



Journalism is a public good. Journalism is essential for democracy.

In the midst of a global pandemic the need for quality, independent information is vital.

And yet, across the world, journalists' jobs are being axed, media are closing down and information is being censored, restricted or used simply as a commodity to be bought and sold by hedge funds, corporations and tech giants.

Facebook – by blocking news and public information sites in Australia - stands exposed as caring more about its profits than citizens' rights to access information.

Corporations are closing down local papers to protect their bottom line at the expense of rural, local, community news. News deserts are a symptom of the changing climate in which journalism operates. Above all they create a democratic deficit.

It doesn't have to be like this.

As unions representing tens of thousands of journalists and media professionals across all media we stand for an alternative.

We condemn unreservedly the actions of Facebook in blocking news sites in a show of corporate power, in a threat to governments everywhere.

We also condemn Google's earlier threats to switch off its services in Australia. These companies cannot use the free flow of information as a bargaining chip to defend their power and profits. Both companies have done all they can to avoid any regulation.

While we welcome steps taken by the Australian government to make tech giants like Facebook and Google pay for the news content they profit from, we do not believe the solution is to be found in individual private commercial deals that lack transparency.

The steps need to be bigger, bolder and ensure that any money raised does not just go to propping up the same monopoly media owners. Any monies must be used transparently to build and sustain a genuinely public-interest media that supports, among others, community, not-for-profit and local media. Such funds should not be used to fund more mergers and acquisitions or reward shareholders but to pay journalists a fair share of the profits made from their work, to retain professional journalists' jobs, to save public-interest media, to build new and more diverse voices.

All funds must go to support and invest in journalism.



Facebook and Google are guilty of excessive profiteering. It is time not only to make them pay a fair share for the content they use but to level the playing field. If your local newspaper or local radio station has to pay tax why are Facebook and Google allowed to avoid and evade their social responsibilities?

If governments were to tax their revenues or their profits, an independent fund could use those revenues to support a news recovery plan, saving jobs, sustaining media, supporting new voices. We could not only retain jobs but build and sustain new media and voices, assuring more diversity, more quality information and more jobs. The receipt of any funds must be strictly conditioned on investing in journalism.

Journalism should not just be a business – nor can it just rely on charity, philanthropy or the crumbs from the tech giants' table. The pandemic has proved it must serve above all the public interest. We need to secure, support and sustain public-interest journalism on radio and television, in print and across digital platforms.

Governments around the world need to take urgent steps to protect and sustain news and information. The use of tax and fiscal policy, public advertising campaigns, job retention subsidies and other measures are all vital to tackling the economic crisis facing media.

As unions representing journalists and media professionals we commit to advocate, lobby, campaign and act together around these principles, to rebuild journalism as a public good.

The NewsGuild-CWA (USA)
National Writers Union (USA)
National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland)
CWA Canada – The Media Union (Canada)
UNIFOR (Canada)
MEAA (Australia)