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## GREENS & LABOR TURN THE CLOCK BACK TO 1984 ON PRESS FREEDOM

Greens Senator Christine Milne's recent call for an inquiry into the Australian media should send shivers down the spine of any Australian who values a free press.

Senator Milne claims the inquiry is a response to the phone-hacking scandal in the United Kingdom that has forced the Rupert Murdoch-owned paper *News of the World* to close down. However, it is clear that the Greens are not interested in addressing concerns about the issues of privacy and police corruption raised by that scandal. They are only interested in furthering their ongoing vendetta against News Limited papers in Australia.

On the ABC's *Q and A* Program recently, Senator Milne claimed that the *News of the World* scandal was "useful" because "it will lead to an inquiry into the media in Australia." Milne also made the extraordinary claim that the inquiry will look into "who are fit and proper people... to be running media outlets."

There is something distinctly Orwellian about a senior member of a governing alliance implying that there needs to be government oversight in relation to who can and cannot run a media outlet. It sounds like the sort of muzzling of the press that would be at home in Stalin's USSR, not Australia in 2011.

Milne's chilling proclamation on *Q and A* follows Greens Leader Senator Bob Brown's bizarre attacks on the Murdoch-owned press a couple of months ago. Senator Brown labelled News Limited papers the "hate media" in a tirade that left journalists at the press conference stunned by his viciousness.

And it's not just the Greens who are calling for an inquiry into the Murdoch-owned newspapers. Prime Minister Julia Gillard has stated that News Limited has some "hard questions" to answer, without bothering to elaborate on what such questions might be. Labor Minister Senator Stephen Conroy has gone as far as accusing News Limited of campaigning for "regime change" against the Gillard Government.

These continuing accusations of bias from Labor and

the Greens are largely the result of the media reporting what Senator Bob Brown and his ilk do not want to hear. Their claims that *The Australian* and other Murdoch-owned papers are running a campaign against the Government and the carbon tax are paper thin.

The simple fact is that the Labor-Greens governing alliance does not welcome the scrutiny the media is applying to their toxic carbon tax. It is in the public interest that legitimate questions be asked about this tax, and that those questions be asked by the media. Just because Julia Gillard and Bob Brown don't like the facts about this tax being published by the media, they remain just that – facts. It is the role of the media to publish the facts, even if those facts are inconvenient to the Government's political message. To not do so would be a dereliction of their vital role in our democracy. That is the role of the fourth estate – to scrutinise, to ask difficult questions, to hold the Government to account.

Claims of media bias are always the last resort of a deeply unpopular Government. While the conduct of some journalists at *News of the World* was inexcusable, there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that journalists who write for Australian News Limited newspapers employ similar practices.

The Labor-Greens governing alliance should stop attempting to blame the media for their unpopularity. The reason that the carbon tax has come under intense scrutiny by the media is because it is a deeply flawed policy, not because the media is somehow biased against this Government.

It is the judgement of the Australian public that Labor and the Greens should be worried about, not the judgement of Rupert Murdoch or News Limited journalists. And if the polls are anything to go by, this Government should be very worried indeed.

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