

GET-RICH SCHEME FOR FAST-TRACK CRONIES

Two cases reveal tip of pandemic contracts scandal, writes **Granville Williams**

Anything that the former Health Secretary Matt Hancock says has to be taken with a very large pinch of salt. His *Pandemic Diaries* were serialised in the *Daily Mail* in early December and immediately provoked angry and dismissive responses about their accuracy.

But some of his comments have the ring of truth – those about the contact the Tory peer Michelle Mone had with him over PPE contracts.

He claims that he felt pressured by her ‘extraordinarily aggressive’ lobbying to try to help a firm win a contract to supply Covid lateral flow tests.

He continues, “She claims the firm, which makes lateral flow test kits, ‘has had a dreadful time’ trying to cut through red tape and demanded my ‘urgent help’ before it all comes out in the media. “I am going to blow this all wide open,’ she threatened.”

He said he chose to ignore the message adding: “I will simply not reply... I won’t be pushed around by aggressive peers representing commercial clients.”

The Tory peer is now engulfed in accusations about her links to the two large contracts, valued at £203m, secured by PPE Medpro in 2020, and what happened to the excess profits.

For nearly 18 months she and her husband Douglas Barrowman constantly dismissed, denied or played down any links to the company.



Guardian breaks news story on Tory peer Michelle Mone as she takes leave of absence



However, in November 2021 the Good Law Project pursued a freedom of information request that led to the information commissioner ordering the government to publish the names of the companies that had received contracts through the VIP lane and those who had referred them. When it did so, PPE Medpro was on the list, with the name of the VIP who initially referred the company to the government: ‘Baroness Mone’.

On 23 November David Conn published the results of a two-year investigation, ‘The yacht, the wedding and £29m:

Michelle Mone’s life during the Covid crisis’, in *The Guardian*. He revealed that Mone and her children secretly received £29m originating from the profits of a PPE business.

This was followed by another report: ‘Bullying Mone hector two ministers, Michael Gove and Lord Agnew, over Covid contracts’ in the *Sunday Times* (4 December). Now Mone and her husband are the subject of police investigation and she is also facing a House of Lord Standards probe over lobbying and not declaring her interest in PPE Medpro.

Mone said on 6 December she was taking ‘leave of absence’ from the House of Lords to clear her name.

£70m profit

Another PPE scandal was revealed in the same issue of the *Sunday Times*. Philip Johnson’s company Ramfoam made a £70m profit on a contract for PPE that was mostly unused. He has paid himself £13m and celebrated his birthday by eating a ‘briefcase of cash’ cake on a private yacht.

Ramfoam was awarded a

• Continued on Page 8

Learning from the American right's playbook

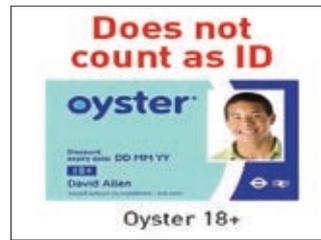
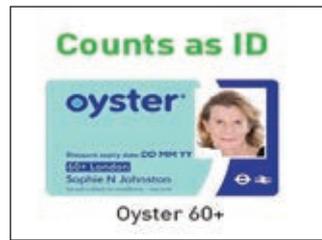
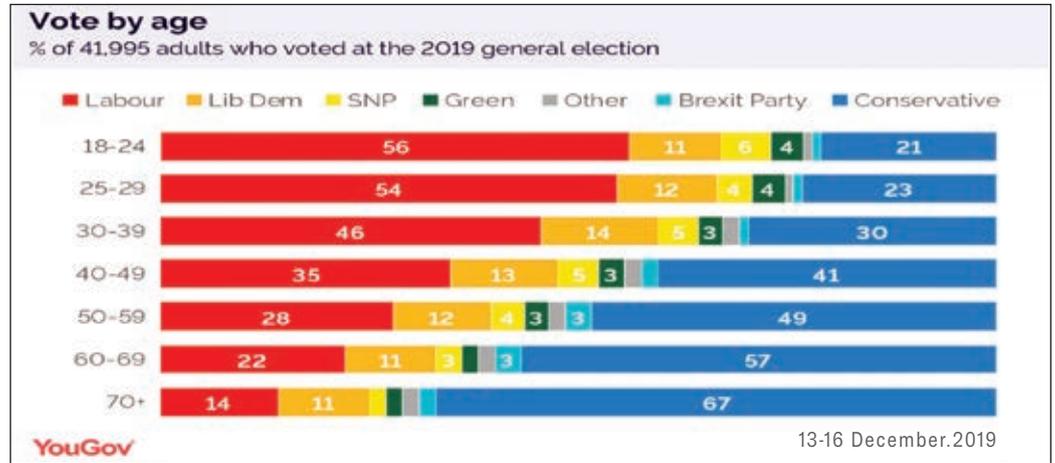
Voter suppression is happening here

This Tory government rules Britain in the interests of the elderly. It knows that when it comes to elections their votes are crucial and it rewards them: pension triple lock, pension tax relief, no national insurance, untaxed property wealth and freedom passes.

As the YouGov breakdown of the 2019 election demonstrates, the majority of voters over 60 swings sharply to the Tories with people over 70 three times more likely to vote Tory than the 18-24s.

Also, pensioners are spread across the country, making them crucial in every constituency, whereas younger voters are piled up in cities, weakening their electoral clout. They are likely to live in rented accommodation, move frequently and are often not registered to vote.

In April this year the Election Act was passed making it mandatory to have ID for the first time, starting with local elections in 2023. Voter ID is a naked attempt by the Government to use a non-existent problem to suppress voters more



Six government approved IDs specifically target older people

likely to vote against them.

It claimed there was a problem with voter impersonation but evidence from the 2017 election revealed there was just one conviction for voter impersonation at a polling station.

However, details of what sort of ID would be required to vote were left out of the Election Act. These were slipped out under secondary legislation

to deter younger voters.

Over 70s are three times more likely to vote Tory than 18-24s

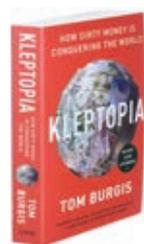
in November. Apart from passports and driving licences, the government listed a number of documents which would be acceptable, a list blatantly skewed in favour of older people. For example, the Oyster Card 60+ is acceptable but not the Oyster Card 18+.

The government's decision to pursue policies on ID for local and general elections can only be described as a deliberate attempt to deter younger voters. **MN**

Media calls for end to intimidating legal tactics

In the March issue of *Media-North* we highlighted how Catherine Belton's book *Putin's People* was subject to libel suits by Russian oligarchs. They used intimidating legal tactics known as SLAPPs, which stands for Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation.

Her case and that of *Financial Times* journalist Tom Burgis, author of *Kleptopia*, received publicity because the publisher HarperCollins challenged the SLAPPs. However, these cases are the tip of the iceberg because many SLAPPs succeed in silencing journalists through the fear of racking up



Tom Burgis and his publisher won their case. Harper Collins called it 'lawfare' – an attempt to silence them

substantial legal costs challenging them.

Burgis told an Anti-SLAPP Conference that lawyers representing claimants targeting the media have become increasingly powerful, resulting in stories being spiked every day.

He continued, "Editors are too scared to run them. And because London law firms whose senior partners wield power equivalent to that of a Fleet Street editor in deciding what we get to read and what we don't get to read are making just those decisions every day on behalf of clients whose interests are completely inimical to democracy."

Now there is a chance that the chilling effect of the rich and powerful abusing UK law can be changed. The UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition has created a model anti-SLAPP law that would allow courts to swiftly dispose of cases deemed to be SLAPPs and hand out penalties that would act as a deter-

rence and ultimately provide full compensation for those targeted, stopping claimants from being able to 'weaponise' the legal system.

More than 70 newspaper editors, publishers and media lawyers have written to Justice Secretary Dominic Raab demanding that the government take urgent action to stop oligarchs and kleptocrats from using their fortunes to exploit British courts. The letter shows a remarkable degree of unanimity drawing together a coalition of senior journalists and editors from across the political spectrum. – *Granville Williams MN*

The model anti-SLAPP law is here:

<https://www.indexncensorship.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Model-UK-Anti-SLAPP-Law-Final-Version.docx.pdf>

Lots on climate change protests but little on COP27. **Barry White** on UK newspaper reporting of a crucial conference

Pushed to the side

The sand has settled following COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt – a country whose prisons are heaving with political prisoners including Egyptian-British pro-democracy activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah. Now it's time to evaluate just how the press covered this most important international climate conference as we face increasing extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, desertification and rising sea levels.

Kate Russell on BBC Radio 4's *The Media Show* (16 November) reported that as Cop27 ended you might have seen more about the activists who threw oil on a Gustav Klimt painting in Vienna or the protesters who brought the M25 to a standstill last week.

Writing in the e-magazine *In Publishing* on 10 November Liz Gerard in her Notebook column <https://inpublishing.co.uk/articles/liz-gerards-notebook-21360> developed this theme: "There is absolutely nothing that matters more today than global warming... in Pakistan drowning under metres of flood water, in remote island states battered by hurricanes, or in South American forests blazing with wild-fires, but here in Europe, where the weather maps now show great swaths of red, and Britain, where we saw record high temperatures in July and record [high] minimum temperatures for November last night (14C when the norm is 3C). Yet the climate sceptics are still given sway in their columns, while editors and their leader-writing teams demand draconian punishments for 'ecowarriors' who disrupt life

for an hour or so..."

Prime Minister Sunak's last-minute attendance at the COP on 7 November was covered by the *Daily Star* which featured a photograph of him with Emmanuel Macron on page 2 above the headline 'Mac 'n' cheese' followed by a short story about talks on stopping small boats crossing the Channel. The only mention of global warming in the paper was the fact that the leaders' hug took place 'at the UN climate change conference in Egypt'.

They were not alone. *The Express*, *Telegraph*, *Times* and *Metro* all used the 'hug picture' on their front pages, three out of four of them to illustrate a story about migrants/asylum-seekers/refugees, and how Sunak was 'getting to grips' with the situation.

Other right-wing newspapers did little better, while the Labour supporting *Daily Mirror* reported Sunak's speech on page 18, alongside Just Stop Oil activists disrupting the M25 in early November. The disgraceful arrest by Hertfordshire police of four journalists while reporting these protests was later found to be 'unjustified' by a police review undertaken by another force. The four were arrested despite being on a public footpath and all showing the police valid UK press cards (recognised by the UK Police

"If you want to address malaria, don't invite the mosquitoes"



Tabloid coverage belittled the climate crisis and people taking action

Chiefs' Council).

Wider conference coverage was provided by *The Guardian* which reported the PM's flying visit pointing out that in his three-minute speech he made no mention of paying reparations. Maybe this was because he spoke hours after Boris Johnson, who made it clear to a fringe meeting that the UK could not afford to pay reparations. Arguments over exactly who picks up the bill led to the talks' two-day extension. A new

fund to help countries worst-hit by the effects of climate change finally emerged. Called the 'loss and damage fund', we don't yet know the details of how much money it will involve, and where the cash will come from, but it's a small step in the right direction.

Why did the COP fail to address the biggest source of emissions - fossil fuels? Well, there were more fossil fuel lobbyists attending than representatives of the 10 nations most affected by the crisis. This did receive serious attention in the UK quality press as data analysis of the United Nations' provisional attendance list for the conference showed that 636 fossil fuel lobbyists had been registered, up 25% from last year's Glasgow conference. Attempts to phase out gas and oil failed after a number of nations, including China and Saudi Arabia, blocked a key proposal to phase out all fossil fuels, not just coal.

This vital aspect has been kicked into the long grass and will doubtless emerge at COP28 to be held in the United Arab Emirates along with an army of fossil fuel lobbyists. As a delegate from Africa said, "If you want to address malaria, you don't invite the mosquitoes."

As far as climate journalism goes the vast majority of tabloid press coverage belittled the crisis and those who want to do something about it.

If the role of the press is to inform the public on important issues that affect them on this topic, then most UK newspapers failed abysmally. **MN**

Scare story from nowhere

Nick Jones on the Tory press and anti-Labour attacks

Keir Starmer's previous backing for Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party is one of the few lingering lines of attack that can be exploited by Conservative-supporting newspapers.

Having had to witness the Tories trashing their claim to financial prudence and currently mismanage a worrying Winter of Discontent, the party's tabloid cheerleaders are having to scabble around to produce anti-Labour story lines.

Corbyn lives on as a threat to the country in the minds of *Daily Mail* headline writers. So toxic is his name, it can be exploited simply by association to trash Starmer's reputation and generate scare stories about his party's policies.

Labour's pledge to remove the exemption from VAT on fees at private schools – by removing their charitable status – is a ready-made attack line.

By juxtaposing a 2017 Corbyn quote about the plan to charge VAT with Starmer's renewed commitment to remove private schools' charitable status, the *Daily Mail* tried to substantiate its headline: 'How he parrots the hard-left'.

'Keir's class war' said the paper's commentator Stephen Glover as he fulminated about



The *Daily Mail* targeted Keir Starmer for attack over his proposal to put VAT on private school fees

what he said was Starmer's failure to repackage himself as a moderate.

'A vindictive policy that smacks of class envy straight from the Corbyn play book' was the headline over Glover's commentary.

For two days in succession the *Daily Mail* devoted its front

Corbyn's leadership has left a troubling legacy for Starmer

page to a scare story that appeared to come from nowhere, a story line that seemed to be substantiated by a single damning quote about Labour 'trying to price people out of sending their children to private schools' – a quote supplied by 'Tory grandee Sir John Redwood, who headed Margaret Thatcher's policy unit'.

'Fury over Starmer class war on private schools' (28.11.2022) was followed next day with a front page with the headline, 'Keir's class war threat to 200 private schools' (29.11.2022) – a policy that could lead to 'mass closures'.

Corbyn's leadership has left a troubling legacy for Starmer.

The more the tabloids can associate Starmer's leadership with the policies of his predecessor, the greater will be the chance of the Tory press raising the spectre of the hard left taking control – a scare tactic that will be open to all manner of fabrication.

As the general election edges ever closer Labour's media strategists will find themselves pitted against the headline writers of Conservative-supporting newspapers who will do their best to undermine the party's push to reassure voters that Starmer has purged Corbyn's influence. **MN**

Media groups say drop charges against Assange

The campaign to free Julian Assange received a boost when five media organisations who partnered with WikiLeaks – *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *El País*, *Der Spiegel* and *New York Times* – called on the United States government to drop its charges against Julian Assange.

In a joint open letter the media organisations said the prosecution of Mr. Assange under the 1917 Espionage Act 'sets a dan-



Vigil in support of Julian Assange at London's Trafalgar Square. Photo: Garry Knight / Flickr

gerous precedent' that threatened to undermine the [US] First Amendment and the freedom of the press.

The action by the media organisations has been welcomed by the Assange Defence Team calling it: "... a big deal, and has generated loads of

mainstream press coverage.... Since then, just about every other major outlet has covered the story!"

Annie Machon, former MI5 officer told MediaNorth: "I have long been an outspoken supporter of Julian Assange and the WikiLeaks publishing model. I am pleased to see the media finally waking up to the threat that if WikiLeaks is penalised in this draconian way, then all media freedom is at risk." **MN**

Gary Herman on Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter

What price breaking things?

Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter is one of the stranger stories that have recently emerged from the wilder shores of the Internet, largely because Musk made a reputation for himself as an adventurer in a world where adventuring had already become passé by the time Musk had made his first fortune, never mind his third.

To detached observers of Internet madness, Musk seemed a little late to arrive at the Internet's Gold Rush hotel, and then he turned up with a somewhat left field tale to tell involving Jules Verne dreams of space rockets and electric cars and wild-eyed HG Wellsian fantasies of Martians and troglodytes and at least one invisible man.

Nevertheless, those who couldn't grasp exactly what Musk was up to when he started to float the idea of taking over Twitter a few months ago probably shrugged their collective shoulders and muttered something like Mark Zuckerberg's famous motto: "Move fast and break things."

This may have been intended to sum up Zuckerberg's philosophy of product design and corporate management, but it was all the same an idiotic summation, ignoring the fact that it is a philosophy of destruction and

mismanagement. It didn't survive even within Facebook (or Meta as it's now called), and it certainly isn't Musk's style.

The truth is that Musk's career is pretty much run-of-the-mill – for internet billionaires. His first fortune was the result of selling an on-line business directory called Zip-2 developed by Elon and his brother Kimbal to a computer manufacturer called COMPAQ.

Three card trick

His second fortune was down to his involvement in PayPal, effectively an early version of digital banking launched by a very right-wing entrepreneur called Pete Thiel who used it to drive the development of ebay, the online auction business.

By the time Musk had begun to dream of taking over Twitter he was firmly established in a conventional groove of persuading Silicon Valley investors to part with their money to launch companies whose overinflated share values made all concerned

superficially very rich.

This same sort of three card trick (or perhaps more accurately this sort of Ponzi scheme) is what's behind Musk's purchase of Twitter. The point about such commercial hanky-panky is that you can only do it if it at least seems to make commercial sense and if someone with their finger on the button can persuade investors and shareholders that it is actually good sense. Musk only had a chance of persuading anyone of his good sense by making a solid commercial case.

The journalist Helen Lewis found the whole process of Musk's negotiations mystifying and wrote, following his 'will-you won't-you' negotiations, when the deal ended in takeover and blitzkrieg in mid-November 2022:

"Like everyone else still left on Twitter – at this point, roughly 90,000 journalists and 14 bemused normal people – I was deeply sceptical about Elon Musk's takeover of the social

network. Was it a weed gag that got out of hand? Did he really want to make himself the main character of American intellectual life? Does it fulfil a deep psychological need to force serious media organizations to weigh in every time he replies 'lol' to some crank, launders a conspiracy theory into the discourse, or makes a particularly obscure dirty joke? (Say 'Ligma Johnson' out loud. You're welcome.)"

Maniac persona

Yet Lewis makes a small confession. "I find Musk a compelling figure," she says, "and not in the disdainful, irony-soaked way that is barely acceptable in polite society. In a world of passive-aggressive rich people smiling through veneered teeth while withholding tips from minimum-wage staffers, I find his unabashedly-workaholic-maniac persona hugely preferable to the usual tech-bro smarm."

And yet Musk's maniac persona has led him to sack thousands for not being serious enough for his new version of Twitter and then to reinstall Donald Trump's Twitter account in the face of Trump's absolute disdain.

Helen Lewis may find Musk 'compelling' but most people will surely find him grotesque and deluded. Of course, he may have a stratagem and it just might work, but I wonder how much Tesla stock he will have to offload to keep his Twitter afloat. And how long will anyone care?

MN

Elon Musk's personal wealth is now \$189 billion, but will Twitter implode under his erratic control?

Photo: JD Lasica, Pleasanton, CA; US / Flickr



Leveson's lost decade

Tim Gopsill on the 10th anniversary of the Leveson Report

Editors love anniversaries as hooks to hang old stories on, but on November 29 they all missed one in their own industry - the tenth anniversary of the publication of the Leveson report on media regulation.

In 2012, after weeks of evidence on dishonesty, criminality and corruption in the national press, Lord Justice Leveson drew up a system of press self-regulation to provide fairer and more responsible news media. Everything he did was opposed, vociferously, by the media owners.

But neither inquiry nor structure was complete: the inquiry into the criminal aspects of phone hacking, including the extent of corruption across press, politics and policing that covered it up, was suspended pending a series of trials, and a crucial clause in the law to make the scheme work is to be scrapped.

The bulk of the commercial press and online news sites have refused to sign up to the new self-regulatory structure. Instead they have been able to maintain their own fake regulator, the amusingly entitled Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).

IPSO was set up in defiance of Leveson and its failings are



Art: 1231f

Ten years on from Leveson, press standards have not improved – and IPSO's sorry record is part of the problem

legendary. They boasted it had the powers to impose fines and conduct tough 'standards investigations' but it has never done either, not once.

While the Tories protect their errant friends in the news media, other parties in Parliament are committed to resume the Leveson process, but what are the chances?

The missing piece in Leveson's self-regulatory structure will never be put in place. The contentious Section 40 of the 2013 Crime and Courts Act was intended to incentivise

news publishers to sign up to a tougher regulator by imposing financial penalties if they didn't.

The national press has run a fierce campaign against this measure, even though the government has announced its repeal several times. But the Labour Party also came out against it shortly after the Tories pulled the plug on Leveson in 2018.

Labour has called for the resumption of the inquiry and there is a lively public campaign for it, based on the group Hacked Off, which was launched in 2011 to fight the scandal of phone-hacking and agitate for decent and fairer national media. Hacked Off is close to the LibDems.

There is residual hatred for the right-wing press in Labour, but it is hard to see the Party getting tough on them. As it prepares itself for government it feels a need to make itself respectable and non-threatening to such establishment institutions as the Tory press.

Party leaders look back to the 1990s when Labour recovered from 18 years in opposition by winning the support of the Murdoch press – sensationally the *Sun*, after Tony Blair signified his deference to Rupert Murdoch. It is all too easy to imagine the same strategy in the mind of Sir Keir Starmer. **MN**

Journalist hit by £90k *Panorama* judgement

The High Court in London has ordered investigative journalist Paddy French to pay £90,000 libel damages plus costs well into six figures to the BBC *Panorama* presenter John Ware.

Paddy French had produced a pamphlet critical of the *Panorama* programme 'Is the Labour Party Anti-Semitic?' in 2019, which was widely criticised as one-sided against the party.

John Ware, who made the programme, sued, claiming £50,000 damages. In 2021 the High Court ruled that the article was not an expression of honest opinion so Paddy French could not argue fair comment.

Instead he would have to prove the truth of his allegations and rely on the public interest defence. In October, just two weeks before the trial, he

withdrew from the case on legal advice that he was unlikely to win. But the trial went ahead in his absence and judge Julian Knowles urged John Ware's lawyers to increase their claim.

Paddy French said: "This case raises serious questions about press freedom in Britain," but he pledged to continue researching the *Panorama* programme and publish a fuller report on its breaches of profes-

sional journalistic standards.

Many journalists have expressed outrage that a privileged colleague of national standing in the BBC should bring such damaging legal action against a freelance with no resources, when there are better ways within the profession to settle disputes, and branches of the NUJ are mobilising a campaign against the practice. — TG **MN**

Granville Williams reviews a powerful book on the Grenfell disaster

A harrowing indictment

**SHOW ME THE BODIES:
How We Let Grenfell Happen**

Peter Apps

One World £10.99

We should sing the praises of the trade publication *Inside Housing*. Peter Apps is the deputy editor and he exposed the dangers of combustible cladding on tower blocks in the magazine thirty-four days before the Grenfell Disaster.

Before that the magazine led the way on exposing issues around fire safety in tower blocks, following the Lakanal House fire in south London in 2009 which killed six people.

Since the Grenfell fire on 14 June 2017 which claimed 72 lives, 17 of them children, he and a team of journalists from *Inside Housing* have worked closely with the Grenfell community and reported on the 400-day Grenfell Inquiry which finished on 10 November this year.

Apps kept watch on the five-year time span of the inquiry when interest from the rest of the media waned. The stunning outcome of all these journalistic efforts is this tremendous revelatory book.

The opening chapter describes a fire in a block of council flats where a faulty electrical appliance sets fire to panels recently installed on the external walls which turned what should have been a minor incident into a tragedy. You think he's talking about Grenfell but he's not: this is Lakanal House fire in the London borough of Southwark, the lessons of which were wilfully ignored.

The book's structure then has alternate chapters centred on either the hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute account of the night of the fire and what happened to residents, or on the decade-by-decade, year-by-year story of the progressive dissolu-



The second phase of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry ended in November. Richard Millett KC, counsel for the inquiry, used his final statement to say that the 72 deaths were avoidable.

tion of the safeguards that were meant to prevent such a thing.

The book's title, *Show Me the Bodies*, is taken from remarks made by Brian Martin, the civil servant responsible for fire safety guidance at the privatised national research laboratory, BRE, to justify not tightening up regulations in response to a series of devastating fires at home and abroad.

There were simply not enough deaths to justify new restrictions on businesses.

But Martin was a willing servant, part of a deregulatory push by successive Tory governments epitomised by David Cameron, who in a New Year's Day speech in 2010 brazenly vowed to 'wage war against the excessive health and safety culture for good' on behalf of 'UK plc'.

It meant that an official culture of cost-cutting and eliminating as much red tape as possible

The inquiry revealed that the companies refurbishing the tower block knew the materials were unsafe

led to the use of cladding, which contained petroleum-derived plastic, in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower and widely elsewhere on tower blocks.

But what was revealed in the inquiry was the fact that companies involved in the refurbishment of tower blocks knew that the materials they used were not safe. Richard Millett KC, lead counsel for the inquiry, rounded on the building companies involved for their 'incompetence', 'cynical' and 'possibly dishonest practices', accusing them of engaging in a 'merry-go-round of buck passing'.

Kensington and Chelsea Council, which managed Grenfell Tower and oversaw its unpopular refurbishment a few years earlier, insisted that cheaper inflammable cladding be used in order to save money.

The London Fire Brigade is criticised too. The fire fighters' heroic attempts to rescue residents are acknowledged but the London Fire Brigade's performance lays bare the results of successive cutbacks in the service, culminating in the closure of 10 fire stations by Boris Johnson in 2010 when he was Mayor of London to save £100m.

Lack of equipment, faulty communication devices and the absence of any plan for an out-of-control fire meant that it was wrong-footed from the beginning. It enforced a 'stay put' policy when a full-scale evacuation was needed early on.

The people who emerge with dignity and respect out of this terrible story are the surviving residents of Grenfell Tower. Their complaints about the building's safety were ignored before the disaster but the author pays tribute to their determination to seek the truth.

The Grenfell Tower inquiry report will not be ready until, at the earliest, October 2023. Only after that will Scotland Yard move towards criminal charges which could range from corporate manslaughter to fraud.

The inquiry has cost the taxpayer more than £150m in legal costs, but the true legal bill is far higher. The cladding manufacturer, Arconic, for example, was spending as much as £3.4m every three months on lawyers, according to corporate filings. **MN**

Peter Apps is on the shortlist of this year's Press Gazette's British Journalism Awards.

Ian Jack / 1945-2022

A prized journalist

Ian Jack died, aged 77, at the end of October and the news of his unexpected death prompted a stream of richly deserved tributes.

His last two pieces demonstrate his great strengths as a journalist.

One was a 17,000-word wide-ranging essay for the *London Review of Books* in which he described in detail the CalMac ferry debacle in Scotland. It was a good example of long form writing at which he excelled.

The other was a *Guardian* comment piece on 22 October which was a paean to the BBC for what it meant to him and his generation: "It looks unlikely that Britain will ever again invent anything so admired and influential; we have been lucky to have it." He concluded, "The BBC celebrated its centenary last Tuesday. Long may it last."

He started his career in journalism as a trainee journalist on the *Glasgow Herald* in 1965 and then the *Scottish Daily Express*.

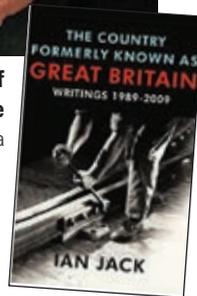
In 1970 he moved to London where, hired by Harold Evans,



Ian Jack: acute observer of the lives of working people

Photo: Granta

he joined the *Sunday Times*. When Andrew Neil took over as editor, he rated Ian Jack highly but, much to Neil's chagrin, Jack left the *Sunday Times* in the aftermath of the Wapping dispute. He later joined the newly formed *Independent on Sunday*, which he edited from 1991



to 1995. He edited the literary magazine *Granta* from 1995 to 2007 and then went on to freelance.

One core theme of his journalism, and his great strength, was writing about working life and the changes wrought by deindustrialisation in Scotland and elsewhere. He celebrated, in the late Martha Gellhorn's phrase, 'serious, careful, honest journalism', the sort he selected when he edited *The Granta Book of Reportage* (1993).

As editor of *Granta* one excellent edition in 2005 was devoted to The Factory. Apart from his introduction there was an outstanding piece, 'Made in China' by Isabel Hilton, which documented the sheer scale and speed of industrialisation in China.

If I was to highlight just one work by Ian Jack to read, it would have to be 'Gibraltar' his *Granta* piece on the inquest into the SAS killing of three IRA members in Gibraltar on 6 March 1988. <https://granta.com/gibraltar> — **Granville Williams** **MN**



Instagram message flaunts the Johnson family wealth

Pandemic contract scandals

● From Page 1

£149 million contract by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Ministers did not put the contract out to competitive tender, invoking emergency procurement rules.

In response to the *Sunday Times* story, a member of Johnson's family posted an image of them boarding what appears to be a private jet with the caption 'Living up to what the paper said'.

Labour's Deputy Leader Angela Rayner pointed out, 'Zero — that's the number of times this government has come clean on this dodgy Medpro scandal.'

The scale of waste and profligacy these PPE cases reveal are the tip of the iceberg. They stand in contrast to government opposition to trade union demands, after years of austerity, for wage increases to cope with inflation and the cost of food and energy we are seeing.

VIP treatment and fast lanes for Tory cronies, austerity and road blocks for the rest of us.

MN

Bill threatens investigative journalism

A coalition of organisations — Open Democracy, National Union of Journalists, Index on Censorship — along with the Society of Authors and cross-party MPs has serious concerns about the scope of the National Security Bill.

They called for a public interest defence to be added to

the Bill to counter the chilling effect the new legislation will have on the practice of investigative journalism. The absence of meaningful free-expression protections means that whistleblowers in government will be further deterred from disclosing official wrongdoing.

However the Bill passed

through the House of Commons in mid-November without a public interest defence being added. The Bill now goes to the House of Lords for a final chance to add in a clause for a statutory defence that would enable journalists to continue producing public interest journalism without fear. **MN**