

Media North

CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM (NORTH) • Issue 7, June 2020 • £1

Tories don't like criticism and will do anything to stifle it

WHY IT'S A DANGEROUS TIME FOR THE MEDIA

By Granville Williams

CONSIDER these three examples of how the Tories treat critical media:

● Channel 4 News ran a piece on Friday 5 June critical of the government inquiry into the high incidence of health worker deaths in the black, Asian and minority ethnic community from the coronavirus. Cathy Newman said, "We did ask for someone from the government to come on the programme but no one has been available to appear for interview on C4 news for three weeks. We've also not been given a chance to ask a question at the government's press conference for the whole of this week."

C4 News has done some good reporting on the high incidence of deaths in health care homes and on 3 June Channel 4's *Dispatches* was a hard-hitting critical programme titled 'Coronavirus Catastrophe: Did the Government Get it Wrong?' It ended with a clear call for a public inquiry into the government's handling of the pandemic.

● In the weeks before the Dominic Cummings story broke Downing Street was still declining to speak to *The Guardian* on the record, while simultaneously providing other media with anonymous source quotes condemning the stories which *The Guardian* and *Mirror* would publish on 22 May as 'fake news'.

This is what *The Guardian* editor, Katharine Viner, said in a BBC 4 Media Show interview:

"The role of the press machine in No 10 has been turned inside out. It is supposed to be a vehicle through which journalists can ask questions with the reasonable expectation of getting

answers. If they are reasonable questions based in fact they should expect to get answers. "At the moment it feels like the press office is like a filter through which we give away what we know or what we think we know. That bides time for them to get their ducks in a row and perhaps start rubbishing the story or rubbishing the journalist before no commenting. It makes you wonder why

● Continued on Page 2



Tory supporting tabloids promote Boris Johnson and avoid the dire Tory response to the COVID-19 pandemic

EDITORIAL

Back from the margins?

In September 2008 the late Geoffrey Goodman, former Industrial Editor at the *Daily Mirror*, gave the last vote of thanks at the end of the TUC conference on behalf of industrial correspondents.

Goodman's speech marked the end of a tradition which stretched back more than 80 years. The General Council had decided to abolish it. Their reason was that there were so few full-time industrial and labour correspondents left to justify it.

Goodman's speech opposed and criticised the GC's decision. He argued that if national newspapers were not paying enough attention to working-class and trade union issues to

employ full-time correspondents, the labour movement should force them to listen.

He placed this argument in a wider context about the need for unions to be more assertive and impose themselves politically.

The remorseless decline in industrial correspondents has continued. Today there is only one, the Press Association's Alan Jones.

For a decade austerity has pushed working people into insecure jobs and zero hours contracts and deepened inequality. We have relied on films like Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* and *Sorry We Missed You*, James Bloodworth's book *Hired*

or the work done by Unite and GMB to expose working conditions in places like ASOS, Amazon and Sports Direct.

But the COVID-19 crisis has seen something remarkable happen. In all sorts of ways this has been an extraordinary time for trade unions and the TUC, both nationally and regionally. Instead of negative headlines and government hostility we have seen positive coverage of key workers who have played such an essential role. These same people are the ones who endure low pay and job insecurity. We explore some of these issues in this edition of *MediaNorth*.

The TUC, since the crisis

struck, has collaborated with the government to an extent unimaginable a few months ago.

Of course the deep-rooted hostility of sections of the Tory press have still been on display as Nick Jones reveals (pp 7-8).

"There can be no going back to business as usual," TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady insists. "We now know the real price of inequality. This time working people can't pay the price for recovery. People will not put up with that."

Let's hope this means we get more accurate and informed reporting of the world of work and the valuable role of trade unions too.

Dangerous time for media

● From Page 1

you bother putting anything to them at all."

● The BBC has been the target of government attacks for one BBC *Panorama* programme highlighting the chaotic situation over PPE supplies, and Emily Maitlis was charged with breaching impartiality guidelines in her introduction to the *Newsnight* programme on 26 May. She said Dominic Cummings had 'broken the rules' and had made the public 'feel like fools'. She also accused Boris Johnson of showing 'blind loyalty' towards his adviser, who had driven 260 miles from London to County Durham during lockdown.

These three examples (there are more) demonstrate how the government responds to the media when it does the job it should be doing – holding the government to account. But they are part of a much grimmer and dangerous pattern which Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings are encouraging. They make claims that are obviously false with the deliberate intention of making people doubt both what is actu-



Newsnight's Emily Maitlis.

ally going on and what the truth is. 'Gaslighting' is the term to describe this.

It is what Cummings was doing when he appeared in the Rose Garden of No.10. It was a show of personal power. 'Look what I can do,' he was saying. 'I can lie about why I went to Barnard Castle, I can lie about how I foresaw how vulnerable the UK was to a pandemic, and there is nothing you can do about it, much like all the previous lies I have made in the past and got others to say.' Cummings was saying in no uncertain terms that he is the power behind the throne.

But the other great danger of such populist tactics is they create a climate of hostility towards the media and journalists, in the

way Trump has in targeting and attacking journalists for 'fake news' at his rallies and press conferences. It makes them fair targets. How else do we explain the attacks on and arrests of journalists by the police in the States as they covered the protests against the death of George Floyd?

And here in the UK Cummings and Johnson have effectively purged critical or independent voices from a government drawn from the extreme right-wing of the Conservative Party. It is a populist government with no respect for independent media. And it is creating a climate which, as in the USA, sees the growth of social media sites which attack and abuse journalists for criticising the government's mistakes.

In these dangerous times we have to unequivocally support those journalists and news organisations which continue to focus on the government's real record in dealing with the pandemic rather than the spin and dishonesty they project through Conservative-supporting media to distract attention.

Barrow journalist in hiding after threats

AMY Fenton is the chief reporter for the *Mail*, Barrow's daily newspaper. She is in hiding with her five-year old daughter and under police protection after receiving more than 100 death threats and threats of violence on social media.

These were triggered by her short report of a 19-year-old woman from Barrow charged with lying about being abused after the woman had appeared in court charged with seven counts of perverting the course of justice.

Chris Morley, the NUJ's Northern organiser, said: "The threats of physical violence against Amy and her daughter have shocked even the most experienced of our members. There is real determination among Amy's fellow NUJ members that this vicious bullying of workers doing their jobs will not succeed."

Trade unions win key policies to defend workers

Support for unions soars during COVID-19 pandemic

By Tony Burke

ON 16 May *The Economist* (not a friend of organised labour) ran an article headed 'The Trade Unions Are Back'. Well, of course, we have never really been away.

The UK's trade unions have seen popular support grow during the COVID-19 crisis among the general public and the media, despite the *Sun*, *Mail*, *Express* and *Telegraph's* best efforts to trash teachers' unions for not bending to Johnson's will and his on-the-hoof announcements.

Indeed, vitriolic comments in the *Mail* describing teachers' unions as 'callous' failed to chime with parents, doctors, scientists, local authorities and the general public, leaving ministers floundering after trying to bounce parents into taking their kids back to schools where heads and teachers say they are not ready for the return and it is unsafe.

Lots of things have happened since March – but it is worth examining the impact that trade unions have actually had in helping workers, not just union members, but working families and the self employed, since the lockdown.

Right-wing media

So what have the unions done during the crisis? From the very first meeting with the Chancellor the unions proposed – and secured – the Job Retention Scheme (furlough scheme).

Over 8 million jobs have been furloughed covering 986,000 employers with over £11 billion being claimed. The Job Retention Scheme provides 80% of wages – at first extended to the end of June, then to the end of October.

When it was widely expected this would be reduced to 60%, the Chancellor agreed to maintain the 80% until October, thus protecting pay and people's jobs and this in spite of comments from the



When Boris Johnson gave 10 hours' notice that it was time to return to work, the unions pointed out that risk assessments still had to be carried out.

Art: DonkeyHotey

right-wing media and some MPs that furloughed workers were 'addicted' to being off work.

The government also announced that additional flexibilities will be available from August which will allow part-time working while on furlough.

When it was clear that genuinely self-employed workers would be hit hard it was pressure from unions that secured the self-employment income support scheme which has seen two million applications, with £3.1 billion being claimed.

Unions were also responsible for securing the changes to Universal Credit. The government increased the standard allowance – the monthly baseline every household receives – by £1,000 (upping payments by around £20 a week) for all new and existing claimants for 12 months. It has also removed the minimum income floor (a calculation set at the national minimum wage) to ensure higher payments for those who are self-employed but unable to earn in this period.

On sick pay, unions were in-

strumental in eliminating the three-day waiting period for people affected by coronavirus. As of 13 March 2020, employees and workers were entitled to receive any Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) due to them from their first day of self-isolation if it was because they have coronavirus; or they have coronavirus symptoms, for example, a high temperature or new continuous cough; or someone in their household has coronavirus symptoms, or they had been told to self-isolate by a doctor or NHS 111.

When Boris Johnson glibly announced on TV it was time to go back to work (with 10 hours notice) the unions were the first to point out that proper risk assessments had to be carried out.

The documents on the return to work that unions and employers received soon after the Johnson announcement failed to reference the requirement for proper health and safety risk assessments.

Unions offered an army of experienced health and safety reps to help carry out the risk

assessments, which they had also done with the offer to switch manufacturing jobs to producing essential PPE and ventilators.

In addition, there are eight Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy guidance groups, covering different classifications of work. Unions have three or four reps on all eight groups – something that would have been unthinkable in the recent past.

Add into the mix the many thousands of local agreements reached by unions with employers to provide safe working for those key workers who have worked throughout the lockdown, the U-turns forced on those employers who tried to just to sack their workforce and the work unions have done supporting communities and key workers – it adds up some big gains for working families.

Unity

One of the key proposals from the TUC and trade unions including Unite is the establishment of a National Council for Recovery to help rebuild the economy.

As TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said recently, "There can be no return to business as usual after the pandemic." She called for a return of the unity shown after the Second World War, when the post-war decade of social investment created growth of 3.3%, but a decade of austerity after the financial crash resulted in growth of only 1.9%.

"We've got to get that safety net strung again, we've got to invest in our public services, which may have to build resilience for a long time to come. Unions are back ... but the state is back too," says Frances.

.....
Tony Burke is Assistant General Secretary at Unite and the TUC General Council's Lead on Employment and Union Rights.

Coronavirus puts unions back in the firing line

By Nicholas Jones

'THE unions are back' declared *The Guardian's* headline over an interview with the TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady in which she called on the government to establish a new consensus with the trade union movement to help restore the economy.

No wonder there was just a hint of grim satisfaction: a recognition that it had taken a national emergency and countless deaths to turn the clock back to the days when Prime Ministers had to listen to the collective voice of workers if they were to have any chance of governing effectively.

Once the coronavirus pandemic took hold and the death toll started rising, and as lockdown brought most of the country to a halt, Boris Johnson and

his ministers were forced to do the unthinkable.

An administration wedded to Thatcherite principles had no alternative but to engage with trade union leaders and discuss the government's plans for handling the crisis.

To his credit, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak led the way in seeking union advice and support as he prepared his unprecedented programme to furlough eight million workers and fund their wages at a potential cost to the Treasury of £80 billion or more.

Unite and other leading unions welcomed Sunak's subsequent undertaking to start discussions to plan for financial support for strategically important companies such as Jaguar Land Rover and Tata Steel.

For the first time since Margaret Thatcher all-but obliterated

WE MUST not let the militant Left use the occasion to get what they want. All the jealors of tight state control and interference, the self-serving unionists and the enthusiasts for making an anti-racist squall, see this epidemic as an opportunity. Their motto is 'Never let a good crisis go to waste', and they are as good as their word.

For this country last December elected a Conservative Government. And while that Government was in power, it was faced with unprecedented numbers in the streets of London, and it was most definitely not swept into office by a people demanding a more socialist Britain.

The election was a rejection, across the broadest possible range of everything that Labour stood for. That is why every class had some hold in Labour for a century tumbled into Tory hands, people wanted free enterprise, personal liberty, new taxation, liberal and good government in general. They will want these things - though they understand very well that immediate and temporary priorities require that some of them should be laid aside for a short while. The key is that the temporary must not become the permanent.

'Any serious person must grasp it's the poor who suffer most from closing schools'

‘Any serious person must grasp it’s the poor who suffer most from closing schools,’

[illegible]

‘The BBC takes every chance to heap sycophantic praise on Sir Keir Starmer’

The Mail
ON SUNDAY
COMMENT

[illegible]

the tri-partite structures that had been created and nurtured by successive Labour administrations, the government, business and unions have been back together round the table.

Having been a labour and industrial correspondent during the Thatcher decade, reporting the turmoil that followed the break-up of the nationalised industries and the ravages of privatisation, I witnessed the extraordinary lengths to which Conservative ministers went in the 1980s and early 1990s to

erase union influence.

An elite and prolific band of journalists ended up writing their own obituary – hence my publication in 2011 of *The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street's Industrial Correspondents?*

But coronavirus has turned the country on its head and perhaps history is about to repeat itself.

Safeguards needed

If the UK is to succeed in climbing out of recession there will have to be far greater consultation and co-operation across the economy, a change of direction which Frances O'Grady believes will require a national recovery council with ministers, trade unions and employers working together to rebuild the economy.

Unite's assistant general secretary, Gail Cartmail, has written to ministers to urge the restoration of the Health and Safety Executive's power to conduct spot checks on social care institutions, shops and pubs to ensure safeguards are in place to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection.

Who knows where a post-Brexit Britain is heading? New trading opportunities and work-

Frances O'Grady 'No business as usual. The unions are back'

[illegible][illegible]

The angry Mail comment page (top) contrasts strongly with coverage in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*



The old headlines are the worst. The right-wing *Daily Mail* revives its history of union bashing

ing practices will offer unions new opportunities to engage constructively in industrial regeneration, to strengthen their representation and to accelerate the recent growth in union membership.

We might well see tripartite discussion – and possibly some agreement – on a host of contentious issues such as state aid, intervention, and protection.

In some areas there could be a common agenda that possibly went some way to marrying up the objectives of Conservative Brexiteers to free the UK from EU controls and the complementary long-term aims of many in the Labour movement to target government assistance on key strategic industries.

Getting Britain back to work cannot be achieved safely if the views of workers are ignored, whether in schools, on public transport or in countless public

services and private enterprises – a massive challenge and opportunity not just to the wider union movement but also for the news media.

A generation of journalists who have had little or no contact with trade unions will have to turn to new sources of information, develop contacts and then explain the ebb and flow of industrial negotiations and the ups and downs in relations between unions representatives, workers and their employers.

Already there has been a vast upsurge in media inquiries to the TUC and trade union headquarters for an insight into the problems that workers are facing, and the dangers posed by encouraging a return to work before testing and tracing has been fully implemented.

Respected group

Journalists across press, broadcasting and online platforms are having to grapple with a lengthening shopping list of potential stories about safety at work and social distancing, not to mention the fallout from lost orders, plant closures and the inevitability of countless redundancies.

When workers were up against it in the 1980s at the height of the confrontations of the Thatcher decade – often taking strike action in a vain at-

tempt to protect jobs – many of the industrial journalists writing for Conservative supporting newspapers took pride in the accuracy of their reporting.

They insisted the facts and quotes in their stories were sacrosanct: editors could determine the headlines, presentation, and layout, but if content was altered or manipulated, they not infrequently asked for the removal of their by-lines.

I fear those days are long gone. Hardly any newsrooms have specialist reporters taking an interest in workplace or trade union affairs.

Gone too is the self-discipline – however slight it might have seemed at the time to observers of press behaviour – that went with being a member of what in those days was a powerful and respected group of journalists.

All too often we find that the Prime Minister's tabloid cheerleaders can no longer be trusted to provide factual information when reporting industrial conflict.

Quotes, facts, and statistics supplied by the Press Association news agency or culled from broadcast interviews are

regularly turned and twisted to boost Boris Johnson and misrepresent organised labour.

A recent proliferation of anti-union stories accusing union leaders of thwarting the easing of lockdown for purely political purposes is a sad commentary on today's journalistic standards.

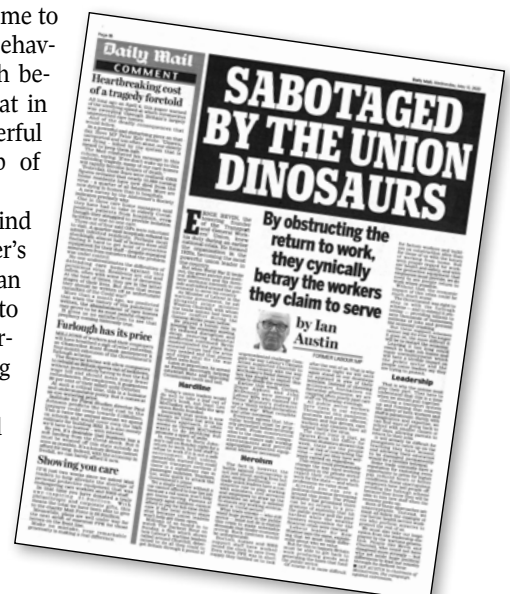
After *The Observer* led the way with its warning, 'No return to work until we feel safe, unions tell Johnson' (10.5.2020) and *The Guardian's* interview with Frances O'Grady ('No business as usual. The unions are back' 20.5.2020), the fightback began in earnest.

'The left is exploiting this crisis to push its own failed agenda' declared the *Mail on Sunday* (17.5.2020) and in his two page assault, 'Who runs Britain', Richard Littlejohn added a picture of miners' leader Arthur Scargill as a reminder of the 'firebrands' who had led the 'unions' self-destruction on the altar of politically motivated strikes' (*Daily Mail*, 23.5.2020).

Set against the negativity of the usual suspects, the coronavirus crisis has led to a re-awakening of interest about workplace issues among broadcasters, regional journalists, and an army of online activist reporters.

Union headquarters have a new-found responsibility to voice workers' concerns about the need for safe working conditions.

A once in a generation opportunity to flag up the strength and relevance of the union movement is there for the taking.



Reporters struggling to find freelance work turn to crowd-funded newsletters

How *PayDay Report* made a mark on US labour scene

By Mike Elk

WHILE many media activists are hoping that government funding will save the news industry, others are taking action into their own hands, working to build new, sustainably funded outfits.

Across the United States, reporters struggling with the precarity of freelance work are turning to their own crowd-funded newsletters. These sites, while small, offer journalists a way to create sustainable sources of revenue by appealing directly to their social media followers (often numbering in the 10,000s) to become paying subscribers to support their work.

Independent journalists with a successful following are presenting a new way to help keep journalists in the industry, and also cover things that other journalists would miss.

In April of 2016, I created my own small crowdfunded outlet *PayDay Report* after being fired during a union drive at *Politico* back in 2015. In three years, we have raised \$100,000 directly from readers to cover stories of the labour movement that nobody else is reporting.

We were the first national outlet to cover the news of the brewing West Virginia teachers' strike back in December 2017. Thanks to reader donations, we were one of only a handful of outlets with a reporter on the ground in all five states that had a teachers' strike last year: West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, North Carolina, and Kentucky.

During the GM Strike, we wrote 28 stories and created 31 videos over a 45-day period from six different states, and all our work was funded by our readers.

The lesson for us has been that people want to read about labour organising because it's inspiring — and they will pay



The *PayDay Report*'s Strike Wave Tracking Map. One of a number of imaginative initiatives which has boosted the site's reputation.



Mike Elk, of *PayDay Report*.

good money for it. Labour coverage that shows workers winning inspires workers to feel like they can win too.

PayDay Report has helped to interject workers' stories into the mainstream press, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our COVID-19 Strike Wave Tracking Map, tracking over 250 strikes, won wide praise from NPR's *On The Media*, *The Economist*, *Vice* and labelled 'invaluable' by Charles Pierce of *Esquire*.

The *New York Times* cited our work four times in just the past year and local publications like the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Mississippi-Clarion Ledger*, the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*

have also cited us.

As more publications cite our work on COVID, our donor subscriber base has been growing rapidly. In 2018, we raised \$45,000 from our readers. In 2019, we raised nearly \$70,000 in reader donations. Now, we are on base to raise nearly \$80,000 from our readers.

While we are growing as a publication, we could be growing quicker with just a little movement support. Even for a small publication with sustainable growing revenue sources based on donors there is still little support.

Sites like Stack, which many workers use to start their own site, are predatory. They charge users a flat 10% of all donations in addition to other fees. Sites like PayPal allow you to simply embed a donation link onto a WordPress site and they will only take a 3% cut.

A WordPress site, unlike Stack, allows a writer to edit the design and have way more editorial control. Instead, many find themselves at the mercy of Stack, which is now even offering some reporters loans to start-up; provided of course

they pay back the loans in full and still give a 10% cut to Stack.

Stack could quickly become, with predatory rates and loan schemes, like 'Uber for Small Publishers'.

However, few writers know this and even fewer writers know how over time they can engage their readers and sustainably grow a funding source of revenue. It's hard-work and has taken many years of failure and success to learn how to engage readers.

A small publisher co-op, though, could fund itself by offering cheaper rates on online donation processing and offer support services to a journalist with dreams of becoming small publishers. A publishers' co-op could also help very small publishers compete for large grants as part of group appeals, which would be tougher for them to compete as smaller outlets. Many foundations don't see small publication as sustainable, but a movement of small publications working together could be more appealing for major funding.

With thousands of layoffs this year in the media industry, many reporters are eager to explore starting their own publication but, so far, their media unions aren't offering them support.

Despite years of advocacy by myself for the media unions to lead efforts to create a small publisher's co-op so far nothing has been done. The promise of a new-worker funded press is there, the question is if we as a movement can give the support to grow it.

Mike Elk is the Senior Reporter on *PayDay Report*. You can donate to support his important work. Go to <https://paydayreport.com/donate/>



Tabloids vilify union leaders when they raise real concerns about opening schools

Back to School: How teachers became new tabloid enemies

By Nicholas Jones

A VICIOUS and highly personalised attack on teachers' trade union leaders for daring to demand stricter safety conditions ahead of the phased re-opening of primary schools in England was another unpleasant reminder of the hateful coverage that has become so entrenched in much of daily press reporting.

Rather than recognise their own failure to hold Boris Johnson's government to account for the death of care home residents and staff through the hasty transfer and admission of infected hospital patients, leading Conservative-supporting newspapers chose to pillory union officials when they tried to ensure that the same mistakes were not repeated in classrooms.

In the two and a half weeks leading up to the 1 June start for the re-opening of nursery and primary schools, teachers' union leaders faced a trial by tabloids, their every word of caution and appeal for more negotiations met with abusive headlines and commentaries.

Singled out by the *Daily Mail* for a hate-filled assault were the 'hard line' joint general secre-

taries of the National Education Union who were subjected to a full-on 'Enemies of the People' campaign. They were accused of attempting to 'sabotage the teachers' return' through their insistence on testing for staff and safe social distancing: 'Callous teacher union's plotting exposed' (Daily Mail, 20.5.2020).

The NEU's 'militant' leadership – 'bellicose Leftists who claim to speak for the teaching profession' – were the real 'enemy' claimed *Sunday Telegraph* columnist Janet Daley (24.5.2020).

An editorial in the *Sun* (21.5.2020) was equally belligerent in urging Boris Johnson to 'get a grip' by resisting 'Corbynites engaging in a political war' who had 'whipped up' a storm against 'getting kids back to school ... and the ability of parents to return to work and rebuild our shattered economy'.

Perhaps not surprisingly those same newspapers had far

less coverage – and scant condemnation – of the rapidly rising death toll that had resulted from the rush to transfer elderly patients from hospital beds to care homes when many of their staff lacked protective equipment.

By then fatalities among residents had risen to 15,000 with 131 deaths among social care staff.

Few care workers in privately owned homes, or employed by agencies,

are union members. They lack the organised structures of the kind that safeguard teachers and having no collective voice they were not seen to be a threat to the government.

There could hardly have been a sharper contrast in the treatment meted out by the tabloids as they demonised the teachers' leaders. Day after day Dr Mary Bousted, the NEU's 'hard left' joint general secretary, was cast as the evil villain, the 'Corbynite

lover of Communist Cuba who says the first word she learned was "strike"' (Daily Mail, 15.5.2020).

Pictured in an uncompromising pose, she stared out repeatedly from the pages of the *Mail* as the headlines hardened: 'Held hostage by the zealots' (16.5.2020); 'Caught out by their own cynical words' (20.5.2020).

Use of the tag 'Corbynite' to besmirch Dr Bousted and her colleague Kevin Courtney was convenient shorthand for the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* as they ramped up their attempt to blame the NEU for widening public concern about the push to re-open primary schools on 1 June.

Despite their best efforts to stir up a hate campaign that began to resemble their onslaught against opponents of Brexit, the tabloids had no answer when an increasing number of education authorities refused to meet the government's 1 June target. They said local infection rates were too high and their schools needed more time to prepare.

Boris Johnson, and later the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson, agreed to further con-

● Continued on Page 8



Teachers are new tabloid enemy (continued)

● From Page 7

sultations with councils and teachers' unions after conceding there would have to be a phased re-opening to ensure the safety of children and staff.

But with only days to go, after several members of the government's scientific advisory group (SAGE) broke ranks and warned publicly that they believed the early re-opening of nurseries and primaries was unwise, the NEU re-affirmed its opposition to the

1 June start date and urged this should be delayed for another two weeks.

Given the broad front of anxious voices, rather than give a platform to those urging caution, Boris Johnson's tabloid cheerleaders changed gear to talk up the benefits to the economy of starting to get children back to school.

The *Daily Express* added its weight to government efforts to encourage a return by younger children, claiming that it would

help at least a million parents get back to work. If all 2.1 million children in the relevant age groups were in school, this would enable 3.8 per cent of the total workforce in England to return to employment (*Daily Express*, 30.5.2020).

The *Sun on Sunday* gave pride of place to a signed article by Education Secretary Gavin Williamson in which he insisted strict safety measures were in place while making no men-

tion of the role of the teachers' unions.

It was billed as a plea from the heart of government: 'Every school must take back more kids, every parent must back it. The virus must not kill children's futures' (*Sun on Sunday*, 31.5.2020).

After initially being vilified, the teachers' unions were side-lined and ignored as union bashing temporarily took a back seat.

Behind the headlines: What about the workers?

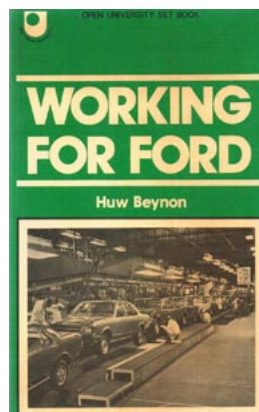
By Granville Williams

For five years in the 1970s I was based in Birmingham and wrote about the car industry and the inspiring campaign by UCATT against the Lump on Bryant's building sites in the West Midlands.

I also had a crash course in the terrible health and safety record in engineering plants and building sites. I was also there covering Saltley and the amazing solidarity by engineering workers in support of the miners in February 1972.

I learned an enormous amount during that time, a lot of it from listening to workers commenting on how the media reported strikes.

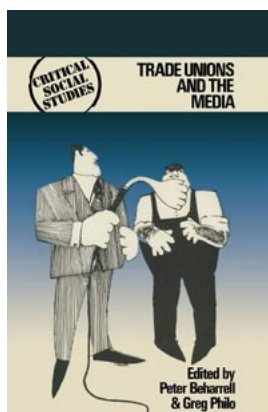
A young tool room worker at Pressed Steel Fisher in Castle Bromwich (they made the car bodies for Jaguar cars) pointed out how the standard report on an unofficial strike in a British Leyland factory always talked about how so many millions pounds of lost car production this caused, but they never said how much lost production there was through breakdowns in plant and equipment, shortages of materials or mistakes in production schedules. He was a highly-skilled worker but the lathe he worked on dated from



the First World War.

These experiences made me interested in bias in media reporting, particularly of trade unions. There was some great material to read too. Books like Huw Beynon's *Working for Ford*, and the series of *Counter Information Service* (CIS) reports on particular companies like Lucas, British Leyland and Rio Tinto Zinc.

But it was the work of the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) and their first book *Bad News* in 1976 which really got me absorbed in this topic, and that interest still continues today. There were two chapters towards the end of the book particularly which drew me in: 'Trade unions and the Media' and 'Down to Cases'. The cases were detailed studies of how TV news reported a Glasgow bin strike and cover-



Two books with great insights into work and trade unions

age of a speech by Harold Wilson about British Leyland linked to a strike by engine tuners at BL's Cowley plant.

The GUMG's powerful conclusion was that television news lay the blame for society's industrial and economic problems at the door of the workforce, and ignored or smothered contradictory evidence.

The GUMG produced another informative volume, *Trade Unions and the Media*, edited by Greg Philo and Peter Beharrell, in 1977.

When the Campaign for Press Freedom was launched in 1979 to address these issues I immediately got involved. The GUMG is still going strong, with one of its key people, Greg Philo, acting as a media adviser to John MacDonnell.

More books about labour struggles

THERE have been some really good books about media, work and trade unions by both journalists and academics. In America there is one university press, Cornell University's ILR Press, which focuses on work, employment and labour. They have published two books by Christopher R Martin which explore these issues: *Framed! Labor and the Corporate Media* (2004) and *No Longer Newsworthy: How the Mainstream Media Abandoned the Working Class* (2019).

Steven Greenhouse covered labour and the workplace for 19 years on the *New York Times*. He was highly regarded and still writes about these issues. His two books: *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker* (2008) and *Beaten Down, Worked Up* (2019).

Here in the UK, we have Nick Jones, a regular contributor to *MediaNorth* and formerly a BBC Industrial Correspondent. Nick wrote *Strikes and the Media: Communication and Conflict* (1986) and edited *The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street's Correspondents?* (2011).

Nick's perceptive chapter 'New Labour: More of the same' is worth reading. – GW

BOOK REVIEWS

Ethics in journalism: What's right, or what you can get away with?

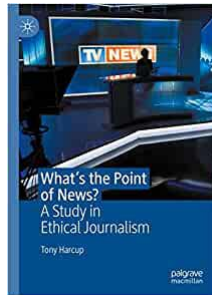
By **Robyn Vinter**

MY first real hands-on experience of 'journalism' was making up stories. I had a week's work experience on a red top in 2009, writing celebrity stories – it wasn't my dream job but, after spending my teenage years reading gossip magazines, I wasn't a stranger to the concept either. Or so I thought.

After a day of doing tasks which even then I knew were busywork, the news editor strode over with a handful of printouts and asked if I wanted to write something.

Thrilled to be able to get the chance to prove myself, I asked what the story was. He gave me the printouts, pap pictures of soap star Jennifer Ellison in combat gear working out on a beach, and said: "It looks like she's doing some kind of bootcamp, just write that."

Though taken slightly aback, I diligently went about making up a story about how she was trying to 'lose the baby weight' and asked the news ed if he had any contacts



WHAT'S THE POINT OF NEWS?

A Study in Ethical Journalism

By **TONY HARCUP**

Published by **Palgrave Macmillan**

Price **£59.99**

I should interview. He told me to write 'A pal said:' and make up a quote. By the end of the week, I realised celebrity journalism was not my cup of tea.

This story is often a surprise to non-journalists, as many people see all 'journalism' as either fact or fiction. Few people really understand the breadth of what we

call news, that some newspapers are full of fiction while, in others, facts are sacred. And they find it odd that someone can have gone through all the hurdles that it takes to get into the journalism industry without the subject of ethics coming up at all.

Even those who study media law will note that it focuses not on what is right but simply what is allowed or even what can be got away with.

Tony Harcup's book *What's the Point of News?* could be the first time many people will be forced to wholly examine the ethics of how journalism works. It's so valuable to see passing thoughts, discussions I've had on Twitter or things that some journalists are actively trying to change spelt out and backed up with evidence. These conversations have always been vital but with traditional media losing power to social media, we need them more than ever.

The book's examination of independent news producer *Democ-*

racy Now! is particularly prescient as I write — an organisation that for many years has covered 'the brutality of the police and their violent acts on the peaceful protesters'.

Similarly, it looks at the issue of profitability and the mismatch between ethical journalism and profitable journalism, something that has never been an academic issue for publishers.

It's a textbook, not difficult to read as academic texts go, but it's not meant to be a mainstream book and I doubt it will be well-read outside of academia. However, as these days many new journalists start with a degree or a masters in the subject, it's likely that lots of our future reporters and editors will have come across this book and be all the better for it.

.....
Robyn Vinter is social affairs correspondent on the Yorkshire Post and founder & editor-in-chief of The Overtake – www.theovertake.com

● MN readers can get 20% off *What's The Point Of News?* with the code **THARCUP2020** at www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9783030399467

A robust call for action on media reform

By **Ann Field**

THIS book draws extensively on the six editions of *ElectionWatch* produced by CPBF North during the 2019 election and the contributions by speakers at the Leeds conference on 8 February 2020. There is also analysis of the attitude of the Tory government to critical sections of the media since winning the election.

The book is a clear call for action and to rouse 'public awareness of the vital importance of diverse independent media' with contributions from journalists, trade unionists and academics.

Three chapters consider whether and how to defend the

IT'S THE MEDIA, STUPID!

The Media, the 2019 Election and the Aftermath

Edited by **Granville Williams**

Published by **CPBF(North)**

Price **£9.99**

BBC. Despite being highly critical of the BBC's failure in its impartiality obligations and neglect of holding politicians to account, the authors argue that the principle of public service must be maintained, with the aim of supporting '...an equal, democratic and participatory society', for 'participating citizens rather than paying consumers'. Audience interests are best served by 'competition

for quality' rather than 'competition for funding'. Calls for abolition are rejected as a 'disastrously short-sighted ambition'.

Nick Jones, a former BBC journalist, refers to 'the production line of anti-Corbyn reportage' and declares bitterly that it was 'a hatchet job that was the vilest I have witnessed in 50 years of political reporting'. Another journalist, Tim Gopsill, discussing Labour and antisemitism describes the concerted four-year media campaign to 'delegitimise and defeat' Corbyn and to 'divide the [Labour] party and destabilise the leadership'.

If you can bear to look at them, 15 pages of front pages,

'news' and 'features' from the four-year, right-wing press campaign against Jeremy Corbyn are included, in full colour.

The task now for the labour and trade union movement is to reconsider how to challenge media power including dealing with complaints; to develop standards for news providers on social media, and for proposals to break up media monopolies and promote diversity. This book provides us with the evidence and arguments to do that and deserves to be widely read.

.....
Ann Field is a former Chair of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

Public service broadcasting under government threat

By Julian Petley

ON 27 March, the Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Committee announced an inquiry into the future of public service broadcasting in order to examine that future 'within the wider media and digital ecology, including funding, content and regulation of PSBs and how this compares with alternative subscription, streaming services and Freeview services'. Taken in conjunction with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's consultation on decriminalising TV licence evasion, this signals extremely torrid times ahead for the PSBs, and especially the BBC.

Why all this frenetic activity? The case against licence fee decriminalisation was made conclusively by David Perry QC in his 2015 TV Licence Fee Enforcement Review, and Ofcom has only just delivered its five-year review of public service broadcasting.

The reasons are not exactly difficult to spot. In his first speech after being appointed, the new culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, warned the BBC that it must 'guard its unique selling point of impartiality in all of its output', questioned whether it is 'ready to embrace proper reform to ensure its long-term sustainability' and stated that it 'needs to be closer to, and understand the perspectives of, the whole of the United Kingdom and avoid

What changes do the Tories want for BBC?

providing a narrow urban outlook'.

Similarly, before he was elected Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee, Julian Knight wrote an article in the *Sunday Express*, 19 January, in which he called the licence fee 'a poll tax' and 'an anachronism in a world of choice', and argued that 'the main option is to move to a subscription service or allow people to opt out from the BBC'. He also accused the BBC of often 'crushing' private sector broadcasters by 'using its awesome spending power' as well as 'spoon feeding' its audiences with the 'lop-sided views' of the 'west London media elites'.

Change, then, is clearly very high on the political agenda. And in this respect, it is highly revealing that among the questions

which the PSB inquiry poses to those wishing to submit evidence are: 'How would representation be protected if changes were made to the PSB model? How would the nations and regions be affected by changes to the PSB model?' and: 'How would changes to the PSB model affect the accessibility of services? How would a wholly internet-based service compare to the current PSB model?'

The problem is, however, that without knowing what these changes are, the questions are largely meaningless, and impossible to answer.

A properly conducted inquiry would, of course, outline a range of possible changes to the PSB system and the reasons for them, and then ask respondents for their views on the consequenc-

es of such changes – in this case, for matters such as representation and accessibility. But this is absolutely not the way of this government, and it's not exactly difficult to glean from evidence already in the public domain (as quoted above, for example) the nature of the changes that it has in mind, even though the call for evidence to the inquiry omits to spell them out.

For those of us with long memories, these developments are all too reminiscent of Thatcher setting up the Peacock committee. But now Labour doesn't appear to have a media policy, and many of those Conservatives who, traditionally, were supportive of PSB have been brutally purged or have left in disgust. That faction of the party which has always loathed PSB is now in almost complete ascendancy, and we know full well from long experience the kind of changes that they have in mind: those that will lead to the complete commercialisation of broadcasting, and the end of the BBC and C4 as we know them. The objective is all too clear – it's just a matter of the government bringing about the 'changes' that will accomplish it.

Julian Petley is Professor of Film and Television at Brunel University and the author, with James Curran and Ivor Gabor, of *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left*.

Julian Knight accused the BBC of 'spoon feeding' its audiences with the 'lop-sided views' of the 'west London media elites'

It's time to buy *It's the Media, Stupid!*



IT'S the Media, Stupid! The Media, the 2019 Election and the Aftermath is now on sale. Sincere thanks to Steve Bell, *The Guardian* cartoonist, for the pungent cover cartoon.

Obviously plans for book launches are now on hold. So we will be relying on people buying the book directly from CPBF(North). Here's how you can do it:

- Send a cheque for £11.50 inc P&P, with your name and address, to CPBF(North) 24 Tower Avenue Upton near Pontefract West Yorkshire WF9 1EE
- Or you can use BACS to transfer £11.50 to CPBF (North) Sort code 08-92-99 a/c No 65796090.

Remember to email cpbfnorth@outlook.com with your name and address.

Murdoch shuts down Aussie newspapers

AS the COVID-19 crisis hit Australian media two months ago, and advertising slumped, Murdoch's News Corp suspended the print editions of sixty of its local newspapers.

Now News Corp Australia has confirmed that more than 100 local and regional newspapers will become digital only or disappear entirely, and there will be a significant number of job losses. Numbers have not been confirmed but estimates are as high as several hundred.

While Rupert Murdoch remains ensconced in his eight-acre Californian vineyard the news of the paper closures and job losses was made by Michael Miller, the News Corp Australasia chief executive, who thanked the departing employees for their 'professionalism, dedication and contribution'.

However the media union, the Media, Entertainment and



Front pages of some of the Australian newspapers affected by the News Corp cuts.

Arts Alliance (MEAA), says staff found out about the closures through leaks to the press. Thirty six of the 112 newspapers will close and the other 76 will remain as online mastheads.

MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy said, "The closure of so

many mastheads represents an immense blow to local communities and, coming off the back of hundreds of previous regional closures during this period, it underlines the seriousness of the crisis facing regional and local journalism."



Support for independent publishers in UK

HACKED OFF are fiercely critical of the deal between newspaper publishers and the government which was launched in mid-April to support national, local and regional newspapers by buying £35m of advertising to promote their health alerts during the COVID-19 crisis.

The campaign group say that the most powerful and wealthiest newspapers have just been given a £35m windfall by the government and Murdoch's newspapers the *Sun*, and *The Times*, as well as the *Daily Mail* and the *Mirror*, are among the newspapers getting a share of this huge state handout, framed as an 'ad deal'.

Many of these publishers are profitable, they argue, while several are owned by individuals who do not pay taxes in the UK.

But the main focus of their criticism is that newspapers which really need help aren't getting it. "While the government hands over your money to big corporate publishers, independent titles struggling to survive have been cut out of the arrangement and are set to receive nothing," they say.

The Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) found in a survey that 75% of independent local titles fear closure due to the impact of coronavirus.

The PINF has now launched the COVID-19 Emergency Fund for independent news publishers affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

The goal of the Fund is to provide small but meaningful grants to help independent publishers keep working through the crisis and beyond. The Fund will award 20 grants of £3,000 each – a total of £60,000 – for independent publishers based in the UK.

US plans to save local journalism

THE COVID-19 pandemic is ravaging the US news industry – forcing tens of thousands of layoffs, furloughs, and pay cuts in recent months.

Local news outlets have been damaged for years by tech giants siphoning away advertising revenue and private equity ownership groups hollowing out the industry with extreme cost-cutting measures.

Since 2004, the U.S. has lost approximately 1,800 newspapers, many of them small papers outside of major cities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the devastation of the local news industry. Advertising revenue has dried up as businesses are shuttered to combat the virus.

Now two organisations have put forward positive proposals for action.

In mid-May the NewsGuild

launched a 'Save the News' campaign and urged Congress to provide relief to an industry that should be considered an essential service in a democracy.

The campaign is demanding that Congress support local news through three different approaches: direct grants to workers; inclusion in the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which many local news outlets are not eligible for because they are owned by larger news companies, and direct federal spending on community outreach advertising to local newspapers to replace lost revenue.

Their plan is here:
www.savethenews.org/

THE media reform group Free Press has come up with a plan that, if adopted by Congress,

could go a long way toward saving local journalism.

It would also preserve and extend employment for tens of thousands of reporters during the current crisis and in the future.

Two things distinguish Free Press Action's recommendations. First, they focus on sustaining journalism, rather than bailouts for the big media companies – and hedge-fund investor – that were making a mess of things even before the pandemic hit.

Second, they bring realism and precision to a discussion that until now has lacked clarity.

You can read their proposals here:

www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/2020-05/free_press_action_journalism_recovery_policies_final.pdf

Grudging, incomplete apology by IPSO and JC

By Tim Gopsill

A LIVERPOOL Labour Party activist falsely accused of anti-semitism by the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC) has been cheated of justice after seeking redress through IPSO – the so-called Independent Press Standards Organisation.

In April last year John Davies, a ward chair in the Riverside CLP, was accused by the JC of ‘vile attacks on Jewish MPs’ for opposing the hostile behaviour towards left-wing members by the then MP, Dame Louise Ellman. She had faced criticism over her strong support for the state of Israel, notably over the imprisonment and killing of Palestinian children.

John Davies wrote to members blaming pro-Israel MPs of orchestrating the witch-hunt of left-wingers as a means of preventing the election of a socialist government led by Jeremy Corbyn. The leak earlier this year of a huge number of documents from party HQ proved this allegation to be correct. The letter, signed by more than 50 activists, said that ‘pro-Israel Labour MPs ... would prefer a pro-Israel Conservative government to a socialist Labour government, critical of Israel’.

The letter said that Louise Ellman’s fellow right-wing MP Ruth Smeeth’s ‘prime interests’ were ‘neither socialism nor the Labour

Party – they lie elsewhere’. It also defended members forced out of the party over the issue, including former MP Ken Livingstone who had stated that Hitler had supported the Zionist settlers in Palestine in the 1930s, which is a historical fact.

He was then suspended from the party himself. The JC report of the suspensions included a comment from Ruth Smeeth who said he had made ‘disgusting justifications of Hitler’s stance towards Jews’.

John Davies – a TV actor who has featured in both the north-west England soap operas *Coronation Street* and *Hollyoaks* – complained to IPSO against the JC, seeking an apology. He said: “To accuse somebody of justifying the holocaust is seriously defamatory.”

IPSO is supposed, if possible, to negotiate an agreed correction or apology; or if not, to investigate and make a judgement on the complaint. Negotiations dragged on for nine months as IPSO and the JC refused to come up with a wording John Davies would accept.

Year later

In April, a year after the offending article, without consulting him, they agreed their own wording which the JC appended to the article on its website. It says:

In an article headlined “Coro-

nation Street and Hollyoaks star suspended by Labour over ‘vile’ attacks on Jewish MPs” published on 17 April, we reported comments from a named Labour MP who claimed that John Davies had made comments which represented “disgusting justifications of Hitler’s stance towards Jews”. We accept that this comment implied that Mr Davies had made comments which could be understood as seeking to justify the holocaust. We wish to make clear that we have not been able to demonstrate any basis to support this allegation.

John Davies rejects the text: “It does not name Ruth Smeeth as the originator of the libel; why are they protecting her? It does not state that the allegation is completely untrue; and there is no apology.”

The JC had earlier wanted him to agree a final settlement, so that he would not sue for libel. The unilateral statement does not require that. But it was posted a year and three days after the article was published, and under the Defamation Act the time limit for bringing a case is one year.

John Davies is consulting lawyers about getting the limit extended because of long delays in the IPSO process. He concedes it is some kind of achievement to get anything at all out of IPSO and the *Jewish Chronicle*, which has been pursuing a vicious campaign against pro-Corbyn Labour members falsely accused of anti-semitism.

Despite Jeremy Corbyn’s resignation this purge of the left has continued, with Sir Keir Starmer agreeing with establishment Jewish leaders to expel anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian members from the party. Meanwhile Louise Ellman has joined other right-wing and pro-Israel MPs who have demonstrated their commitment to Labour by leaving it.

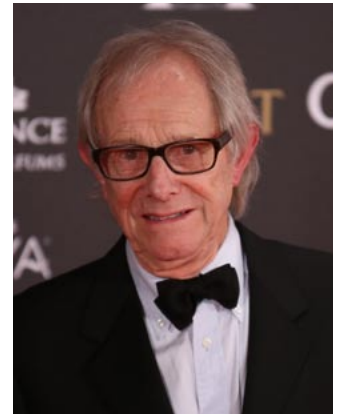


Photo: Ruben Ortega

CRITICAL: Ken Loach

Ken Loach slams BAFTA over *Panorama* nomination

THE filmmaker Ken Loach has fiercely criticised the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) for nominating the highly controversial *Panorama* programme ‘Is Labour Anti-Semitic?’ for a BAFTA.

Ken Loach said, “This nomination disgraces BAFTA, just as the programme disgraced the BBC. The film was widely recognised as a crude polemic, without balance or objectivity, intended to undermine Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership.”

The BBC received over 1,500 complaints about the programme in just under two weeks after it was shown.

Loach also points out that BBC’s *Panorama* has done nothing about the leaked Labour Party document. He said, “Now the leading witnesses, senior party officials, are revealed as plotting to wreck Labour’s election chances and remove Corbyn as leader. They used the language and tactics of the gutter. They were responsible for the very delays in dealing with disciplinary hearings, including cases of alleged antisemitism, for which they blamed Corbyn and his staff. Did *Panorama* investigate any of this? Of course not. It didn’t fit the desired narrative.”

MediaNorth

This issue went to press on 9 June 2020

Editor: Granville Williams

Design and Production: Tony Sutton, www.coldtype.net

If you would like to receive future copies of the online version of *MediaNorth* contact us at cpbfnorth@outlook.com.

MediaNorth is published quarterly, and we welcome comments or suggestions for articles. Become a friend on Facebook at: Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom North.

Twitter: @campaign_and

Website: www.coldtype.net/MediaNorth.html