

# ElectionWatch

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A CAMPAIGN FOR PRESS AND BROADCASTING FREEDOM (NORTH) INITIATIVE

## EDITORIAL

# Press lapdogs

*“A FREE PRESS is essential to our democracy. But much of our press isn’t very free at all.*

*“Just three companies control 71 per cent of national newspaper circulation and five companies control 81 percent of local newspaper circulation. This unhealthy sway of a few corporations and billionaires shapes and skews the priorities and worldview of powerful sections of the media.*

*“And it doesn’t stop with the newspapers, on and offline. Print, too, often sets the broadcast agenda, even though it is wedded so firmly to the Tories politically and to corporate interests more generally”. – Jeremy Corbyn. The Alternative MacTaggart lecture, Edinburgh 2018.*

The Sunday papers of 10 November provided a vivid example of this.

Tory Chancellor, Sajid Javid, released a 36-page dossier which claims Labour’s policies will cost the UK £1.2tn over five years. The estimate was compiled by the Conservative Party and is not the work of civil servants. Shadow chancellor John McDonnell has called the estimate “an incompetent mish-mash of debunked estimates and bad maths”.

No matter. On cue, the bloc of Tory supporting papers unleashed their attack journalism. ‘Scale of Labour’s reckless spending revealed’, *Sunday Telegraph*; ‘£1 trillion Labour splurge to bankrupt the UK’, *Sunday Times*; ‘£1.2 TRILLION That’ll cost every UK household £43,000’, *Mail on Sunday*.

It’s one more example of why we launched *ElectionWatch*.



Dominic Sandbrook in the *Mail* and Ross Clark in the *Sun*. Two of the hacks for hire to dish out anti-Corbyn tirades

If Conservative morale needs a boost after a run of unhelpful setbacks, these journalists have no difficulty in conjuring up words to bolster the brilliance of Boris

# The Commentariat

Right-wing tabloid attack-journalists line up to hammer Jeremy Corbyn

A SPECIAL REPORT BY NICHOLAS JONES / PAGE 6

# 'Dangerous' government advert for universal credit ruled misleading

IN MAY the Department of Work and Pensions kicked off a nine-week campaign, costing £225,000, to detoxify the new system of universal credit. The aim of the campaign was to 'set the record straight' on controversial myths about the new system.

Adverts (pictured right) appeared in print in the *Metro* newspaper and on its website, as well as on the *MailOnline*, in May and June extolling the virtues of the new system and purporting to bust 'negative myths' about the flagship Tory welfare policy.

They have now been banned because they are 'misleading'. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) found that a claim that people moved into work faster on universal credit (UC) than under the old system could not be substantiated.

Two other claims – that jobcentres will pay an advance to people who need it and that rent can be paid directly to landlords under universal credit – were also found to be unsubstantiated.

The ASA also ruled the webpage hosted by *MailOnline* and *Metro.co.uk* to be in breach of rules stating that marketing communications must be obviously identifiable as such, because a label identifying it as DWP content was too small.

UC, which is running six years behind schedule, rolls six benefits into one monthly payment. A recent estimate suggested millions of claimants would be up to £1,000 per year worse off when they move on to it.

Labour has pledged to abolish UC.

**UNIVERSAL CREDIT UNCOVERED**

A lot has been written about Universal Credit recently – not all of it correct, sadly.

Whether you're confused by this new benefits system, or simply want to know what all the fuss is about, we will set the record straight for you. Over the next nine weeks, we'll be bringing you the real stories from the front line of Universal Credit.

**MYTHS & FACTS:**  
We set the record straight

'Paul has gone from being afraid of work and losing his benefits to being employed and taking as many hours as he can because he knows he has the safety net of Universal Credit supporting him'

YOUR GUIDE TO UNIVERSAL CREDIT • MEET A WORK COACH • YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The shadow work and pensions secretary, Margaret Greenwood, said: "It is shameful that this Conservative government chose to waste

thousands of pounds on misleading ads about UC rather than ending the harsh, punitive policies that are causing such severe hardship."

## Welcome to our second issue

This is the second issue of ElectionWatch. We decided to launch this publication two weeks ago with the focus on media coverage of the election, highlighting bias and providing alternative sources of information. The four-page first issue which we rushed out on 4 November was well received and we welcome comments, feedback and ideas for articles. This is also a self-funding initiative and we welcome donations to sustain our work. You can contact us at: [cpbfnorth@outlook.com](mailto:cpbfnorth@outlook.com)



# Tories accused of using public funds for Facebook ads in key seats

BORIS JOHNSON'S government was accused of going on a spending spree using taxpayers' money to woo voters in swing seats in the run up to the general election.

Ministers released details on Thursday 30 October of plans to improve the dilapidated town centres of key marginal seats mainly across the north of England and the Midlands. Public money was to be spent publicising the scheme using targeted MyTown Facebook advertisements sent to local people. Seats being targeted include Wakefield, Bolton, Mansfield, Lincoln and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

In an announcement on a government website, the department of housing, communities and local government said part of a £3.6bn fund would be spent boosting rundown high streets across dozens of towns.



Localised MyTown Facebook advertisements.

Adverts informed the public that 'the government was investing up to £25m' in their local area, featuring the name and image of the local town. In reality, the sum going to each settlement is likely to be much smaller.

However, by Friday 31 October it was reported that Facebook had pulled some of the government adverts. Facebook said: "The adverts run by the MyTown page were not correctly labelled as being about social issues. Ads about social issues, elections or politics that appear on our platforms should include a disclaimer provided by advertisers."

The controversy continues. The

government claimed that all towns selected for funding were chosen according to the same methodology, including analysis of deprivation, exposure to Brexit, productivity, economy resilience and investment opportunities. But the *Local Government Chronicle* has revealed that government officials have refused to explain how the 100 towns chosen to benefit from the towns fund were selected, as it emerged that ministers had the final say on which places made the list.

It is one more example of how the government is merging political activity with the arms of government in its own political interest.

## Tory attack ad broke rules, but got attention

THE FORMER Boris Johnson aide who was behind a Facebook ad that broke the social network's funding disclosure rules previously worked on a fake grassroots campaign pushing for a no-deal Brexit.

Alex Crowley oversaw the previous 'Mainstream Network' Facebook campaign alongside employees of the lobbying firm run by Sir Lynton Crosby, the Australian political strategist who helped run three Conservative general election campaigns.

His new Fair Tax ad claimed that Labour's tax plans would cost 'an extra £214 each month' for everyone, and was posted under the name 'Fair Tax Campaign'.



Fair Tax Campaign's false claim.

But despite using clear political language, including the name of a political party, Facebook only became aware of the advert and removed it after being contacted by the BBC.

Labour's tax plans have not yet been published, so the £214 claim

was bogus.

But here's the other issue. By drawing attention to the fake Fair Tax Campaign Facebook ad this has happened: The campaign's page, created three weeks ago, received only 13 likes on Facebook in that time. The advert itself cost less than £500, and received between 35,000 and 40,000 views, according to Facebook's ad library.

But with the image now on the front page of multiple news sites, as well as leading BBC programmes including *Today* and the *News at Ten*, being banned has provided more awareness of its key claim than the group could ever have paid for.



# Trade unions brace for 'winter of discontent' headlines

By NICHOLAS JONES

ANY PRE-ELECTION threat of industrial action presents an immediate target for Conservative politicians and their media allies.

Add to the mix a pledge by the Labour Party to row back on ever-tightening legal restrictions on trade union activity, and within an instant Conservative-supporting papers are warning of an imminent repeat of the 1979 Winter of Discontent – the year that 29.4 million days were lost due to strikes.

An image of Jeremy Corbyn's face superimposed on a 1979 photograph of heaps of rotting garbage piled up in Leicester Square appeared in the *Sun* at the time of his election as Labour leader in the summer of 2015.

The message then was that such was Corbyn's "total loathing for Britain" that he would "not be leading

New Labour...or Old Labour, just... Dead Labour" (*Sun*, 23.8.2015).

On day two of the 2019 general election campaign, the *Sun* had another two-page spread that reprinted the very same photograph – this time with Corbyn looking apparently in despair, holding his head in hands.

"Jez plan for 70s-style union chaos: Winters of Discontent" (*Sun*, 7.11.2019).

News of possible pre-Christmas strikes in support of long-running disputes affecting rail and postal services commanded front-page banner headlines throughout the opening week of the election campaign.

"Post union 'plotting to wreck election'" (*Daily Telegraph*, 5.11.2019); "Rail union's Xmas misery for millions" (*Daily Mail*, 6.11.2019); "The nightmare before Christmas" (*City AM*, 6.11.2019).

This followed the RMT's warning of 27 days of strike action on South Western trains, starting on 2 December, because of SWR's refusal to give assurances on the future operational role of guards.

In response to the threat of postal strikes in the run up to polling day and Christmas, the Royal Mail began action in the High Court challenging the CWU on the grounds that the union might have breached the Trade Unions and Labour Regulations Act when balloting its members.

There was a turnout of 76 per cent in the CWU ballot of 110,000 members, across 1,400 workplaces, and a 97.1 per cent Yes vote, but Royal Mail has alleged there were "potential irregularities" due to interference by union officials when members were said to have been bullied into voting at workplaces after ballot papers





Front pages of right-wing papers filled with propaganda forecasting a new 'Winter of Discontent' if Labour wins general election.

were intercepted before arriving at members' homes.

Most newspapers and broadcasters have simply said that the dispute is about a "disagreement" with management on implementing last year's deal, without going into any background or detail.

There has been little or no explanation of the CWU's complaint that commitments on pay, working hours and pensions have not been met by Royal Mail, which was privatised in 2013.

Rather than devote space to interviews with postal workers, press coverage has followed an all-too familiar path, with the *Daily Telegraph* wheeling out a demolition job on the credibility of the CWU's general secretary, Dave Ward: "Corbynista who affiliated union with hard-Left Momentum" (*Daily Telegraph* 5.11.2019).

Without any resolution to either of the disputes, the closer it gets to polling day and Christmas, the greater will be the attempt by Boris Johnson and his press supporters to turn up the heat with alarmist predictions about the impact of Corbyn's pledge to repeal at least some of the most recent restraints on trade union organisation.

# TV footage of Keir Starmer doctored for Facebook attack

KEIR STARMER has accused the Conservatives of 'an act of desperation that backfired' after footage of the shadow Brexit secretary was doctored to show him unable to answer a question on Labour's Brexit position.

In the Tory version of an interview with ITV's *Good Morning Britain*, produced by the party for its social media channels, Starmer is shown unable to speak after being asked about Labour's position on the EU, with his face appearing under the caption 'Labour has no plan for Brexit'.

In reality, the shadow Brexit secretary did provide a lengthy answer regarding his discussions with other EU countries over the past three years and insisted: "A customs union and single market alignment and protection of workers' rights and environmental rights and consumer rights is something that can be negotiated."

After being called out on the party's decision to edit the video, the Conservative party failed to apologise and appeared to revel in the extra attention. The incident highlights the difficulty in reporting on misinformation and online duplicity during a general election. The extra attention given to misleading social media posts often creates a feedback loop with Twitter and Facebook responding to the high levels of user engagement by pushing it into more people's feeds.

This has led to fears that there is very little to be lost by reinforcing lies and deceptive material in a media environment where the aim is often to get attention at all costs and by any means.

Facebook would allow the Con-



VICTIM: Keir Starmer.

servative party to promote its "doctored" video of Keir Starmer as a paid-for advert during the election campaign, the social network has confirmed. But the company has announced a policy aimed at cracking down on pages that conceal their ownership in order to mislead users.

The executive Rebecca Stimson said the public debate that followed the airing of footage of the senior Labour MP in an ITV interview justified the company's policy of allowing political misinformation on the site.

"You can see, in the UK, what that has meant is that what the Conservatives put in that ad has been the subject of ferocious political debate and discussion, as a result of our policies," said Stimson, the company's head of UK public policy.

# Johnson's elite Commentariat

## The attack journalists who line up to hammer Jeremy Corbyn

By NICHOLAS JONES

READY TO “die in a ditch” with Boris Johnson the closer it gets to polling day are his blood brothers, a taxi rank of highly-paid wordsmiths able to twist and turn the daily news agenda as they strive to deliver a Conservative victory and get Brexit over the line.

Johnson has always been their hero, the Brexiteer-in-chief for much of the media class, a journalist admired for his wizardry in delivering an endless stream of anti-European Union exclusives about the mad machinations of the Brussels bureaucracy – the fake news of his day.

In his hour of need, columnists and feature writers employed by hard line Brexit-supporting newspapers – *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* – are only too happy to follow in his footsteps, able within a matter of hours to pull together an election storyline into a hard-hitting column or feature.

Attack journalism is the forte of this elite commentariat: yet more character assassination of Jeremy

Corbyn; a chance to ridicule Nigel Farage; trash Jo Swinson; or perhaps an alarmist set of predictions about the imminent disaster of life under a Labour government supported by the SNP.

If Conservative morale needs a boost after a run of unhelpful setbacks, they have no difficulty in conjuring up words to bolster the brilliance of Boris.

Envious of their speed of writing, fluency and turn of phrase, I persuaded a top columnist to describe the task of writing to order for the *Daily Mail* (this was in the days of its legendary editor Paul Dacre):

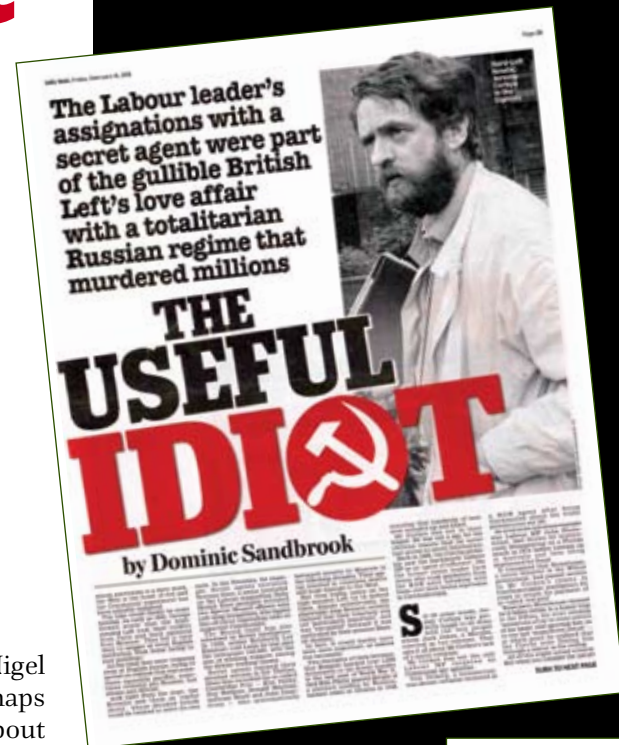
“You get the call mid-morning, after the editorial meeting. In offering you a commission, the backbench team have explicit instructions.

“Usually the headline is pre-determined, so there’s no doubt about the direction of the narrative.

“After some research and thinking it through, the piece is taking shape by mid-afternoon and the backbench team are on the phone, wanting to be updated, to be sure that the column is on track.

“As the deadline approaches, it

**KICKING JEREMY:** A group of prolific right-wing journalists churns out biased columns and features for Conservative-supporting tabloids, the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*.



can be intense, the pressure to go further and further to justify the headline; there seems no escape.

“It’s like riding on the back of a shark, fearful any moment of falling off and getting eaten alive.”

Some of the columnists are so in demand for the flexibility of their writing that they are not tied to one newspaper. Several rotate their by-lines in the pages of competing titles, and deliver instant articles across the political waterfront:

Leo McKinstry has few equals in the range of his output: “Threats may loom but Boris is still ahead of the game” (*Daily Express*, 4.11.2019);







# The Commentariat: Right-wing hack tactics

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punch lines that feed through to the commentary on television and radio programmes and spark off reaction on social media.

So in-your-face is the press commentariat of the right-wing press – and so heavily outnumbered are media voices from the left – that they command a far higher proportion of broadcast interviews and invitations to newspaper reviews on television and radio.

All too often, the multiple roles – and political affiliations – of the commentariat's elite get conveniently ignored by broadcasters.

When, at the start of the election campaign, Dominic Sandbrook was interviewed on the *World At One*

(4.11.2019) about the consequences of the “heyday of public spending in the 1970s”, he was introduced by the presenter Sarah Montague as “the historian, Dominic Sandbrook” – no mention was made of his stock-in-trade as the *Daily Mail's* star anti-Corbyn columnist.

As long as press headlines continue to be treated as news – and the front pages are reproduced in extended television press reviews – the tabloids will retain, despite rapidly falling circulations, at least a fair degree of their previous clout.

Perhaps, as others are now suggesting, the BBC, ITV and Sky could make a start by including a health warning in press reviews by reminding viewers – and listeners – of a paper's political affiliation.

A headline or quote could be prefaced by the lines that this is from a paper that advised readers to vote Leave or Remain in the 2016 referendum.

If there was clear signposting, the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* could hardly complain as they were jubilant in congratulating

themselves on securing the Leave majority through the strength of their campaigning journalism.

I suggested in the inquest after Theresa May's drubbing in the 2017 general election that she had been duped into thinking that voters were bound to agree after she had been crowned a popular hero by the Brexit press. She had become cocooned in the deadly embrace of the anti-Corbyn hate of Conservative-supporting titles.

We will see on 12 December whether Boris Johnson's blood brothers in the Brexit commentariat are making the same fatal mistake as in 2017 – or whether tabloid editors will have the satisfaction of celebrating a triumph to equal that of their Referendum Day victory.

Media coverage of 2017 was the vilest of any general election of my 60 years as a reporter. I fear 2019 might be even worse.

**Nicholas Jones** was a BBC industrial and political correspondent for 30 years until retiring in 2002. His books include, *The Lost Tribe: Whatever Happened to Fleet Street's Industrial Correspondents?*

# The Northern Echo and the NE battleground

THE NORTH EAST of England voted heavily in favour of Brexit. The Tories have identified four constituencies as key battlegrounds: Bishop Auckland, Darlington and Stockton South, currently held by Labour: and Middlesbrough South East and Cleveland which is held by a Tory.

The Brexit Party's chairman, Richard Tice, is standing in Hartlepool, currently held by Labour.

The *Northern Echo*, a regional daily newspaper which covers national as well as regional news, is slap bang in the middle of all these constituencies. It is based in the town of Darlington and serves County Durham and Teeside and has a revered history.

Harold Evans, who went on to edit the *Sunday Times* and the *Times* until

his spectacular fall-out with Rupert Murdoch, writes vividly about his editorship of the paper from 1963-1967 in his autobiography, *My Paper Chase*. He described a time when ‘most of the readers to the north were coal miners and industrial workers, but in the south a belt of farmers and gentry’.

Drastic change, driven by the Thatcher and Major governments, has seen the closure of the pits and the hollowing out of the big engineering and manufacturing industries which sustained the region.

The paper is owned by Newsquest. The paper has had job cuts imposed by the company – most recently in August last year when four regional news groups were merged to two, with the loss of seven journalists. But



Dramatic front page of the *Northern Echo* five years after the former Tory Chancellor, George Osborne, launched the Northern Powerhouse.

the journalists work hard to produce a good regional newspaper which is distinctive for its informative and balanced reporting, in stark contrast to the partisan reporting of the bulk of our national newspapers.



# The Tories really don't love the NHS

A *Financial Times* report reveals the NHS is mired in 'perpetual winter' with performance sharply deteriorating against important targets such as waiting times for emergency departments and cancer treatment. **Don Mort** highlights the key issues facing the NHS in the election

CONVINCING VOTERS that the Conservatives are the 'party of the NHS' might be a tall order in the run-up to a pre-Christmas general election. But Tory activists are attempting to out-flank Labour on the health service, aided by compliant media.

The British Medical Association has warned that the NHS is on the 'cusp of collapse'. The Care Quality Commission's annual State of Care report warned of alarming delays in A&E departments, even over the summer.

There is no consensus around how adult social care should be funded. Almost one in seven elderly people do not have access to all the support they need, said the CQC. But Tory fears of a backlash will have been eased by news in the *Mail on Sunday* that 'Prime Minister Boris Johnson holds a six-point lead over Jeremy Corbyn on NHS'.

Market research firm Deltapoll had once again been commissioned by the tabloid to gauge public opinion. The results vindicated Tory strategists' decision to fight Corbyn on his own turf by highlighting 'the extra £34bn-a-year in funding for the NHS' by 2024.

In its proper context, however, the NHS funding settlement follows years



The Tory blurb for this ad says, 'By keeping our economy strong, we've been able to support our NHS since 2010'. No. Their austerity policies have left the NHS short of staff and money.

of under-investment and the Health Foundation has warned that extra capital funding for hospital upgrades could be a 'drop in the ocean'.

Conservative announcements to reassure potential voters include plans for 50m more GP appointments a year and 6,000 extra GPs. But it follows a failed pledge to boost the GP workforce by 5,000 by 2020: The number of fully-qualified GPs has fallen by 1.8 per cent since September 2015.

Doubts over the future GP workforce are among many warning signs of a lack of capacity to reduce pressure on NHS hospitals by caring for patients in the community.

The CQC has warned that while a 14 per cent fall in the number of mental health beds between 2014/15 and 2018/19 was in line with national policy, a lack of properly skilled staff means vulnerable people are not getting the right support in a crisis.

The need to make big efficiency savings has heaped pressure on hospitals, with many reporting multi-million pound deficits. It has made for a lucrative marketplace for private consultancy companies, sometimes hired where NHS trusts lack the management capacity to find cost savings.

Mid Yorkshire Hospitals Trust, for example, paid £15m to Ernst and Young up to September 2015 to help cut £37m from its annual budget. The

organisation is still £20m in deficit.

Beneficiaries also include 'elite advisory services and leadership development firm' McChrystal Group. Set up by the former US Iraq general Stanley McChrystal, the company was paid £420,000 in 2016 to help draw up NHS cost savings and service integration in Wakefield. As part of the project, a presentation to health bosses said: 'We recognise that those difficulties that are endemic and have been blocking proper integration of services for decades were what the US Army met when they were trying to defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq.'

The number of NHS patients having surgery in private hospitals has trebled since 2010 and for-profit companies are cashing in. BMI Healthcare treated the largest number, followed by Spire and Circle Health.

In England, 214,967 people had operations in 2009-10. Last year the number tripled to 613,833. NHS trusts have to send patients to private hospitals because they are too busy and under-staffed. This huge rise in outsourcing conflicts with what Matt Hancock, the health and social care secretary, told MPs in January, "There is no privatisation of the NHS on my watch."

Dr Tony Sullivan, co-chair of the campaign group Keep Our NHS Public, said, "The NHS has been enfeebled after close to a decade of Conservative government and been left desperately short of staff and money."

# Anti-semitic attacks on Labour is not bad journalism – it's much worse than that

By TIM GOPSILL

IT WAS not 'fake news' when the right-wing press opened the election campaign with ferocious attacks on individual Labour candidates accused of anti-semitism. It was not bad journalism – because it was nothing to do with news or journalism at all. The media intervention against the Labour left was purely political activism.

Journalism at election times is about feeding people information – true, or false or somewhere in between – to impel them to vote one way or another. But the hunt for anti-semites is not directed at the readers; it is targeted at Labour itself. The objective is to destabilise the party. And they do it because it works.

Enormous damage has been done to the party's operations, its confidence and public esteem over the three and a half years since the witch-hunt began.

In the first week of the campaign the party sacked four newly-adopted

Parliamentary candidates, three of them for alleged anti-semitism.

The fiercest attacks were in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Sun* and the *Mail*, but the source of much of the material is the *Jewish Chronicle*, which has pursued a demented crusade against Corbynism since 2016.

This began then with a revelation from the Facebook page of the Labour MP for Bradford West Naz Shah, who in 2014 shared a spoof image from the website of the American anti-Israeli Jewish academic Norman G Finkelstein showing a map of Israel moved into the USA as a tongue-in-cheek solution to middle east conflict.

Labour moved quickly, instructing Naz Shah to apologise – to Finkelstein's bemusement – and since then it has been defenceless. As waves of attack swept down on the party, all it could do was continuously apologise and promise to do better, which has had the effect of inviting yet more.

The *JC*'s editor Stephen Pollard is a former editor of the *Daily Express*, the most right-wing and, ironically,

openly racist national paper. On November 3 he was given a platform in the *Sunday Telegraph* to launch his own campaign – an appeal to 'fellow British citizens' to reject Corbyn.

Pollard announced that 47 per cent of Britain's Jews would 'seriously consider' emigrating if Labour won – a claim endorsed in the paper by Tory party chairman James Cleverly, not a recognised representative of the Jewish community. He said that people he had known for 'much of my life' had said they would be 'out of here' if Mr Corbyn became PM.

There were half a dozen articles on the same theme, including an interview with the former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky, who spent nine years in Russian prisons before managing to emigrate to Israel. There he became a leader of the West Bank settlers, heading a party of mainly Russian hard right-wing emigres and was deputy prime minister for a time.

He told the *Sunday Telegraph* that he was 'concerned about echoes of Soviet propaganda in British political discourse', and feared that

## Launch cancelled after book called antisemitic

THE LAUNCH of *Bad News For Labour* in Waterstones Brighton during the Labour Party Conference was cancelled due to a torrent of abuse and threats claiming the book and its authors were themselves antisemitic.

Greg Philo, one of the authors of the book, issued this statement:

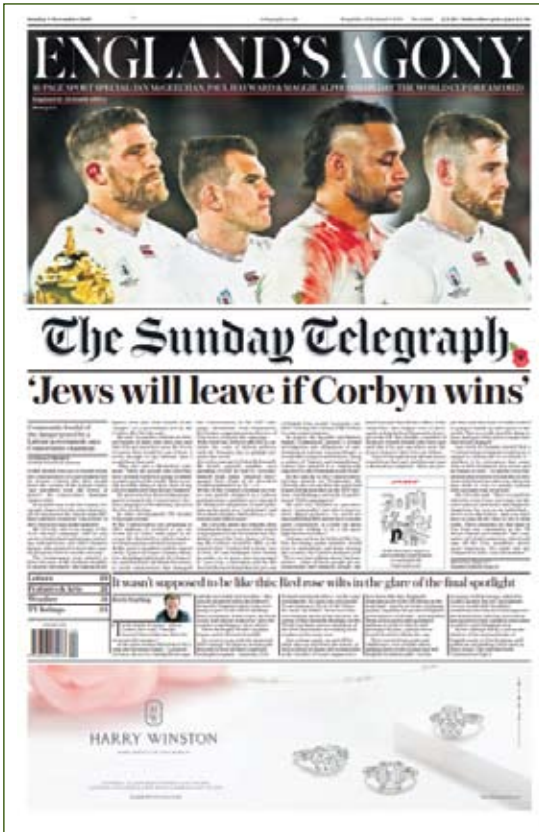
'The five academic authors had intended to present their research at a book launch in Waterstones, Brighton on 23rd September. But this occasioned a storm of abuse on Twitter, calls to boycott Waterstones and false

accusations about the authors and the content of the book. Waterstones cancelled the event citing organisational problems.

The book's authors have also issued a statement saying it is completely unacceptable to attempt to prevent academics from presenting research findings in a bookshop. They say, 'The claims that *Bad News for Labour* and its authors are antisemitic are a false and slanderous attack on us as individuals and on our professional integrity as academics. Those responsible must desist.'







Front pages of the *Sunday Telegraph* and *Jewish Chronicle* attack the Labour Party.

anti-Semitism had become a 'mainstream' feature in the UK.

On November 9 the *Sun* and the *Mail* had near-identical spreads of 'Labour's Dirty Dozen', a rogues' gallery of 12 MPs said to have brought the party into disrepute. Seven stood accused of anti-semitism:

Gideon Bull, the candidate in Clacton-on-Sea, was accused of calling a Jewish fellow cabinet member "Shylock" in a meeting at Haringey Council, north London. He said the allegation was 'entirely false'. He had used the term to describe others he regarded as behaving avariciously, and not the Jewish councillor herself. He said: 'When she politely informed me that this saying was offensive, I apologised and said I did not know that Shylock was Jewish.' Unfortunately innocence is not a defence when the Labour Party is in a panic.

Kate Ramsden, the candidate for the Scottish seat of Gordon, was kicked out when it emerged she had claimed that anti-semitism smears against Jeremy Corbyn were being 'orchestrated by the wealthy establishment.' She also wrote that the state of Israel, 'like many abusers, unable to reflect on their own abuse

... ended up recreating it in the abuse of others, exerting their power in those weaker than themselves because once they were the powerless.' A party source said: 'We took immediate action to have Kate Ramsden's candidacy reconsidered ... The party took swift and robust action.'

The charge against Laura McAlpine, candidate in Harlow, was that she had supported a campaign organiser who had blogged that some Israelis would be happy to see a 'pogrom in Gaza and the West Bank, a Jewish final solution to the Palestine problem'. However, she did disown the remarks as 'unacceptable'.

The candidate in Coventry South, Zarah Sultana, was pressured to quit after saying she would 'celebrate' the deaths of Tony Blair and Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu. She apologised but refused to stand down.

Jane Aitchison, candidate for Pudsey in West Yorkshire, publicly defended Zarah Sultana, comparing the death of Tony Blair to that of Adolf Hitler. She said: 'I apologise for causing offence, but I said in the interview that I did not condone anyone celebrating the death of anyone, and I do not.'

Ali Milani, seeking to oust Boris

Johnson in Uxbridge, was accused of making anti-Semitic comments online and promoting 9/11 conspiracy theories.

In North Swindon, Kate Linnegar had 'liked' a post entitled 'How Israel lobby manufactured UK Labour Party's anti-Semitism crisis'. She also defended former London mayor Ken Livingstone who quit the party in the face of anti-semitism charges.

Since then frontbencher Laura Pidcock was pilloried in the *Jewish Chronicle* for saying of people who attack Labour candidates: "They will say some really hurtful things. Forgive them. For they know not what they do."

According to the *JC*, these words, uttered by Christ before he was crucified, 'have been frequently used by those wishing to stir up religious hatred amongst the Jews.'

A spokesperson for Pidcock told the paper: 'Any suggestion [this] was anti-semitic is absurd and defamatory.'

*Tim Gopsill is a former editor of the National Union of Journalist's magazine The Journalist and co-author, with Greg Neale, of the union's centenary history, Journalists: 100 Years of the NUJ.*

# The Russian money tree

## Why did Boris block report on Russian political interference?

BORIS JOHNSON personally prevented the publication of a parliamentary report on allegations of Russian interference in British politics, according to the chair of the committee that drew it up.

Dominic Grieve, the former Conservative attorney general, said intelligence agencies had actively supported the report's release ahead of next month's general election.

"With parliament shortly to be dissolved, we had made arrangements to print and lay the report within an hour of confirmation [from Downing Street] on this occasion," he added.

"This has been a standard process, right up until the point that the prime minister – against the advice of the agencies themselves – stopped us from publishing."

Now, despite previous Tory pledges to distance themselves from Russian money, an Open Democ-



Russian industrialist Alexander Temerko (right) and Prime Minister Boris Johnson at a dinner.

racy investigation has revealed the Conservatives have received significant recent cash injections from a number of Russian donors and their associates.

Well-connected Russian oligarchs and companies heavily involved in lobbying for Russian interests have stepped up their funding of the Conservative party in recent months.

By far the largest recent Russian donor has been Lubov Chernukhin. The wife of a former Russian deputy

finance minister, Chernukhin has donated more than £450,000 to the Conservatives in the last year.

Former arms tycoon Alexander Temerko is another prominent Russian donor in Tory circles who has given money in the past year. Temerko, who has spoken warmly about his 'friend' Boris Johnson, has gifted over £1.2 million to the Conservatives over the past seven years and has reportedly admitted being involved in a Eurosceptic plot to oust May as Tory leader less than a year ago.

The Conservatives have received more than £3.5 million from Russian funders since 2010. While donations slowed down after the poisoning of Russian double agent Sergei Skripal in Salisbury in March 2018, they have picked up again in recent months, according to filings at the Electoral Commission.

Between November 2018 and October 2019, the Tories received at least £489,850 from Russian donors, compared to less than £350,000 in the previous year.

## Keeping it in the family

SHORT SELLERS abound in the world of financial speculation. They bet against the share price of a company falling to make a killing. The best defence is to ensure your share price soars, and inflict losses on the hedge funds that are shorting you.

Jupiter Asset Management used this defence, their stock rising almost 50 per cent in the first six months of the year. But it has since fallen back.

Nichola Pease has just been appointed chairman of Jupiter. She was a Northern Rock director from 1999 until its collapse and nationalisation in 2008, the first run on a British bank for 150 years. She sat on the Northern Rock board audit committee that paid millions to Adam Applegarth, its later disgraced executive. She and other Northern Rock directors were criti-

cised by MPs on the Treasury Select Committee for their 'high-risk, reckless business strategy' and failing to act as a restraining force on executives.

She is married to Crispin Odey, the hedge fund manager. Their net worth is estimated in the *Sunday Times Rich List* at £775m. The connection with short selling? Crispin Odey was short selling Jupiter but now his wife is on board he has vowed not to touch the company. He was one of the high-profile businessmen cited by Jeremy Corbyn when he launched the party's election campaign. Odey was called a 'greedy banker' who 'makes millions betting against our country and on other people's misery'. Corbyn also pointed out he had 'donated huge sums to Johnson and the Conservative Party'.

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**Editor:** Granville Williams

**Design and production:**  
Tony Sutton, [www.coldtype.net](http://www.coldtype.net)



**CPBF(North)** also produces *MediaNorth* quarterly. We are on Facebook – become a friend at Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom North – and Twitter: @campaign\_and

Contact [cpbfnorth@outlook.com](mailto:cpbfnorth@outlook.com) if you would like to receive future online issues of *ElectionWatch*