions of
 what I was proposing and what, you know, Europe was
 proposing -- because actually, for the first time under
 these proposals, Britain was going to be paying roughly
 the same as France, when, for decades, we hadn't -- you
 know, that, in my view -- look, I didn't expect anything
 else in this issue, but it wasn't straight reporting.

 That doesn't mean to say if they find something out


A. Well, I think if you took, for example, the Times newspaper, which is basically Euroceptic but I think it reports Europe fairly. That's not to say if they come across a story that sort of, as it were, fuels your receptors, they won't publish it, but why not? They're perfectly entitled to. But you know, I think they're a paper that will basically try to report it fairly.

Q. Okay. Can I come back to a point which you open with.

Paragraph 4(d) of your statement, our page 05573. You say: "Most important of all, certain of the newspapers are used by their owners or editors as instruments of political power ..."

Then in paragraph 7, you're careful there not to identify which newspapers are, as it were, guilty of these characteristics and which are not, and it may be you would not wish to do so now, but some people would differ quite markedly as to which newspaper falls into which category. Will you accept at least that?

A. Up to a point, actually. I think, you know, their -- whether you agree with their position or not is another matter. The heart of my argument to you is really this:

that the problem that you have as a political leader is that where, with certain parts of the media, the press becomes not merely politically partisan in their comment or editorial line but in their news coverage, then it becomes all the more important -- and that's why I use the word "crucial" -- that you try and prevent yourself becoming an object of that attack, and that is what is -- gives rise to the -- this closeness, and as I say to you, also in paragraph 8, emphatically, this is not confined to the Murdoch media. I'm not saying the Murdoch newspapers, the tabloid ones, did not have that characteristic -- they do -- but they're not the only ones by any means at all.

So I would say probably the -- I think you'd say the bulk of what we call the tabloid press basically writes in a way that if they're against a particular policy, party or person, it's a pretty all-out affair.

Q. Certainly the position is stated with crystalline and direct clarity in every conceivable instance, one might say?

A. Yeah.

Q. Can I ask you to comment on the Sun, which many have looked at as a sort of paradigm. Do you agree that it generates a special power or influence because of its appearance of being a form of floating voter with a constituency of circulation 3 million or readers?

So maybe it's partly derived from his own thinking. Is there an element of political calculation?

A. Yeah. I mean, the Sun and the Mail, frankly, are the two most powerful of the papers, and the Sun, partly because it is prepared to shift, it makes it all the more important.

I don't think there's anything wrong with that per se, by the way, just as I don't think there's anything wrong with the Daily Mail being against my government or against me. It's -- you know, as I say, I think it's -- where I put the line is in the: once they're against you, that's it. It's full on, full frontal, day in, day out. Basically a lifetime commitment.

Q. Just on the floating voter point, do you feel that that has been the result of some sort of deliberate strategy or is it just the accidental by-product of events?

A. I think it's difficult to work out that, actually. I think it's partly because Rupert Murdoch himself, I think, is not actually a sort of identikit right wing person. In other words, I would never describe him as a sort of -- I'm indicating my own political prejudices here but as a sort of tribal Tory. I wouldn't say that at all. You know, he has bits of him that are very anti-establishment, sort of meritocratic, I would say.
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1. speak for others -- I didn't feel under pressure in
to commercial interests from the Murdoch
people, or indeed anyone else. The pressure for me was
more political but that's maybe because the issues
didn't arise in a particular way. I don't know.

Q. You mention the Daily Mail and the Associated titles.
The influence they exercise not through appearing to be
a floating voter because that's not the way they
operate. Therefore, how do they, in your view, exercise
to power and influence?

A. Look, the Daily Mail, frankly, is a subject on which
I wouldn't claim to exercise much objectivity. The fact
is, if you fall out with the controlling element of the
Daily Mail, that is -- you are then going to be subject
to a huge and sustained attack. The Daily Mail, for
me -- they've attacked me, my family, my children, those
people associated with me, day in, day out, not merely
when I was in office but subsequent to it as well.

So that is -- and they do it very well, very
effectively, and it's very powerful. You know, I did
a -- I just asked my office to do a random analysis of
50 stories straight after the 2005 election when, after
all, I'd been re-elected for the third time, and 50
stories just prior to leaving office, just the 50
stories that you take on either side of that. So if you
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9 (Pages 33 to 36)
It's not the closeness, in my judgment, that's the problem; it's the kind of imbalance that comes into it, because you know that at a certain point, with certain elements of them, if you're in a position where you're pursuing a course you believe in and they don't believe in it, or they don't believe in you, then you're in a big fight. That big fight's something you have to take into account before you decide to go off in a particular direction.

So, you know, that's the difference that I would say. So I've always -- you know, when I've heard people describe this as cosy and close and so on, that's not quite the way I would put it. I don't know whether it's worse to put it in the way I'm putting it, but it's a little different, I think.

Q. Possibly it's an unspoken but really self-evident aspect of the terms of engagement between you. Is that a fair description?

A. Yes, I think that is a fair description. I mean, you know, they're aware of the power they have and you're aware that they have it.

Q. In a slightly different context, I used the term "finely tuned antennae", which some people didn't like very much, but does that come close to describing it or not in your view?

A. In the sense of ...?

Q. That was in the sense, I think, of a particular lunch at Chequers during your time on 4 January 1981. You probably will recall that little vignette, but I'm now speaking more generally.

A. Finely tuned antennae in the sense of your antennae to what you thought their --

Q. Exactly.

A. You know what each other's positions were. I mean, they weren't very secret. But I think that in itself -- you know, this is -- one of the things I find hardest about this is, as I say, distinguishing what is wrong from what is inevitable. I can't imagine a situation, given the penetration of our media -- and this what is inevitable. I can't think of anything but I don't think we actually published any of the meetings with the media people, actually. But the reason for having -- I mean, not just him, but certain people who you knew would then spend days trying to explain what you were talking about, was simply that you would spend days explaining what you were talking about, so -- look,

I think in future it's probably better you publish everything but I don't think we actually published other media meetings either. But I can check on that.

Q. Though there may be a huge leap between lack of transparency and conspiracy, lack of transparency certainly gives rise to speculation. Would you accept that?

A. Yes, I mean I don't -- I think Alastair Campbell said to you in his evidence that and he left he came in the back door, but there was no great conspiracy. It's just that you didn't need another great another flurry about whether he was coming back or taking over or whatever.

Q. In relation to Mrs Brooks, do you feel that you got too close to her when you were in power?

A. I don't know -- look, Rebekah Brooks mattered, obviously, because she -- I think she was the editor of the Sun during my time. She didn't actually come to this more senior position at News International until after I'd left. And I guess towards the end particularly -- and I think you'll see a lot of the meetings and calls were towards the end -- there wasn't a great deal of support left. So those people that did, sure, I was pretty close to.

But again, bluntly, the decision-maker was not Rebekah Brooks in relation to this.
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<th>Q.</th>
<th>It was obviously Mr Murdoch?</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Yes. He was the key decision maker for sure.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>A schedule of all your contacts with proprietors and editors between May 1997 and June 2007 has been provided. It runs to 18 pages. I'm sure we can put that on the screen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>There's another schedule which we've prepared which looks at interactions with Mr Murdoch and -- only one of them, really -- with Rebekah Wade between 15 September 1994 and 1 May 1997, which of course was election day. There's only one point arising out of those earlier interactions. There are not that many of them. It's dinner at Mossimans on 15 September 1994, which had been arranged by Gus and Gillian Fisher. Do you remember anything about that?</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I remember that such a dinner took place. I don't remember a great deal about it, frankly, but I've seen this Andrew Neil account.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>There's an account -- we don't know its source -- from Mr Neil. Full disclosure. In the bundle we've put together for you, it's pages 31 and 32.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>Mr Fisher is described as Rupert's senior man in London. Is that right or not? This is September 1994, of course.</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I think so. I think I remember him being there for -- I think for a reasonably short time, actually, but I certainly remember him, yeah.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>Mr Neil says that he had been lobbying the Labour Party on News International's behalf on such issues as cross-media ownership and Sky TV's control of satellite scrambling systems. Did you know about that?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>I don't recall specifically being told about it, but look, I would have known what their position was, certainly on media ownership, and most particularly, the issue that I do remember they were very strong on was statutory recognition of trade unions, which, given obviously what had happened in the past, is not surprising.</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>According to Mr Neil, he -- this is Gus Fisher -- had also struck up a relationship with you.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Mrs Gus Fisher?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>I think it's --</td>
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<td>A.</td>
<td>I'm afraid I -- I'm sorry, I don't recall that one, but ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>Nothing of that nature here.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Which is not to say it didn't happen, by the way --</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>It's Mr Fisher, Mr Blair.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Sorry?</td>
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| Q. | Mr Fisher. |
| A. | Oh, Mr Fisher. I thought you said Mrs Fisher. |
| Q. | No. |
| A. | Okay. |
| Q. | I think "relationship" is just in the sense of a very loose friendship. |
| A. | Yeah. |
| Q. | I'm not sure exactly what the implication is there, though. |
| A. | Right. |
| Q. | I think the suggestion may be that you well knew what his position was and what his company's position was on the cross-media ownership issue. Is that right? |
| A. | Yeah, of course. I mean -- and look, our position was -- as I say, I mean, I decided I was not going to take this issue on. I actually don't believe, by the way, that ownership is the issue here. I think it's the rules under which the media operate. But we had -- or I had taken the decision we weren't going to do a big inquiry into cross-media ownership. I thought it would be a distraction for the Labour Party coming into office. I don't specifically recall -- it's perfectly possible it would have come out at the dinner and I'd have explained our position, as I would have on statutory recognition. |
| Q. | Yes, because Mr Neil's account of the dinner, apart from it going, apparently, very well: Mr Murdoch indicated his newspapers were not wedded to the Tories. Does that chime with your recollection? |
| A. | Yeah, not specifically at that dinner, but I think it was clear that there was an openness there hadn't been before because of the way I was changing the Labour Party, and I think -- no, I hadn't actually put the clause 4 thing at that point up there, but it was obvious I was going to be a different type of Labour leader, so ... |
| Q. | Then you apparently indicated that media ownership Rules would not be onerous under Labour. Is it possible that you said that? |
| A. | I think "not onerous" is not the way I would have put it. I can't specifically remember what was said, but it's perfectly possible, if that issue came up, I would have said, "That's not an issue we're going to be taking on." |
| Q. | So whatever the position, by the end of that dinner, Mr Murdoch would have had some degree of comfort from you, at least in this particular domain. Are we agreed about that? |
| A. | Yeah, but I don't know that he would have particularly... |
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A.  Look, they would have understood it anyway when we published our manifesto and so on, but of course, I'm not -- I wasn't unaware of the fact that this would have -- if we'd decided to do this, they would have been

Q.  It may be there are two things going on here, that for separate reasons the issue of cross-media ownership was not an issue you felt you were going to undertake because it would have been too controversial and would have occupied too much time, but secondly, it might have been necessary to communicate a degree of reassurance about that to Mr Murdoch so at least he understood that.

A.  It was -- yes, of course, I wasn't unaware of the fact that, you know, the Murdoch media group would have been worried had we decided to launch a huge distraction for the Labour Party, and as I recall it, the big issue they were genuinely worried about, and where there was -- and I think they were perfectly entitled to do this, by the way, where we were lobbying very hard -- was on our commitment to trade union recognition, because we -- and we did introduce trade union recognition.

Q.  You compiled a schedule which you said ran to 18 pages.  What does that include?

A.  Mm-hm.

Q.  There's even a meeting with Mr Dacre on 1 July 1997.

A.  Yeah, I think there were several, actually, over time.

Q.  Those meetings with Mr Dacre appear to have ceased at a certain point, certainly by about 2001.  There's a meeting on 18 January 2000 with him, but I think that may be the last one.

A.  I didn't -- I haven't -- we literally were collating this just on information that's come in on the last two or three days.  You may well be right.

Q.  There's some meetings with News International which haven't been included, which may or may not be correct --

A.  LORD JUSTICE LEVESON:  I'm not sure you're right, actually, to be fair, because on 13 July 2000, there was a dinner with Mr Dacre and Lord Rothermere.

Q.  Yes.  It's 2001, I think, was the --


MR JAY:  Oh, did I?

MR JAY:  I don't think there's one after 2000.


MR JAY:  I don't think there's one after 2000.

A.  Yeah.

Q.  We can check, but I think I'm right about that.

A.  Yeah.

Q.  As this goes through, the picture is, I think, fairly stated to be a greater interaction with Mr Murdoch and certainly with Rebekah Wade.  Would that be a fair assessment?

A.  Well, I think -- yeah, I mean as -- I mean, I think if you collate all these meetings, I think about a third were with -- and calls, by the way, because we've included calls as well.  I think basically half of the interactions that we've recorded were calls and not meetings, and I think it's about one-third with the Murdoch media, two-thirds were with others, but I think you're right -- obviously, certain people -- I mean, frankly, it became pretty pointless to have the meetings with, for example, the Mail group, past a certain point.

So in a sense there is a -- this probably then -- some of the people get stripped out for reasons that are to do with there really not being much point in doing it.  I think at a certain point the Express people told me they had to change their line and then it became also pretty pointless to see them.

Q.  In terms of this schedule which you compiled, I think with assistance from the Cabinet Office, to corroborate various meetings, it runs to 18 pages.  I think we can put it on the screen.  It is available.  In terms of trying to discern trends, which may be difficult, certainly at an early stage, after 1 May 1997, you were fairly, indeed entirely eclectic in your choice of who you would meet with and speak to.  In other words, we see a whole range of editors and sometimes proprietors from all the main national newspapers; is that fair?

A.  Mm-hm.
Q. At that stage, of course, I think all the Murdoch papers remember now, but they'd all taken the same position before 11 March 2003, so there was no question of you, as it were, persuading them to take a position which they had not already attained for their own reasons.

A. Yes, because I wouldn't dispute in any shape or form that I wasn't interacting with these people closely.

MR JAY: Rebekah Brooks, in her statement, has about five or six additional lunches or dinners which you haven't included, but she may or may not be right about those.

A. Yeah, Look, this is a huge issue, obviously. I mean, my recollection is that I initiated one of those calls.

A. Absolutely, and by the way, since I was having to deal with President Chirac, and in the aftermath -- where,
23 Q.  "Tony said he had the impression that these days
19 Q.  There's no evidence of any other dinner between
18 Q.  The dinner was 15 September 1994.
15 Q.  Yes.
14 2005 to step down and there was a lot of
13 F Fisher dinner.  I mean, I was saying to you -- I don't
12 know what he raised at that -- I can't recall it
11 precisely, but this is what I'm saying -- this is
10 in November, is it, 1994?
9 A.  Yeah, that might be, by the way a reference to that Gus
8 A.  And the dinner was ...
7 LORD JUSTICE LEVESON:  It puts them in a tremendously
6 And we weren't -- in 1992, we weren't really
5 You know, there's no -- that would have been the only
4 So I'm not sure I would have the same view now about
3 this now is if he'd been persuaded -- I mean, it looked
2 as if we were going to win, so you didn't have to be
1 losing side, and -- you know, so I'm not -- my view of
interests he feels in being on the winning side or the
losing side, and -- you know, so I'm not -- my view of
this now is if he'd been persuaded -- I mean, it looked

1 Page 53

1 frankly, there was not a great deal they could do for me
one way or another, as it were, but I think -- you know,
inevitably, as time goes on, you tend to associate more
with those that at least will give you a fair shot of
it.
Q.  They remain, I suppose, a sympathetic ear or pair of
ears in what became increasingly hostile media
landscape?
A.  Yes, it was very hostile during that time, and you know,
I had won a third election, I never intended to fight
a fourth, but I was under pretty constant pressure all
the way after 2005 to step down and there was a lot of
political manoeuvring around that, obviously.  So that
was an important media relationship.
But I would say that was sort of more important
because -- for the reason you give, namely that there
was a certain amount of support and willingness at least
to put across our point of view, whereas by that time,
a significant part of the media were effectively a kind
of closed book to us.
Q.  Can I look now at some evidence, if that is what it is,
of your interactions, in particular with the
News International papers and issues surrounding that
from 1994.  In Chris Mullins' diaries, which is page 2
in the bundle we've prepared, he notes a meeting he had
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1 Page 54

1 "If I thinks we're going to win, he'll go easy on
us, but if he thought we could lose, he would turn on
us."
He added:
"If the press misbehave badly during the election
campaign, I will stop everything for two days and we'll
have a debate about what they're up to, who owns them,
the lot."
Then Mr Mullin:
"Did you say that to Murdoch?"
And your answer:
"Not in so many words."
Is that an accurate gist then of your conversation
with Mr Mullin?
A.  I think it is.  I mean, as I say, this is going back
18 years or 17 and a half years now, but certainly that
was my attitude.
I think now, by the way, I would have a slightly
different view.  In other words, I think -- there was a
view of Rupert Murdoch, which I think Paul Keating
speaks to the same effect, which is that he just backs
the winner.  My view now is it's not as simple as that
actually.  There are very strong political views and
those actually do come first, I think, or put it like this: they're equal first, let's say, with whatever
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1 interests he feels in being on the winning side or the
losing side, and -- you know, so I'm not -- my view of
this now is if he'd been persuaded -- I mean, it looked
as if we were going to win, so you didn't have to be
a genius to think we had a good chance of winning,
although when you've lost four a row, by the way, you
never think it's that clear.
So I'm not sure I would have the same view now about
that, but that may well have been what I said to Chris
and to -- and yes, look, if I'd ended up in a situation
where they turned on me, I would have had to fight back.
You know, there's no -- that would have been the only
recourse.  And we weren't -- in 1992, we weren't really
in a position where we were able to fight back, but this
time we would have.

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14 (Pages 53 to 56)
1. Murdoch media.
2. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: No, I understand that, I understand.
3. A. But, yes, look, there's no -- I was looking at this as
4. the leader of the Labour Party. We lose four elections.
5. As I say, I went through that 1992 election. Now, by
6. the way, there are all sorts of reasons, mistakes that
7. we made, which meant that the election result -- I don't
8. blame the media for us having lost. I make that
9. absolutely clear. But, no, the power is significant,
10. and it's significant for the reason that I give. It
11. would be significant anyway. That's why I have to --
12. I keep qualifying what I'm saying because I think if you
13. have a readership of 3 to 4 million, even if the
14. newspapers are behaving in the most totally proper way,
15. that's power, and I think -- I don't know any other way
16. of describing it.
17. But yes, I mean, if you looked at those main media
18. blocs, of which the Murdoch press were the most powerful
19. but there were others that were very powerful as well,
20. yeah, that was definitely a major factor had you to take
21. into account when you were working out your strategy for
22. winning and governing.
23. Now, as I say, was it more -- you know, supposing
24. they decided to oppose us in the 1997 election. My view
25. is we would still have won. So I think we have to also

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1. be careful of -- I think actually we were sometimes
2. guilty of ascribing to them a power that they ultimately
3. don't really have and actually have less today than
4. I think back then, but sitting -- trying to put myself
5. back 18 years and sitting in that seat and thinking,
6. "Right, how are we going to create the right
7. circumstances in which we get a fair hearing for our
8. case?'', this was important.
9. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Mr Jay, is that convenient?
10. MR JAY: Yes.
11. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: We have a break to allow the
12. shorthand writer to recover.
13. A. Right.
14. (11.24 am)
15. (A short break)
16. (11.35 am)
17. MR JAY: Mr Blair, the other point on this extract from
18. Mr Mullins' diary, the lines:
19. "Did you say that to Murdoch?
20. "Not in so many words."
21. You're intending to communicate to Mr Mullin that
22. obviously the clear and stark message which we see at
23. the top of the page might not have been imparted to
24. Mr Murdoch; a more attenuated, subtle version might have
25. been. Do you accept that or not?

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1. the run-up to the election."
2. Might you have said that to him?
3. A. I don't recall saying that, frankly, but I think the
4. general tone of what I might well have said to him is:
5. "Look, if Rupert Murdoch's going to wage war on us,
6. we're going to stand up to them."
7. But all the way through, for me, as it were, the
8. issue of media interests -- other than the fact, as
9. I averred to at the outset, I'd taken a strategic
10. decision I was not going to put this at the forefront of
11. our programme as a government, you know, I was, as it
12. were -- that was not my issue. So, you know, I don't
13. think it's a question of media interests, but had
14. they -- as I'm saying to Chris Mullin back then -- and
15. I don't, as I say, recall precisely the words I used,
16. but there's no doubt at all that if what they'd done is
17. started to treat me as they had Neil Kinnock, I would
18. have fought back in a very tough way.
19. Q. Can we move forward to Hayman Island and Mr Campbell's
20. account in his diary. First of all, page 6 of this
22. This is what Mr Campbell attributes to what Mr Keating,
23. the then Australian Prime Minister, told you:
24. "On Murdoch he told TB: 'He's a big bad bastard and
25. the only way you can deal with him is make sure he

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1. A. Yeah, I can't honestly remember precisely what I would
2. have said, and frankly it wasn't -- you know, it wasn't
3. an occasion, that dinner, as I recall it, where I was
4. going out there to start banging the table, so
5. I don't -- I don't know whether it sums up what I said
6. to him or the implication or not, really.
7. Q. Then at the end of this little encounter with Mr Mullin,
8. you apparently say:
9. "My absolutely priority is to win. I know that
10. sounds unprincipled, but I just see it as my role in
11. life."
12. Might you have said that?
13. A. Yup, sounds like it. I mean, by the way, let me
14. emphasise: I don't think it's unprincipled to win.
15. I think if you believe in what you're doing, you should.
16. But yes, I don't -- it would be pointless to do anything
17. else. But I saw an ability to go out there and persuade
18. the Murdoch group, as I did with others, as important.
19. Q. Mr Neil has attributed something that you said to him.
20. Page 15 of this bundle. This is the introduction to the
22. says, about ten lines down:
23. "Blair once said to me: 'How we treat
24. Rupert Murdoch's media interests when in power will
25. depend on how his newspapers treat the Labour Party in

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| 1 | thinks you can be a big bad bastard too." |
| 2 | Is that what Mr Keating said, or words to that |
| 3 | effect? |
| 4 | A. It sounds absolutely like what Paul Keating would have |
| 5 | said. I mean, again, I don't recall the precise |
| 6 | language, but I guess this it is how Alastair recorded |
| 7 | this contemporaneously, so I'm perfectly happy to accept |
| 8 | it. |
| 9 | Q. "You can do deals with him without ever saying a deal is |
| 10 | done, but the only thing he cares about is his business |
| 11 | and the only thing which he respects is strength."
| 12 | Was that advice given by Mr Keating? |
| 13 | A. That was Paul Keating's view, and he, as he does, |
| 14 | expressed himself in robust terms. I mean, I actually |
| 15 | came in time to have a different view myself, which |
| 16 | wasn't as simple as that, but, yeah, it's perfectly |
| 17 | possible he said that. As I say, if Alastair's recorded |
| 18 | that at the time, I'm happy to accept it. |
| 19 | Q. Because Mr Keating's statement, I suppose, chimes with |
| 20 | the implied deal thesis, which, are we clear, do you |
| 21 | accept or do you reject it? |
| 22 | A. So far as we're concerned -- I mean, I can't answer for |
| 23 | him, obviously -- so far as we're concerned, absolutely |
| 24 | I do reject it. There was no deal on issues to do with |
| 25 | the media with Rupert Murdoch, or indeed with anybody |

| 1 | else, either express or implied, and to be fair, he |
| 2 | never sought such a thing. |
| 3 | So was I aware of the fact that he had certain |
| 4 | interests and was I aware of the fact the media as |
| 5 | a whole had a very strong interest in us not legislating |
| 6 | on the media? Absolutely. But in terms of, implied or |
| 7 | express, some deal about media interests, absolutely |
| 8 | not. Indeed, as I go on to say in my statement, when we |
| 9 | actually came to the specific issues in relation to the |
| 10 | Murdoch media group, we more often decided against them |
| 11 | than in favour of them. |
| 12 | Q. The last comment of Mr Keating's at page 8, we're still |
| 13 | on 16 July. I think you'd just been to a barbecue. |
| 14 | About ten lines down: |
| 15 | "You have so remember with Rupert, it is all about |
| 16 | Rupert. Rupert is number one, two, three and four as |
| 17 | far as Rupert is concerned. Anna and the kids come next |
| 18 | and everything else is a long way behind."
| 19 | Is that what he might have said? |
| 20 | A. Yeah, he may well have said that. Again, I'm perfectly |
| 21 | happy to accept it. You know, there was a -- the |
| 22 | relationship with the Australian Labour Party and |
| 23 | Rupert Murdoch is a whole other volume, as it were, and |
| 24 | I think Paul -- Paul's view of it was very -- you know, |
| 25 | was very straightforward. As I say, in time I didn't |

| 1 | really quite buy the crudeness of that, but it sounds to |
| 2 | me exactly the type of thing he would have said. |
| 3 | Q. Okay. Can we move forward in time to 29 January -- |
| 4 | we're now in 1997 -- |
| 5 | LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Just before you move from the Hayman |
| 6 | Islands -- presumably this was, for perfectly |
| 7 | understandable reasons, a charm offensive. You wanted |
| 8 | the Murdoch press to support the Labour Party, for |
| 9 | understandable reasons. Does that not come out in |
| 10 | something else that appears in Mr Campbell's diaries, |
| 11 | where you got somebody to go through the speech from |
| 12 | a Murdoch angle -- this is page 6: |
| 13 | "He liked it, thought it had a clear message. There |
| 14 | was enough in it for the News Corp lot and enough for |
| 15 | the anti-Murdoch neuralgics." |
| 16 | A. Absolutely. Look, I wouldn't have been going all the |
| 17 | way around the world -- and I remember I had to go after |
| 18 | one Prime Minister's questions and return for the |
| 19 | next -- if it hadn't been a very deliberate and, again, |
| 20 | very strategic decision that I was going to go and try |
| 21 | and persuade them. I had a minimum and maximum |
| 22 | objective. The minimum objective was to stop them |
| 23 | tearing us to pieces and the maximum objectives was, if |
| 24 | possible, to open the way to support. |
| 25 | Now, actually, the speech I gave -- yes, of course |

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1. My view is it's perfectly open to you to say: the
2. best way of putting this case is to say it's about
3. individual rights, and I'd already fought this whole
4. thing within the Labour Party, getting rid of support
5. for the closed shop and so on and so forth. So I had,
6. you know, a certain amount of accumulated credibility on
7. this issue, but of course you want to put your case
8. across in the best way possible.
9. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: But that's no different -- is this
10. fair? Would you say that is no different to any speech
11. you might make to any group?
12. A. Correct.
13. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: You think precisely about what they
14. want to hear and load bits that fit with your philosophy
15. of what they want to hear into it but also the other
16. bits?
17. A. Yes, sir, that's absolutely right, and if I'm the first
18. politician to do that, I'd be surprised. I think it's
19. just a part of the art of politics.
20. But what is important, I think, to emphasise -- and
21. that's why I actually draw attention in my statement to
22. the Guardian report, for example, of my speech the next
23. day -- I actually did have in all the things that we
24. were committed to they wouldn't like. I was also --
25. because I was having to watch my other audience as well.

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Q. In your conversations with Mr Murdoch at about this time, or perhaps later as well, when you were in power, it's quite clear that the main subject matter was the big political issues of the day, including, of course, the euro, which was very much a concern to Mr Murdoch, but did you also have conversations about issues such as regulation or the BBC?

A. No, not -- I mean, regulation -- he was basically a deregulator rather than a regulator, so in general terms -- I can't recall conversations about media regulation per se. I mean, he didn't lobby me on media stuff. That's not to say we weren't aware of the positions their companies had, because we were, but as I say, we decided more often against than in favour.

So, you know, that was a -- the conversations there were really basically politics and about politics too.

I also used to find those interesting, because, for example, on issues in relation to the United States, he had as good an insight as anyone else I was talking to at the time.

Q. At what point exactly -- it may be difficult to define a moment -- did a close friendship develop between the two of you?

A. This would be -- you know, I would describe my relationship with him as a working relationship until after I left office. So I got to -- I know there been all this stuff about me being godfather to one of his children. I would never have become a godfather to his child on the basis of my relationship with him in office. But after I left, I got to know him better, and frankly, the relationship can be a lot easier and better, and his family.

So, you know, now it's different and it's not the same -- I don't feel the same pressures. So you're able to have a relationship in a way that also -- because there are lots of other things that he's involved in and does that are of -- you know, that are interesting and don't involve issues to do with British politics, when I was the Prime Minister and you were in a relationship that, as I say, was a working relationship but it also had this fairly acute tension at the heart of it.

Q. Is it because the elimination of the powerful undercurrents, which you refer to stopping in June 2007, made it possible to have a different sort of relationship; is that it?

A. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that's exactly it.
| Page 73 | I nearly lost the vote and then would have had to have resigned, or academy schools -- I mean, interacting with them would have been important on these issues.
| Page 74 | A. Yeah, I mean, if you take the whole of the relationships within government, but then I think you'd say that, probably, to be fair, about most of the senior political media people.
| Page 75 | LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I quite understand. It was because of your phrase, "a major part of what you had to do and was difficult". I just wondered whether that increased or diminished in your period in office?
| Page 76 | LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I'm not sure it's necessarily either inevitable or wrong, whether there isn't some other issue. Something you said just a few moments ago, which actually chimes a little bit with this question Mr Jay is asking, was this: "Managing these forces [that's of the press] was a major part of what you had to do and was difficult."
| 1 | LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I don't know whenever she wanted it, but if she was -- if there was an issue that concerned her -- I mean, I don't know whether she would necessarily have come on to me about it, but I should imagine most -- most Cabinet ministers will take the call of an editor of a major newspaper. I'd be surprised if they didn't.
| 2 | And I don't think per se there's anything wrong in that and, you know, on certain occasions I would have. But I think, again, you just have to be careful of distinguishing what is inevitable from what is wrong.
| 3 | A. Funnily enough, I think probably in one sense -- look, in my last three or four years -- it's what I always say to people about the problem you have as a political leader, that you begin at your least capable and most popular, and you end at your least popular and most capable, and frankly, actually, towards the end, in a way, by then, I had just decided I was going to do what I thought was right.
| 4 | A. No, I wouldn't say it was ever -- look, most of these calls were pretty short. So mean -- no, it definitely wouldn't be the case that I was so busy dealing with the media I couldn't focus on the issues of the day.
| 5 | What is more, I would say that sort of managing the media inevitably is a part of trying to manage -- if you're trying to put through, for example, let's say tuition fees, which was the single thing that was probably most difficult in terms of votes in the House of Commons for me as Prime Minister and the thing where

| 6 | LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Except that -- and it may be that Mr Jay will come onto this -- you took the decision that you needed somebody to direct your communications who had a real background in tabloid journalism and took the responsibilities very seriously and very effectively, and --
| 7 | A. Yes, that's an absolutely correct point. I mean, look, what I could see developing -- and by the way, this is even more so today. You have 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week media. You have stories -- the thing that's changed -- and I noticed this, by the way, around the world; this is not a specific British problem -- is the interaction between social media and conventional media today means that you get what used to be a building wave of opinion, which, if you intervened in

| 8 | A. I don't know whenever she wanted it, but if she was -- if there was an issue that concerned her -- I mean, I don't know whether she would necessarily have come on to me about it, but I should imagine most -- most Cabinet ministers will take the call of an editor of a major newspaper. I'd be surprised if they didn't.
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| 12 | What is more, I would say that sort of managing the media inevitably is a part of trying to manage -- if you're trying to put through, for example, let's say tuition fees, which was the single thing that was probably most difficult in terms of votes in the House of Commons for me as Prime Minister and the thing where

| 13 | LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: -- now we see that political leaders generally appear to have followed the same sort of pattern.
| 14 | A. Yes, that's an absolutely correct point. I mean, look, what I could see developing -- and by the way, this is even more so today. You have 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week media. You have stories -- the thing that's changed -- and I noticed this, by the way, around the world; this is not a specific British problem -- is the interaction between social media and conventional media today means that you get what used to be a building wave of opinion, which, if you intervened in
the right way, you could maybe -- it would then ebb again. It now reaches tsunami force within hours sometimes, days certainly, and can capsize a -- can literally wash a government away. You see this around the world.

So for example, I think when you're analysing these Arab revolutions, which in the work I do now I see quite closely, I would say social media is an absolutely integral part of what has happened there. I would say today -- absolutely, you're right. Today, this whole issue of managing the media is far more difficult and far more important because -- I mean, this is not a criticism; it's just a fact. The fact is it occurs in a way and with an intensity that, in the old days, wouldn't have happened.

This is why I used to say to people, when they used so say, "Your Cabinet meetings don't last long enough" -- and I used to always give the example that Roy Jenkins used to give me back in the 60s, where a Cabinet decision would go on for two days and at the end of it they would have a show of hands around the time. By the time I became Prime Minister, if a Cabinet meeting went on for two days -- I mean, forget it. It would have been total crisis mode for the whole of the government. And if I'd said to them: "Right, we're going to have a show of hands now", who had voted which way and how would have been out within 30 seconds and you would have -- all I'm saying is the business of politics -- part of the problem here, which is why this is the right moment to assess what can be done, is the business of politics has become acutely more difficult, not the fault of either politicians or media, but because the system within which you operate, the technology that's available, the way it works today is just fundamentally different.

And this is a problem, by the way -- you know, this is a problem that has arisen here in a particular way and this is why we have this Inquiry, but I tell you, you could talk to any leader in the democratic world today and they would say to you this is a major question for them, as to how they have the right interaction with the media in a world that is just light years away from what we grew up with.

MR JAY: Your informal contacts with Mrs Brooks, or at least what she refers to, did many of those have to do with her personal support for you in the context of what she describes as deepening hostility between you and Mr Brown?

A. I've read that in her evidence. Actually, to be fair to her, she was, you know, pretty cautious, actually, about whatever she said about Gordon Brown and basically was supportive of him taking over, with me at any rate.

No -- I mean, look, they were about politics in a pretty general way.

As I say, so far as -- at that point, at any rate, for the Murdoch press, I mean, I had my own relationship with Rupert Murdoch and he was the key decision-maker.

Q. What did you feel about some of her campaigns, in particular Sarah's Law? Did that appeal to you or not?

A. No, I was pretty ambivalent about that, as I think I said to her at the time. I mean, I understood why she thought it was a big problem but I thought particularly the way -- the trouble with any of these campaigns is that if you're not careful, the way they're conducted ends up getting out of hand.

Q. Do you feel this one did?

A. Yeah.

Q. What about some of the personal attacks in the Sun against some of your colleagues?

A. My attitude to that throughout was always to say -- I mean, not merely to her but to anybody else -- I mean, I didn't like it, I don't like it, I think it's not the right way to conduct politics, but again, to be frank, this was not a matter simply for the Sun. I mean, you could spread that across the media piece.
A. Yes, absolutely.
Q. Can I ask you, though, what were then the sound objective reasons for changing the policy?
A. They were twofold. First of all, I didn't and don't believe the issue of the ownership is what is important. In other words, I think that — and I thought this particularly as we get later to the 2003 Communications Act. I think prejudices against foreign owners or saying this particular owner we like or we don't like — I think it better to deal with at least issues on the basis of competition for the concentration of media ownership and if you don't change the culture or the rules, then you won't actually improve the situation.
And also, as I said to you earlier, I mean, I'd taken the view I was not going to have the Labour Party coming back into power after 18 years with a programme of change for the country and having the centrepiece of the programme being issues to do with media ownership.
I thought that would have been a distraction and wrong.
Q. I think it was Mr Lance Price who has expressed the view that the cross-media ownership policy was quietly dropped within six months of the Hayman Island trip, which was in July 1995. Is that a fair assessment or not?
A. No, it's not a fair assessment. The fact is I was saying this particular owner we like or we don't like — so by then, I think, I would have been surprised if he knew, by the way, Phil, I don't think, but — you know, by then, by the way — this is March 1997, I think.
Q. It is.
A. So by then, I think, I would have been surprised actually if they hadn't come out and backed us.
Q. Is the general point being made an accurate one, that their big fear was more unions than Europe?
A. I think probably that was true, actually. I mean, look, they'd been through all this Wapping business, so the unions weren't merely a theoretical issue; it was a major practical issue. He felt that — to some extent, rightly, that if I hadn't been able to overcome that union opposition, he would never have been able to save the Times and operate in the country, so it was obviously going to be a big issue for them.
But my position on the unions — let me make it absolutely clear — was because I believed in it. So we introduced a minimum wage, equal rights for part-time workers. We introduced statutory recognition. We were going to introduce individual rights, but I was determined — and this was a matter of conviction, not because Rupert Murdoch or anyone else believed in it — that we were not going to reverse the key principles of the Thatcher legislation, and I did that for reasons because I thought it was right.
Q. There's a later diary entry, page 11 of this bundle. We're a few days later, so I don't have the exact date, although we know the first piece in the Sun was 17 March 1997. Do you remember that one?
A. Yes.
Q. The second piece was 17 April 1997. At the top of our page 11, Mr Campbell notes that:
A. I do actually remember Alastair telling me about his conversation with Phil Hall, yeah, which is not to say that he knew, by the way, Phil, I don't think, but — you know, by then, by the way — this is March 1997, I think.
Q. Policy in the immediate run-up to the 1997 election.
A. I don't. I mean, I can try and find out from the Labour Party policy people at the time.
Q. Do you know exactly when this change of policy arose?
A. I don't. I mean, I can try and find out from the Labour Party policy people at the time.
Q. If Mr Price is right -- he may be wrong about cause and effect -- we're sort of at the back end of 1995, early 1996. Could that be right?
A. I don't know. I have to go and check it. I mean, don't let me -- on the other hand, as I say in my statement, had we kept that, it would definitely have been a problem with the Murdoch media group in particular, that's for sure, but I didn't think it was the right policy anyway, so, you know -- and I think really throughout my -- and also at the beginning part of my time in office, I was pretty much on the self-regulation side of the market. I came to a different view at a later stage. So in a way, the policy that we pursued then was consistent with the policy we first pursued in government.
Now, had you decided to take all of that on, it comes back to my strategic decision but that's another topic.
Q. First of all, Mr Campbell's diaries, page 10 of your bundle, the entry for 11 March 1997, where Mr Hall, then the editor of the News of the World, called to say there had been a sea change in Les Hinton's view:
"There was definitely movement to us and their big fear was more unions than Europe but his view was Murdoch was definitely going to back us."
Do you remember that sort of message being communicated to you?
A. I do actually remember Alastair telling me about his conversation with Phil Hall, yeah, which is not to say that he knew, by the way, Phil, I don't think, but — you know, by then, by the way — this is March 1997, I think.
Q. It is.
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A. Yes.
Q. The second piece was 17 April 1997. At the top of our page 11, Mr Campbell notes that:
"Meanwhile, I call Stuart Higgins as agreed and he said, clearly having spoken to Murdoch, that if we gave them a piece on Europe saying the kind of things TB had
1. said last time they met, they’d put it on the front.
2. I spoke to TB and after we chewed it over, we agreed to go for it. TB felt it could be the last thing needed to swing the Sun around.”
3. Pausing there, is that accurate or not?
4. A. Yeah, that’s accurate.
5. Q. “We agreed it was important not to change in any sense the policy, but in turn to allow them to put over the message that TB was not some kind of caricature euro fanatic.”
6. So did you feel it was more a sense of rhetoric and tone than substance, or do you feel that the distinction between those two is sometimes a little bit difficult to see?
7. A. No, I think in this instance, it was very much on that basis. That’s why I talk about the difference between managing them and conceding on policy. I didn’t concede on policy at all. I remained, throughout my time as Prime Minister, pro-European. The fact is we had a commitment for a referendum. If we went -- I think it was for the single currency -- it was a referendum on the single currency was part of our five pledges, and it was important also, by the way, to counter the fact that people thought you might be just for some sort of European superstate or so on, which isn’t my position.
8. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: I’m sorry for that, Mr Blair. I’d like to find out how this gentleman managed to access the court through what is supposed to be a secure corridor. I’ll have an investigation undertaken about that immediately. I apologise.
9. A. That’s fine. Can I just say, actually, on the record, what he said about Iraq and JP Morgan is completely and totally untrue. I have never had a discussion with them about that or any relationship between them and Iraq.
10. LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: You’re entitled to say what you want, but you should not feel it necessary to answer somebody else’s points.
11. A. No, I appreciate that, but part of the difficulty was important also, by the way, to counter the fact that people thought you might be just for some sort of European superstate or so on, which isn’t my position.

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<td>I support the Labour Party. Or maybe they did. I can't remember. Anyway, for me it was important to get them on board. So again, in that way, I don't think there was anything wrong in that or surprising. If a major newspaper comes on side, particularly one that's been hostile, I think it makes a difference. I don't think there's anything wrong in that per se.</td>
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<td>A. Of course. I mean, I think their support -- it's hard to quantify this, but of course their support would make a difference. Actually, one of my constant strategic discussions with my folk was I actually think it did make a difference for us, with voters, that business was -- a significant part of business was on side. I mean, I was the first Labour leader to be able to go to a launch of a manifesto and have a whole lot of business people sitting alongside us and I still believe, for people on my side of the political fence, that if you don't have substantial business support, it's hard to win the economic argument. So I think these things actually do have an impact, but anyway, that's my business, not yours.</td>
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<td>Q. I've been asked to put to you some questions in relation to the issue of union reform. We saw that hinted at in one of the extracts I've recently drawn to your attention and the questions are these: did you reach an understanding with Rupert Murdoch, after you became leader of the Labour Party but before you became Prime Minister, that you would not repeal the constraints imposed on trade unions by the various Trade Unions Acts and associated legislation passed in the Thatcher area? And the quid pro quo, I suppose, is that his papers would endorse your election. A. No, this was a position I took because I believed in it and actually it was completely consistent with the positions I'd taken when I was employment spokesman of the Labour Party.</td>
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<td>Q. I put to Mr Murdoch a piece in the Times -- I think it was 31 March 1997 -- which indicated your position, but cause and effect here is completely disassociated; is that it? A. Yeah, because my view was one of the essential things Labour had to do was it had to -- we were dogged throughout the '83, '87, 1992 elections with a position that said we were going to repeal all this Conservative legislation, which I thought was not simply foolish politically for us; I thought it was wrong. You know, I went through all those campaigns, and in the end I thought the closed shop, for example, was wrong as a matter of principle. I still do. I didn't need Rupert Murdoch or anyone else to tell me about that. Now, it's true that had we had a different position, then I think that would have been a big problem with their newspapers but we didn't take the position for that reason. It was a position I believed in and was for me a very, very important part of New Labour.</td>
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<td>Q. And the subsidiary question I've been asked to put: was it not part of this agreement that whilst you insisted that a statutory recognition procedure should be introduced, he insisted -- that's Mr Murdoch -- that there should be a clause within it which specifically enabled the existence of a non-independent staff association like NISA to block an application for recognition by an independent trade union at a News International title? A. No. So this was -- I understand why these sort of conspiracy theories arise but it's not as if my position on unions and so on was a matter of great surprise. It was actually, for me, a very, very strong article of belief. I think trade unions are a very important part of a modern democratic society, but -- you know, it's interesting, actually. Their argument through the 60s and the 70s -- and I grew up with this argument -- was that they should not be subject to legal constraint, you know, that this was an interference with the democratic principles of trade unionism. And as time went on, I just came to the view that you couldn't argue that. You know, they had power. They should be subject to some form of legal framework. So this was -- my view of this was because I genuinely believed these positions for the Labour Party should change and had to change.</td>
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<td>Q. Lord Mandelson, in his evidence, drew a neat analogy between what he described as the powers of the unions of old and the modern power of the press. Do you see that as a neat analogy or as a mismatch? A. I think some of the arguments are a little, to me, somewhat the same, in the sense that I remember at the time people used to argue, within the trade union movement, that -- just this whole concept that someone else could tell them, you know: &quot;Here are certain standards&quot; was wrong, so I suppose there was a certain reflection of that, but I suppose you can take that analogy too far quite quickly.</td>
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| **Q.** Can I move on to the Prodi intervention in 1998. We've received already quite a lot of evidence about that. Can I throw into the melting pot another extract from Mr Mullins' diary, page 17 of our bundle. **A.** Yes. **Q.** We're in March 1998. Do you see the second paragraph there: "Murdoch came up again at the Parliamentary committee. The papers are full of stories alleged that the man [that's you, of course] has been ringing up the Italian Prime Minister on Murdoch's behalf. I asked, one, who initiated the call to Prodi, and two, what is our relationship with Murdoch? The man was visibly irritated. 'I don't reveal the content of private conversations,' he said, testily. I replied I just wanted to say it was Prodi, adding, 'The story in today's Telegraph is a load of balls.' Then he relaxed and said, 'My relationship with Murdoch is no different from that with any other newspaper proprietor. I love them all equally.' He said forcefully --" **A.** A touch of irony, I'd just like to emphasise in that one. **Q.** I certainly detected the irony but whether I delivered it in quite the right tone, probably not, in my desire to maintain impartiality throughout. But in terms of the gist of your conversation with Mr Mullins, is this a fair account or not? **A.** Yeah. I mean, again, I can't honestly remember this, but it probably sounds to me about right, and as I think I say in my statement the call was initiated from Romano Prodi, and basically I was -- raised the issue of the -- of whether the idea of having someone from the outside come and own part of Mediaset would be resented or not. He gave me an answer and I can't remember how it was relayed back, but I'm sure it was. But my point is I would have done that for anyone with substantial British interests. I would have done that if another media group had asked me to do it. **Q.** Mr Campbell's account, his diary entry for 1 April 1998, page 19, the end of the first paragraph for that date: "TB said he didn't fear them coming at him about me but about the relationship with Murdoch and he didn't fancy a sustained set of questions about whether Murdoch lobbied him." **A.** Yeah, because what you knew, as indeed turned out to be the case, is that what was an intervention, which I think was perfectly justified, that lasted about two minutes ended up occupying days and weeks of time. **Q.** So is this your point: that this is an example of a conspiracy theory which really has developed like turvey (?) out of a story which had no validity? **A.** Absolutely, and you know, as I said, when you come to how we decide media policy -- now, it's correct that what we decided not to do was to do a big media, you know, regulation and so on, but in respect of the specific issues that came up along the way, we decided -- as I say, I think more of them against than in favour. I say that in my statement and I wasn't saying whether it was a good idea he bought Mediaset or not. I mean, all I was doing was finding out whether a foreign owner would be welcome or not welcome. **Q.** The answer, I think, was not welcome, and Mr Murdoch didn't press the matter at that point? **A.** Yeah. **Q.** Is that it? **A.** Yeah. I don't think that's unreasonable for that to be asked or -- you know, as I say, if another media group had been interested in a possible acquisition, I would have done the same. **Q.** Can I deal with perhaps an issue of more substance. The Human Rights Act, Mr Blair, which was one, I suppose, of the -- certainly the most significant achievements of your then state of mind? **Q.** And were you generally supportive of that position? **A.** Yes, that's right. They wanted no suggestion that you would move outside the bounds of the PCC and self-regulation. **Q.** Was the position reached that following, if I can put it as it were, not through the Human Rights Act, which was Lord Wakeham who was head of the PCC, who was something actually I thought was doing quite a good job of that, and the PCC were pretty fierce on this, on behalf the whole of the media, really, not any one particular part of it. **Q.** Was the position reached that following, if I can put it in these terms, pressure from Lord Irvine -- of course then your Lord Chancellor, who I think was responsible for piloting the act through Parliament generally, certainly of course through the Lords -- that he...**
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|---|---|
| Q. Although the development of a privacy law through the gateway of Article 8 would be entirely consistent with self-regulation, wouldn't it? | A. Yeah. It's not what they at the time felt at the time. |
| A. Yeah. | LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: Well, what do you think about that? |
| I mean, my recollection of this was that the PCC itself was really the lobbying organ on this one. | You may be right, but what do you think about the idea that the PCC is actually acting as a lobby -- |
| LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: -- rather than doing the job which might have been thought that it should be doing in the light of Calcutt, which was to provide a mechanism of redress? | A. That's a good point. I suppose, look, they felt -- you know, they were defending their own position as the custodians of press standards. But, yeah, I mean I think that's a perfectly reasonable point. |
| MR JAY: But your original position, in line with the press position, which would have placed the press, as it were, outside the Human Rights Act, would certainly have removed all the force of Article 8 and arguably would have given force for the common law position, which is reflected in Article 10. Why was there a policy issue here? Surely the position, particularly after | |
First of all, is he right about that?

A. Yes. There was a -- look, there was a big debate going on with the people around me, some of whom felt very strongly -- Jonathan was one, Alastair was another -- that we should take this issue on. I mean, I was reluctant, for the reasons I give. So -- I mean, he says here that he -- I think you're quoting from Jonathan Powell, aren't you?

Q. I am, yes.

A. Yes. Yeah. I mean, I remember that discussion taking place and I think some work was done on it, but I mean, this never got to the stage where I was anywhere near taking a different decision to the one I took up then.

Q. I suppose you reached the point in your -- this was your second term. Some would say you were at the zenith of your power, really. Of course, the situation may or may not have changed later. It was the opportunity insofar as there ever was one. Is that fair or not?

A. Yes. Look, some people say, "You could have done it straight after 1997. You'd just won this landslide victory. That would have been a chance." And some people say, "After everything that happened after the death of Princess Diana, that would have been the chance." Some people say, "After the 2001 election, you'd won a big majority, that would have been the chance."

The decision I took, rightly or wrongly, as I say, was there was never going to be a moment when this was not going to have to squeeze out the rest of the government agenda, and, you know, however supportive they seemed or however powerful I seemed, this was going to flip like that the moment you put such an issue centre stage. You see the degree of focus on this Inquiry now, so, you know, if you'd been the government of the day and said, "I'm going to legislate on this", and royal commissions and all the rest of it, I think it would have been a -- anyway, that's the decision I took.

We were, by then, in my second term, really starting to move forward on reform in public services. Academy schools were being introduced and competition within the health service. We were really getting things -- changing major law and order legislation. Later, we had legislation on terror and so on. I never felt that I could risk putting all of that to one side to fight this.

Now, that's the political judgment, in a way, that you have to make. So some people would say to me -- and some did say, "Look, you can do this along with everything else", and I used to say to them: "You're being completely unrealistic about this." You take this issue on as Prime Minister -- and you're the Prime Minister. You're the person they think they're holding to account, so in some ways you're the worst person to initiate this debate, because they say, "You're parti pris. You want to control us and put us into a straitjacket."

So I never felt that I could take a different strategic decision and I think, as I say, it's only because of this and because of what has happened that you're in a position where a Prime Minister could and indeed should.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: But Mr Cameron may say it's rather easy for you or the other party to say, "Now is the time for the Prime Minister to grasp the nettle." I've become rather depressed as I've listened to you. Do you think it's different now?

A. Um ... yes. I think it is, actually. I think what has happened -- this is what sometimes happens in life, never mind politics, is that something people have known needs to be sorted out, suddenly the circumstances become such that people say, "Right, it's got to be sorted out."

I think what you do about it is very difficult. I don't think it's so difficult in relation to these,
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<td>you know, appalling abuses and so on. I think what's -- the political aspect of this is quite difficult, for reasons we can go into, but I think you can get a political consensus today and keep it, and I think there's a lot of responsibility on the rest of us, by the way. If the Prime Minister is now faced with decisions arising out of your report, it's really important people don't play politics with that, because my anxiety -- there was never anything of this nature that came up in this way. My anxiety, frankly, about the strategic risks of going down this path was I could see a situation where the opposition would immediately be going to the media and saying, &quot;I don't know why he's doing this.&quot; Even people within your own party, even within your own Cabinet, would say, &quot;He's gone crazy now. He's trying to take on the ...&quot; My actual view was it was not possible. I do think, though, what is very unfair would be to leave this Prime Minister in -- and I'm trying to work out how, if I were him, I would deal with it, and I think if there are reasonable recommendations that come out, and we can come on to some of the things that those might be, I think it's very important that he is not left with a position where he's politically exposed on this, because that is not fair to him, because we should be under no doubt at all that this is going to be extremely difficult, but actually, no, on balance, I think it can be done and it should be done now.</td>
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<td>produce a different situation. And I actually remember during the course of this piece of legislation, I actually wanted to see if there were major media companies, I mean people the Time Warners of this world, Viacom, I think, Axel Springer, other big organisations that if you had a more open media policy would be prepared to come in, because what concerned me always was that you needed -- it wasn't necessary just to have other media ownerships, it was necessary to have other media owners with heft, with the ability to put major investment in, and frankly with the type of global media position that I could see the world moving to. Some people took a different view from me. I had no belief that if you turned bits of the media over to British as opposed to foreign owners you were going to necessarily get a fairer crack of the whip. Q. Okay. The last point is the 2004 referendum on the European constitution. We've covered, of course, with Mr Straw and with Lord Mandelson, but the position from their evidence is really that had nothing much to do with the position of the Murdoch press. Is that right or not? A. Yes. It wasn't, by the way, the Murdoch press's position. I think the majority of the media would have</td>
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been in favour of a referendum on the constitution.
I didn't want to do it, by the way, but as I think I say
in my statement, Jack Straw in the end wrote me a memo
saying, "It's going to happen, so do you want it to
happen to you or take the initiative?" and his advice
very strongly, and I thought rightly in the end, was to
take the initiative.
Q. Okay. I'm sure you would want to draw express
attention, Mr Blair, to 05575, under the rubric,
"Particular questions", where you collect together six
examples that the government turned down the positions,
as you say, of the Murdoch media. You start off with
the Man U bid, then BBC, new channels, the increase in
the licence fee, greater powers to Ofcom, ITV and listed
events for sport, and you say that's clear evidence of
the absence of any sort of express deal?
A. Yes. We were -- I feel on very, very strong ground on
this. When it came -- as opposed to the more general
issue to do with the media and regulation and so on,
when it came to the specifics, yeah, I think it's very,
very clear and the 2003 Communications Act is an example
of that. And, you know, the strongest lobbying
I remember getting from media organisations during my
time was actually the BBC over the licence fee, and by
the way we supported and I continue to think that

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a strong BBC is a very important part of our democracy,
even though obviously, particularly over Iraq, we had
a severe falling out with them. But none of these
things were things they liked or wanted.
That's why I don't -- you know, I think although the
commercial interests of these organisations are
obviously always important, I do say in my statement
I think looking at their influence solely through that
paradigm, I think, is a mistake.
Q. Can I put to you a contrary view from Mr Price, which is
under tab 42.
A. Mm.
Q. I don't think this is in the context of an express deal,
but it might be of implied deal. This is in the second
file we've prepared for you, a piece he wrote in the
Guardian on 1 July 2006, headed:
"Rupert Murdoch is effectively a member of Blair's
Cabinet."
First of all, can we be clear, Mr Price worked for
you from 1998 to 2000 and -- not sure exactly when, but
can you help us?
A. I think Lance Price was, first of all, a Labour Party
press officer and he came into Downing Street for
a time, at least.
Q. For about how many years was he there, can you help?

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dangerous man in the world" or something, so this is --
this is not -- it's to misdescribe the issue, actually.
Q. Then he says a bit later down:
"I've never met Mr Murdoch, but at times when
I worked at Downing Street, he seemed like the 24th
member of the Cabinet. His voice was rarely heard, but
then the same could have been said of many of the other
23, but his presence was always felt."
Well, what do you make of that?
A. Look, also in respect of policy, by the way, I should
say the whole -- if you look at the policies that
Rupert Murdoch or indeed anybody else was concerned
about, they fitted into certain categories. Europe was
obviously -- that was probably the major thing he and
I used to row about, actually, and debate, but sometimes
what people wouldn't accept from the Labour Party
perspective was things like public service reform or
trade union reform, for example, I didn't -- our views
may have coincided, but I believed in what I was doing,
I didn't need him or anyone else to tell me what to do.
So I think this is -- you know, it's ...
Q. He says when he submitted his book, "The Spin Doctor's
Diary" to the Cabinet Office, your staff were deeply
unhappy:
"No fewer than a third of their reactions related to

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one man; not Tony Blair or even Gordon Brown, as might
have been expected, but Rupert Murdoch."

Do you remember that?

A. I don't, frankly. Actually, by the way, it says
apparently he was here from 1998 to 2001, I see down at
the bottom.

Q. Thank you. The final point:

"In my first few weeks as Alastair Campbell's deputy
[so that's in 1998] I was told by somebody who would
know that we'd assured Mr Murdoch we wouldn't change
policy on Europe without talking to him first."

Was that assurance given?

A. No. We would never have given an assurance to Murdoch
or anybody else that we were not going to change policy
without seeking some sort of permission. That's absurd.

However, having said that, I mean, if we were about
to engage in a major change of policy on an issue that
mattered to any particular media group, we would
probably have tried to prepare the way for it, but
I mean that, again, I think, is perfectly sensible and
there's nothing wrong with that.

You see, the thing that's important to realise about
this is, of course, you were aware that he, and indeed
other papers, had very strong stances on issues, and
again I think it's important that this is not simply
located with the Murdoch media and nobody else. So we
realised the Guardian would have very strong issues on
certain things, and the Mirror, for example, and
obviously the Mail group and so on, the Telegraph. But
would we interact with them in order to try and, if we
thought they might be opposed, soften that opposition,
say, "Look, I think you should be aware of X, Y and Z,
so when you're writing about it, you should realise this
is our argument"? Of course we would. I don't think
you're going to stop that, and even if you don't do it
from the official organs of government, if you're
a Cabinet member about to take through a difficult piece
of legislation, you're going to speak to many, many
different media outlets to try and get your point of
view across. That won't just be by formal interviews,
you'll briefing them, you'll have in the main political
correspondents and say, "Look, this is what I'm trying
to do, this is why I'm trying to do it."

I don't think there's anything wrong with that.

I think that's a perfectly healthy interaction with the
media, and (b), I think it's absolutely inevitable.

That is a completely different thing from saying, you
know, "You have a veto over policy", and by the way, if
we -- I mean, the most obvious case I gave you earlier
is the EU rebate, when there were vitriolic editorials
written about my position on a whole series of things to
do with that, and we did the budget deal with literally
not -- I doubt we got any part of the media on board for
that, and that was a big deal. We did it and we did it
irrespective of what the Murdoch media or anybody else
said because I thought it was the right thing to do for
the country.

LORD JUSTICE LEVESON: All right. That's probably
a convenient moment. We'll resume at 2 o'clock, if
that's all right, Mr Blair. Thank you very much indeed.

A. Thank you.

12 (1.00 pm)

(The luncheon adjournment)
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