

Media North

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Landslide: Election day forecast



Day after: Magnanimous in defeat



Dire warning: On the 'road to serfdom'

What can we expect now?

For one brief day after the election the front pages of the right-wing press acknowledged the scale of Labour's election victory. But the next day it was back to attack mode with the *Daily Mail* describing it as 'a Loveless Landslide on just 54pc of the vote'.

The paper believes it still has the sort of influence it had in its glory days as Thatcher's mouthpiece. It made the claim that the tactical voting guide it produced 'helped save 40 Tory seats'.

Boris Johnson's column in the same issue, for which he reportedly receives £1m a year, has a 10-point plan for bashing Labour.

It ended with him presenting himself as 'an election winning leader' who in 'the days before I was forced to resign in what was really a media-driven hoo-ha' he was only two or three points behind in the polls.

No remorse there for Partygate and the distrust of the Tories which followed.

One thing is clear though. None of the right-wing media groups can make convincing claims that their coverage had any

Granville Williams on the post-election media coverage of politics after Labour's historic landslide victory over Tories

influence over the election outcome. Indeed their desperation, as they whipped up fears of an elective dictatorship and 'Star-mageddon', was exposed.

David Yelland, who edited the *Sun* from 1998 to 2003, believes that the Labour government will have only a brief respite from the right-wing press.

He also points out that tabloids like the *Sun*, *Mail* and *Express* will, as the Tories struggle to find their way out of electoral meltdown, focus on Farage and Reform. "Farage says he is coming for the Labour Party. He'll work with the tabloids to control the agenda. Three areas that the right

will push on are: immigration, what they call 'the war on woke', and net zero," he predicts.

And, of course, *GB News*, the channel which has employed Nigel Farage, Richard Tice and Lee Anderson, will be strengthened by the number of people who voted for Reform to amplify pro-Reform coverage.

And what about the BBC? Its charter requires it to ensure that audiences can engage in the democratic process by offering 'a range and depth of analysis and content not widely available from other United Kingdom news providers'.

On that count its election coverage failed. The *Today* programme interviewed the Conservative and Labour work and pensions spokespeople entirely about the ethics of betting and not at all about welfare policies. We had policy-light reporting rather than a focus on policy issues like Gaza, climate change, social care, the crisis in prisons and the justice system.

The next test will be how the BBC covers Farage and Reform. (see page 2) **MN**



In April Ofcom released revised guidance for the section of its Broadcasting Code concerning due impartiality, due accuracy and undue prominence of views and opinions. This was in response to ongoing complaints about *GB News* breaching the Code repeatedly, not least by using politicians as presenters. In addition, Ofcom published a research report from Ipsos UK, which used focus groups ‘to help us understand audience attitudes’ to news and current affairs programmes.

However, this resulted in absolutely no substantive changes to the relevant rules concerning politician presenters. Rules 5.3 and 6.6 of Ofcom’s Code remained unaltered.

The former states: ‘No politician may be used as a newsreader, interviewer or reporter in any news programmes unless, exceptionally, it is editorially justified. In that case, the political allegiance of that person must be made clear to the audience.’

And the latter: ‘Candidates in UK elections, and representatives of permitted participants in UK referendums, must not act as news presenters, interviewers or presenters of any

type of programme during the election period.’

Farage airtime on BBC

Thus, by defining politicians only as electoral candidates, Ofcom would have permitted Nigel Farage, arguably the most influential British politician this century, to carry on presenting his weeknight prime-time programme on *GB News* during the election had he not stood as the Reform candidate for Clacton despite the fact that, at the start of the election campaign, Richard Tice stated that Reform would put up 630 candidates.

Farage is both a co-owner and a director of Reform, which is a limited company registered with Companies House, where he is listed as ‘Director of a Political Party’. He took over as party leader from Tice on 3 June but, under Ofcom’s interpretation of its rules, had he not decided to stand as an MP, he could have carried on presenting programmes during the election period.

As things stand, he is entitled to do so afterwards, and exactly the same applies to other politician presenters such as Lee Anderson, Esther McVey and now Tice himself.

Julian Petley analyses Ofcom’s flawed approach to *GB News*, Reform and Impartiality

Who ya gonna call? Ofcom?

That is down to the distinction which Ofcom makes between news and current affairs.

But as Stewart Purvis, a former Ofcom Partner for Content and Standards and former Chief Executive of ITN, points out, this distinction is ‘not set out in the law that created Ofcom, the regulations Ofcom enforce or the guidance it has provided to broadcasters’.

Furthermore, the Code, in line with section 320 of the Communications Act 2003, doesn’t differentiate news from other kinds of content, but specifically states that in ‘matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy’ there are ‘special impartiality requirements’ and these apply to ‘news and other programmes’.

This is crucial, as controversial subjects are *GB News*’ stock-in-trade, not least during their opinion-driven evening programmes. Thus, as Purvis and Chris Banatvala (the Founding Director of Standards and former Content Board member at Ofcom) conclude: ‘Ofcom’s distinction between the two genres news and current affairs – and, on the basis of this, allowing politicians to present programmes dealing with controversial matters – is simply self-created.’

However, the situation regarding Farage, Tice and Reform goes beyond *GB News* and concerns the amount of airtime that they are now going to be allotted on the BBC. Even before he was elected as an MP, Farage had appeared 37 times on *Question Time*. Recently published research from Cardiff University showed that between 2014 and 2023, Tice’s partner, Isabel Oakeshott, ap-

peared 15 times, equalling only Julia Hartley Brewer in the gallery of right-wing pundits who dominate the panels.

Given the BBC’s remarkable indulgence of Farage, one expects this pattern to continue, and that Reform, with its five seats, will be treated far more generously than the Green Party, even though it has only one less.

And no doubt the BBC will defend this imbalance by arguing that Reform deserves more coverage because it received a 14% share of the vote compared to the Greens’ 7%.

But this would be entirely to ignore the strength of the Greens’ support outside Westminster, where it has over 800 councillors in 170 local authorities and three members of the London Assembly. By contrast, Reform has a mere ten councillors and only one Assembly member.

More newsworthy?

The BBC might also argue that Reform is more ‘newsworthy’ than the Green Party – while, of course, entirely ignoring its own role in helping to make it so. This is partly because they regard Farage and his populist pals as ‘entertaining’, and thus as ratings boosters, and partly in order to appease the forces of the Right by demonstrating that they’re not ‘woke’.

The first is an alarming reflection on the BBC’s journalistic standards, and the second seriously calls into question its political impartiality. Here, surely, is a case for Ofcom – except that it has shown itself entirely incapable of dealing adequately with serial infractors of its impartiality requirements by *GB News*. **MN**

Labour's media policy

Tom O'Malley
outlines policies
for media reform

Cautious was the watchword of Labour strategists in the run-up to the General Election.

That meant there was only one mention of media policy in the manifesto. Labour committed to 'working constructively' with the BBC and UK public service broadcasters, 'so they continue to inform, educate and entertain people, and support a creative economy by commissioning distinctively British content'.

Thereafter it was silent on the many challenges facing public service broadcasting in the context of an under-regulated media environment, years of cuts and a hostile press.

Questions of press regulation or what to do about the radically shifting communications environment were not included. It clearly didn't want to provoke attacks from the right-wing media by encouraging a discussion of media policy.

Now the election is over, the new Secretary of State at the DCMS, Lisa Nandy, has to address these and other pressing issues.

Implementing Leveson

Before the election, Labour stepped back from its long-standing commitment to implement the Leveson proposals to encourage newspapers to join an independent regulator.

These proposals have strong support in other parties, in particular in the Liberals Democrats and the Greens. Now is the time to implement Leveson.

As for the BBC, the right-wing press and pressure groups like the Institute of Economic Affairs, want to see the BBC further undermined. The News Media Association, which represents most UK local and national news publish-



Lisa Nandy, Labour's new Culture Secretary. Under the Tories there were 11 in 14 years

ers, has called for curbs on the BBC's journalism.

The DCMS should resist this pressure. It should open consultations on the future of the BBC to the public as well as seek ideas about how to make it, and other media institutions, more accountable.

For instance, we have to overhaul radically the neo-liberal media regulator, OFCOM. It has consistently preferred promoting under-regulated communications markets over its obligation to sustain public service media. Regulation has to be about funding a strong, accountable public media across all platforms. We need to support initiatives that inject more accountability into the system, like proposals for the devolution of broadcasting powers to Wales and Scotland.

The power of the big tech giants – Meta, Google – has to be challenged. They exist in a regulatory Wild West. They extract huge profits from the UK and are not properly taxed. A levy on these companies would

help fund new public service media initiatives.

Media ownership, workers' rights, the implications of AI and the need to make streaming services subject to requirements to produce content in and about the UK are all pressing issues.

Labour has a chance to reform the media. We must encourage that by lobbying for change, now.

The Media Reform Coalition (www.mediareform.org.uk) is organising a fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference on 25 September. Encourage conference delegates you know to go. It has produced a *Media Manifesto for 2024* – now available on its website. **MN**

Get help from MediaNorth

MediaNorth can provide model resolutions and speakers for your CLP or TU branch discussions. Contact us at cpbfnorth@outlook.com. Get copies of this newsletter, online or hard copies, and distribute them widely.

Opinion

What to do about Reform?

I had to do a double take when the General Election exit poll predicted Reform would win 13 seats.

The final figure turned out to be five – all middle-aged blokes with short attention spans who get rattled at tough questions and have only a passing familiarity with economics and the world outside the 1950s Britain they wish still existed.

The coverage of Reform in the media following the election result was at times staggering. Anyone would think Farage had become Prime Minister.

The fact is that too many media outlets give him an easy ride and indulge his cheeky chappie image. He is a good communicator, can turn a phrase, seize on prejudices and push the envelope. But he is a one-man band and Reform a company, whose financial sugar daddy is Richard Tice.

Reform polled surprisingly well and vox pops after the election show he has a lot of support among working people who buy the easy slogans, prejudices and 'common sense'.

The Labour Government now has enormous powers and has to tackle the grievances Reform exploits head on and challenge their lies.

The BBC's love affair with him has to change too. His easy access to the airwaves should stop and he should be treated just like the leaders of other small parties such as the Greens.

In the meantime, expect the *Mail*, *Express*, *Sun*, *Telegraph* and *GB News* to regroup and form the opposition to Labour as the Tory electoral catastrophe hits home.

– **Tony Burke**

MN



Robert Olley, *Orgreave after Guernica*, 2018, oil on canvas. © Robert Olley

Art with impact

Jean Spence reviews a powerful exhibition on the end of mining in the North East

The subject matter of *The Last Cage Down* is the long decline of the deep coal mining industry that was once at the heart of the prosperity of North East England. Its timing coincides with the 40th anniversary of the Miners' Strike that set the terms for the antagonistic political ruthlessness with which the industry would be privatised and eventually destroyed.

To reach the two rooms where *The Last Cage Down* is showing, visitors must walk through the permanent display from the Gemini Collection of mining art that focuses primarily on the active years of the industry,

depicting working miners, underground conditions, and the centrality of mines in the social and physical landscape before. In this way, the exhibition about the demise of the industry is contextualised for the viewer who on reaching the first room is confronted almost immediately with the shock of Bob Olley's 'Orgreave After Guernica' which occupies most of one wall.

Olley experienced the violence of Orgreave, 18 June 1984, in which mounted police attacked striking miners gathering for a mass picket. Using Picasso's

famous Spanish civil war painting as reference, Olley's work recalls Margaret Thatcher's reference to striking miners as 'The enemy within' and her determination to defeat them at whatever the cost.

For those involved in the strike, the confrontation with the state was experienced as a civil war and the repercussions of the defeat of the strike remain today. It would be worth visiting this exhibition to see this painting alone. It is impossible for the viewer to escape the eyes of the police in this room or having viewed the image to forget the implications of the state violence that it portrays.

The 1984-1985 miners' strike marked a turning point for the mining industry that had implications for mining communities

THE LAST CAGE DOWN

3 May - 6 October

Mining Art Gallery
Market Place

Bishop Auckland DL14 7NP



as signified by Barrie Ormsby's 'Miners' Strike of 1984' showing a row of police in riot gear creating a barrier between a peaceful gathering of seated miners dressed for summer and their mining village. With the death of the mines, comes the death of mining life as had already been experienced during the 1960s when 'Category D' villages, associated with mine closure, were left without investment.

Daeth of an industry

Russian artist Kirill Sokolov perhaps understood the implications of the death of the industry when he collected detritus after the 1984 unofficial miners' gala in Durham to make silk screen collages. The collage shown in this exhibition is to my mind one of the best pieces included.

Understanding the meaning of closure not only for future employment prospects but for a whole way of life brought women from local communities into the strike. Marjorie Arnfield's 'Women Protesting' (1985) is an important reminder that not only were women part of the resistance to mine closures, but also that they have represented mining life and its changes. Indeed, that they continue to do so is signified by the inclusion of Janet Buckle's 'Moving Coal at Hayroyd's' which suggests the shift to open casting that followed deep mine closures, leaving no respite for local landscapes and residents.

The strike was a significant moment in the wider landscape of industrial life in Britain. The defeat of the NUM opened the

gates for a wave of anti-trade union and anti-working class legislation that continues to this day. Another image by Barrie Ormsby, that of the 'Crucified Miner', implies the way in which miners, their industry and their communities were sacrificed to open the gates for the post-industrial, neo-liberal policies that would follow in the wake of the strike.

Feeling of sadness

Inevitably, post-industrial monuments, destruction and dereliction of places and people appear in the exhibition, represented by artists such as Bob Olley, Tom McGuinness, Robert Soden, and including a piece by Bob McManners who along with Gillian Wales created the Gemini Collection.

The efforts of McManners and

Wales on behalf of mining art in Co. Durham have helped to preserve and show high quality work that might otherwise never have come to public attention. They have curated *The Last Cage Down* thoughtfully and with a clear understanding of the issues at stake. Inevitably, because of the overall focus on mining itself, the pain of the strike and de-industrialisation, the exhibition left me with a feeling of sadness about what was lost and anger at the nature of that loss.

My one criticism would be that there might perhaps have been more reference to the positive energy that the strike generated and that is continuing to influence community activism in ex-mining localities. Perhaps though, this is the subject of another exhibition.

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

The power of art and memory

Julian Petley reviews John Berger's writings on mining

The *Underground Sea* gathers together John Berger's works on miners. Chronologically (which is not how they're presented in the book) these are: a 1963 interview with former miner Joe Roberts for the Granada series *Before My Time*; 'The Nature of Mass Demonstrations' from *New Society* 23 May 1968; the short BBC film *Germinal* broadcast in July 1973 and repeated at the height of the miners' strike in July 1984, which was a follow-up to a 1970 BBC adaptation of Zola's novel of the same name; and 'Miners' a piece written by Berger to accompany a 1989 exhibition on miners by the Swedish artists Knud and Solwei Stampe at the Cleveland Gallery in Middlesbrough.

The collection also contains an introduction by the book's editors, Tom Overton (Berger's biographer and cataloguer of the Berger archive at the British Library) and Matthew Harle.

No easy task

In terms of length, *Germinal* is the most substantial component of the book, described by the editors as a 'conscious reversioning' of the original film – no easy task given Berger's complex and reflexive mode of combining words and images. In making it, Berger and his producer, the Irish writer Nuala O'Faolain, visited the Derbyshire pit village of Creswell,

just as Zola had researched his novel in the mining town of Anzin, and their film attempts to extrapolate what is at stake in Zola's original, relating it both to the novel's own time and the film's present.

Zola's novel ends with its central character, Etienne, leaving the mines of northern France on a beautiful Spring morning to engage in political activism in Paris. *Germinal* was the name of the seventh month in the new calendar established after the French Revolution (roughly mid-March to mid-April in the conventional calendar), and clearly suggests growth and rebirth.

JOHN BERGER: THE UNDERGROUND SEA Miners and the Miners' Strike

Tom Overton and
Matthew Harle (eds)

Canongate
£16.99

Zola makes the parallel between natural and political germination absolutely explicit, and Berger quotes the book's closing lines: 'Men were springing up, a black, avenging host was slowly germinating in the furrows, thrusting upwards for the harvests of future ages. And very soon their germination would crack the earth asunder.'



He then asks: 'What does that mean three generations after it was written? Where is the harvest of a future age?'

And now, equally, the question arises of what Berger's film, and indeed the rest of his work on miners collected here, means today?

Awkwardly organised though it is, the book suggests several answers:

Firstly, Overton and Harle note that Berger's *Germinal* 'presents its viewers with a set of questions about how to work with the past. They seem particularly worth asking in a year where archive footage of the violence at Orgreave will be replayed across platforms and feeds'. And, one should add, where the likelihood of an inquiry into Orgreave will be increased by the election of a Labour government apparently committed to establishing one.

Second, both *Germinal* and *Before My Time* are related closely to a more recent tradition of discussing the strike which 'has focussed as much

on what it felt like being part of a mining community as on the political background'. And *Germinal* in particular, with its footage of landscapes and miners' families going about their daily lives, 'stands partly as a document of the communities or life-worlds killed off and not replaced by Thatcherism'.

Finally, Berger's works here, and in particular in the first and last published pieces, testify very forcefully to the power of art and memory. 'The Nature of Mass Demonstrations' argues that, faced with such events:

"Either authority must abdicate and allow the crowd to do as it wishes: in which case the symbolic suddenly becomes real, and ... the event demonstrates the weakness of authority. Or else authority must constrain and disperse the crowds with violence: in which case the undemocratic character of such authority is publicly displayed."

Authority almost invariably

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40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

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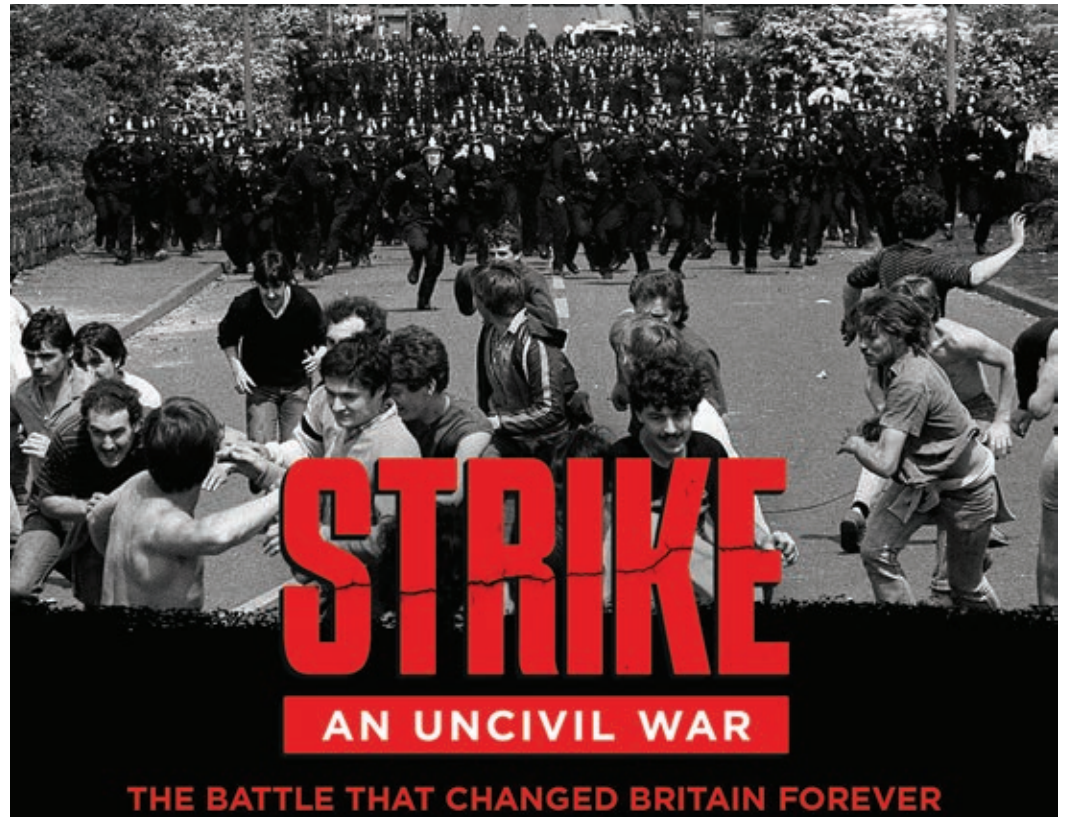
chooses the latter, but, in doing so, it 'ensures that the symbolic event becomes a historical one: an event to be remembered, to be learnt from, to be avenged', a process in which cultural representations of one kind or another play an absolutely key role.

They are out to break you

Then in 'Miners', written four years after the end of the strike, Berger argues that: 'When gradually you realise that They are out to break you, out to break your inheritance, your skills, your communities, your poetry, your clubs, your home and, wherever possible, your bones too, when people finally realise this, they may also hear, striking in their head, the hour of assassinations, of justified vengeance.' This is a call with which Berger clearly sympathised, but he then suggests the possibility of another way:

'A way less likely to fall out on your comrades and less open to confusion. I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past has suffered, so that it has never been forgotten. I know too that the powerful fear art, whatever its form, when it does this, and that amongst the people such art sometimes runs like a rumour and a legend because it makes sense of what life's brutalities cannot, a sense that unites us, for it is inseparable from a justice at last.'

In the heat of industrial conflict, such sentiments may sound distinctly like whistling in the dark, but as the truth about the miners' strike continues to emerge even 40 years later, thanks in considerable part to films, television programmes, podcasts, blogs, photo-journalism and novels, as well as works of non-fiction (amongst them ones produced by the CPBF), Berger's faith in the power of art has proved increasingly well-founded. **MN**



Strike: A committed and powerful film

Granville Williams on a documentary which vividly captures what happened at Orgreave

Strike: *An Uncivil War* had its world premiere at the Crucible theatre in Sheffield on Sunday 16 June. The audience responded with a standing ovation and enthusiastic cheers.

The next day the film won the Sheffield Doc/Fest Audience Award.

The commitment of the film's director Daniel Gordon and his team at Very Much So to the project is clear. "Every single person who's worked on this film has effectively given their time for free," he says. "Sometimes the crew have just

worked for their petrol money and hotel expenses for wherever we've gone to do the interviews. But everyone was the same in their thinking: we've got to make the film, we've got to tell the story, and we've got to give them a voice."

The Sheffield-based filmmaker previously made the Emmy-nominated 2014 documentary on the Hillsborough disaster and he is clear about the links between Orgreave and Hillsborough and the at-

"I hope what the film does is show that there's enough there to have a proper full inquiry and holding to account of what happened"

tempts in both cases to consistently block and cover up who was responsible.

The film will undoubtedly be a powerful voice for an independent and authoritative inquiry in the battle of Orgreave and who was responsible, something Labour committed to in its election manifesto. "I hope what the film does is show that there's enough there to have a proper full inquiry and holding to account of what happened," says Gordon.

The central part of the film focuses on events at Orgreave on 18 June 1984 and the interviews with miners who were there, arrested and charged are outstanding and powerful. Archive footage of the police assaults on miners that day put their words in the context of unfolding events.

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The best documentary of Orgreave

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Daniel Gordon's interviews capture men often breaking down and crying as they relive the events of 40 years ago and reveal how traumatic the experience of being at Orgreave was for them.

What stands out in the film is the contrast between miners in summer attire confronted by mounted police, police with dogs and police units with short shields and truncheons intent on injuring and arresting miners as they flee.

The officers claimed that their assaults on pickets were in response to attacks – a narrative reinforced by coverage in the right-wing media and the BBC's reporting in the early evening news that day.

This spurious narrative was exposed when the first group of miners, charged with riot, went on trial a year later. Police officers recount in *Strike* being instructed by their seniors to fabricate witness statements. At the trial the police video of the mounted police charge shows no missiles were being thrown when the order to go in was given.

The film does look more broadly at the year-long strike and highlights the tactics used by the government and National Coal Board to orchestrate the 'return to work'.

This is undoubtedly the best documentary to come out of the 40th anniversary of the strike and is essential viewing.

There is also an excellent book to accompany the film: *An uncivil war: The Battle of Orgreave* by Michael Donald and Daniel Gordon published by *The New European*, £20.00

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The Holmfirth Film Festival is showing Strike on Sunday 28 July at The Civic, Holmfirth at 2.00pm Tickets on the door £5.00 or book online. Granville Williams will lead a Q&A session afterwards



Free at last: Assange deplanes in Bangkok after flying from Britain.

Assange is free, but press freedom still under threat

By Granville Williams

In 2019 President Donald Trump's administration took the decision to charge Julian Assange with 17 counts of breaching the 1917 Espionage Act.

Assange rose to prominence with the launch of WikiLeaks in 2006, creating an online whistleblower platform for people to submit classified material such as documents and videos anonymously.

Footage of a US Apache helicopter attack in Baghdad, which killed a dozen people including two journalists, raised the platform's profile, while the 2010 release of hundreds of thousands of classified US documents on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as a trove of diplomatic cables, cemented its reputation.

A five-year fight against extradition has finally ended and for the first time in 12 years Assange is a free man. Released

from Belmarsh Prison, he was flown to the US-governed Pacific island of Saipan. There he pleaded guilty to illegally securing and publishing classified documents in exchange for a prison sentence of five years, which he had already served in the UK.

Julian Assange's treatment has been described as 'a frontal attack on press freedom'. The Espionage Act under which he pleaded guilty allows no public interest defence.

His case will have a chilling effect on journalism. Those who want to expose government misdeeds may now think twice.

The energetic high-profile campaign to secure his freedom has been public and international for many years.

We should however acknowledge the key role the Australian government played behind the scenes to negotiate a deal that would ensure his freedom.

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MediaNorth Events



Festival of Debate

We held a well-received session in this year's Festival of Debate in Sheffield on *AI: Threats and Opportunities for the Media*. The contributions by the panel were wide-ranging and informative.

You can watch the session here: <https://youtu.be/-ofqonJRhtk?si=8Us2vyx-vFNWW5TO>

South Yorkshire Festival



The Art of Class war

We're back again with our regular slot at the South Yorkshire Festival, Sunday 18 August at 2.00pm in the Unison Room, Wortley Hall, Sheffield S35 7DB.

Former BBC Industrial Correspondent, Nick Jones, who reported on the 1984-85 miners' strike, will draw on his own experience as well as his personal archive to look back at the strike through the eyes of news cartoonists.

Admission Free

Also at Wortley Hall:

Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture, 7pm Sat 17 August. Speakers: Professor Mary Davis, Philippa Clark and Suki Sangha. Chair: Glasgow TUC.

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