

Will social media ban on under-16s work?

Granville Williams on the issues raised by Starmer's decision to tackle tech industry

In her new book *How Big Tech Took Control and How to Fight Back* social media campaigner Beeban Kidron argues that the internet titans are now facing their 'tobacco moment' when the evidence of public health risk becomes strong enough to justify state intervention.

The problem is that the link between smoking and health hazards is clear but social media use by children (and adults) have both beneficial and harmful aspects. The tech industry has known for years that smartphone addiction and problems of online safety for children are real.

John Naughton in his *Observer* column cites the case of a 2020 Meta study done in association with the audience researcher Nielsen to measure the effects of taking a one-week break from Facebook and Instagram. Users who stopped for a week reported lower levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness. The results were never published.

Public hostility

The increasing concern and public hostility to the damage done led Australia to be the first country to take action when it banned under-16s from Instagram, Facebook and other services in December 2025.

Now Keir Starmer, in yet another policy U-turn, announced on 15 June an 'Australia plus' social media ban on under-16s at a

Downing Street event attended by a number of campaigners for the ban, including parents who have lost children. The announcement was light on detail: Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, X, Kick, and Twitch will be included in the ban but not messaging services WhatsApp and Signal. But how the ban will be enforced – for example age verification – is now handed over to Ofcom to sort out.

By-election timing

A cynic would point to the timing of the announcement, in the week of the Makerfield by-election. Whilst it certainly got the headlines there are several issues yet to be resolved before the policy is implemented in spring 2027.

But there are also big questions about whether the ban will solve the problems Starmer identified.

Ian Russell, whose daughter Molly died after being bombarded with suicide and self-harm material on social media, sees the ban as full of flaws. He cites the effect of the Australian bans – 60% of teens and young children are able to circumvent it. He thinks Starmer is 'choosing to take a politically easy route that the evidence shows will not work, and will leave children at continued risk'.

The Molly Rose Foundation,

the NSPCC, Five Rights Foundation, the Children's Media Foundation and many other organisations believe that social media bans are the wrong solution. They want to see a requirement on platforms to use highly effective age assurance that robustly enforces minimum age limits. They also want 'a fundamental reset of our expectations on tech firms. Social media firms should be required to move away from addictive design'.

MN



Guardian and Times front pages, but not all the UK press, thought Keir Starmer's social media ban was front page news. The Telegraph was critical, describing the ban as a 'rushed job'

GB News and Ofcom: The long view

Julian Petley argues Ofcom has had a long-term desire to change its attitude towards broadcasters like GB News

Since Michael Grade stepped down as Ofcom chair, he has fired off various ill-considered remarks about his time in the job, particularly about his attitude towards GB News. For example, he told *Politics Home* that he thought that GB News's critics are 'embarrassed by the fact that there is a news organisation that has a different news agenda to them, that speaks to the agenda of the majority – a large swathe of the voting population who have no voice on the BBC.

'Immigration, Brexit, these are all issues that don't get the weight on the BBC, or haven't been able to, that GB News will give, so what's the problem?' Well, just the plain facts that the views endlessly regurgitated on GB News are not those of the majority of the population, and that the BBC is actually obsessed by immigration and doesn't discuss Brexit only because the Brexiters have bullied it out of doing so.

Grade's outbursts have led some to claim that these explain why Ofcom has treated GB News with such leniency. However, in response, Ofcom has stated that 'any personal views a former chairman has expressed do not represent Ofcom policy'. In which case the only explanation of the regulator's indulgence of the rogue channel can be that it's the result of policy decisions taken within Ofcom itself regarding due impartiality.

In fact, there is evidence of Ofcom's long-term desire for a policy shift in this area. A par-

ticularly significant example can be found in a discussion document that it produced in July 2007 (15 years before Lord Grade's appointment) called *New News, Future News: The Challenges for Television News after Digital Switch-over*. This asked whether impartiality was 'a barrier to diversity in an era with a wide range of services available to viewers', and if, subject to changes in legislation, non-PSB channels should be allowed to offer 'partial news in the same way that newspapers and some websites do at present'.

Story selection affected

It suggested that the way in which the impartiality regulations had hitherto operated had affected not only the way in which news stories had been told, but also the selection of those stories in the first place.

This, it argued, resulted in a middle-of-the-road news culture and a 'tendency to clustering around a narrow, generally perceived news agenda' which served to 'stifle the expression of views that are not part of the established mainstream'. It said that a 'rigid approach might encourage greater engagement among those not currently inspired by mainstream sources'.

It is perilously close to culture warrior phantasms of 'liberal elites' brainwashing the population



Official Ofcom portrait of former chair, Michael Grade

These sentiments are quite remarkably similar to those recently expressed not only by Grade but also Ofcom CEO Dame Melanie Dawes, who told the DCMS committee on 14 March 2023 that 'we are always thinking about freedom of expression here and do not want to see just a single, monocultural – a mono-representation of views on British TV. When you compare what you get in the UK with what you see in America, which it is unregulated, it is very, very different'.

Indeed it is. But the idea that the public service broadcasters in the UK represent a homogenous monoculture is perilously close to culture warrior phantasms of 'liberal elites' brainwashing the population.

It's also a variation on the kind of ideological conjuring trick played in the US by Fox News, whose claim to be 'fair and balanced' depends entirely on the canard that it is providing the 'balance' to the 'left-wing' news provided by NBC, ABC and CBS.

However, *New News, Future News* was simply a discussion document, and much of the discussion which it provoked, including trenchant contributions from the CPBF, was extremely hostile to Ofcom's proposals. Naturally right-wing newspa-

pers were highly enthusiastic, exploiting the discussion document as yet another opportunity to attack BBC 'bias' and also sensing in Ofcom's proposals lucrative possibilities for establishing their own biased TV channels – and, in Murdoch's case, turning Sky News into Fox News UK. However, the hostile voices won out, and this, presumably, is why no more was heard of it.

Radical change

However, what would appear to have happened in the interim is that Ofcom, without any public consultation and without any parliamentary approval, has unilaterally decided to change radically the way it interprets the impartiality regulations contained in its Broadcasting Code.

But as the Code has a legal foundation in the Communications Act 2003, then, as former senior Ofcom figures Stuart Purvis and Chris Banatvala have repeatedly argued, only Parliament can alter the regulations and the way in which they are supposed to be interpreted.

This is something which the culture secretary, Lisa Nandy, seems reluctant to do, despite GB News effectively mutating into Reform TV. It is vital that GB News's many critics intensify the pressure both on Ofcom and the government.

Nick Jones on media coverage of 18 June, 1984

Are we getting any closer to the truth about Orgreave?

Securing full access to police plans to control the presence of the news media at the Battle of Orgreave should be one of the priorities for the long promised Orgreave Inquiry to be chaired by the Bishop of Sheffield, Dr Pete Wilcox.

Terms of reference published in March acknowledged that the ‘public narrative’ which developed around the events that day needed to be investigated and explained.

An enduring complaint of those who took part – especially those who were injured or arrested – was their shock at the distorted news reporting of the way the police responded.

At issue is the degree to which pre-planned action by the police might have influenced or even shaped the news coverage.

Post-Orgreave research by journalists and academics, backed up by numerous broadcast interviews, has suggested that there was pre-planning for media access and a determination to publicise the effectiveness of the police response.

The mindset was clear: there would be no repeat at Orgreave of the much-publicised humiliation at the 1972 Battle of Saltley Gate when television footage showed the police retreating in the face of mass picketing.

When arriving at Orgreave, tv crews and press photographers were directed for their own safety to agreed positions. Effectively they were being corralled behind police lines – an advantageous position but limited to a one-sided view of the action.

Was there a pre-planned arrangement to invite tv crews and photographers to witness events from the perspective of the police? Did this attention to detail have the desired effect and weight news coverage in their favour?



Complaints about collusion between the police and media at the Battle of Orgreave resurfaced soon after then Home Secretary, Theresa May, said the government would consider if there was justification for an inquiry into policing at Orgreave and if officers had altered their statements. A report in *The Independent* (15.11.2013) revealed that many photographs and tv pictures were taken from agreed positions behind police lines. Reporters said at the time that the officer with a backpack was filming the event for the police

An evident imbalance in the BBC's teatime news bulletin has become a cause celebre among those seeking the truth behind the events at Orgreave.

There was a recognition within the BBC that its report in the early evening news needed to be corrected for the later bulletin.

Next day at a BBC News and Current Affairs meeting, editor Peter Woon said that there had been 'a general feeling' in the newsroom that the teatime coverage had displayed 'a marginal imbalance'. Alan Protheroe, assistant director general, admitted the report 'might not have been wholly impartial'.

Complaints about the coverage were made by the NUM and the then Labour MP Tony Benn.

They argued that the BBC

There would be no repeat at Orgreave of the much-publicised humiliation at the 1972 Battle of Saltley Gate

had screened the events in the wrong order, creating the impression that mounted police charged pickets only after coming under violent attack whereas it was the police who had moved in first.

'Exceedingly difficult'

Replying to the criticism, Woon emphasised the pressure facing BBC journalists: "It was exceedingly difficult to edit an hour's shooting. Any departure from balance, however, was not such as to justify the NUM's view that the BBC was biased."

Perhaps, unwittingly, the minutes of the BBC editorial meeting give a clue as to why tv crews and press photographers were compliant when being shepherded to their agreed positions.

Editors pointed out that tv crews feared that if they left the relative safety of filming from agreed positions, they faced the risk of being attacked by strikers if they ventured too far behind the picket lines.

Whatever the misgiving that might have surfaced within the BBC, tv news reports from Orgreave confirmed the view of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that the police were in the right.

This was, she famously said, 'mob rule' by the miners which had been plain for all to see.

Cabinet records covering the period of the strike revealed the close relationship which had developed between Mrs Thatcher and officers of the South Yorkshire Police who were in the lead that day.

Another line of inquiry might well be to secure transcripts of news conferences and interviews given by senior officers in the immediate aftermath of Orgreave.

To what degree did statements by the police contribute to the narrative which attracted widespread complaints from within the mining communities and which the Orgreave Inquiry has promised to investigate?

Nick Jones reviews a new book which explores the provocative role of anti-union press proprietors in lead-up to the 1926 General Strike

100th anniversary of the General Strike

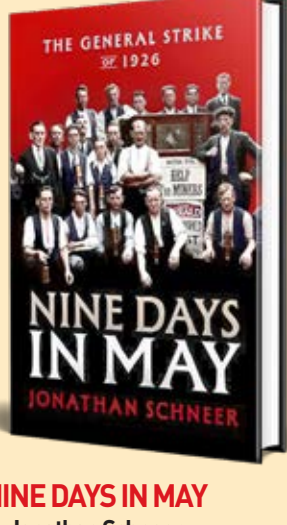
Provocative interventions by owners and editors of national newspapers have often played a pivotal role in the conduct and outcome of major industrial disputes in the long and turbulent history of strike action in Britain.

There could be no clearer illustration of malevolent interference of a press proprietor than a highly charged standoff between the *Daily Mail* and its print workers which became the pretext for the start of the General Strike of 1926.

By allowing the government an opportunity to claim strike action had already started – when negotiations were thought to be still in progress – Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin was able to call the TUC's bluff.

Nine Days in May, Jonathan Schmeer's new study of the strike, describes the momentous fallout from a one-sided confrontation with an anti-union newspaper, assured of government support – a scenario repeated down the decades when union leaders have tried, against the odds, and often with little success, to challenge biased press reporting.

At the height of a tense weekend of talks between unions and ministers in early May 1926, a refusal by print workers to produce the *Daily Mail* was the justification which the Baldwin government deployed in its declaration to end negotia-



NINE DAYS IN MAY
By Jonathan Schmeer
Oxford University Press
£25

tions with the TUC:

“Overt acts have already taken place, including gross interference with the freedom of the press. Such action involves a challenge to the constitutional rights and freedom of the nation.

“H.M. Government, therefore, before it can continue negotiations, must require from the Trade Union Committee

both a repudiation of the actions referred to that have already taken place, and an immediate and unconditional withdrawal

of the instruction for a General Strike.”

Time and again all that it has needed has been the cry ‘freedom of the press’ for print workers, their leaders and fellow trade un-

ionists to be thwarted by managements bolstered by the combined strength of the newspaper industry and assured of a sympathetic hearing from the government of the day.

‘For King and Country’ was the title in extra-large type of the *Daily Mail* leader which the Sunday night shift of the National Society of Operative Printers and Assistants refused to print.

Miners’ leaders, protesting over lower wages and longer hours, were accused in the *Mail*'s editorial of being under the influence of people who meant ‘no good to this country’:

“A General Strike...is a revolutionary movement...a movement which can only succeed by destroying the government...it cannot be tolerated by any civilised government.”

The deputation of printers which went to the editor, Thomas Marlowe, did not demand withdrawal of the article but asked him, “to modify (one) offensive paragraph”.

Marlowe told the delegation to stand by while he made calls to Downing Street and the *Mail*'s proprietor Lord Harmsworth.

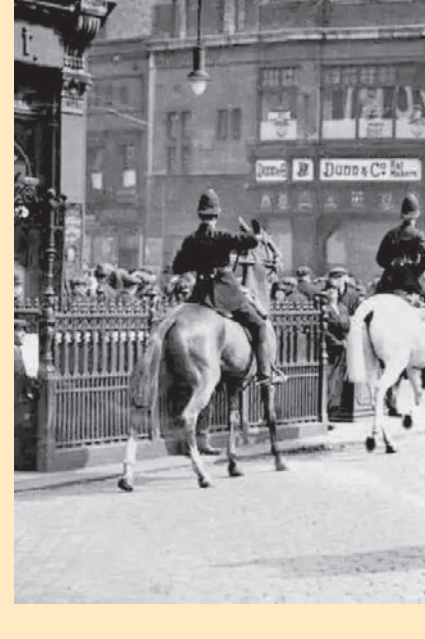
Print or 'hats and coats'

He returned to the delegation to tell the men to ‘either print the article as it stood or put their hats and coats on and go home’.

In trying to piece together what happened, Schmeer concludes that the Home Secretary and editor decided to force the process, leaving the next move up to the TUC.

It would be full speed ahead: ‘they would make the printers’ act of conscience into a casus belli’.

If the TUC had gone to



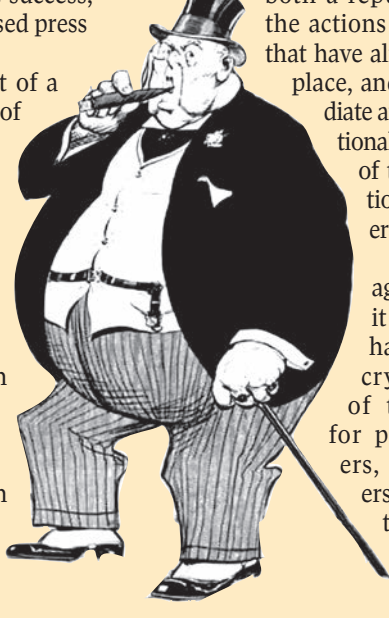
Baldwin immediately and disowned the printers’ action, the outcome ‘might have been different’.

The previous evening, after printers at the *Sunday Express* had objected to a government recruiting advertisement, Lord Beaverbrook was advised to back down so that negotiations could continue.

When the cabinet was told that what transpired at the *Daily Mail* that Sunday evening indicated that ‘General Strike instructions’ had already been dispatched, cabinet ministers stood firm.

TUC leaders acknowledged somewhat ruefully that ‘war has been declared’.

All print workers were ordered to cease working to ‘shut down entirely’ a press that was





LEFT: Mounted police baton-charge strikers at London's Elephant and Castle after a bus had been set on fire. PREVIOUS PAGE: 'The Subsidised Mineowner - Poor Beggar', cartoon published in 1925 in the trade union magazine Unity. BELOW: Front pages of news sheets hastily produced during the General Strike. BOTTOM: Dockworkers picket during the strike.

largely opposed to the General Strike.

When the presses stopped rolling in Fleet Street, most national dailies and regional papers were able to appear in only a severely truncated form, some producing flimsy typewritten editions.

To fill the void the government launched its own newspaper, the Daily Gazette, published by His Majesty's Stationery Office and edited by former journalist and Chancellor of the Exchequer Winston Churchill.

In response the TUC published the British Worker, under the leadership of the Daily Herald editor, Hamilton Fyfe.

Although circulation reached 700,000 it lacked effective distribution and failed to match the British Gazette's circulation which rose as high as 2,000,000.

Schneer's conclusion was that

the TUC was determined to control publicity during the General Strike and by publishing the 'carefully edited and generally anodyne' British Worker, it hoped to persuade local strike committees to stop publishing their own 'much more militant' local strike bulletins.

Radio sales soared

A rival source of news was the recently established BBC which by 1925 was being broadcast across the UK and which was being supplied with news and information by the Reuters news agency. Sales of radios in-

creased dramatically.

BBC news bulletins were a vital source of national news for small non-unionised local newspapers which upped their print runs to meet the extra demand generated by the absence of national dailies.

In an era when the press was the dominant source of news, some weekly newspapers in the suburbs printed daily editions for sale in London.

The Barnet Press, which published a daily 5 o'clock National Emergency Edition for central London, informed readers about

the source of its news coverage.

A reporter had listened to BBC news bulletins and then written up copy to deliver the latest news about the 'serious pass to which this country has been reduced'.

A selection of front-page headlines gave a clear indication as to why the proprietor of the Barnet Press had not recognised the print unions: 'Prime Minister stands firm', 'Rioting at Edinburgh', 'Motor cars attacked', 'Government to protect non strikers'.

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Tim Gopsill on the lessons the leader of the Green Party can learn from anti-semitic charges

Vilifying Zack Polanski

Zack Polanski, leader of the resurgent Green Party of England and Wales, has been condemned as anti-semitic by national media and the leaders of the other main parties. Even before its victories in the May elections the *Telegraph* headlined: ‘Polanski is an extremist, says Israel’.

Next day the *Daily Mail* said: ‘Polanski’s Greens Are a Party of Poison’. After the Golders Green stabbings the *Times* featured a caricature of Polanski with an exaggerated hooked nose kicking a police officer. Yet Polanski is himself a proud Jew. How can he be a Jew-hater too?

It is ten years since the first accusations of anti-semitism against the Labour Party under the new leadership of the left-winger Jeremy Corbyn. Those charges led to a huge crisis in the party and defeats at the next two elections.

The Greens are now posing a potential threat from the left. Could it happen to them?

Corbyn swept to top

In 2015 Corbyn was astonishingly swept to the leadership by party voters in despair at the ineffectual opposition the party had offered to the preceding Conservative austerity government. There followed a vigorous revival of progressive politics as party membership trebled (from 198,000 to 563,000 in 2017).

As an energetic left-wing MP Corbyn’s main functions had been to support militant trade union activity and introduce international liberation and resistance movements to Westminster politics. Among these had been Hamas and other Palestinian groups. At one meeting for instance he casually introduced Hamas representatives as ‘friends’.

It is hard to imagine that anybody seriously believed he was anti-semitic. Corbyn is a benign and harmless figure, a lifelong anti-racist who enjoys warm re-



lations with the sizeable Jewish community in his north London constituency. But the past soon caught up with him, and anti-semitic he officially came.

There was a relentless campaign openly co-ordinated by right-wing and pro-Israeli organisations – some of them within Labour itself – and the Jewish press. The *Jewish Chronicle* broke all records for the number of sheer lies it published, according to the press regulatory body IPSO, and the national press and the BBC joined in with gusto.

The avalanche of attacks left a shattered party in its wake. Labour was split down the middle, with hundreds of supposed

The Green Party complained to *The Times* over this cartoon depicting Zack Polanski (pictured left) as using ‘tropes so clearly associated with anti-semitic depictions of Jewish people’

anti-semites expelled and thousands leaving in disgust at the injustice of the campaign and the party’s official response.

These were lifelong anti-racists and the accusations hurt. Some formed new networks such as the Exiled Labour Network or Labour Against the Witchhunt (LAW). Few of the accusations against them concerned the persecution or denigration of Jewish people. Many cases were over criticisms of Israel, but most were objections to the process itself. The film director Ken Loach joined LAW and was expelled for ‘failing to disown members who had been expelled’; former MP Ken Livingstone was ousted for stating the historical fact that in the 1930s Zionist settlers negotiated with Hitler over the emigration of Jews to Palestine.

Corbyn was eventually expelled for stating another truth, that the extent of anti-semitism had been exaggerated for politi-

cal reasons. But this was only after he had lost the leadership.

While in office he had tried to appease his attackers, constantly apologising and pledging to root out the anti-semites. His team began summary cases on flimsy evidence against his own supporters and the expulsions began. Keir Starmer now claims the credit for driving the left out of the Labour Party, but it was underway before he arrived.

Jewish support

Prominent among Corbyn’s supporters and the members expelled were dozens of Jews. They reject the Zionist ideology of Israel and advocate justice for Palestinians. They join London’s regular pro-Palestine anti-war marches. They are labelled ‘hate’ marches by government and media, but there has been no violence and little if any evidence of anti-semitism on these marches; and none of the perpetrators of violent crime



Above: *Sun* cartoon. Below: *Telegraph* cartoon using the visual language of anti-semitic stereotypes



against Jews has been linked to the pro-Palestine or anti-war movements.

So there is a dire sense of déjà vu around the vilifying of Polanski. As a new and dynamic party leader he launched a revival of radical politics attracting thousands of people. He too has trebled party membership (65,000 to more than 220,000, which

is likely higher than Labour's, though it won't release figures). It strongly supports the Palestinians and condemns Israel's actions against them.

Muslim shock

This has bought success in local elections, and notably in the Parliamentary by-election in Gorton and Denton, east Manchester, in February. In a result that confounded political wisdom, a large Muslim community, supposedly anti-semitic and socially conservative, turned out en masse to vote for a young working woman (the Greens' Hannah Spencer) standing for a leftwing party led by an openly gay Jew, rather than Labour. Polanski has done some foolish things such as sharing a social media posting criticising the police officers who held down the knife attacker who stabbed

two Jewish men in north London in May – the target of the *Times* cartoon. That was asking for trouble, but it wasn't anti-semitic.

Anti-semitism is the hatred and persecution of Jewish people. It does not cover opposition to the state of Israel. This is distinction that should hardly need explaining, but backers of Israel try to muddy it in their obvious self-interest. But the war crimes of Israel are nothing to do with the Jewish people in Britain. It would be yet another false accusation to suggest that they are – in fact it would be anti-semitic!

Random assaults

It is a shame that their welfare should be exploited for political ends, and natural that they are anxious about their safety. There have been random assaults on the community, with a few violent attacks and two Jews murdered in Manchester.

Some attackers may have been driven by upset and rage at the sheer cruelty on view in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. Understandable perhaps, but it is still wrong to blame ordinary Jewish people.

Obviously Polanski does not, though it may not help him. The more he succeeds politically, the more he could face retribution. He has, in Corbyn, a model to study. For although Corbyn lost his job after the 2019 election, it wasn't the electorate that killed him off but his own party.

It was the split in Labour that did for him, between a membership that wanted peace and justice and the hostile party apparatus, that opposed him all along and collaborated with the fake 'anti-semitism' campaign.

The Green Party of England and Wales is a new coalition of long-time environmentalists, middle class liberals, young people without former political engagement, and those left-wing Labour exiles. Plenty of differences there for malign forces to work on and divide the party.

Polanski's lesson, if things become difficult, would be to hold his party together.

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Yorkshire unveils latest information Exchange

By Tony Harcup

People in West Yorkshire have a new way of becoming better informed, thanks to the arrival of independent news and investigative outlet *The Exchange* in June. It is the latest addition to the Mill Media group of subscription-based online outlets that include the *Sheffield Tribune*, the *Manchester Mill* and the *Liverpool Post*.

As *The Exchange* was preparing to launch on June 1, editor Daniel Timms told *Media North*: "We can't wait to bring a new kind of local news to Leeds and West Yorkshire, with investigations, long reads and beautifully written features. We're launching with a great team of two journalists – Brad Deas and Mia Jankowicz – and we'll be hoping to grow from there."

Advance subscriptions

The launch was only made possible by advance subscriptions from more than 500 eager readers, some of whom are old enough to recall when West Yorkshire had a flourishing alternative press scene in the shape of *Leeds Other Paper*, *Bradford Banner*, *Huddersfield Hammer*, *Spenn Valley Spark* and others. *The Exchange* won't be the same as those fondly remembered long gone titles, of course, but it is certainly a welcome addition to today's local news ecosystem.

To subscribe or find further information, see:

<https://theexchange.news/welcome-to-leeds-new-paper/>

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Government boost for local news

By Barry White

The government recently announced the setting up of the Local News Fund worth up to £12 million over the next two years to support local media outlets.

The fund aims to help local news publishers transition to digital business models.

The funding will be distributed through a centrally-managed competitive bidding process, supporting investments in digital tools, software and innovation, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/amplify-the-local-media-action-plan/>

The fund will also include community radio stations, doubling funding from £500,000 in 2024/25 to £1 million over the next three years.

This initiative is part of the government's broader Local Media Strategy to boost social cohesion and ensure the long term sustainability of local journalism in the UK.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) described the Local Media Strategy as the 'first action plan to back local news in a generation'.

They cited research from the Public Interest News Foundation that showed up to 37 local authority districts are effectively 'news deserts' with no dedicated print, online, TV or radio outlets, affecting 4.4 million people. <https://www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/blog/local-news-launches-closures-and-the-state-of-play-in-2025/>

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy

said: "This strategy will provide unprecedented funding for local media outlets to invest in innovation and infrastructure, almost tripling the size of funding for community radio, harnessing the power of local and national government and giving

more young people access to high quality journalism and the opportunity to pursue careers in it."

Plan welcomed

The decision was welcomed by the NUJ which has cam-

paigned for a number of these measures in its News Recovery Plan.

Commenting on the announcement, general secretary Laura Davidson welcomed the plan, which she described as a 'positive start'. **MN**



Andrew Ward

Miners from Yorkshire, South Wales and Kent join a mass picket outside the Grunwick factory, led by Arthur Scargill, then President of the Yorkshire NUM

Grunwick strike meeting

SOUTH YORKSHIRE FESTIVAL EVENT

MediaNorth's annual event at Wortley Hall, Sheffield, on Sunday 9 August at 2.30 pm

By Nicholas Jones

Fifty years ago, trade unions were at the height of their power and influence, but a dispute involving Asian women who were dubbed by the news media 'strikers in saris' became a harbinger of the troubles that lay ahead.

Jayaben Desai, an Indian-born mother of two, was the hero of the 1976 Grunwick dispute, a cause celebre for the Labour movement which ended in failure amid bitter recriminations.

She was up against George Ward, proprietor of the Grunwick film processing plant at Willesden, who defied the TUC, intervention by the conciliation service ACAS and the findings of a government inquiry, but whose refusal to grant union recognition or reinstatement was backed by the House of Lords.

Mrs Desai's defiant two-year

struggle to secure the union backing which she had been promised but which had failed to be delivered, ended in further acrimony after she and some of the strikers staged a hunger strike outside Congress House.

From the start, despite regular mass pickets – and over 500 arrests, the most since the general strike – Ward stood his ground.

His repeated legal challenges were backed by the Conservatives and the National Association of Freedom, becoming a test bed for a blizzard of employment laws introduced after the 1979 Winter of Discontent.

Mrs Desai's defiance on behalf of immigrant workers' rights was legendary. She led her walk-out after a heroic confrontation with a Grunwick manager:

"What you are running is not a factory – it's a zoo. There are monkeys who dance on your fingertips. Others are lions who can bite your head off – we are those lions, Mr Manager!" **MN**

MediaNorth

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