



How *The Guardian* reported the news of the government's new ID plan

New bills reveal ugly priorities of Tories

Boris Johnson has surrounded himself with politicians and advisers on the far right of the Tory Party. His electoral pitch to the angry, disappointed, nostalgic and fearful has given him an 80+ majority after the Hartlepool by-election.

The consequences of this were revealed in the policies which grabbed the headlines in the Queen's Speech.

The plan for mandatory photo ID at elections is part of wider government plans to reform the electoral system, including new curbs on postal and proxy voting, and repealing the act which sets elections at five-year intervals.

The photo ID proposal has triggered anger. How could this policy get priority while the burning issue of social care was dismissed in a single line?

In 2015, the Electoral Commission found that 3.5 million people didn't have any photo

Granville Williams on the impact of the Conservative Party's shift to the far right

ID. A new ID law would make it much harder for them to vote.

But that's the whole point: to disenfranchise the young, the poor, and people of colour. Not only are they less likely to hold a passport or driving licence – they are also less likely to vote for the Tories. It is a blatant form of voter suppression.

Add to that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. Already the focus of significant opposition, this Bill represents the biggest threat to the right to protest in a generation. It threatens to criminalise protesters who are noisy, disruptive or even 'annoying', while effectively outlawing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities' way of life.

The government is also

introducing legislation that would allow people blocked from speaking at events to sue universities and student unions. This would undermine universities' independence and may force them to platform anyone invited by student groups, no matter how dangerous their ideas.

A Judicial Review Bill is also being introduced, supposedly to 'protect the judiciary from being drawn into political questions and preserve the integrity of judicial review for its intended purpose'. In reality, this is an attack on the power of citizens to challenge a government that acts unlawfully, following a number of defeats for the government over recent years.

Boris Johnson and his allies in the Tory press will thrive on the anger and protests these proposals will rightly provoke.

Make no mistake, we have an ugly, authoritarian government.

EDITORIAL

Recent appointments threaten BBC impartiality

RECENT BBC behaviour is reminiscent of Smike in Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Smike was so brutalised by the assaults of Wackford Squeers, the awful Head of Dotheboys Hall, he ducked instinctively when Squeers approached.

The BBC seems to have been doing a lot of ducking recently. It seems to have made a strategic decision to appease its enemies in the Conservative Party. These are people who hate the very concept of publicly-funded public service broadcasting and who are ultimately unappeasable. No matter how many concessions the broadcaster makes, they will still hate it.

Extreme Brexit

The latest worrying example is the appointment of Sir Robbie Gibb to the BBC Board. Gibb is an extreme Brexit-supporting member of the Conservative Party.

Gibb is no friend of the BBC's journalism. Last August, he wrote in *The Telegraph* that 'the BBC has been culturally captured by the woke-dominated group-think of some of its own staff. There is a default left-leaning attitude from a metropolitan workforce mostly drawn from a similar social and economic background'.

This has all the signs of an overtly party-political

• Continued on Page 2

Assault on media disrupts coverage of Gaza suffering

Granville Williams on the reporting of Israel attacks on Gaza

ON Saturday 15 May an Israeli air strike destroyed a 12-storey apartment building used by local and international media companies, including the Associated Press (AP) news agency and Al Jazeera.

The prominent building in Gaza City offered a vantage point for the world on Gaza. AP had cameras positioned on the roof terrace.

"The world will know less about what is happening in Gaza because of what transpired today," AP's president, Gary Pruitt, said in a statement following the Israeli attack.

The action got international coverage and condemnation from across the world. Unlike

similar strikes on the previous Tuesday and Wednesday when Israeli warplanes bombed and destroyed high-rise residential buildings housing more than a dozen international and local media outlets, including the Al-Jawhara and Al-Shorouk offices.

Disrupting independent media

The second attack came a day after the Israeli Army misled the media, saying that ground troops had entered Gaza. Its strategy is clearly to disrupt independent reporting on the conflict and coverage of the human suffering there.

There is a broader issue about the reporting of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The UK mainstream media's often

subtle narrative on Palestine supports a pro-Israeli perspective. *Spotlight* provided a good analysis of how this happens by taking a specific Sky News story and analysing the narrative that underpins it.

It's partly the choice of words used, partly the implication that Palestinians (even children) are equally matched with heavily armed and trained Israelis, partly the total absence of context.

There is plenty of documented evidence and a video record of Israeli police brutalising Palestinian worshippers outside Al-Aqsa Mosque throughout the month of Ramadan.

But for the journalist it is 'unclear' who started the violence. We simply get a repeat of the Israeli evidence-free narrative that Palestinian 'extremists' had been plotting 'well in advance' to 'riot'.

For those that want to understand why there is this pro-Israeli perspective *Bad News From Israel* by Greg Philo and Mike Berry published by Pluto in 2004 remains essential reading.

Read the *Spotlight* piece here:

<https://spotlight-newspaper.co.uk/world-news/05/12/insidious-british-media-narrative-on-palestine-explained>

Recent BBC appointments threaten impartiality

● From Page 1

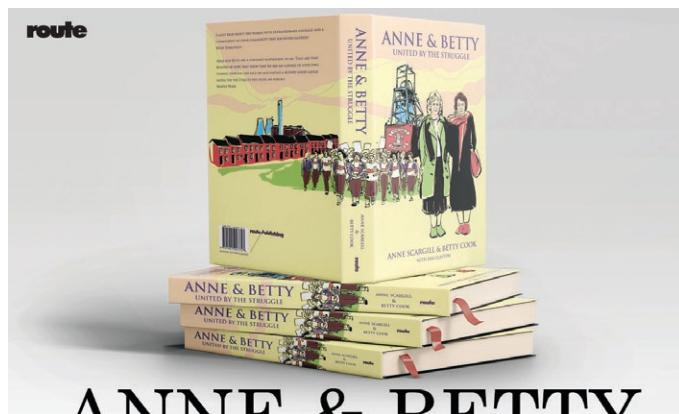
appointment by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (see Page 12). A pattern can be detected here.

The Board's chairman Richard Sharp has donated hundreds of thousands of pounds to the Conservative Party, while the BBC's Director-General Tim Davie (who has an ex-officio place on the board) once stood for election as a Conservative councillor.

We won't know what BBC journalists make of all this. One of the new DG's actions, under the guise of the BBC's impartiality, was to warn them about expressing their views publicly.

The BBC's media editor Amol Rajan, writing on the BBC's website, said that Sir Robbie's 'appointment clearly strengthens the BBC's links not just with Westminster, but with the Conservative Party specifically'.

The question is how those closer links to the Conservative Party are supposed to deliver greater impartiality? The BBC's independence absolutely depends on it not being too close to the Conservative government.



ANNE & BETTY UNITED BY THE STRUGGLE

Anne Scargill and Betty Cook's memoir tells the story of two daughters, wives and mothers of the coalfields who rose to prominence in the 1984/85 miners' strike as key members of the transformational Women Against Pit Closures movement.

'Anne and Betty are a constant inspiration to me. They are two beacons of hope that show that we are all capable of affecting change, tackling life face on and having a bloody good laugh along the way. I salute you both, my heroes.'

Maxine Peake

'A must read about two women with extraordinary courage and a commitment to their community that has never faltered.'

Ricky Tomlinson

An indispensable slice of social history that reveals the vitality of two remarkable women who possess the strength and resolve to stand up for what they believe in and how, no matter what, they never give in.

OUT NOW
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MediaNorth

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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.

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Holding power to account in Salford

The *Salford Star* has closed. **Judith Suckling** wrote this appreciation in the Manchester-based *The Meteor*

THE *Salford Star* has been shining a light on events in the city for 15 years. It covered a diverse range of stories that occurred in the microclimate of Salford during that time. From the fracking protests at Barton Moss, riots in Salford Precinct, floods in Lower Broughton, to local politicians involved in the political expenses scandal.

Co-founder Steven Speed and editor of the *Star* Stephen Kingston announced in April the online magazine would close after the local elections in May.

“We are closing this magazine with a smile. We are celebrating all of the hard work that our team and we have put into it. We are proud of what we’ve achieved, but enough is enough. There are only so many times that you can see the same story come back around again,” Stephen Kingston said.

When Kingston and Speed started the magazine in 2006, they researched if any recent local history had been recorded. They went to the Working-Class Movement Library in Salford, but there was nothing. Journalism has been referred to as ‘the first rough draft of history’, but without that first draft would a more polished version ever be produced?

Salford was missing history on the regeneration of the area, the effect of the government’s policies, and the struggles for social and environmental justice across the city.

Kingston wants the legacy of the *Salford Star* to carry on. They have paid for a ten-

year domain name so people can still read the articles and the British Library has also agreed to archive the back catalogue of the magazine. More than 6,000 online articles and eight full print issues will be held on their central system.

The *Salford Star*’s aim was to hold power to account, particularly the local authority, and as the *Star* documented these first drafts of history, they also proved prescient in predicting future outcomes from the current events reported on. When regeneration plans affecting the homes of the working-class communities began, they said that it would cause a housing crisis. When the Salford council decided to close and merge the schools, the *Salford Star* predicted there would be a school’s crisis. Lo and behold, years later, both of those things happened.

When the *Salford Star* opened, Kingston says Salford Council was pretty transparent.

As the animosity from Salford Council intensified, more advertisers pulled away



Front pages from the print edition of the *Salford Star*



ent. But as they started writing articles and asking questions about why things were happening, the more closed the council and local politicians became.

Kingston said: “I’ve had politicians telling me I’m doing the right thing. That power needs to be held to account. But as time goes on and they become more influential, they run away scared.”

When the magazine first started, it was viable. Advertisers wanted to be involved and had full-page glossy ads. But as the animosity from Salford Council intensified, more advertisers pulled away from the *Star*.

They could no longer afford to print the magazine and get it to the poorest people who didn’t have the luxury of a smartphone or a computer. Kingston says, “That level of control that the Salford council had over investors was disgusting.”

Kingston wants to thank the

supporters of the magazine that have kept them publishing public interest news in Salford into 2021: “We wouldn’t have been able to do it without them. They are the ones that have come forward and given us the stories they wanted us to print... The magazine thrived from the energy of its readers.”

Stephen Kingston plans to write about his relationship with Salford council. A lot has gone on over the years between the council and Kingston and he wants to get that story out to benefit other journalists struggling with council communications and policy.

Over 6000 articles are on the *Salford Star* website for readers to enjoy. Kingston wants to assure readers that they are not all doom and gloom. The weekend editions of the magazine celebrate all the creativity that came out of the city - from the poets, to local theatre shows, to book reviews, and local celebrities.

This is an edited version of Judith’s The Meteor article, reprinted with permission. The full version is at www.themeteor.org/2021/04/29/salford-star-closing

Positive media coverage for gig economy workers

Nicholas Jones analyses the reasons why small independent unions are getting their stories told

AMID what for so long has been a dearth of regular in-depth news coverage in the mainstream media about employment and trade union issues, there is one positive development.

Drivers and couriers in the gig economy, who are challenging the working practices of online innovators such as Uber and Deliveroo, are winning a sympathetic hearing on radio and television, and especially in the national press.

Their demands for guaranteed rights such as the minimum wage and an entitlement to holiday pay have struck a chord among journalists, who, like so many other employees, are having to adjust to rapidly changing terms and conditions.

New start-up trade unions have emerged to take up the struggle of those whose working life is dictated by the gig economy, flexible shifts, and zero hours contracts.

Unlike traditional, established trade unions, these independent newcomers have succeeded in recent months in securing favourable news coverage.

All too often the UK's dominant Conservative-supporting press tends either to ignore or downplay the achievements of the union movement or offer readers a negative slant on their achievements.

Columnists and commentators take every opportunity to side-line and misrepresent the work of the TUC's affiliated unions, deriding their role as being no more than that of pay-



Above: 'Fast Foods and Throwaway Jobs' is the headline from *The Listener's* 1986 cover story by Nicholas Jones. Right: *The Mirror* exposes Deliveroo's stark pay inequality



masters for the Labour Party. Because they are free of these political links, these independent unions have been given a much-needed platform by hitherto hostile newspapers not least because editors recognise the heightened public interest in the challenges posed by the gig economy and the impact that online behemoths such as Amazon have on everyday life.

Observing this upsurge in union activity and media engagement over employment rights has been like a trip down memory lane. In the late 1980s I did regular reports for BBC Radio news bulletins and pro-

Intense competition to establish bargaining rights has been a strength of the union movement

grammes on what at the time were largely futile efforts to win trade union recognition for the increasing number of young people being employed in rapidly expanding hamburger and pizza chains.

Exploitation

'Fast Food and the Throw-Away Jobs' was the headline for the front cover of the much-missed former BBC weekly magazine *The Listener* in May 1986 for my feature on the way school leavers were being exploited by the catering industry.

My focus was on the conduct of employers such as McDonald's, Wimpy and Pizzaland and the hurdles that faced unions such as the GMB, Transport Workers' Union, shop workers' union USDAW, and the Bakers' Union. They were competing to gain a foothold in an industry where three-quarters of the workforce were aged under 21 and turnover was at an unprec-

edented rate.

Inter-union rivalry and intense competition to establish bargaining rights has in some ways been a strength of the British trade union movement, but it does have its downside.

Not surprisingly my suggestion that the TUC should intervene over the heads of its affiliates and launch a one-stop platform to offer some form of free introductory membership to all young workers did not go down well among those unions pursuing their individual campaigns for recognition.

All too often the result has been that large groups of unorganised, low paid casual workers have been left to their own devices to combine resources and negotiate their own terms with contractors and franchise operators.

The Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain was established in 2012 to represent mainly low-paid migrant work-

Technology Intelligence

Thursday 8 April 2021 The Daily Telegraph



Deliveroo's riders demand to be set free from the grasp of its algorithm

An app decides who gets a job and their pay, but workers are on a quest for transparency, says Matthew Field

On a bitterly cold April morning, Deliveroo riders gathered outside a KFC in Reading's Broad Street yesterday to strike against their working conditions. Among the organisers is 24-year-old Wave Roberts who has been riding with Deliveroo for three years. In that time, Deliveroo boss Will Shu has watched the value of his stake in Deliveroo surge to \$47m (£34.5m).

Roberts, on the other hand, claims to have been hammered with falling pay packets. "When I started working for Deliveroo, you would get any where from £3.20 on average," Roberts says. "But now, Deliveroo has taken away offers, based on their distance to the job and the number of riders logged in, in an effort to cut order times." But some riders have claimed this can mean hourly uncertainty over what they will take home and how much work they will do.

"What we want is transparency," says Roberts. "We want to know how our pay is calculated and decided. We want pay security and minimum wage, at least on our days off."

company's stock market debut last week, the shares tumbled 30pc as some investors voiced concerns over workers' rights and the future of the so-called 'gig economy'." A report by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, published with the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB), claimed that in one case a Deliveroo rider received an little as £2 per hour. It found that even for riders who have earned above the minimum wage, they were working on delivery, logged into its app, not on the time riders were working on delivery.

A Deliveroo spokesman said of the protests: "This small self-appointed union does not represent the vast majority of riders who tell us they value the total flexibility they enjoy while working with Deliveroo alongside the ability to earn over £15 an hour." "Only yesterday we ran a survey and 89pc of riders said that they were happy with the app and the flexibility it gave them." But some riders have made from groceries and delivered to their father, a barman of 57.



ers such as outsourced cleaners and security guards.

Another newcomer, United Voices of the World, founded in 2014, describes itself as a grassroots organisation for low-paid migrant and precarious workers. The App Drivers and Couriers Union (previously the United Private Hire Drivers) has gone from strength to strength thanks to its pursuit of landmark legal action that began in 2015.

Two private hire drivers, Yaseen Aslam and James Farrar, challenged Uber over their working conditions and, as lead claimants, it was their case, pursued jointly with the GMB union, that led to a Supreme Court ruling in February awarding the drivers the

right to the minimum wage and holiday pay.

These two unions are now fighting for compensation and for a legal undertaking that Uber complies with the ruling. So far, Uber has argued that the minimum wage applies only from the time when a driver is booked and until drop off; waiting time, which can represent 40 per cent or more of a driver's working time, is not protected.

Nonetheless the Supreme Court's ruling is perhaps a significant step in providing a foundation for a more secure future for today's flexible workforce. Its potential consequences disrupted the stock market flotation of Deliveroo because investors feared Deliveroo's

systems "dysfunctional... a black box... no one knows what's inside, all we know is that we work every day and we get paid what we earn or we don't get paid if we've decided. The present is completely unjust." "Trying to support these conditions offers impossible tasks." Deliveroo riders are not classified as employees the time they are logged in. They are able to reject work and are able to do the work. The company says they are not entitled to sick or holiday pay. Deliveroo would have complaints about working conditions. Such issues are not just picket line protests. Ahead of Deliveroo's float, a campaign union and activist Shazvat awareness over rider conditions. Such issues are not just picket line protests. Ahead of Deliveroo's float, a campaign union and activist Shazvat awareness over rider conditions. Such issues are not just picket line protests. Ahead of Deliveroo's float, a campaign union and activist Shazvat awareness over rider conditions.

Below: Front page anger from the Daily Mirror



Above: The Daily Telegraph highlights Deliveroo workers' demands. Left: The road to workers' rights, a cartoon from The Standard

with the GMB's national officer Mick Rix and the difficulties which established unions face in generating publicity.

"Frankly, after the extent of the coverage for the Uber drivers and Deliveroo couriers, I was shocked when the newspapers paid so little attention to the GMB's dispute with British Gas over the scandal of its 'fire-and-rehire' policy and the sacking of up to 500 Centrica fitters.

"Here were a group of well-paid workers with a lifetime's employment getting the sack. All it got in some newspapers was a few paragraphs.

"As a new union we are only too well aware of how challenging it can be to get a positive hearing in press, radio and television."

Another union leader with recent experience of the highs and lows of engaging with the news media is Sarah Woolley, general secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union, which has been struggling to get coverage for its campaign for better pay for workers in the food industry.

She told the Sheffield Festival of Debate's session in May on trade unions and the media how publication of her union's *Right to Food Report* exposing poverty pay in the food industry

Continued on Page 6

riders and couriers might benefit from the Uber ruling, another story that captured the headlines.

Farrar, the App Drivers and Couriers' general secretary, acknowledges that media interest has strengthened their campaign on behalf of a workforce falling below the poverty line as global corporations exploit drivers on an unprecedented scale.

Investigation

Positive news stories featuring the new union have helped with promotion and recruitment and the repercussions of their Supreme Court victory continue to generate extensive coverage, which has included a follow-up investigation by Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme.

Having teamed up initially with the GMB in their joint legal action to fight for the minimum wage, Farrar sympathises

Independent media is a valuable labour platform

● From Page 5

had been timed to coincide with the *Dispatches* programme.

“Unfortunately, we were squeezed out on the night by the plight of the drivers and couriers with Uber and Deliveroo and this illustrates how the media is more likely to pay attention when unions take on a global multi-national and expose what is happening.”

Ms Woolley speaks with direct experience because of the coverage which the Bakers’ Union secured in October 2019 when workers staged strike action at some of McDonald’s London outlets as part of an

international day of action for fast food workers.

“This was our fourth strike at McDonald’s and the largest so far. The media jumped on our McStrike campaign, but we only seem to get publicity when we take on an international baddie.

“We did manage to get one article in *The Guardian* and stories in the *Morning Star* for our survey showing 40 per cent of food workers were eating less during the pandemic because of lack of money.

“What was even more shocking about the media’s silence on our *Right to Food Report*

was that there were attacks in right-wing newspapers about food workers spreading Covid-19 because they were having to share houses and cars to get to work but no explanation about their poverty wages.”

At the close of the Sheffield session my advice was that unions should continue to sharpen up their communications.

Broadcasters and journalists often face difficulty in finding case histories exposing exploitation, poverty pay and health and safety failures. Local union officials are well placed to locate workers who are prepared to give telling

quotes and audio.

Even if mainstream outlets do not respond, the burgeoning world of independent media can provide a valuable platform for reports and interviews from the union movement and today’s online activists are well placed to exploit the wider world social media – a vital first step in alerting journalists.

Nicholas Jones is a former BBC Industrial and Political Correspondent. He took part in the Sheffield Festival of Debate event, Trade Unions, Workers’ Rights and the Media on Wednesday 5 May.

THIS review was written in the days after the Hartlepool by-election when the Conservatives overturned Labour’s majority of 3,500 at the general election and took the seat with a majority of 6,940.

The headline in the following Saturday edition of *The Northern Echo* was “Boris’ blue wall”. The same paper also announced that the Labour Party lost its overall majority on Durham County Council for the first time in over a century. After the result the Labour leader, Simon Henig, announced his resignation.

The picture in Wales was more positive. Labour held its ground against challenges from the Conservatives and Plaid Cymru to win 30 seats, just one short of a majority in the Senedd.

Essential reading

The Shadow of the Mine is essential reading for those who want to understand what’s gone wrong in areas of the country where the ties have unravelled that bound coal mining communities and Labour inextricably together.

The focus of the book is on the coalfields and communities of Durham and South Wales which the authors have intimate knowledge of. The first four chapters deal with the

BOOK REVIEW

The ties unravel

Book analyses causes of political upheaval in former coalfields

The Shadow of the Mine

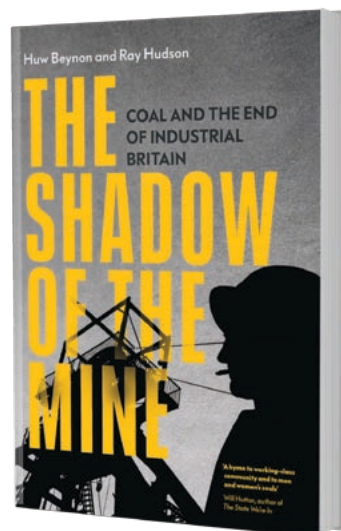
Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson
Verso £20.00

history of the two areas up to the 1984-85 strike.

They are a reminder that both areas had already begun to see the impact of pit closures in the 1960s and they point out that in the 1970 general election there was a decline in active support for Labour:

“The dramatic closure of so many mines under a Labour government, changing the social structure of these areas and peoples’ way of life would

The most powerful chapters are those dealing with the terrible effects of the end of mining



not be forgotten.”

Readers familiar with the history of the NUM, the victories of 1972 and 1974, the epic 1984-85 strike and the aftermath will find new insights and information here. But for me the most powerful and important chapters are those dealing with the terrible effects of the end of mining in these communities. One was ‘a deep and lasting sense of loss’ of missing the mine, its comradeship and way of life, being ‘marras’ (friends) in Durham, in South Wales ‘butties’. But the other strength of the book is the way it tracks the way the loss of the mine and work led to the disintegration of the other social networks which held communities together.

The callousness of the pit closures by the Thatcher and Major governments was to inflict massive economic and social damage and disruption on coal field communities without providing any support or planning.

Failed regeneration

There is a wealth of details of failed attempts to regenerate these areas. The Sunderland MP Chris Mullin wrote in 2011: “What my constituents need is work but in the eight years I have represented them ... I cannot think of a single job that has been created or saved as a result of my efforts.”

The final chapters analyse the consequences of communities which have been left behind during the austerity years; the high support for Brexit and the collapse of support for Labour in former ‘Red Wall’ seats.

This is an important book, one which needs to feed into any discussion of how Labour rebuilds support in these former heartlands.

Granville Williams

SOUTH YORKSHIRE FESTIVAL ONLINE EVENT

Sunday 8 August 3.00pm

Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson will be speaking

Put the date in your diary

BOOK REVIEW

Dead centre: 200 years of *The Guardian*

Tim Gopsill highlights the failings and flaws of the paper's recent history

PEOPLE choose media that reflect their views of the world. Except on the British left, where everybody reads *The Guardian*, but many don't share its outlook at all. They feel no loyalty, even if they give money to keep it going, and complain about it quite bitterly.

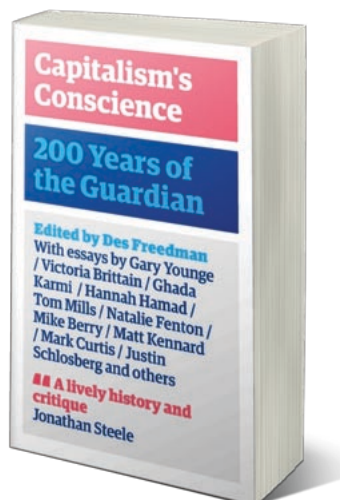
Their reading choice is determined for them by the market. *The Guardian* has to position itself only millimetres to the left of *The Independent* to scoop up the whole of that readership. For the last five years that has been a substantial market. Labour Party membership swelled over half a million under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership: people eager for facts and comment to fuel their zeal to transform the world. Socialism was on the agenda.

The Guardian prospered. It was able to stabilise its chaotic finances and construct a sound base of voluntary subscriptions. But just when it mattered politically, the paper took fright. From generally supporting the Labour Party under a Tory government, it turned on Corbyn and joined the right-wing media witch-hunt.

It deserted a lot more than just the Labour left. Over recent years *The Guardian* has been through a dramatic lurch to the centre. As it smugly celebrates its 200th anniversary, an alternative history appears, entitled *Capitalism's Conscience*, a collection of 15 essays by left-wing writers and academics, edited

by Des Freedman, catalogues a series of reversals from the paper's strong historical legacies:

- After defiantly exposing the phone-hacking scandal in the face of the fury of the rest of the press, it snubbed the corrective regulatory process installed after the Leveson Inquiry.
- After courageously publishing in the Wikileaks documents exposing atrocities committed by the USA in Iraq (and those leaked by Edward Snowden three years later), *The Guardian* turned on Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, running a smear on his alleged collaboration with Russian intelligence and downplaying his defence against extradition.
- After earning a shining reputation among feminists for



Capital's Conscience: 200 Years of The Guardian
Edited by Des Freeman
Pluto Press / £16.95



Above: *The Guardian* promoted its achievements for the 200th anniversary
Below: Julian Assange, smeared by the paper

its pioneering Women's Pages in the last century, *The Guardian* is now accused of buying into sex-based liberal feminism that enables transphobia and reinforces the attack on the Labour Party left, signified by the ugly term 'brocialism' that brands the Corbyn movement as essentially masculine – even though it was embraced enthusiastically by trans and cis-women alike.

- And after decades of radical reporting and commentary on the third world, with writers such as Victoria Brittain and Richard Gott, it opted in this century to back the Latin American clients of the USA in turning back the 'pink tide' of Bolivarian nationalism.

There are more. This story of betrayal presents itself as polemical, but in truth it is not at all controversial, because *The Guardian* does not pretend to be socialist. Sometimes it says it is 'of the left' but its self-ID is liberal, big or small L, and since 2015 it has effectively been the mouthpiece of the New Labour right – notably in its promotion of the 'anti-semitism' smear.

But its permanent align-



David G Silvers / Wikimedia.org

ment is centrist. It has a long lineage of columnists who wobble on the tightrope of the precise political centre. One day they write a bit lefty, tomorrow they lean to the right. Chief current exponents are Polly Toynbee and Jonathan Freedland.

Some enterprising leftwing academic might work up a theory using textual analysis of *Guardian* comment columns to pinpoint the dead centre of politics at any given time, and posit it as the furthest left opinion tolerated in mass media in liberal democracy.

While the left chides *The Guardian* for its political failures, it relies rely on its reporting. *The Guardian* publishes some marvellous stuff. But it's not left-wing. Got that?

Northern Culture Inquiry launched

A cross-party group of Northern MPs has come together to form the new Northern Culture All Party Parliamentary Group:

www.northernculture.org.uk.

Their aim is 'to provide a strong and cohesive voice to bang the drum for Northern culture in Whitehall and Westminster'. The co-chairs of the group are **James Daly**, Bury North, Conservative, and **Julie Elliott**, Sunderland Central, Labour.

The vice-chairs are **Alex Sobel**, Leeds North West, Labour (Co-op), and **Jason McCartney**, Colne Valley, Conservative. **Tony Lloyd**, Rochdale, Labour, is Secretary of the group.

The Northern Culture Inquiry invited evidence with a view to:

- making recommendations to Government on rebalancing Northern Culture in recovery
- producing a 'Post-Covid Action Plan' to rebuild Northern Culture

- generating and influencing debate and policy thinking to accelerate and embed policy change
- highlighting the need to level-up investment to support cultural growth in Northern towns and cities

MediaNorth submitted evidence. Its main focus was on the key role local and regional print and broadcasting have played in nurturing and promoting the diverse range of cultural activity across the North of England. We argue they are a vital part of our cultural infrastructure and need to be strengthened. See www.medianorth.org.uk.

One section of the *MediaNorth* evidence deals with the demise of the three regional ITV franchises (Granada, Yorkshire TV and Tyne-Tees) and, as their achievements recede into distant memory, we are pleased to print two articles to remind us of their distinctive roles.

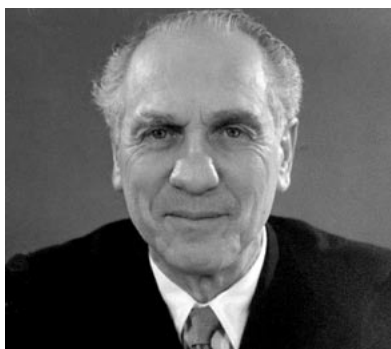
Judith Jones & Stephen Kelly on the cultural impact of Granada TV

Drama, soaps and hot news: Creativity galore in the regions

BEFORE 1960 you'd be lucky to have heard any voice on the BBC other than some plum southern accent. They called it 'BBC English' or received pronunciation.

But then in the 1960s two things happened. First there were the Beatles with their Scouse accents that suddenly made Liverpool the most popular place on the planet. And second there was the television programme *Coronation Street* with its depiction of working-class life 'up North'. The programme was made by Granada Television in its Manchester studios and although only scheduled for an initial run of 12 episodes it's still going strong 60 years later. At its height in the 1980s it was attracting a twice-weekly audience of 15 million and when the action got spicy it touched 20 million.

But what *Coronation Street* also did was to demonstrate to the world that there was creativity galore in the regions, particularly in the north west with writers, actors, directors,



Sidney Bernstein - the inspiration behind the distinctive Granada ITV franchise

producers, camera operators and so forth which Granada, more than any other of the regional ITV companies, set about harnessing and showing to the world.

When *Coronation Street* began, its producers raided local rep theatres for their best talent. The programme also encouraged the development of northwest writers, such as Tony Warren, Paul Abbott, Jimmy McGovern and Caroline Aherne. The company's

founder Sidney Bernstein, championed the North, arguing that what London could do, the North could do better. He even talked about producing a Granadaland passport.

And nor was it just *Coronation Street*. Over the years Granada went on to produce some of the finest television drama of the era with *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Jewel in the Crown*, *Cracker*, *Prime Suspect*, *Cold Feet*, *Hillsborough*, *A Family at War* and many others.

Not content with its drama output, Granada set up a current affairs team that in 1963 produced the first *World In Action*, an award-winning investigative journalism programme that revealed corruption, lies and misdemeanours at home and abroad. If only it was still going today! And over the years gave early opportunities to young directors and producers like Michael Apted, Paul Greengrass, David Boulton, Leslie Woodhead and Ray



The imposing façade of Granada's central Manchester building

Fitzwalter. Again, its team was based in Manchester and over the course of 30 years exposed the false imprisonment of the Birmingham Six, revealed that the Queen did not pay tax, highlighted the health risks of smoking and so forth. And in the 1980s it also bravely produced *Union World*, a current affairs programme for Channel 4 devoted to the trade union movement. That'll never happen again!

But Granada did other things as well. Broadcasting regulators required regional TV companies to produce a minimum output of regional programming (as opposed to network programming). Granada always produced more than was necessary as it was ideal training for young producers and directors.

There were a host of other programmes with a specifically local focus that included sport, politics, culture, consumer rights and religion as well as the first programme in Hindi and Urdu aimed at its Asian audience. It also opened satellite offices in Liverpool, Chester and Blackburn. Granada was fully committed to its region in a way that the BBC was not. The BBC might have had expensive regional offices but their output was limited and risk averse.

Granada was unashamedly left wing. Sidney Bernstein was a lifelong member of the Labour Party and the company never tried to hide

away from its left-wing leanings. At one point it employed ex Labour MPs Margaret Beckett, Jack Straw, Brian Sedgemore and Chris Mullin and there were journalists recruited from the *Morning Star* and at least four recruited from *Tribune*.

Granada grew its own staff, particularly presenters who were the public face of Granadaland. It gave opportunities to a host of northwest presenters, many from Manchester and Liverpool and usually with the appropriate accent. These included Tony Wilson, Judy Finnigan, Anna Ford, Bob Greaves, Brian Trueman, Trevor Hyett, and many others.

Granada also liked to recruit internally with few jobs generally advertised in the national press. Rather it liked to promote from within so that secretaries, technical staff and others could become researchers, directors, camera or sound operators. Granada provided in-house training to its technical staff. As a consequence, there

Granada fostered, cherished and developed local talent and gave it the opportunity on a bigger stage

were few 'outsiders' joining for senior jobs. And anyhow Granada always had a light management touch. There was little or no freelancing until 1990 and employees were staff and consequently committed to the company and the region.

The regional ITV companies, but especially Granada, fostered, cherished and developed local talent and gave it the opportunity on a bigger stage. It got away from the London concentration of the BBC model and proved that there was outstanding talent elsewhere.

But the death of regional independent television in the late 1990s has only seen a reverse shift towards London where most production companies and freelancers work. Nowadays there are so few slots on the channels that there is little opportunity for production companies to see their ideas through to the screen. It was Granada itself, by then under new management, that chewed up all the other local regional companies and morphed them into ITV, thus changing the entire regional structure of ITV. What an irony!

The authors have been compiling an oral history of Granada Television and now have well over 100 interviews with former staff members. These can be heard and read on www.graadaland.org



Photo: TCM

Lindsay Anderson



Photo: StanBarstow.info

Stan Barstow



Photo: Simon Wilkinson

Barry Hines

Local voices

Ian Clayton reflects on his experiences as a Yorkshire Television presenter

In 1952 Lindsay Anderson, one of the pioneers of the Free Cinema movement, came to the Wakefield district to make a documentary about the work of the local newspaper. Anderson made a bonny film, some of the shots wouldn't have been out of place in an Italian Neo-Realist movie. We got to see old men on allotments, children dancing and singing around a pit village and the oldest woman in Horbury, Miss Mary Compton, born in 1859. The narrator, in a strong West Riding accent told us, "She likes to share her memories, and her memories are important." The one false step in the film was that we didn't get to hear Miss Compton's own voice or her memories.

If we look at the film nearly 70 years on, we can see it as an attempt to record something very different, and on that level it is cutting edge, but for all of the local input, it still feels like a film made by somebody from the outside. A decade later Anderson returned to Wakefield to make *This Sporting Life*. He adapted the book by the Wakefield-born author David Storey and created parts for local people and locations.

There was a long-running radio programme called *Down Your Way*. It involved visiting small provincial towns and meeting local people who might have an interesting job or something unusual to say. Back in the 1960s its presenter, Franklin Engelmann, visited our neck of the woods.

I was an excited young lad on the



Photo: BBC

Alan Plater's early work included scripts for the ground-breaking *Z Cars*

Sunday lunchtime when the programme was broadcast. I sat down with my grandparents to listen. No sooner had the programme finished than my grandfather, who was never short of an opinion, announced in his broad West Yorkshire baritone, "It was alright Hilda, but it wasn't for me. I could have made that programme me'self. He doesn't know 'owt about round here, only what folk have told

him and I knew most of that already."

I found it funny that my grandfather, who worked as a tail-gate ripper at Sharlston pit, thought that he could make a wireless programme for the BBC. I wasn't really sure what the old lad was talking about, but I did remember the words, which came up from somewhere, like a folk song.

The writer Alan Plater used to talk a lot about finding the music in regional dialects. He said, "The more we 'McDonaldise' the world, the more important a regional identity becomes." Alan wrote about ordinary people in ordinary situations. His writing was very northern. Alongside the legendary radio producer, Alfred Bradley, he developed a programme called *Northern Drift* in Leeds. Many young

"The more we 'McDonaldise' the world, the more important a regional identity becomes"

writers like Barry Hines and Stan Barstow had a place to take their work because of that programme. Alan's first play for television was made by BBC North and he wrote the early episodes of *Z Cars* when it was very much a programme of the kitchen sink school.

When I decided to go freelance with my own writing in the 1980s, Alan became a mentor to me. He was the one who encouraged me to find my own voice. He once said to me, "Just ask yourself who you are and how you got here and then be sure that whatever writing you're going to do next comes from the same place as you do."

Years later when I worked in radio and television myself, the penny dropped. It's not enough to know what programmes are about, we need to know who they are by, how we get them aired and who they are made for as well. I worked as a presenter at Yorkshire Television from the beginning of the 1990s. By then we were used to hearing local dialects on television news reports and regional documentaries, though it was still a bit of a novelty for a presenter to have a strong local twang. I was never pigeon-holed at YTV and I roamed across a variety of subjects in places all over the world.

A regional TV station like Yorkshire was never just confined to its own region. In fact, one of YTV's most famous programmes was made in Haiti, when Alan Whicker visited Papa Doc, and put together by people who lived within a few miles of the studios in Leeds. There was a lot of skill and know-how at YTV, built up over years of independent thinking and creativity. And everything was done in-house from the first spark of imagination to the mending of electrical



The original Yorkshire Television buildings on Kirkstall Road, Leeds, now house ITV studios. The soap *Emmerdale* is produced there

It's local voices that hold local politicians to account, local voices that save local landmarks

equipment. You could come up with an idea at the morning meeting, see your boss at lunchtime and have the idea commissioned before you went home. There was no waiting for somebody in London to tell you that it fit some kind of grid pattern.

It was a shame when it all started to fall apart. I freelanced for YTV for 15 years and then one day, in the light of all the redundancies for staff, some of whom had been there almost from the start, I was called in and told that due to decreasing budgets for the regions there would be no more work for me.

There is a need to look beyond what is now the mainstream, celebri-

ty-based broadcast culture to find the overlooked and the voices we don't normally hear. We need to find the musicality in local dialects that both preserves the nuances of different places and enriches expression.

Change comes on the rim of the wheel. It's local voices that hold local politicians to account, local voices that save local landmarks, and, if you believe the local hospital, library, post office, pub and playing field are worth keeping, it's local voices that give you a chance.

At the end of Lindsay Anderson's local newspaper documentary, there were shots of paper boys posting papers through neighbourhood letter boxes. The narrator told us, "It is out, time to show the town its own face." Perhaps it is time to stand up, speak out and show our face again.

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Ian Clayton's latest book, It's The Beer Talking, won first prize for best writing about pubs at the annual British Guild of Beer Writers awards.

Voices from the North East

TYNE-TEES TV began broadcasting in January 1959. It had its ups and downs. In 1962 the Pilkington Report criticised Tyne Tees for avoiding minority programmes and putting out cop shows or westerns instead. In 1978 *The Economist* reported that Trident, the franchise owner, was 'London-dominated, overly diversified, and out of touch with the grass roots'. Locally made programming amounted to an average of less than nine hours a week, with the remainder of programming from the ITV network.

Some of Tyne Tees' best known pro-

gramming includes the groundbreaking music show *The Tube*, critically acclaimed adaptations of Catherine Cookson novels, and children's programmes such as *Supergran*.

Two other distinctive North East voices were Amber Films and Trade Films. Murray Martin of Amber Films and Stewart Mackinnon of Trade Films worked with other independent film makers to devise the Workshop Declaration (1982) in partnership with the film union ACTT and Channel 4.

The Workshops worked with local communities, women's organisations and ethnic minority communities, and

by 1988 44 workshops had had films funded and screened by Channel 4, which helped finance and produce Amber's first feature-length film *Seacoal*, set among the coal-collectors on Lyne-mouth beach, close to the coal-mining towns of Ellington and Ashington.

Trade Films' productions included *The Miners' Campaign Video Tapes* and *Northern Newsreel*, which was distributed to trade unions and the Labour movement. Amber and Trade Films were supported by Northern Arts, the regional association of the Arts Council of Great Britain at the time.

Cultural commissars take out dissenting voices

Tory ministers are intervening to impose conformity on appointments

BORIS JOHNSON'S minions at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport are systematically reshaping opinion on the boards of museums, galleries and media groups by easing out dissenting voices and appointing trustees more aligned with government thinking.

The problem is you won't find much about what's going on in our government-friendly media. Only high-flying cases like Lord Dacre's possible appointment as Ofcom chair hit the headlines.

Let's start with one small example, reported in the *Financial Times*. Sarah Dry, an author on the history of science, was a trustee at the Science Museum. She has withdrawn her reappointment application in protest at being asked to 'explicitly express support' for the government's policy



London's Science Museum is one body where a trustee withdrew her re-appointment application in protest

against the removal of contentious historical objects.

In her letter, sent to the group's board and chair Dame Mary Archer, she writes that bowing to these conditions would ultimately harm the Science Museum Group's reputation, compromise its board and 'betray the trust of the public'.

She continues, "Any requirement which seeks to constrain the independent cu-

ratorial and interpretive work of national museums violates the long-established principle of arm's length bodies. Today it is contested heritage. Tomorrow it may be another issue. This has several damaging effects."

Dowden in control

Oliver Dowden, the Culture Secretary, is carrying out Downing Street's wishes. Last September

he wrote to public bodies warning about 'activism or politics' and explaining the government's policy to 'retain and explain' contentious statues and works.

He refused to reappoint Dr Aminul Huque as a trustee of the Royal Museums Greenwich, leading to the resignation of its chair, Carphone Warehouse founder Sir Charles Dunstone. Huque's fate was presumably linked with his work calling for the decolonisation of the curriculum.

The Culture department is taking an aggressive stance on appointments, limiting trustees to one term and, in a complete break with past practice, requiring candidates to pledge support for the government's 'contested heritage' policy.

The disturbing aspect of this controlling intervention by the Culture minister is that, far from people refusing this government-imposed constraint, chairs and trustees have accepted Dowden's more prescriptive approach to appointments, with several new appointees giving assurances of support.

Photo: Christine Matthews / geograph.org.uk

Channel 4 is also in government's crosshairs

YOU wouldn't think that Ofcom was responsible for finding, vetting and appointing Channel 4 board members based on what happened recently.

In April the government vetoed the reappointment of two women to Channel 4's board of directors, including one of only two women of colour. It was another example of ministers intervening in senior media appointments. The decision not to renew the boardroom positions of Uzma Hasan and Fru Hazlitt at the state-owned but privately funded broadcaster was made against the advice of both the Channel 4 board and the media

regulator, Ofcom.

Such reappointments are usually waved through by the government, but there's a broken relationship between C4 and the government. This goes back to before the general election. Remember the attack on Boris Johnson by Dorothy Byrne, then Head of News and Current Affairs at C4, in her MacTaggart lecture? During the 2019 general election we featured in *ElectionWatch* the robust coverage of the Tory campaign by C4.

Since then Tory ministers have consistently been absent from Channel 4 News and reporters regularly ritually incant the

lines, "We did ask a minister to appear but none was available."

The threat of C4 privatisation has been a favoured proposal of the broadcasting minister, John Whittingdale, for many years and last October Culture Minister Oliver Dowden said the issue of privatisation had to be 'on the table' as part of a government review of public service broadcasting.

But back to the blocked reappointments. Both women were recommended for another three-year term on the broadcaster's board. However, ministers have instead decided to seek new candidates.

Downing Street should have

no formal role in the appointments process but the decision was influenced by officials working in No 10. This is part of a wider push, a clearly-planned strategy which has led to the appointment of Conservative allies to leading media roles.

We should be concerned. Boris Johnson already has a powerful bloc of right-wing newspapers which consistently cheerlead and provide uncritical support. In a way reminiscent of Viktor Orban in Hungary, it seems like Johnson is now intent on curbing and weakening sections of the media he deems too recalcitrant or critical of him and his government.