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Julian Petley on the damage done by political appointees and what needs to change

BBC crisis: The vultures begin to circle

The Telegraph **used the leaked memo to say the BBC is institutionally biased, deceptive and should be defunded**

The BBC is currently facing an existential threat. This was precipitated by the leaking to the *Daily Telegraph* of a memo to the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee (EGSC) by disgruntled former member Michael Prescott. This, and the events leading to it, resulted in the resignation of the director general Tim Davie and head of news Deborah Turness.

This crisis, which has by no means run its course, raises a whole host of fundamental questions, none of which were adequately answered by the DCMS committee's questioning (interrogation would be far too strong a word) of BBC Chair Samir Shah, Prescott himself, BBC board members Sir Robbie Gibb and Caroline Thompson, and former EGSC advisor Caroline Daniel.

Questions

For example, how does the avowedly politically partisan Gibb understand impartiality in the case of his work for the BBC? Why were all the concerns raised by Prescott (Trump, Israel/Gaza, unfounded claims of racism, biological sex and gender identity) coming from one particular political direction? Who commissioned the reports on which these concerns were based? If Prescott himself didn't leak his memo, did he really believe that it wouldn't reach the pages of the BBC-hating press? And was the BBC's fatal delay in responding to the criticism – entirely justified – of *Panorama*'s editing of Trump's speech the result of institutional paralysis caused by ructions on the board on the part of its political appointees, led by Gibb?

How does the politically partisan Gibb understand impartiality in the case of his work for the BBC?

The fact that we actually know so little about what has been happening in a public corporation – not helped by hyper-partisan coverage of the situation by the right-wing press, led by the *Telegraph* – is in itself deeply disturbing, and if this crisis has an upside it is that it has thrown light on serious causes for concern within a public body. Foremost among these is the presence of those political appointees.

Just before the crisis broke, the British Broadcasting Challenge (https://britishbroadcastingchallenge.com/) actually published a report, *Renewing the BBC*, which addressed this in the context of wider concerns about threats to the BBC's political independence. In this respect, it proposed the creation of an entirely new BBC Governance Board, responsible for holding BBC management to account for editorial and strategy delivery, whose members would be chosen by a new and wholly independent appointments body.

Interference

This would at least end a form of direct political interference in the BBC's affairs, although it should of course remain subject to scrutiny on behalf of the public via the current parliamentary mechanisms. But the BBC also needs to find new ways of engaging more directly with the public, such as Citizens' Assemblies, if it is to be held properly publicly accountable.

By these and other means crises such as the present one might be avoided, and the licence fee payer would not be in the unenviable position of standing by helplessly while the BBC floundered and the vultures circled overhead. MN

LOCAL PAPERS BATTLE FOR BOOZE REVENUE – NICK JONES, PAGE 4

Indigo Crane examines recent research on how younger people access news and information and provides her own perspective

Gen Z's changing news habits challenge idea of an 'objective' media

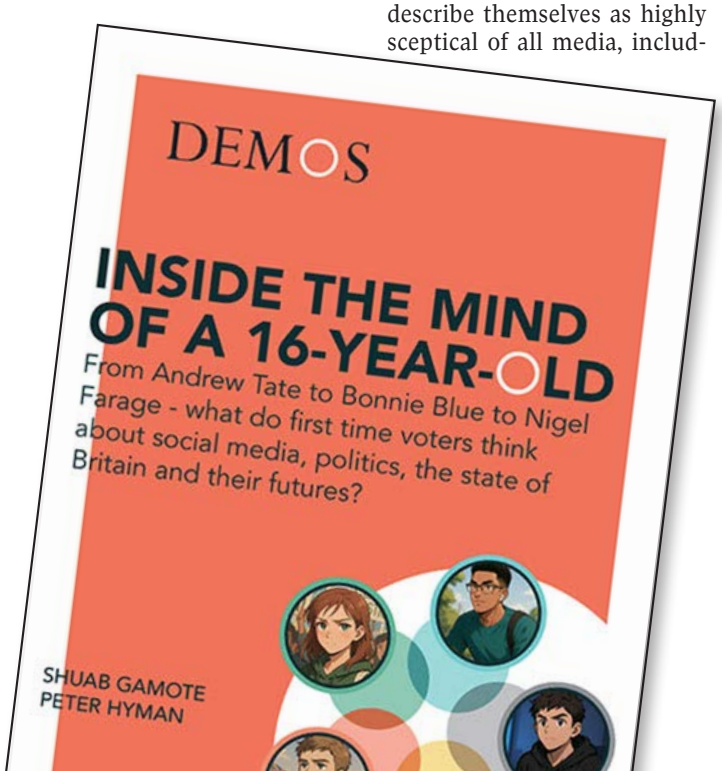
New data on how young people in the UK access and interpret news suggests a generational shift that could reshape political communication and public trust. For Generation Z news is no longer a discrete product delivered by institutions; it is a continuous stream embedded in social platforms, peer networks and personalised algorithms. This change raises questions about whether 'objective' or 'reasonable' news consumption remains a shared expectation.

According to Ofcom's *News Consumption in the UK 2024* report, 63% of 16 to 24-year-olds now get news from social media platforms, with TikTok showing the fastest growth. Traditional broadcast news has fallen sharply among this group: only 47% use TV news compared with 70% a decade ago, while fewer than one in ten young people say they actively visit news websites. Instead, news appears incidentally as part of scrolling behaviour, delivered by algorithms that prioritise engagement over editorial hierarchy.

Researchers warn that this environment shifts the criteria by which information is judged. Rather than assessing news based on institutional reputation, Gen Z tends to evaluate credibility through relatability, tone and shared values. Influencers, activists and commentators, none bound by editorial standards, often function as de facto news sources. Ofcom notes that TikTok users in particular 'trust news from people they follow more than from journalists', a reversal of older generations' instincts.

This is not synonymous with gullibility. Young people often describe themselves as highly sceptical of all media, including traditional outlets. Their approach is better understood aspragmatic: they distrust institutions they see as partisan, out of touch or overly formal, but are comfortable navigating multiple sources and making up their own minds. Studies from theReuters Institute show that 16 to 24s are more likely than older adults to 'cross-check' information across platforms, albeit through rapid, informal comparison rather than through established fact-checking processes.

Below: Cover of a recent Demos report on Gen Z voters



Deeply aware

A recent Demos report on first-time voters, *Inside the Mind of a 16-Year-Old*, reflects this dynamic. While not a study of news consumption alone, it finds that teenagers are deeply aware of misinformation but still prefer social platforms because they feel mainstream media does not represent their perspectives. The report notes that young people often encounter political content through influencers or micro-communities rather than parties or news organisations, contributing to a personalised, sometimes polarised, information landscape.

The consequences for public debate are ambiguous. On the one hand, young people are more politically engaged online than previous generations and more willing to challenge received narratives. On the other, the fragmentation of news sources may make collective understanding harder to achieve. With no single set of authorities, 'truth' becomes decentralised, a negotiation rather than a broadcast.

For traditional media and political institutions, the challenge is not only to reach young audiences but to adapt to a world where authority is no longer assumed. As Gen Z's influence grows, the UK's information environment may continue to move away from shared notions of neutrality and towards a more subjective, network-driven model of news.

From my perspective, the real problem is not my own susceptibility but the way social media has reshaped the wider information environment around me. Even though I try to avoid relying on it for news, I cannot ignore the extent to which these platforms encourage shallow engagement, emotional amplification, and a collapsing of distinctions between fact, speculation and performance.

What troubles me most is how news becomes secondary to the logic of visibility: posts spread not because they are accurate, but because they provoke reaction, reward outrage, or fit neatly into a narrative that generates clicks.

I can see how this distorts public debate, reducing complex issues to bite-sized claims optimised for speed rather than understanding. Influencers with no editorial accountability can gain the same authority as experienced journalists simply by appearing confident or relatable, and misinformation circulates faster than corrections ever can.

Even when I step outside this ecosystem, I still feel its effects, conversations become anchored in whatever happens to be trending, and people increasingly treat news as content rather than a public responsibility.

My scepticism, then, is not directed at traditional journalism but at the platforms that trivialise it, substituting personalised feeds for shared facts. What worries me most is that this fragmented environment leaves little room for the kind of collective understanding a democratic public sphere requires. However carefully one curates their own media habits, it is increasingly difficult to escape the distortions that social media has already imposed on how news is produced, circulated, and believed. MN

***Indigo Crane** is in her final year of an English degree at Durham University and will study for an MA in Journalism at Salford University next year.*

Tony Burke on unions organising workers in the US and the UK in the gaming industry

Photo: IWGB

Protests outside Rockstar Games in London after 31 workers were fired

Gaming sector workers unionise

Unions organising in the digi-tech sector have been turning their attention to organising workers in the gaming industry.

In the USA employees on Microsoft's Diablo series have voted to unionise, with 450 developers joining the Communication Workers Of America (CWA) citing major concerns of lay-offs.

"With every subsequent round of mass layoffs, I've witnessed the dread in my co-workers grow stronger because it feels like no amount of hard work is enough to protect us," said Kelly Yeo, Team 3 Game Producer on Diablo and a CWA organising committee member. "I am overjoyed that we have formed a union – this is just the first step for us joining a movement spreading across an industry that is tired of living in fear. We are ready to begin fighting for real change alongside our Diablo colleagues."

Diablo developer, Ryan Littleton, said the idea behind union representation is to "organise across the industry to make great games and protect the developers who create them from the constant pressures of lay-offs."

At Call Of Duty Studio, Raven Software workers who began organising three years ago have just won a new contract and developers at Bethesda Game Studios (part of Microsoft) across their US-based studios in Dallas, Rockville and Austin formed the 'OneBGUSA' group.

In a statement the workers said: "We, a majority of developers at Bethesda Game Studios, are ecstatic to announce the formation of our union. Together as #OneBGSUSA, we advocate for the betterment of every developer at BGS, setting the new standard for our industry." The OneBGSU is part of the CWA.

Grand Theft Auto maker Rockstar Games accused of union busting

It is estimated that 3,500 Microsoft workers have organised with the CWA, "fighting for fair compensation, job security, and a seat at the table to improve workplace conditions."

In the UK workers at Disco Elysium studio ZA/UM have joined the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), a small union which stands outside of the TUC and is the first union in the UK games industry to get a foothold in the sector. The move arrives after turmoil within the global gaming industry, and follows layoffs at ZA/UM itself in early 2024.

In another development Grand Theft Auto maker Rockstar Games has been accused of union busting by the IWGB who said 31 workers were fired from Rockstar's UK studios on 30th October.

Demonstrations were held in Edinburgh and London outside the owners' Take-Two Interactive offices.

The IWGB describe the sacking as 'the most blatant and ruthless act of union busting in the history of the games industry'. The demonstrations also attracted the support of Unite members and the TUC London, East and South East region.

Rockstar denied union busting and said the sackings were 'in no way related to people's right to join a union or engage in union activities' and said workers have been 'distributing and discussing confidential information in a public forum, a violation of our company policies'. MN

Damning COVID Inquiry report slams Johnson

Boris Johnson oversaw a 'toxic and chaotic' culture within government that led to poor Covid decision-making, the inquiry into the pandemic response has found.

Johnson's former top adviser Dominic Cummings was also singled out as a 'destabilising influence' who tried to make 'key decisions' in Johnson's place.

COVID-19 Inquiry critics have consistently attacked it as a costly waste of time. The *Daily Telegraph* front page headline, after the report's publication of Module 2 on UK decision-making, was: "The £200m Covid 'I told you so'."

Cummings – in a social media post - said the inquiry 'has enabled a vast rewriting of history'.

Boris Johnson, after initially remaining silent, used a double page spread in the *Daily Mail* to accuse the judge of 'breathtaking inconsistency' and being 'hopelessly incoherent'.

The Covid Bereaved Families group said: "Instead of showing regret, contrition or even apologising, Johnson is using a newspaper column to do what he couldn't do under oath at the Covid Inquiry - twist the truth, promote debunked myths and ignore the facts."

The group want Johnson to lose all of his ex-PM privileges.

MN

Fairness in Advertising / 1

Local papers in battle for booze ad revenue

Nick Jones tells how big media groups seek to protect a lucrative revenue source

Local newspapers across the country have been publicising a campaign by press proprietors to persuade the government to continue a legal requirement for changes in alcohol licensing to be advertised within each locality.

Under the headline 'Last Call', identical front pages warned that the public's 'right to know' was threatened by a review of licensing laws in England and Wales aimed at cutting red tape in the hospitality industry.

In a co-ordinated publicity blitz, the News Media Association (NMA) argued that ending the need for alcohol licensing notices in local papers would deliver 'a hammer blow to local democratic engagement'.

Journalists were said to use these notices as leads for stories, 'seeking reaction to the proposals and comment from local residents' – a justification which led to hollow laughter in the many communities served by free newspapers which employ few if any local reporters.

Special pleading by the media owners for a continuation of the requirement for publicans, restaurateurs, club and shop owners to have to pay for public notices only serves to underline the proprietors' reliance on the income they derive through the archaic rules which govern the duty placed on local authorities to advertise notices affecting planning, highways and other services.

The UK's much diminished stock of regional daily and weekly papers is largely controlled by a handful of conglomerates – including Reach, Newsquest and National World – which effectively operate as local monopolies.

This latest campaign reflects their determination to maintain what some community news organisations claim is effectively a stranglehold on a vital source of local advertising revenue.

Under legislation dating back to 1883, only registered newspapers which are published on a daily or weekly basis (or in some cases fortnightly), and which reach specified thresholds for circulation, qualify under the legislation.

Little original content

Many free papers published by the dominant groups now have little or no original content and to save costs they print a minimal number of copies, often only enough to meet the required circulation thresholds for public advertising.

Increasingly newspaper bins in town centres and shopping arcades offering free copies have all but disappeared.

Advertising revenue from public notices has become a financial lifeline for weeklies

While some local authorities already question the value for money issues raised by falling circulations, there is no doubt that for local weeklies which do still employ locally based journalists, the advertising revenue derived from public notices has become a financial lifeline.

Often two, three or even more pages are filled with these small, classified advertisements from councils and other statutory undertakings, an irreplaceable income stream.

However, wider issues are at stake in big conurbations where monopoly free newspapers tend to dominate.

A share of the available advertising spend cannot be accessed to help finance community-led newspapers or magazines which are trying to fill the void left by a dearth of locally based journalists.

They fail to qualify because invariably they can only afford to publish on a monthly basis and lack an audited circulation.

The back end of papers are a shadow of what they once were, long since having lost the pages filled by advertisements from house agents, car dealers, furniture showrooms and the like, so no wonder the media association

Newsquest's *Barnet Borough Times* gets the lion's share of Barnet Council's nearly £300,000 a year ad spend. Monthly community paper *Barnet Post* gets nothing

is fighting back with its 'Defend Your Right to Know' campaign.

In an astute move aimed at shoring up the obligations placed on local authorities, the NMA, with the support of Google News, has launched a national online service listing public notice advertisements.

By entering a postcode, the Public Notice Portal identifies any notices or applications which are being advertised in the press.

Again, the proprietors insist that the portal will help ensure that individuals or groups will have an opportunity to find out about and comment on planning applications, road closures, licensing changes or any other proposal which might impact their community.

When the portal was launched the association said that it would display more than 10,000 live notices at any given time. The website was built by Reach plc with £1million from the Google News Initiative. MN

Fairness in Advertising / 2

Democratic deficit – *Barnet Times* v. *Barnet Post*

Barnet Council is spending not far short of £300,000 a year on advertising public notices about planning applications and other statutory announcements such as road closures and traffic restrictions.

The lion's share of the annual budget goes to Newsquest's weekly free newspaper, the *Barnet Borough Times*, but there is zero for its rival, another free paper, the monthly *Barnet Post*.

Social Spider Community News, which publishes five free newspapers in north and east London – including the *Barnet Post* – is campaigning for a change in the law to allow a wider selection of news outlets to earn income from public notices.

Newsquest, which is the UK's second largest press proprietor, secures the vast bulk of local authority advertising not only in Barnet but also in many other London boroughs and across much of south-east of England.

David Floyd, editor of the *Barnet Post* – and a co-director of the Social Spider community interest company – says that because they can only afford to print monthly, their papers fail to qualify under the 1883 convention on public notice advertisements.

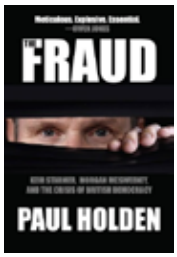
Archaic law

"We have been arguing for years for a change in this archaic law but whenever we do, we get blow back from the media owners.

"So, a legacy title like the *Barnet Times*, with little or no original content of its own from the locality, can take advantage of public advertising."

An FOI request revealed that in 2023-24 Barnet Council spent £262,000 advertising public notices, 'many times' more than the total turnover of the *Barnet Post*.

Adding to Floyd's frustration is that much of the original content in the *Barnet Times*, and in many other nearby Newsquest titles, is from the BBC-funded local democracy reporters who are locally based and who are employed by the Social Spider group. MN



THE FRAUD!
Keir Starmer, Morgan McSweeney and the Crisis of British Democracy
Published by OR Books / £20

Steve Bell / Pilgrim's Progress

How low can you go?

Tim Gopsill on the role of Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood in the deceitful, secret campaign inside Labour to destroy Corbyn and install Starmer as a right-wing leader

When the new Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood twice stood up in Parliament in November to announce successively tougher measures restricting immigration to the UK, it was just the latest lap in the race to the bottom on migration rhetoric.

The government is determined not to slip behind right-wing parties competing to gratifying the supposedly racist working class demanding the ever more pitiless treatment of refugees.

Mahmood insisted her plans could unite 'a divided country' – but they united only right-wing politicians, winning the embarrassing approval of the rival parties. Her Tory shadow Chris Philp said he supported much of the statement and accused the government of 'copying and pasting' Conservative policies. Nigel Farage invited Mahmood to join Reform UK, and the ultra-nationalist Tommy Robinson called her a 'patriot'.

But Mahmood's new prominence is also significant for the Labour Party itself. It strengthens the ascendancy of the small group of MPs, far-right in Labour terms, that put Keir Starmer in Downing Street.

The grouping, calling themselves Labour Together, formed secretly after the shock election of left-winger Jeremy Corbyn in 2015 and only broke cover five years later in the run-up to the election for his successor, following the rout by Boris Johnson's Tories in December 2019.

They raised money from rich financiers to 'win the party back'. In the process they deceived members about their intentions, breached data protection legislation and flouted the rules governing donations. It was a classic political conspiracy and one of the chief plotters was Shabana Mahmood.

The others were Steve Reed, Bridget Phillipson, Wes Streeting, Lucy Powell, Rachel Reeves, Lisa Nandy, Jim McMahon and John Cruddas; all bar a couple who dropped away are now senior members of the cabinet. They styled themselves the 'Brave Eight' crusaders who took on the task of ridding the Labour Party of its left wing once and for all. This is the supreme mission of Starmer himself.

Much of what went on was unreported until the recent publication of a book: *The Fraud: Keir Starmer, Morgan McSweeney and the Crisis of British Democracy* by journalist Paul Holden, which recounts every detail in 544 pages of relentless revelation.

McSweeney is Starmer's Chief of Staff, a pantomime schemer of the kind who invariably crashes but has had a relatively easy ride, so far – though in the summer the Tory opposition started raising disturbing questions about how, as Labour Together's director, he ran its finances.

All UK political donations must be reported to the Electoral Commission. Labour Together raised £740,000, which, despite reminders, it failed to declare. Indeed it was prepared to pay a £14,000 fine rather than identify its donors.

Party survey

After the 2019 defeat the group set up a 'commission' to conduct a large-scale survey of party members, jointly with Labour List, the party's authoritative but independent online 'house magazine'.

Mahmood wrote an article in *Labour List* to encourage participation. She said that Labour Together was 'not supporting any leadership campaign and the data ... will not be shared by any campaign ... We don't want our findings to influence the result'.

She said they were funded by 'donations small and large from activists, trade unions and members ... [that were] registered on the Electoral Commission website'. None of these assertions was true. Indeed on voting day, 2 April 2020, Labour Together itself announced: "We backed Keir Starmer and helped him win the leadership."

Paul Holden writes: "Party members who voted did so in ignorance of important facts – a grave failure of transparency." With Mahmood's reassurances, more than 11,000 members took part in the survey; on top of political advantage Labour Together gathered a huge amount of personal data.

Holden points out that the law forbids the gathering of data on false pretences. "Questions have to be asked about whether Mahmood's conduct was befitting of a Secretary of State for Justice."

That was her title when the book was written. Now she has attained one of what are laughingly described as Great Offices Of State.

It is widely held that Starmer is not long for Downing Street. Will he take Mahmood and the rest of his little band of conspirators down with him? MN

Granville Williams on the ITV series *The Hack*, the film George Clooney never made, and the furore around the BBC memo leaked to *The Daily Telegraph*

Our Fourth-rate Estate exposed

Hack Attack by *The Guardian* investigative journalist Nick Davies was published in 2014. The book drew on his experiences over six years investigating Rupert Murdoch's UK newspapers.

He shows how their habit of hacking into the voice mail messages of elected officials, celebrities – and even ordinary British citizens – and the victims of terror attacks was happening on an industrial scale.

Murdoch, in an attempt to contain the scandal and try to save his bid to take over BSkyB, closed *The News of the World* in July 2011. Pressure on David Cameron led to the establishment of the Leveson Inquiry. The Leveson Report was published in November 2012.

In September 2014, George Clooney announced he would direct a film adaption of *Hack Attack*. He said the book 'has all the elements – lying, corruption, blackmail…and the fact that it's true is the best part'.

Production was meant to start in 2015 but the film was never made. Clooney, for all his profile and a track record of making the critically acclaimed film *Good Night and Good Luck* (2005), was unable to raise the $25-$30m to finance it.

Speaking at the 2019 Byline Festival, Nick Davies said: "Even Clooney, with all his connections and all of his prestige, had to let it go." Murdoch didn't "… even have to lift his finger…It's what you call passive power. That everybody knows how much power that guy has got, so from the outset they set out to placate him."

Fast forward to autumn 2025 and the release of the seven-part ITV drama *The Hack*. It came in a blaze of publicity with a star-studded cast (David Tennant as Nick Davies and Toby Jones as *Guardian* editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger) and high expectations. One publicity piece ended, "If the huge success of *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* is anything to go by, this will be a must-watch."

> "Even Clooney, with all his connections and his prestige, had to let it go"

ITV

David Tennant (left) as Nick Davies, and Toby Jones as *Guardian* editor, Alan Rusbridger, in the ITV series *The Hack*

The hope was it would dig down into the way the phone-hacking scandal exposed the corruption and abuses of power at the heart of British newspapers and that it would reignite interest and impetus in the Leveson Report's findings and recommendations, particularly on press

● **Continued on Page 8**

Trusted alternative news sources

Julian Petley suggests a list of information sources which he thinks need wider publicity

One of the great paradoxes of our times is that whereas dis- and mis-information are rife online – not least on the websites of right-wing newspapers – the self-same media sphere is home to a vast range of valuable and reliable sources of information of one kind or another.

The problem is, however, that the sheer weight and market power of the dominant media players (both online and offline) work to eclipse the presence of alternative online sources of news, views and analysis.

MediaNorth thinks it's crucial to try to ensure the widest possible awareness of the existence of such sources. Otherwise there's a very substantial risk that we continue to move towards a two-tier politico-information order in which the majority are fed with junk and become ever more manipulable while a well-informed minority find themselves increasingly powerless to exercise any kind of purchase on social and political reality.

To this end, we list below a selection of sites that we regard as raising and debating particularly crucial current issues. We welcome further suggestions from our readers.

- **Byline Times** www.bylinetimes.com/about/
- **Open Democracy** www.opendemocracy.net/en/
- **Democracy for Sale** www.democracyforsale.substack.com/
- **Full Fact** www. fullfact.org/
- **Desmog** https://www.desmog.com/
- **DeClassified** www.declassifieduk.org/
- **Electronic Intifada** www.electronicintifada.net/
- **The Canary** www.thecanary.co/
- **Left Foot Forward** leftfootforward.org/
- **Brexit and Brexitism** www.chrisgreybrexitblog.blogspot.com/2025/09/from-brexit-to-brexitism.html
- **Computer Weekly** www.computerweekly.com
- **Inside Housing** www.insidehousing.co.uk/
- **Hacked Off:** www.hackedoff.org/
- **Media Reform Coalition:** www.mediareform.org.uk/

Podcasts

The Two Matts (*The New World*), Media Confidential (*Prospect*), When It Hits the Fan, Strong Message Here, Roger Bolton's Beebwatch, Peter York's Culture Wars House Party, Rock 'n' Roll Politics (Steve Richards), The Rest is Politics, Page 94 *(Private Eye)*.

Substacks

Mostly free, but you get more if you pay (rarely more than £5 a month). For example:
Notes from Underground (David Aaronovitch), *A Lawyer Writes* (Joshua Rosenberg, though note that views on Israel are avowedly Zionist), *Folded* (Adam Bienkov), *WritesBright* (Sam Bright), *Odds and Ends of History* (James O'Malley), *Striking 13* (Ian Dunt), *Comment is Freed* (Sam and Lawrence Freedman), *Broligarchy* (Carole Cadwalladr) and *Zeteo* (Mehdi Hasan). MN

UK press unaccountable and tilted to the right

● From Page 7

regulation, which David Cameron did not implement.

Sadly, the series was a dud, with mediocre viewing figures, and it failed to stimulate any wider debate.

Leveson 2, supposed to investigate 'the extent of unlawful or improper conduct' within press organisations and establish potential links between the press and the police facilitating such misconduct, was scrapped by the May government in 2018.

Keir Starmer also abandoned Leveson 2 in exchange for *The Sun*'s tepid support for Labour in last year's General Election. In an uncomfortable parallel with David Cameron's appointment of Andy Coulson, the former editor of *The News of the World*, as his Director of Communication, Starmer appointed David Dinsmore, former head of News UK and ex-*Sun* editor.

Brutal truth

The brutal truth is we still have an unaccountable, all-powerful press tilted to the right.

Witness the response to the leaked Michael Prescott memo published by *The Telegraph* on 3 November. Right-wing newspapers, united in their mutual loathing for the BBC, put the organisation at the centre of a media frenzy which resulted in the resignation of Director General Tim Davie and the News Director Deborah Turness.

Now we have the news that Lord Rothermere's privately owned publishing empire the Daily Mail and General Trust (DMGT) has made an exclusive £500m bid for the *Daily Telegraph* group.

With Rothermere now able to pour resources into a paper weakened by debt there is the prospect of a new reinvigorated paper leading to a further consolidation of media power on the right.

The key question is what will Labour's response be to Rothermere's bid? MN

Coming Events

Wapping 40th anniversary event

By Meirian Jump

The Marx Memorial Library & Workers' School (MML) has a significant collection of documents on the News International (Wapping) dispute, and a two-year project to complete the cataloguing of this important collection is now completed.

January 2026 will see the launch of an accessible index of the collection, opening it up to researchers for the first time.

The Wapping dispute remains a pivotal moment in modern labour history. Beginning in 1986, this year-long dispute saw Rupert Murdoch's News International move production overnight to a fortified plant in Wapping, demanding print-workers accept reduced conditions and sacking more than 5,000 print-workers in the process.

It unfolded as part of a broader offensive by Margaret Thatcher's government against strong trade unions – an assault that also encompassed the miners' strike.

Wapping stands as a stark illustration of the use of the police and state power to break organised labour, reshape the press and accelerate the shift toward casualised, derecognised news production that continues to shape our media landscape today.

We will be marking 40 years since the Wapping dispute with an all-day symposium – online and in person – on Saturday 24 January.

Speakers will include Granville Williams of *MediaNorth*, Morag Livingstone, *Morning Star* editor Ben Chacko, and veterans of the dispute. We warmly invite all those committed to press and broadcasting freedom, labour history and workers' rights to join us as we reflect on the legacy of Wapping and the struggles that lie ahead.

Book your ticket here: https://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/521

***Meirian Jump** is Director Marx Memorial Library & Workers' School* MN

Novels alert us to political threats

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE!

At the Red Shed, Wakefield

Saturday, 17 January 2026

A Wakefield Socialist History Event – 1pm to 4.00pm

Admission Free

It Can't Happen Here by Sinclair Lewis was a dystopian political novel published in the USA 90 years ago. Buzz Windrip, a vain, anti-immigrant, fear-mongering demagogue runs for President of the United States and wins. An authoritarian state quickly develops.

The way Donald Trump is using the forces of the state against his perceived enemies in the USA makes the novel remarkably prescient.

A September YouGov MRP poll indicated a 'near certainty' of a Reform UK government if an election were held at that time.

The stage version premiered simultaneously in 21 US theatres sponsored by the Federal Theatre Project.

Since this year's Labour Party conference, Reform has increased its polling lead by two percentage points in reaction to the criticisms levied against Farage.

There is the prospect of a far-right/Trumpist government in the UK.

Against this background *MediaNorth* editor Granville Williams examines novels published by American and English authors which imagine alternative histories: *It Can't Happen Here*, Sinclair Lewis; *The Plot Against America*, Philip Roth; *Fatherland*, Robert Harris, and *Dominion*, C.J. Sansom. Williams discusses how thse novels alert us to the contemporary political threats we face.

Stephen Dorril, author of the widely praised *Blackshirt: Sir Oswald Mosley and British Fascism*, will – using clips from such films as Eliza Kazan's 1957 satire *A Face in the Crowd* – consider whether Trump and Farage are actual fascists or simply populists, and why such figures failed in the past but are successful now. MN

MediaNorth

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